

10.02 *The Verandah in Australia*

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Grose's verandah

The first identifiable verandah in Australia is that added in 1793 by the Lieutenant Governor, Major Francis Grose, across the 22 metre frontage of the house built five years earlier by his predecessor, Robert Ross.¹ Mark Jackson has pointed out² the similarity of this verandah to that of the house 'Newlands' at Cape Colony, discussed by Lewcock, but as Newlands dates from 1819 it cannot be the source, and no evidence has been adduced of earlier South African examples. Irving has pointed out that Grose would have encountered the verandah in North America during his service in the American War of Independence,³ and further, in consideration of the fact that Grose had served in India, regards the addition of the verandah as making the house into 'the colony's first bungalow'.⁴

Broadbent favours the American connection as the critical one, notwithstanding the fact that Grose's verandah was quite unlike Colonel Montresor's or any other known American example. He discusses it in detail,⁵ principally on the basis of the illustration attributed the visiting Spaniard Juan Ravenet, of the Malaspina Expedition.⁶ The verandah was raised on a high basement wall and enclosed by a screen of vertical studs spaced apart about 600 mm. Broadbent suggests that the close-set supports might have been 'the result of a lack of confidence in the strength of the structure', a hypothesis which cannot bear too close an examination, given that

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- 1 Robert Irving, 'Georgian Australia', in Robert Irving [ed], *The History and Design of the Australian House* (Melbourne 1985), p 40. Moffitt points out that Ross had served in the marines in the West Indies, the Mediterranean and North America (Peter Moffitt, *The Australian Verandah* (Sydney 1976), pp 5-6); Irving relates the appearance of the house more specifically to the French-American plantation houses which Ross would have seen while serving in the American War of Independence. However, Broadbent points out that Ross did not build the verandah, so these considerations are scarcely relevant. Irving had already discussed the Grose connection in 1975, and it is unclear why he came to attach importance to Ross, for subsequently, in his 'Narrative' (*vide infra*), he again emphasised the Grose connection.
 - 2 M R Jackson, 'History of Verandahs in Australia' (B Arch, University of NSW, 1974).
 - 3 Robert Irving, 'The First Australian Architecture' (MArch, University of NSW, 1975), p 337.
 - 4 Robert Irving, 'A Narrative ...', in Tim McCormick et al, *First Views of Australia 1788-1825* [Chippendale, NSW, 1987], p 16.
 - 5 James Broadbent, 'Aspects of Domestic Architecture in New South Wales 1788-1843' [3 vols, PhD, Australian National University 1985], I, pp 4-7.
 - 6 Juan Ravenet [attr], 'Borador del Resivimiento de los Oficiales en baia Botanica', 1793, reproduced in Tim McCormick et al, *First Views of Australia 1788-1825* [Chippendale, NSW, 1987], p 49, pl 15.

the principles of timber framing were well understood in the Sydney of the time. Two better suggestions can be advanced. It may have been a frame designed to be subsequently clad as a solid wall, which never eventuated, or it may have been designed to be clad with some material such as muslin to keep out insects. The latter would be consistent with its use for such official receptions as that illustrated by Ravenet, and with the American concept of the piazza as an outdoor living space.

early colonial examples

Within a year a single storey verandah along the front of Government House, probably also by Grose,⁷ and in 1802 this verandah was extended along the side of the long drawing room which had been added to the east end.⁸ This was a simple skillion roof carried on posts, and has more the appearance of the English Regency verandah, but it still pre-dates that fashion. Robert Campbell's house of 1802 was also of the basic skillion type, and was the first example in Australia of a verandah built at the same time as the house rather than added. It had undeniable Indian connections, but if the verandah was already established in Sydney, and was already known in England as a typical American feature - or perhaps a colonial one more generally - we should not be too hasty, on the strength of this later example, to attribute its appearance here to Indian influence. Only at a later date, probably after 1815, was Campbell's verandah extended along a second face of the house to give something like a bungalow appearance.⁹

At Newcastle the government house built in about 1804 had a verandah set in under the main hipped roof and closed at either end by small rooms projecting out to the face.¹⁰ This places it in a somewhat different tradition - not the standard lacy attachment of the Regency period, but the somewhat less common and more architecturally integrated loggia form. This use of the verandah width to create corner rooms had become an established practice in colonial India by the 1780s, when it was described by William Hodges.¹¹ In the western part of South Africa some houses, known as the 'stoepkamer' type, had a similar arrangement which, as Ronald Lewcock rightly remarks, is vaguely reminiscent of Palladio.¹²

In 1805 tenders were called for a courthouse in Sydney, and the foundations had already been laid for the new main guard house with a 'Varando' in front,¹³ though the latter was not finished for some time. It is unclear whether these verandahs were

7 Broadbent, 'Aspects of Domestic Architecture', I, pp 7-8: not by Hunter, as stated by Irving, 'Narrative', p 18.

8 Irving, 'Georgian Australia', op cit, p 39.

9 Broadbent, 'Aspects of Domestic Architecture', I, p 10.

10 Broadbent, 'Aspects of Domestic Architecture', I, p 43.

11 William Hodges, *Travels in India during the Years 1781-3* (London 1793), p 145, quoted by A D King, *The Bungalow* (London 1984), p 28.

12 Ronald Lewcock, *Early Nineteenth Century Architecture in South Africa* (Cape Town 1963), p 201.

13 *Sydney Gazette*, 3 February 1805, quoted in Peter Bridges, *Historic Court Houses of New South Wales* (Sydney 1986), p 20.

continuations of the main roof or were separately pitched.¹⁴ The court house verandah, or 'verando' as the tender notice calls it, had small rooms at either end, like that at Newcastle.¹⁵ The skillion-type verandah was so common in Sydney by 1809 that a single view by John Eyre shows seven examples.¹⁶ In 1810 the Rum Hospital was proposed with a 'virandah' around not one but two storeys.¹⁷ James Broadbent points out¹⁸ that the early Australian verandah was certainly not an active interface between the house and the outside world, easing the transition between the two, because it was in fact inaccessible from anywhere other than the main doors.

So far the verandah may have been little more than a practical response to the climate and a reflection of a colonial stereotype, but with the arrival of Francis Greenway it achieved its role as a Regency stylistic device, commonly associated with French windows. When Greenway opened up his practice in 1814, he specifically advertised his expertise with 'Plans of awnings, Veranda's',¹⁹ as might be expected from his background in Regency Bristol. French windows did not come into use until about 1815,²⁰ a few years after their appearance in England,²¹ though they were - logically enough - known much earlier in French colonies. But in 1817 Barron Field wrote to Macquarie of his house, wishing:²²

that there may be a verandah with the windows opening down to it like doors all along the front of the house, and, that to both the ground and first floors, in like manner as there is to the House, at present occupied by the Revd Mr. Cooper.

The reference to 'Cooper' - actually the Rev William Cowper - indicates that Regency verandahs and balconies had already arrived. Yet the surviving drawing of the house built for Cowper four years earlier shows a somewhat primitive Georgian house, two storeyed but lacking either verandahs or French windows.²³ Presumably either the original design was altered, or Cooper was temporarily occupying some other house

14 Broadbent, 'Aspects of Domestic Architecture', II, p 446.

15 *Sydney Gazette*, 17 February 1805, quoted in Peter Bridges, *Foundations of Identity* (Sydney 1995), p 56.

16 Identified by Broadbent, 'Aspects of Domestic Architecture', I, p 11.

17 Bridges, *Foundations of Identity* (Sydney 1995), p 99.

18 Personal discussion, 19 July 1990.

19 *Sydney Gazette*, 17 December 1814, quoted in Bridges, *Foundations of Identity*, p 56.

20 Broadbent points out that the drawings for the Rev Cowper's house of 1815 (possibly a design by John Watts) do not show French windows, but that the design may have been altered because in 1817 Barron Field writes of his proposed house 'I very earnestly desire that there may be a verandah with the windows opening down to it like doors all along the front of the house, and, that to both the ground and first floors, in like manner as there is to the House, at present occupied by the Revd Mr. Cowper. Broadbent, 'Aspects of Domestic Architecture', I, p 87, quoting Field to Macquarie, 20 May 1817, Colonial Secretary In Letters 1817, Archives Office of NSW 4/1737, p 304.

21 Irving, 'The First Australian Architecture', pp 166-7, identifies the oldest surviving French windows in Australia as those of 'Glenfield' farmhouse at Casula, of about 1817, and as other local instances cites 'Hambleton', Parramatta, and 'Denbigh', Narellan.

22 Judge Barron Field to Governor Lachlan Macquarie, 20 May 1817, NSW Colonial Secretary In-Letters, 1817, AONSW 4/1737, p 304, quoted in James Broadbent, *The Australian Colonial House* (Sydney 1997), p 50.

23 From a folio of drawings, 'Buildings erected under Macquarie', Mitchell Library, reproduced in Broadbent, *Australian Colonial House*, p 51.

at the time when Field wrote. Henry Kitchen's preliminary scheme for Hambledon Cottage, Parramatta, of about 1820, shows a high style Regency verandah right across the front of the single storey house, and possibly returning some distance at the sides.²⁴ Opening onto it are three pairs of French windows. By the 1820s the verandah was almost the norm, and Cunningham wrote that 'generally speaking, the better sort of houses in Sydney are built in the detached cottage style ... one or two stories high, with verandahs in front.'²⁵

the second phase

By the 1820s the role of the verandah has changed, and there is considerable evidence of planning in which it provided the *only* access to some rooms, so that it was in effect an external passage. The plan for a settler's house published by James Atkinson in 1826²⁶ has the rooms in a long strip, with a 'viranda' right along the front. The entrance is direct into a sitting room, off one side of which is a bedroom, and off the other a kitchen and small store. There are two further bedrooms, one at either end of the block nestling under what are in effect the returns of the verandah, and it is onto the verandah that their doors open. Atkinson explains the reason for planning the house in the form of a long strip: it means that split timber can be used for the rafters, joists and beams. This would be impracticable if the house were broader, because of the difficulty of splitting straight rafters over greater lengths.²⁷ Broadbent suggests that the design is based on the house which Atkinson built on his own estate, 'Oldbury', near Berrima, in the early 1820s.²⁸

The big move towards verandahs seems to date from about 1830. Even in Van Diemen's Land Henry Darling was prepared to assert in 1826, as his wife reports, 'that we must have Verandahs in this Country all round the House at least round all the Rooms commonly occupied.'²⁹ In Sydney a cottage designed by Mortimer Lewis in about 1833 had a verandah around two sides.³⁰ In Fremantle there were no verandahs in 1829,³¹ but a view of Pakenham Street in 1832 shows at least two,³² and by the 1840s they were common.³³ In Adelaide, however, buildings with verandahs were said to be rare even in 1841.³⁴

24 Reproduced in Philip Drew, *Veranda* (Pymble [New South Wales] 1992), p 63.

25 Peter Cunningham, *Two Years in New South Wales* (2nd ed, 2 vols, London 1827), I, p 43.

26 James Atkinson, *An Account of the State of Agriculture and Grazing in New South Wales* (London 1826), between pp 98,99.

27 Atkinson, *An Account of the State of Agriculture*, p 96.

28 Broadbent, 'Aspects of Domestic Architecture', II, p 462.

29 Broadbent, 'Aspects of Domestic Architecture', II, p 369, citing Eliza Darling in a letter of 26 June 1826, Allport Library, Hobart, as reported by Joan Kerr.

30 J[ames] Thompson, letter of 10 August 1833, in *Architectural Magazine*, I, (December 1834), p 376.

31 Information from Robin Campbell, 1990.

32 Reproduced in J M R Cameron, 'The Colonization of Pre-Convict Western Australia (PhD, University of Western Australia 1975), pl xxxiii, pp 344-5.

33 Information from Robin Campbell, 1990.

34 Stefan Pikusa, *The Adelaide House 1836 to 1901* (Netley [South Australia] 1986), p 11.

In 1830 T W Maslen argued strongly that all houses in Australia, 'both of rich and of poor', should have a 'piazza, alias verandah' around at least three sides. It would be a great comfort during the torrential rains of winter - Maslen was perhaps thinking of the Indian monsoon to which he was himself accustomed - and in summer would soften the otherwise almost intolerable glare. The roofs should be flat or terraced to serve as an open balcony or gallery round the upper rooms. Every street also should have a verandah along each side, of the same width as the footpath.³⁵ Maslen had never been to Australia, and his prescriptions were mostly irrelevant to it, but by the 1840s the verandah had achieved general acceptance, is in part through the influence of settlers with the same Indian colonial background. In 1841 the Colonial Secretary found it necessary to curtail the grandeur of the proposed Melbourne Post Office design, for he could see 'no reason why a verandah should be made to extend around three-fourths of the house, but on the contrary ... thinks that it should be limited to the front of the building'.³⁶

Fowles says, of cottages in Macquarie Street, Sydney, in 1848: 'the wide verandahs afford a cool shelter from the intense heat of the meridian sun, and give the cottages an air of shady retirement, which has its own peculiar elegance'.³⁷ This, however, was not the general picture, for Charles Mundy complained:³⁸

The construction of the buildings is blameably ill-suited to a semi-tropical climate, - barefaced, smug-looking tenements, without verandahs or even broad eaves. This fault extends to the Government House, whose great staring windows are doomed to grill unveiled, because, forsooth, any excrescence upon their stone mullions would be heterodox to the order or disorder of its architecture. Surely a little composite licence might have been allowable in such a case and climate.

The point, therefore, is not so much that the verandah had become universal, as that it was increasingly being seen as desirable.

There are few theories current about the origins of the two storey verandah. At first sight it seems to require little explanation because local examples post-date those of Regency England. However the two storey verandah which surrounds the building, rather than being simply an attachment the front, is not an English form, and is difficult to account for. There are not many examples before the 1850s, and at that time one of the more interesting is suggestively described as 'Moorish' in style. This is in a report published in 1856 of the completion of two 'marine residences' at Elwood, a seaside suburb of Melbourne, where a 'wide Moorish verandah' surrounded both storeys.³⁹

35 T W Maslen, *The Friend of Australia* (London 1830), pp 273, 262-3.

36 Colonial Secretary to C J La Trobe, 6 March 1841, in Michael Cannon & Ian MacFarlane [eds], *Historical Records of Victoria. Volume Four. Communications, Trade and Transport* (Melbourne 19085), p 592.

37 Joseph Fowles, *Sydney in 1848* (Sydney 1848), pp 78-9.

38 G C Mundy, *Our Antipodes* (3 vols, London 1852), I, p 412.

39 *Australian Builder*, 14 May 1856.

the awning verandah

The writer long ago pointed out that the striped painting so commonly used on the nineteenth century verandah derived from the striped fabric verandahs of the Regency period, and this is now generally accepted, but it has not been widely realised that fabric verandahs were common also in Australia. Loudon's *Encyclopaedia*, which was so widely used in Australia, describes the construction of a verandah with iron columns or 'props' supporting a cast iron gutter, and wrought iron sash bars spanning back to the building. The space between the bars might be filled with glass panes, pieces of slate, sheets of copper, zinc, tinsplate or rolled iron, 'or even tarpauling well painted, or oil-cloth.' The 'lightness of appearance' might be increased if the sash bars were bent to give a concave profile.⁴⁰ The introduction of the curved iron verandah roof in Australia has been discussed above, including one at 'Ingleby' carried on wrought iron T-sections reminiscent of Loudon's sash bars. Most of the earlier Australian examples seem to have roofed in shingles, which were cheap, and did not have to be imported, but by the 1850s fabric was commonly used for both house verandahs and shop awnings. When the contents of 'Barwon Bank', Geelong, were offered for sale in 1856, they included 'circular rafters for verandah' and 'quantity of canvas suitable for same'.⁴¹

Fabric verandahs cannot, as a general rule, be distinguished in contemporary views from more solid ones, and no examples survive intact. However, some fragments have been found in recent years, as well as some documentary references. The Government Cottage at Port Arthur, Tasmania, had a verandah roofed with a canvas awning by 1860,⁴² and the Girls High School in Hobart had what appears in a photograph to be a fabric roof in strips lapping at the edges on timber rolls.⁴³ The best physical survival is at Mills Cottage, Port Fairy, where the verandah dates from about 1856, and has the remains of painted striped canvas on top of the rafters and beneath the later corrugated iron. There are many views of shop awnings, principally photographs of the 1850s and 1860s, which clearly show them to be of canvas or oilcloth. It is clear that a permanent timber frame was built out over the footpath, and over this the awning was rolled out and tied down during the appropriate weather, though the detail is generally hard to discern.⁴⁴ In Melbourne these awnings were of American duck on a deal frame,⁴⁵ and they were permitted until 1859. From that time onwards the roof had to be of corrugated iron,⁴⁶ and from 1868 the posts had to be of iron as well.⁴⁷

40 J C Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture* (London 1846 [1833]), §156, p 74.

41 *Geelong Advertiser*, 28 July 1856

42 Maggie Weidenhofer, *Port Arthur: a Place of Misery* (Melbourne), p 62.

43 Julia Cark, *This Southern Outpost: Hobart 1846-1914* (Hobart 1988), p 49.

44 However, the detail shows up well in John Flannagan's rendering of his second prizewinning design for the Bank of Victoria in Collins Street, Melbourne, of 1860 (BAN 40-1, MUAS Collection, State Library of Victoria), in which Flannagan carefully depicts the end of the awning on the site adjoining the bank.

45 *Australian Builder*, 33 (16 October 1856), p 276.

46 *Australian Builder*, 12 March 1859, p 77; 18 June 1859, p 185; 14 January 1860, p 8.

47 G F James, 'Melbourne: the Growth of a Metropolis', in David Saunders [ed], *Historic Buildings of Victoria* (Melbourne 1966), p 30.

the verandah revival

The verandah declined in fashion during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, though it remained commonplace on ordinary houses. We have quoted above the comments of Terry & Oakden about the ubiquitous iron lacework, and their preference for a masonry loggia integral to the building in the Italian tradition. Not long afterwards John Sulman was to say something similar:

Of the modern verandah it is difficult to say anything satisfactory as a work of art. It is a light and flimsy structure, stuck on outside a building, of which it forms no integral part - nothing more. The first step in advance must be the recognition of the verandah as a portion of the whole design, and indeed, when properly treated, as its leading feature, in such a climate as we possess.⁴⁸

Late in the century architects became increasingly concerned with the development of a style suitable for Australia's climate and conditions, and by the second decade of the twentieth century this merged with a full-blown colonial revival in which earlier forms, including the verandah, were given a new lease of life. Because the verandah had never actually died out in the intervening period it is difficult to pinpoint the effect of these new trends, but there can be little doubt that the reappearance of the verandah in the work of high style architects - after the verandahless interregnum of the English Queen Anne Revival - should be seen as the result of this trend. John Sulman's Bishop's Lodge at Hay, New South Wales, of 1888, is one unequivocal and self-conscious resuscitation of the verandah form. In Western Australia John Talbot Hobbs built houses less complicated and picturesque than their Federation counterparts in the east and, it is believed, explicitly inspired by the vernacular buildings of the north-west of the colony. 'Chirritta' at 55 The Esplanade, Peppermint Grove, is a case in point. It is basically a giant pyramidal roof and a surrounding verandah, enlivened by only one forward break and one small gable.⁴⁹

Somewhat paradoxically, however, a fully built-in verandah seems to have been a desideratum in Darwin by about 1915. An illustration of a 'New Type of Residence, Darwin' shows a squarish house on high piles, with a low hipped roof, and what seems to be a detached gable-roofed kitchen. The house has a complete perimeter, so far as one can see, of walled-in verandah, with one unglazed opening and a propped awning in each bay, almost certainly with a continuous verandah-like space behind. The lining is, however (to judge from an interior view of what is probably the same verandah, not solid sheeting but some sort of semi-solid slatwork.⁵⁰ In Central Australia the architecture was less formal, but basically the same transition occurred from open verandahs, meant principally for shade, to insect screened spaces used for relaxing and sleeping.⁵¹

48 *Australian Builder & Contractor's News*, 14 May 1887, p 3.

49 Ian Molyneux, *Looking Around Perth* (East Fremantle [Western Australia] 1981), pp 24-5.

50 E J Brady, *Australia Unlimited* (Melbourne, no date [c 1915], p 543.

51 Howard Pearce, *Homesteads of the Stony Desert* (Adelaide 1978), p 20.

The reinterpretation of the verandah as a 'piazza' in the American fashion is discussed below. Even more surprising than that is the fact that the term 'stoop' makes an appearance in Australia in the twentieth century. West Australian Workers' Homes Branch plans in 1913, produced under the Government Architect, Hillson Beasley, have a conventional verandah along the front, but at the back, in the indent between the servants wing and the body of the house, is a 'verandah or stoop' of considerable size - larger in each case than the kitchen to which it gives access - and screened on one face so that only one side is entirely open.⁵²

conclusion

Throughout Australia the tendency has been for verandahs to begin by being open, but gradually to be built in, not only depriving them of their special climatic benefits, but making the inner rooms behind them stuffier and worse ventilated than if the house had been built verandahless from the beginning. This building-in process might begin with insect screens to make the space more useful for sleeping, as was happening in Central Australia well into the twentieth century.⁵³ It became more drastic when solid sheeting and louvres were used to create kitchenettes and other subsidiary rooms, especially in urban areas during the depression on the 1920s. The built-in verandahs and balconies of this period did as much as anything to bring nineteenth century architecture into disfavour in Australia in the 1940s and 1950s.

The iconic Australian verandah, then, is scarcely an Australian invention. But if we take the typical form as that surrounding the building on three or four sides, then it is more characteristic of Australia than of any other place. The idea of a surrounding verandah came from India, or from American military connections, or both. Surprisingly, it seems to be only after this that the idea of an awning or small verandah reached us by way of the English Regency style. Other forms of verandah came from other sources, or evolved within Australia. But the verandah which is embedded in the Australian culture by way of paintings, poems and novels, is not necessarily of the typical surrounding form. Tom Roberts painted the verandahs of Bourke Street, and Russell Drysdale the shop verandahs of country towns. Hal Porter's watcher is on a cast iron balcony, not a verandah in the normal sense at all. It is perhaps because the word 'verandah' is applied to so many different and independent forms that it seems more typical, and more ubiquitous, than it really is.

52 Western Australia, Workers Homes Board, *Workers Homes, Hints to Applicants* (?Perth 1913), plans 1 & 5, reproduced in Ian Kelly, 'The Development of Housing in Perth (1800-1915)' (MArch, University of Western Australia, 1991), p 296.

53 Pearce, *Homesteads of the Stony Desert*, p 20.