

The Sanctuary

The Gift of Rudi and Hanna Lemberg

Rudi and Hanna Lemberg

Hanna and her husband Rudi Lemberg were refugees from Nazi Germany who fled to England in 1933, where they first met Quakers. They came to Australia in 1935 after Rudi was appointed director of the Research Biochemical Laboratories at Royal North Shore Hospital.¹ Hanna Lemberg was a textile artist whose works are held in the National Museum in Canberra.

Hanna and Rudi Lemberg shared a love of nature and of colour. For Rudi this resulted in his biochemical study of pigmentation; for Hanna it shaped the aesthetic she brought to textile work, including weaving, tapestries, embroidery and dressmaking. The National Museum holds clothing and a wall hanging that she made.²

In Germany in the 1920s Hanna Lemberg (1899–1998) learnt various textile crafts as part of her social work studies, and taught them to children. Hanna and Rudi had married in 1924 after meeting through the German Youth Movement in Breslau (now Wroclaw in Poland), where they both volunteered in a social work program attempting to improve slums. They were both members of the youth group *Wandervogel* ('migratory bird' in German) that encouraged young people to engage with nature and live a simple way of life.³

After their marriage, they moved to Heidelberg where Rudi worked at the university. By 1933, however, their situation became dangerous. Rudi's family were German Jews, and despite his service in the First World War (where he had earned him the Iron Cross), he was advised that it would be unsafe for them to remain in Germany. Academic colleagues succeeded in recommending Rudi to a position in Cambridge, where the Lembergs were offered a home with a member of the Religious Society of Friends (widely known as Quakers).⁴

The Academic Assistance Council in the UK sought to find placements for German academic refugees, and this resulted in Rudi's appointment in Sydney. He soon resumed his research into the process of pigmentation involved in vertebrate respiration.

Hanna assisted on at least one occasion, helping to process vats of seaweed to isolate and study the nature of its pigments. She produced woven textiles for interior designer Marion Hall Best and exhibited her work. In 1975 an exhibition of her 'petit point' wall hangings was held at the iconic Macquarie Galleries, Sydney.⁵

In 1953, they built ***The Sanctuary*** in north Wahroonga. The house was designed by Hugh Buhrich, also a German refugee, in the Bauhaus style, which was unusual for Sydney. [**NOTE:** Buhrich's work encapsulates a crucial period in the development of design in Australia, and has recently received a great deal of critical acclaim. His own home, built in Castlecrag between 1968 and 1972, has been described as "a truly radical building" (*Françoise Fromont*) and "the finest modern house in Australia" (*Peter Myers*).⁶

Hanna and Rudi were inspired by the native bush on their block and, over the years, the bush garden was supplemented with non-native plants such as orchids and camellias. By the 1960s Rudi had labelled all the plants and trees in the garden so that visitors could learn about them as well.⁷

In 1956 Hanna and Rudi joined the Quakers, and held Meetings for Worship in their house. They gave the front part of their property to establish the beginnings of Wahroonga Quaker Meeting

and, with the prize money that Rudi was awarded by Encyclopaedia Britannica for his research, the current Friends Meeting House was built in 1966.

Wahroonga Friends Meeting is a busy, active meeting, and the meetinghouse is still in use today. Rudi said that: *'There was much that appealed to us in Friends, both in their form of worship and their actions; the idea of the unity of faith and life, their sober mysticism, the seeking and exploring (which, like that of the scientist, does not expect to find final truth – static and ultimate or complete truth), the quiet time for meditation, their practical humanism, their acceptance of the stranger and of strange ideas.'*⁸

Rudi died in 1975 and Hanna died in 1998, aged 98. The Lembergs did not have children, and the property was left to Australia Yearly Meeting (of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia). Also left was money for repairs, as the property and the bush garden had been poorly maintained for decades.⁹

The Property and the Garden

The property is located in a leafy suburb on the upper north shore of Sydney opposite a Council controlled park which adjoins a National Park. The house is located at the rear of the Wahroonga Meeting House in a beautiful, tranquil setting of 3850 square metres in area.

As well as part of the Australian Quaker history, The Sanctuary house and garden and the Wahroonga Meeting House are symbolic of the impact on Australian society by the migration of European refugees and migrants to Australia in the mid-20th century. They sought to express their religious and social connections after the persecution, the destruction and the political and social upheaval in their countries. The freedom to express architectural style and connect with the natural environment is also part of what these new Australians brought to their new country.

The Australia Yearly Meeting (of the Religious Society of Friends, Quakers) established a Sanctuary Management Committee. At first, the property was rented to Friends who happened to require a rental property at that time. Then extensive renovations were undertaken and the garden revitalised by removing weeds and establishing new plantings consistent with the bush garden character. The Meeting House and the Sanctuary are both listed as heritage with Kuringai Council.¹⁰

Wahroonga Meeting would like to thank Anthea Gunn for her generous permission to use excerpts from her essay on Hanna Lemberg in this informational brochure.

References:

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5. Gunn, p12.
6. State Library New South Wales, Collections Information: Hugh Buhrich
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8. Gunn, p12.

9. The Sanctuary, Australia Yearly Meeting, Report to Australia Yearly Meeting from the Sanctuary Future Uses Committee, May 2009

10. The Sanctuary Report.