

Rattenbury's Residence

"The preservation of historic places as a monument to the past is as important a feature as keeping a graphic history. In years to come, as Victoria ages, many of the older buildings will be destroyed either by time or the march of progress, and we will only have a written description of what used to be. Although we have very few old places now, thought should be given to preserving some, for how much more interesting it is to be able to see that which has taken a place in history.

Victoria still has a number of historic old buildings, between 50 and 60 years old that are still being used but in time will be cast aside.

One such building is the main building of Glenlyon Preparatory School, a picturesque old house that stands set among trees at 1701 Beach Drive. This is the former residence of the late Francis M. Rattenbury, one-time reeve of Oak Bay, who, among other noted achievements drew up the plans for the provincial legislative building and the Empress Hotel. The house on Beach Drive, designed and built by F.M. Rattenbury, stands in excellent condition today, largely due to the fact that it can still serve a useful purpose, but one day this house will be vacated and left to crumble if no care is taken to preserve it. As no definite records have ever been kept of the Rattenbury House, many of the facts stated here have had to be deduced and assumed to be correct by visual observance.

It would seem that the first building erected on the grounds by Rattenbury was a relatively small English cottage built in 1908 , more likely 1900, with heavy stone walls over 16 inches thick. By the photograph this is the right wing and gable of the house.

The rooms of the original cottage have retained their charm and structural strength. The sitting room has a striking green marble fireplace with a polished brass grate and fender. The door frames are heavy oak, beautifully carved. The ceiling is Prussian blue, apparently the original colour- undoubtedly this room must have once been referred to as the blue-room. Facing the sea there was a porch now glassed-in and used as a study. Upstairs the most striking feature is the bathroom. This room has polished white marble walls with a most unusual closed shower arrangement.

The shower is encircled by water pipes, with a great number of taps to give the bather absolute control over the water. The water sprays out from all angles of the shower.

Difference in woods and finishing would indicate that the left wing was built at a later date. A large room overlooking the ocean was once used as a music conservatory. The ceiling is low, probably to give a sounding-board effect. This room- in common with every room in the house- has a fireplace, fronted with old English-style brass grates which give out a great deal of heat. An interesting item displayed in this room is a long-stemmed crystal goblet with Francis Rattenbury's initials in gold on it.

In the extreme left wing there is a small room that is used as a cooler. All year round, even in the hottest weather this small room, panelled with marble, stays cool, yet there is no cooling mechanism, only a small vent in the wall and another in the floor. No one quite seems to understand why this room remains cold.

What is now the boys' dining room was once the Rattenbury library. This magnificent room has a massive fireplace in grey rock set in carved oak panelled walls. Above the fireplace is a motto 'East West Hames (Homes) Best'- not a particularly good motto to be displayed in a

boys' school, as Mrs. J. Ian Simpson, wife of the headmaster, pointed out. Nearly all the rest of the house on the main floor has white marble walls identical to those in the Parliament Buildings.

The dining room, now a class room, is another fine room, originally graced with a large oaken table, rich mahogany floors and eight big tear-drop crystal chandeliers.

The basement once contained a wine cellar, now it stores jars of preserved fruit to delight young school boys.

The old coach house, changed and remodelled to function as a locker room and teachers' quarters stands apart.

Throughout the house the finest materials and workmanship are still evident: heavy doors that still move smoothly have crystal knobs: Oak floors, after 50 years of use, are still in marvellous condition, and there are many other evidences of Mr. Rattenbury's architectural genius. He used cove-lighting in many rooms and placed numerous wall plugs throughout the house in anticipation of the electric age.

Today the house stands in far better condition than it did at the time of acquisition by Mr and Mrs J Ian Simpson in 1935. The Residence had been badly neglected for six years and needed renovation when they took it over for school purposes,

Stout and solid, the Rattenbury house looks as if it will stand for another 50 years with no trouble at all."

-Taken from the Oak Bay and District Leader, Thursday, September 21, 1961, by Peter Bower