

THE TWO WINGS OF BISHOPSCOURT : THE REASONS FOR THEIR CONTRASTING STYLES AND THE ORIGINS OF THEIR DESIGNS.

Note : Images of the buildings and the painting referred to in the text are available on Google.

The question most commonly asked by visitors to Bishops court is the reason the two wings are built in such distinctly contrasting styles. Both wings have acquired reputations at wide variance from each other, neither being wholly deserved. The bluestone, or Blackburn wing, is generally regarded as a work of architectural perfection, while opinions of the red brick , or Butler wing, vary from it being dull to abominable.

THE BLACKBURN WING.

The mellowed bluestone Blackburn wing has grafted itself onto the affections of those familiar with it as one of the earliest and most beautiful examples of colonial architecture in Melbourne. However it is not an accurate example of the Italianate style intended by its architect James Blackburn, as it is almost certain that it was not completed in accordance with his design. Split bluestone rubble, at that period the cheapest form of masonry construction would, on a building of Bishops court's size and status, have been intended to be rendered.¹ If this had been done Bishops court would have a totally different appearance to what it has today. It would resemble Rosedale Homestead near Campbelltown, Tasmania, which was designed by James Blackburn shortly before he moved to Melbourne, and was surely the inspiration for the design of Bishops court.

Rosedale is a stylish Italianate villa which, with its rendered, cream painted walls would not look out of place in the Tuscan countryside. Leaving aside the different finish of the walls, Rosedale has many similarities to Bishops court. The compactness of the design with the squat tower, hipped roofs, the box bay window in the drawing room, even the terrace on which Rosedale stands are replicated on a smaller scale at Bishops court.

Most architectural designs are derivative, and Rosedale is no exception. It began life as plain single storey Georgian homestead built in 1828 for grazier John Leake.² ³In 1847 Blackburn designed major additions which included a double

¹ Elizabeth Rushen, Bishops court Melbourne : Official Residence and Family Home, Mosaic Press, Preston, Vic., 2013, p. 39.

² Eric Ratcliff, A Far Microcosm : Building and Architecture in Van Diemen's Land and Tasmania 1803-1914, Fuller's Bookshop in association with Foot and Playsted, Hobart, 2015, p. 581.

³ John Leake 1780-1865 was a merchant in Hull and Hamburg who emigrated to Van Diemen's Land in 1823. The capital he brought with him entitled him to a grant of 2000 acres, and his subsequent industriousness earned him a further grant. He was an example of colonial success, in both farming and banking, in which he utilised his previous mercantile experience. From humble beginnings when he and his family personally tilled the soil and endured the privations of

storey asymmetrical wing, a square three storey tower and another smaller tower over the entry porch, situated in the centre of a colonnaded verandah.⁴ The richly ornamented interiors must have accounted for much of the 4000 to 5000 pounds Leake spent on the additions. Considering that the whole of Bishops court had to be built from the government grant of 2000 pounds, most of it during a period of gold rush inflation, it is not surprising that the rendering was omitted.

The design of Rosedale was almost certainly based on that of Sandridge Park in Devon, designed by John Nash in 1805 for Lady Ashburnham, the widow of a banker. It is dominated by a square tower, on one side of which is a bay window balanced by a conservatory on the other. The walls on either side of the tower were faced with columns. To the left of the bay window, but set back from the façade was a circular tower.⁵

Nash's design was well publicised, having been exhibited at the Royal Academy. It was also engraved for publication by Thomas Hosmer Shepherd, but from an angle which excludes the circular tower from view. It must have been this engraving which was the inspiration for Blackburn's design for Rosedale.⁶

Nash's design for Sandridge was in turn based on his earlier design for Cronkhill, at Attingham in Shropshire,⁷ built in 1802 for Francis Watford, manager of Lord Berwick's estate.⁸ Here the main features of the plan are a circular and a square tower, connected by a right angled loggia. Cronkhill, like Sandridge and Rosedale, was built on a wooded hillside overlooking a gently sloping valley. The site of Bishops court, backed by trees which had not at that period been cleared, and overlooking the slope of the future Fitzroy Gardens may have reinforced Blackburn's decision to base Bishops court's design on that of Rosedale.

Cronkhill was the earliest of a series of designs by Nash based on the vernacular architecture of the Campagna, the plain surrounding Rome.⁹ Ever since the early 18th century when wealthy Englishmen had begun making the Grand Tour, Rome, as the home of the classical writers on whom their education was based, had been their ultimate destination. Highly romanticised paintings by Claude Lorrain, Poussin and Salvator Rosa depicting Roman ruins and the surrounding

pioneering, which included withstanding a siege by bushrangers, he went on to be one of Tasmania's most successful pastoralists, bankers and politicians. The building of Rosedale homestead signified his success. See Sharon Morgan, *Land settlement in early Tasmania : Creating an Antipodian England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 8, 36, 130.

⁴ Clive Lucas and Ray Joyce, *Australian Country Houses : Homesteads, Farmsteads and Rural Retreats*, Landsdowne Press, Sydney, 1992, p. 50.

⁵ Michael Mansbridge, *John Nash : A Complete Catalogue*, Phaidon Press Limited, London (Paperback) 2004, pp. 118, 119.

⁶ Ratcliff, pp. 971, 972.

⁷ Mansbridge, pp. 118, 119.

⁸ Mansbridge, pp. 101, 102.

⁹ Mansbridge, pp. 101, 102.

countryside were brought home by the grand tourists, and in many cases served as the inspiration for their owners to transform their estates in the style of classical landscapes.¹⁰

The design of Cronkhill was most likely inspired by Claude Lorrain's painting 'Rome and the Ponte Molle', painted in about 1645.¹¹ It was purchased by Lord Ashburnham in 1760 and now hangs in the Birmingham City Art Gallery. The Ponte Molle is the bridge which carries the Via Flaminia across the Tiber.¹² On the left of the painting is a villa with circular and square towers, in a wooded setting overlooking the river.¹³ This was the scene which inspired Nash's designs, and subsequently Blackburn's.

Bishopscourt is not the only Australian house whose design can be traced back to this painting and Nash's design for Cronkhill. In 1825 Bungaribee homestead was built for William Campbell near Eastern Creek to the west of Sydney. Its main feature was a two storey circular tower from which two single storey verandahed wings radiated at right angles. This too was a romantic interpretation of the architecture of the Campagna derived from Claude Lorrain, John Nash and the architectural pattern books containing sample designs for the use of architects and amateur builders. There is an intriguing possibility, although unlikely ever to be proved, that Bungaribee was designed by Francis Greenway. Not only are there many stylistic similarities between it and some of his works, but Greenway was employed in Nash's office at the time of Cronkhill's design. Regretably, this exquisite cousin of Bishopscourt was demolished in the 1950s.¹⁴

THE BUTLER WING.

In comparison with the unfinished Blackburn wing, the Butler wing was completed according to its design, and has a stylistic heritage which can be traced back further than that of the Blackburn wing.

As a reaction against the classical style which had dominated architecture in the eighteenth century, and as part of the romantic movement which had influenced all forms of art since the beginning of the nineteenth, came a renewed interest in the Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages. Once regarded as barbaric, these venerable buildings ranging from Westminster Hall in London to small parish

¹⁰ David Watkin, *The English Vision : The Picturesque in Architecture, Landscape and Garden Design*, John Murray, London, 1982, pp. 28, 29.

¹¹ Mansbridge, pp. 101, 102.

¹² Catalogue, Birmingham City Art Gallery.

¹³ Watkin, pp. 116, 117.

¹⁴ James Broadbent, *The Australian Colonial House : Architecture and Society in New South Wales 1788-1842*, Hordern House, Sydney, 1997, pp. 145, 146.

churches and ruined abbeys throughout the countryside came to be viewed with a new appreciation.

A major advocate of the Gothic style was the architect Augustus Welby Northey Pugin (1812-1852). His architectural output ranged from houses like Scarisbrick Hall in Lancashire,¹⁵ the interiors and decorative details of the new Houses of Parliament at Westminster, and innumerable churches, Catholic and Anglican, in England, Ireland and Australia.^{16 17}

Pugin was conscious of the damage caused to the English environment and social fabric by industrialisation, and believed that these ills could only be rectified by a return to the values of the Middle Ages. He developed a social theory based on an idealised vision of medieval life where all manufacturing and building was carried out by craftsmen, economic activity was that of the pre-industrial era and towns were visions of Gothic perfection. Pugin's enthusiasm for Gothic was fuelled by his conversion to Catholicism, and the conviction that this style, being that of the Catholic dominated culture of the Middle Ages, was the only one appropriate for ecclesiastical buildings.¹⁸

Pugin's utopian and impractical vision of a recreated medieval world was not shared by many, but other influential thinkers believed that certain values of the period could be usefully incorporated into contemporary society as an antidote to some of the social ills of the Victorian industrial world. Amongst them was the art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900). Ruskin believed in the moral superiority of Gothic architecture on the grounds that it was created by artists and craftsmen who were free to express their individuality in their work, instead of being confined by the rigid rules of style and proportion that governed classical architecture, leaving no room for individual expression. Like Pugin, Ruskin deplored the social damage caused by industrial capitalism.

William Morris (1834-1896) publicised the virtues of medievalism through his writings, textile designs and furniture. Under the influence of Christian socialists such as Charles Kingsley, Morris advocated a pre-capitalist communal life, where production was in the hands of individual craftsmen.¹⁹

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT

The English Arts and Crafts movement gradually evolved from this philosophy based on a perceived medieval past. It was believed that a combination of architects, painters, sculptors and craftsmen could merge with politics to create

¹⁵ Rosemary Hill, *God's Architect : Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain*, Allen Lane (Penguin), London, 2007, pp. 183, 184.

¹⁶ Hill, pp. 520, 521.

¹⁷ Pugin never visited Australia, but sent out plans or sometimes wooden scale models.

¹⁸ Hill, illustration plate 52.

¹⁹ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Victorian and After*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1968, p. 110.

the ideal society. The basic tenets of the English Arts and Crafts movement included a belief in the superiority of Gothic architecture for the freedom of expression it allowed the individual craftsman, the simple beauty of the work of the country artisan and the necessity of art for the happiness of humanity. The concept of a society and economy based on the work of craftsmen, as opposed to mass production on the capitalist model, led many exponents of the Arts and Crafts movement to regard themselves as socialists. The irony was that due to the expense of constructing hand crafted buildings, only the rich could afford them.

ARTS AND CRAFTS BUILDINGS IN BRITAIN.

According to Arts and Crafts theory, a building should fit comfortably in its setting, be constructed with local materials preferably obtained from the site, be constructed in accordance with local building practices, and be designed to reflect the local vernacular style. The styles available for inspiration depended on the locality, for example, Scottish Baronial in Scotland, Elizabethan half-timber in the Midlands or stone cottages in the Cotswolds. Arts and Crafts buildings were meant to be new interpretations of traditional styles, and so the best of them were, but very often the results were convincing imitations. Many were built for newly enriched industrialists wishing to be given a veneer of respectable antiquity.

Typical of such houses was Cragside in Northumberland, built to the design of Richard Norman Shaw between 1869 and 1884 for armaments manufacturer Lord Armstrong. Built on a rugged hillside, it was inspired by the castellated, battlemented fortresses of northern England and included much old English half-timbering. William Morris textiles and stained glass dominated the interiors.²⁰

Another was Wightwick Manor in Staffordshire, built between 1887 and 1893 to the design of Liverpool architect Edward Ould for Theodore Mander, a paint manufacturer from Wolverhampton. The Mander family was familiar with the Arts and Crafts philosophies of Ruskin and Morris, and Ould produced for them a convincing half timbered Elizabethan house in the local building tradition.²¹

Attempts to apply Arts and Crafts principles to the design of housing for workers who would in theory be the beneficiaries of its practitioners socialist principles resulted in Lord Leverhulme's model village at Port Sunlight to house the employees of his soap factories. Although not inspired by any identifiable vernacular style, at least the generally picturesque compositions achieved by means of tall chimneys, gables and spreading roofs gave the model village an appearance which was a welcome relief from the standard factory terrace.²²

²⁰ Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1979, pp. 305-316.

²¹ Girouard, pp. 375-380.

²² Nicholas Crane, *The Making of the British Landscape*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 2016, p. 458.

ARTS AND CRAFTS BUILDINGS IN AUSTRALIA.

As difficult as it was to faithfully apply Arts and Crafts principles in Britain, it was even harder in Australia, where there were no acceptable local building traditions for inspiration. They therefore had to be borrowed from Britain, and in unskilled hands the result was a style that became known as Old English or Queen Anne. Here, a few hand crafted fittings and small areas of half timbering or rough cast were grafted onto red brick walls pierced by leadlight windows, with steep roofs of Marseilles tiles and clustered chimneys. However, in the hands of architects like Walter Butler, trained by the finest Arts and Crafts practitioners in England the style produced some striking buildings which in some instances reflected elements of the true English Arts and Crafts philosophy.

WALTER BUTLER.

Walter Richmond Butler was born in 1864 on the Somerset farm of his parents Henry and Mary Butler, one of eight children. At the age of 15 he was articled to architect Alexander Lauder of Barnstaple, Devon. Lauder was a supporter of Arts and Crafts principles, and required that all workers engaged on his buildings should be conversant with crafts other than their own, so that they could feel that they were contributing to the whole building, not just carrying on a particular trade. Through Lauder's office Butler met the leading arts and crafts architects of the day : William Lethaby, John Sedding, (in whose office he later worked after leaving Lauder), and Richard Norman Shaw. Sedding's office was affiliated with William Morris. Shaw, Sedding and Morris formed the nucleus of the London Arts and Crafts movement, and Butler worked with Morris on several projects.

In 1888, at the height of the land and building boom, Butler came to Melbourne after being offered a 12 month contract by architect Alfred Dunn. Other members of his family followed, and their marriages cemented Butler into the Victorian architectural fraternity. In 1894 Butler married Emilie Millicent Howard. Emilie's sister was married to Albury architect Campbell Macknight, and her cousin was Arts and Crafts architect Rodney Alsop. Butler's sister Florence married architect Beverley Ussher, with whom Butler later went into partnership. He was also related by marriage to the Austin family of Western District graziers, whose connections provided some lucrative commissions.²³

Butler soon became one of Melbourne's leading architects, reportedly due as much to his personal accomplishments and success in cultivating clients, as to his professional skill. Whatever socialist sympathies he may have imbibed during his training with the English Arts and Crafts architects were well submerged by the time he arrived in Melbourne. In any case, they had probably never

²³ Katrina Place, Walter Richmond Butler : An English Arts and Crafts architect in Australia, Master's Research Thesis, University of Melbourne, 2002.

developed beyond the utopian vision of contented, individualistic craftsmen producing fine architecture in a recreated pre-industrial world, which had been one of the basic tenets of the early Arts and Crafts movement. He certainly did not emulate William Morris, a dedicated supporter of Engels and Marx, who was imprisoned for his political activities. By the early 1900s Butler's practice was largely centred on the design of palatial homesteads for Western District and Riverina graziers, Melbourne houses for industrialists and ecclesiastical commissions for the Church of England after he was appointed Diocesan Architect in 1895.²⁴

Butler's first major homestead commission was Blackwood at Penshurst in the Western District, designed in 1891 for grazier Robert Blackwood Ritchie. Butler disliked the standard style of Australian country houses, standing squarely in the landscape without regard to orientation, and surrounded by cast iron verandahs screening large windows. Blackwood was a complete contrast to this model, and incorporated many elements of Arts and Crafts theory. Stretching along a ridge, it fitted comfortably on its site. Being built largely of bluestone quarried nearby, it conformed to the requirement of being constructed of locally sourced material, used in accordance to the local building traditions, bluestone being the characteristic building material of the Western District. At a glance Blackwood looked, as was intended, to have evolved over time. The English elements of its inspiration included the prominent chimneys, half-timber gables, steep tiled roofs, and lead light windows of a size dictated by exposure to the sun. The interiors were in the Old English style.²⁵

In his next two major commissions, Wanganella and Newminster Park homesteads, Butler further developed his adaptation of the Queen Anne style which he subsequently used on a reduced scale in the design of Bishopscourt. Wanganella homestead near Deniliquin was designed in 1894 for leading merino sheep breeder Thomas Millear. The Millear family's Western District homestead Edgarley was the typical square bluestone verandahed house that Butler regarded as inappropriate to the Australian environment. The Millear's new homestead was a complete contrast. Comprising 52 rooms, the double storey house was built of red bricks made on the site in the best Arts and Crafts tradition, with steep slate roofs dominated by a long ridge, half-timbered gables and bay windows. The ground floor verandah was the main concession to the Riverina climate. The interior was ornately finished, the polished wooden staircase being its main feature. Extensive out buildings also designed by Butler were constructed at the same time. Wanganella was accidentally burnt down in 1935.^{26 27}

²⁴ Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 7, Melbourne University Press, 1979, article by George Tibbits.

²⁵ Harriet Edquist, *Pioneers of Modernism : The Arts and Crafts Movement in Australia*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2008, pp. 75-78.

²⁶ Edquist, p. 78.

²⁷ Timothy Lee, *Wanganella and the Merino Aristocrats*, Hardie Grant, Richmond Vic., 2011, p. 165.

Squatter rivalry was the most likely reason for the construction of Newminster Park homestead to the north of Camperdown in 1900 for Andrew Spence Chirnside (not to be confused with his father Andrew Chirnside of Werribee Park.) Chirnside had apparently been impressed by plans Butler had prepared for huge extensions to William Manifold's homestead at Purrumbete, and requested plans for a house of similar proportions from Butler. Prior to the commencement of building, Chirnside and his wife left for England to attend the coronation of Edward VII, leaving the construction entirely in the hands of Butler. On their return they realised that they could never live in such an enormous house, and never moved in. Meanwhile the Manifolds had decided that the plans Butler had prepared for them were excessive and changed architects, engaging Guyon Purchas to produce the unique design of the present Purrumbete homestead. Newminster Park was later sold to Janet, Lady Clarke, and after passing through the hands of numerous other owners was demolished in the 1930s except for the tower which still stands in a paddock surrounded by a few surviving garden trees. The long ridge of the red tiled roof, clustered chimneys, half-timbered gables and windows expressed as a strip across the walls, were repeated on a reduced scale at Bishops court. The tower bears a strong resemblance to that designed by Butler for Holy Trinity Church, Benalla.²⁸

With Butler's addition to Bishops court in 1903, the house became a more genuine example of Arts and Crafts architecture than the previous designs, as rather than just appearing to have been built at different periods, as for example Blackwood, it actually had been, its two wings having been built 50 years apart. The abrupt junction of the two wings of Bishops court in their contrasting architectural styles is often the subject of unfavourable comment. This must be due in part to the lack of exposure in Australia to buildings which have been constructed in stages over a long period, each successive addition being designed in accordance with the style prevailing at the date of construction. This is however commonly found in England, and is not considered unusual or in any way detracting from the inherent worth of the building. Such buildings were the inspiration of the Arts and Crafts movement, and it was entirely in accordance with its philosophy that additions should be made in the style current at the date of construction. Each part had to be true to its time.

A brief article on the Butler wing appeared in the Building, Engineering and Mining Journal during its construction. Interestingly it states that the new wing was the 'first section of an ultimately complete residence', but gives no source for this assumption. This would imply that the bluestone Blackburn wing would ultimately be replaced by an extension of the new Butler wing. However, considering that the ground swell of opinion in favour of retaining the Blackburn wing was apparent from the time the issue of extending the house was raised, and the strain on the church finances to pay for the Butler wing was so great, it is unlikely that any further building could have been seriously contemplated. Butler must have been aware that when his additions were completed, the appearance of Bishops court would remain unaltered in the foreseeable future. This would not have troubled him, as the addition to the house in the current,

²⁸ Edquist, pp. 78-80.

even if contrasting style, was perfectly in accordance with English Arts and Crafts theory. The author of the article in the journal evidently thought so too, as he went on to state 'the work when completed will form an admirable addition to the present house.'²⁹

That the practice of adding to an existing house in a contrasting style was acceptable at that period is borne out by Butler's work at Murndal homestead near Hamilton in 1906. This property had been established by Samuel Winter in 1837 and the house had grown steadily since then from a two room stone hut to a 40 room mansion, largely by means of ad hoc additions. By 1906 the original central stone section was fronted by a conservatory, and flanked on the right by a stone gabled, leadlight windowed wing which would not have looked out of place in Winter's native Ireland, and on the left by a double storey bluestone Italianate wing with a cast iron verandah. The only unifying feature was the ivy which smothered the whole building.

Butler was commissioned to provide more bedrooms above the original stone section, which by that date had been transformed into the library. One of the provisos of the brief was that there be no damage to the library, which was revered as the heart of Murndal.³⁰ Butler solved the problem by placing a three gabled half-timbered wing above the library and between the two end wings. As at Bishops court, the half-timber gabled addition directly abuts the bluestone wing. The long ridge line of the roof of the new wing echoes that of Bishops court and Wanganella, and connects the two original wings of different heights.³¹ Murndal is an excellent example of how English arts and crafts principles were applied in the Australian context, the three contrasting styles of the main façade blending harmoniously together. Murndal is regarded as one of Australia's most beautiful homesteads.

Butler was not the only architect to design new buildings which were intended to give the appearance of having been built in stages over time. This was achieved by the use of contrasting building materials and construction methods. Ettrick homestead near Derrinallum in the Western District was built in 1900 for grazier Sibbald Currie to the design of architects Sydney Smith and Ogg. Ettrick was given a picturesque uneven profile, with a rough quarried bluestone ground floor, (resting on concrete foundations reinforced by railway lines, which have prevented any subsidence), rough cast, cream painted upper storey walls, a half-timbered billiard room and a brick tower and window trimmings.³²

CONCLUSION

In summary, we need to reassess the commonly held prejudices about the architectural value of the two component parts of Bishops court. Both wings have architectural pedigrees stretching back hundreds of years before the dates of

²⁹ Building, Engineering and Mining Journal, Melbourne, 13 October 1913, p. 258.

³⁰ Australian Council of National Trusts, Volume 1, Cassell Australia Ltd., North Melbourne and Sydney, 1969. Chapter author Weston Bate, pp. 132-139.

³¹ Edquist, pp. 82-80.

³² Edquist, p. 85.

their construction, both styles originating in parts of the globe quite alien to the antipodean setting to which they had to be adjusted. The Blackburn wing, although designed by a master architect, was not completed as planned, while the Butler wing was completed in accordance with its design by Melbourne's finest Arts and Crafts architect in a style which relates to many of his most successful buildings. Both wings are equally significant components in a building of major importance to Melbourne's heritage.

Tim Gatehouse. 7 July, 2017.