

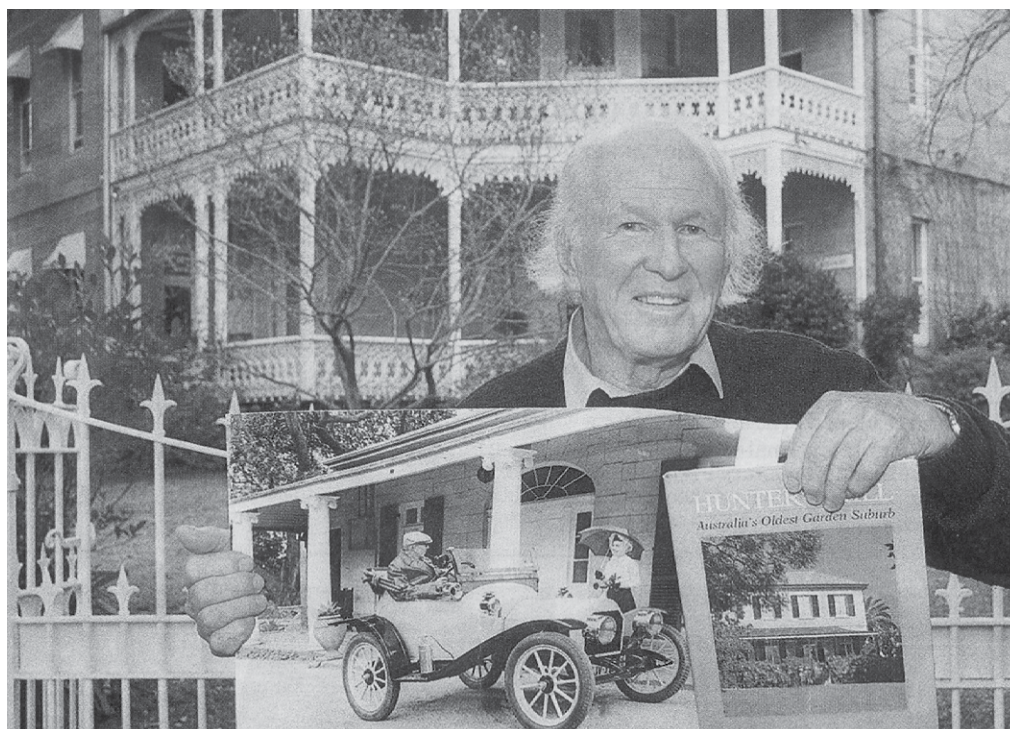


DOUGLASS BAGLIN (1926-2010)

Douglass Baglin was a prolific international photographer, filmmaker and author, and a tireless heritage campaigner in Hunters Hill. He died, aged 84, on October 7th.

The Baglins lived locally, at Villa Floridiana in Sea Street, from 1956 to 1988, and then moved to a property "Merrendee" outside Mudgee. In 2007 Douglass was awarded an OAM for his service to the community as a photographer of indigenous people, plants and wildlife of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific islands, and of historic buildings throughout Australia. More than eighty books feature his photos.

Douglass was amongst the first people to become aware of the threat posed by inappropriate development to the distinctive character of Hunters Hill, and began taking photographs of the houses and streetscapes under threat. The thousands of photographs taken by him became the central visual record of the suburb. He played a vital role in setting up the Hunters Hill Trust, and his photography played a large part in the campaign to have the suburb declared a Conservation Area and to define the character of the suburb.



Douglass Baglin in front of St Claire, Wybalena Road

The 1982 edition of the Trust's book "The Heritage of Hunters Hill" was made up almost entirely of his pictures, which were specially taken for it. His collaboration with Beverley Sherry resulted in the outstanding history "Hunters Hill, Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb".

Douglass also copied a large number of pictures which people brought to him from their family archives. These negatives are the largest single record of the early days of Hunters Hill and are now archived in the State Library.

All this work was done voluntarily and the Trust and the Municipality of Hunters Hill is forever grateful for Douglass's generosity and photographic skills.

For those of you who didn't attend the funeral at All Saints on 11th October, Bev Sherry's tribute to Douglass is on Page 2.



*Preserving Australia's
Oldest Garden Suburb*

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A PERSONAL TRIBUTE TO DOUGLASS BAGLIN

Beverley Sherry
11 October 2010

I thank my lucky stars that I met Douglass because he changed my life—my professional life—much for the better, and I’m so glad I had the opportunity to tell him that at least a couple of times, including this year.

*Not long after I moved from Queensland to Hunters Hill, my husband Sean and I met Douglass and Elaine through the Hunters Hill Trust. From about 1980, over a period of more than ten years, Doug and I worked together on a number of projects, all to do with Australian history and the environment, especially historic buildings. These projects culminated in two books, **Hunters Hill: Australia’s Oldest Garden Suburb** and **Australia’s Historic Stained Glass**. I think these were the last books in Doug’s career as a photographer before he moved to “Merrendee”. And I can’t mention that name—or “Villa Floridiana”—without remembering dear Elaine.¹ The Hunters Hill book (a bicentennial history, published in 1989) meant much to us personally because we both lived here, we cared about the place, and we hoped that the book might have some lasting value in protecting Hunters Hill.*

But the stained glass book (1991) was a far more pioneering venture, and this was when I really got to know Doug. We travelled the country tracking down stained glass windows in both rural and urban areas and in churches, houses, and public buildings. It was a joy to work with him, though fiery at times. And wherever we went people were welcoming (it helped that Doug had such a gentlemanly manner).

I remember we were in Port Pirie in South Australia to see the glass at a house called “Carn Brae”. The owners entertained us at morning tea, and we were heading next to Maitland on the Yorke peninsula, so we rang ahead to ask the people at the church of St John if they would mind removing the protective bars outside the windows so that Douglass could get better pictures of Cedar Prest’s windows there. No problem, they called in some friends and removed the bars from ten windows, which were all clear when we arrived. Of course the bars had to be screwed back into place again after we left. This was typical of the generosity we regularly encountered. The same at Cranbrook School here in Sydney, the bars were removed from their Captain Cook window so that Doug could get good photos.

Everyone recognizes that Douglass’s achievement is partly the huge range and sheer quantity of his work—he has photographed everything from “dinkum dunnies” to cathedrals—but I would like to praise the quality rather than the quantity of his work. It’s not easy to photograph stained glass, for example, but Doug understood the intimate relationship between stained glass and the sun, the importance of aspect, of the time of day, the weather, even the time of year. He took a series of photographs of a window in Burwood, and the owners of the house said, “Come back in autumn in the late afternoon.” So he did this, and succeeded in getting brilliant photographs of the waratahs in that window on a west-facing staircase.

He also tried, and was frequently able, to capture both a window and its architectural setting, the surrounds, for example, the interior of the Great Hall of the University of Sydney, the staircase window of Government House Perth, the interior of St Mary’s Cathedral Darwin. That’s no mean achievement because there are two contending sources of light, the sunlight coming through from outside as well as the light inside the building. If you look on page 70 of the Hunters Hill book, you’ll see what I mean, his lovely photograph of the Evangelists in the south nave of this church during a spring festival. He captures not just these windows made by Lyon & Cottier - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - but also the sandstone, the tessellated tiles of the floor, the warm wood of the pews and pulpit, and the magnificent abundance of spring flowers—it’s a whole composition.

Another of his gifts was his ability to capture the spirit of his subject. There is a photo of old Mr Hordern sitting on a seat in Alexandra Street, Hunters Hill (p. 113 Hunters Hill book) which conveys the sense of loneliness and yet the dignity of this man, who was well known in Hunters Hill sitting on this particular seat. And if you look on page 17 of the same book, you’ll see Douglass’s photo of the Lane Cove River from “Villa Floridiana” (a place close to his heart) on a winter’s afternoon, and here he has captured an atmosphere, a feeling, a mood, a kind of nostalgia. That photo has a poetic quality. Whenever I look at Government photos on the web (records of buildings and places), I think, these pictures have no soul compared with Doug’s.

So, thank you Douglass for what you’ve given us all—what you’ve given Australia! And for me, I will never forget working with you, knowing you, being inspired by you, and taking flight into worlds I might never otherwise have explored.

FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESKTOP

Tony Coote

The view from Europe

Since the last Journal hit the newsstands Gillian and I spent some time in France and Britain looking at a lot of buildings and townscapes. It is clear that the French and English are much better at preserving their heritage than we are in Australia and that the French are better at it than the English, particularly when you compare Paris to London.

Being an unreconstructed fan of “The Bill”, I was keen to see how one of the perennial features of the show, the Swiss Re building (aka the Gherkin and also “the towering innuendo”), fitted into the townscape of Central London. The Gherkin generally appeared on The Bill’s opening credits seen from the air where it looks more like a piece of sculpture rising out of a sea of ordinary, conventional structures than a building. I was keen to see what it looked like from the ground.

It turns out Lord Norman Foster’s phallic symbol can be seen from quite a few places on the ground, particularly from the South bank of the Thames. It still looks more like a piece of sculpture than a building and, to my eyes, is a discordant element in the townscape. However, the shocking fact that I discovered when walking the streets on a quest to find The Gherkin is that it is just one of many recent buildings that have been built in The City which pay no heed to context or townscape. They are primarily “look-at-me” structures whose main aim is corporate self-aggrandisement by building-branding. In itself this aim is somewhat problematic because the original owner inevitably on-sells the building or another corporation with a different name subsumes it. The impact of these buildings on the townscape is more than problematic - it has been a disaster.



Lord Foster’s Gherkin

So it’s hard to disagree with Prince Charles (the Royal Institute of British Architects’ arch enemy) when he said of The Gherkin that it is “not just one carbuncle on the face of a much-loved friend, but (there is) a positive rash of them that will disfigure precious views and disinherit future generations of Londoners”. He went on to say that office towers in the capital should be confined to Canary Wharf and the Docklands in the east of the capital, “rather than overshadowing Wren’s and Hawksmoor’s churches”.

This is not to say Lord Norman Foster can’t make a fine structure that is sensitive to its context. His refurbishment of the British Museum is masterly. And it’s not to say that modern architecture cannot make a great contribution to an older city’s environment and can’t be complimentary to its architectural heritage. I was also keen to see I.M. Pei’s contribution to the Louvre Museum - another controversial building. I discovered that the work is much more than the glass pyramids in the Louvre’s forecourt. It is in fact a massive subterranean structure that connects the three buildings of the museum in a single entrance and to include various retail outlets and to give access to the Metro. I thought it was a remarkable and inspired work of infill and adaptive reuse.

Speaking of Prince Charles, we also visited Poundbury in Dorset, which is an experimental new town on land owned by the Duchy of Cornwall (Charles is the Duke of Cornwall). Poundbury seeks to implement the principles expounded in the prince’s 1989 book “A Vision of Britain”..

Poundbury is still under construction and will not be finished until 2025, when its population will be 5,000 and will provide 2,000 jobs in the factories, offices and general facilities across its 40-hectare site.

The architectural style of Poundbury, which uses traditional local forms and materials has been criticised for being anachronistic, cutesy-pie and not modern. Poundbury itself has been criticised for being something of a gated community of wealthy people. Despite this criticism Poundbury, when compared to most recent housing developments (particularly in Australia), is a very pleasant place to be in (at least as someone simply walking around it).

It consists mostly of medium density housing in terrace form with 2 and 3 storey buildings. The emphasis has been to create an overall sense of place through familiar architectural forms and materials and the creation of public places with generous landscaping throughout. Context rather than individual expression has been the driver and I think it has been very successful in creating a “place” rather than an ugly street where each house competes with the one next door for prominence on the street and the main element in each house is the double garage doorway.

The view in Hunters Hill

All this relates to ongoing development in Hunters Hill, where new work mostly fails to respect the context and character of its neighbourhood. This is particularly so of the knock-down-and-rebuild school of development which is becoming more and more common in Hunters Hill. In the last Journal there was a piece on the foreshore destruction at 39 Bonnefin Road. In this journal is a photo of a knock-down in Reiby Road opposite the High School – note the giant saw, which is part of the technology that made this massive excavation of sandstone possible.