

‘Green Gables’, Kangaroo Point: Some Historical Notes

by

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Her eyes dwelt affectionately on Green Gables, peering through its network of trees and reflecting the sunlight back from its windows in several little coruscations of glory.

Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874-1942), *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), chapter XXVII.

In the *Sutherland Shire Heritage Study: Built Heritage Report*, vol. 2: p. 26 ‘Green Gables’, No. 10-12 Kangaroo Point Road, Kangaroo Point, is described as a ‘particularly outstanding example’ of Tudor Revival in the Sutherland Shire.¹ Indeed it was one of only two examples mentioned in the study; the other is ‘Coombe Grange’, 52 Taloombi Street, Cronulla. The evaluation criteria for its eventual listing on the Sutherland Shire Local Environment Plan were its aesthetic qualities (considered ‘rare’) and its significance as a representative example of this style in the Sutherland Shire. The residence is a charming local landmark with high-pitched roof, half-timbered gables, decorative fretwork fascia, leadlight oriel window, herringbone brickwork and an impressive doorway with a centred-arch and quadriform mouldings: in short, all the brash eclecticism of the Old English revival style. It is also one of the few remaining buildings of its period left on Kangaroo Point.

‘Green Gables’ was built by Sydney Keith Bayer (1902—1981) and his wife Clarisse Elizabeth Bayer née Hutson (1910—1978) apparently in stages between 1946² and 1952.³ The building was very probably designed by Mrs Bayer who had studied architecture at Sydney Technical College between 1929 and 1931⁴ and had worked as a draughtsperson.⁵ When she married at St Ann’s Catholic Church, North Bondi, on 3 May 1934, she described her occupation as ‘architectural profession’,⁶ however, she was not registered with the Board of Architects. It is not yet known which architectural

¹ *Sutherland Shire Heritage Study: Built Heritage Report*, Perumel Murphy Wu Pty. Ltd., Surry Hills, 1993, vol.2: p. 26.

² See statement of account, Wildman & Co. 27 August, 1946 and receipt signed by J. Innes in the name of S. K. Bayer C/- Dustflo Vacuum Cleaner Company, 363 Pitt Street, Sydney, 11 October 1946.

³ Mrs Rita Phillips, who purchased land at 42 Tara Street, Sylvania in 1949, recalls the existence of the house in the early 1950s; Mrs K. J. Bayer, of Gynea, widow of a nephew of Sydney Bayer, recalls construction work on the house during construction of her own home in 1952, telephone interviews, 16 July, 2004.

⁴ Bronwyn Hanna, *Absence and Presence: A Historiography of Early Women Architects in New South Wales*, Ph.D. Thesis, UNSW, 2000, p. 334.

⁵ Interview with Mr Don Bayer (born 1924) son of Graham Arthur Bayer and nephew of Sydney Keith Bayer, Sandringham, 19 July 2004. According to Bronwyn Hanna, employment in an architectural practice was a precondition for enrolment in the architecture course at Sydney Technical College.

⁶ Certificate of Marriage, No. C363016, dated 3 May 1934.

practice she was employed by—perhaps that of a relative. Given the small number of women employed as architects in Australia at the time, Clarisse’s likely role as the designer of her own home adds to the social and historical significance of ‘Green Gables’.⁷

Sydney Keith Bayer was born in Paddington on 27 January 1902,⁸ of devout Catholic-Bavarian and Irish stock.⁹ His father, Arthur, was a travelling wine and spirit merchant. Sydney proved to be an accomplished salesman in his own right and became ‘Hoover Sales Ace’ for Australia in 1934.¹⁰ He eventually established his own firm, ‘Dustflo’, which specialized in reconditioning vacuum cleaners. This business thrived during the Second World War when new vacuum cleaners were almost impossible to purchase. Sydney Bayer was also a partner in the firm of Bayer, McDonald, Day which sold home appliances in Goulburn Street, Sydney. This company held the lucrative distribution rights for the ‘Hygea’ septic tank system. Furthermore, Bayer attained some prominence in racing circles when his horse ‘Timor’ won the Epsom Handicap in 1957 and the Brisbane Cup in 1958. He was also a significant donor to the building fund for the Church of Our Lady of the Way, Sylvania.¹¹

Construction of the sea wall, excavation and construction of the retaining wall for the boatshed at Kangaroo Point was completed by Wildman & Co. (50 Railway Street, Marrickville), in late-August 1946 at a cost of £114.¹² This was when the property was still officially owned by Sydney Bayer’s theatre-manager brother Gordon. It was transferred to Sydney’s name in 1948 and to joint tenancy with his wife Clarisse in 1952 (presumably on completion of the original residence). A stonemason lived on site in a caravan for an extended period during the construction of the sandstone walls and terraces,¹³ which are of a high standard. Clarisse Bayer was a passionate gardener and much of her time was devoted to landscaping and shaping the grounds with the assistance of a full-time gardener.¹⁴ The eastern (waterfront) side of the property has undergone significant changes, but the original front façade (judging from photographs annexed) retains its integrity, despite the more recent southern extension.

Clarisse Bayer, like her husband, was born in Paddington. However, unlike him, she appears to have been of English descent.¹⁵ Her paternal Anglo-Saxon origins may explain an interest in idealized

⁷ For further discussion of this issue, see: Bronwyn Hanna and Julie Willis, *Women Architects in Australia 1900—1950*, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Red Hill, A.C.T., 2001.

⁸ Birth Certificate No. 15282/362, dated 27 January 1902.

⁹ Sydney was baptized in St Francis Church, Paddington, on 9 February 1902. His grandfather was Dr Frederick Bayer, a Munich-born graduate of the University of Erlangen, who arrived in South Australia as surgeon-superintendent of the *Heloise*, on 17 March 1847. Dr Bayer had fled Germany after assisting a young student mortally wounded in a duel and refusing to name the other party; see *In Memoriam Frederick Charles Bayer MD*, no date.

¹⁰ With a remarkable 71 vacuum cleaner sales in 12 weeks; see J. S. Drysdale, Director, Hoover (Australia) Limited, to Sidney [sic] Bayer 20 June 1934.

¹¹ Interview with Mr Don Bayer, Sandringham, 19 July 2004.

¹² See statement of account, Wildman & Co. 27 August, 1946 and receipt signed by J. Innes in the name of S. K. Bayer C/- Dustflo Vacuum Cleaner Company, 363 Pitt Street, Sydney, 11 October 1946.

¹³ Interview with Mr Don Bayer, Sandringham, 19 July 2004; telephone interview with Mrs K. J. Bayer, of Gympie, 16 July, 2004.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Clarisse may also have been of Irish descent, for her mother’s maiden name was Feeney. Her parents married in Sydney in 1895.

English traditional architecture and the strong visual imagery of the Tudor revival style. One of the other Bayer racehorses was named 'Empire Link', which is also suggestive of nostalgic ties to the 'mother country'. Clarisse's background was lower middle class (her father George William Hutson was a tramway inspector) from the inner city, but 'Green Gables' like the transplanted home of rural English gentry, offers an instant image of upper class respectability.¹⁶ Yet here too are allusions to the romantic idyll of 'Green Gables' at Avonlea on Canada's Prince Edward Island, for the Bayer residence almost certainly takes its name from the house in Lucy Maud Montgomery's (1874—1942) novel: *Anne of Green Gables* (1908). It has not been known by any other name. Kangaroo Point on the Georges River, like Avonlea on the Gulf of St. Lawrence, 'occupied a little triangular peninsula . . . with water on two sides'.¹⁷ Although Clarisse enjoyed the trappings of wealth, the solace of her garden and a beautiful home, her marriage was childless and she appears to have been an unhappy woman who ultimately fell victim to chronic illness.¹⁸

Sydney and Clarisse Bayer sold 'Green Gables' in 1973 and retired to Snowy Place, Sylvania Waters. Clarisse died on 8 April 1978, aged 68. Sydney died on 21 April 1981, aged 79. They are both buried in Lot 33A of the Roman Catholic Lawn 1 at Woronora Cemetery.

¹⁶ As Patrick White wrote of his old school, built in the same style: 'The building was a mansion in the Thames Valley Tudor style favoured by the Australian rich in the earlier part of the century. It had been an impressive "residence" when lived in by an important family'; Patrick White, *Flaws in the Glass*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1981, p. 17.

¹⁷ Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), chapt. 1.

¹⁸ Interview with Mr Don Bayer, Sandringham, 19 July 2004.