

National Trust

taking care of the Nation's heritage

In 1957, 12 years after it was founded by Annie Wyatt in 1945, the National Trust of Australia (NSW) acquired its first property, the Tenterfield School of Arts. Transferred to the Trust by a special Act of Parliament, the 1870s property is nationally significant as the site of the famous 'Federation Speech'. It also holds tremendous significance for the Trust, as the first in a large and diverse portfolio of buildings and sites, each of which has brought its own challenges.

By Angela le Sueur.

With the acquisition of the Tenterfield School of Arts, the Trust's initial role – to protect heritage from destruction – took on the added dimension of care and responsibility for significant heritage. For a community-based, not-for-profit organisation, the frustrations and rewards were intense. Over the years, through the Trust's quarterly publications, National Trust members have been able to share the complex issues inherent in acquiring and caring for significant heritage; rallying to the constant fundraising drives, and participating in the discussion as approaches to conservation and management have changed.

Three early property acquisitions reported by Trust publications illustrate the diverse challenges facing an organisation with severely limited financial resources, but determined to set the best possible example in management and care.

EXPERIMENT FARM COTTAGE – a 'CHALLENGE TO TRUST MEMBERS'

So said the headline of the May 1961 Bulletin. At a cost of £4,350, the Cottage was the Trust's first property purchase. It was estimated that repairs would cost almost half the cost of

purchase – some £2000 – and, although donations from members poured in (the sum of £1204 was acknowledged with thanks in the May issue), there was a long way to go. It was clear that a not-for-profit organisation which was starting to acquire heritage properties was in desperate need of a fundraising committee.

In 1961, Helen Blaxland (to become Dame Helen Blaxland, DBE) founded the National Trust Women's Committee. The aim was to attract funds and furniture for the property, and to create events to attract new members. By the time Experiment Farm Cottage opened in 1963, the Committee had raised £2,500 towards its restoration.

By August 1961, the Bulletin was able to report that work on repair and restoration had commenced under the supervision of the Trust's Honorary Architect at Parramatta, Mr L J Buckland. The grounds, too, were receiving attention, with Professor E G Waterhouse preparing a master plan for their development. The Cottage was emerging as the rural but elegant home of Surgeon John Harris.

However, there were what seemed to be insurmountable problems to the recreation of the colonial setting of the

Cottage. The land had been subdivided in the 1920s, and the new Ruse Street passed directly in front of the Cottage, divorcing it from its surrounds. As the first land grant in Australia and the site of former convict, James Ruse's critical experiment into self-sufficiency, the grounds held particular significance for the site. They also connected visually with two other similarly significant properties of the same era, Elizabeth Farm Estate and Hambleton Cottage.

Restoring the grounds

Years later, Colleen Morris wrote in the May-July 2001 issue of *Reflections* that the Fraser family, who lived in Experiment Farm Cottage from 1903 to 1913, 'could see the Stone Pines (*Pinus pinea*) of Elizabeth Farm Estate and the towering cypresses and araucarias of Hambleton. Old roses grew in the large oval garden bed, a Blood-red Trumpet Vine (*Distictis bussinatoria*) shaded the back verandah and to the rear of the cottage near the kitchen door there was a large vegetable garden.'

In the year 2001, funding under the Commonwealth Federation Cultural & Heritage Project Program allowed the Trust to embark on what was outlined in the February-April 2001 issue of *Reflections* as: 'An ambitious project to



OPPOSITE PAGE: Spring bulbs at Everglades.
Photo: Christopher Shain.

LEFT: Paul Sorensen, with son Ib and grandson Barry. 1962 National Trust Archives.

reinstate aspects of its (the Cottage's) colonial setting'.

The original drive and use patterns were restored to the front of the cottage, while landscaping and planting restored early plant species to the grounds, recreating the ornamental gardens and orchard. Survey plans and photographs of the Fraser family provided important evidence as to key plantings and the layout of the grounds. A Purchase's nursery catalogue of 1871, together with a database developed by Historic Houses Trust for Elizabeth Farm and studies carried out by Colleen Morris of the National Trust's Parks and Gardens Committee guided the selection of species. Replacement of fences and removal of inappropriate plants completed the picture.

The grand re-opening of the property by Her Excellency the Governor of NSW, Professor Marie Bashir AC took place in 2001. School children lined the reinstated carriage-way to watch the arrival of Professor Bashir arriving in a horse-drawn carriage, much as her predecessors might have done over a century ago.

EVERGLADES – once again a 'dream of loveliness'

Following quickly on the heels of Experiment Farm Cottage, the Trust acquired the then derelict Everglades Gardens at Leura. The Trust Bulletin of May 1962 announced on its cover page that the acquisition was made possible by 'the generosity of certain members who desire to remain anonymous'.

Created between 1933 and 1939 by

businessman Henry van de Velde with a team led by horticulturalist Paul Sorensen, the gardens and structures were an extraordinary endeavour for their time. In an article for the August-October 2002 issue of *Reflections* which discussed the shared role of van de Velde and Sorensen, architect Howard Tanner said the garden drew 'on the European tradition of forming massive terraces or platforms to civilise the landscape, and was cognisant of the most advanced garden designs created in Europe in the late 30s'. In the same article, Professor Philip Goad of the University of Melbourne is quoted as citing Everglades and, in particular, its studio terrace as 'one of the most significant, set pieces of Australian modernist garden design'.

But by 1962, the property had suffered from many years of neglect and decline. Fortunately, Paul Sorensen was available to work with the Trust, to achieve its vision for the garden as the 'first Australian National Garden'.

Bulbs, rhododendrons and structural repairs

As was to become the usual practice, the Trust launched immediately into a campaign to raise funds for restoration. The May 1962 Bulletin waxed lyrical: 'To help us in making the first Australian National Garden the dream of loveliness it ought to be'. Some 3000 tulips were among the first bulbs planted, and were anticipated eagerly as spring approached. The traditional rhododendrons however were not in flower that year, due to the extensive replanting, transplanting and massing needed to undo many years of neglect.

By 1969, Everglades was ready to participate in the famous Leura Garden Festival, of which it is now the highlight. Overgrown areas had been thinned, vistas opened up and the original planting of rhododendrons (1935) augmented with many varieties.

Structural landscaping came later. In February 1996 the Bulletin praised the extensive restoration program being carried out by the Mawland Group, which revealed the splendour of the gardens, 'characterised by purple-red ironstone, and walls and pathways of sandstone quarried on site'. Other features described were the archway – salvaged from the demolition of the London Chartered Bank building in Sydney, a Bacchus Fountain, grotto pool, original Italian urns and figures.

Gardens grow and change.

Over the decades the stark, modern movement elements of Everglades have been softened as spreading trees and shrubs asserted their own presence. Today, the property is truly a garden for all seasons, loved by visitors all year round.

OLD GOVERNMENT HOUSE – a Cinderella tale

Built in stages starting with the 1799 core constructed by Governor Hunter, the addition of Palladian wings as part of a major transformation by Governor and Mrs Macquarie between 1815 and 1821, and embellished or neglected by subsequent occupants, the story of Australia's oldest public residence over the decades is a mix of heartache and pride.

The building is owned by the NSW State Government, however in 1966



The late Ivor Wyatt OAM escorted Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on her 1970 visit to Old Government House. Following are His Royal Highness Prince Phillip, with Mrs Mabel Wyatt. National Trust Archives.



Princess Margaret on her 1975 visit to Old Government House. National Trust Archives.



Old Government House today. The ground floor has been reinterpreted to 1821, to reflect the tastes and styles of Mrs Macquarie during Governor Macquarie's period of residency.

the National Trust took over responsibility for its care and management. The early years were a welter of work, rushing against the clock to restore and furnish the house in preparation for not one, but two visits from the British Royal Family.

The Royal visits

Thursday 30 April 1970 went down in the annals as a very special day in the history of the Trust. The July issue of the Bulletin reported the visit of Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh to the property, with the Queen officially opening the restored building as a museum of the early Governors of New South Wales.

Five years later, the red carpet was out again; this time for Princess Margaret who, said the December 1975 Bulletin, 'became the first member of any British Royal Family to sit at the dining-table in Australia's oldest Vice-Regal residence', when she had lunch at the house on 30 October.

A letter to the Trust made all the preparation worthwhile. Princess Margaret's Lady-in-Waiting conveyed her appreciation for 'a delightful time' and said Her Royal Highness was impressed with the restoration of Old Government House 'to its former glory'.

Much to do – and undo!

The restoration project had been immense! The April 1970 Bulletin reported that 'The cost of the initial restoration, furnishing and landscaping, approximating \$180,000 has severely strained the Trust's financial resources'. Fortunately, benefactors were many. Foremost among them was The Commercial Bank of Australia Limited, which donated \$50,000 to the project in 1967 to commemorate its own centenary.

The tale of neglect and dilapidation was a long one, but it certainly could not be blamed on its early occupants! In the February 1995 Bulletin, former Trust curator Ian Stephenson wrote that 'After Macquarie's departure only minor extensions were made but the house was regularly refurbished. For example, considerable repairs and improvements were made for Governor Bourke in 1832.' The Colonial Architect queried the costs, 'especially those of the painter who claimed to have applied five coats of paint!'

The first major period of decline appears to have started in 1847, following the death of the Hon Lady Mary Fitzroy, wife of Governor Fitzroy, in a carriage accident in the grounds. Governor Fitzroy had been the driver. After

the incident, the Governor rarely visited the house. It fell into disrepair to the point where the Colonial Architect found in 1855 that it was 'in such a decayed state as to render it, in my opinion, useless to attempt to repair it'.

A period of private leases followed, but the property was still in poor shape when Government Architect, Walter Liberty Vernon carried out, in 1909, what has been called the first conscious restoration project undertaken in NSW. Large sections of render were missing from the front and rear, the eaves had dropped and Lady Gipps's Bower had collapsed.¹

The first 'restorations'

The property was adapted at this time to allow its lease to the Kings School. Changes were largely superficial, however. The configuration of the central portion of the house remained largely intact. Ian Stephenson reported that: 'Many original details were repaired or copied. For example, the plaster cornices inside the house and the decoration on Greenway's portico were re-run using the old as a template.'

When the National Trust took over responsibility for the property in 1966, Stephenson was reported by the Bulletin as saying: 'A main aim was to reconstruct

elements from the gubernatorial period which had been lost in the 1909 works. This involved reconstructing the kitchen and elements of the Housekeeper's Room and Servants' Hall, based on the c1817 plan attributed to John Watts. In addition, skirting boards and a stone chimney piece were changed to give the public rooms a more uniform appearance. The effect was to make the house look like one building instead of a series of structures whose major development took place over 20 years between 1799 and 1818.'

A quarter of a century later, however, the February 1995 Bulletin reported that major repairs were needed again. 'The slate roofs and downpipes were failing and the hard internal cement renders applied in 1909 and the 1960s were exacerbating problems with damp and threatening to damage the soft brick walls.'

Stepping back into 1821

In the year 2001, funding of \$1,200,000 under the Commonwealth Federation Cultural Heritage Projects Program enabled the National Trust to embark on major conservation works which, for the first time in decades, dealt with structural problems delayed due to the lack of funds. The Butler's Pantry and

Housekeeper's Room were restored, the latter complete with shelves as revealed by archaeological investigation. The exterior of the house was painted as it was during Macquarie's residency and the interpretation of ground floor interiors to 1821 began.

Over the past year, since early 2004, a soft furnishings program coordinated by Dr James Broadbent and nineteenth century soft furnishings specialist, Elizabeth Wright has been transforming the ground floor to reflect the tastes and styles of Mrs Macquarie. Skilled volunteers are recreating the curtains, bed hangings and even the floor coverings using colours and fabrics known to have been favoured by Mrs Macquarie.

Almost a century and a half since the departure of the last gubernatorial household from Old Government House, the property today is reasserting its significance as Australia's oldest public building, and a rich experience to be treasured.

¹ Conservation Plan for Old Government House, Parramatta: NSW Department of Public Works and Services, November 1977.

THE NATIONAL TRUST'S PROPERTY PORTFOLIO

Significant acquisitions over the years

Tenterfield School of Arts Transferred by Act of Parliament	1957	National Trust Centre and S H Ervin Gallery Leased from the NSW Government	1975
Experiment Farm Cottage Purchased	1961	Miss Traill's House & Garden Bequeathed by Miss Ida Traill	1978
Everglades Gardens Purchase made possible by anonymous gifts	1962	Woodford Academy Gifted by Miss Gertrude McManamey	1979
Lindesay Bequeathed by W D Pye	1963	Saumarez Homestead Gifted by the White family	1984
Stella James House (formerly Walter Burley Griffin House) Purchased	1964	Vienna Cottage Purchased, with funding from the local Vienna Appeal Committee	1984
Wirrimbirra Sanctuary Transferred by the Stead Foundation	1965	Dundullimal Gifted by the Palmer family	1986
Cooma Cottage Purchased	1970	Tomago House Gifted by Tomago Aluminium	1986
Norman Lindsay Gallery Purchased	1970	Golden Vale Gifted by the Keighley family	2005