

View from Fernleigh showing the harbour bridge and one of the castellated turrets (foreground). The view of the harbour extends for some miles to the right.

THE C.B.C. Bank's origins date from 1834 when it opened for business at The Colonnade in Bridge Street, Sydney.

By 1879 it was operating 80 offices, including one in London, opened in 1859.

In 1927 the bank amalgamated with The Bank of Victoria, consolidating a wide network of branches throughout the eastern states of Australia.

To-day the C.B.C. is a diverse group of companies providing public and professional services through more than 550 branches of the bank in Australia, offices in London, Tokyo and New York; through its finance company, Commercial & General Acceptance Limited, and with merchant banking, trust company and other financial associates in Australia and around the world.

The C.B.C. has certainly gone a long way since it opened in 1834, but in one thing it has not changed — that warm, friendly welcome which has always been a part of the C.B.C. tradition is still the same to-day.

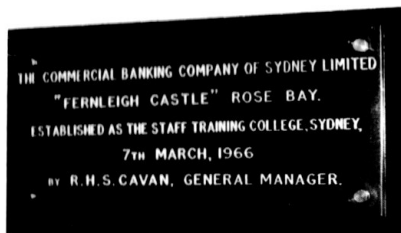
Fernleigh Castle

ITS HISTORY



The **COMMERCIAL BANKING COMPANY OF SYDNEY LIMITED**
C.B.C. SAVINGS BANK LIMITED

In the entrance vestibule of Fernleigh Castle is a small brass plate inscribed:—



ESTABLISHED in 1966 and dedicated by the then General Manager, Mr. R. H. S. Cavan, Fernleigh Castle has proved an important acquisition for the C.B.C. Bank.

The College has filled a great need within the bank as a suitable centre for the training of its officers in the skills of executive and management positions. From 1966 to 1972 more than 1,000 officers attended courses and seminars at the College.

Fernleigh Castle, like the bank it serves, has a long tradition and we must go back to the year 1831 to discover the origin of this magnificent castle and its surroundings.

Real Estate

It all started on March 8, 1831, when Samuel Breakwell of the City of Cork in Ireland was granted 60 acres of land at Rose Bay, which he promptly sold for £450. The land was so remote from settlement, however, that it was not until 1874 that the then owner, Charles Warman Roberts, built himself a small stone cottage which he named "The Ferns." C. W. Roberts was a member of the family who established and conducted the famous Roberts Hotel in Market St., Sydney, until it closed. In 1881 the property, then known as Fernleigh, was sold to Frank Bennett, proprietor of the Sydney newspaper "The Evening News," for £4,600. Incidentally, for some years

the famous Banjo Paterson was the editor of "The Evening News."

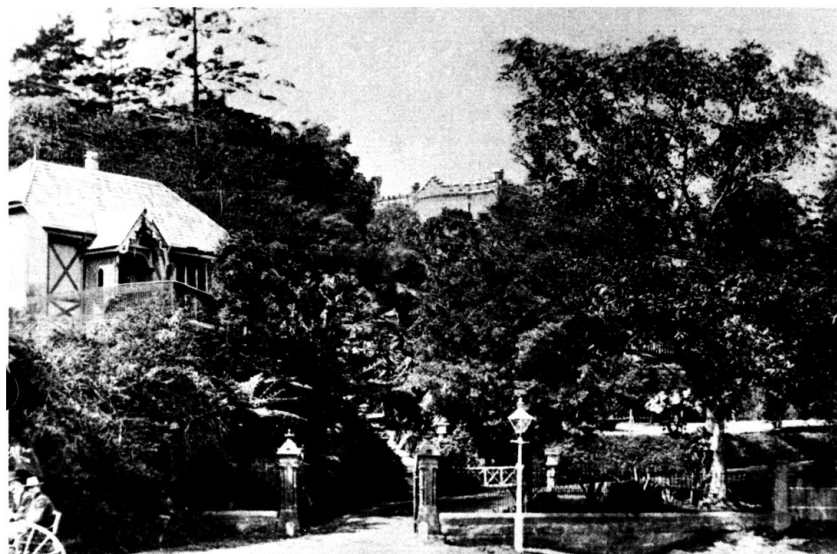
Scottish Australian

Bennett is known to have spent heavily to have Fernleigh enlarged and remodelled into its present form, a replica of a Scottish castle. The work took eleven years and was completed in 1892. The original stone cottage, which had been extensively enlarged, was not demolished. It was incorporated in the castle and forms the present lounge room, dining room and principal's office. The original hardwood flooring in the present lounge and dining rooms had been dressed with an adze. It was still in perfect condition when it was carpeted a few years ago, although sanding it smooth was quite a task. The caretaker's cottage, which is still there although considerably modified, was built by Frank Bennett near the entrance to the drive on New South Head Road.

Shortly before 1920, when the property was purchased by Mrs. E. M. C. Watt, wife of New Zealand racehorse owner, Edward James Watt, who had settled in Australia and had extensive grazing interests here, Fernleigh was leased for two years to Dame Nellie Melba, who caused a mild uproar by having some of the trees cut down to widen the view of the harbour.

At that time the seven acres of land extended to New South Head Road and the castle was approached through a magnificent drive flanked by beautiful lawns and gardens.

E. J. Watt died in 1942 but his wife lived at Fernleigh until her death in 1950. In April, 1951, the property was sold to a syndicate which subdivided and sold about six acres of the land lying between the castle and New South Head Road. Shortly afterwards, the remainder was acquired by Mr. William Buckingham, a director of the well known Oxford Street store, Buckingham's Ltd.



Reproduction of a 1910 photo showing the caretaker's cottage near the entrance to the drive at New South Head Road, and the extensive grounds and gardens.

Most things in this world have their ups and downs and castles apparently are no exception. When Mr. Buckingham's original plans fell through he tried to sell the property but couldn't find a buyer. At this stage Fernleigh was vacant and suffered the supreme indignity of being visited by the lowest form of life, the vandal. A plan to sell it to the Government of Czechoslovakia was well on the way when the Petrov affair blew up and wrecked the project. The British airline, B.O.A.C., then decided to buy it as their Sydney headquarters but the sudden failure of their early Comet aircraft forced a radical change of plans. Architects were called in to test the walls and the general layout of the building with the idea of converting it into five self-contained flats. Stonemasons had actually picked testing holes in the sandstone walls

when this plan had to be abandoned.

While all this was going on a charitable order of the Roman Catholic Church had been toying with the idea of buying the building but had not been able to reach a decision. Then, towards the end of 1954, Mr. Bruce H. Jackson was driving along New South Head Road when he saw a notice offering secondhand shop fittings for sale. Mr. Jackson, who was a builder, did not want shop fittings, secondhand or otherwise, but he had a friend who did. Following the directions on the notice he found the fittings stored in the now slightly depressing old building, Fernleigh Castle.

"I had one look at the castle," said Mr. Jackson, "and was captivated. I realised that under the thin veneer of shabbiness was a magnificent building and I just had to own it."

"I went looking for Bill Buckingham and found him in the street. The next day, Tuesday, I made an offer; on Wednesday I paid the deposit, and on Friday we clinched the deal by exchanging contracts. That day I drove home on air, literally and metaphorically.

"Next morning I went to our castle (my wife was part-owner) and was met by a puzzling sight. Some twenty or more ladies were cleaning the building inside and out. Their dress and their manner showed that they were not professional cleaners so I concluded that they were local residents, so pleased that the castle had been saved from demolition or decay that, as a gesture of appreciation to me, they had decided to restore Fernleigh to its former glory as quickly as possible.

"This rather fanciful conclusion quickly evaporated when I found the leader of the working party and asked why they were cleaning the building."

She replied, 'Because the Archbishop is coming to look at it.'

'And why,' I asked, 'should the Archbishop want to look at it?'

'Because we've bought it,' she replied.

'But you can't have bought it, because it's mine.'

'You must be mistaken,' she said, 'our church has considered buying this building for quite a while and we have now decided to go ahead.'

"And that was so. By a strange coincidence the church, after considering the proposition for quite a long time, had decided to buy the building on the very day I had exchanged contracts."

Character Preserved

For eight years Mr. Jackson conducted Fernleigh as a private hotel and all the time he worked on its restoration and modification. To raise much-needed capital he sold part of the grounds, including the tennis



Part of the castle staircase.



"Fernleigh," later incorporated in the present Fernleigh Castle.

court. He built the swimming pool, the cottage suite at the rear of the main building and restored the garden on the remaining land. He bought sandstock bricks from W. C. Wentworth's old home in Phillip Street to make the sunken garden alcove. From historic St. Malo and from the old Stewart-Dawson home at Darling Point he bought bricks, fittings and shutters to give the right character and atmosphere to the cottage suite. The lamp post which so fittingly decorates the entrance came from the Bourke Street Presbyterian Church. In short, the scars left by Fernleigh's lean years were removed by the pride and the care and the artistry of Fernleigh's owner who, fortunately, was a builder, too.

Little remains to be said about the owners of the castle. In 1962 Mr. and Mrs. Jackson sold it to C. G. Lloyd and his wife who transferred it, in 1963, to Franco-Swiss (A'sia) Pty. Ltd. Then in August, 1964, Mark Richard Cotter and his wife, Monica Mary Cotter, became the owners until February 11, 1966, when this beautiful old

building, fully furnished and restored, became the property of an old and distinguished Australian, The Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Limited.

It is eminently proper that this gracious building should have been the home of distinguished guests and the visitors' book is rich in names of interesting people—Laurence Olivier, Vivian Leigh, Robert Helpmann, Edith Sitwell, the Ambassador of Spain...

Musical Magic

As Jim Macdougall, the well known "Daily Mirror" columnist, so aptly put it:—

"Fernleigh Castle, the dignified old pile on Rose Bay Heights with the swooniest of views of the Harbour, has been bought by The Commercial Banking Company of Sydney as a staff training college for its executives.

"Fernleigh Castle was once the home of A. E. Bennett who owned the long defunct Evening News and for two years it was the home of Dame Nellie Melba. On a quiet night, if you

DATE	NAME	ADDRESS
1948	(O'Brien) Vincent Taylor	Much Gratitude, for a great deal. Many thanks for your kindness.

Signatures of two famous people taken from the visitors' book.

listen closely to the walls, you can hear the tingling magic of a High C and feel all the haunting presence of the great Melba."

But let us leave the guests to speak of the castle itself, and we could not do better than quote extracts from a "Sunday Telegraph" article which describes Fernleigh as it was in 1951.

"Standing alone in the centre of a vast room of this historic Rose Bay mansion—a room of 1,600 sq. ft. beneath its 15 ft. high ornate ceiling—this was Fernleigh Castle. But you might have passed its gates every day without seeing it for it is set back in large grounds surrounded by a forest of trees and shrubs that effectively hide it in an enchanting garden world of its own.

"Although it is set in a heavily populated residential area surrounded by other homes you can't see one neighbouring house. But you can look straight across a breath-taking vista of Sydney Harbour . . .

Robert Helgman.

Another famous signature.

"When milady alighted from her carriage in the heyday of life in this colonial castle-mansion she leaned on the arm of her escort as he led her up a short flight of stone steps between two crouching sandstone lions . . .

"First room on the left off the entrance hall is the drawingroom, a lovely spacious place 35' x 18' . . . the ceiling, like all the ceilings in the house, is of white zinc, figured and patterned and in the same condition today as when built, ready to last another hundred years if necessary.



Main Entrance Hall.



The gardens include a beautifully landscaped swimming pool.

"Each of the main rooms has a massive fireplace typical of the period. Each fireplace is inset with exquisitely executed figured and patterned tiles and is framed by a finely carved mahogany mantel with carved marble pillars on either side . . .

"Upstairs are the main bedrooms, the largest being 35' x 18' and a bathroom with an enormous white porcelain built-in bath enclosed in a frame of cedar and marble and almost 3' deep . . .

"Altogether Fernleigh has 30 rooms and there are also outbuildings such as the gardener's cottage (there are two permanent gardeners), chauffeur's quarters and a workshop . . .

"For many years this turreted castle will serve as a reminder of an age of gracious, leisured living when only balloons were inflated and the atom remained unsplit."

And so to the present. The forest is not there now, but several of the beautiful old trees still adorn the grounds. The isolation has gone, the chauffeur has gone and so, too, has the second gardener. But the beauty, the dignity and the character are all still there and it is easy to sense that Fernleigh is well pleased to link its future with another great Australian institution, The Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Limited.