

KU-RING-GAI LOCAL HISTORY SERIES

SECOND SERIES :  
ARCHITECTURE

# HOUSING

IN

# KU-RING-GAI



KU-RING-GAI HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1986

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HOUSING  
IN  
KU-RING-GAI

ROBERT STAAS

*Cover illustrations :*

*Old Bark Hut, Gordon*

*Seidler House, Kalang Ave., Killara*

*Artwork : Louise Proudman*

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## HOUSING IN KU-RING-GAI

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## THE COLONIAL ERA 1810-1888

### Rustic Shelters

The first European shelters built within the Ku-ring-gai region differed little from the Aboriginal shelters which preceded them.

From about 1810 government sawing gangs, followed by private individuals, exploited the magnificent timber resources of the Lane Cove district as it was then called. These rough men established themselves in the vast virgin forests, building temporary bush shelters from saplings and bark. One or two sawyers would spend time in one location, often close to a running stream, felling trees and sawing the timber where it was felled, or dragging it through tracks by bullock team to one of the sawing establishments and then on to the Lane Cove river for transport to Sydney Town. When one area was depleted, the men moved on, establishing a new camp further into the forest. Such temporary shelters were built initially in the area close to the present Fiddens Wharf Road and at the Cowan Forest near Hornsby.

A vivid description of the type of shelter built by early timber getters is given by Alexander Harris in his book "Settlers and Convicts":

"a few sheets of bark stripped from trees, and each varying from the size of a common door to that of double that width by the same length, was but a single area of about 9 feet one way by 6 the other: the roof too was of bark, and of the usual shape. One of the 6-foot ends was a chimney, throughout its whole width, in which the fire was made by logs of any length and thickness available; on the earthen hearth, at the other 6-foot end, was a sort of berth, as also of bark, like the bunks on board ship, fixed at about 3 feet from the ground; whilst at the 9-foot side next the road was the door, which likewise was of bark; and at the opposite parallel side was a little table, and that too was of bark, to wit, a sheet about 3 feet one way by 2 the other, nailed on to four posts driven into the ground, and having of course its inner or smooth side upwards."

Examples of this type of dwelling survived well into the 20th Century but are now known only by photograph.

Some examples:

Old Bark Hut at Gordon  
Hut, Fairlawn Avenue, Turramurra



### Georgian Colonial Style

Whilst much of the Lane Cove district remained uninhabited, with many land grantees not taking up residence, small permanent settlements grew up at nodal points, changing the character of the district.

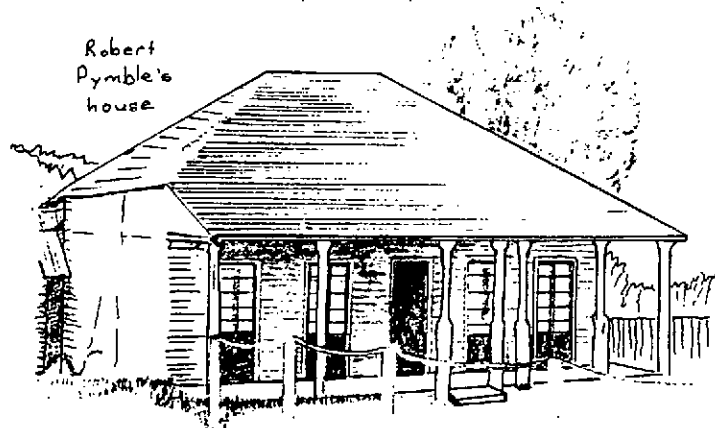
In 1854, The Sydney Morning Herald commented:

"The inhabitants of Lane Cove generally are in middle station of Colonial life, some are in professional employment, others are sawyers and timber merchants and tradesmen of various kinds. Some cultivate their lands, others are mere squatters in the bush and live as they can. But the mass of people are well off."

J. G. Edwards described Lane Cove society as 'the haves and the have nots':

"In the 1850s there were two classes of people in the district - those who owned property and had some interest in the district and those who owned nothing. The latter were almost all sawyers and timber splitters ... their huts were built of slabs of stringy bark, furnished with a hardwood table, two or three hardwood stools made by boring auger holes through slabs, and a few similarly made three legged small stools and a large fireplace.

"The other class was composed of men of some education. They had come to the new country to see what openings for business here existed, and for their enterprise received large grants of land."



Housing of the mid 19th Century in this rural community of orchardists and farmers was typically unpretentious and utilitarian, of timber or stone construction, small and neat with verandahed fronts and detached outbuildings. The home of Robert Pymble, an important early land owner in the "middle station" of life, is representative of many houses of the period. A continuation of the Georgian vernacular homestead style of architecture, the house is, unlike the bark hut, divided into several rooms with a verandah giving it an air of importance.

Occasionally houses might have classical details in elements such as the verandah columns, front door case and dormer window frames.

Additional examples:

Cottage in Ravenswood grounds, Pacific Hwy., Gordon  
Cottage in Roseville Park (formerly Firs Estate)  
"Greenwood", Mona Vale Road, St. Ives.

## Mid Victorian Style

As the isolated communities prospered and grew, buildings of greater substance and architectural pretension arose to house the well-to-do or to accommodate commercial functions. The most significant surviving example of this era is the house,



known as "Grandview", located on Pymble Hill. Built circa 1870 by Richard Porter, landowner and publican, the house was later used as the first bank in Ku-ring-gai, with the bank manager living on the first floor.

The house is typically Mid Victorian, formal and symmetrical in design with

a hipped roof and flanking chimneys. A cast iron verandah carried across the front of the building shades the large paned French doors.

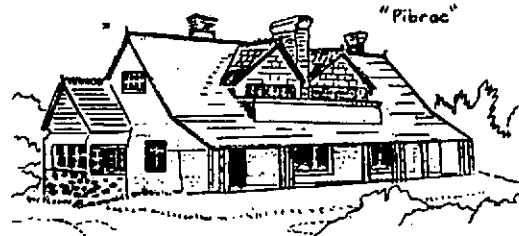
As the Victorian age continued the degree of external decoration on such houses increased.

Additional example:

The Rectory, St. John the Evangelist Church, Gordon.

## THE FEDERATION ERA 1888-1914

### Shingle Style



Throughout the middle of the 19th Century, Ku-ring-gai remained a quiet rural community, with the emphasis changing from timber production to orcharding and market gardening. The community served the markets of Sydney and its inner ring of heavily built up suburbs.

By about 1888, the pressures of population growth in Sydney, and the move towards suburban expansion, generated by improved public transport, created a change in the type of residential development taking place on the North Shore. Lobbying for a railway service had commenced in the late 1860s, and when in 1882 it seemed certain that a line would be developed from St. Leonards to Hornsby, land speculators saw the opportunity for suburban subdivision and began purchasing large landholdings close to the proposed railway stations.

One of the first of the new residential developments was at Wahroonga, where the architect John Horbury Hunt built one of the most original houses to have been seen in Australia at that date, "Pibrac", for Eccleston du Faur. "Pibrac" was as unlike the settlers' cottages as du Faur was to those earlier pioneers. An affluent and educated man, he had great influence on the artistic, scientific and cultural life of Sydney. His architect, Hunt, is seen by many historians as being instrumental in turning Australian architecture away from Victorian eclecticism towards the modern styles of the 20th Century. His use of the North American idiom of the Shingle style of architecture set the stage for the development of the Federation style.

"Pibrac" is built almost entirely of timber, combining a strong asymmetrical balance with a utilitarian approach. The elements used were massive squared posts, and shingled walls which grew into steep shingled roofs anchored by enormous brick chimneys. The house underwent considerable alteration early in this century.

#### Additional Examples:

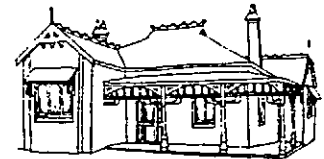
No. 1 Hill St., Roseville

No. 5 Cleveland St. Wahroonga

No. 52 Hastings Rd. Warrawee

### Federation Style

Architects of the 1890s were preoccupied with the development of an Australian style of architecture. No longer satisfied with imported English and American designs, they developed a unique type of residential building known today as "Federation Style", combining the use of face brickwork and terracotta tiles with extensive timber detailing and utilising the verandah as a principal design element.



Federation houses were constructed throughout Ku-ring-gai in the period up until the First World War. Some of Sydney's most important architects of the era lived and worked on the North Shore. These included Sir John Sulman, Howard Joseland, Walter Liberty Vernon and E. Jeaffreson Jackson.

## Queen Anne Style 7.

Other design influences were at work on the development of Australian domestic architecture in the last decade of the 19th Century. These included the work of Norman Shaw in the "Queen Anne" style, and that of the exponents of the Arts and Crafts movement, founded by William Morris and brought to Australia by the many English-trained architects who came to Sydney to practice in the 1890s.

Throughout Ku-ring-gai the fashion for 'Queen Anne' saw many red houses with modified classical detailing rise amongst the native landscape. The walls were of finely-gauged red brickwork and the roofs were of terracotta or slate with tiled ridges. The joinery was invariably painted white or ivory. Picturesque towers with 'candle snuffer' roofs and tall spikey chimneys gave a broken effect to the skyline.

The largest and most significant example to be built was "Innisfail" at Wahroonga, for John Toohey the brewer in 1894. Complete with Tudor gate lodge, separate ballroom and dairy, the house was set in eight acres of parklike grounds. Design elements which are particularly rare are the metal 'lantern' crowning the roof and the fine plaster strapwork in the front gable.

Queen Anne elements were popularised by speculative builders in a debased form throughout the 1890s.

Additional examples:

"Kiewa", Church Street, Pymble

"Glensley" ("Wychwood"), Ku-ring-gai Avenue, Turramurra

"Claremont", Telegraph Road, Pymble



## THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918

### Arts and Crafts Movement

The social turmoil of the war with its accompanying economic constraints produced a new approach to architectural design. Two styles were popular - a simplified Arts and Crafts style, and a Colonial revival.



"Tulkiyan", at Gordon, built in 1915 for William Donaldson, was designed by the architects Waterhouse & Lake.

B. J. Waterhouse had a gift for arranging shapes, textures, solids and voids into seemingly casual, informal architecture. His houses are comfortable and have a warm character without fuss or strain, free of unnecessary stylistic detail. The dominant feature of this charming Edwardian house is the large sheltering roof with broad simple planes of finely-textured terracotta shingles. "Tulkiyan" survives intact as a remarkable example of the theories of design which were in great measure to be overthrown following the War.

Additional Example:

8 Nyora St. Killara.

## Colonial Revival Style

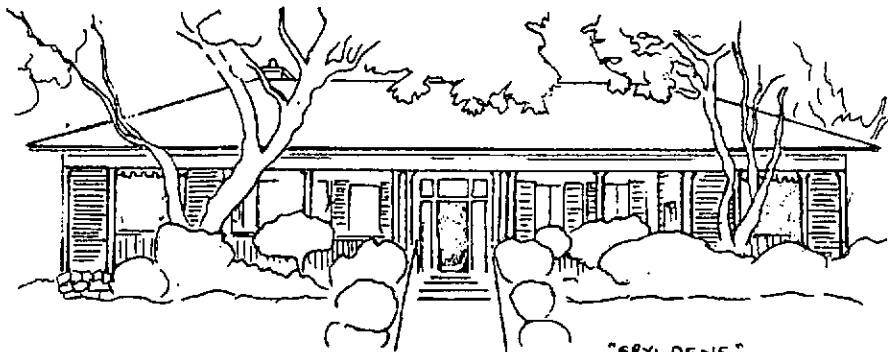
A small number of architects, reacting against the excesses of Victorian and Edwardian design, harkened back to the pure, controlled simplicity of Georgian design, using painted walls, low-pitched hipped roofs with boxed eaves, and windows which were simple rectangles with Georgian sashes and louvred shutters.

"Eryldene", at Gordon, was built in 1914 for Professor E. G. Waterhouse, to the design of North Shore architect William Hardy Wilson. The design was based on Wilson's exhaustive studies of early Colonial architecture and in particular of the Colonial bungalow "Horsley" at Smithfield. The design features a long, colonnaded verandah flanked by open pavillions at either end, and the joinery is copied directly from Colonial examples.

Colonial Revivalism had a short but influential flowering at this period, with many important examples in the Ku-ring-gai municipality.

Additional examples:

"Purulia", Fox Valley Road, Wahroonga  
No. 3 Addison Ave. Roseville



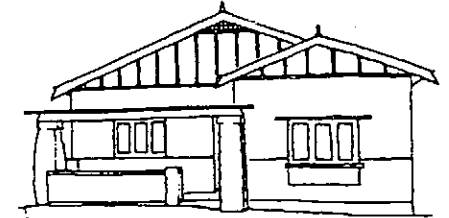
"ERYLDENE"

## BETWEEN THE WARS 1918-1939

### California Bungalow Style

The arrival in Australia of Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion Mahony in 1913 heralded a renewed interest in American domestic design in the local building press and the appearance of the California or Pasadena Bungalow design. The California Bungalow was plain, direct and close to nature. Using dark oiled timbers, rough stonework or smooth river-washed pebbles combined with dark brickwork and roughcast finishes, it was set low to the ground, fortress-like under a shallow oversailing roof with multiple gables.

James Peddle, a local architect who had been working in California, also returned to Sydney in 1913 to carry out designs for the housing estate at Daceyville. Peddle's skill in the new style won him several important commissions (for large bungalow designs) on Sydney's North Shore. Amongst these were a group of houses in Killara, including No. 4 Lynwood Avenue.



Built in 1917, these houses exhibit many of the typical details taken up by speculative builders throughout the following decade.

Additional examples:

No. 713 Pacific Hwy. Gordon  
No. 29 Mona Vale Rd. Pymble  
No. 49 Tryon Rd. Lindfield  
No. 51 Tryon Rd. Lindfield



## Spanish Mission Style

During the 1920s fashionable architects continued to look to America for inspiration. The fantasy and glamour of Hollywood came first to Australia in 1926 in the form of the mansion "Boomerang" at Elizabeth Bay. Within five years the Spanish Mission style had spread through all levels of domestic design, from large architect-designed houses to speculative bungalows.

In Ku-ring-gai the style was quickly adopted for its picturesque and decorative effect.

Typically "Mission" houses were built of brick finished in rough-cast render and roofed with pan tiled terracotta or multi-coloured tiles. Pseudo Spanish motifs were used lavishly on

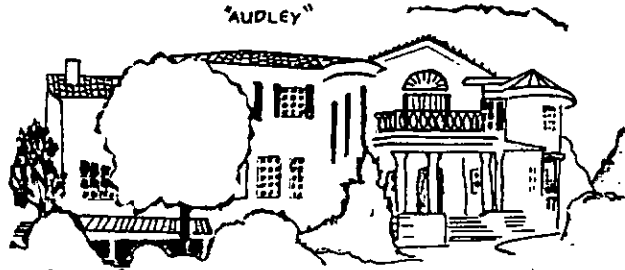
the larger homes, more sparingly on the smaller ones. Barley-twist columns, wrought iron grilles, rustic shutters and gabled chimneys, ornamental plaques and hanging lamps all helped in creating the illusion. In the garden, a grove of palms added an exotic touch in the North Shore bush setting.

### Additional examples:

- 1565 Pacific Hwy. Wahroonga
- 1161 & 1163 Pacific Hwy. Turramurra
- 8 Boomerang St. Turramurra
- 24 Mona Vale Rd. Pymble
- "Burnam Thorpe", Edward St. Gordon (now "Lady Gowrie")

A more restrained and rational version of Mediterranean-inspired domestic design was also being employed on the North Shore by Professor Leslie Wilkinson. Some examples:

- 7 Warrawee Ave. Warrawee
- 34 Hastings Rd. Warrawee



## Stock Broker Tudor and English Cottage Style

The horror of the Depression years led to two different approaches to domestic design, one stretching into the future, rational and severe, the other harking back to the good old days of merry England.

A revival of Tudor Manor House architecture commonly known as "Stockbroker Tudor" carried with it the connotations of success and respectability. The main feature of the style was the half timbered facade over red brick or rough cast walls. Above rose tall chimney stacks, sometimes with Tudor details. Below, the base was fortified with rough-hewn stone, flattened Tudor arches and small leadlight windows. These buildings were often unconvincing and superficial, although several architects created a more accomplished version of the style. The work of John R. Brogan on the North Shore is typical of the more lavish examples.

### Examples:

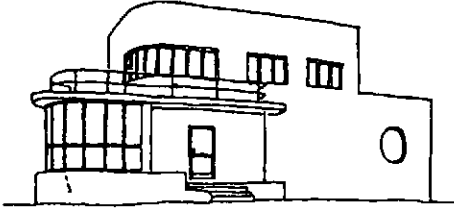
- 1428 Pacific Hwy. Wahroonga
- 1262 Pacific Hwy. Turramurra
- 2 Grosvenor St. Wahroonga
- 82 Pentecost Rd. Pymble
- 10 Bangalla Ave. Warrawee
- 1 Springdale Rd. Killara

For those with a nostalgic inclination but with less pretensions and a restricted budget, a more relaxed English Cottage style evolved. Suitable for single storey houses, it featured bell cast roofs and whitewashed walls, with face brick dressings and often a quaint crooked chimney.



## Modernism

Avant garde Australian architects, seeking a modern architecture to express the changing lifestyles of the 20th Century, broke with traditional forms and dropped all references to historical styles. They turned to the white cubic forms of the European school, utilising industrial products and mass-produced machine-made



components. Walls were cement-rendered and painted white, or built in cream-coloured brickwork. Streamlining and horizontality and the juxtaposition of curved walls and interlocking cubic forms outlined with ship railing balustrades suggested the name "P & O Style". Internally, Art Deco motifs with chrome and glass became dominant design features. Bathrooms and kitchens took on a futuristic look as every form of modern convenience was introduced to make the house 'a machine for living'.

As with the other styles of the between-wars period, builders and speculators were quick to take the stylistic motifs of modernism and apply them to a basic cottage form, producing thousands of mediocre examples.

Some examples:

- 34 Bangalla Ave. Warrawee
- 36 Park Cres. Pymble

## Art Deco Style

The 'Art Deco' movement of the 1920s and 30s and the 'Jazz Modern' style of the early 1940s were principally concerned with the decorative and applied arts. The style was characterised by angular motifs and strong geometric lines. Two houses in

Ku-ring-gai by Walter Burley Griffin are strongly related to the style, their external design idioms being generated by angular geometry incorporating stylised organic decorative elements.

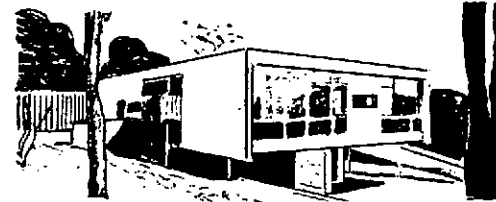
Many house interiors of this period reflect the principles of the Art Deco style. "Mahratta" at Warrawee is an outstanding example of an intact Deco-interior on a grand scale.

## POST WAR 1939-

## International Style

As with the years following the First World War, the 1950s proved to be a time of mixed directions in residential design. An international flavour came to Australia through a government policy of assisted migration, and traditional British ties were further eroded. Architects, subjected to building restrictions and shortages of materials, produced houses of simple form with low-pitched roofs and horizontal emphasis derivative of the work of Marcel Breuer. The style became known as the "International Style".

One of the most influential houses of the period was the Seidler house at Turramurra. On a sloping rocky site, Seidler supported a flat-roofed, machine-precision-looking box on thin-pipe columns and long projecting stone blade walls. The windows were designed like Mondrian paintings framing the view. Despite its climatic shortcomings,



imitations of this International style house sprang up all over Australia. The International style only appealed to a small section of society. However many significant examples of the style are to be found in Ku-ring-gai.

## The Sydney School Style

The 1960s saw a reaction against the sterility and impersonal coldness of Minimalist architecture issuing from the International school.

A group of young architects rediscovered the richness and texture of natural materials, clinker bricks, sawn western red cedar boarding, off form concrete and textured Swiss patterned tiles.

MAYTONE AVE.  
KILLARA



The houses they produced were thoroughly and distinctly Australian in the tradition of the Arts and Crafts movement. They were rich, warm and human in scale, texture and colour, an emotional response to the Australian condition. Nestled amongst the North Shore's rugged bush landscape, the style was termed "nuts and berries" architecture or the Sydney School style.

The economic climate of the time and a large increase in demand for housing led to the development of the 'Project Home' concept. Pettit & Sevitt produced a series of off-the-shelf Sydney School houses to the design of Ancher Mortlock Murray & Woolley.

## Classic Modern Style

As with the period following the First World War, the decades following the Second World War have seen a proliferation of stylistic idioms in residential design.

International Modernism has however continued to have a strong influence on the work of many architects over a long period of time. Prominent amongst these architects is Harry Seidler, who designed for himself a large house at Killara in 1967.

The house is built on a ruggedly steep site with massive cantilevered concrete projections creating a visually dramatic effect. The planning is broken up on four levels with a complex interplay of volumes, internally and externally. It exists as a sculptural work of art, ideally suited for the display of Seidler's extensive collection of modern art objects and furniture.



## Post Modernism

A development of the late 1970s and 1980s, Post Modernism describes a movement in architecture which, though based in popular culture, is intellectualised. For its forms it relies heavily on classical motifs used in unusual ways.

One of the most influential proponents of the theories of Post Modernism is Robert Venturi. In his paper "Complexity and Contradiction", he wrote "...be guided not by habit but by a conscious sense of the past - by precedent thoughtfully considered." Venturi's influence is seen in a house in Warrawee Avenue by architect James Muir. This building recognises complexities and contradictions: it is both complex and simple; open and closed; big and little. The spaces are complex whilst the outside form is simple and symmetrical, reflecting the classical pedimented shape of a Greek temple.

In Ku-ring-gai, architects continue to develop the current theories of architecture by designing homes of significance which will in time become heritage items of the National Estate.

Example:

No. 11 Warrawee Ave. Warrawee

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DOCUMENTS, RESEARCH PAPERS

Documents and research papers are held in vertical files of the Local Studies Collection and Ku-ring-gai Historical Society collection, located at Ku-ring-gai Municipal Library. Indexes available.

MAPS & PLANS

Selected resources relating to significant buildings are held in Ku-ring-gai Municipal Library. Indexes available.

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the author.....

ROBERT STAAS M.B.Env. U.N.S.W.  
B. Arch. N.W.W.I.T.  
Dip. Cons. Studies (YORK.)

Architect and director in the firm Noel Bell Ridley Smith & Partners, Robert Staas is a longtime resident of Ku-ring-gai. His special study has been the development of Architectural Style during the Federation period, and in his practice he specialises in conservation issues and heritage work. He is also Secretary of the Anglican Church's 'Historic Buildings Preservation Council', a founding member of the National Trust Ku-ring-gai Research Group, and a member of Ku-ring-gai Historical Society.

the designer and artist.....

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