The Annunciation at Woonona Baths, Near Wollongong N.S.W.
By Amanda Townsend

HARDY WILSON IN ILLAWARRA

No twentieth century Australian did more for the appreciation of our early architectural heritage than William Hardy Wilson. His Old Colonial Architecture in NSW and Tasmania (1924) is a book that simply overwhelms one with its beauty and genius. I can't think of another book that has had a bigger impact on my aesthetic sensibilities. It's the only book I've read that has actually changed the way I look at the built environment.

I remember stumbling across this old (and torn, if I remember rightly) gigantic...
I found the reference section of Wollongong Library as a twenty year old. I wasn't anywhere near capable of fully appreciating it. Indeed, I haven't set eyes on it since. And when I asked the reference staff for another look some months ago, they were unable to locate it.

I suspect it's been stolen. After all, it's the sort of book anyone would love to own. But maybe it'll turn up one day. On the Thirroul Library's bizarre new computer catalogue I managed to find it listed under the arcane prefix: SRFF 720.994 WIL (450185). And as we all know where there is a computer there is hope.

So it was with some delight that I accidentally discovered last year that a Thirroul friend of mine is actually Hardy Wilson's grand-daughter. I was even more pleased to discover recently a set of plans in a book called Colonial Architecture in Australia. A set of plans by Hardy Wilson of a cottage at Kiama for R.H. Stevenson.

Strangely, the plans looked familiar and I recalled that in my rather large collection of post-cards of the Illawarra was an undated photo with no accompanying details whatsoever of a house that looked very like these plans.

I got very excited and presumed I'd just discovered an important and previously unknown Hardy Wilson residence.

In reality all I'd discovered was a previously unknown photo of an important Hardy Wilson house. In the national Trust's catalogue there was a photo (p. 85) but mine was much better and much earlier.

Still it was enough to spur my interest and, better still, through the good graces of my Thirroul friend, to be fortunate to have lunch on the 1994 Anzac Day weekend with her 77 year old father, Dr Lachlan Hardy Wilson, A.M.

What does all this petty reminiscence and name-dropping have to do with the IHS?

Well, the only mention Hardy Wilson has ever received in our IHS Bulletins was in a single page piece by Edgar Beale in December, 1980 (p. 70). He was following up a request from the National Trust for the IHS to identify a building sketched by Wilson which the Trust wished to include in a centenary retrospective of Hardy Wilson's work.

Edgar Beale and other IHS members identified the building as a bungalow which once stood opposite our museum and so it appeared in the Trust's

But, amazingly, Edgar Beale does not seem to have bothered to review either the exhibition or the Trust's accompanying publication.

This is especially puzzling when one finds Edgar Beale's name in the long list of acknowledgments and the following items at numbers 49 and 50 of the Trust's Catalogue:

49
Cottage at Wollongong, NSW
Elevation
Pencil. 51.2 x 68.7 cm (SM)
Signed: HW (l.l.)
Collection: NLA
(This cottage of the 1830's stood in Market Square. It became the office and printery of the Illawarra Mercury until 1910 when it reverted to private occupancy. It was demolished during the 1920's)

50
Cottage at Wollongong, NSW 1913
Pencil 29.6 x 35.1 cm (SM)
Signed: W Hardy Wilson 1913 (l.r.)
Collection: NLA

Why the National Trust didn't ask for help in identifying this second item (which I have not yet been able to get to Canberra to see) I have no idea.

It's equally puzzling that Edgar Beale didn't excitedly point out to readers of the IHS Bulletin that the published National Trust Catalogue contains a full page colour reproduction of a Hardy Wilson watercolour titled:


This building is, of course, none other than our very own Museum building and it is quite a compliment that Hardy Wilson admired it so much.

The other mystifying thing is that the catalogue contains photos of no less than three Hardy Wilson houses built in Kiama between 1912 and 1926. Sadly, only one survives today.
The "Cottage at Kiama for R.H. Stevenson was designed by Hardy Wilson in 1912-1913.

It was a commission that gave Wilson lots of scope. A 4 acre block off Bong Bong Street Kiama, right at the crest of a hill, with fabulous and unimpeded views of the harbour and town.

Hardy Wilson loved to feature a north-facing verandah as a 'bridge' between the garden and the interior of his houses and he was able to admirably achieve this with the house that became known as 'Yoon-Goo', supposedly meaning "beautiful view" in a local Aboriginal tongue.

R.H. Stevenson, the owner, was a wealthy Kiama shopkeeper. I have attempted to trace his genealogy but his father appears to have also to have been an R.H. (Robert Harry) Stevenson, a brother is C.M. (Charles Moore) Stevenson and there may have been a Robert Stevenson as well. It's all very confusing. The family was of Irish descent, but the details given in The Aldine Centennial History of NSW 1888 by W.F. Morrison, Volume 2 and Illawarra Pioneers vary greatly.

According to one of my informants, Mr Ron Lyons, the Stevenson shop in Kiama was located where the National Bank is sited today, just east of Tory's Hotel. Mr Lyons reports that there is a monument to Stevenson, made of black marble, near the Council Chambers and the old ES&A Bank.

Although 'Yoon-Goo' was designed in 1912-1913, Mr Lyons suspects that it was built much later. He even suggested that it was actually built by C.M. Stevenson, rather than by the R.H. Stevenson listed on Hardy Wilson's plans.

Furthermore, Mr Lyons suggested the house was built around 1924-1926. I still have my doubts, as the photos of the house in my possession have proved difficult to date.

Whatever the exact date of construction, Mr Lyons has a detailed knowledge of the house because his father Harold Lyons (Kiama's Town Clerk) purchased the house in 1940 and lived there with his family until 1951. He has provided the following details.

The house was built on 4 and a half acres and actually had a grandiose three-seater toilet 50 yards down the back.

The outside weatherboards of 'Yoon-Goo' were in excellent condition in the 1940's, painted grey. The frame was oregon and the Galvanised iron roof was still original in the 1940's.
The interior was lined with Canadian Redwood and there were simple cast-fireplaces with redwood panelling. Gas-lights throughout and some still had operable mantles in the 1940's, even though the house was then connected with electricity.

One very unusual feature mentioned by Mr Lyons was the concrete placements at the front with cannons (presumably melted down during WW2).

When sold in the early 1950's an attempt was reputedly made to perate the house as a sly-grog "night club", but this venture proved unsuccessful.

The property was then sold to Kevin Arkinstall who enclosed the verandahs and turned 'Yoon-goo' into flats, later subdividing it and erecting townhouses on the site of the demolished building and grounds in the late 1960's.

At some stage, as is revealed from the photos in my possession, a Californian bungalow-influenced residence was erected in front of 'Yoon-goo' by the Gould family who may have been related to the Stevensons.

Any further details on the history of this remarkable house would be warmly welcomed.

Presumably inspired by the success of 'Yoon-goo', N.E. Hindmarsh commissioned a cottage called 'Rosebank', near the corner of Terralong and Collins Streets Kiama in 1925.

I have spent many months comparing the photo of Rosebank with the plans in the National Trust Publication and puzzled over their differences. Recently, however, I have learned that although Hardy Wilson was commissioned to draw plans for this project, the owners found his design too expensive and subsequently commissioned someone else to design something similar.

The strong suspicion must therefore be that 'Rosebank' was not, strictly speaking, a Hardy Wilson house. At any rate, both the cottage and its adjoining (and much older stables) were demolished after a celebrated Kiama Heritage battle circa 1979.

The only surviving Hardy Wilson house in Kiama, therefore, is the one on the corner of Bong Bong and Shoalhaven Streets, designed for a Mrs Ryan in 1976.
It's most remarkable feature is the lattice-work columns on the verandah.

Sad to say, not much of the colonial architecture which Hardy Wilson so admired is still standing in the Illawarra today.

Sadder still is the fact that the Illawarra can no longer boast one of Hardy Wilson's finest colonial revival designs—Yoon-goo at Kiama.

I would like to be able to proudly boast that the demolition of a house like 'Yoon-goo' would not be allowed today. But with the demolition of both 'Lake View House' and the 'Woonona Baths Pavilion' I doubt that the custodians of our heritage have learnt much at all.

JOSEPH DAVIS

(All additional information would be warmly welcomed)
'Yoon - Goo', Kiama

(landmarked by large tree on the hill)
Cottage, 'Yoon Goo' off Bong Bong Street, Kiama, for R H Stevenson, 1912