

## **National Trust Heritage Awards 2016**

I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of this land – the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to elders past and present – the people of this place. People! - everything we do and celebrate here is associated with people - from many places, all with a myriad of stories, skills, accomplishments and contributions.

And thinking about that, and given that I'd like to think that these awards are the Oscars of the heritage world, I'm going to start with remembering a person we lost this year who was very important to the Trust. A person who, in 1987, was included by the United Nations on a list of the world's 500 most influential environmentalists for 'outstanding contributions to protection and improvement of the environment'.

This person was a member of the National Trust Board and a long term member of the Landscape committee. He was a vital and zealous advocate for the environment, for the National Trust and for the protection of public housing, something the Trust is still fighting for - and that is Joe Glascott – journalist, and Australia's first 'environment writer'. A position ably occupied today by Elizabeth Farrelly.

Joe's obituary described him as a 'stubborn zealot for the environment' and maybe that's what it takes. Our individual awards today celebrate three more people who are continuing in his tradition. As we say farewell to Joe we know that the roles of advocate, zealot and champion are still being filled by dedicated people.

Our Lifetime Achievement award for 2016 goes to someone who continues to be a strong advocate for heritage, a former staff member of the National Trust who then served on the Landscape Committee for many years with Joe. We owe such a debt to Reece McDougall for a number of the roles which you've already heard about but particularly for what he achieved at what was, we now know, the hey day of the then NSW Heritage Office. It is so sad today to see such a vibrant office depleted and moved from its purpose built fit-out in the Old Kings School – a use that demonstrated everything we all preach about using old buildings – back into a faceless office building and a mere subset of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage. I sometimes wonder if it wasn't his success that made government so nervous about heritage. Of course we are still enjoying the fruits of many of Reece's successes not least in the efforts of the people he inspired and mentored many of whom are in this room today.

The Skills award goes to another person who is extremely generous with his time and knowledge, Dave McBeath. Dave's name is synonymous with getting things done – solving the unsolvable and inspiring others.

The Cathy Donnelly award goes annually to a woman in the heritage field. Cathy was an architect who valued small scale work and quiet achievement and today we award Jean Rice for those same qualities. She epitomises what Cathy stood for and held dear.

This year we had almost double the number of entries from last year - 108 entries and 98 finalists. It made the judging more challenging of course but worth it and we were all encouraged to know that there is real ability, commitment and passion being demonstrated.

Despite the increase in quantity there was no reduction in the quality of the entries received. As usual the judges did a bit of juggling between categories but interestingly not very much this year and for that we can all thank Eloise who quietly and efficiently sorts all this out and guides us, the judges, in the right direction. We did however have

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to introduce a few sub-categories because we simply had too many entries that deserved awards and hopefully that is a situation that won't change.

One entry this year however defied all categories and classification, so we decided to give it an award all of its own - that is of course Stan Grant's *Talking to My Country*. One of the judges described reading it on the train over a series of mornings, suspecting that the other passengers thought he had an emotional problem because he was regularly weeping as he read. We, as a community, have talked for many years about 'reconciliation' and 'shared history' and while we love to celebrate the positive stories none of it means much if we do not acknowledge the negative; if we don't have a good hard look at where we are and how we got here. We thank Stan Grant for this book and encourage everyone to read it. We know it'll do well and it's already receiving rave reviews.

Speaking of books there are a couple that we saw that we deferred for consideration because they promise to be great but weren't quite ready - so that looks good for next year's entries! These, like others submitted, round out our stories with ever more information and with a widening of points of view.

We've heard about a few already and added to those I'd like to mention a few others. The first is about migration history - *Every Story Counts* because of course it does and another *To Climb A Hill* - a beautiful book about Newcastle East public school. Another that took my fancy was *Eat Your History* - probably because it combines two of my passions! It too expands the way we look at, and understand our past but there are many more on that list.

The stories of our past, collectively and individually is what heritage is all about whether that is manifest in a building, a town or suburb, a colour scheme, an object, a report, a book or whatever someone considers important.

This is probably a good moment to remind everyone that the publications are available at the desk by the door! I've only mentioned a few so please explore the offerings and buy, read and enjoy!

Given that one of the main tenets of the National Trust is advocacy we are always thrilled to see such strong battles being forged by people across NSW. Just last weekend CAWB, who won last year's award for advocacy, celebrated - or maybe commemorated would be a better word - 1000 days of the continuous vigil in Thompson Square Windsor which is an amazing achievement. It is far from easy to maintain that level of fight. Speaking about commitment to a cause I'd like to mention the dynamic duo of Peter, and his late wife, June Poland and their battle, along with other people of course, to save Strickland House.

And let us not forget those amazing bands of expert volunteers who zealously research and conserve such objects as the cranes at Cockatoo Island, the UIVER DC2 and the Arnotts Biscuit Van. What would we do without them? Of course volunteers come in all forms and with all sorts of expertise. The Rose Garden at Suamarez is another wonderful example of the power of people to achieve when they get together.

Another positive I see from these awards is that while we are seeing an apparent diminution of Government commitment to heritage on one hand we are seeing Sydney Trains embrace its responsibilities and National Parks and Wildlife doing such sensible things as leaving Gogerly's Cottage alone as a ruin while upgrading buildings capable of

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being used as accommodation in Royal National Park and giving more and more life to Hartley Historic Village through physical works as well events and activities.

The corporate sector is also stepping up with great work being done at 5 Martin Place and 55 Clarence St and individuals continuing to do outstanding work as we saw in the conversion of the former Gundagai Literary Institute.

This year there was an increase in entries from students in the Masters in Heritage Conservation course at Sydney Uni. The quality of work being prepared speaks well for the future of heritage and for professional standards. Although the almost \$2 billion in savings in education in the Federal budget on Tuesday doesn't offer a lot of hope. I'm not sure what's happened to heritage in the budget - it didn't seem to get a mention at all. Is that a good thing or a bad thing I wonder?

While we may argue at times about how individual projects are executed or what is, or is not appropriate no one can deny that quality work is being produced in NSW.

One entry that did give us pause however was the introduction of the portals at Lennox Bridge in Parramatta which the Trust actively lobbied against. It is always hard in those circumstances to look impartially at the end result but we did our best.

No project happens in a vacuum and each is the result of the work of many people and influences from zealous advocates, guiding legislation, enthusiastic owners, skilled tradespeople and expert volunteers.

We saw great tours we all want to go on and saw fabulous events (who wouldn't want a helicopter tour of South Solitary or to see Sydney Harbour from a forgotten angle). We also saw innovative websites and research tools and inspiring investigation. On behalf of the judges I'd like to congratulate you all and thank you for putting yourselves forward for consideration.

Thank you.