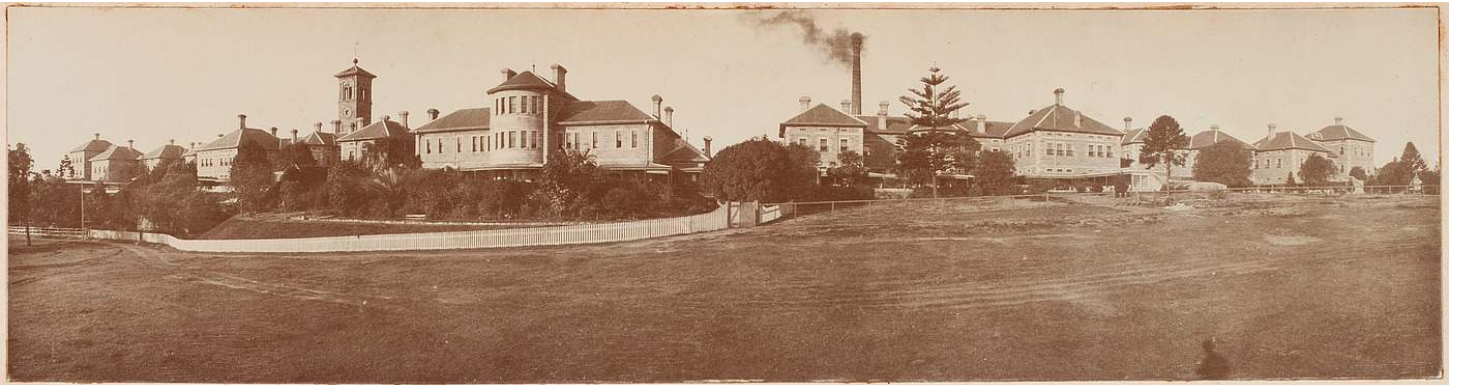


CALLAN PARK WRITERS WALKING TOUR



Callan Park Mental Hospital, 1903. State Library of New South Wales, a5415088



Starting point: New South Wales Writers' Centre

Length: Approximately one hour (depending on time spent writing)

It is recommended that you take the tour during weekday business hours, as some stops may not be accessible outside these times. Alternative route provided within tour.

What is this tour about?

You've probably noticed that Callan Park is filled with fascinating old buildings. You may even know a little about the history of this site as an asylum. But what stories are hidden behind this sandstone façade? The Callan Park Hospital for the Insane was home to various renowned writers and poets throughout the twentieth century. Step into this tour and discover their stories.

At each stop on the tour there is a writing prompt include – we'd love for you to pause and get those creative juices flowing! Feel free to write in prose or poetry, to follow the prompt or go with whatever sparks your imagination. This site is rich with potential inspiration.

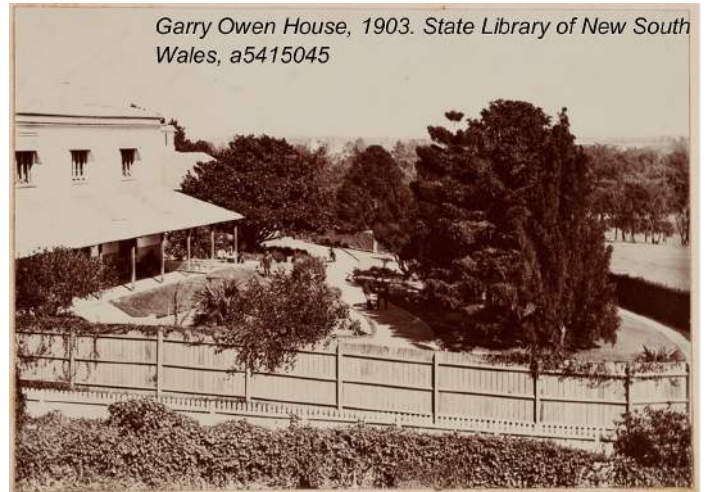
Enjoy!

Stop 1: Garry Owen House



Start the tour on the north side of the Writers' Centre, outside the main entrance.

Garry Owen House (later known as Callan Park House) has special historical significance as it was the first building on this site and provided its name. It was built in the late 1830s as a grand Victorian estate house, a central hub of socialisation for the upper class of the local area. Following the owner's bankruptcy it was eventually purchased by the government and in 1875 adapted for holding asylum patients. The local psychiatric facility, Gladesville Lunatic Asylum, was vastly overcrowded so this site was repurposed to house the overflow of patients. This involved extensive changes to the surrounding landscape.



What had once been sprawling gardens now needed to provide enough food to provide for the patients and staff. Plants were ripped out and relocated to the Botanic Gardens, and many acres of land were fertilised to accommodate the crops. Shortly afterwards the Kirkbride building was built, and Callan Park declared a separate asylum from Gladesville. Garry Owen House was used as an administration building, and later in the twentieth century became a Nurses Training School. The picture to the left shows what is now the Patrick White Room, and it's still recognisable today (second room on the left when you enter the Centre).



When you're done...

From your position in the garden, facing the main doors, walk down the left side of the building. Before reaching the carpark you should see a path off to the left (with a sign to the public toilets). Follow this, and you'll find yourself on the road. Walk along here to the left for a few minutes until you reach the cluster of Sydney College of the Arts buildings — you can't miss them!

Get writing!



Garry Owen House has undergone renovations to make it suitable for modern use, but the photo above looks remarkably similar to the landscape on which you stand today. Have a look around the grounds, or peek into the Patrick White Room to see how it has changed. Write a creative piece from the point of view of a member of hospital staff in this period. When they weren't attending patients, how might they have spent their time in this place?

Stop 2: Kirkbride Building



Main entrance to Kirkbride Block, 1903. State Library of New South Wales, a5415015



© Cassandra Watson, 2015

When the Kirkbride Block was built in 1885, it was based upon a progressive approach to psychiatric care in which residents were treated as patients rather than prisoners. The beautiful garden surroundings were thought to have a therapeutic effect, and the asylum was heralded as modern and humane.

Mr J F Archibald, one of the founders of the "Bulletin," has so broken down mentally and physically that he has had to be removed to the Callan Park Asylum.

News of the Week (1906, December 28). *Western Champion* (Parkes: 1898-1934), p. 5. Retrieved October 16, 2015, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article112314828>

Archibald, the man who started the "Bulletin," is a mental wreck, and has been admitted as a patient to Callan Park asylum (says an exchange.)

[Untitled] (1907, January 25). *The Independent* (Deniliquin, NSW: 1901-1946), p. 2. Retrieved October 16, 2015, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article119946931>

MR J. F. ARCHIBALD, one of the founders of the *Bulletin*, and till recently its editor, is now in Callan Park Asylum. Pity.

Local and General News (1906, December 14). *The Cobargo Chronicle* (NSW: 1898-1944), p. 2. Retrieved October 16, 2015, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article106438663>

J.F. Archibald is one of Australia's best known names in art and literature, being the founder of the renowned portrait prize as well as weekly magazine *The Bulletin*. Towards the end of 1906, after suffering increasingly from depression and anxiety, Archibald was forcibly admitted into the Callan Park Asylum. The papers were signed by his business partner William Macleod without consulting him, and Macleod never visited Archibald in the asylum.

Apart from a brief release he remained a patient there for the next four years. This environment seemed to benefit him: in between episodes he experience periods of lucidity, where he was able to write poetry and fiction. Many of his friends visited him there, including famed artist and writer Norman Lindsay. Upon his release in 1910, Archibald seemed to be completely cured and lived for almost another decade remaining active in his field.

Get writing!

Try writing a creative piece from the point of view of either Archibald or Macleod. Or try your hand at both! Some suggestions:



J.F. Archibald

Imagine how it would feel to be forced into an asylum, knowing that your mental breakdown was splashed across the newspapers. How would you cope with having friends visit you there, but not the one who put you into the facility?

William Macleod

Imagine how it would feel to watch an associate and friend descend into depression, and see only one appropriate course of action. What would it be like to continue working at the magazine he founded without him, knowing that Archibald would likely never forgive you?

Stop 3: The Courtyard



If the Sydney College of the Arts is open (business hours and some Saturdays), walk through the main entrance into the picturesque courtyard. On your way in, note the plaques that commemorate the history of this site.



© Cassandra Watson, 2015

Alternative route

If the SCA is closed and you cannot access the courtyard, you can still get a glimpse of the historic buildings. Walk around the side of the complex, following the walls, until you reach the lawns cascading down from this building.

Now the Administration Building, it previously held the Medical Officer's Wing and later a library.

Take a look around, exploring the underground hallways, and then take a seat on the spectacular lawns to learn from the rest of the tour.

MORE CALLAN PARK ALLEGATIONS

ORDER FOR ROYAL COMMISSION

Order for Royal Commission (1960, December 8). *The Canberra Times* (ACT: 1926-1995), p. 3. Retrieved November 13, 2015, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article103111805>

Francis Webb, the celebrated Australian poet, spent a brief time in Callan Park in 1962 and later that decade was committed for another four years. He had previously been a patient at other psychiatric facilities, in Parramatta and Orange, but his experience at this asylum was particularly bleak. While Archibald's stay at Callan Park seems to have been peaceful and therapeutic, the asylum had changed drastically by the time Webb became a patient. After two World Wars it was severely overcrowded and underfunded, while reports of cruelty and mistreatment were rampant. One man who was an attendant during that period recounts that some of the wards were heavily shuttered, with no light coming in, and patients would spend seventeen hours a day locked up inside.



In 1961, following the publication of similar allegations in newspapers, a Royal Commission was launched to investigate the quality of care being provided to patients. The findings were published in a report and improvements implemented, with upgrades to facilities starting quickly, but life for the patients didn't change overnight. It is likely that Webb still suffered in the aftermath of this Commission. Indeed, this may have something to do with his creative silence.

"I have been unable to think of writing a poem, nor ever be able again to write whilst in this Hospital." — Letter, Francis Webb to a friend, from Callan Park Hospital, April 7th 1968.

This letter, and others from his stay here, reveal the deep despair and desolation he suffered in Male Ward Two. It was particular to Callan Park, as we can see from the stark contrast painted by a later letter.

"Orange is as lovely as ever in this golden autumn. And I have a pleasant little room to myself. I can't say that I'm free of all the old troubles as yet; nor have I been able to scribble out some verse. But the beauty of the place is recompense enough. And in the evenings I can go outside and see the stars."

— Letter, Francis Webb to a friend, from Bloomfield Hospital, Orange, 29th March 1969.

Webb didn't pick up his pen to compose again until he was transferred back to the hospital in Melbourne.



After entering the courtyard, turn left and walk as far as you can go.

This building now houses the Ceramics Studio, but it used to serve as Male Ward Two where Webb stayed. According to Leichhardt Council's Conservation Management Plan, this building has exceptional heritage significance and therefore it externally looks much the same as it would have during Webb's time.



Get writing!

Based on what you've learned about his time at Callan Park, and the landscape that surrounds you, write a letter to a friend as if you were Francis Webb. You might like to use the first quote as a starting point, and build the rest of the letter around it.



Stop 4: NSW Writers' Centre



Retrace your steps back to our starting point, the New South Wales Writers' Centre.

Callan Park Hospital for the Insane ceased to exist independently in 1976, being amalgamated with the nearby Broughton Hall to become Rozelle Hospital. This facility operated for almost a decade, until it was shut down in the 1990s. In the following years, there was extensive public and government debate about how the Callan Park site should be used.

After a lengthy campaign to prevent residential development and maintain public use of the space, it was decided that these valuable heritage buildings should be used for cultural activities. The Writers' Centre was granted use of Garry Owen House, while the main Kirkbride Building was renovated for use by Sydney College of the Arts. It's fitting that the historical significance of this site should be recognised by those who use it today. We hope your tour today helped to enhance your appreciation for the past which is still so palpable in Callan Park.

Writers' centre will open

ON MONDAY the historic Garry Owen House on Rozelle Hospital grounds will officially become the Writers' Centre of NSW.

The centre will become a meeting place for all writers and an information resource for all NSW writers.

Arts Minister Peter Collins will officially open the centre, which was the brain-child of former NSW Premier, Neville Wran.

An active steering committee has worked towards its fruition.

The site is valued at more than \$2 million. The Government has spent \$235,000 refurbishing it and will assist the centre with its operation.

The Glebe, 18th September 1991, p. 18.
Courtesy of Leichhardt Library

What Now?

Want more information and inspiration?

Select bibliography

- Griffith, Michael J., *God's Fool: the life and poetry of Francis Webb* (Sydney: Collins/Angus & Robertson, 1991).
- Lawson, Sylvia, J.F. Archibald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
- Leong, Ken, 'Garry Owen and Callan Park: The story of Rozelle Hospital, Lilyfield: 1819-1984', *Leichhardt Historical Journal* 14 (1985), pp. 5-22.
- Sydney College of the Arts, *Kirkbride: Past and Present* (2005).



The State Library of New South Wales holds a few issues of the *Park Periodical*, a magazine produced in 1955 which contains prose and poetry written by asylum patients. Check it out for a fascinating read!

This tour was prepared by Cassandra Watson, from the University of Sydney, with assistance from the New South Wales Writers' Centre