



BLAIRGOWRIE

Background

The tangible evidence of the act of generosity and faith of the founder, Sir James Burns, and his Board was the erection of the *Burnside Presbyterian Orphan Home* in 1911. The home was known as the 'No. 1 Cottage' the following year, when its neighbour was built, but changed to No. 2 Home when *Airlie House* became a home. In order apparently to eliminate more confusion with the nomenclature, by 1925 the existing homes were allocated Scottish names which they have retained long after they ceased to be homes for orphan and other disadvantaged children. The original home became known as *Blairgowrie*.

The home was financed by a £1000 donation from Sir James Burns and a like sum from general donations. The architects were AL McCredie and Anderson and the builder Mr George Dalton. The home was officially opened with considerable ceremony by the Countess of Dudley (wife of the then Governor General of Australia) on 17 June 1911.

Blairgowrie is of Federation style, single storeyed although unadorned and similar to much domestic architecture of its period with an intricate roof plan and timber ornamental verandah. The building is constructed from banded rough cast walls on sandstone foundations with clay shingle roof. The architect Gregory Nolan observes the exceptionally high quality of the workmanship, particularly the pointed brickwork and the verandah joinery. Initially as well as the normal domestic components for the children, it contained residential accommodation for the staff and an office which was to

serve until the erection of the administrative block. The design, which excluded adequate definition between the dormitories and the dining room and lack of privacy for the staff, was to be corrected in later homes.

Although intended to house up to 30 young boys admissions were slow – the first 2 children took up residence in August 1911 and by March 1912 only 13 boys occupied the home.

Blairgowrie was altered to a 'Kindergarten' home – housing children of both genders under 7 years of age. It was often, in its history, to house infants partly because it was one of the few single-storeyed Burnside homes. By 1917 it temporarily contained the play-school for day-time activities of younger children. This activity however soon moved to *Sargood Hall* and later to *Airlie House*.

War Years

During the Second World War the children were evacuated to the Blue Mountains. From 1941 to late 1944 *Blairgowrie* was occupied by the Australian General Staff and Training Section.

1945 to present

The children returned to North Parramatta in January 1945. Most of the homes were remodelled in the decade following the reoccupation of the homes. The remodelling included general maintenance and moderation of kitchen and bathroom facilities. There is no reference to the remodelling of *Blairgowrie*. This was possibly the reason that the Home was closed in 1952 and the children moved to Reid Home. It is unlikely that the home was ever used as a residence for child care after this date.

By 1980 architect Gregory Nolan observed that the building was in poor repair and was being partly used for storage. The former dining room was used as an ironing centre for women from the Mulawah Womens' Centre, otherwise the building was unoccupied.

In 1984 the community organisation 'Aunties and Uncles' was moved into *Blairgowrie* and part of the remainder of the building was leased commercially.

In 1997 *Blairgowrie* underwent extensive renovations and became the Burnside Heritage Centre, housing the Museum and meeting rooms.

Today *Blairgowrie* houses the Museum, meeting rooms and the Burnside Library.