

Otto Kuster (1941 -

Heathcote Hall in 1915 2016

Oil on board

Kurnell artist, Otto Kuster was commissioned by Sutherland Shire Historical Society to paint this view of Heathcote Hall in 2016 from an archival photo in the Society's collection.

The grand Italianate style mansion was built on 20 acres of land in 1887 by wealthy brickmaker Abel Harber. The 1890s depression forced the property into possession of the mortgagee, and it was eventually disposed of by a Tattersall lottery in 1896.

Heathcote Hall had a number of owners until 1942 when the rundown property was bought by Joseph and Mimina Farrelly as a family home. After their deaths, their daughter Maxine tried to renovate the now dilapidated building and in 2015 she offered it for sale. Plans for the building are still pending.

Otto Kuster (1941 -)

Heathcote Hall in 1915, painted 2016

This grand Italianate style mansion was built in 1887 by Abel Harber, a wealthy brickmaker from St Peters on 20 hectares of land that was part of the original Bottle Forest subdivision gazetted in 1842. It cost £7000 to build, and with the deep depression that followed in the 1890s Harber ran into financial difficulties, forcing possession by the mortgagee. A buyer could not be found and it was eventually disposed of through a Tattersall lottery in 1896.

Edmund Brown owned it from 1901 until his death in 1925. During World War I, the south coast Waratah recruitment march passed through Heathcote in 1915 and Mr Brown provided refreshments. Anti-German sentiment led to rumours that spies were sending Morse code signals from the building's glass turret. However, it was discovered that reflections on the glass were caused by a lighthouse.

In 1925 the Heathcote Hall Estate Limited was formed and 50 acres of the estate were subdivided with the aim of developing a model residential suburb. Sales were disappointing. In April 1928 Heathcote Hall itself and its surrounding four acres were put up for auction. It didn't sell, but was leased to Miss I. Pocklington who opened the Heathcote Tearooms on the premises.

In 1939 Heathcote Hall was leased by Austin Kirton. It became rundown during the war years and unsightly fibro additions to enclose verandahs for tenants. Then in 1942, Joseph and Mimina Farrelly bought the property, living there with their three children. In 1996 it was the site for the movie, *The Munsters' Scary Little Christmas*. Minima died in 1986, and their daughter Maxine stayed on and looked after her father until his death in 2005. Despite Maxine's efforts to renovate the building, it had become quite dilapidated, and in 2015 she offered it for sale.

After some conflict about the future of heritage listed Heathcote Hall, it has been deemed not suitable for commercial use. It is likely the mansion will be restored and sold as a private home, with the development of a residential complex in its grounds. The developer is awaiting the decision of the Sydney South Planning Panel (July 2021).

About the artist:



Otto Kuster was born in Bohemia, Czechoslovakia in 1941. He studied art at the Kempton Studio of Josef Mayer of the Munich Academy and privately under noted sculptor Joseph Konrad, obtaining his Arts Diploma in 1958. Otto and his wife, Susie arrived in Australia in 1960. Otto spent several years working as a farm labourer, cane cutter and opal miner, before the pair settled in Kurnell where Otto continued painting and teaching art.

He is known as one of Australia's foremost impressionists with his palette knife style and dramatic light effects. His work is represented in major galleries around the world. Otto and Susie became Australian citizens in 1992.

References:

- 'Heathcote Hall', by Bruce Watt, SSHS Bulletin, May 2016; *Leader* 13 March 2021
- <https://kevinhillstopen.com.au/artists/8/otto-kuster>