

THE NATIONAL TRUST FAREWELLS BARRY O'KEEFE

An inestimable debt of gratitude

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The new Board had to address financial problems and a lack of public confidence, which it would take time to restore. However, the first words to members from the new President struck a rallying chord which was to gather support for the Trust for the next 15 years.

'A sense of optimism pervades the Trust. It has a new Board. It has settled down to work in earnest, for there is much to be done.' He outlined three priorities; to renew the confidence of members and supporters, double membership and, last but certainly not least, to put the Trust on a self-sufficient footing within two years. He ended by appealing to members in the way only Barry O'Keefe can. 'I will do my best. Please join me'. The Trust was on the road to recovery!



The new Trust Board. From front left: Diana Hazard, Barry O'Keefe, Jillian Oppenheimer, Helen Temple, Peter Webber, Joseph Glascott. Back: Wendy McCarthy, Bette Kingsford-Smith, Peter Johnson, Geoff Ashton, Richard Mackay, John Macarthur-Stanham, Neville Gruzman

Edited by Angela le Sueur

In July 1991, after a year in administration during which the National Trust endeavoured to wind back debt and place itself on a sound footing for the future, the first new post administration Board was elected, under the leadership of its new President, Barry O'Keefe.

The new Board and its staff, led by Executive Director, Wendy McCarthy, rallied to its work, making the Trust's voice heard on issues which included the protection of Chaelundi, an old growth forest, and successful opposition to a proposed redevelopment on East Circular Quay, which the Trust claimed would be 'gross overdevelopment of the site'. The Trust was also successful in fighting RTA proposals to demolish the 1836 Lennox Bridge, and pointed to a fire at the Finger Wharf to call for urgent protection and conservation of its fabric.

Conservation Fund paves the way

The voice of the Trust was being heard again – but it was the launch of the Conservation Fund in April 1992 which really paved the way for its financial recovery. Led by former Prime Minister Bob Hawke, and Rosemary Foot, NSW member for Vaucluse, the appeal was chaired by Bob Sommerville AO. Boosted by government funds under the One Nation Scheme, the first stage, with a \$5m target was exceeded and the Trust was able to embark on cautious spending on the restoration of some properties and collection items.



The Conservation Fund was launched in 1992. Pictured from left: Bob Hawke, Rosemary Foot, Barry O'Keefe and Wendy McCarthy

Extending throughout the regions

From the start, Barry O'Keefe understood the vital importance of the Trust's grass roots support, particularly in the regions. He embarked on an intense round of visits to Branches and Committees throughout the State, attending meetings, officiating at events and taking a personal interest in local issues.

New National Trust Branches were formed in Parramatta, where the

future of colonial heritage was very much in the balance, and Port Macquarie, a regional centre which had suffered heavily from the development rampages of the 1980s. The President reported to members in the Trust magazine of October 1992, that, 'The establishment of these Branches is a reflection of the Board's policies that the Trust should look forward and outward. It is my firm view that the Trust should reach into every part of New South Wales and draw its membership from every section of the community.'

By the end of 1993, the Trust still had an overdraft, but its end was in sight.

As always, there were wins and losses on the conservation front. The long standing campaign to protect historic picture palaces saw the classification of the 1930s Mudgee Regent Theatre, but demolition of the Roxy at Cootamundra. A major campaign was in full swing to stop peat mining in the Wingecarribee Swamp, which was classified that year.

In January 1994, Barry O'Keefe announced the appointment of Elsa Atkin as the new Executive Director to the Trust.

This was the start of a very special 'double act', which saw the National Trust move from strength to strength over the next 12 years. New supporters and members were drawn to the Trust, and the increasing professionalism of staff and volunteers helped to position it at the forefront of campaigns, best practice in conservation and the development of educational programs for all age groups.



A very special 'double act'. Barry O'Keefe and Elsa Atkin at the EnergyAustralia National Trust Heritage Awards in 2005, Elsa's last year with the Trust

The inaugural Heritage Awards were held on 18 April 1994. Presented by His Excellency, Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair AC, Governor of NSW and Patron of the Trust, the Awards were sponsored by Sydney Electricity – now EnergyAustralia. From this event a partnership grew which has seen the Awards move from strength to strength, to become the most prestigious recognition of heritage excellence in Australia.

That year, planning began for the National Trust's Golden Anniversary in 1995. Although money remained tight, it looked as though the really dark days had well and truly gone. The Trust ended the financial year with a budget surplus of nearly double the estimated amount of \$60,000. In addition, it welcomed the University of Sydney, as its first corporate sponsor.

In 1996, the need for the Trust was highlighted by events which included the destruction of the George Patterson building by fire, and the devastation of the Australasian Sugar Mill at Canterbury. A major challenge for the Trust was to increase widespread awareness of what was at stake – without using its limited funds.

To the rescue came the internationally acclaimed advertising agency, The Ball Partnership. Over the years, Michael Ball was to become one of the National Trust's most valued supporters. As a Board member until mid 2004, his greatest gift to the Trust was the development of the concept of National Living Treasures, selected by public poll. This was launched with a gala event, and followed by others which, together, raised close to one million dollars for the National Trust.

As Sydney started to gear itself up for the 2000 Olympics, the National Trust commented on a number of major development proposals and other threats to our heritage. In the city, they included the retention of significant structures at the RAS Showground following relocation of the Easter Show to Homebush, the re-use of Sydney's GPO building and

the future of the Woolloomooloo Finger Wharf. Regionally, the Trust commented on the future protection of Kangaroo Valley, highlighted the heritage significance of the Era and Burning Palms shack communities and the cultural heritage of the Royal National Park, and was successful in lobbying for the retention of the Old Windsor Road.

A number of major issues were emerging however, which would test the resources and ingenuity of the National Trust for some years to come.

Towards the end of 1996, plans were resurrected to site a second airport for Sydney on the Holsworthy Army Base. Barry O'Keefe wrote to Prime Minister John Howard urging that the site be dropped from consideration, and the Holsworthy Landscape Conservation Area was classified early in the new year. Meanwhile, our President also protested against an 82% Australia wide cut to the National Estate Grant Program, expressed horror at the proposed demolition of the Edwin Davey Flour Mill at Ultimo and foreshadowed an issue which was later to galvanise community protest, namely the height and bulk of proposed development at East Circular Quay, now generally known as 'The Toaster'. The fate of public lands, particularly the former Sydney Harbour Defence Lands was thrown into sharp focus with the threatened sale of Middle Head as the start of a possible government 'fire sale'. Despite Premier Carr's assurance of a major government policy to protect the lands, this issue was to raise its head time and again in the years to come, as heritage lands and structures owned by both State and Federal Governments became obsolete.



Leading the walk through Parramatta's George Street, to launch the National Trust's Heritage Festival in 1997, and draw attention to the threatened development of Oak Street

Although 1997 was not heralded as a great year for heritage, it did end on a positive note.

Holsworthy was listed on the National Estate, and saved from development. The sale of *Swifts* to the Moran family was seen as a triumph for the National Trust, which had worked hard to 'set the scene' for a satisfactory outcome, and a long term survey of the State's cemeteries reached a landmark, with the completion of surveys in the Central West Region. Also the sale of the Trust property, *Fernhill* at South Bowenfels had a happy outcome, with ownership transferred to descendants of the original owners.

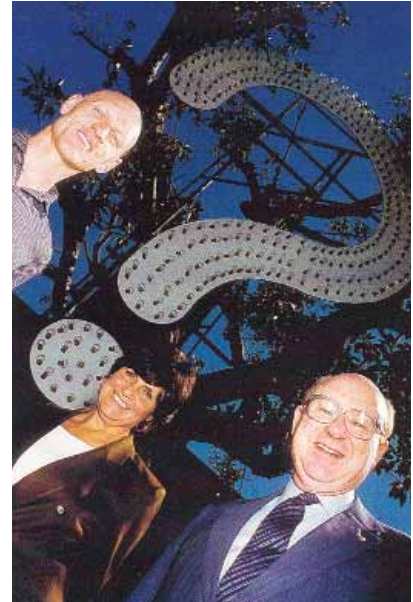
Financially, the Trust was moving into new, more assured ground.

Corporate sponsors now included Leighton Holdings, Philips, Westpac, the Commonwealth Bank, Channel 7 and Condé Nast Publications. In 1997, the NSW Government allocated \$250,000 per year for the three years leading to the Olympics, to assist with the conservation of Trust properties and programs. (This funding was subsequently continued by Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority.) The success of the National Trust Heritage Festival continued to grow, and in 1998 Robert Hughes delivered the fourth Heritage Festival lecture to a packed Sydney Town Hall.

However, the need for the Trust as a community voice for the protection of heritage reached a new level in 1999, with the demolition of wharves 6 and 7 at Walsh Bay. Loudly proclaimed as a major tragedy for heritage, the demolition had been fought vigorously by the Trust, which had been prepared to challenge it in court but was prevented from doing so by a special and specific Act of Parliament, the Walsh Bay (Special Provisions) Act.

Anger and despair were evident as Barry O'Keefe summed up the situation. 'Walsh Bay, Circular Quay, the Conservatorium.....what will be next? Parliament House, Hyde Park Barracks, The Mint?' Emphasising the need for the National Trust, he said, 'Individuals may feel powerless against the triumvirate of governments,

developers and media gurus. The effectiveness of the National Trust in its role as counter balance to these powerful forces depends on you, the members, and on broader community support.'



A giant, illuminated question mark outside the National Trust Centre posed many questions for heritage during Heritage Festival 1999. Peter Garrett filled Sydney Town Hall to capacity, when he delivered the National Trust Heritage Lecture

The Olympic year dawned bright and hopeful. Barry O'Keefe commented that 'The 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ has been commemorated by the restoration of St Andrew's Cathedral, St Mary's Cathedral and St Patrick's Church.'

Favourites, curated by Margaret Olley and Barry Humphries was an all-time success at the S H Ervin Gallery; David Malouf delivered a sensitive and memorable heritage lecture at the State Theatre; a concerted community voice successfully opposed a proposal to run the Parramatta-Chatswood railway line through Parramatta Park, but the sale of the Navy property *Tresco* was a reminder of the growing willingness of governments to sell off our heritage as if it were a mere

commodity. 'The thin end of the wedge is slowly but surely gaining girth', warned the President.

However it was Quarantine Station which stepped right into the limelight, with a proposal from developers for the 'adaptive re-use of Quarantine Station into a cultural tourism experience'.

Non-interventionist management by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service had left the fragile ecology of the site, its built fabric and rich social and medical history almost untouched. The Trust took the position that proposed changes to buildings and land use would destroy much of the significance of the site. In particular, it argued that the proposed 45 year lease was far too long to allow any damage to be reversed later, while making the site vulnerable to changing business climates.

Our President wrote to the NSW Premier, with the proposal that the impact of change on Quarantine Station could be minimised through an holistic approach to the management of North Head which would allow the proposed accommodation to be placed off-site in the nearby Artillery Building. However, over the years, the issue has moved in and out of the shadows; with decisions hard to pin down and discussion held behind closed doors. Despite enormous community opposition to the proposal, it remains unresolved.

The destruction of 12 industrial structures dating from 1913 to 1922 following the sale of the BHP site at Newcastle evidenced the complexities of protecting industrial heritage, while the almost literal burying of the Verge designed *Tempe House* at Arncliffe behind encircling high-rise



Margaret Olley, Michael Ball and Gough Whitlam at the gala event – *Treasures in Concert*

development, and the razing of its highly significant curtilage proved that antiquity and beauty alone were no safeguard.

As the Centenary of Federation approached, the National Trust conceived a project to win federal funds – a National Trust Family of Properties. The forward planning was very successful, and the Trust received magnificent news.

Under the Commonwealth Cultural and Heritage Projects Program, the Trust received a grant of \$6.2m to fund conservation and interpretation works at ten key properties, with a further \$2.75m allocated for restoration of the Tenterfield School of Arts. It was the very first property to be placed in the care of the Trust and was known popularly as the 'Cradle of Federation' since it was the venue for Parkes' first rallying speech in favour of Federation.

Among the most exciting projects made possible by the funding were the rerouting of Ruse Street, Harris Park, the demolition of a recent building to allow the re-creation of the immediate grounds of Experiment Farm Cottage as they were in colonial times, and stabilisation works at Old Government House, Woodford Academy and Miss Traill's House.

The timetable for the projects was daunting – but achieved. Special celebrations marked the completion of works at each property. Perhaps the grandest was the arrival of Her Excellency, Professor Marie Bashir AC, Governor of NSW and Patron of the National Trust, in a horse-drawn carriage to be met by our President, followed by the official opening of the reinstated carriageway at Experiment Farm Cottage.

Trust President, Barry O'Keefe took part in each and every ceremony, ensuring that the deep appreciation of the Trust was duly expressed to all involved in each step of the process. He emphasised the Trust's need for support

in caring for properties of high significance to the development of the nation.



With Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC, Governor of NSW and Patron of the National Trust, and Clive Lucas OAM in 2002

The Trust took advantage of fundraising opportunities presented by the Centenary of Federation, with a Federation Ball held in the grounds of Government House, Sydney. A symbolic ringing of handbells at 8pm to mark the dawn of Federation was led by Professor Marie Bashir AC.

In the year 2001, a design competition was launched by the Lord Mayor of Sydney, for the adaptive re-use of the former Maritime Services Board building at West Circular Quay. There were no guidelines to protect the integrity of the *art moderne* building, but it was clear from the outset that demolition would be permitted as an option.

The Trust's campaign to save the building – and its site – from unsympathetic development was fought vigorously on all fronts. In a repeat of history, the CFMEU joined forces with the Trust to impose a Green Ban. The Trust efforts resulted in the abandonment of all proposals for the site. Barry O'Keefe described the decision as a huge success for heritage. 'Our successful campaign to save the former Maritime Services Board building and its site, which is of unique significance to the nation, demonstrates what can be achieved through a strong public voice.'

This was the last relatively 'straightforward' campaign to be run by the Trust. As older established areas such as Ku-ring-gai began to feel the impact of blanket urban consolidation



With author David Malouf, His Excellency Gordon Samuels, Governor of NSW and Patron of the Trust, and Elsa Atkin at the National Trust Heritage lecture, 2000

policies - most notably SEPP 5 which waives residential density restrictions for medium density proposals for people over 50 years, and permits dual occupancy – it became clear that threats to heritage and amenity had moved onto a new, less tangible level, where the wishes of the community were inconsequential and speed of development was of the essence.

In 2003, the Trust resolved to tackle the difficult issue of heritage management by local councils, with the issue of its State of Heritage Report, a 'report card' based on feedback from a survey. It was designed to highlight areas where local councils needed advice and support to provide better protection for heritage. In the main, Councils responded enthusiastically. Trust action helped to achieve the listing of the Kurnell sand dunes on the State Heritage Register, and secured funding for the Grafton Saraton Theatre which had been saved by the Trust some years earlier. A major boost to Trust funds was the gala event, *Ned Kelly Framed*. Coordinated by Elsa Atkin, it raised over \$250,000 for the Trust, a success summed up by our President as a 'tour de force'.

The year 2004 dawned with an announcement by

Premier Carr that Sydney Harbour would cease to function as a working harbour by the year 2012.

A Summit to crystallise opinion and strategy was held immediately by the National Trust, it was chaired by Barry O'Keefe who summed up the threat. His words were carried to the nation through prime time media: 'This is no minor change, this is a revolution in planning, it is a revolution in land use. What are the studies? By whom were they prepared? By whom were they reviewed? And when did Cabinet consider this decision?' Jack Munday noted that it was 30 years to that day that the fight had begun to save The Rocks from demolition!

In the face of further threats to government owned heritage and sites, the Trust became a founding member of the Protectors of Public Lands, set up to campaign for the protection of heritage and public access to sites which included St Mary's ADI and a number of regional hospitals.

On a positive note, the year saw the start of the soft furnishings project at Old Government House, Parramatta which, under the auspices of Dr James Broadbent and Elizabeth Wright, is

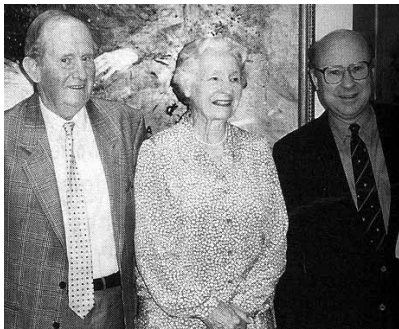
interpreting the principal rooms of the property to reflect the tastes and styles of Mrs Macquarie in 1821. A colonial ball at the property during Heritage Festival 2004 allowed a preview of work in progress and raised much needed funds for the Trust.

An event much anticipated by our President, the Transit of Venus, was celebrated at Woodford Academy on 8 June 2004, with viewings, lectures and events commemorating the significance of the event and the use of the property as a principal site for the 1874 Transit. Barry O'Keefe commented that the Transit of Venus 'engendered a feeling that history was both being relived and made'.

The decision by the Hon W G Keighley to gift his outstanding Southern Highlands property, *Golden Vale*, to the Trust was announced in 2004. It was welcomed by our President who said, 'I cannot emphasise enough, the value of this property to the National Trust. By gifting *Golden Vale* to the Trust, the Keighleys have ensured the future care of the property while opening opportunities for its qualities to be shared and valued by the community.'

Perhaps the greatest indication of how far the Trust had come financially over the years since administration was the decision in 2004 to reinstate funds taken from the S H Ervin bequest to keep the Trust going in its dark times.

A National Trust icon passed away early in 2005, the year the Trust celebrated its Diamond Anniversary, with the death of Ivor Wyatt OBE. In his obituary for the National Trust magazine, Barry O'Keefe wrote, 'He was the National Trust's longest standing member, had been an outstanding President and a contributor without equal. Conservation was his passion and he had always been there for the National Trust. Ivor will be sorely missed. This is a watershed for the Trust.'



Ivor Wyatt and his wife Mabel.

Volunteers, always a mainstay of the National Trust since its first days, were honoured with Diamond Anniversary Foundation Day events at Trust properties and throughout the regions. Their invaluable contribution to the Trust was recognised with the presentation of a pin to each volunteer, and a gift of membership. Barry O'Keefe officiated at a special event for volunteers held on Observatory Hill, raising his glass as he voiced his appreciation of their valuable contribution.

True to form, he went on to visit many regional branches, committees and properties, ensuring that Trust volunteers throughout the State knew that their commitment counted. 'From its very beginnings, volunteers have played a major part in the Trust's growth and development. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to those who have helped us over the past 60 years. They are the backbone of our work,' our President said.

A further highlight was the reception hosted at Government House by Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC, in the presence of HRH Prince Charles during the 2005 Heritage Festival, in honour of the National Trust.

In the midst of the Festival celebrations, our President chaired a packed meeting at Sydney Town Hall in May 2005, where it was unanimously resolved to demand the development of a Working Harbour strategic plan. This was to be prepared in consultation with all interested parties including the public, and to be available for detailed discussion and input prior to its adoption.

The launch of a Federal Government Productivity Commission Inquiry into heritage was cautiously welcomed by the President as an opportunity to gain recognition of the real value of heritage, and develop adequate resources for its conservation. The Trust made a submission to the Inquiry but, to date, outcomes have fallen short of initial expectations.

In 2004, an era came to an end when Elsa Atkin advised of her intention to resign as Executive Director of the National Trust. This was followed at the 2005 Annual General Meeting of the National Trust, when Barry O'Keefe announced that he would not seek re-election to the Board of the Trust, and would therefore retire as President in November 2006. These events foreshadowed the end of a partnership which had seen the National Trust shake off the weight of crippling debt, and reinstate its integrity and relevance as Australia's premier conservation organisation.

Summing up the challenges of the future in the National Trust magazine, Barry O'Keefe said, 'The anniversary of 60 years of fighting for the protection of heritage in NSW has given us the opportunity to send out a strong

message that the National Trust is very much alive; as active, dedicated and vigilant as ever. The exponential growth of Sydney and the rest of the State is posing threats not just to individual buildings and streets, but to the fabric and character of whole precincts and townships. Most alarming is the speed with which decisions are being made. In many instances, any pretence of public consultation and opportunities for comment which we have been led to believe are an integral part of the planning process, have been swept away.'

At one level fearsomely tenacious – at another, a true friend of volunteers, supporter of Trust Branches and Committees and advocate for National Trust staff – and again as a major financial supporter of the Trust – Barry O'Keefe has done perhaps more than anyone, to shape the Trust as it is today; a force to be reckoned with!

The Board, Staff and countless volunteers throughout New South Wales wish him the very best of health and happiness in his years of retirement from the Presidency of the National Trust. We doubt that he will ever be far away!



Raising a glass to National Trust volunteers throughout the State