

INTRODUCTION

George Taylor and the early Australian town planning movement

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The year 2014 marks the centenary of the original publication of George Taylor's *Town Planning for Australia*.¹ It was published as one of the world's then newest and most urban nations was slowly coming to grips with the need for more sophisticated models of urban governance and development.

A context for rhetorical reform

The first and second decades of the twentieth century mark a critical formative period in the emergence of an active, sustainable suite of town planning movements worldwide.² There were different inflections reflecting contrasting national preoccupations, cultural settings and institutional arrangements.³ The Australian response to this international phenomenon was mediated through distinctive geographical and historical circumstances – a network of small but sprawling youthful cities on a big continent across which the idealism of imperial regulation of land settlement was giving way to the unruliness of market forces. Federation in 1901 saw the establishment of a new Commonwealth Government with the former independent Australian colonies becoming states and the biggest cities their coastal capitals. The national government assumed responsibilities for policy issues such as defence, trade and communications. The states retained their status as powerful urban governments heavily involved in the provision of metropolitan infrastructure. A patchwork of small local governments servicing everyday community needs was kept intact. In this hierarchy of governments, the Commonwealth steered clear of explicit urban issues with one major exception: the planning and development of a new federal capital city. As the twentieth century unfurled, the states were the logical tier to assume significant powers to shape the direction of longer term urban development and coordinate the expanded regulatory regime of local councils.

At Federation the continental population of Australia was less than four million persons but nearly 40 per cent lived in the six state capital cities. The American economist Adna Ferrin Weber had already commented upon this 'most remarkable' concentration trend in the 'newest product of civilisation' as a bellwether for other western nations.⁴ Sydney, the island nation's most populous metropolis had nearly a quarter of a million inhabitants in 1901. It would become the country's first 'millionaire' in the late 1920s, steadily

increasing its share of the total population of the state of New South Wales (NSW) by that time to nearly 50 per cent.

The first stirrings of a modern planning movement date from the late 1880s around issues of city improvement, better governance, discovery of slums, lack of open space, and the lowly profile accorded to civic aesthetics. This awakening happened almost simultaneously in the widely separated major cities each embedded in separate legislative frameworks inherited from the colonial era. The years 1913–1915 in Australia are seen as a highpoint in Australian social progress.⁵ They were certainly marked by a convergence of grassroots and professional movements for city improvement, open space and housing reform. Assuming the leadership of what became a series of parallel impulses rather than a genuine national movement were progressive architects, surveyors, engineers, civic officials, medical men and crusading women in all the major cities and some regional centres.⁶

The predominantly Anglo stock looked primarily to Britain ('the mother country') for exemplars and leadership but also across the Pacific Ocean to the United States as a comparable New World civilisation. Australian urban reformers acquired up-to-date overseas knowledge through a variety of channels. International business trips and study tours provided first-hand insights. Visiting experts also spread the word, with an extensive national lecture tour undertaken by Charles Reade and William Davidge on behalf of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association from May 1914. Printed reports came thick and fast from other quarters: Robert Irvine's *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Question of the Housing of Workmen in Europe and America* (Sydney, 1913), William Bold's *Report on Tour Round the World* (Perth, 1914), and James Morrell's *Town Planning: Report to the Honorable the Minister of Public Works* (Melbourne, 1915). Town planning content infiltrated the pages of professional journals like *The Salon*, the nationally circulating journal of the New South Wales Institute of Architects. These treatments were pitched mostly at professional audiences, state governments and local councils. The states began to explore the possibilities of town planning legislation to enable local authorities to better regulate suburban extensions and urban renewal. Meanwhile, on the ground came model housing estates like Dacey Garden Suburb in Sydney to showcase an aspirational standard of residential development. Already as Australia's most international city and with growing pains reflected in what one commentator termed a 'metropolitan muddle',⁷ Sydney witnessed the first decisive Australian stirrings towards organised modern planning reform.

Town planning advocate

In the thick of the action in Sydney was George Taylor (Figure 1). He promoted town planning through the media, lobbied government, and marshalled like-minded professional, civic and citizen individuals into action. He was singularly instrumental in formation of the Town Planning Association of NSW in October 1913. Momentarily conceived as a national body, the primary goal of the association was 'to promote Town Planning on the principles enunciated by recognised authorities in respect of badly arranged sections of older cities and towns, suburban development ... [and] new garden cities, towns and settlement areas'.⁸ Three early strategic actions strove to catch the popular imagination. In November 1913, Taylor arranged an exhibition of modern town plans and perspectives in the Royal Art Society's rooms in Sydney, one of the first occasions that the visual power of planning proposals has been harnessed to help

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mobilise support for the cause in Australia. In January 1914, he orchestrated a major public lecture by the visiting founder of Port Sunlight, Sir William Lever, in the Sydney Town Hall. And the following month, Taylor convened a meeting to initiate a scholarship fund in architecture and town planning to honour the contribution of Walter Liberty Vernon, a former NSW Government Architect.⁹

Taylor had a particular interest in the federal capital project which he saw as embodying numerous patriotic, nation building, town planning and technological aspirations. He was involved directly in three ways. First, he prepared one of the first military maps of the Canberra district in his work for the NSW Division of the Australian Intelligence Corps. Second, as Captain Taylor, in March 1913 he attended the official ceremony which named the city Canberra. Third, he became an early promoter of Walter Burley Griffin who was announced as the winner of the international design



Figure 1 George Augustine Taylor (1872–1928)

(Source: J.M. Giles, *Some Chapters in the Life of George Augustine Taylor: A Biography*, 1957)

competition in May 1912. He hailed Griffin as ‘a progressionist possessed to the full of that freedom of thought and action which harmonises so admirably with the aims and aspirations of this free and maturing nation’.¹⁰ After the national government had substituted a composite alternative plan damned by Patrick Abercrombie from afar as ‘a third rate Luna Park’,¹¹ he organised a petition calling for a Royal Commission into the development of Canberra. Amid broader professional unrest, this had some influence in the government’s decision to invite Griffin to Australia to become the federal capital director of design and construction in late 1913.¹²

Town planning was just one of Taylor’s many passions. But he believed passionately in the power of new environments ‘to cause human transformation’¹³ and regarded ‘town planning’ and ‘uplift’ as ‘synonymous terms’.¹⁴ His interests extended to efficient public administration and for a time he was Honorary Secretary of the Greater Sydney League committed to local government reform. His stock-standard solution for greater efficiency was right out of the toolkit of the American progressive: the non-partisan expert commission.¹⁵

‘The Leonardo of Loftus Street’

If the reporter-reformer was an archetype of the progressive era in the United States, then Taylor exemplified a comparable Australian spirit.¹⁶ Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* described the diminutive and hard-of-hearing Taylor as ‘a man of many parts – town planning, aviation, and wireless enthusiast, journalist, author, and general all-round man; withal very pleasant and breezy’.¹⁷ His claims as a self-made polymath were captured in a posthumous hagiographic biography.¹⁸ Taylor’s interests ranged broadly. He was variously described as a ‘cartoonist, business manager, organiser, journalist, author, soldier, survey draftsman, military map-maker, lecturer, inventor, humorist, satirist, poet, musician, astrologist, geologist, architect, engineer, town planner, aviator and radio expert’.¹⁹ A colleague in the Town Planning Association captured him as ‘brilliantly-gifted, irrepressibly energetic, Peter Pan-like’.²⁰ The scientist T. Edgeworth David dubbed him ‘The Leonardo of Loftus Street’.²¹

Born to working-class Irish parents in Sydney, George was the eldest of two sons who would become interested in aviation. Vincent was to make his name as a daredevil balloonist called Captain Penfold.²² Five siblings died in infancy from the effects of epilepsy. George left school at 14 and trained on the job as an architect to become an assistant draftsman in the NSW Department of Lands. He became officially certificated in 1894 and subsequently made a living as a cartoonist and artist. He exhibited with the Royal Art Society, contributed cartoons to Sydney and Melbourne weeklies, and was reportedly the first Australian to have drawings accepted by London *Punch* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, January 21, 1928). He entertained many a meeting, soiree and ‘at home’ with his ‘lightning sketches’. Taylor circulated in Sydney’s ‘bohemian’ circles and counted amongst his peers artists of the calibre of Norman Lindsay, Sydney Ure Smith and David Low. His own magazine *Ha Ha* lasted only three issues. *Taylor’s Blue Book of Commonwealth Comicalities* published around 1902 and *Australian Types* (1907) were collections of published cartoons. Taylor brought to his art a serious social conscience, conjuring ‘pictures of a spiritual world, to which were linked problems of modern civilisation’.²³

Taylor juggled multiple roles. Entrepreneurial in spirit, he helped develop a sugarcane-based bagasse plaster for use on ceilings in 1900. He was an honorary lieutenant in the Australian Army from December 1909. At the outbreak of the Great War, he joined the

7th Light Horse in October 1914 but was seconded to the Intelligence Section General Staff.²⁴ He also taught architecture part-time at Sydney Technical College where he met Florence Parsons, whom he married in April 1907. The same year they established the Building Publishing Company, operating initially out of rented premises in Grosvenor Street in Sydney's central business district before moving into their own building in nearby Loftus Street which they also made their home. The company would be best known as the vehicle for a variety of technical, trade and social journals mainly in the architecture, building, engineering and property fields. It became a remarkable empire, and the Taylors' editorial stances were invariably feisty. With the equally assertive and business-like Florence alongside, George would become one half of 'possibly the most amazing couple in Australia's history'.²⁵

The flagship journal was *Building*. Taylor's introductory statement in September 1907 stated: 'This Magazine is published in the interests of Architects, Builders, Craftsmen, and Property Owners, to record their doings, study their requirements, watch legislative and other movements that may affect their interests, lay before them the cream of the world's research in their various lines, and study for them fluctuations in property and building materials.' *Construction and Local Government Journal* ('the weekly journal of building business influences') followed, and both titles (with variations on their names through their lifetimes) became aligned to the Master Builders' Association, ensuring a steady revenue flow as official mouthpieces. The stable of journals included at various times into the 1920s *Australasian Engineer*, *The Property Owner*, *Junior Australians* (later *Young Australia*), *The Soldier*, *Australian Home* (later *Commonwealth Home*) and the *Radio Journal of Australia*. All the journals shared a lively 'will-to-teach'.²⁶

George Taylor was an 'energetic wielder of the pen and pencil' who further made his mark as an author of numerous books, booklets and published addresses, many reproduced and often serialised in his journals.²⁷ His works included *The Schemers* (1912), 'a story of architecture, art and political intrigue'; *Songs for Soldiers* (1913); *The Book of Confidence* (1915); *The Sequel: What the Great War Will Mean to Australia* (1915) (Figure 2); *There!* (1917), an account of his experiences during a world tour in 1914; *Those Were the Days* (1917), reminiscences of his bohemian days in the 1890s; *Where? The Quest of the Golden Fleece* (1918); *The Air Age* (1918); *Repatriation and Development* (1917); *Just Jingles* (1922) and *A World of Peace: Its Advantages and How to Win Them* (1923), a study of nationalities at the Third Assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva in 1922 and including pen portraits of delegates. *The Ways of the World* (1924) was his last major work and told 'the adventures of an Editor, an Engineer, a Master Builder, a Country Storekeeper, a School Teacher, and a Lady Architect, in all of the places likely to be visited by tourists to the British Empire Exhibition and Europe generally'.

The titles of Taylor's journals and books capture the nature and extent of his causes. Not always consistent in his beliefs, he remained nevertheless zestful and never far from controversy which he seemed to relish: 'I have always found an enemy a stimulating circumstance'.²⁸ 'The Common Ground', the editor's personal page in *Building*, was a regular mouthpiece over many years to air his passions and prejudices. He was a keen lecturer in many different professional and community forums. Moreover he was an inveterate organiser and active officer-holder in numerous organisations, most of which he founded. Apart from the Town Planning Association (1913), they included the Institute of Local Government Engineers of Australasia (1909), New South Wales Aerial League (1909), Wireless Institute (1911), Property Taxpayers and Ratepayers' Association (1916),



Figure 2 George was a prolific writer on many subjects but war, repatriation and peace were favoured themes. *The Sequel* was a book 'tracing the causes and results of war and the inevitable aftermath'. (Source: National Library of Australia)

Association for Developing Wireless (1922) and the Association for the Development of Wireless (1923).

Taylor not only argued for scientific research as the mother of invention, he undertook his own experiments in the early development of radio telegraphy. Florence called him 'The Wireless Wizard'.²⁹ He experimented with communication technology between two ends of a moving train and was also able to send a picture by radio, a primitive form of fax transmission. Many radio experiments were carried out in a camp south of Sydney where in 1911 he was visited by Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone.

He was an enthusiastic model aeroplane maker who graduated to fabricating box gliders in a factory in the inner Sydney suburb of Redfern. In December 1909 he became the first Australian to undertake controlled flights in a heavier-than-air flying machine over the sand dunes at one of Sydney's northern beaches. He harboured the ambition of being the first Australian to fly a proper aeroplane and unsuccessfully sued a young engineer for failure to deliver a motor on time (*Evening News*, Sydney, 28 June 1910). He did, however, officiate at the first air race in Australia held in Sydney in June 1912.

All of Taylor's causes were ultimately interlinked. Advanced wireless telegraphy could be deployed in aeroplanes for defence purposes. The fascination for aviation reflected an unswerving commitment to technological change and progress. His alliances with the building industry saw him celebrating modernity in construction. His appreciation of modernist architectural design was more ambivalent. As Apperley has written of both the Taylors, in principle while 'they freely accepted the need for a new architecture ... in practice they found the brave, unequivocal boxes' of European internationalists 'disturbingly unpalatable'.³⁰

While never seeing active service, military connections made Taylor an ardent patriot. In a lecture in 1910 he stated that 'a nation that rots in deadly peace becomes effete, and like ancient Rome, passes out'.³¹ In 1912 he alarmed an audience of engineers with reports of Japanese and German visitors making surveys of natural features in NSW possibly in preparation for invasion (*Examiner*, Launceston, 13 October 1912). As the war in Europe unfolded, Taylor shifted his concern from militarism to repatriation. The greatest problem of the war became the question: 'what are we going to do with the returned soldiers'. He looked ahead not to pensions and charity but full employment in the interests of national development (*Cairns Post*, 4 April 1917). At the international scale his ideology shifted again to embrace the peace movement and support for the League of Nations which he had witnessed first-hand during a European trip in 1922. In 1924 he joined with a number of church and welfare leaders in a 'universal brotherhood' campaign (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 January 1924).

Underlying all of these causes was a deep conservatism fusing elements of nationalism, militarism and patriotism. His world tours only added to his fears that multiculturalism was unworkable and that the instigators of the 'White Australia' policy were 'vary far-seeing men' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 December 1924). Inaugurating the Building Publishing Company turned him into an employer inevitably adopting pro-business positions. He began to see strengths in speculation: 'the spirit, far from being vice as is claimed by many, is, when diverted into progressive channels, a national asset' (*The Property Owner*, December 1917). He hardened in his anti-unionist views and faith in 'an elitist technocracy to inspire society'.³² Accentuated by Taylor's connections to conservative para-military organisations and figures, his progressivism began to take on 'fascist colouring'.³³ He became less and less enamoured with idealists and more and more convinced that realists were at the vanguard of social progress. Suffice to say that this mix of views placed him in the 'right wing' of the planning movement.³⁴

'The first text book on the subject issued in the Commonwealth'

George's *Town Planning for Australia* appeared in mid-1914. The timing is intriguing in that Taylor from May to August 1914 was travelling in the United States. But in other

ways it was 'most opportune' as John Sulman mentions in his preface. Sulman, an expatriate British architect, was the leading planning advocate of the day and President of the Town Planning Association.³⁵ He commended the book for its contribution to furthering the cause of 'the improvement of the conditions of town life'. With town planning making its mark as a distinctive movement for city improvement in Australia and controversy raging over the national government's handling of Canberra, Taylor as a central protagonist in the Sydney planning movement, with a national profile on federal capital matters, and a successful writer, editor and publisher to boot, was well placed to make a contribution (Figure 3).

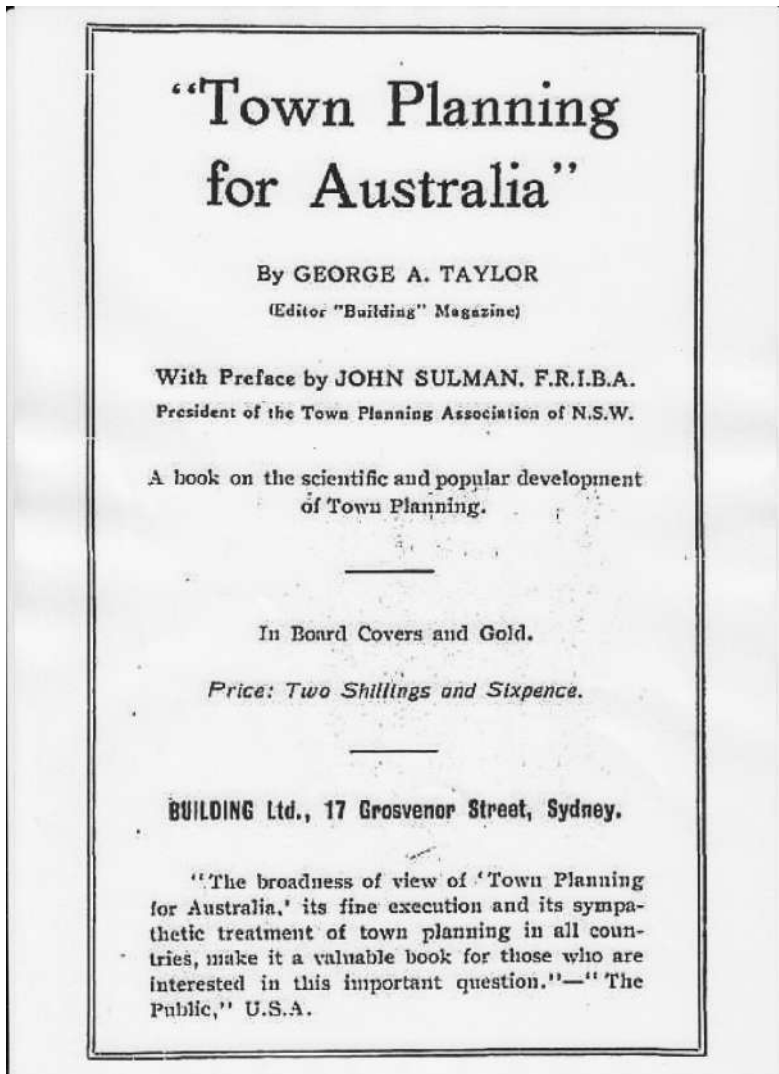


Figure 3 Advertisement for Town 'Planning for Australia'
(Source: *Construction and Local Government Journal*, 20 August 1915)

An advertisement for the book, undoubtedly written by him, in the *Construction and Local Government Journal* captures the core marketing pitch:

The town-planning movement is firmly established in the Commonwealth and New Zealand, and it must rapidly advance in popular favour – firstly, in the democracy of its appeal; secondly, because it coincides so closely with the natural inclinations and national ambitions of the people ... It is morally incumbent upon Architects, Engineers and Master Builders, as designers and builders of the homes, business houses and industrial undertakings of the people, to support a movement that makes for improved living conditions. It is profitable to property owners to support a movement that is based on improvement of land and buildings. ‘Town Planning for Australia’, as the only book dealing with the science in its particular relation to Australia, is, therefore, at least an essential possession of all interested in constructional development.³⁶

Sulman’s preface is dated May 1914. That month Taylor commenced serialisation (‘the first text book on the subject issued in the Commonwealth’) in *Building* in monthly instalments running to September that year. The page layout is virtually identical to the book proper, with just three exceptions.³⁷ The front and end-papers (reproduced in this edition) were given over to advertisements for various building product firms and other Taylor publications (including *Building* and another new book, *The Schemers*). The book was priced at 2/6, and available postage-free.

Town Planning for Australia is a short book with 136 folio-sized pages in its original printing, 24,000 words of text, and 21 sections or chapters of varied length. There is an overall structure which is not immediately apparent deserving a brief explication. The book commences with three basically historical chapters and then segues into a further historically based review of the international scene. The treatment of Washington DC in Section 6 provides a link to a quartet of chapters dealing with Australia’s federal capital. Section 7 provides a potted account of Australian capital city planning history as a prelude to the rationale of devising a new capital for a new nation. Section 8 provides a brief overview of the federal capital competition organised by the Commonwealth Government. Section 9 describes the winning scheme in some detail with admiration apparent for the skills of Walter Burley Griffin but the treatment of the other premiated entries is perfunctory, and Eliel Saarinen’s name is spelt incorrectly.

Section 10 covers the ‘travesty’ of the Commonwealth’s decision to synthesise features of the winning plans into a hybrid concoction to assuage the powerful bureaucrats seeking to control the future direction of Canberra.³⁸ In June 1913 Taylor published a devastating critique of this plan by W.L. Vernon in *Building* (Figure 4). He followed this up by organising a signed petition to Prime Minister Joseph Cook from ‘professionals’ (mainly architects) from New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland calling for an official inquiry into the so-called ‘Departmental Board’ plan and the ‘general administration relative to the building of Canberra’. The Institutes of Architects in each state independently expressed their dissatisfaction to the government.³⁹ The immediate upshot of such lobbying was a decision by the government to invite Walter Burley Griffin to Australia to supervise implementation of his winning plan. While the ‘Royal Commission of professional experts’ called for by Taylor’s petition (reproduced across four pages of his book) was rejected, the problems which Griffin encountered

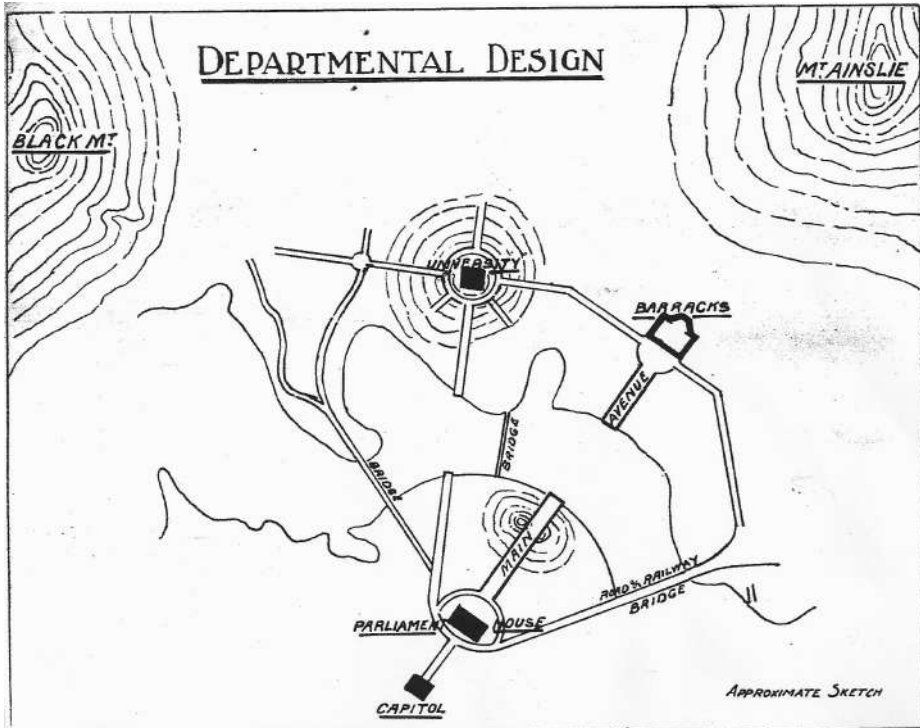


Figure 4 The critique of the aesthetic and functional frailties of a new plan for Canberra assembled from the Griffin and other schemes by a Departmental Board plan in November 1912 by architect Walter Liberty Vernon (1846–1914) was referred to in George Taylor’s petition for a ‘square deal for Canberra’.

(Source: *Building*, June 1913)

throughout his tenure as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction from 1913 to 1921 would subsequently be investigated by a Royal Commission in 1916–17. Meanwhile, from late 1912 Taylor had been drawn into a debate with Louis Curtis, President of the New South Wales Institution of Surveyors, over the merits of the Griffin plan itself. Curtis acknowledged the ‘fine drawings’ (the work of Marion Mahony Griffin) but dismissed the scheme ‘as an effective piece of city planning’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 December 1913). *Town Planning for Australia* responds to the major criticisms in detail, first elaborated in *The Surveyor* in late 1912.⁴⁰

Section 11, a short two-page chapter, offers a general statement on ‘the mission of the town planner’ and casts this contribution as providing overall direction for the more specialised contributions of surveyors, architects, engineers and master builders. An exemplar for this organisational model was found in Gary, Indiana, a planned community founded by US Steel in 1906. Section 12 describes the development of this ‘ideal town’. Taylor acknowledges the limitations of its unimaginative gridiron layout but is animated by its apparent success as a ‘business proposition’. In retrospect, the choice was unfortunate with the failings of Gary in terms of housing policies soon to become apparent.⁴¹

Sections 13 to 18 elaborate on five key financial factors in planned development (evident in Gary) dealing successively with land values (Section 13), infrastructure (Sections 14–16), building construction (Section 17), administration (Section 18) and publicity (Section 19). The relevance of these factors is grounded not only in the case of Canberra but also ‘the establishment of any other new Australian town’. The penultimate chapter deals with civic art and the concluding Section 21, ‘The City of the Future’.

Six major themes bind this volume together. The first is a foundational and orthodox environmentalist position in relation to city improvement. ‘With better environment, a better class of individual will result’, Taylor writes, quoting along the way British reformers such as William Lever and John Burns to highlight the importance of ‘physical efficiency’ and the benefits that ensue in terms of lower crime rates, ‘fraternal companionship’, even ‘honesty in business dealings’. The physical and mental health problems caused by congestion seemed all the more unacceptable in a ‘glorious land of open spaces’. Only ‘a decent people’ could produce ‘a decent city’, encapsulated in Taylor’s most intriguing phrase of the whole book: ‘a city is a reflex of the calibre of the crowd’.

Second is a philosophy of planning as a collaborative art between professions but guided by the harmonious grand scheme of town planners. While their primary justification derives from physical determinism as ‘missionaries of sunlight’, the stance that can be pieced together from across the book is the planner as a ‘practical idealist’. That is, they must be equipped with practical knowledge to temper ‘flights of fancy’. Taylor elaborated his views on ‘the town planner and his mission’ in a small booklet also published in 1914.⁴²

Third is a strong endorsement of capitalist enterprise as a means to progressive ends. Here Taylor breaks from most of his Australian contemporaries who advocated new place-based regulations controlling private development as the way forward. Taylor acknowledges the calamity of the industrial city but in places like Port Sunlight, Bournville and Gary he sees enlightened commercial interests saving the day. Taylor’s treatment of financial matters is double-sided. Land speculation may have almost ruined Washington DC but elsewhere this same spirit can prove a ‘good genie’. He is also quick to transform the stereotype of the polluting factory into a commercial necessity bringing wealth to the community. Section 18 provides a revealing upbeat account of early garden suburb development from a business administration, rather than the conventional aesthetic, perspective.⁴³ Taylor was an admirer of the private developer of the Haberfield and Rosebery Garden Suburbs in Sydney, Richard Stanton, for having made ‘a financial success of town planning’.

A fourth, aesthetic, dimension underpins the treatment, although it is going too far to say that Taylor was ‘preoccupied with civic beauty, vistas, spectacle and visual drama’.⁴⁴ Indeed, at one point he dismisses artists as cranks who impede city improvement. The ‘city beautiful’ chapter (Section 20) declares that ‘environment has a great effect on character’ and concentrates on practical rather than artistic dividends of town planning. The greater aesthetic treatment in the book is in Section 4 and its quickfire survey of Rome’s ‘great link-ways’, French ‘town squares’, and German ‘street pictures’. More instructive of the broader stance of the book are three asides: that beauty is ‘a commercial asset’; that standardisation through regulation eliminates originality, and that Australian town planning should respond to local conditions rather than uncritically ‘dog-follow foreign types’. Here Taylor’s deeper social values which informed his broader writings are in evidence.

Technological utopianism underpins the promise of futurism, a fifth major theme of the book. The engagement is most explicit in the final chapter but permeates the discussion. Taylor looks to continued advances in technology to improve the quality of life. Aviation,

a major obsession outside his town planning interests, is projected as having a significant impact on the form of the city, the design of buildings, and methods of urban analysis. He has no time for historic preservationists laying physical impediments in the path of progress. By contrast, a vision of future building and street forms to more efficiently deliver lighting, communication and transportation services extracted from Eugène Hénard's paper at the 1910 Royal Institute of British Architects Conference, is especially enthusiastic.⁴⁵ So too the coverage of Hendrik Christian Andersen and Ernest Hébrard's world centre of communication which concludes the book.⁴⁶ Like British commentator A. Trystan Edwards, Taylor was struck by the originality and completeness of the conception.⁴⁷ Edwards treats the proposal as a landmark of urban design and Taylor similarly provides a detailed description, drawing on the 'fine drawing' which Anderson had sent him in 1912. But Taylor's main enthusiasm was more existential: the vision of an international hub 'from which the spirit of the world's peace can flow'. In 1922 Taylor met Hébrard at a 'peace city' conference in Brussels in his capacity as official Australian envoy. The occasion reinforced his new mission of promoting peace for mankind.⁴⁸

Finally, the sixth, dominant, and most distinctively Australian theme of the book – indeed, one of its primary catalysts – is its enthusiasm for the new national capital city of Canberra. This represented Australia's 'first great opportunity for scientific town planning' and would be emblematic of 'the virile white race which is building a nation great in the Southern Seas.' Taylor saw Canberra as representing the best opportunity for developing a planned modern city *de novo* – greater than either the British garden communities or Gary. By the final chapter, the promise of the world city of peace is conflated with the Canberra project for 'the only Continent that has never known war.'

The style of *Town Planning for Australia* is unabashedly combative rather than soberly factual. It is popular journalism, with punchy expression and short paragraphs replete with opinionated claims. Sections are discursive as international, national and Canberra references compete for attention. A short bibliography is provided but the work has not been researched in any scholarly manner. The historical content is breezy and patchy, seemingly intended to create opportunities to interpolate comparative references to the contemporary Australian experience. While the book provides an explicitly pragmatic treatment, the elaboration of practical issues is uneven. The discussion from Section 13 onward dealing with the development of an Australian town is a mixture of received wisdom, exhortation, argument, international and Australian examples, with Canberra a constant frame of reference. The treatment is thus neither systematic nor sophisticated but rather a primer of concepts, albeit detached from any broader design philosophy. The most perceptive ideas relate to a critique of low-density development and the related need to address housing needs beyond the family cottage.

The images are a vital part of the presentation. These were always a strength of Taylor publications which carried an estimated 19,000 illustrations in the years 1907 to 1961.⁴⁹ Quality is not high, but typical of the reproductions in *Building* and other sister journals. *Town Planning for Australia* reproduces over 100 figures. These are mostly general scenes in various Australian and world cities. At a time when newspaper articles were not heavily illustrated, the images provided accessible reproductions of key planning exemplars such as the English garden suburbs and villages. Of enduring value are a selection from the federal capital competition including Griffin's diagrams explaining the logic of his spatial ordering as well as samples of his other notable work including the housing development Rock Crest-Rock Glen in Mason City, Iowa (1911), the E.W. Clark Memorial

Fountain in Grinnell, Iowa (1912), and the Trier Center Neighbourhood community plan for Winnetka, Illinois (1913).⁵⁰ John Sulman wrote that the combination of illustrations, ‘graphic pen pictures’ and opinion was ‘most valuable and convincing’.⁵¹

Also noteworthy is Taylor’s occasional role as a key player in the events described. He is the instigator of the Town Planning Association which is depicted in Section 19 as an ideal model for ‘furtherance of town-planning development in any community’. He takes a lead role in mobilising the architectural community to petition Prime Minister Cook to revisit the departmental board plan for Canberra, described and depicted in Section 10. He shares design insights about the formulation of the winning federal capital plan from his conversations with Griffin after his arrival in Sydney in August 1913 – the siting of the Governor-General’s residence close to the House of Parliament (an expression of Australian democracy at work, said Griffin) and locating the defence complex on a commanding knoll to the east, towards the sea being the most likely direction for overland attack.⁵²

Town Planning for Australia was received well. The *Sydney Morning Herald* pronounced it as ‘altogether ... an excellent production, which will stimulate popular interest in the cause of town planning’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 June 1914). The book also garnered international reviews. An American journal *The Public* saw its treatment of planning as broad, sympathetic, and finely executed, making it ‘a valuable book for those who are interested in this important question’.⁵³ *The British Architect* described it as ‘full of illuminating information on the difficulties and pitfalls for town planning and explains a good deal about the genesis of Canberra’.⁵⁴ Patrick Abercrombie, a keen observer of federal capital affairs from afar, wrote in the *Town Planning Review* of ‘a certain crudity of general format’ dominated by Canberra content but noted the imprimatur of Sulman’s preface. But he couldn’t restrain himself from commenting on Taylor’s single line drawing of Prime Minister Cook as an unusual inclusion ‘in a volume of so serious a subject’.⁵⁵ The book appears to have been profitable for Taylor, helped along by regular advertisements in his *Construction and Local Government Journal* to mid-1915. By June 1915 it was in its fourth printing and ‘only a few copies’ were left.⁵⁶

Keeping the dream alive

George Taylor kept working toward improved town planning for Australia into the late 1920s. In 1915 he launched a new journal, *Town Planning and Housing*, initially as a supplement to *Building*. This was billed as ‘a monthly record of achievement and advocate of best living conditions for Australians’ (Figure 5). It was an overly idealistic attempt to help link up the various town planning associations across Australia but lapsed in 1916 when that goal proved chimerical.⁵⁷ He served as a vice-president of the Town Planning Association from 1916 to 1920 and became involved in a Betterment Board for the regional centre of Newcastle in 1925. Juggled amid all his other interests were several major planning initiatives. One was an intermittent campaign to secure a town plan for metropolitan Sydney. In 1918 he launched an invitation for public subscriptions to enable experts to prepare a scheme over three years.⁵⁸ The idea was revived in 1925, this time by awarding prizes in a competition, with up to £2,500 for the winning entry.⁵⁹ These were populist suggestions which came to naught and contrasted with other more serious initiatives within the town planning movement in Sydney that bypassed the Town Planning Association altogether and channelled into a new professional-civic organisation, the Sydney Regional Plan Convention.⁶⁰

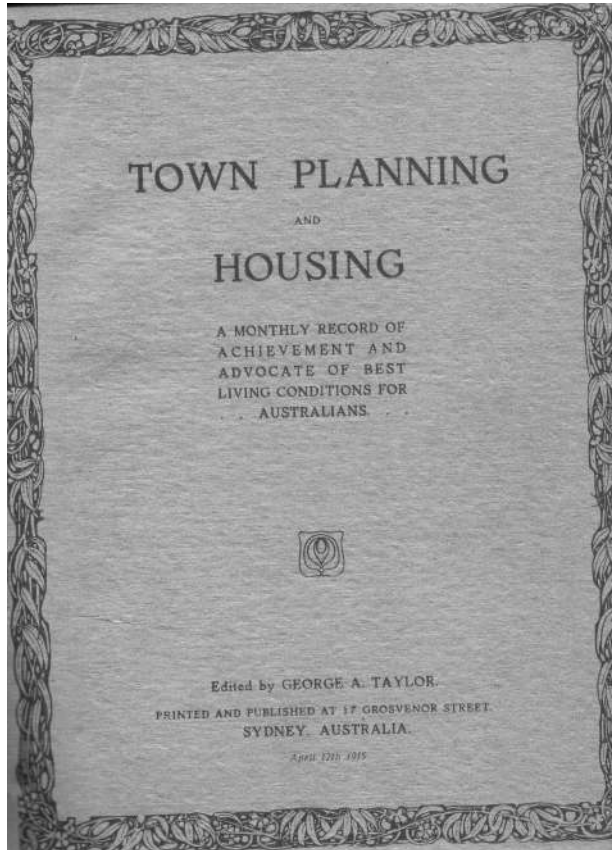


Figure 5 Nine issues of George Taylor's journal explicitly targeting town planning and housing appeared between April 1915 and May 1916 (Source: State Library of New South Wales)

Taylor maintained his international vision and connections. He became Secretary of a Panel accountable to the national government with the task of preparing an exhibit on the evolution of urban and rural housing for the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924. With his wife Florence he attended the conference and also the Tenth Anniversary Dinner of the Town Planning Institute at London's Savoy Hotel in May 1924. Through the 1920s he also tried to drum up community and government interest for an international exhibition in connection with the anticipated opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1931 (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January 1928).

In March 1915 Taylor gave evidence alongside other leading planning advocates including John Sulman and Richard Stanton to the Victorian Royal Commission on the Housing Conditions of the People in the Metropolis at a special Sydney sitting. His statement stressed common-sense in distinguishing between idealistic and practical planning, further advocating extension of affordable home ownership rather than state-sponsored social housing.⁶¹ Taylor's working relationships with his colleagues in the planning movement were often fractious. He had run-ins with Charles Reade who preached a

more regulationist paradigm of planning as well as high-profile Sydney figures John Daniel Fitzgerald and Robert Francis Irvine, both active in the Town Planning Association but with contrasting liberal-socialist sympathies. While fond of declaring planning as free of politics, his strained relationships frequently resulted from his own dogmatic ideological views. Publicly unscathed throughout were Sulman, an unassailable patriarch bestowing both authority and credibility to the planning movement and more particularly the Town Planning Association, and J.J.C. Bradfield, the designer of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the most spectacular example of practical urban 'planning' in Australia between the wars.

A major cleavage opened with Walter Burley Griffin, paralleling an equally spectacular fallout between his wife Florence and Griffin's life and creative partner, Marion Mahony. *Town Planning for Australia* is only laudatory about Griffin who assisted with personal introductions to a range of contacts in the United States for Taylor's trip commencing in May 1914. Taylor was ebullient about visiting the USA for the first time: 'America has always been a wonder world in my imagination ... indisputably the land of the up-to-date ... the land of enterprise and innovation'.⁶² But he returned in a much darker frame of mind because of the country's tardiness in joining the war effort. Moreover, his investigations of American city planning and interactions with people who knew Griffin, notably an acerbic Frank Lloyd Wright, saw him adopt a jaundiced view of Griffin's capabilities.

Where once Taylor had championed Griffin, from early 1915 he turned against him, and in quite vicious style.⁶³ Florence joined in and their invective targeted his administrative and practical capabilities. Griffin was given some credit as a town planner. He had, after all, won an international competition and had been praised by George, but his management and political skills could be attacked. A July 1915 essay, 'The Fight for Canberra',⁶⁴ is a remarkable chronicle of conflict between Griffin, public servants and politicians told through military metaphors: bombs, shrapnel, counter-attacks, 'exchange of artillery', bombardment of positions, strongholds and 'high explosive shells'. Griffin is depicted as a talented individual flawed by a slowness to complete tasks, ignoring strategic advice (largely George's), lacking tact, failing to exploit opportunities, and with a poor writing style prone to 'weird phrases'. He was 'an amateur soldier on the field of battle'. Florence soon launched an attack on Griffin's credentials as designer. In her opening article in a *Building* series on Australian architecture in December 1915, she described Griffin's Collins House office building in Melbourne as 'freakish and faulty architecture' distinguished only by 'eccentricity, ugliness and extravagance'. This was followed in January 1916 by an attack on Griffin's proposed design for Newman College also in Melbourne as 'a gaol with exercise yards'. The Taylors went as far as offering a public apology for their former association with the Griffins: 'we take upon ourselves the blame for bringing Mr Griffin to Australia'.⁶⁵ Had there been a second edition of *Town Planning for Australia*, the treatment of Griffin and the federal capital would have been decidedly different.

Taylor continued writing about town planning, Sydney and local government reform. In 1915 he commenced a second major book which he called *Town Planning and Common-Sense*. A blurb in the *Construction and Local Government Journal* announced the forthcoming text, the opening lines in part a veiled reference to his disillusionment with Walter Burley Griffin:

Town planning is being made the 'happy hunting-ground' of extremists, posturing philanthropists, impractical designers and faddists in general. The essentials are either being misrepresented or over-loaded with formula and ritual.

There is scope for the application of the reasonable and the practical in town planning. A new work on the subject is justified and demanded. Encouraged by the success of 'Town Planning for Australia,' now in its fourth edition, the author is shortly publishing the following companion volume ... proving how town planning can embrace the elements of art, serve its humanitarian purpose, and yet be conducted at a profit. The arguments are drawn from the personal investigations of the author during his recent tour of thirty-eight American cities.⁶⁶

In June 1915 Taylor embarked on a lecture tour to Adelaide, Brisbane and Melbourne to sell his new mantra of common-sense planning. Following a tried and trusted formula, the book was serialised monthly commencing with the June 1915 issue of *Building*. However, the third instalment was diverted into reproducing his lengthy account of Canberra machinations which had recently appeared in *Town Planning and Housing*. There the venture stopped, until resuscitated in 1918 as a 'second edition'.⁶⁷ The early chapters share text in common but the journal version now reads as a stuttering first draft. The book was serialised in the *Construction and Local Government Journal* from May to November 1918, in *The Property Owner* the same year, and was 'brought up to date' and serialised again in *The Property Owner* from May 1922 under the title 'Town and District Development'.

Town Planning and Common-Sense was the same mix of story-telling, ideology and opinionated discursiveness we see in his 1914 book. Short on grounded knowledge and detailed documentation, it is sprinkled with American references, mostly critical because city plans there 'have neglected the citizen for the stranger' with wasteful city beautiful planning. Drawing also on 'his experiences in the inauguration of the town-planning movement in Australia', Taylor refines his message into uncompromising statements on the need for business-minded planning, expert commissions, and home ownership. But in contrast to the earlier book, Canberra is barely mentioned: 'it has not yet had any reason for people to live there, it is still a city on paper, and will remain so until a profitable reason is developed for people to transfer their business or homes there'.⁶⁸ Griffin, the hero four years earlier, is dismissed as a theorist, 'excellent in designing "an ideal city" yet in construction failed lamentably'.⁶⁹

The impetus for finally completing and publishing the book three years after commencement may well have been to capture the market created by the staging of the Second Australian Town Planning Conference and Exhibition in Brisbane from 30 July to 6 August 1918, although the Taylors were conspicuous in their absence from this landmark event. While many delegates would have shared some of Taylor's views, the overall political complexion of the movement was far more moderate with practitioners having to grapple with actually implementing the sorts of ideals which remained rhetorical for Taylor. The book ends on an optimistic note, which few would have contested, for linking town planning, home building and the repatriation of returned soldiers. This was the major theme of the conference and revisited well-worn territory for Taylor: 'the planning of sensible cities could have no better stimulus'.⁷⁰

The end

In early 1927 Taylor announced plans for a third town planning text. Improbably entitled *The Scenic Side of Cities*, it was billed as a 'coming Christmas book'. The first edition would be bound in a cloth and gold cover and retail at 10/6 per copy. The contents

rehearsed some familiar themes, but with a new emphasis on the dangers of centralisation. The book would:

... carry a careful study of the tendency, in this Age of Haste, for humanity to congregate around common centres, such as capital cities, leaving country areas unpopulated, this being particularly noticeable in Australia where in 1911 the proportion of capital cities to total population was 39.02 per cent whilst in the year 1926 it had increased to over 45 per cent. In the preparation of this great work, Mr Taylor has paid three visits to the leading cities of the world during the past twelve years, noting the tendency to crowd capital cities, and what it will tend to human development, and how mechanical means can best be utilised in this age of invention to turn the tendency to best account for human progress.⁷¹

The book never appeared. On 20 January 1928 George Taylor died after an epileptic fit at his Loftus Street apartment. He was 55. The *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that his death 'removes from the life of Sydney one of its most familiar, vivid, and versatile personalities' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January 1928). His funeral the following day was attended by many well-known names from the worlds of planning, architecture, engineering and politics including former Prime Minister Cook, former Sydney Lord Mayor Sir Allen Taylor, J.J.C. Bradfield and Sir John Sulman.

Sulman in a valedictory note to Florence said that George 'was the most versatile and talented man I ever met, and his work was always for the public good. His was an example of whole-hearted service that this generation sadly needs, and we shall all be the poorer for his absence.'⁷² His name would be remembered by various medals and scholarships established by his wife Florence including a Master Builders Association prize and a memorial lecture series on aeronautics at Sydney University. Suburban memorials to his work for military wireless and the development of aviation in Australia were erected in the 1960s shortly before Florence's own death. *Town Planning for Australia* was dedicated 'To my architect – my wife' and while they had been very much a team – 'the triumphant Taylors' – Florence would carry on in the same mould of publisher, editor, writer and conservative social activist for another four decades. Hers was also a remarkable life and she sustained a similar mix of causes to her late husband, starting with town planning.⁷³

But Florence's planning, like George's before her, was increasingly dated and marginalised by the mainstream planning movement. George's role in bringing structure and a voice to that movement in Sydney and nationally in the 1910s was undeniable and *Town Planning for Australia* remains a valuable if quirky reminder of that heady era of planning reform. A professionalism certainly evident from the early 1920s pushed in new directions toward restrictive legislation, development controls and social housing, a palette with which the entrepreneurial George was not comfortable. The Town Planning Association of NSW was already in a slow, agonising decline after Sulman had stood down as President in 1925. It hung on until the mid-1960s sharing its views at ever-shrinking targets completely forgotten by what had become an established planning profession with its own Institute.⁷⁴

George's greatest legacy for the latter day planning movement was arguably the translation of his Vernon Memorial Scholarship fund into supporting an annual series of adult education town planning lectures at Sydney University commenced by John Sulman who produced a compilation in the form of his own book, *An Introduction to the Study of*

Town Planning in Australia (1921). This was the first truly credible, authoritative Australian textbook, a major advance on Taylor's maverick musings.⁷⁵ These lectures continued into the late 1940s and eventually segued into the first formal diploma course in town and country planning at Sydney University from 1949.

The body of work which George left behind remains a richly intriguing resource for scholars today seeking to understand the international evolution of modern planning theory and practice. In its day his key text *Town Planning for Australia* enjoyed wide circulation in drumming up support for town planning ideals. Its journalistic style did not seriously rival other serious contemporary English language texts such as Patrick Geddes' *Cities in Evolution* (1915), J.S. Nettlefold's *Practical Town Planning* (1914) and Henry Aldridge's *The Case for Town Planning* (1915) as planning manuals of substance let alone the tomes which preceded these by Raymond Unwin, Charles Mulford Robinson, Inigo Triggs and the like. George Taylor's book instead taps planning's more polemical roots, making a popular economic and social case for planning, akin to the treatment in, say, Benjamin Marsh's *An Introduction to City Planning: Democracy's Challenge and the American City* (1909). But it has national and global significance as the first Australian book on modern town planning in the early twentieth century.

Notes

- 1 My thanks to Helen Meller and Alex Hollingsworth in supporting this project, Bryan Li for technical assistance, Charles Rowe and Margaret Park for research assistance, and my late uncle Les Sheridan for presenting me with his personal copy of the book as an undergraduate geography student in the early 1970s when I had no idea of what to make of it.
- 2 Sutcliffe, *Towards the Planned City*.
- 3 Sanyal, *Comparative Planning Cultures*.
- 4 Weber, *The Growth of Cities*, 138.
- 5 Hetherington, Introduction, *Glorious Days*, x–xi.
- 6 Freestone, "Introduction", *Cities, Citizens and Environmental Reform*, 15–16.
- 7 Fitzgerald, *The Metropolitan Problems of Sydney*, 12.
- 8 Quoted from Freestone, "Introduction", *Cities, Citizens and Environmental Reform*, 11.
- 9 Boyd, *No Sacrifice in Sunshine*.
- 10 George Taylor, "Canberra Saved", *Building*, October 1913, 46.
- 11 (Abercrombie), "Federal Capital of Australia", 222.
- 12 Reps, *Canberra 1912*, 253–257.
- 13 Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*, 193.
- 14 George A. Taylor, "Town Planning and Uplift – IV", *Building*, November 1920, 81.
- 15 Nugent, *Progressivism*.
- 16 Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*: 185–209.
- 17 Quoted in an advertisement for "The Ways of the World", *Australian Home*, February 1925, 4.
- 18 Giles, *Some Chapters in the Life of George Augustine Taylor*.
- 19 "A Tribute to the late George A. Taylor", *Building*, February 1928, 47.
- 20 J.S. Purdy, *Annual Report of the Town Planning Association of New South Wales*, November (1926), 1. Copy in the State Library of New South Wales.
- 21 Murray, "Pirouette and Pose", 47.
- 22 Craddock, *Feeling the Air*.
- 23 "A Tribute to the late George A. Taylor", 47.
- 24 Michael Roe, "Taylor, George Augustine (1872–1928)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/taylor-george-augustine-8756/text15343>, accessed 31 December 2013.
- 25 Freeland, *The Making of a Profession*, 78.

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- 26 Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*, 187.
- 27 Sydney "Daily Mail" quoted in Taylor, *A World of Peace*, 122.
- 28 Taylor, *Town Planning with Common-Sense*, 10.
- 29 Florence M. Taylor, "The Radio Enthusiast", *Building*, February 1928, 51.
- 30 Apperly, "Sydney Houses 1914–1939", 78.
- 31 Giles, *Some Chapters in the Life of George Augustine Taylor*, 26.
- 32 Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*, 193.
- 33 Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*, 191. See also Teather, "Fascism and Australian Town Planning Propagandists".
- 34 Sandercock, *Cities for Sale*, 19.
- 35 Freestone, "Sulman of Sydney".
- 36 From advertisement in *Construction and Local Government Journal*, 25 June 1915, 11.
- 37 In the initial sections reproduced in the May 1914 issue, a caption is corrected (Pisa instead of Florence, top image on p. 20). In the final September 1914 instalment images of Wellesley Place, Calcutta and 'a neat pen drawing' of a house by E.R. Orchard were dropped respectively for a perspective of a beachside holiday camp proposal by one of Taylor's associates, F.E. Stowe (p. 130) and the list of references (p. 136). The book was naturally published by Building Limited, then based at 17 Grosvenor Street.
- 38 Reid, *Canberra following Griffin*, 92–105.
- 39 Reps, *Canberra 1912*, 258–259.
- 40 Curtis, "The Federal Capital Designs".
- 41 Mohl and Betten, "The Failure of Industrial City Planning".
- 42 Taylor, *The Town Planner and His Mission*. This booklet is largely cobbled together from Sections 5 and 11.
- 43 Freestone, *Model Communities*, 182–183.
- 44 Sandercock, *Cities for Sale*, 19.
- 45 Hénard, "The Cities of the Future".
- 46 Andersen and Hébrard, *Creation of a World Centre of Communication*.
- 47 Edwards, "A World Centre of Communication".
- 48 Taylor, *The Ways of the World*.
- 49 Kerwin Maegraith, "The Taylors of Loftus Street", unpublished manuscript (c1968), Mitchell Collection, State Library of New South Wales, ML MSS 4944.
- 50 Harrison, *Walter Burley Griffin*, 23, 52–53.
- 51 Quoted in an advertisement in *Construction and Local Government Journal*, 23 February 1927, 4.
- 52 See also Griffin, *Report Explanatory*, 9.
- 53 Quoted in an advertisement in *Construction and Local Government Journal*, 20 August 1915, 7.
- 54 Reported in "Town Planning for Australia", *Building*, September 1914, 64.
- 55 "Two Australian Pamphlets on Town Planning", *Town Planning Review*, 5 (1914), 241.
- 56 Advertisement for "Town Planning for Australia", *Building*, June 1915, 42.
- 57 Freestone and Park, "The Limits to Nationalism".
- 58 "Make Sydney a City of Health and Beauty", *Building*, March 1918, 19–27.
- 59 *Construction and Local Government Journal*, 12 August 1925, 7.
- 60 Freestone, "The Sydney Regional Plan Convention".
- 61 Evidence taken by the Royal Commission on the Housing Conditions of the People in the Metropolis, *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, No 29 (1917), 312.
- 62 "The Common Ground", *Building*, May (1914), 49.
- 63 Paragraph substantially based on Freestone and Hanna, *Florence Taylor's Hats*, 141–142.
- 64 Taylor, "The Fight for Canberra".
- 65 Quoted in Freestone and Hanna, *Florence Taylor's Hats*, 141.
- 66 Advertisement in *Construction and Local Government Journal*, 11 June 1915, 2.
- 67 Taylor, *Town Planning with Common-Sense*.
- 68 *Town Planning with Common-Sense*, 78.
- 69 *Town Planning with Common-Sense*, 28.
- 70 *Town Planning with Common-Sense*, 124.
- 71 Advertisement in *Construction*, 23 February 1927, 4.
- 72 "Excerpts from Letters of Condolence", *Building*, February (1928), 56.

73 Freestone and Hanna, *Florence Taylor's Hats*.

74 Wright, *Expectations of a Better World*.

75 Sulman, John, *An Introduction to the Study of Town Planning in Australia*.

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