



Caernarvon

120 years overlooking Camden





Built at the turn of the 20th Century, Caernarvon sits atop a gentle hill with commanding views over Camden Airport, the Nepean and old Narellan. I was privileged to wander around the property with current owners John and Katie McDonald and previous owners Elizabeth and Jim Davies.

Jim had lived in the home for a total of 40 years. His parents bought Caernarvon in 1957. "We moved in over Easter 1958," Jim explained as we stood at the perfectly symmetrical eastern facade of Caernarvon. When the home was built in 1904 by the Vicary Family, this was the front entrance.

Jim married Elizabeth and Caernarvon became their home up until its sale in 2000. Wandering the property with the charming couple was fascinating.

The U shaped floor plan was typical of the time and housed four large bedrooms, a study,

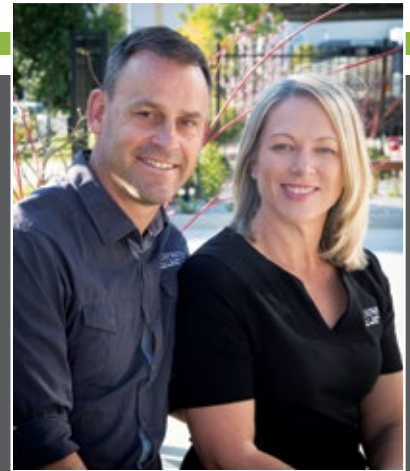
living/dining area and large entertaining room. The master bedroom and veranda opens both ends to a 'sleepout'. "Mrs Joan Higgins tells me her brothers used to sleep in that space. Her grandfather was the original builder of Caernarvon," John said. "Joan is 94 now, living at Carrington and had not been here since she was ten," he added. "She was our guest here for Christmas lunch. Turns out Joan taught my four sisters piano growing up... small world."

A wide central hallway divides the home from front door to backdoor. The stunningly beautiful timber floor kept me distracted while we stood gathered in the hallway. What was the backdoor would have opened to a central courtyard, that has since been enclosed to create a cosy family room. "It was closed in before we lived here," Elizabeth said opening a folder of old photographs she had brought along. One showed this very room, with two large exposed beams bracing the ceiling, more evidence to support John's assumption that this was a courtyard, converted into a room.

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The gorgeous hallway is the centerpiece of Caernarvon.
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On the northern side of the courtyard were two smaller bedrooms, "likely to be traveller rooms," John explained. And on the other side were two kitchens, which like the traveller rooms, was also standard for the day. One kitchen dedicated to the family and another for the estate's staff to use.

"The kitchen is the next job," John smiles ruefully.

Every room has functioning fireplaces which adds to the nostalgic romance of Caernarvon.

There are two bathrooms, one with a massive dressing room attached. Both have been masterfully renovated by John, a local builder with vast experience and knowledge of heritage

homes. He led the rebuild and refurbishments of Harrington Park Estate, Oran Park House (now Catherine Park House) and Wivenhoe. John is far and away, our district's heritage building expert. Little wonder he jumped at the chance to own Caernarvon when it came up for sale just over a year ago.

After a wander around the gardens, we entered the home via the laundry which John has cleverly modernised while keeping the old concrete dual basins that anyone of an age would be very familiar with. This room connects to the gorgeous inside outside space facing the pool (pic next spreads). But in between the two rooms, behind the bar, is a custom built walk-in cellar complete with commercial bar fridge. Superb!

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Looking back at Caernarvon across the pool.

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Caernarvon's history over some 120 years, lists some of the most influential families in Camden and beyond. G Cary ran a successful horse stud at Caernarvon in the early years and Thomas Murray Sheil, who was mayor of Camden 1911 to 1913, developed the dairy, but maybe the most important figure from a Camden perspective is J.S. Haddin. As General Manager of Camden Park Estate, Haddin oversaw the creation of Camden Vale Milk Co.

In 1952, The Editor of the 'Camden Advertiser' wrote an article on Mr. Haddin when he sold Caernarvon, which he described as one of the finest dairy farms in the State. The article continues: "The 280 acre property was in poor shape seven years ago when taken over by a man of vision — Mr. J. (Stan) Haddin.

I was an afternoon guest of Stan Haddin, one of the most friendly and modest fellows in our fair land. From the beautiful lawn and garden, near the comfortable homestead, I glimpsed a glorious panoramic view of our picturesque township, and the vine-dotted village of Elderslie. The homestead, situated high on the slopes above Macquarie Grove is protected in the west by hedges and trees.

The thickly grassed, improved pastures slope down to the Nepean River and to another beautiful tree-banked stream that winds its way through the lower portion of the farm. An electrically-driven pump gathered cool water from the stream, forced it through a pipeline, and poured it out at the rate of 50,000 gallons per hour, to irrigate vegetable beds and lucerne fields.

Suntanned men were busy filling a lucerne shed when we moved through the well-fenced paddocks. Their job for the following week was to be the mowing of pastures for more hay. Near the cleanly-kept dairy a contented herd of 90 Jerseys awaited turn for milking.

Troubled health caused Mr. Haddin to sell the Caernarvon property, which was part of Kirkham Estate."

After my experience exploring Caernarvon with four owners of the property, I know there is a lot of sentiment attached to the property.

In one of J.S. Haddin's 1948 diary entries, written after a fortnight's tour around dairy-farms of Australia:

"I returned home with the feeling that Camden is the nicest place in Australia and 'Caernarvon' the best farm."

The beautiful home, atop a gentle hill, is now heritage listed (including the hedge around the house) and it could not be in better hands.



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