

OUR PLACE – our place – what makes it special

As part of the National Trust's quest to preserve for future generations the essence of what is significant to Australians, the National Trust Festival 2008 takes 'Our Place' as its theme in a state-wide celebration of the places we feel are important to us. It may be the intrinsic qualities of the place itself; beauty, history or other significance.

But below that first layer may be other, more personal associations and perceptions which have resonance for us all.

Over the course of the Festival hundreds of events have been planned throughout New South Wales, to take place between 5 and 20 April. There will also be signature events such as the EnergyAustralia National Trust Heritage Awards, the annual Heritage Lecture, Schools Competition and, of course, a wide range of activities and events at many National Trust properties. For a complete list of what's on, please see the National Trust Festival Program 2008, enclosed with this magazine.

A new program this year is a partnership with the Architects Registration Board to be launched at the Festival. A photo competition will invite the community to send in a digital image of a place they love, accompanied by 100 words or less on the theme 'I love this place because...'. Entrants will fill in an online questionnaire designed to elicit information on what it is that makes a place special, and how this is related to sustainability. The winner and runners-up, decided by a judging panel, will receive cash and other prizes. Further detail will follow on the web, in the Magazine and in our regular enews (register at www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au).

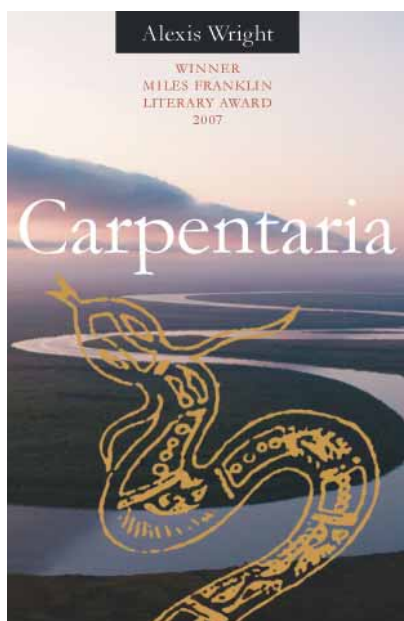
In the lead-up to the Festival, National Trust Magazine invited a number of artists, writers and others whose work embodies an innate understanding of the 'soul', to write a short description of a place which has particular resonance for each of them.

Tina Jackson

Executive Director

By kind permission of Alexis Wright, from her book 'Carpentaria'

The Gulf of Carpentaria



Inspired by all of the beauty that comes from having an ancient homeland that is deeply loved by those who guard it, and especially by my countrymen, Murrandoo Yanner and Clarence Waldon.

The ancestral serpent, a creature larger than storm clouds, came down from the stars, laden with its own creative enormity. It moved graciously – if you had been watching with the eyes of a bird hovering in the sky far above the ground. Looking down at the serpent's wet body, glistening from the ancient sunlight, long before man was a creature who could contemplate the next moment in time. It came down those billions of years ago, to crawl on its heavy belly, all around the wet clay soils in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Picture the creative serpent, scoring deep into – scouring down through – the slippery underground of the mudflats, leaving in its wake the thunder of tunnels collapsing to form deep sunken valleys. The sea water following in the serpent's wake, swarming in a frenzy of tidal waves, soon changed colour from ocean blue to the yellow of mud. The water filled the swirling tracks to form the mighty bending rivers spread across the vast plains of the Gulf country. The serpent travelled over the marine plains, over the salt flats, through the salt dunes, past the mangrove forests and crawled inland. Then it went back to the sea. And it came out at another spot along the coastline and crawled inland and back again. When it finished creating the many rivers in its wake, it created one last river, no longer or smaller than the others, a river which offers no apologies for its discontent with people who do not know it. This is where the giant serpent continues to live deep down under the ground in a vast network of limestone aquifers. They say its being is porous; it permeates everything. It is all around in the atmosphere and is attached to the lives of the river people like skin.



Wylie's Baths. Photo: Christopher Shain

Akira Isogawa, fashion designer Wylie's Baths, Coogee

Last summer I went to a swimming place that I hope will remain in Sydney for many years to come.

Wylie's Baths in Coogee is unique. Worthy of note because of the feeling you get there of yesteryear. The wooden decking tiered along the cliff face is reminiscent of the 1940s and 50s and you begin to feel time slow down as you instantly become relaxed. I thought to myself, one piece swimsuits and bathing caps for ladies and thick high waisted, Y fronted trunks for men once graced these decks. Quaint wooden dressing sheds added to the experience of an afternoon by the sea as I slipped into my bathers.

The swimming pool below juts out into the sea where all the vigour of the great blue Pacific Ocean comes to rest after crashing against the pool's edge. It brings with it some of nature's treasures, such as starfish and other small sea creatures that find their way to the bottom and can be spotted when you are doing your laps.

After the swim in the pool, warming up on the wooden decking is delicious and, when in need of shade, there is plenty supplied by the cliffs and rocks. A little slice of heaven I thought, as I became totally lost in my thoughts. Here, I didn't have to compete with hordes of beach goers, and I felt I was in a private place.

On my way out I had a coffee at the kiosk, took in the view once more and breathed in as much sea air as I could. The winding path out, past native trees and shrubs, beckoned my return to what is the splendour of the 100 year old Wylie's Baths.

Clive Lucas, conservation architect St Matthew's, Windsor

I first saw St Matthew's when I was ten years old, and it made an extraordinary impression. What a fine classical building, and what a building to find in a rural location. It seemed more sophisticated than anything I had ever seen: the fine brickwork, the beautiful cupola with its four stone urns and the lovely apse. The way it seemed to dominate the countryside was also special.

My great great grandfather had come to NSW with the army, travelling on the same ship as Francis Greenway. He was later to serve with his regiment in Van Diemen's Land and India before returning to England. Later in 1828 he returned to NSW and settled in the Hawkesbury near

Richmond. There was no church at Richmond and the children, born in the 1830s, were baptised in St Matthew's Church.

In 1956 I was given Morton Herman's book, *The Early Australian Architects and Their Work*, and this explained something of Greenway's church. When I started architecture I discovered Hardy Wilson's book, *Old Colonial Architecture*. In the teens of the twentieth century Wilson had discovered our Colonial architecture and with Neave, Berry and Turner measured such masterpieces. In 1923 he wrote that Greenway, 'seems to have caught the sunlight of the Hawkesbury Valley on his glowing westward wall', and of his rare feeling for scale.

By 1960 the Church I had seen was in dire need of attention. Termites threatened the tower and the beautiful brickwork was suffering from damp. The National Trust mounted a major campaign and, under the guidance of Rachel Roxburgh, raised the funds necessary to repair the Church.

But somehow the Church was never the same again. The smooth lead of the cupola was replaced in ribbed metal and the new shingles were treated so that they never weathered to the soft, silver grey. The splendid sandstone urns were joined to the tower by heavy metal brackets. Inside the Church, the raised timber pew platforms were done away with, and the beautiful weathered cedar disappeared under a heavy coat of red shellac and wax.

Much of the subtlety of Greenway's masterpiece disappeared, but when I drive into the Hawkesbury I still wonder at its majesty. Recently, I spied in an auction a Roland Wakelin painting of the Church. Wakelin, along with Rees and Santry, had taught several generations of architects at Sydney University. They too admired Greenway's Church and now I have Wakelin's painting to remind me of my special place.

Joanna Capon, artist The Castle, Ballyhooley, Co Cork, Eire

Although today it is referred to as The Castle, the tall limestone tower standing on a cliff high above the River Blackwater was built as a watchtower in the year 1213, by an Anglo-Norman, Thaibald Roche. There men were posted to keep watch for raiders sailing up the river or stealing over the opposite Nagle Mountains to attack Roche's fortress which stood beside the River Awbeg, a tributary of the Blackwater, at Castletownroche, a few kilometres away.

As a child I played in the tower, climbing up the spiral wooden staircase, pausing at each level to visit its large single room, kitchen, the dining



The Castle, Ballyhooley



area with its huge fireplace where I could hide without ever being found, and the ballroom with its minstrel's gallery. From there the staircase became steeper and narrower, made of stones pitted with marks like the indents in shortbread biscuits. After climbing two more levels I reached the broad, crenellated terrace. From there I could look up and down the river and hear the echo of the water as it ran beneath the arches of the bridge, and the creak of the horses and carts as they carried churns of milk across it on the way to the nearby creamery. In the mornings and evening there was the sound of lowing cattle in the fields beside the water, and in spring the bleat of lambs from the hillside opposite drifted upwards.

The very top of the tower was reached by a wooden ladder; in this small area where the Roche standard once fluttered, the countryside was visible for many miles in every direction. I used to look down into the village and across the land until it rose to the distant Ballyhoura Hills. At times my brothers and I would sit there and sing Australian-Irish songs our Australian mother had taught us, such as *The Wild Colonial Boy* and *Click go the Shears Boys*.

Although there is no record of when The Castle was last occupied, life has continued around it from its earliest records. Descendants of the Roche family still live in the area and to them – and to me – it remains sentinel to our feelings of a very special and evocative place.

Shirley Fitzgerald, City Historian, City of Sydney Jervis Bay

When I bought a rundown little fibro shack in an unpretentious street in Huskisson a few years ago, it was not because of the charm of the shack, which was a very ordinary little place, nor of the street, which was a very ordinary street, nor even for the village itself, though it has its charms.

The attraction was the delights of Jervis Bay with its brilliant aqua waters, its endless beautiful beaches and estuaries, its stunning white sands. For my daughter, who came with me one weekend so she could go diving, and who said to me 'just buy it', it is what is under the water of the bay that is a major attraction. And if you should ever

tire of all that, then there are walks to be had in the lovely Booderee National Park.

The special place that is Jervis Bay is well known to many, and the conservation battles to preserve its pristine waters, not to mention the battle to save it from becoming the site for a nuclear reactor some decades back provide a rich legacy for today.

But what I didn't expect was how much I would come to appreciate the shack. It needed a thorough paint job, the leaking roof needed to be renewed, and a few minor things needed replacing, but we have been careful not to upgrade the feel of the place. The odd windows and 'found' doors remain, the bits of quad used for cornices are fine, and the huge old bath is a delight. There was no phone, and we never got one.

We now try to remember to grace the shack with the name of 'the cottage', but whatever it's called, it is a place to immediately wind down from the stresses of the city and the working life. I'm not going to claim, as is often claimed for such places, that we go back to a simpler time when we're there. It is 2007, and even 2007 can be simple. There are still lots of these places dotted up and down the coast. The ones that are being replaced with designer bungalows or town houses are probably following the market, but special places follow other imperatives.

Meg Stewart, writer St Mary's Cathedral

As a little girl I adored seeing brides appear on the steps of St Mary's Cathedral. I lived in Bridge Street, right in the heart of the city, until I was nearly six and if we were driving past St Mary's on the weekend my parents would always stop the car so I could watch these visions. The brides in their white gowns were like dolls come to life. The joyful pealing of cathedral bells, a sound that still never fails to thrill, completed the treat.

Then, of course, there is my father's poem, *The Bishop*, about one of the two bronze statues at the top of the wide steps leading up to the



Jervis Bay. Photo: Graham Quint



The Bishop, with outstretched arm, at the entrance to St Mary's Cathedral. Photo: Meg Stewart



Cowan Creek

Cathedral. The poem pays homage to the flow of life the bishop silently and uncritically observes there.

I, too, like the urban dwellers and the homeless – and among them, the occasionally inebriated – who traverse the open space or piazza as I like think of it, in front of the Cathedral (although, at present most of this area, which came into being in 1998, is hidden behind a hoarding while undergoing refurbishment). I like the anticipation that pervades day trippers – like me – as they set off for the city. I like the tourists taking holiday snaps of each other on the steps. I like the pigeons that sometimes, as my father noted, preen on the bishop's head. I even liked skateboarders who zipped about pre-hoarding. (Skateboarders, apparently, will not be encouraged to frequent the refurbished space.)

Best of all, I like the forecourt in the evening after I've walked across Hyde Park, in that purple-light hour before dark. I think of my father's line about 'trim little bits, with their scarlet nails, homing to flats at the Cross' and I feel at home in the city myself.

Bruce Rickard, architect

My special place

The first time I went to Cowan Creek (down river from Bobbin Head) in my youth was in a row boat with several friends intending to fish. We soon became unconsciously aware of a magical place. We stopped rowing and just gazed reverently at the sublime spectacle laid before us. There was no sound except for the cries of a few birds, everything was so still.

Here we were looking at a pristine, ancient, mixed eucalyptus forested landscape laid vertically before us on the walls of the waterway. Huge Angophoras and Casuarinas were growing right down to the water's edge, some seemingly growing on the rocks with great boulders scattered through the bush between the undergrowth of enormous grass trees, banksias, wattles and other typical Hawkesbury Sandstone flora.

Because the walls of this drowned river valley are so steep it is difficult for visitors to gain a foothold on the bank and so this environment has remained in this pristine state up to now, and hopefully forever.

The picture of this environment has been with me ever since and has influenced my work. My first house was built in a similar landscape without the water and at one time I built a house for myself at Cottage Point overlooking Cowan Creek. I have been fortunate enough to design houses ever since on land with similar attributes but never on land so sublime.



The refurbished Aquarium

*Guy Cooper, Director and CEO,
Taronga and Western Plains Zoos*

A historic zoo with a modern twist

Few zoos if any in the world enjoy such a historic and special relationship with its community as Taronga. It is not only what the Zoo does that is special, but also its history and wondrous location. It's not surprising that Arthur Streeton when living in the Curlew Artists' Camp in the early 1890s describes that experience as dwelling in 'a land of passionfruit and poetry'. Now, within the Zoo grounds, the pathways and the campsite itself have been refurbished with great care and enthusiasm.

This heady mixture of past and present makes Taronga and its surroundings special to me and to so many.

The 12-year redevelopment program of the Zoo is enabling us to not only provide facilities of world class standard, but also refurbish and celebrate elements of the original design – elements that will now be even more cherished as they again become accessible and part of today's experience of visiting. Areas that exemplify the evolution of new and old at Taronga include the re-opening of the original 1916 lower entrance building. It once again provides a memorable entrance for visitors as they pass beneath the original ornamental animal head quoins that have been given a new formal colour scheme complete with a touch of gold.

The original entrance to the long disused Aquarium has also been given new life, paying homage to the former grotto-like effect of the old building and a vivid blue colour scheme to highlight its decorative facade. The original bronze plaques on the entry portals pay tribute to former sponsors Burns Philp and MLC Fred Flowers (first president of the Australian Labor Party) who was Chairman of the Zoo Trust from 1912 to 1928.

Close to the Aquarium, an original aviary (supposedly based on those from Moore Park days) has now been bought back to its former nineteenth century splendour. Designed as a beautiful and exotic exhibit in its own right, it now features a rebuilt fountain based upon original photos, and houses suitably colourful and glamorous birds.

Being able to march forward while honouring the past and safeguarding the favourite memories of so many Sydney-siders, will hopefully ensure that the less tangible qualities of a visit to the Zoo will continue to delight and remain a special part of everyone's experience and memories of Taronga – as they do for me.

Helen Glad, curator and granddaughter of Norman Lindsay

Sydney Fish Markets

On my journey to the Sydney Fish Markets I am lucky enough to travel across the spectacular Anzac Bridge – a wonderful monument to match the other Sydney bridge. One day I will walk across the Anzac Bridge and really take in the view. However, I am always in too much of a hurry to get to a place of magic for me – the Sydney Fish Markets. Situated on Blackwattle Bay, the markets give us an opportunity – rare in these days when so much is pre-packaged – to appreciate the reality of where food actually comes from.

I usually get there early in the morning (but never on pre-Christmas or pre-Easter days!) The variety of fish sold through the auctions is the second largest after Tokyo. The auctions are over by the time I arrive but the workers, in long aprons and gumboots, are busy moving trolleys full of fish, the purchasers are packing their refrigerated trucks and the retailers are ice-ing their magnificent displays of the abundance of the sea.

For a woman who seriously loves food, it is an ecstatic experience. The shoppers and retail workers reflect the diverse multi-cultural nature of twenty-first century Australia – there is always someone who can explain what to do with exotic species. The pleasure for me is doubled since the reason for my visits is usually that I will be providing a feast for loved family and friends. The enjoyment of the table should never be underestimated for its ability to civilise and enhance our day. I admit to becoming a greedy person as I try to decide between all the scampi and blue fin, oysters, balmain bugs or any of the other choices.

The markets are basic. Even though there have been numerous proposals over the years to upgrade everything from the carpark to the retail shops, so far such 'gentrification' hasn't gone beyond planning stage. And long may it be like that – the possibility of a 'Disneyland' type experience is abhorrent to me.

Perhaps the Fish Markets are one of the last places in our often sanitised modern life where city dwellers can still feel part of the whole cycle of food gathering. Let's keep its pelicans and basic facilities to give us a sense of what we might lose if we don't treasure it for the future.



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sense of place – National Trust Conservation Conference 2008

By Jacqui Goddard

Sense of place is that ephemeral something that makes us react to a place and, generally speaking, it is a phrase used to describe a feeling of grounding, belonging and memory. It is immediately identifiable and yet very hard to define. Over a number of years, the annual National Trust conservation conference has discussed sense of place in relation to other concepts. *Suburbia, Out There, Heritage Under Glass and Places in Context – Natural and Cultural Landscapes*, all dealt with attitudes and reactions to types of places, and measures that can be taken to preserve 'sense of place'.

The Conservation Conference for 2008 will concentrate on the issue of 'Sense of Place' in a direct way. It is well recognised by people dealing with mental health that sense of place and identity issues play a large role in both cause and treatment. This is particularly well articulated in research into Indigenous health, but it is also true for other groups and is one of the most vexing issues facing immigrant communities. Speakers will include a psychiatrist talking about mental health issues related to loss of identity, and papers are also being sought from historians, sociologists, immigrant groups, the Indigenous community and longer-term residents fighting to save a particular place.

Making a place to belong to

The history of settlement in Australia is peppered with attempts by immigrant populations to instill a sense of place that they can identify with in their new and alien home. Efforts range from 'taming the wilderness', to planting elms, to building Chinatown and recreating Tuscan villas, as each wave of new arrivals seeks to stamp its own cultural identity on the new place. While they are doing that, the established community bemoans the loss of what they identify as 'Our Place'.

Other threats to sense of place can simply be development led and, while new development may not be consciously trying to destroy a place, this happens because the fragility of that sense, or the importance of it, is not recognised by those who are changing it. Sense of place may be prompted by a particular atmosphere, a predominant landform, common plantings, density, scale, wildlife, vistas and less tangible features such as the smell of a particular type of shop or noise from a school or the sea.

Despite criticisms by those who want us to 'live in the present', the present by its very nature doesn't last and in a second becomes the past. Memory of that past is basic when it comes to issues of identity. The United Nations ratified the right to memory as a fundamental human right many years ago. The effects of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia is perhaps an extreme example of what happens when we seek to build a future while denying a past, but it is a lesson that should be remembered.

Conservation Conference 2008 – *Sense of Place* – will be held on 8 May 2008 at the National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill, The Rocks, Sydney. Proposed papers or inquiries should be directed to Mara Barnes: P (02) 9258 0161.