

Jeffrey John Turnbull, *Walter Burley Griffin: the architecture of Newman College, 1915-18*, Vivid Publishing, 2018



The first 56 students were admitted to the Initial Structure at Newman College on 24 March 1918. As part of the centenary celebrations, a book on the architecture of the Initial Structure, 1915-18, conceptually designed by Walter Burley Griffin, facilitated by Marion Mahony Griffin, will be published during June 2018.

Little has been written on the Newman College commission, so this building was studied in relation to the literature available prior to 1915, which might explain Griffin's expertise in planning, construction and form. Thus, insights emerged about Griffin's architectural ideas, design methods, life experiences, and convictions. Until now the peculiar architectural expression found in Griffin buildings has been attributed in Melbourne to the mistaken view that he was a Theosophist.

Walter grew up in a family committed to their Congregationalist beliefs. During 1893 the Griffin family moved another eight miles west from Chicago's business centre, from Oak Park to Elmhurst. Their home was now across the road from their Congregationalist church buildings. However, Walter drifted in belief toward a universal Christianity, rather than favoring any denominational 'cult'.

Indeed, in that year 1893, the World's Parliament of Religions was an international conference held in the newly erected Art Institute of Chicago,

located on lake-side parkland beside Michigan Avenue. Many miles south at the Midway, the Chicago World's Fair attracted thousands, including seventeen-year-old Walter. Three and four years before that Walter began avidly reading the books of the American economist and politician, Henry George, such as *Social Problems*, 1883. Consequently, Walter became a follower of Henry George, and also an architectural advocate for democracy and equity.

In 1913 Griffin joined a building committee procuring a new community hall beside the Elmhurst Congregationalist Church. Every family in the congregation was issued a tile to paint, which were collected and placed on the new hall in a continuous head-high band. The hall was open to all in the suburb, providing library, meeting and recreational rooms.

Later that year, August to October 1913, Walter travelled alone to Australia to find out what had happened to Walter and Marion's prize Canberra Plan of 1911. During that visit he was appointed Director of Commonwealth Works with the brief to establish their Canberra Plan. In July 1915 the Griffins' practice gained the commission to design and construct the new Roman Catholic College at the University of Melbourne, Newman College.



The story of the design of the Initial Structure is intriguing for all College alumni, everywhere, and all students and scholars of early 20thC social, technological, and aesthetic changes.

For copies of Jeffrey John Turnbull, *Walter Burley Griffin: the architecture of Newman College, 1915-18*, please order or pre-order at:
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