

Tranby

*Continuity, conservation
and contemporary values*

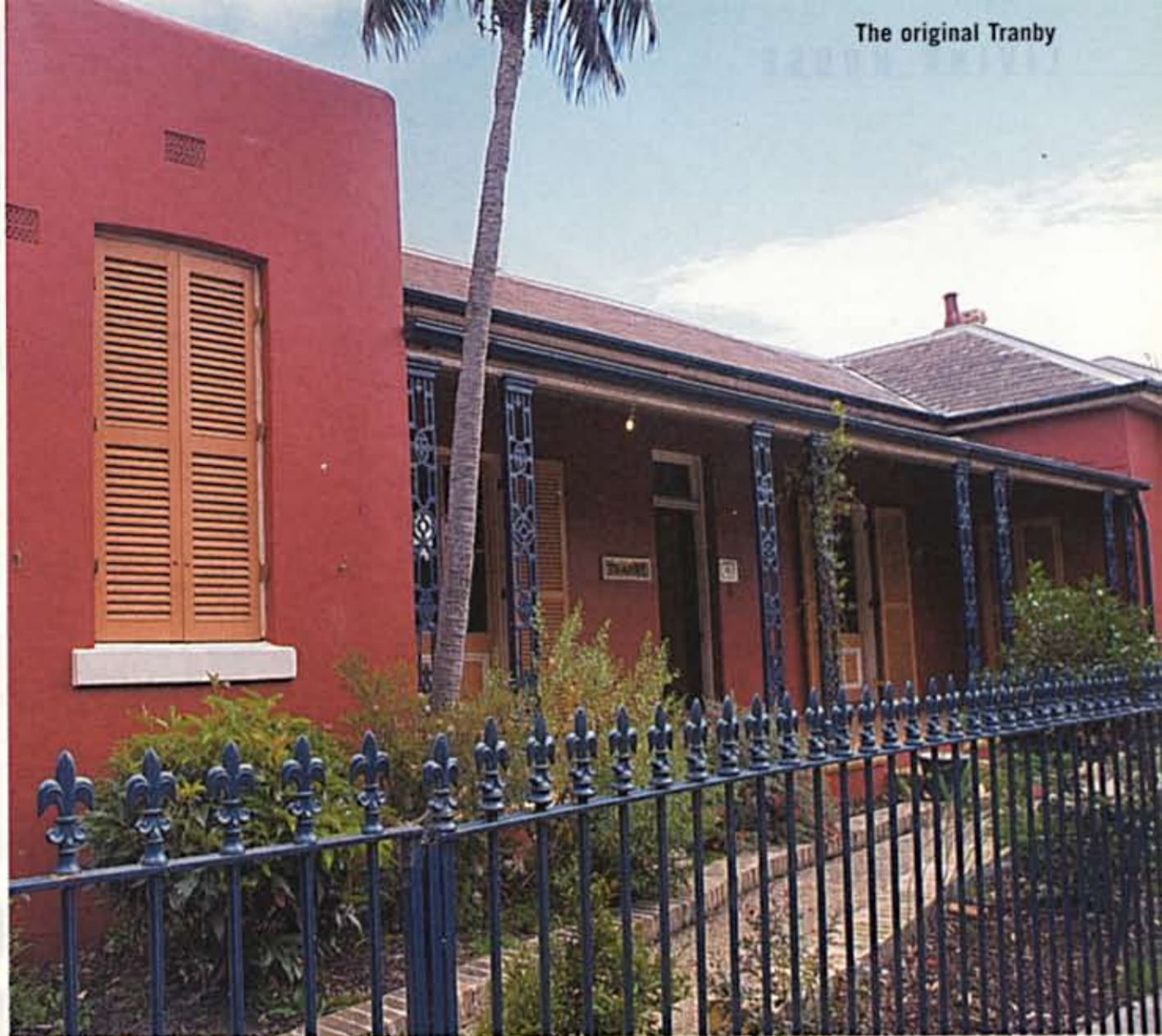
There are few examples to be found where well-designed contemporary architecture sits sympathetically in a 19th century townscape. It is an attitude that should be taken into the 21st century – in this case, social values contribute to the significance of a place and, when applied to the built form in a skilled way, add to community spirit and physical identity.

By Stephen Davies.

Photography by Peter Lonergan and Simon Kenny.

Entering Tranby Aboriginal Cooperative College in Mansfield Street, Glebe, is an exploration of the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

The long, cool passage of this former dwelling leads to a bright rear courtyard which is enclosed on one side by the rear of Tranby c.1850s and the adjacent Minnamurra c.1883 and on the other side by a contemporary building comprising circular forms. This new building, approved in 1994, provides additional accommodation for the college which has been operating on the site since 1958.



The role of the Cooperative has changed over 40 years and the new building reflects a commitment to adapting to the changing needs of the Aboriginal community.

The Glebe area is the home of the Cadigal ancestors. It was densely covered by eucalypt and abundant with bird and animal life. Figs, lilly pillies, yams and burrawang nuts grew in the bush and there were abundant fish and rock oysters from Blackwattle Bay. Along the Balmain peninsular, Cadigal people met their Wangal neighbours who shared the Darug language with coastal and inland communities around Sydney – Eora country.

'Tranby', the dwelling, was described by Bernard and Kate Smith as an interesting example of a cottage which retained the low lines and broad proportions of early colonial dwellings.

It was built on the Allen Estate prior to its subdivision of the 1880s, but exactly when it was built is not known. Tranby is a fine example of a post-Regency picturesque cottage and may possibly have been designed with the style of Toxteth Park in mind. It is feasible that George Allen Mansfield designed the northern extension to the cottage of Tranby in the 1870s-'80s.

The site formed part of the Grant

from Governor Phillip to the Reverend Richard Johnson, the first chaplain of the new settlement, for the support of a clergyman and a schoolmaster for the settlement. The land was renounced by Johnson due to the lack of convict labour. It was purchased by the prominent George Allen in 1829 and Tranby was occupied by his third daughter Mary Emma and her husband George Allen Mansfield, a prominent architect. The Allen family owned the land until 1946 when it was purchased by the Reverend John Hope of Christ Church St Lawrence and other trustees. It was pledged as a gift in 1957 to be used as a training centre for the development of cooperative practices for Aborigines.

The findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody have expressed the great need for better educational facilities and curriculum for Aboriginal leaders.

The educational and cultural facility offers an Aboriginal philosophy and perspective on education and culture, which has resulted in the development of culturally appropriate teaching methods, materials and educational programs.

The first students lived at Tranby training in skill-based work and

apprenticeships. They attended cooperative management classes and gained confidence to return to their communities – with skills to organise social and economic resources.

Aboriginal representation on the Board of Directors in the 1970s included Kevin Cook, a student of Tranby who followed Alf Clint as General Secretary in 1981. Kevin listened to the needs of Aboriginal Communities and guided changes. In the 1980s Tranby successfully lobbied for government funding and the structure of the courses changed to compensate for the failures of mainstream education.

With Aboriginal studies and cooperative principles maintained, Tranby provided certificate courses in literacy and numeracy, tertiary preparation and business studies. In 1998 Jack Beetson became Executive Director and Tranby achieved national accreditation, through the NSW Vocation, Education and Training Board, of the college's diploma courses.

With the guidance of Community Elders, Tranby has developed the Diploma in Development Studies, Aboriginal Communities and the Advanced Diploma of Applied Aboriginal Studies. The Diploma of National Indigenous Legal Studies, developed through the Human Rights Commission, addresses the legal and human rights of indigenous peoples.

It is in this social and historic context that the most recent stage of architectural development has occurred. The design of the classrooms reflects the cultural values of the college. The circular rooms reflect a philosophy of equality in communication and the masonry walls provide a solid appearance that reinforces the adjoining 19th century architecture. Circular copper roofs with protruding vents provide contemporary finials to a massed turreted form. When the plans prepared by the architects Julie Cracknell and Peter Lonergan were submitted to



Circular rooms reflect the philosophy of Tranby.

Leichhardt Council, they created a huge amount of opposition.

The 'foreignness' of the architecture raised concerns about the further occupation of the 'indigenous' occupants. The proposal involved the demolition of a rear portion of



Tranby and a rear section of the adjacent Minnamurra.

Cracknell and Lonergan, in a proactive way, worked with all parties including the external authorities to modify the design in amenity terms and to argue the philosophy of design, in an intelligent and convincing manner.

Tranby today provides for a sympathetic 'traditional' restoration of two important buildings facing Mansfield Street. Behind sits the new Tranby – energetic in design, and energetic in attitude. ■

Thanks to Tranby College and Julie Cracknell for information on the history of Tranby.