

Hunters Hill Trust Journal

October 2012 ISN 0310-11 Volume 50, Number 2



THE NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART A MISSED OPPORTUNITY A TALK BY BOB CLARK

Bob Clark is a Sydney architect who works with the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust (SHFA). He gave this talk at the Trust's AGM in June this year. At the time the new alterations and additions to the museum had just been opened, to a considerable amount of discussion about the design and its relationship to the existing building.

History

The current MCA complex covers the sites of the Commissariat Stores and associated wharf and a large part of the Government Dockyard. The Stores building was commenced in 1809 to a design by Lt Colonel Foveaux and completed under Governor Macquarie. The King's Wharf was constructed directly in front for the unloading of food and items for the Commissariat Stores. The Dockyard commenced in 1796 under Governor Hunter and was enlarged and improved under Governor Macquarie. The creation of the stonewall to form Semi-circular Quay saw the filling in of the Docks in the 1850s. Three of the four Dockyard docks are within the site.

These two uses were essential to the survival and growth of the young colony – the Stores Building, holding the supplies to be distributed to colonists and the dockyard, building and repairing ships.

Evidence for both buildings was revealed in the limited archaeological excavation and monitoring carried out by Casey and Lowe Pty Ltd Archaeological and Heritage Consultants for the new works to the MCA.

The MCA Building (former MSB Building) and its environs are listed on the State Heritage Register as part of the Sydney Cove West Archaeological Precinct, which states that the Precinct is a site of exceptional archaeological significance as evidence of some of the earliest colonial and maritime infrastructure of the convict settlement of Australia.

The extension provides a bold statement of differentiation from the rest of the Museum housed in the former MSB building – an obvious need felt by the MCA to advertise its

credentials in a way that was constrained by the symmetrical straitjacket of the existing building. Here was the opportunity to put its "contemporariness" on show and it has achieved that objective.

However the MCA is located on a very prominent site on the western side of Circular Quay – arguably the most well-known and important urban space in Australia with an international reputation. On its western side it relates to the historic Rocks Precinct, itself a major tourist attraction of high heritage significance, that is state owned and administered by the SHFA. It is therefore reasonable to expect, indeed require, that major new works should not just fulfil the Museum's requirements but should also enhance its important physical context.

Relationship with Circular Quay



The extension fills what was a significant gap around the foreshore of the Quay, an L shaped site from George Street, along Argyle Street to the Quayside forecourt, wrapping around the corner Police Station. Its bold cantilevered entrance with the equally bold orange triangle shaped graphic is a highlight of this extension with its darker southern side contrasting strongly with the sandstone of the former MSB building.

The lightness of the eastern entrance and its rather steep concrete stair flight is carried out to the edge of the promenade with matching concrete furniture, stairs and ramp. The wide ramp leads up towards a bland featureless wall. The raised edge of the podium to Argyle Street and the Promenade incorporates formed-concrete continuous seating.

Continued on page 2



Preserving Australia's
Oldest Garden Suburb

Hunters Hill Trust Contacts

- President Robyn Christie
rjmchristie@gmail.com
- Secretary David Gaunt
david@gleebooks.com.au
- Journal Tony Coote
tony@tonycootearchitect.com
- Address PO Box 85 Hunters Hill 2110
- Website www.huntershilltrust.org.au
- Contact Kate Russell
humanly@zeta.org.au

Publications

- Heritage of Hunters Hill \$15**
- The Vision and the Struggle \$15**
- Members discount 25%

MEMBERSHIP

The Trust anyone interested in preserving the unique character of Hunters Hill to become a member.

- Single membership \$20**
- Family membership \$40**
- Contact the secretary to join or download a form from the website.

**MCA – A missed opportunity –
continued from page 1**

At present this all appears rather stark and overly architectural.

When the east elevation is viewed from the distance of East Circular Quay the southern entry portion holds its own. However the northern section appears much flatter and the sculptural quality dilutes to a straight-lined corner and a large dominating expanse of white. The placing of a black corner block on top of the white weakens the overall concept of the play of receding and protruding planes at such a critical location.

Relationship with the immediate surroundings

This commentary accepts the northern extension for what the architect states it to be i.e. a sculptural, inclusive addition and looks at other aspects of its relationship to its surrounding context.

The George Street Frontage

The former MSB building is set back from the George Street frontage, which contributes to its freestanding character. It is now cloaked in the same clothes as the northern extension arrayed along the street boundary.



This appears as the weakest part of the MCA additions. The sculptural character has given way to large scale, same-plane patterns with a somewhat token indentation in white and grey coinciding with the central element of the former MSB building. This indentation is partly negated by the strong white awning travelling between the southern and northern wings of the former MSB building, the southern end being the only easily appreciated part of it remaining.

The central street entry has no emphasis and blends in with the shop fronts on either side looking forlorn with no real purpose. The panelled additions project a cheap, temporary appearance in contrast to the materials of the former MSBB.

The flat, horizontal emphasis of the panels and the awning contrast insensitively with the buildings on the western side of George Street.

By contrast the new George Street gallery entrance maintains the sculptural theme, projecting forward to the street frontage, in the process hemming in the northern wing of the original building further detracted from by a collection of concrete boxed services and a pair of white doors. However, closer up, there is a recessed glazed gap between the new wing and the old. The view through to the Quay is a welcoming one and makes the reception area an exciting space. The architect sees this as picking up on the laneways of The Rocks area.

The corner Police Station building retains a harmonious link to the existing building on the SW corner of Argyle and George Streets.

The site's archaeological importance

Archaeological excavation was limited to areas affected by the proposed new works. What was revealed was paving and footings associated with the Commissariat Stores building. Some of the stone remnants are of the earliest stone docks in Australia. The site is one of the most tangible links to our past and the foundations of European settlement in this country.

The interpretation of this archaeology is clearly inadequate. It is a missed opportunity that could have linked the site with Foundation Park and Dawes Point.

Bob Clark

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESKTOP

GREEN PAPER DREAMING

I am reminded of the Nobel prize winning Italian playwright, Luigi Pirandello, who constantly explored the fine line between fantasy and reality in his short stories and plays. *Così è (se vi pare) (Right you are, if you think you are)* is an expressionistic parable that examines such themes as the relativity of truth, the vanity and necessity of illusion and the instability of the human personality.



The reference is a useful introduction to "A New Planning System for NSW: Green Paper" on two accounts. First is the difficulty of balancing individual perspectives within a logical planning process and what some would argue is the simultaneous need for certainty and flexibility within the planning system.

Second, and utilising Pirandello's identification of "seeming" and "being" more specifically, is the interpretation of the intent of the Green Paper, as opposed to its content.

Having spent days exploring a plethora of submissions on the Green Paper, I wonder how best to present the information both practically in terms of the content and critically in terms of its potential implications or, alternatively, to interpret between the lines.

The Environmental Planning & Assessment (EPA) Act 1979 provides the framework for the planning system in New South Wales. Now over 30 years old, it has been modified over 150 times and I doubt anyone would argue against the need for a comprehensive review of the system. A number of the amendments have watered down (obliterated in some cases) the major, innovative intent behind the original Act. Indeed the Act has lost sight of the very important objective, namely to provide increased opportunities for public involvement and protection of the environment in planning and assessment. From the Trust's perspective, the main question we need to ask is whether the Green Paper proposes a system that reassures us that this original intent will be restored?

The Green Paper is organised around four fundamental reforms:

1. Community participation
2. Strategic focus
3. Streamlined approval
4. Provision of infrastructure

Under each of these it outlines 17 changes in total that provide, what might be termed, the essence of "how" they will be delivered. The four-tier structure of new planning instruments is revealed under the heading "Strategic focus", in Changes 5 to 8:

1. NSW Planning Policies (NSWPPs) will provide high level planning, identifying 10 to 12 key policy areas that drive the new system. While the new policies will be non-statutory in nature, their intent will be implemented through the lower tier instruments (RGPs, SRDPs and LLUPs). Current State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs) will be repealed.

2. Regional Growth Plans (RGPs) will articulate the principal direction for regional or metropolitan growth for the next 20 years and deal with such matters as spatial planning, projected population growth, development patterns, key actions

on regional issues, cumulative impact considerations, accountabilities for delivery and review. Again, these are intended to be non statutory in nature.

3. Sub Regional Delivery Plans (SRDPs) are the delivery tools for high growth areas, to provide for rezoning land, code based complying assessment and development, to consolidate agencies' development requirements and to link the planning process with infrastructure planning. The SRDPs will identify priority growth areas, biodiversity corridors, conservation areas and prime agricultural land. Underpinned by evidence from "sectoral strategies" (housing, environment), they will be developed with Regional Planning Boards and Local Councils.

4. Local Land Use Plans (LLUPs) are to have four common areas. First, is a strategic intent or desired development outcome that is non statutory. Second, are spatial and land use plans that will be statutory. Third is the delivery of infrastructure and services. And fourth is the provision of development guidelines (non-statutory) and performance monitoring.

Finally the strategic reform also nominates three new zones to capture investment opportunities and preserve local character - an interesting juxtaposition, capturing so-called Enterprise Zones, Future Urban Release Zones and Suburban Character Zones. The latter zone is, at least in my view, a glimpse at what should in fact be the first consideration in any planning document - to protect and preserve an existing environment, as well as to encourage sustainable development.

Hunters Hill Council has prepared a comprehensive submission that responds to the four areas and each of the 17 changes. It is worth having a good read of the full document on line.

While on the surface the proposed new planning regime seems logical, there are fundamental underlying problems in accommodating the disparate issues and protagonists. "Seeming" is not "being". There are four main areas of particular concern, each of which are equally relevant to Hunters Hill Trust members, the local community in Hunters Hill and local communities across the state.

The first is the Green Paper's presumption that "planning" equals "growth".

Development is one of many issues in strategic planning but *sustainable growth*

must be the overarching objective of the new Act.



Strategic planning should integrate *all* environmental outcomes, natural resource management and existing cultural heritage, in order to ensure the cumulative impacts are considered alongside urban sustainability, design quality and climate change adaptation. Population growth and the provision of housing are two of many complex issues that it is planning's job to evaluate and provide for; infrastructure, facilities, employment and jobs are additional social elements also in the mix.

The primary emphasis of the Green Paper is on supporting development growth and the concern is that the overarching objective of the new planning system must be to ensure that development is sustainable and that population and economic growth does not occur at the expense of environmental protection, heritage conservation and social cohesion. (Hunters Hill Council (HHC) submission p.1)

The second issue is the failure to engage with any meaningful incorporation of the environment and heritage as part of the strategic planning process. Despite the original intention to combine the two Acts together, historically the Heritage Act was enacted two years before the EPA Act in 1979. The EPA Act does, however, contain heritage provisions within the requirements for Local Environment Plans drafted at local government level. The Green Paper, however, is completely silent on heritage.

There are a number of issues aside from the wider question as to whether the objects and powers of the 1977 Heritage Act would be more effective or more diluted if incorporated into the new Planning Act. The existing environmental protections in the current State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs) would need replicating in the new NSW Planning Policies.

Similarly, are the NSW Planning Policies going to include a policy on heritage? How will Conservation Areas be distinguished from Suburban Character Zones, and will this diminish their value?

The proposed expansion of code-complying development and private certification have huge implications for listed heritage items and conservation areas. The National Trust and the Environment Defenders Office offer complementary recommendations.



The National Trust (NT) recommends that development applications for heritage items, sites neighbouring heritage items, sites within heritage conservation areas or sites neighbouring heritage conservation areas must be excluded from code assessment. (NT Rec. 10)

Codes must only apply to genuine low risk low impact development. Codes must not apply to areas of high conservation value, environmental sensitivity, cultural heritage significance etc. Clear thresholds and parameters for the application of Codes must be set out in the new Act. (Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) Rec. 24)

The third area of concern is one ostensibly covered, not omitted, in the Paper – the importance of the community. While Community Participation is presented as the first new area of reform, with the Government promising a Public Participation Charter, this is not given any substance by the proposed changes. Community engagement is moved to the strategic planning process and away from the development assessment process.

The practical reality of informing and involving a community at a strategic level in the planning process is difficult to envisage given the problem of explaining key planning concepts in an understandable language. Three layers of independent panels are proposed at state, regional and local level – the Planning Assessment Commission, the Regional Planning Boards and Independent Expert Panels respectively. But I feel very strongly that development assessment should not be removed from Ministers and Councillors, who are the elected representatives of a community and given to independent, unaccountable panels. A comparable situation in the law might be telling the community they are the now legislators, but aren't required for juries anymore.

Removing the elected Councillors from strategic decision planning and development consent is contrary to the mandate of the elected Councillor. (HHC p.5)

Denying a community the right of development notification is not justified on the basis that in a technically savvy age, e-planning and electronic information provide an adequate alternative. The practical reality is that the first notification a neighbour would receive of a development application for a new house next door will be the arrival of a compact excavator on the site. Furthermore the argument for expanded review rights for developers must be matched by equal review right for third parties. These proposed changes are directly contrary to Section 5 of the original EPA Act, which provided increased opportunities for public involvement and protection of the environment in planning and assessment. Such issues do not augur well for the strength and content of the proposed Public Participation Charter.

The Public Participation Charter should be a schedule to the new Act and applied to all relevant processes including: law making and amending, all strategic planning and plan/policy making, development assessment and the development and amendment of Codes. (EDO Rec. 6)

The fourth and final issue is the questionable further streamlined approval process. Although it might be argued that to obtain an outcome from the planning process, speed is more cost effective, it is difficult to see how fast tracking environmental impact assessments and the process of approvals will answer the public's need for transparency and the

right environmental outcomes. The type and number of Code Assessable developments is to be increased, but will it be limited to low risk, low impact development and not extended to industrial or other building types as indicated? While clear thresholds and parameters are needed, the use of Codes is inappropriate in areas of high conservation value, environmental sensitivity and cultural heritage significance. History to date has taught us to be cynical.

The application of state wide "blanket" codes has been largely unsuccessful both in terms of the impacts it has on speeding up development approvals, as well as the conflicts between the standard codes and local circumstances. Development standards and guidelines for code assessable developments must be locally developed to ensure the level of assessment matches the level of impacts of the development due to local circumstances and community expectations. (HHC p.7)

Complications with the system of private certification to date should also make us wary of this method of streamlining. To ensure transparency, a private certifier must be appointed by a neutral party, not a developer. There must be a separation between a private certifier approving a development application and the certifier providing the construction certificate. If such anomalies exist and the local councils are also removed from local control, it will be difficult to establish any public trust in the new system.

The State Government must make a serious attempt to fix the systematic dysfunctional private certification system that has a poor track record with respect to issuing certificates that are significantly inconsistent with consents, failing to detect and act on unauthorised work during inspections, certifying incorrect plans or incorrectly applying BCA / Regulations. There is an urgent need to reinstate public trust and confidence in the Certification system before any further expansion of the scope for code assessable developments. (HHC p.7)

The Green Paper appears to be a logical planning system. It appears to involve the community. It appears to offer opportunity by way of growth and development. But in truth it fails to work from the most important premise. It fails to deliver a plan based on sustainable environmental growth. It fails to engage the community beyond the initial strategic level.

The reality of planning that the majority of us experience is its impact on the house, the street and the neighbourhoods in which we live. Are we now to lose our right of ownership to developers?

Robyn Christie

DRAFT PLAN OF MANAGEMENT FOR RIVERGLADE RESERVE

As noted in the May 2012 Journal Hunters Hill Council commissioned a consultant to prepare a revised Plan of Management for Riverglade Reserve. After consultation with residents and users of the Reserve, a Draft Plan was delivered to Council in July 2012 and placed on public display until 14 September.

Problems with the Draft Plan

The Trust believes the Draft Plan should not be adopted because it contains uncertainties, ambiguities, errors, inconsistencies, and omissions.

One serious problem with the Draft Plan is that none of the recommendations relating to organised sport are validated except by reference to a draft document that is still being prepared, so it has not yet been presented to Council, and has not been made available to those wishing to understand the reasons for its recommendations. In addition, the major demand for organised sport at the Reserve comes from the sporting clubs, many of whose members are not resident in Hunters Hill. The other major user of the Reserve for organised sport is a school that makes little contribution to the Municipality.

Council's first duty must be to its own community, who, the Draft Plan found during its consultation, generally values the use of the reserve for passive purposes, including informal exercise and sport.

The Trust's submission

We recommended that the Draft Plan of Management (PoM) be re-written to correct its many deficiencies, to save Council money and to incorporate the following points:

Reserve Management

A formal mechanism is required to maintain *'ongoing community involvement in park planning and management'* (p46). If this role doesn't fit one of Council's existing Advisory Committees, a new committee is required.

Organised sport

Revert to a single, full-sized soccer pitch,

as existed until 2006 under the current PoM. If appropriate, this pitch could also be marked for junior games.

Ensure adequate separation between the soccer pitch and pathways.

Because most players arrive already wearing their sporting outfits there is no need for the proposed change rooms,

There is no need for a permanent toilet block opposite the footbridge. The experience of 2011 showed that 'Port-a-loos' can be provided during the winter sport season.

Car-parking and Access by vehicles

Maintain the current ban on all but service and maintenance vehicles entering the Reserve.

Provided that organised sport is kept to a low level, there is no need to formalise parking at the end of Waruda Place.

If car-parking is to be allowed beyond the end of Waruda Place, access should be provided directly from Victoria Rd.

Exercise of dogs

Allow off-leash exercise of dogs throughout the level area beyond the ponds except where organised or informal games are in progress. Discourage dogs from entering bushland by the use of light fencing.

Paths

Upgrade and where necessary replace various paths through the Reserve that don't meet current standards and expectations for pedestrians and cyclists, including those of people with disabilities. This will require a setback from the seawall, and isolation from any marked playing field(s).

Alister Sharp

NEWS UPDATE

GIL WAHLQUIST

Former Trust president, current Hunters Hill Historical Society President, Bunk editor and all round legend Gil Wahlquist is resting at home after a stint in hospital with some serious health problems. Vincie is looking after him. We wish him all the best.

COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Council elections were held on Saturday 8 September 2012 right across NSW. In Hunters Hill 7,845 people out of an enrolled total of 9,516 turned out to vote

for a new mayor and six Councillors. Of the 82.4% turnout 5.3% voted informally for the mayor. 10.1% of North Ward Councillor votes were informal and 7.3% of South Ward Councillor votes were informal. The Trust is not sure what to make of the difference in the informal vote. Could South Warders be marginally more capable than North Warders?

Compared to other Council areas the figures show that Hunters Hill voters were more diligent in their turnout and less likely to vote informal. For example 40% of Ashfield Council's voters failed to vote and 17% of those votes were informal. In Blacktown over 24% of votes in 3 out of 5 wards were informal and in one ward in Parramatta 26.75% of votes were informal.

Considering the waste of paper, time and resources, this correspondent remains convinced that having a popularly elected mayor is bad for the environment, that democracy would be better served by nine Councillors and that calling East Ward *South* and West Ward *North* is just not geographic.

The results were as follows:

Mayor – Richard Quinn
North Ward Councillors – Mark Bennett, Gary Bird, Peter Astridge
South Ward Councillors – Justine McLaughlin, Meredith Sheil, Zac Miles

The Trust congratulates those elected. We congratulate retiring mayor Sue Hoopmann on her many years of service to the Municipality and we acknowledge the work of long-serving Councillor and former mayor Ross Sheerin who failed in his bid for the mayor's position and was outpolled in the election of Councillors for South Ward.

Newcomers on Council are Mark Bennett, Gary Bird, Justine McLaughlin and Zac Miles. Zac Miles took time off work to extensively door-knock the ward and as a result was able to garner more votes than better-known candidate Ross Sheerin.

In the past, The Trust has taken a more active role in campaigning for particular candidates. In the 1974 Council election, for example, The Trust interviewed the candidates and produced a How-to-vote list, which included support for such luminaries as Moira Baird, Kerry Bennett, Anne McNally (Mrs Mac), Sheila Swain and Rodney Cavalier. You can see more details of the 1974 election via the Trust's website by clicking on publications, then Journals 1972 – 1984 and then Volume 3, No 4 September 1974.

For this year's election, The Trust did not produce a how-to-vote recommendation but we did provide information about the candidates on the website, where it became clear that a number were standing for the sole purpose of vote splitting and had no real hope or intention of becoming councillors. There was also an apparent push by a group with real estate and developer interests to gain a majority on Council. In the end this push was not successful.

In recent years the character of Hunters Hill has been subjected to a slow drip of degradation. Small cottages have been demolished and replaced with large McMansions or inappropriate Project Homes. Bits of public land have been given over to various interest groups without public consultation and public works undertaken without proper assessment or oversight. Various developments, particularly the new buildings at the Hunters Hill shopping centre and along Ryde Road, have shown that the current planning controls are inadequate. They have not been able to prevent the proliferation of a hodgepodge of architectural styles and have failed to preserve the existing scale and character of the area.

Council oversight of much development has been taken over by private certifiers.

Finally, judging by the underlying principles outlined in the Green Paper, amalgamation is very much on the radar as an integral part of the proposed new planning system.

So there is much work for the new Council to do. The Trust commits to continue to work closely with the new Council through our representation on various committees, particularly the Conservation Advisory Panel, through our court appearances in support of Council and via our submissions on various development applications and Council initiatives.

HOLE WATCH

As previously reported there is an increasing tendency in Hunters Hill for home owners to demolish the cottage they have just bought, and then dig a huge hole into the bedrock to accommodate umpteen cars and/or to adjust the topography so a house designed for a flat block can be dropped into what was previously a sloping site.

Hunters Hill's Development Control Plan describes a number of features essential to creating the residential character of the Municipality including that "buildings

respect and reveal the landform of the peninsula, that views to and from the water are retained and that building materials and man made surfaces are unobtrusive". Similarly, under Garden Topography: "cut and fill for any development of the site shall generally be limited to a maximum of 1m vertical depth at any point with a combined overall maximum vertical height of 1.5m. Excavation above this limit is usually an excessive intrusion on the natural topography of the site."



Sandstone excavation at The Point Road as seen from the water

It is clear that the objectives of the DCP are being increasingly ignored in many developments across Hunters Hill, to the detriment of its character. This is definitely another area for the new Council to look at again.



The hole at Mapledoram's Corner.

Trust members would also be aware of major digs now underway in Gladesville Road for the new developments at Mapledoram's Corner and the Hotel Development.

Beyond the Mapledoram's hole you can see the new development beside the village arcade. This is a clear example of how the DCP controls have failed to ensure that new development is sympathetic and appropriate to the existing character and scale of the shopping centre.

BORONIA PARK OVAL #3



More mountain than hole

This used to be an oval. For almost 2 years it has been unusable. It now looks more like the slagheap of a mining operation than a cricket ground. The Trust has attempted to get to the bottom of how this has been allowed to happen - without success. Our concerns were set out in the last issue of the Journal but since then the stockpiles have only become higher and work has now come to a complete halt.

Hunters Hill's public places

There are other examples of Council's somewhat cavalier approach to its responsibility for the design and maintenance of public spaces in the Municipality.



Here is a path to nowhere on the eastern edge of Boronia Park Oval #2. The path was apparently created on a whim with some left over material and without any planning whatsoever.

Design excellence does not form part of Council's philosophy - it is more interested in thrift. As noted in a recent Council newsletter about the shelter at Buffalo Creek Reserve: "One of Council's works staff has saved thousands of dollars by designing and building the shade structure himself". The so-called "urban design works" at the corner of Gladesville Road and Joubert St appears to have been designed by the same person and Council has not considered the work significant enough to have its Conservation Advisory Panel review the proposal.

This lackadaisical attitude to Hunters Hill's public spaces is in stark contrast to that of other authorities with responsibility for development around the Sydney Harbour foreshores. The Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, for example, takes great care in insisting on the highest quality of design in the layout of its places and the buildings and infrastructure that are placed within them.

The Trust urges the new Council to take a much more responsible attitude to its public places. A good start would be to consider the public land under the Figtree Bridge. With the cooperation of Transport Roads and Maritime Services, this place could be turned into a really beautiful park. At present it is so neglected that people have no pride in it at all and use it as a dumping ground.

HECKLER HOUSE



In the last Journal we reproduced the SMH Heckler article that compared the 13 months taken to build the 102 storeys high Empire State Building in New York with 3 plus years taken to construct a single house in Bonnefin Road. The house is still unfinished and all construction has been stopped for the last 3 months.

"Cash flow problems" is the rumour. The lack of flow is clearly serious enough for the builder to have walked away from the job. Bonnefin Road residents have welcomed the respite from the daily disruption caused by tradies' vehicles, giant mobile cranes and concrete trucks.

Now we can take stock of what we have been left with. We don't know what the front fence will look like but for the time being at least, passers by in the street have a view of the river down one side of the house. The original house previously blocked this view.

However we are not happy with the minimalism of the the front garden, which is dominated by the concrete drive and turning area. Very little garden area has been left for planting. As well the

somewhat brutal industrial aesthetic of the house's uncompromising geometry, solid walls and lack of windows facing gives little to the streetscape and seems quite antisocial.

OUT OF THE ASHES



5-7 Alexandra Street

Behind the hoarding in the photo above were the charred remains of the former Axi's restaurant and shops, which had been deliberately set on fire by the restaurant's owner Eddie Besir and his son Ozkan in 2004. For seven years this site had been an eyesore on Alexandra Street.

Now restoration of the building is nearing completion. Owners Bridget and Peter Hawthorne began the massive task at the beginning of this year. They have carefully scraped back the smoke damaged stone, repaired floors and rebuilt roofs to take the building back through a number of incarnations to when it was a private house. They will soon be moving in with their two children.

The couple are supervising the work themselves and have worked closely with Council in the painstaking task of repairing the extensive fire damage and restoring the house's fabric. Bridget's father is well known Trust member and house renovator Tony Ryan and her brother Stephen is also known for the work he has done restoring his house in Ryde Road. Clearly the renovation gene runs in the family.

CUNNINGHAM'S REACH

The battle waged by Friends of Cunninghams Reach (FOCR) to prevent the alienation of public parkland on the banks of the Lane Cove River across from the bottom of Princes Street has been successful. Sydney University Rowing Club is now looking at redeveloping their existing site and have abandoned plans to attempt to develop the park at Cunninghams Reach.

Congratulations to FOCR on a well fought campaign.



The park at Cunninghams Reach

MUSINGS

An occasional column

Recommended reading

Capital is the name of John Lanchester's latest novel. It is an epic story of early 21st century London. Capital, of course, has two meanings - accumulated assets and the most important city in a country, usually its seat of government. London also has additional importance as a global financial centre. These two meanings of *capital* underlie what the novel is about.

Its 577 pages is divided into 106 chapters which cover the lives of a large cast of individuals and families who either live in Pepys Road or have some business to be there. To quote the back cover: "*Pepys Road is an ordinary street in the capital. Each house has seen a hundred years of fortunes made and lost, of hearts broken, of first steps and last breaths. One day in December 2007, a card with a simple message drops through each letterbox:*

We Want What You Have."

The reader is gripped from the first page and is held by the many dramas being played out despite their multiplicity. Lanchester's beautifully sparse prose and his biting satire add to the enjoyment. The reference to London's most famous diarist, Samuel Pepys, is entirely appropriate.

Here are some excerpts from the book:

"It would be hard to put your finger on the exact point when Pepys Road began its climb up the economic ladder. A conventional answer would be to say it tracked from the changes in Britain's prosperity, emerging from the dowdy chrysalis of the late 1970s and transforming into a vulgar, loud butterfly of the Thatcher decades and the long boom that followed them. But it didn't seem quite like that to the people who lived in the street – not the least because people in the street changed too.

As house prices slowly rose, the working classes, indigenous and immigrant, cashed in and moved out.



People began to do up the houses, not in the ad hoc way of previous decades but with systematic make-overs in the knocking-through, open-plan style that became fashionable in the seventies and never really went away.

Someone in the street was always doing up a house; there was never a time when there weren't skips outside, builders' vans hogging the street, and all the banging, crashing, drilling, pounding, roaring and turned-up transistor radios of builders and scaffolders that came as part of the package."

How familiar this is to the residents of Hunters Hill. Throw in the incessant pounding of massive rock hammers smashing into the sandstone bedrock and it would be just like home.

One of the main characters, Roger Yount, is also familiar. His *"hoped-for bonus of a million pounds might seem lavish, but with second homes and nannies to maintain its starting to look more like a necessity"*.

I am reminded of "cash flow problems" and the stalled build at the Heckler House. Could it be that someone's bonus did not come through this year?

More on extreme wealth

George Monbiot, the well-known English writer and environmentalist, has an interesting take on the American presidential candidate Mitt Romney's world view.

He calls it **Romnesia**, which he describes as: *the ability of the very rich to forget the context in which they made their money. To forget their education, inheritance, family networks, contacts and*

introductions. To forget the workers whose labour enriched them. To forget the infrastructure and security, the educated workforce, the contracts, subsidies and bailouts the government provided.

Monbiot notes that: *The crudest exponent of Romnesia is the Australian mining magnate Gina Rinehart. "There is no monopoly on becoming a millionaire," she insists. "If you're jealous of those with more money, don't just sit there and complain; do something to make more money yourselves - spend less time drinking or smoking and socialising and more time working ... Remember our roots, and create your own success."*

Remembering her roots is what Rinehart fails to do. She forgot to add that if you want to become a millionaire - in her case a billionaire - it helps to inherit an iron ore mine and a fortune from your father and to ride a commodities boom. Had she spent her life lying in bed and throwing darts at the wall, she would still be stupendously rich."

TWT clean off the rails

Hunters Hill locals would have been amused to see The Weekly Times getting a work-over from Jonathon Holmes on the ABC's Media Watch on September 10:

"As a free paper, advertising is crucial for The Weekly Times; and it suffered a grievous blow a while ago when Ryde City Council – the biggest local government in its patch – switched its advertising to the paper's rival, News Ltd's The Northern District Times. In December last year, an evaluation committee recommended the contract stay with the News Ltd paper. But six out of twelve councillors proposed it should go back to The Weekly Times. The Council minutes record a fierce battle. "The voting on the Amendment was 6 all. The Mayor used his casting vote against the Amendment. The Amendment was LOST. It seems John Booth has neither forgiven, nor forgotten.

In the run-up to (September's) local government elections, The Weekly Times coverage of Ryde council has been startlingly one-sided. The councillors who voted for The Weekly Times have revelled in a blizzard of ads with laudatory copy."

You can read the whole transcript on the Media Watch website.

Writing about Architecture

In an article in the New York Times in March this year, Allison Arieff wonders whether it was Martin Mull, Steve Martin or Laurie Anderson who said that

"writing about music is like dancing about architecture." She goes on: "To ruin the analogy further, writing about architecture is like mangling language, and far too often the experience of reading architectural writing feels about as pleasurable as tooth extraction."

I have noted the same thing in Australian architectural writing. Here are a few from a 2006 issue of *Architecture Australia*:

The new building "juxtaposes a taut, abstract exterior skin with the insistent materiality of a remarkably robust interior."

"Contrasting with the prevailing thin, taut and precise materials of the exterior, the effect on coming into the building is immediately one of volume, weight and texture."

"Doors, areas of carpet on the floor, ceilings are detailed as circumstantial, delimited necessities, not fundamental conditions. The concrete is assertive in its weight and weightiness."

"For Popov, each project stems from seminal studies of an architectonic module."

Tony Coote

Architect John Richardson is the guest speaker at this year's

TRUST CHRISTMAS COCKTAIL PARTY



When: Wed 12th December at 6.00 pm
Where: 2 View Street Woolwich
Cost: \$45 per person
 RSVP: maureen@fairfaxbm.com
 or post your cheque or bank transfer notification to The Secretary HHT
 Box 85 Hunters Hill 2110

Bank Transfer details (include your name)
 Westpac Gladesville BSB 032 185
 Account No. 500410