

THE GLEBE LANDS OF BISHOPTHORPE AND ST. PHILLIP'S

1971

THE CASE FOR PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION

INTRODUCTION:

The Glebe lands of Bishopthorpe and St. Phillips form the easternmost areas of the Sydney suburb of Glebe and are bounded mainly by Parramatta Road, St. Johns Road and Cowper Street. This preliminary report seeks to establish these areas as being of outstanding historical and architectural value and advocates the substantial preservation of the historic townscapes, the rehabilitation of most buildings and the careful and sympathetic construction of some new buildings.

It is based on the assumptions that -

- (a) the Western Expressway will not be built in this area;
- (b) Leichhardt Municipal Council's planning proposals, now being prepared, will encourage substantial preservation within the density codes proposed for the various areas of Glebe, and
- (c) the areas bordering Broadway, Parramatta Road and Arundel Street will be zoned for complete re-development.

ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

The architectural importance of the area is of a special kind. It does not consist of great houses or buildings of intrinsic architectural merit. Because of their unusual history as church property Bishopthorpe and St. Phillips have preserved, within an area large enough to continue to serve changing contemporary needs, the character of Australian town architecture of the third quarter of the nineteenth century - that important but yet insufficiently understood period, between the gold rush of the 1850's and the building boom of the 1880's.

Within the area, cottage types and terrace types of great importance for an understanding of the development of architecture in Australia have survived. Set among them, in spacious, tree-lined streets, will be found, some larger houses, corner shops, former hotels and stores, together with an important group of church and public buildings in the vicinity of the corner of Glebe Point Road and St. Johns Road. Altogether the areas provide a traditional community precinct unique to Sydney, which still possess a vital community life today. With appropriate preservation, and some sympathetic development to increase the density of the areas, they could be made to serve the needs of the present day whilst retaining their traditional character as part of the nation's heritage.

CHARACTER AND TOWNSCAPE VALUES:

The distinctive character of Bishopthorpe and St. Phillips derives from their development mainly during the twenty years between 1855 and 1875. Due to the fact that the areas, including the streets, have remained under the control of a single owner, they are still in substantially original condition. For this reason they are unique in Sydney and even in Australia.

More important still, this architectural profile of a past Sydney suggests even earlier periods in the nineteenth century. Building styles changed little in the thirty years before the building boom of the 1880's and consequently many styles of the 1820's, 30's and 40's were extensively used in the 1850's to 1870's. Thus Bishopthorpe and St. Phillips contain not only the architecture of their time but also

reflect the building styles existing in the city in the 1820's to 1840's, a part of our heritage that has all but disappeared from the central city area. This fact can be substantiated by a comparison of buildings in Joseph Fowles' "Sydney in 1848" (1) with close cousins still standing in The Glebe.

This substantial reminder of our past history is thus valuable for several reasons and when viewed in relation to the mainly later development in the rest of Glebe, forms as complete a picture of nineteenth century urban Australian architecture as can be found.

Even when looked upon merely as townscape these glebe lands are, however, visually and architecturally interesting. The strong grid pattern of its wide streets, its lanes and tree plantings combine with the low and regular profile of the buildings to form a unity. The atmosphere is similar to that found in some of our older and better-preserved country towns and should be regarded as especially valuable in keeping a sense of diversity within a large, modern city.

It should be noted that restoration of many missing architectural details would, of course, assist in more clearly delineating the historic image of these areas.

HISTORY:

Bishopthorpe

Although Glebe was sub-divided into 28 allotments for the first public auction of land in Glebe in 1828, three contiguous lots nos. 7, 8 and 28 were not offered for sale. Lots 7 and 8 were later handed over to the trustees of St. Phillip's Church, the income derived to be used for diocesan purposes. Lot 28 was set apart for the residence of the Archdeacon and all revenue derived from the area retained for the Church and School Corporation 'to and for the personal use and occupation of the Archdeacon of New South Wales and his successors forever'. It was first known as the Archdeaconry.

When in 1836 Dr. W.G. Broughton was consecrated Bishop of Australia, the Archdeaconry became known as the Bishopthorpe Estate. In 1856 it was divided into 238 allotments and offered on 99 year leases. Lots were retained for St. John's School and St. Barnabas' parsonage.

The Bishopthorpe leases required all buildings to be constructed either of stone or brick. Other conditions prohibited the erection of more than two dwellings on an allotment and required buildings to face the main roads. No restrictions, however, were placed on the use to which buildings could be put. The subsequent erection of a number of hotels resulted in later years in questions at Synod as to the propriety of the Church deriving income from such a source. As a result of the conditions imposed, the buildings erected were generally of good standard. A contemporary description runs:

"The sub-division has been on the most liberal scale - the Streets being of the full proclaimed width of 66 ft. with lanes of 16½ ft. wide. The allotments have all 40 ft. frontages by depths

(1) Joseph Fowles lived in Glebe Point Road from 1866 to 1871.

averaging about 120 ft., thus affording ample space for good improvements and a plot of garden ground for each. The situation is a most desirable one, close to the city boundary but exempt from taxes and enjoying consistent communication with all parts of the city."

In general it may be said that occupation, following the subdivision, began from the Parramatta Road end of Glebe Point Road and Derwent Streets and moved diagonally towards St. Johns Road and Mount Vernon Streets. Most of the settlement took place between the early 1860's and the late 1870's, Mount Vernon Street, being fully built up in 1886, was the last street completed.

St. Phillips

This thirty-two acre portion, which the Church had not offered for sale in 1828, was cut up into 32 allotments in 1842 and auctioned as building allotments on 28 year leases. The building lease represented a convenient device by which the land could be rendered profitable over and over again without being alienated. With building leases the plots were let at a low ground rent on the condition that the lessee built at his own expense a house or houses of substantial character, such house at the expiration of the lease becoming the property of the ground landlord.

In 1870, the 28 year leases on St. Phillips expired and the dilapidated timber houses were soon cleared away and the land offered again on building leases, this time with terms of 45 to 50 years.

Two individuals, George Wigram Allen and David Elphinstone, played critical roles in the building up of St. Phillips during the 1870's; Allen as head lessee and financier, and Elphinstone as the prolific terrace builder.

Throughout the 1870's Mitchell, Campbell, Norton, Glebe, Broughton and Cowper Streets and the southern side of St. Johns Road were rapidly filled with substantial one and two-storeyed brick and slate terraces, advertised on hand bills as being ideal tradesmen's or mechanics' cottages. Development continued until the late 1890's.

DESCRIPTION OF ARCHITECTURE:

The traditional building types extant in The Glebe are briefly discussed in Appendix 1 and a brief walking tour of the areas in Appendix 2.

THE CASE FOR PRESERVATION:

The State Planning Authority in its "Glebe Study" (2) forcefully presented the case for preservation of appropriate inner suburban areas.

"Existing residential densities in the inner areas are high in relation to other parts of Sydney, particularly when it is considered that terrace houses provide most families with some private open space. When these old dwellings have been redeveloped they have usually been replaced by flats. The indications are that most Australian families with children do not find flats a suitable form of accommodation. Because the new development is generally in the form of three storey buildings, population densities are only slightly increased. Redevelopment has thus often made inner suburban living less attractive to families, without significantly increasing the number of people who can live there. Moreover, parts of the inner suburbs are architecturally and historically valuable and have a high degree of social

cohesion. Too often redevelopment results in the breaking up of both the physical quality and the social structure of the area. It is therefore important that increase in population should neither destroy areas of worthwhile character nor replace all the existing dwelling types which are suitable for family living, with flats.

As a generalization, it may be said that the overall objective of the inner suburbs should be to increase population and at the same time improve amenity and livability."

REHABILITATION AND PRESERVATION:

The complete redevelopment of the areas bordering Broadway, Parramatta Road and Arundel Street for high density commercial and semi-commercial activities, possibly including student hostels, would provide the owners with a high rate of return on their investment and allow them the economic freedom to adopt more socially oriented policies in the rest of the glebes.

Redevelopment in the residential areas could occur where open spaces exist (infill housing) or where there is useless open space at the rear of existing dwellings. For example, many of the cottages in Bishopthorpe are built on allotments 120 feet in depth. Here the possibility arises of a mews type development of one or two storeys based upon the lanes between the streets. St. John's Church of England Village could provide an admirable contemporary model for a development of this kind. In all cases it would be essential to retain existing character and scale.

A policy of rehabilitation of the existing stock of houses would be a sound one, as the condition of the buildings appears basically good and they provide facilities, such as private open space, that are generally regarded as desirable.

The optimum mix of redevelopment and rehabilitation would of course, depend on the results of a considerable number of detailed surveys and policy statements. These would include -

House Condition Survey - needed to establish what it is economically feasible to rehabilitate or redevelop (a pilot study is in preparation).

Traffic and Parking Survey - (a study is underway)

Survey of Present Uses - available from land use maps prepared by The Glebe Society for Leichhardt Council.

Social Survey and Social Priorities - the status of present residents and occupants would need to be considered. The formulation of a social policy would protect the rights of existing tenants (where necessary) and establish priorities for the letting of properties in accordance with Church policy which may assume certain obligations towards, for instance, old people. Disposal of some buildings as they fell vacant may be deemed desirable to help achieve socially and economically diverse but integrated neighbourhoods. Hugh Stretton in "Ideas for Australian Cities" expounds on the desirability of such a situation.

Economic Policy - A social policy would need to be integrated with an economic policy, as income produced must cover maintenance and produce an acceptable return on investment. The rate of return would depend on church policy and more particularly on the income producing potential of the Arundel and Broadway precincts.

(2) The State Planning Authority of New South Wales, April 1972.

CONCLUSION:

Much has been done in recent years to preserve our important public buildings and the grand homes of our more famous and wealthy early citizens. However, this approach has done little or nothing to conserve whole areas which offer more complete evidence of earlier life styles.

The Glebe lands of Bishopthorpe and St. Phillips, with their structural and historical unity and substantially original condition, represent a unique opportunity to preserve not only the atmosphere of the 1870's to 1890's in which years most of the area was developed, but also elements of the building styles of the 1820's to 1840's. In addition, preservation would allow the retention of the existing community that would inevitably be destroyed by any scheme of complete or substantial redevelopment.

Rehabilitation with some sympathetic redevelopment would provide medium to high density living combined with a high quality social and physical environment.

The rehabilitation of Bishopthorpe and St. Phillips represents a challenge in town planning, architecture and social policy of a type and scale never before tackled in Australia. This opportunity should not be allowed to pass.

APPENDIX 1

TRADITIONAL BUILDING TYPES

BISHOPTHORPE

Cottages

The single-storey, double fronted and verandahed cottage is a traditional type of building with a history reaching back almost to the beginnings of European settlement in Australia. It is the earliest type which survived in Bishopthorpe. These brick cottages give Bishopthorpe its unusual, spacious character, due largely to their scale and regularity.

The other important cottage type is the free-standing cottage. It is usually larger than the single-storey terraced house, featuring a hip-roof and verandah, and is normally set further back from the street front on a 40 foot allotment.

Terraces

Although single-storey dwellings predominate in Bishopthorpe, the townscape is given variety by many terraces, most of which were built in the 1870's. There are two distinct types - those with verandah only, and those with verandah and balcony.

The early 1870's brought a spate of two-storey terraces, complete with verandahs and balconies to an area which during the 1860's had consisted entirely of little cottages set amid vacant paddocks on the outskirts of the city.

Larger houses and villas

Bishopthorpe consists mainly of small cottages, but the presence of larger houses and villas indicates the mixed character of the occupants, a few master builders and successful merchants among a community of skilled artisans and tradespeople.

ST. PHILLIPS

Unlike Bishopthorpe, with its predominance of single-storey dwellings, St. Phillips is dominated by rows of strictly regimented two-storey terraces, built to house the working classes close to their places of employment in the city.

Due to the activities of Messrs. Allen and Elphinstone and a number of building companies and societies, row upon row of the St. Phillips terraces have a remarkable sameness in the design of windows, doors, roofs and chimneys and the standardisation

even extended to the door knockers. These functional but unpretentious cottages have few front gardens and portion of the small backyards are invariably occupied by brick toilets with curved tin roofs. Occasionally however, simple barge boards lining the eaves, attics with carved dormer windows or plain wrought iron columns provide a pleasant variation to the standard building form.

APPENDIX 2

A WALKING TOUR IN BISHOPTHORPE AND ST. PHILLIPS

Many hours and some miles of walking would be required to explore the whole of the glebes. However, the character and charm of the area and the full range of architectural styles can be discovered by following this tour.

Commence at the corner of St. Johns Road and Glebe Point Road.

The ecclesiastical buildings around the church of St. John the Evangelist, Glebe, which includes the original church (1857), Record Reign Hall (1897) and St. John's Church of England retirement village (1963), form a well-scaled group in their relation to the church, thus providing a village atmosphere at the heart of the suburb. St. Johns was completed in 1870, designed by John Horbury Hunt and Edmund Blacket.

Walk west on St. Johns Road and turn left into Derwent Street.

Derwent Street

- 117 and 115 - Built for Mr. Gracie by 1869, it retains its original wooden frieze, fretted brackets and turned verandah posts, similar to those used in the terrace at No. 44.
- 113 and 111 - Built by 1869. The oldest two-storey in the area and unlike any other houses in the street.
- 114 to 110 - 1876. Note the round-headed lights in the upper sashes of the windows: a stylistic feature that became common in Glebe in the later 1870's.
- 108 - Thorpe House. Built in 1867 by Richard Gawthorpe and occupied by him until 1891.
- 106 and 104 - Built by 1869 on land purchased by Edmund Blacket, and probably designed by him.
- 105 - 1869 with 1920's bungalow additions.
- 102 - Original ironwork of the 1870's (still present at 94 to 100) has been replaced by iron of the 1890's, the verandah roof changed from concave to convex and a bow shaped moulding run beneath the window sills.
- 83 and 81 - Built in 1868.
- 79 - Built in 1869-70.
- 65 - At the corner of Mitchell Street is an appealing group of stores built in this predominantly domestic enclave. This well-scaled, varied group of buildings provides a natural urban accent at the intersection. Number 65 was built in the late 1870's and the upper storey added in 1894.
- 66 and 64 - Derwent and Radnor. Built in 1873 and 1874 in the neo-gothic style.
- 52 - Ramelton House. An Italianate villa built in 1874 by David Elphinstone for himself.
- 44 - 1869. Note the unusually steep slope

of the bell-shaped verandah roof, the turned wood posts and fretted brackets and the large hoods over the upper windows.

- 32 to 4 - The groupings of houses are important for the character of the area. The eleven terraced cottages (4, and 10 to 24) combine with two gable fronted cottages (4, 6 and 8) at one end and two dormer-windowed cottages at the other, to form with two sets of terraces (26 to 32) a pleasant grouping of early colonial type domestic building.
- 28 and 26 - Built in 1880, flush to the street frontage, with unadorned party walls, French windows on the upper storeys, and shutters. The circumscribed circle pattern of the iron-work was patented in 1870 and is very common in Glebe.
- 22 and 20 - Unusual for their stone construction. A quarryman, J. Park, lived here in 1861.
- 35 to 27 - A charming mixed group of single and double-storey houses, all very early houses probably built before 1868.

Turn right into Catherine Street and right again into Westmoreland Street.

Westmoreland Street

- 2 - Chesterfield House, 1875, is admirably scaled, proportioned and sited in its own triangle of land. Situated at a mid-point of the Bishopthorpe area, this is a house which should be preserved and restored. Because of its size, site and garden it could well be put to a community purpose.
- 15 - A fine hip-roofed cottage built in 1881.
- 55 - Toxteth Park Hotel, 1875.
- 61 - "Wynthorpe". Built in 1874-5.
- 56 to 60 - Note the particularly intricate wooden frieze.

Turn left into St. Johns Road and proceed to the Town Hall on the corner of Mt. Vernon Street.

The Glebe Town Hall, 1880.

Corner of Lodge Street, St. Johns Road and Mt. Vernon Street. A fine example of the astylar Italianate palace style. Designed by Ambrose Thornley, Jnr.

Turn left into Mt. Vernon Street and at its end turn left into Catherine Street and left again into Mitchell Street. Follow Mitchell Street into St. Phillips, Glebe, on the other side of Glebe Point Road.

Mitchell Street

A walk down Mitchell Street from Glebe Point Road to Wentworth Park reveals rows of terrace houses built from the 1870's to the 1890's.

- 113 - The first fire station in Glebe.
- 111 to 101 - Park Terrace - built by William Jarrett in 1875.
- 134 to 124 - Louisa Terrace - 1875
- 97 to 89 and 87 to 81 - Lorne Terrace, built by William Jarrett in 1875.
- 104 to 96 - 5 stone cottages built before 1869.

- 77 to 67 - Built in 1882 for The Metropolitan Building Society who were responsible for many terraces in St. Phillips.
- 78 to 52 - Built in 1883.
- 50 to 26 - Terrace of 1889.
- 27 to 3 - Note the change in original roof line. Built in 1885.

Turn left into Wentworth Street and left again into St. Johns Road. Proceed up St. Johns Road noting the many fine and varied terraces. An interesting side journey may be taken down Glebe Street by the more energetic.

Glebe Street

This street contains the oldest surviving houses in the area. These houses lack verandahs and were built up to the street frontage with steps built out into the footpath.

- 11 - Double fronted cottage probably built in the early 1840's.
- 45 - Small paned sash windows retain the character of verandahed cottages in the early 19th century.
- 47, 49 and 51 - All built onto the street as in the city in 1840's.
- 55 - A very fine example of the corner store. Note stone and brick construction.
- Cnr. Bay St. - Australia Youth Hotel built around 1863. Still in near original condition.

Returning to St. Johns Road, one notices the fine group of civic buildings between Talfourd Street and Glebe Point Road. All were designed by James Barnett, the Government Architect at the time.

The Court House, 1889

Corner of Talfourd Street and St. Johns Road, Italian Renaissance in a heavier and more monumental manner than the Town Hall, symbolising justice.

The Police Station, 1883.

In a similar but simplified style to the Court House across the street thus providing an agreeable grouping.

The Post Office, 1888.

Corner of Glebe Point Road. The land was rescinded from St. Phillips, Glebe, in November 1889.

This returns the walker to the start and completes the tour.

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mainly from research material prepared by Professor Bernard Smith, Kate Smith and Max Solling. Additional copies available on request (at ten cents each) from the Secretary, Alan Robertson, phone 660-6149.

This brochure is the forerunner of a detailed monograph now in preparation by the Society. This monograph will cover the whole of the suburb of The Glebe and the case presented will be an extension of the argument above.