2010

Fairy Knoll; Johais Hancock and an Apparition in the Sky; Light Well Conduit - works of art exhibited in the exhibition The Ipswich House: Heritage House Portraits by Contemporary Queensland Artists

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Abstract
On its completion in 1901, Thoman Hancock Junior's grand residence, Fairy Knoll, afforded an enviable view of Ipswich and its surrounds. Its prestigious hill top site overlooking Limestone Park amply reflected the position occupied by the Hancock family in Ipswich society and the material culmination of Hancock's successful business career as a timber merchant.

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This creative work is available at Research Online: http://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/971
THE IPSWICH HOUSE

Heritage house portraits by contemporary Queensland artists
On its completion in 1901, Thomas Hancock Junior’s grand residence, FAIRY KNOLL, afforded an enviable view of Ipswich and its surrounds. Its prestigious hill top site overlooking Limestone Park amply reflected the position occupied by the Hancock family in Ipswich society and the material culmination of Hancock’s successful business career as a timber merchant.

Hancock had arrived in Ipswich in 1863 and, together with his brother Josias, he presided over almost 300 employees in Ipswich and Brisbane after inheriting his father’s business in the late 1800s. From humble beginnings, sawing timber at Pine Mountain, the Hancocks acquired sawmills at Rosewood and North Ipswich, further expanding their operations to produce joinery and mouldings, as well as doors, window sashes and panelling.¹

In 1897, Hancock commissioned the prominent Ipswich architect George Brockwell Gill to design FAIRY KNOLL in place of the family’s original timber dwelling. The new two storey residence was built to accommodate a high standard of living, and featured a decorative polychromatic brick core and surrounding timber verandahs on all sides. The timberwork incorporated finely detailed screens, balustrades and embellishments — defining the building as characteristic of the ‘Federation Filigree’ style of architecture.²

Two of the most notable elements of the house were a light well located at the apex of the roof, later used as a spotter’s tower in WWII, and the central carved cedar staircase which it illuminated.

Although Thomas Hancock did not live to see the building realised, his family resided at FAIRY KNOLL for 46 years until the death of his widow Louisa in 1947, upon which the house was acquired by the State government. It was then used as a Maternal and Child Welfare home, and later as a respite care centre for intellectually disabled children.³ The house currently sits empty, a somewhat forlorn relic of a past era and its glories.

FAIRY KNOLL
MADELEINE KELLY

MADELEINE KELLY

The day I first went to see FAIRY KNOLL, I viewed the rear of the long corner external staircase from the bottom of the hill. My diminutive position accentuated its height and I considered the grand perspective. There was something bleak about the closed blinded windows and this redundancy coupled with its ominous position is something I tried to capture when I eventually painted its face.

In Fair Knoll a ghostly man peering into the light well gazes down into the cedar staircase that is reputedly lit by filtered sun light. The figure is not based on an actual image of Thomas Hancock who originally built the house, but one whose appearance might suggest a man of his generation and stature.

The light well is the house’s most distinguishing feature. While it once functioned as a spotting tower during WWII, its function was to let light in, illuminating the carved details of central cedar staircase with a warm ambience.
Thus in Light well conduit I have taken some artistic liberty in representing the light well askew, with fractured futuristic light moving through the space. References to the actual staircase appear as mimetic fragments in this fictional cross section of the architecture.

After viewing an image of the saw mill that Thomas Hancock’s son, Josias Hancock, operated in Ipswich around 1888, I had a dream in which an inundation of tree trunks collapsed out from a cliff above me and stopped poised in threatening balance. This dream inspired the floating logs to the fore of the mill in Josias Hancock’s saw mill and an apparition in the sky. References to timber, light and transformation are featured as linking devices between the three paintings because the family business dealt in timber. The interplay of light and cedar in Fairy Knoll seems to encapsulate the way in which timber was central to the Hancock family’s livelihood.