

THE GARDEN CITY IDEA IN AUSTRALIA  
BEFORE THE GREAT WAR

Sheridan Burke, Conservation Planner

As Australia's capital cities grew from penal colonies and frontier hamlets through the economic booms and depressions following the gold rush era of the 1850s, they exhibited many characteristic problems of the emergent cities of the Victorian age of laissez faire - capricious urban expansion, inappropriate civic organisation, confusingly complex distribution of responsibility for local services and utilities, and and unrealistic municipal finances.

When the limitations of public transport kept people close to the city, municipal servicing costs were relatively low, the the human costs in health and fire hazards created by excessive subdivision and jerry-built houses in inner areas were rising. As public transport improved in the 1860s and 70s, and outer tracts were speculatively developed, the expansion of municipal vanities created many small local government entities.

The Federation of the Australian States in 1901 brought with it a new awareness and interest in the role of government, its responsibility to protect the health of its citizens, and to finance the increasing costs of urban infrastructure and services.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, planning and building legislation were promoted as the basis of successful urban reform by visiting British town planning experts and by Australians returning from study tours abroad to investigate housing and planning practice, or from active military service in Europe. Australia proved particularly susceptible to the importation of the garden city proposals emerging from the British Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, and the American City Beautiful ideas.

Model suburbs had been designed and built since the 1840s and Gentlemen's mansion estates such as the Appian Way, built in 1903 to 1911 at Burwood in Sydney, and 'artistic' industrial model suburbs such as Rosebery also in Sydney, designed in 1911 and Darra in Queensland (1917) seemed a fine portent for the future.

Two of Australia's major garden suburb experiments - Haberfield and Dacey Garden Suburb in New South Wales - are presently the subject of conservation adaptation work. Only at Haberfield is a rigorous conservation analysis underway based on the philosophy and methodology of the Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Cultural Significance - The Burra Charter, (1981), Australia's national adaptation of the Venice Charter (1966) and Moscow Resolutions 1978.

### HABERFIELD, SYDNEY, 1901

Haberfield was the first, and is probably the best known, of the Australian housing estates called garden suburbs. Promotor Richard Stanton was a former local mayor and a prominent real estate entrepreneur, later to become a foundation councillor the Town Planning Association.

Haberfield's development began in 1901 (predating Hampstead Garden Suburb in London by five years) with the first estate of 50 acres (20 hectares). It was promoted with extravagant advertising, as: "the only garden suburb of the great City of Sydney, famous... as the Place of Beautiful Homes ... a visionary scheme ... the greatest suburb building venture in the Commonwealth".<sup>1</sup>

Stanton was not aware of the British garden cities idea at the time and his use of the term garden suburb is a descriptive rather than a theoretical one.

The sales prospectus issued in 1911 by Stanton's syndicate, the Haberfield Proprietary Company, emphasised the objective of founding a purely residential suburb and provided a recreation club and tennis pavilion to encourage social intercourse. Industrial and business premises were excluded entirely from the first subdivisions, as was any provision for local parks, playgrounds or open space, although the estate prospectus prominently advertised the availability of these amenities elsewhere in the local municipality.

In the absence of statutory controls Stanton framed specific building regulations which were incorporated as title covenants in all sales contracts, through which he hoped to secure a uniformity of the class of buildings constructed on the estate and to control future alterations of the houses.

Stanton's prospective purchasers were the middle class, liberated from the economic depression of the eighteen nineties and responsive to the nascent nationalist spirit of the Federation era. Stanton was a prominent local advocate of Federation, and he named streets after the Federation cabinet members - Deakin, Forrest, Barton. The houses' leadlight kookaburra and waratah windows, and their plaster flannel flowers and lyrebird ceilings, reflected the optimistic nationalism of the Commonwealth's formative years. The Australian coat of arms and the motto "Advance Australia" were emblazoned across the rough cast gable end walls of cottages, and the rising sun motif was frequently incorporated in roof ventilators and ornamental timber work.

Until the nineteen fifties little changed in Haberfield, since development pressures were at work in the outer-ring suburbs of Sydney. However, with the post-World War Two "baby-boom" and immigration influx, the pressure on housing areas closer to the city increased.

1 HABERFIELD PROPRIETARY COMPANY, Haberfield Garden Suburb  
Sydney n.d. (circa 1911)

Many of Haberfield's original inhabitants have now passed away, and houses have been allowed to deteriorate.

New residents' desire to alter their homes often arises from the prolonged absence of maintenance, leading to failure of timber decorative elements, especially windows and verandahs. More serious long term damage has been done by the extraordinary practice of 'skinning' buildings. The entire outer skin of original bricks (usually blues or reds, sometimes banded) laid in soft lime mortar is removed and replaced by cream, white or reproduction "colonial" bricks set in hard cement mortar. The vast majority of these changes did not require building or planning consent from the local Council. Very, very few were even known to Council, being the co-operative weekend work of the owners and their friends and family.

A growing conservation lobby within the area supported by the National Trust and the Heritage Council of New South Wales began to actively pursue the conservation of Australia's first "garden suburb" in the late 1970s, opposed by a reluctant and at times hostile local council. Although New South Wales has powerful Environmental Planning and Heritage Legislation, the State Government has preferred to encourage local responsibility via seminars, bilingual brochures, and eventually, a conservation-oriented local environmental plan.

In the meantime, there have been losses, but the passage of ten years lobbying, court actions, publicity and new Council elections have changed the local Council approach and it has recently engaged Consultant conservation architects to prepare and analyse a comprehensive data base of the suburb, and to draw up detailed guidelines for Haberfield's future development and conservation. With an enthusiastic local conservation association and expert professional advice, Haberfield's future looks more secure.

#### **DACEY GARDEN SUBURB**

Dacey Garden Suburb, the major public experiment in garden suburb design in New South Wales, was designed for the State Housing Board in 1911. Intended to occupy 443 acres (180 hectares) as a self-contained residential unit, the suburb made provision for shops, schools, churches, halls, a police station, a fire station and a technical college. No sites were set aside for industrial or manufacturing activity, since such uses were already in close proximity. Major roads radiated from a nine way intersection with secondary roads in concentric curves and rear service lanes eliminated.

The Curator of Sydney's Royal Botanical Gardens, J.H. Maiden, planned and directed street planting and estate landscaping. In addition he acted as judge of the suburb's annual cottage garden competition, organised to encourage tenants to develop and maintain their gardens.

The first houses presented an architectural unity of materials, colours and forms - hipped and gabled roofs, overhanging eaves with exposed projecting rafters, chimneys surmounted by terracotta pots and deeply recessed verandahs. The early houses are reminiscent of the housing which Edwin Lutyens and others designed for Lever at Port Sunlight, adapted to Australian social and climatic conditions.

However, the development of the suburb slackened due to the pressures of war and by 1917, only 240 of the planned 1,437 cottages and just a few of the proposed public buildings and facilities had been built.

Today, in Dacey Garden Suburb, 170 of the surviving houses have been adapted and augmented by sympathetically designed new infill buildings replacing the many original cottages demolished. The design concept of the curvilinear street pattern and radial focus of the suburb layout have been replaced in part by buildings aligned to a rectangular grid layout, with substantial street closures ending the planned vistas and view corridors of the original design.

#### **A GARDEN SUBURB IN EVERY STATE ..."**

Dacey Garden Suburb sponsors' hopes that the suburb would provide an example to local councils in the provision of public housing were, to some extent, rewarded. As Letchworth Garden City had served England and indeed the world, Dacey Garden Suburb was of propaganda value to the developing town planning movement in Australasia after the war.

Mitcham Garden Suburb in Adelaide, South Australia, was designed by Charles C. Reade, the former secretary of the British Garden Cities Association. Together with W.C. Davidge, Reade had been sent to tour Australia by the Association in 1914, bringing the gospel of garden cities to Australasia. After over 150 lantern slide lectures in every capital and many provincial cities throughout Australia and New Zealand, Reade decided to accept an appointment as South Australia's first Town Planner.

Reade's major works project during this appointment as was the design and layout out of the 300 acre (121 hectare) Mitcham Garden Suburb, now known as Colonel Light Garden Suburb in Adelaide. Using many of the features of the Garden City (though not its basis of communal land tenure), Reade proposed separate living and commercial areas (once again there was no land for trade or manufacture), set aside generous open space reserves and established all building alignments, as well as designating the location of the public buildings. Landscaped byways provided utility links for telegraph, electricity, sewerage connections and garbage collection as well as rear garage entries for houses.

In 1919, the Garden Suburb Act was passed by the South Australian Parliament, permitting construction of Reade's ambitious plan to begin, but in the post war era, home finance was difficult to obtain and the development of the suburb was slow until after 1924, when the

South Australian State Bank initiated its "Thousand Homes" scheme, experimenting with mass construction techniques developing the Southern Portion of the estate to assist in the post war housing shortage.

Reade's activities also encouraged design of parks and playgrounds and other model villages as well as private consulting projects, such as the provision of initial advice to Cadbury's Pty.Ltd. on the design of their proposed works village, "an Antipodean Bournville", at Claremont, Tasmania, in 1920.

Today, Adelaide's economic fortunes and natural conservatism seems to have conserved its garden suburb more successfully than private lobbying or government action has in New South Wales. The suburb has matured and changed colour gently, unpressured by redevelopment or government action.

#### THE BEAUTIFUL CITY OF OUR DREAMS ...": CANBERRA

The design of the Federal capital at Canberra provided Australia with its greatest opportunity to demonstrate nationhood and maturity in the field of contemporary urban planning.

Early in 1911 the Commonwealth Government formally announced the world wide competition for the design of the new Australian Capital. Competitors were provided with information about the geography and climate of the Canberra district and a list of facilities and major buildings to be incorporated. The city was to cater for an initial population of 25,000 and was to become the permanent seat of the Commonwealth Government.

137 entries were received, and the winning design was that of young Chicago architect, Walter Burley Griffin, then employed in the office of Frank Lloyd Wright. Griffin had responded with a monumental plan of formal geometrics, using the three major natural features of the site as the points of a triangle, terminating with major groups of buildings representing the functional purposes of the city. The Capitol and Parliament House faced the Mt. Ainslie site of the War Memorial across the central land axis and the National University Group terminated the water axis below Black Mountain, with the municipal centre and Russell Government offices between, linked by a spider-web pattern of roads. An informal element was created in the design by flooding the Molonglo river to form a meandering lake.

Griffin's plan had its critics, but after returning briefly to America to wind up his Chicago projects, Griffin eagerly took up his Australian commission as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction. He was given the right to private practice and he lectured and wrote frequently on town planning topics with his wife and colleague Marion Mahoney. Griffin prepared plans for parklike residential subdivisions in Melbourne at Heidelberg (where the Griffins lived) and in nearby Eaglemont. The themes he used there were later

to reappear in his Castlecrag estates in Sydney built during the nineteen twenties for the Greater Sydney Development Company Limited.

Sadly, Griffin's major work on the Federal Capital continued to be consistently frustrated by official ill-will, which eventually erupted into open antagonism by the time of the 1916 Royal Commission into the Federal Capital Administration, which exonerated Griffin from any suggestion of incompetence.

In 1920, a frustrated Griffin resigned his Canberra appointment, and the future development of the Federal capital was placed in the hands of a committee. The "city beautiful of our dreams" was slow to materialize, for whilst foundation stones abounded, initial city investment was directed more to site landscaping and tree planting on the windy open plains than to buildings. The Griffin Plan was officially gazetted in 1925, but most of the Federal Public Service remained located in Melbourne during the Great Depression and it was not until the establishment of the National Capital Development Corporation in 1954 that the city promised by Griffin's visionary scheme claimed a national identity.

Canberra's development had been controversial, but the conservation of its design ideals and early housing stock is now carefully pursued by the responsible government authority.

#### CONCLUSIONS

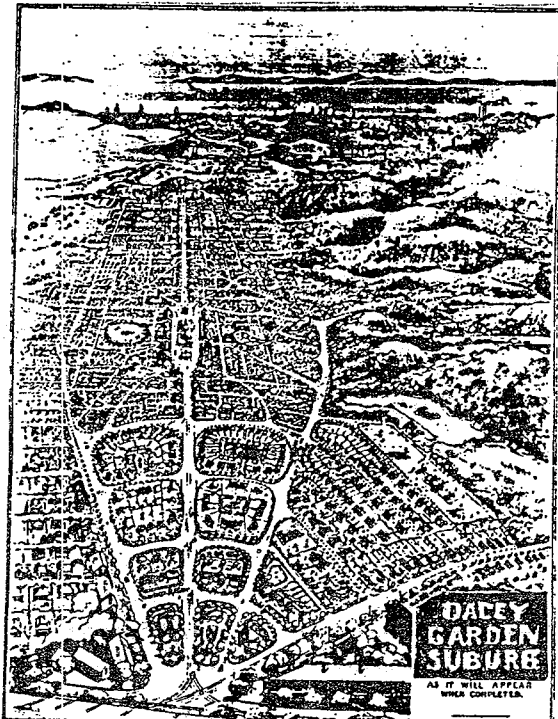
The Canberra wrangle had brought to the attention of the Australian public the theory and problems of planning new towns, but it was in the area of suburban development that Garden City ideas were more influential in Australian lives.

The environmental "ideal" of the Garden Suburb has survived better than the physical evidence of its early interpretation. Its basic concepts are enshrined in current planning and building legislation and its popularity is superficially evident in many residential areas developed after the Great War in Australia. Unlike the ideals of the City Beautiful Movement which, with the exception of Canberra, provided financially impossible, the visual images of the Garden City were readily interpreted in acres of detached cottages in gardens, ignoring the basic precept of creating independent and self-contained entities, and creating enormous social and community infrastructure problems for present generations.

Today, Australian metropolitan planning is concentrating on urban consolidation, utilizing the existing infrastructure of developed areas rather than bearing the cost of extending into new and distant areas. Conservation of the physical evidence of Australia's early planning experiments, within the context of this consolidation, is of increasing concern to conservation advocates, practitioners and the government authorities responsible for safeguarding their future.

ICOMOS 8th General Assembly, Washington, 1987

PLATES  
 THE GARDEN CITY IDEA IN AUSTRALIA  
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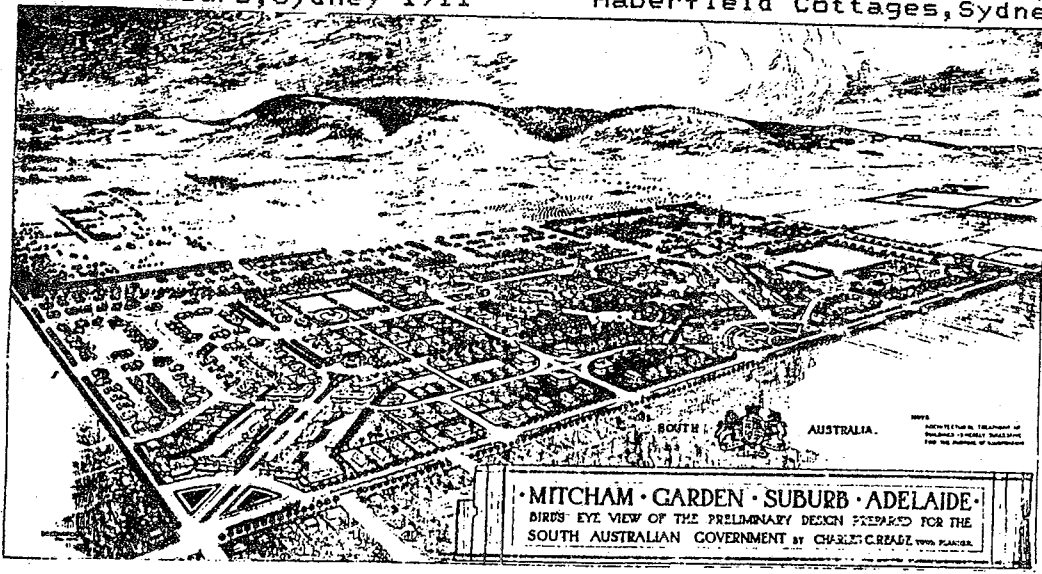
Dacey Garden Suburb, Sydney 1911



Canberra, A.C.T. 1911



Haberfield Cottages, Sydney 1911



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Summary  
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The theories of physical determinism underlying the municipal and social reform movement in nineteenth Century Britain found fertile soil in Australia's burgeoning cities at the turn of the Century. By the nineteen twenties the British philosophy of "Garden Cities" had been propounded in all capital cities and provincial centres by touring British Town Planning Association experts and by Australian professionals returning from study tours to Europe and America.

The first Australian "garden suburb", Haberfield, in Sydney was began in 1901 - without knowledge of the British Garden City movement. The developer of Haberfield, Richard Stanton, became interested in town planning, and later helped to found other model suburbs and industrial estates, as well as the first Australian town planning association. Today, Haberfield has become the subject of concerted conservation analysis and planning efforts, as changes in lifestyles and housing ideals threaten the integrity of its fabric.

Using the philosophy and methodology of the Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural significance (the "Burra Charter", 1981), Australia's national adaptation of the Venice Charter (1966) and the Moscow Resolutions (1978), conservation architects and planners are providing a comprehensive data base and technical advice to help the local community and government authorities conserve this unique example of Australian Garden Suburb development.

The first garden suburb - in the British sense of the term - to be sponsored by government in Australia was also located in Sydney. Dacey Garden Suburb, designed in 1911 for the State Housing Authority of New South Wales, was to founder uncompleted as the Great War escalated costs and limited the availability of materials and labour. A similar fate befell Mitcham Garden Suburb in Adelaide, South Australia, designed in 1918 by Charles Reade, former secretary of the British Garden Cities Association.

Australia's major opportunity for garden city planning was the international design competition for the plan of Canberra, the new national capital, in 1911. The winner was an American, Walter Burley Griffin, a former associate of architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Griffin proposed a monumental "City Beautiful" scheme of formal geometrics linked by a spider-web of roads and a central meandering lake. Canberra's development has been controversial but the conservation of its design ideals and early housing stock is now carefully monitored by the responsible government authorities.

Of the many garden suburbs and model towns planned, only a few were to be realised but the philosophy which shaped their conception markedly influenced the future urban pattern of Australian suburbs and towns.



L'idée de la "Cité-Jardin" en Australie  
avant la Grande Guerre

Sheridan Burke, urbaniste-conservateur

Les théories du déterminisme physique qui étaient à la base du mouvement émergent de réforme municipale et sociale au dix-neuvième siècle en Grande Bretagne ont trouvé un champ fertile dans les villes australiennes qui fleurissaient à la fin du siècle.

Au début des années vingt la philosophie britannique des "villes-jardin" - "Garden Cities" avait été déjà proposée dans toutes les capitales et centres provinciaux par les experts de l'Association d'Urbanisme de Grande Bretagne et par les urbanistes australiens revenants des voyages d'étude en Europe et en Amérique.

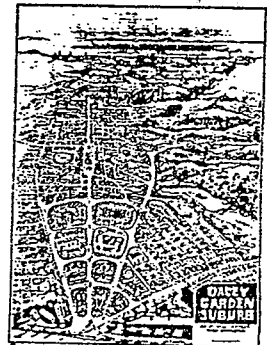
En 1901 on a commencé à développer la première "cité-jardin" australienne, Haberfield à Sydney, sans connaître le mouvement des Villes-Jardins de Grande Bretagne. Le lotisseur de Haberfield, Richard Stanton, est devenu passionné de l'urbanisme. Plus tard il a aidé à fonder d'autres "cités modèle" et zones industrielles, aussi bien que la première association d'urbanisme d'Australie.

La première "cité-jardin" - au sens britannique du terme - que le gouvernement a soutenu en Australie se trouvait aussi à Sydney. "Dacey Garden Suburb" préparée en 1911 pour le service de logement de l'état de Nouvelles-Galles du Sud, allait s'effondrer inachevée à cause de la hausse des prix et de la manque de matériel et de main-d'oeuvre dues à la Grande Guerre. C'était aussi le cas de la cité-jardin de Mitchum à Adelaide en Australie du Sud, le projet élaboré en 1918 par Charles Reade, ancien secrétaire de l'Association des Villes-Jardins de Grande Bretagne. Parmi nombreux autres projets de cités-jardin et de villes-modèle proposées en chaque état, il n'y avait que très peu à être réalisées. Pourtant, la philosophie qui les a mises au point a exercé une influence marquée sur le futur développement de la banlieu et des villes en Australie.

L'occasion la plus importante qui s'est présentée en Australie pour la planification d'une cité-jardin fut en 1911 le concours international pour le plan de Canberra, la nouvelle capitale nationale. C'était un Américain, Walter Burley Griffin, ancien associé de l'architecte Frank Lloyd Wright, qui a gagné au concours. Griffin proposait la "Belle Ville" - "City Beautiful" - un projet monumental de formes géométriques liées par une toile d'araignée de routes et par un lac central sinueux. Le développement de Canberra a été controversé mais maintenant la conservation de l'idéal du dessin original et des premiers logements est contrôlée soigneusement par les autorités responsables du gouvernement.

Aujourd'hui, Haberfield est devenu le sujet d'une étude de conservation et d'aménagement concertée, comme l'intégrité de sa structure est menacée par les changements dans les modes de vie et dans la conception de la maison idéale.

En se référant à la méthodologie des documents suivants la Charte de la Conservation des Lieux de Significance Culturelles, dite "Burra Charter" de 1981; l'adaptation australienne de la Charte de Venise de 1966; les Résolutions de Moscou de 1978 les urbanistes et les architectes conservateurs sont en train de fournir des renseignements de base et des conseils techniques pour aider les membres de la communauté locale et des autorités gouvernementales à sauvegarder cet exemple unique de la "cité-jardin" australienne.



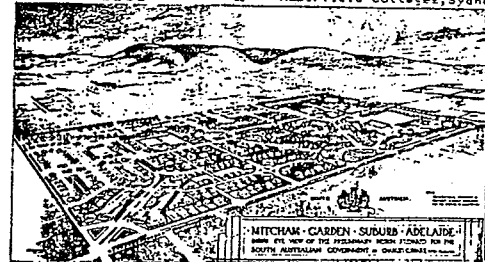
Dacey Garden Suburb, Sydney 1911



Canberra, A.C.T. 1911



Haberfield Cottages, Sydney 1911



1918