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Architecture Bulletin Autumn–Winter 2016

Front cover: Two past GAO projects in Sydney. In the foreground are the Palace Garden Gates (James Barnet, 1889). These gates are interesting as they are often thought to be the gates built for the Garden Palace in 1879, but were actually built to commemorate the building seven years after it burnt down. At centre is the State Office Block (project architect Ken Woolley, 1968). Once the country's tallest building, it was demolished by 1997 to make way for Aurora Place. Photo: Max Dupain © Courtesy Max Dupain & Associates. Source: State Library of NSW

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The Autumn edition of the Bulletin has in recent years been dedicated to heritage. This time we expand this idea to mark the extraordinary achievements of the Government Architect's Office, which for 200 years has shaped the built fabric of New South Wales.

This year marks the bicentenary of the Government Architect's Office and a rolling series of events called GAO200+. However, it is also a year of significant transformation for the office as it moves away from an active design office into a more nimble strategic advice office. We could not let such an important change occur without critical reflection.

Shaun Carter speaks with the current Government Architect **Peter Poulet** about the transition and downsizing of the Government Architect's Office (GAO) into the Office of the Government Architect (OGA) and the move to the Department of Planning.

In reviewing the recent exhibition *Imagine a City: 200 years of public architecture in NSW*, at the State Library, **Andrew Nimmo** reflects on the role of the office over 200 years and how the current changes were seeded nearly 30 years ago.

We asked each of our living past Government Architects, **Lindsey Kelly**, **Peter Webber**, **Chris Johnson** and **Peter Mould**, to pen a short piece on their experiences in the role and what they saw as their key achievements. **Andrew Andersons**, Assistant Government Architect during the giddy celebrations of the Bicentenary, muses on the relationship between GAO and Government. **Helen Lochhead**, another Assistant Government Architect, writes on the role of GAO in providing strategic advice.

With the assistance of **Matthew Devine**, we have assembled a 200-year timeline of the GAO mapping its life and times.

Dillon Kombumerri reflects on the achievements of Merrima, the Indigenous Design Unit within the GAO. **Philip Thalys** reminds us of the role of the GAO and laments the retreat from undertaking actual projects. **Noni Boyd** looks at the GAO's early work in regional NSW under Vernon's guidance and his innovative application of passive environmental design principals.

Finally, **Natalie Lane-Rose** and **Monica Edwards** check in on the Champions of Change one year on.

Andrew Nimmo, Chair of the Editorial Committee



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Barangaroo

The NSW Chapter has had a keen interest in the redevelopment of the public land at Barangaroo for a number of years. We made three submissions in 2010 and 2011 focusing on the quality of the concept plan and on the process for assessing development proposals at Barangaroo South.

Then there is James Packer's casino, to be built on land in Barangaroo Central. The schemes in the design competition for this building prompted a letter by then NSW President Joe Agius in May 2013, in which he criticised them for lacking any sense of context. He also dubbed as 'ludicrous and offensive' the proponent's claim that the new building would rival the Sydney Opera House in its contribution to the city.

The scheme that won the competition is the subject of a development application that has been slowly making its way through the approval process. Planning Minister Rob Stokes appointed a design assessment panel chaired by NSW Government Architect, Peter Poulet, to advise the Department of Planning & Environment on the design quality of the proposed casino building.

The department rejected the panel's key recommendations in its submission to the Planning Assessment Commission, which makes the final decision on the development application. The *Sydney Morning Herald* published my criticism of this action the following day.

Articles by key Fairfax journalists about the design review process were then published in the paper on two successive weekends.

I also received good coverage of my address to the Commission's public hearing, criticising the intrusion of the casino onto land that should be a public park.

Powerhouse Museum

I am sure all members will welcome the prospect of a major new museum to be built in Parramatta, as announced by Premier Baird. The cultural spend in Western Sydney is shockingly low considering the area comprises ten per cent of the total *Australian* population.

What is hard to fathom is the Premier's insistence that the new facility will be paid for by selling off the Ultimo building. Our architectural and Institute heritage is at stake here. In 1988, the adaptive reuse of the power station was awarded our highest honour, the Sulman Medal. The Sulmans are



our most highly prized buildings; we must not allow them to be trashed or removed without a fight. The building's listing on the Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012 and the Lord Mayor's public advocacy are of great assistance in the campaign to retain the building.

Powerhouse Museum, Sydney (project architect Lionel Glendenning, 1988)

Greater Sydney Commission

In the last issue, I welcomed the appointment of Institute member Rod Simpson as Environment Commissioner for the Greater Sydney Commission. Now I am equally pleased to greet the appointment of former NSW President Deborah Dearing as North District Commissioner.

Deborah has had wide experience in planning and urban design in both the private and public sectors. She has held senior executive roles with the NSW Department of Planning, Architectus and Stockland, and board positions with City West Housing, Livable Housing Australia and the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust. She sits on the Heritage Council of NSW and Sydney University's Henry Halloran Trust and was until recently executive director of place renewal for the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority.

Other district commissioners appointed were Edward Blakely, Maria Atkinson and Sean O'Toole.

GET & the Male Champions of Change

In March, our Male Champions of Change (see page 32) signed a pledge to put in place ten initiatives that will drive real gender equity change in their practices. This will have the flow-on effect of driving real change in gender equity in the profession. These men will be held up as leaders to actively lift women within architecture. They will actively seek opportunities for the women of our profession to rise to the highest power positions in their organisations. I look forward to working with the Champions this year as they implement their pledges.

Shaun Carter, NSW Chapter President

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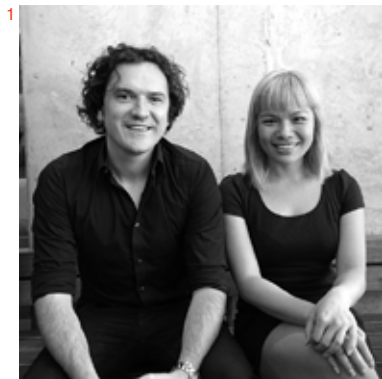
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DARCH

The votes are in! We would like to announce and congratulate our two newly elected DARCH co-chairs, Phuong Le from MPA Workplace and Joseph O'Meara from BVN Architects. Phuong and Joseph are both actively involved with DARCH and other industry associations. Phuong is currently also on the NSW Chapter Committee of the National Association of Women in Construction and Joseph is currently also a mentor in the Institute's mentoring program and a tutor in the Institute's PALS (Practice of Architecture Learning Series) program.

Phuong and Joseph replace outgoing co-chairs Ksenia Totoeva and Tim Hastwell. We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ksenia who was elected as National EmAGN President and who will continue on as a DARCH committee member. We would also like to farewell Tim Hastwell and thank him for his significant contribution to DARCH over the past five years. Best of luck Tim with your future endeavours.

The NSW DARCH committee have planned an exciting year ahead with several upcoming site tours, talks, competitions, awards and new events to encourage, support and inspire young members of the profession. For more information on upcoming events visit www.darch.com.au, follow us on social media, or email: darch@architecture.com.au

2016 DARCH Committee

Country Division

The annual conference will be held at the Mantra resort in Salt, near Kingscliff from 27-30 September. Scott Carpenter and Sarah Aldridge are this year's creative directors and the conference 'Onshore/Offshore, quite sure, not sure' will be exploring ideas of place and identity. The organisation of this event is being handled by the national events team for the first time and Country Division is trialling this new way of working as part of the restructure.

The awards program organisation is also being handled by the national awards team for the first time on a trial basis. Russell McFarland is the Jury Chair this year. The awards are now open and judging will be in July. Awards will be presented at the awards night at the conference in September.

The Country Division 'Architects Outback' program – see archoutback.com.au – has been receiving excellent press coverage, including a story on ABC Radio National called 'Architects in regional Australia'. This program received a grant of \$3,800 through our accumulated funds Special Projects grant program and has gone on to secure co-funding from the NSW Architects Board. This is an excellent example of a regional grassroots advocacy project initiated by members. It is promoting the use of architects in remote areas and generating work for other Country Division members. Congratulations to Cameron Anderson and team for an excellent initiative.

Sarah Aldridge, NSW Country Division Chair

Newcastle Division

The Newcastle Division Committee has reconvened following a period of uncertainty after the closure of the regional office. The Committee is working to recover lost ground, to hold events, to make the AIA relevant to the local profession and raise the awareness of architecture and design in the community.

Debra McKendry Hunt has unfortunately stepped down from the Chair for personal reasons and Peter Kemp has taken over. The Committee wishes to thank Debra for her outstanding effort in leading the Division over the past eighteen months, and in particular for the time she has committed to ensuring the Newcastle Division is fully supported by the NSW Chapter following the office closure in December 2015.

A very successful Newcastle Awards program was run at the beginning of the year with twenty-six entries and over ninety attendees at the awards presentation held on 17 March. In lieu of our regular joint University lecture series, SueAnne Ware from the School of Architecture and Built Environment brought a stimulating Practice Matters lecture series into the city to provide ongoing discourse on architecture and related fields.

Upcoming events include: Architecture on Show featuring some of the recent award-winning architects discussing their projects; PALS course from 18 June, and further CPD events and ArchiMEET later in the year. Chapter Council is also proposing to meet in Newcastle for their July meeting. This will

give members the opportunity to meet Councillors and for Councillors to learn more about the Newcastle Division.

Following much lobbying, a dedicated person was recently employed to look after the Newcastle and Country Divisions. Over the last three months, Kristen Carroll has been the new Manager, Member Engagement NSW. We support the Institute's proposals to restructure at national level and will be keen to develop active communication with the newly appointed CEO, Jennifer Cunich.

Peter Kemp, Acting Chairperson, Newcastle Division



Allen Jack+Cottier

Like many architecture firms, AJ+C has been very fortunate in enjoying a long, ongoing association with the NSW Government Architect's Office. We would like to think this history and exchange of knowledge and learnings, continues to be mutually beneficial – certainly from our perspective, that's unquestionably so.

It's impossible to measure the value and benefit to NSW of twenty-three Government Architects employed over the past 200 years to create a city for the future and a State to be proud of. From our first appointed Civil Architect Francis Greenway to our current incumbent Peter Poulet, each of these men (yes, sadly, we're still waiting for our first female appointee) has made an invaluable contribution to NSW. Each of them, to quote the latter, has endeavoured to provide 'a greater public good than just the sum of individual buildings'.

These contributions, again from those of our earliest representatives to the present day, have come despite often challenging environments, diminished roles and responsibilities. At all times, it's incumbent upon all of us as members of the profession to support this vital role for the people of NSW. We applaud the Government Architect's Office for their ongoing work and celebrate with them their proud bicentenary.

Bates Smart

Bates Smart recently won a City of Sydney design excellence competition for Site 18, Green Square – a joint venture between Mirvac Green Square and UrbanGrowth. The twenty-level residential building occupies a prominent location at the intersection of Green Square Plaza and Zetland Avenue.

The team's design approach steps the building form to open up the view corridor between the Library Plaza and the Drying Green, which are the two principal public open spaces at Green Square. The ground plane is treated as an extension of Neilson Square and will provide a high-quality pedestrian environment with retail on all frontages.





6 New associates at Cox: Belinda Lee, Sophie Coulier, Leesa Bennett, Sydney Ma, Chris Collignon and Shirin Adorbehi (absent: Claudio Aravena-Mesias)
7 Design render of Voyager project by Mirvac at Docklands, Melbourne
8 Learning Hub design render at Redlands school, Cremorne by Tanner Kibble Denton Architects

Cox

In continuing to position the practice for the future, Cox Richardson – the Sydney studio of Cox Architecture – has appointed Lachlan Abercrombie, Mark Davey, Bill Luders, Alex Small as Senior Associates and Shirin Adorbehi, Leesa Bennett, Chris Collignon, Sophie Coulier, Belinda Lee, Sydney Ma and Claudio Aravena-Mesias as Associates. We have broadened our associates creating a senior team that is collectively diverse in its contribution and strengthens the studio's ability to achieve design excellence.

In January 2015, Cox committed to participate in the CareerTrackers 10x10 initiative. CareerTrackers is a non-profit organisation that seeks to increase the participation of indigenous Australians in professional private sector employment. Cox in partnership with SJB has teamed up with nine other organisations to make a ten-year commitment to supporting indigenous university students. Cox currently employs interns under this program in architecture, planning and interior design in our Sydney, Brisbane and Perth studios.



Mirvac

Voyager is Mirvac Design's latest project at Yarra's Edge at the Docklands precinct in Melbourne. The forty-three storey project consists of 315 residences in a tower podium configuration. Voyager is the tallest tower to date at Yarra's Edge and will form a gateway marker when coming into the city over the Bolte Bridge from the north. The project will be the second tower to be constructed in the Wharf's Entrance precinct.

Organic in form, it differs from the previous stages and continues the curved, fluid language of Wharf's Entrance. The warm reflective glass facade of Voyager contrasts with the cooler tones used in Forge, the first tower in the precinct and currently under construction. This will give the building a distinct identity while creating a dialogue of geometries. The tower is necked-in at the first two levels creating a transition at the tower podium interface. The podium facade consists of a precast skin wrapping around the building, with the glass of the tower continuing through linking the two elements.

The upper level of the tower has been reserved for resident amenity consisting of a lounge, dining room, multipurpose room and sky garden. The outdoor landscaped space is fully enclosed by a seven-metre high glass screen, open to the sky with views north to the city. It will provide a protected environment for the enjoyment of residents and finishes the building with an iconic roof feature.

Tanner Kibble Denton Architects

Masterplan and stage one Learning Hub for Redlands Cremorne by Tanner Kibble Denton Architects was approved by the Department of Planning on 30 April. The design of the new four-level building includes collaborative learning spaces, a music centre and new landscaped podium, providing a significant increase to outdoor space for both passive recreation and learning.

TKD have also joined with EWB Connect to undertake the design, design development and construction phase services for a crisis and respite housing project in Chatswood. EWB Connect is the newest program from Engineers Without Borders, facilitating the provision of pro bono services to community organisations.

Supporting not-for-profit disability support association, The Housing Connection project aims to provide designs and approvals for approximately 120 sqm of additional flexible accommodation to an existing facility, and will house and meet the specific needs of people with a disability and/or their families in crisis or needing respite.

This project follows TKD's ongoing assistance to Make a Difference, a charity supporting children and young people living in challenging circumstances, to develop 'permanent camping' accommodation for their retreat programme.

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Transforming the NSW Government Architect’s Office



Government Architect Peter Poulet discusses the restructuring of the GAO and the future vision of his role

Shaun Carter **At least half the Institute members that talk to me are completely supportive of GAO moving away from its fee-for-service design role to a more strategic and design thinking role. The argument of the other fifty per cent of members is: ‘Look at the long history of the Government Architect prior to the change. The Government Architect’s Office is the gold standard in terms of design excellence, and what good strategic thinking can do to deliver the greatest value for government’.**

Peter Poulet Your members are right on both counts. We should not be in direct commercial competition with the private sector and we no longer are. In turn this has given us the opportunity to focus on the value adding of our strategic role: the advice and direction we give to Government and communities. Our intention is to engender design thinking in Government.

I also agree we have to set the gold standard, as you put it, and that is still our focus. If anything, buildings will be even better delivered collaboratively with an informed Government client.

Our strategic focus aims at delivering this. Our work with Government at the very early stages of projects through mechanisms such as Strategic Frameworks helps by defining parameters, expectations and ambitions for projects. This benefits

everyone, project clarity for our design partners as Government is able to clearly articulate what it requires and most importantly community understanding with no surprises for them.

The Minister has clearly spelt out what the Government needs us to focus on and that is to make people’s lives better through sustainable and inclusive growth. This task gives us opportunities to work across government to enable and support design quality. Specifically, this encompasses Design Led Planning, establishment of a Government Architect’s Design Excellence Program, enabling Green Infrastructure, stewardship of heritage and strategic projects.

Our role as people who bring forward the good ideas using design methods sees an expanded future for the role. I imagine this as a three-way partnership between us, industry and academia.

It seems like your aim is to bring university into that conversation with government and industry. How could you start bringing those three together?

My goal is to have an industry reference group, which will include those three pillars of our industry. We’ll start there and ask that group to start advising us how we go about it. I envisage academia even running PhDs with us, running

design competitions for students and running elective courses.

The cooperative model I’m putting forward between the government, or the Government Architect, the profession, industry and academia, is equally applicable if you include construction. Cooperative between the client, construction and the design profession. Why doesn’t it work there as well? It’s a question for all of us. The future of how we build is being invented now, new technologies, new materials, new manufacturing all leading to innovative outcomes.

If you can make that work and really get that three-dimensional triangle working at those four points – government, industry, academia, construction-procurement – it’s going to be wonderful, not only for architects that work for the public good. I’m on the record saying that you would need somewhere between 30 to 60 staff to be able to do all you need to, in terms of interacting with government agencies, but also to engage with academia and industry.

We’re starting with a core of twelve, but hopefully, with a project budget that will help us leverage the private sector to deliver as well. I don’t want to get too large, because a large organisation becomes a bureaucracy. I’d love to have a standing army of professionals out there who are prepared to act on our behalf. They’ll need to be skilful and know what our methods are, to deliver either a design conversation, design excellence adjudication, or write some early briefs.

Looking across all the other states with a Government Architect position, are you operating in a similar way to them or reinventing the role?

What’s consistent across all the jurisdictions is the advisory and review role. It’s probably most advanced in Victoria and South Australia, and in South Australia it’s legislated. Any state significant development gets referred to the Government Architect for design advice.

But their mechanisms are limited. The three- or four-dimensional model I described is new. That’s above what other states do. I think it’s a richer model which will deliver better industry connectivity, and better currency to the role, because of that connectivity. We can’t be backward or behind the times if on a daily basis we’re engaged with the profession on real projects.

Probably the most difficult question that I find that I get asked by members, is: how has this change occurred? Do you see yourself as an agent of change, or was this a direction the government was hell-bent on going on?

It was a combination of the two. When I first entered the office I involved the staff in a number of conversations around what our office should be. At that very point, everybody said, ‘Oh, we need to be valued by government, strategic, encouraging the industry, co-operative players in delivering better outcomes’, all those things. This pointed to a very different model to the historical one and it pointed to a model deploying contemporary means. This is what we have now achieved and are building.

Many people find change difficult, and a criticism of myself is that I didn’t recognise that clearly enough. So when I put forward the prospect of the change that has now occurred, it’s been seen by some as abandoning the old. I think I’ve actually cemented the role of the Government Architect into the future, and it’s the role that’s important. I’m not going to have the role forever, but I do want to make sure that the role has relevance and longevity. Many of the staff are supportive of that, even at their own expense, and that’s what I’m talking about, people in the public service understanding the greater good.

I think it’s important to (a) cement the role as being meaningful, and valued, and respected, and having longevity, (b) to choose those critical projects that are going to fit it as imperative that we exist, and (c) make sure we start getting across all of government, not just those people that are interested in us.

I don’t have a stylistic focus. I’ve got a process focus that involves good thinking, good ideas, innovation and the best people.

This is the best value when you deal with the economic, but also the social, cultural and environmental factors that need to be considered for public sector projects.

The environmental aspects I believe are back on the table. We shouldn’t underestimate the impact that construction and building have on our environmental performance as a society.

This plays into the heritage conversation argument. What are we knocking down? Do we have to knock anything down? Why aren’t we reusing more? Why aren’t we building for reuse? Why aren’t we building buildings that will allow for loose fit, long life? I think that is a conversation we need to have with our development industry and with our government.

There needs to be a serious value add proposition, as opposed to how it’s seen at the moment – as an impediment or a problem. I think it’s an amazing opportunity. That’s where we have expertise. We’ve got very good heritage architects.

The GAO 200 celebration gives you a great platform to celebrate what you’ve done, and how you are the cornerstone of building a community, a city and a nation, but equally the platform to have that voice to articulate the Government Architect position.

Minister Stokes is very supportive. He’s interested in design, and in design leading innovative thinking and solutions. We’re making sure that the transformation of the office is a success, and that it has a clear mandate.

A fantastic legacy for my tenure as Government Architect would be a cementing of the role in the mind of government as meaningful role that they’re going to actually nurture and support. The legacy that I want to leave is the advancement of the role for the next 200 years.

Peter Poulet was the inaugural State Architect of Tasmania from 2009 to 2012. He has served as the NSW Government Architect since 2012



1 Charles Pickett, curator; Jennifer Blunden, creative producer of exhibitions, State Library of NSW; Matthew Devine, curatorial team & GAO liaison. Photo: Annie Tennant. Exhibition photos: courtesy State Library of NSW

Imagine a City

200 years of public architecture in NSW

There was a sense of irony in attending the opening night of *Imagine a City: 200 years of public architecture in NSW* at the State Library of New South Wales. At the same time as celebrating this achievement, the Government Architect’s Office (GAO) was transitioning from a design and construct role to one of strategic design advice only. The office was downsizing from eighty to a core of twelve and had moved into the Department of Planning. They would no longer be designing and constructing buildings – yet here we were celebrating 200 years of built work. The exhibition was part of a yearlong program called GAO200+, commemorating the extraordinary built achievements of the GAO, one of the oldest architectural practices in the world. It featured a rich and rarely seen collection of original drawings,



photographs, plans, paintings and models from both historic and contemporary times. It was on display at the State Library from 20 February until 8 May 2016 and was curated by Dr Charles Pickett, Matthew Devine and Margot Riley. As a method for exploring the body of work, the exhibition was structured under a series of



themes: future, law and order, learning, city, landmarks and culture. A timeline celebrated each of the twenty-three Government Architects, from colonial Francis Greenway to today’s GA Peter Poulet, referencing notable works completed under their stewardship. Within clear constraints, it was an excellent exhibition, but considering the breadth and quality of work completed, it was far too small to give due credit to the portfolio. Despite Peter Poulet’s statement in the official brochure: ‘buildings can be fearless, buildings can be of their time and buildings can be controversial’, it was a very safe exhibition with few examples of fearlessness or controversy on display. A short video on how Ian Thompson brought Dante Bini to Sydney and introduced fourteen of Bini’s shells to the schools program is fascinating. As was Michael Dysart’s simple but revolutionary concept known as the ‘doughnut plan’, to wrap school classrooms around a central court. The exhibition needed to show us more of this type of research and experimentation. It is hoped that a detailed monograph will be assembled to complement the exhibition, as the booklet provided as a memento was not nearly detailed enough.

Some history
When Governor Macquarie appointed Francis Greenway (1816–22) Civil Architect in 1816 – effectively commencing the 200-year tradition of the Government Architect – there was a clear need for the role, as a reliable private alternative did not really exist. (Notwithstanding that Greenway had set up private practice prior to his appointment and continued to maintain his practice whilst in the role of Civil Architect). The position was a stop-start affair to begin with. Standish Lawrence Harris (1822–24) and George Cookney (1825–26), the second and third Colonial Architects (as they became named), did very little and the role was then abandoned from 1826 until Ambrose Hallen (1832–35) was appointed in 1832. At the time the Board of Works believed the position was unnecessary as private architects could be commissioned as the need arose, an argument that has returned continuously, often strongly lobbied by private practice.¹

After Greenway, Mortimer Lewis (1835–49) and Edmund Blacket (1849–54) stand out amongst the early Colonial Architects. Blacket had a successful private practice before being appointed and ‘advocated the design of public buildings by competition among private architects’.² During his time, he was responsible for few public buildings and returned to private practice to complete his seminal buildings at the University of Sydney. During the time of Blacket’s successor, William Weaver (1854–56), a public inquiry was conducted that led to major reforms of the office due to apparent corruption at many levels. More than any other James Barnet (1862–90) has left a significant built legacy across the whole of NSW. During his twenty-eight years in the position, he built up the office from a staff of seventeen to sixty-four by the time he left. The work was not just prolific, but it symbolised a period of confidence and economic boom and marked the graduation of Sydney from Georgian settlement to Victorian city. Barnet and his successor, Walter Liberty Vernon (1890–1911) occupied the role for nearly fifty years between them. This period represents one of the two golden periods of the office; the other being the 1950s to 70s. Despite Barnet’s apparent success, and in part because of the extraordinary office output, there were constant reviews of the office performance and pressure from the competition lobby for public buildings to be procured through design competitions amongst private architects. At the end of Barnet’s tenure, the government had decided again to abolish the position of the Colonial Architect’s Branch. This could easily have been when the role was abandoned for good, as was happening in the other Australian states at the time as many believed the need for the office had run its course. Abolition lasted little over a month before Vernon was appointed Government Architect, the first time this term was used. His brief was to oversee a new competition policy for public buildings that only lasted two competitions. When William Lyne, Secretary of Public Works, intervened in the competition for a new insane asylum near Goulburn by supporting an entry by architect Kirkpatrick (a close friend) over the winning scheme by Sulman and Power, a scandal followed that meant abandonment of the competition policy. This effectively cemented the role of the Government Architect for the next 100 years. The second golden period commenced under Cobden Parkes (1935–58) and his senior design architect Harry Rembert. Rembert was influential in introducing the ideas of Modernism into the office. After Parkes, Ted Farmer (1958–73) and Rembert reintroduced Barnet’s Room System, where architects specialised in particular types of design. The office grew in size and importance, reaching 1300 staff spread across Sydney and regional areas by the time Peter Webber (1973–74) took over. The office became multi-disciplined, with the integration of engineering, landscape architecture, urban design and heritage. →



2 Post Office and Courthouse, Bathurst (James Barnet, 1880)
 3 Conservatorium of Music, Sydney (Francis Greenway, 1821; George McRae, 1915)
 4 Model of Turramurra (Ku-ring-gai) High School (Michael Dysart, c 1964). Photo: Max Dupain. © Courtesy Max Dupain & Associates. Photos 2–4: courtesy State Library of NSW
 5 Bini Shell, Narrabeen North Public School (Dante Bini, 1975)



The GAO, in particular the Design Room, was the place to be for young and talented graduates, and traineeships were very competitively sought. By the late 1960s there were 1500 applications for twelve positions. The Design Room was described as an ‘atelier in the true European sense of the word’.³ Peter Webber, Ken Woolley, Michael Dysart and Peter Hall were the initial ‘Young Turks’ of the 1950s, and many others followed through the 60s and 70s, with some moving on to significant careers in the private sector. It was during this period that the longstanding tradition of attributing design only to the Government Architect was relaxed and the project design architect was allowed to be identified. This was important in raising the profile of young architects within the office and assisted them in establishing their private practices.

When architects reminisce on the good old days of the GAO, it is probably this period that they are thinking of. The office was producing some of the most experimental work in the country and since 1962, when it first started entering in the RAIA Awards, it has received more Sulman medals than any other practice. The reputation of the office was the envy of the world, and combined with the private work of the Sydney School in the 60s, it was a formative period for Sydney’s architecture.

By 1988 when Lindsay Kelly (1988–95) was appointed, it was an era of restraint with the newly elected Liberal Greiner Government. Under the push for economic rationalism, it was assumed that the private sector could always do better. This really represents the beginning of the end for the GAO as we know it. Combined with the Fee for Service approach, the office transitioned into a semi-commercial practice, competing with private firms for public work. This was never going to be sustainable in the long term, nor was it ideologically sound.

What is clear from the above potted history is that the role of the Government Architect has continually adapted over the 200 years of its existence. Various public building typologies have

moved in and out of its brief. There have been consistent reviews over the quality of work, management practices, governance and even the need for its existence. It has not been immune from corruption and incompetence. And, there have been constant calls for public buildings to be procured through the private sector. What has been consistent is that it has had a strategic advisory role to government while also being a functioning architectural practice.

Legacy

There is concern that much corporate knowledge will be lost in the restructure of GAO. Whilst some may argue that it will just be redistributed amongst the private sector, it is not quite the same thing. A heritage architect working in a commercial practice and one working in a government office perform very different roles.

Putting aside the real emotional wrench and tragedy of staff being retrenched – what does it mean to make this restructure? Restructures happen across government departments and the commercial sector on a regular basis and for a range of reasons. If the reasons are sound, and assuming that those retrenched are treated fairly, then restructure should not be opposed simply because there is an emotive response to keep doing things the way they have always been done. The transition from a ‘doing’ office to an advisory role was set in train when the Liberal Greiner government took power; it has just taken twenty-eight years for the process to be completed under the latest Liberal government.

Just to remind us of the norm, the exhibition booklet notes, ‘in western nations government buildings are normally the work of private architects selected through competition, tender or patronage’. However Peter Reynolds in his PhD thesis of 1972 on the evolution of the Government Architect’s Branch from 1788 to 1911, writes of the ‘contributive importance of the Branch to Australian Architecture and its singular uniqueness in world architecture’.

‘Is there a need for a GAO that designs, documents and oversees work? Arguing that there is no longer a need is perhaps akin to saying that there is no need for the ABC to make TV or radio, as perfectly good programs are made by the commercial media’

In an interview with Richard Johnson included in the exhibition he says, ‘to say that private enterprise can do what government can do ... I don’t think they can entirely’. Johnson uses the example of his own office, JPW, where unprofitable public work is in effect paid for by the profitable commercial projects.

The real question remains: is there a need for a GAO that designs, documents and oversees work? Looking beyond the GAO, there are clear examples of government-funded work that has and always should be wholly managed within the public sector. Few would suggest that our police or military forces should be contracted out and replaced by private militias and mercenaries. There are also examples where we accept that the government has a part to play in partnership with the private sector, such as healthcare, where public and private hospitals complete the system.

Arguing that there is no longer a need for a GAO producing work is perhaps akin to saying that there is no need for the ABC to make TV or radio, as perfectly good programs are made by the commercial media – and that is a debate that is currently being pushed by parts of the conservative right.

How often have programs commenced on the ABC, only to be picked up by the commercial stations later on? How much poorer would our cultural landscape be if the ABC and SBS were to be reduced to an advisory role?

There is a strong argument based on the historical record to suggest that the enhanced role of the GAO in NSW gave it the ability to influence and

advance architectural practice as a whole, as often it would lead the discourse, being in the rarified position of being answerable for the results of its output, not just the commercial viability.

Conclusion

Imagine a City was important for all who care about public architecture. Not just as a history lesson, but for understanding the power of continuity in design excellence and for thinking about what the current changes to the GAO mean for this legacy.

One wonders what is the level of continuity between that historical legacy and the GAO’s new role. Will the office have the same level of credibility when it is no longer setting the example through design and construction?

I predict that the shift away from a ‘doing’ office to a strategic role will be temporary. At some time in the future, either through a change of government or constant complaints from government agencies that the private sector does not understand the specialised nature of what is needed – the argument will resurface that some work is best handled by the public sector. The GAO will then re-emerge as a specialised office with a targeted role on specific projects, whilst maintaining its strategic advisory role. This is exactly what happened in the 1890s, and probably this cycle will continue as long as we continue to build public buildings in NSW.

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Notes

- 1 Government Architect’s Office Preliminary Historical Outline – 19 February 2015, p 1
- 2 Ibid, p 10
- 3 Russell Jack, ‘The Development of the Government Architect’s Branch During the Time of EH Farmer’, Thesis for Diploma of Architecture, UNSW, Vol 1, p 10

Reflections on the GAO

Four emeritus GAs outline their major initiatives and achievements during their respective terms in office. Many of the projects were architectural awards winners, as can be seen in the overall summary of the achievements of the Government Architect’s Branch.



Peter Webber (1973–74)

After twenty years in the GAO designing buildings and master planning sites for an exciting range of projects, from hospitals and schools to major public buildings, zoos and universities, I was privileged to serve for just under one year in 1974 as NSW Government Architect. It was a seamless transition working closely with the same colleagues, but there were serious challenges to be faced in reorganising the office of almost 800 staff, including architects, engineers and administrative assistants. Many of the most talented names in the profession were designing remarkable projects in the office. We already were working in Ken Woolley’s urbane State Office Block, Andrew Andersons was applying his creative skills to the Art Gallery of NSW and Macquarie Street public buildings, Don Coleman developing world leading projects at Taronga Zoo, and many other outstanding architects were contributing superb and often prize-winning projects.

A major initiative was the introduction of long-overdue reforms to ensure coordination of design and construction phases of every project by forming integrated teams in each of the major specialist groups, specifically those dealing with schools, health buildings, tertiary education universities and colleges, as well as special projects including the Art Gallery, State Library and Parliament House. Resources for landscape and interior design were reinforced, and concurrently

we established a Branch Board to debate issues and move to a more democratic form of management. Fascinatingly, in retrospect, it was an era when computer graphics technology was just emerging as a serious tool, and new forms of contractual arrangements for building construction were being tested in the industry as alternatives to the typical competitive tender process based on exhaustive and comprehensive ‘working drawings’ and specifications. The industry and the office were changing dramatically. The design of possibly the largest-ever building project in Australia was beginning – Westmead Teaching Hospital. I worked with Ross Bonthorne to organise the planning, and Ross then designed a scheme for this vast project which was innovative, highly successful, and delivered in good time to serve the rapidly growing needs of Western Sydney. After this challenging year, I was invited to the new role of Commissioner in the newly established Planning and Environment Commission. As a planner with commitment to urban design issues I moved on with very mixed emotions, but as compensation at least continued a close association with key staff of the GAO on a range of projects, collaborating on forward planning for key projects such as Circular Quay East, Darling Harbour, Observatory Hill and the city markets.

Lindsay Kelly (1988–95)

In the early 1980s, governments around the world were ‘commercialising’ government departments and ‘privatising’ government services where equivalent services were available through the private sector. The Government Architect’s Office was given a short exemption while it completed a large number of important projects leading through to the Australian Bicentennial Celebrations in 1988.

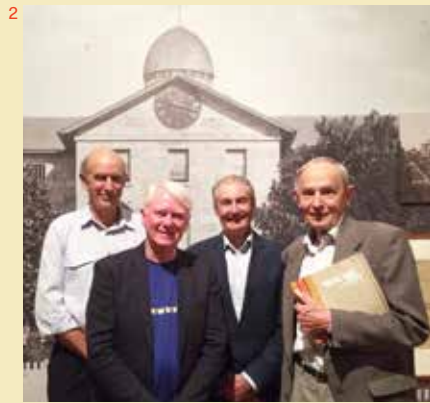
The initial steps in the privatisation of the Government Architect’s Office saw some architects, under a ‘client service’ banner, tasked with helping their previous client departments and agencies engage private architectural firms, whilst other architects formed a commercial design group, and others left to join private architectural firms. The Government Architect’s Office retained an advisory role to the Premier and Government Ministers on major State assets, such as the Sydney Opera House through to the State-owned heritage buildings, and on major projects such as the Governor Phillip Tower, Governor Macquarie Tower and the Museum of Sydney, the Sydney Olympic Games, and the Darling Harbour development. The office also carried out a range of feasibility studies for the Government, such as removing the Cahill Expressway from above Circular Quay.

My nomination for a favourite project would be the Sydney Sandstone Restoration Program, managed by the Heritage Group of the State Projects, which aimed to both conserve Sydney’s sandstone heritage and maintain the traditional craft of stonemasonry. This program was submitted in 1993 for the National Lachlan Macquarie Award for Conservation and the state award for Conservation– the Greenway Award.

Chris Johnson (1995–2005)

I became Government Architect in 1995 shortly after a change of government to the Labor Party. The role had become less public so I set out building connections to ministers and particularly to the Premier Bob Carr. I was helped dramatically by the future Olympic Games to be held in Sydney in 2000 and through David Richmond, the head of the Olympic Coordination Authority, we got the Government Architect lifted into ensuring design quality across the Olympic facilities. Legislation also put the role onto the Central Sydney Planning Committee and the Heritage Council and a chairing role on a series of design review panels followed.

The Premier then asked me to take a leadership role with the design quality of residential flats which led to SEPP 65. With the confidence of the support of the Premier and the Minister, I then researched and wrote a history of the Government Architect’s Office in a book called Shaping Sydney – Public Architecture and Civic Decorum (launched by the Premier) and a series of other books: Greening Cities; Olympic Projects, and Homes Dot Com, which



helped position the advocacy role. We used the Year of the Built Environment in 2004 as a framework to publish more and present an exhibition of Houses of the Future on the Opera House forecourt with massive publicity and visits.

We designed the Premier’s favourite project, the Conservatorium of Music (he kept the model in his office for a year), managed heritage tensions at the Walsh Bay redevelopment, lifted internal design quality by appointing Lindsay and Kerry Clare as design directors and established an Aboriginal design group called Merrima who designed some amazing lizard- and fish-like buildings at Bathurst and Wilcannia (the Googar Creative Work Centre at Bathurst gaol and the Wilcannia Health Service).

After 200 years of colonial architecture, it was very important to establish an indigenous architectural practice within the Government Architect’s Office. As Government Architect, I used the 5P approach to success: Profile, Promote, Publish, Partnership and Product.

Peter Mould (2006–12)

At a time of political volatility – with changing Premiers and government restructures – the office remained stable. I sought to align it with other parts of government to establish projects together rather than reactively compete for them and reframed the professional roles. On a number of projects we worked in partnership with other architectural firms.

We advocated an environmental agenda and targeted strategic initiatives. This approach was most successful under Premier Iemma, who with thoughts of selling the electricity grid had our office prepare a range of public projects across the State. Although these died with his departure, they helped strengthen relationships with other agencies to develop urban projects, such as the Walsh Bay Cultural Precinct and Crown Street Mall, Wollongong.

Other important initiatives did not survive the change of Government in 2011; however, the office was strong enough to adjust with good strategic relationships, healthy finances and an energised workforce. A restructuring seemed inevitable.



- 1 Anzac Memorial Centenary Project, Sydney, for completion in 2018. Concept design GAO; design development & documentation Johnson Pilton Walker. Rendering: JPW
- 2 The Ponds Primary & High School (project architect Julia Carras, 2015)
- 3 Point Clare Public School (project architects David Burdon and Ray Kwok, 2016). Rendering: Christian Reyes
- 4 Cullunghutti Aboriginal Family and Childcare Centre, Nowra (project architect David Burdon, 2014). Photo: Brett Boardman
- 5 National Parks and Wildlife Service Office Building, Narooma (project architect Angus Bell, 2008)
- 6 Yurong public amenities, Royal Botanic Garden and The Domain (project architect Kit Ku, 2013)
- 7 Newtown Railway Station, masterplan and concept development (project architect Helen Lochhead; detailed design development and documentation: Caldis Cook Group, 2012). Photo: Ross Thornton
- 8 Alfred, Pitt, Dalley and George Streets site urban design study, Sydney (project architects Helen Lochhead & Jesse McNicol, 2009)



GAO 1816–2016

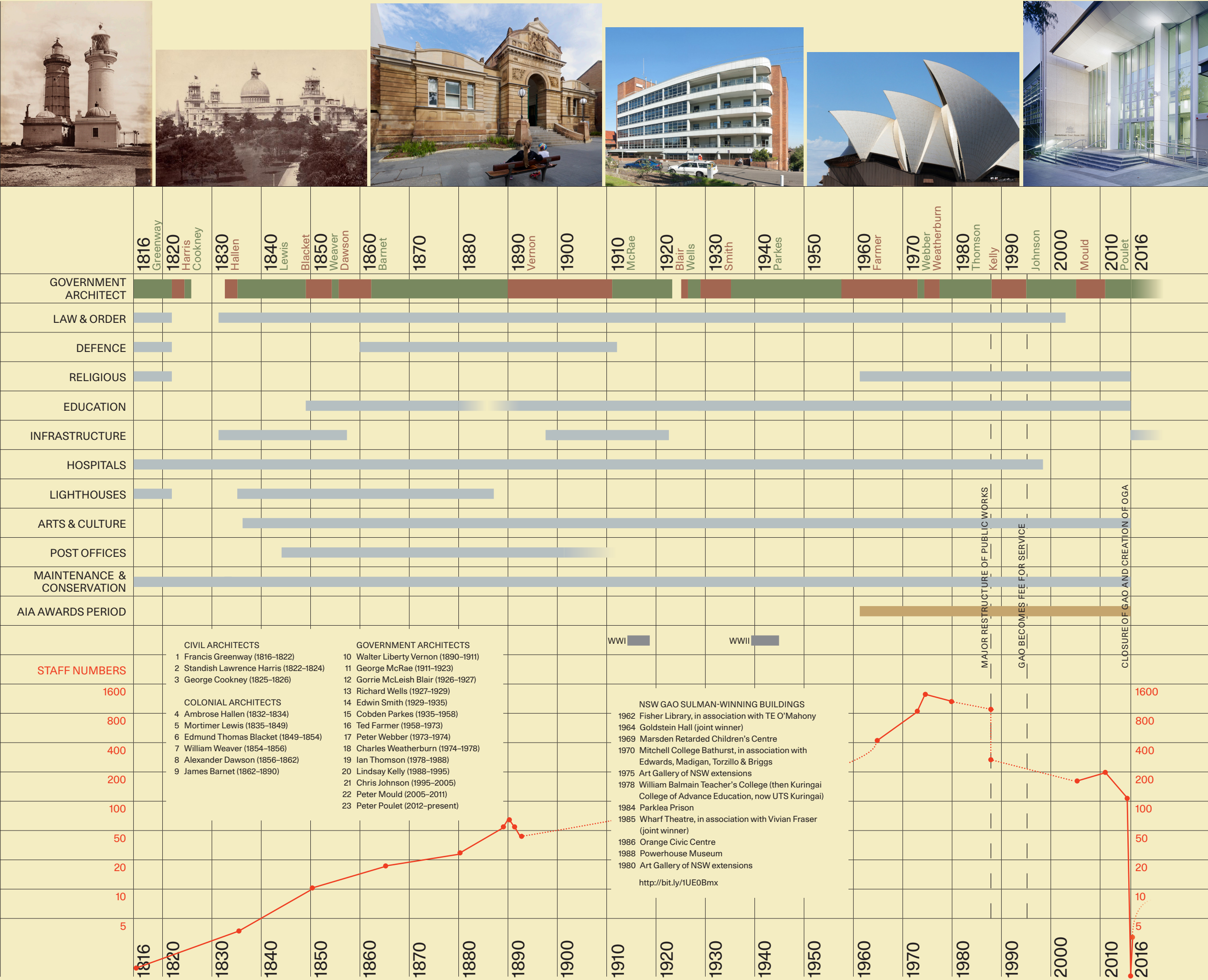
Since the appointment of Francis Greenway as acting Civil Architect and Assistant to the Engineer, in March 1816, there has always been a government-appointed architect in NSW, acting under a range of titles – Civil Architect, Colonial Architect and Government Architect. This range of titles does not reflect an essentially unchanging role over the last 200 years: the design, management and providing direction to the government in terms of architecture, building, infrastructure and planning.

And other than the first few Government Architects, there has always been a team of support staff, across a wide range of building environment disciplines, all of whom have facilitated the vision of their leader, and were often as skilled. Staff numbers have varied over the years, fluctuating with demand, world events and political ideology. Similarly, the works of the office have varied over the last 200 years, in response to similar conditions.

A major change in the focus of the 23rd Government Architect was announced in mid-2015 and implemented in 2016. This change involved the closure of the existing Government Architect’s Office of 120 staff (within NSW Public Works, within the Department of Finance, Services & Innovation) and the cessation of the design and management of buildings and places. A much smaller Office of the Government Architect (within the Department of Planning) has been created, focusing on the design quality of the built environment and the public domain, by providing key strategic and independent advice for the future of our state.

Matthew Devine is an architect and heritage specialist at the NSW Government Architect's Office. He was also co-curator of the *Imagine a City* exhibition at the State Library of NSW

Old and new Macquarie Lighthouses, Sydney (Francis Greenway, 1818 and James Barnet, 1883). Photo: Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales
The Garden Palace, Sydney (James Barnet, 1880)
Redfern Courthouse (Walter Liberty Vernon, 1898). Photo: Michael Nicholson
Balmain Hospital, Sydney (GA Cobden Parkes, 1944. Photo: AV Services, RPA Hospital)
Sydney Opera House (Jørn Utzon and Hall, Todd & Littlemore in conjunction with GA Ted Farmer, 1973). Photo: OZinOH
Bankstown Courthouse (project architect William Phelps, 2006)



Setting the record straight

At the end of 1958, I was interviewed by Government Architect Cobden Parkes for a traineeship with the Public Works department. Nearly thirty years later, in 1988 I was selected to be the new Government Architect but resigned before assuming that office. In the intervening period I saw four GAs come and go witnessing great achievements as well as imminent decline. For the second half of this period, I enjoyed the most fulfilling projects as well as the privilege of close contact with politicians and decision-makers, especially as Principal Architect and Assistant Government Architect during the time of the Wran government.



The splendidly presented exhibition at the State Library of NSW, *Imagine a City*, had little to say about this period and conveyed no particular impression of the achievement of the office in the 1970s and 1980s or the role of the titular Government Architect. By the end of the 1960s there had been a generational change in the office. As students they were in awe of the likes of Ken Woolley, Michael Dysart and Peter Hall, but by this time they had moved on to

private practice and the Government Architect's Branch was enjoying the fruits of the traineeship programme. Quite a few had obtained master's degrees from prestigious Ivy League universities and experience in offices in the UK, creating a vibrant culture fed by great job opportunities.

Personally, the Sulman Award-winning success of the 1972 Captain Cook wing at the Art Gallery of

NSW and the commencement of the NSW Parliament House project put me in contact with the ministers of works and later the premiers of the day creating the unique opportunities that arise out of personal relationships. It became clear to me that politicians relish advice that leads to results which enhance their government's standing. Many key moments have never been documented leading to the limitations evident in exhibitions based solely on archival material.

In the mid-1970s, the NSW Parliament House project put me into close contact with Leon Punch, the Country Party Minister of Public Works. Notwithstanding his rough and ready 'country' demeanour, Leon and his wife were interested in contemporary art and design and were happy to support a generous arts budget for the major Parliament House addition, setting up a works of art committee as well as an all-party Upper and Lower House building committee to oversight the design and construction of the building.

During this time, I developed close relationships with Evan Williams, Director of the Ministry of the Arts, leading to a works programme to meet the needs of the states' cultural facilities that the Wran government (elected in 1976) was happy to adopt. Virtually everything in this report was built by the end of the Wran decade in office.

The change of government was not lacking in moments of drama. I particularly remember Minister Jack Ferguson addressing the senior 100 or so staff with the halting phrase 'youse are the tools of the Country Party!' Remarkable within days a tangible sense of responsibility and loyalty developed to the Minister, who as an ex-bricklayer, could literally lay foundations stones applying the mortar bedding with a silver-plated trowel.

My family had come to Australia as refugees from the communist takeover in Latvia during WWII and were nothing if not right wing in their politics. However, Latvians were also heavily involved in the 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions. Fergusson somehow found out that I was born in Latvia and told me that he was aware of Lenin having a bodyguard contingent formed by Latvian riflemen. This led to the Minister calling me 'comrade', inviting me to go on trips away with him and Freddy Smidt, his private adviser, and giving me a reason to brush up on revolutionary history. Jack was also Deputy Premier and had delivered

the left faction votes that had made Wran the Leader of the Opposition and ultimately Premier. Jack was unwavering in his loyalty to the Premier and enjoyed a close but no uncritical relationship with him. He would often say, 'the problem with Neville is that he's capable of saying anything'.

Parliament House and the Arts programme had brought me into contact with the Premier, but it was the refurbishment of the Premier's suite in the now-demolished State Office block that clinched the relationship. The suite was a unique set of rooms, designed by Ken Woolley, consisting of striated terrazzo walls made with white marble chips with a ceiling of NSW cedar joists suspended in a brass armature. Commissioned under Premier Askin, the rooms were furnished with the standard State Office Block furniture range dominated by a gigantic free-standing Chubb safe. The GAB designed a Premier's suite resplendent with antique cedar desks and chairs and an elegant informal seating area of B&B ITALIA furniture.

Wran was delighted with the outcome and I felt I had the confidence of the Minister and Premier.

'The new minister called me up to his office and congratulated me on my appointment as Government Architect and said: "Your job is to sack half the staff in the first two years of our term and the balance by the end of our four-year term. However, you'll be alright mate, as we'll need someone to write the briefs and hire the consultants"'

This led to an incredible diversity of projects and events. As far as Wran was concerned, I was the Government Architect. I was invited to present important projects to the policy and priorities committee of Cabinet, usually the only public servant present apart from the secretary of the Premier's department.

Besides developing major architectural projects with the Special Projects team such as additions to Parliament House, the State Library, the Australian Museum, the Ryde Food School, I wrote the brief and called bids for the Sydney Entertainment Centre, carried out a detailed feasibility study for the Olympics to the held in Sydney, advised on the brief for Convention and Exhibition facilities in Sydney and was heavily involved in the procurement of Darling Harbour. Less conventional activities included a study commissioned by Wran to place projects such as the Entertainment Centre and the Powerhouse Museum in the path of projected DMR freeways, as this was the only way that Wran felt they could be stopped.

Perhaps even more important was attending a dawn meeting at which the then head of the Maritime Services Board tried to persuade the Premier and Minister that Walsh Bay should be demolished and turned into landfill container wharves in place of the Pier 4/5 Sydney Theatre project. The MSB head was told to 'get fucked' by the Premier and sacked shortly afterwards.

In the mid-1980s, I was appointed to the position of Assistant Government Architect, Bicentennial Projects. This included the extensive improvements to Circular Quay, including the forecourt and lower concourse to the Sydney Opera House, the improvements to Macquarie Street, including the restoration of historic buildings along its length, the building of the Riverside Theatres in

Parramatta as well as the design and procurement of decorations for the Bicentennial celebrations.

A consortium of architects, including winners of Institute of Architects' Quay Ideas Competition, was set up for Circular Quay. An invited competition was held for the Federation Pavilion at Centennial Park and was won by Alec Tzannes. Tenders were called for the Sydney Opera House carpark and I was involved with development bids for the Park Hyatt Hotel, as well as unrealised earlier schemes at Walsh Bay and Woolloomooloo Finger Wharf.

There were no scandals or significant cost or time overruns with any of these projects and the government of the day was happy with the services provided by the GAB. Peter Webber had reorganised the branch as series of largely autonomous client-oriented sections. In Special Projects, I felt it was important to deal with all aspects of architecture from brief compilation to construction completion to fully develop architectural skills. There was always a major project under documentation in-house, as well as relationships with private firms at many levels.

Imagine a City assigned many of my projects to various Government Architects. At no time did Ted Farmer discuss anything or attend any meeting to do with the Captain Cook Wing at the Art Gallery of NSW. Peter Webber had left the GAB by the time Parliament House and the Ryde School were serious projects. Charles Weatherburn certainly helped with good advice on the procurement of complex jobs such as Parliament House. Ian Thomson had no contact, whatsoever, with the numerous Bicentennial projects listed, keeping busy with the administrative responsibilities of a large organisation. The 1988 wing of AGNSW was practically complete by the time Lindsay Kelly became Government Architect. It's good to set the record straight!

All this came to an end with the election of the Greiner government. The new minister, the avuncular Wal Murray called me up to his office and congratulated me on my appointment as Government Architect and said: 'Your job is to sack half the staff in the first two years of our term and the balance by the end of our four-year term. However, you'll be alright mate, as we'll need someone to write the briefs and hire the consultants.' A week later, I had another meeting in which the Minister said, 'They tell me you've been seen around the National Trust – I'd make myself a bit scarce around there!'

My appointment was reported in a quarter column on page eight of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. My resignation rated three columns on page three!

It's taken twenty-eight years for Wal Murray's vision to be realised. It is poignant and ironic that *Imagine a City* coincided with the end of the Government Architect's Office.

Andrew Andersons worked within the Government Architect's Branch from 1958 to 1988 and was appointed Assistant Government Architect in 1984. Formerly principal director of PTW Architects, he is now a freelance consultant

Art Gallery of NSW – Captain Cook Bicentennial Project extensions (project architect Andrew Andersons, 1972). Photo: Max Dupain, © Max Dupain & Associates. Courtesy Eric Sierins

The evolution of the role of the Government Architect's Office, from an architectural practice providing professional design services, to the role of an advisor to government advocating for high quality design, has been a work in progress for quite some time. The focus of my term at the Government Architect's Office (GAO) under two Government Architects, Peter Mould and later Peter Poulet, was to broaden the scope of our work to enhance our value proposition to government.

This required a shift in the practice paradigm to purposefully engage in upfront project framing and more strategic projects, as well as design research and demonstration projects that put policy into practice. Alongside this recalibration of our role, GAO continued to develop the advisory role providing independent advice and championing design excellence through participation in design review panels, competition juries and procurement.

This evolution of the practice was achieved through various means and was enabled by the range of the practitioners in this large multidisciplinary office that included not only architects but also a diversity of other built environment professionals including urban and landscape designers, heritage specialists and engineers. While the overt objective of the

practice was to serve government clients, the underlying modus operandi of the office has been to work to a larger agenda: the public interest. This has often required balancing the competing tensions of immediate political imperatives, while keeping the bigger picture and long-term aspirations clearly in sight.

A range of projects and initiatives over this period, set new benchmarks many winning recognition through industry awards and broader implementation. Here are some notable examples.

Partnering with state and local government clients in the early phases of project conception enabled them to be framed differently and possibilities explored that delivered more than imagined. *Design Parramatta* is a good example.

GAO worked with Parramatta City Council to develop this initiative. It was modelled on the City of Sydney's *Sydney Spaces* initiative conceived in the lead up to the 2000 Olympics to stimulate city-wide discourse and successfully seeded a \$100 million public improvements program. At Parramatta, working with limited resources and a lack of political buy-in, we were able to harness the design expertise of a wide range of design professionals through a global call for design concepts and demonstrate the benefits of these ideas to the Council.

The value of this project is manifold, and the ability of designers to conceptualise compelling ideas that bring strategies and policies to life cannot be underestimated. *Design Parramatta* engaged both the design and broader community, and secured unanimous endorsement from council that led to the rollout of a range of projects including Parramatta Square, Church Street Mall renewal, the Riverfront and the Parramatta Green Grid.

Another was Walsh Bay Arts Precinct. A project we conceptualised with Arts NSW in 2012, acknowledged the opportunity of working with multiple strategies and stakeholders to develop a proposal that delivered much more than the original project scope. We expanded our brief for an internal fit out of Pier 2/3 into a vibrant new arts precinct framing a new water square, outdoor amphitheatre and a green spine connecting Dawes Point to the new headland park at Barangaroo. This transformed an Arts project into an urban proposition with broader benefits to both Sydney-siders and the visitor economy. This leveraging was recognised by Infrastructure NSW who funded the first stage now underway.

Policy and design are often uncomfortable bed partners. Demonstrating policy through design strategies and propositions that put policy into practice bring the two together.

Published in 2009, *ESD* was conceived as both an educational publication as well as an opportunity to showcase the capabilities of the office. It demonstrated to government stakeholders how ecologically sustainable development principles embodied in the diverse range of GAO projects not only met government's environmental targets but embodied a range of additional benefits not foreseen by clients, including significant recurrent costs savings. Projects profiled programs such as statewide water saving and energy management programs through to buildings, adaptive reuse projects and precinct-wide water management strategies embedded in the public domain, such as Victoria Park at Zetland, a multiple award winning project.

Green initiatives have borne plenty of fruit. In conjunction with the Department of Environment and Climate Change (now the Office of Environment & Heritage), planning and local government in Western Sydney, we developed a kit-of-parts approach to tackle heat island impacts in Western Sydney. A range of strategies via place-based proposals in Liverpool and Penrith demonstrated the benefits of urban greening. This project led to the development of the award-winning *Greencover technical guidelines*. To date, the most far-reaching green initiative of GAO is the *Sydney Green Grid*.

Acknowledging the pressure of Sydney's future growth, the community's resistance to change and building on the Parramatta Pilot, our office proposed an open space strategy to underpin the Metro strategy that connects the dots – the existing green spaces, waterways, town centres and neighbourhoods – to create an interconnected system that contributes to the environment and quality of life of the city. This is now being implemented through the subregional plans and by multiple agencies.

Research by design has also been important. By far the most work has been done in the educational space. Schools have long been the mainstay of the office however in recent years the office was commissioned to research new models for teaching and learning for the Association for Learning Environments (formerly CEFPI), the NSW Department of Education and FACS.

Design guidelines for flexible learning spaces have been developed as well as new school models. These include high-rise schools such as Arthur Philip High School at Parramatta, schools as community hubs that share facilities and the Aboriginal Family Centres in rural NSW, which combine preschools and community health facilities.

Housing has now come into focus as the office moves into a more pivotal advisory role to planning, housing and urban growth.

Our involvement in projects of strategic significance over the last few years has been key to positioning the future role of the Government Architect as a central player in large-scale urban renewal projects.

Notable examples I led include the structure planning for the Bays Precinct and the Sydney Harbour Urban Design Framework that established the groundwork for the inner harbour planning currently underway and the Redfern-Waterloo Built Environment Plan (BEP) urban design framework, central to the renewal strategy for this corridor.

There are many other examples of note, however, the Government Architect's Office has morphed considerably in recent years in response to the changing political landscape. The role will continue to evolve and be political while it challenges government and the private sector to do better in the interests of a higher quality built environment. Let us all be sure that the role has the support it deserves to advocate for the public interest, quality design and the livability of our cities for a long time to come.

Professor Helen Lochhead is Dean, UNSW Built Environment and former Deputy NSW Government Architect

A shift in practice paradigm

1 Walsh Bay Arts Precinct masterplan conceptualised by the GAO with Arts NSW in 2012, showing a green spine connecting Dawes Point to the new headland park at Barangaroo
2 Conceptual rendering of a new arts precinct framing a water square and outdoor amphitheatre at Pier 2/3, Walsh Bay



The time has come

For some, this will be a time long overdue and for others a time to despair. Above all, however, it is a time to reflect on the enormous contribution of the NSW Government Architect’s Office to public service in its 200-year history. Ross Gittins wrote that a ‘broken public service leads to broken governance’¹ and proposed that the public service has lost much of its policy expertise, including its memory of what does and does not work. Although GAO is closing its doors all but the Government Architect’s position has been retained and relocated to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment. At least this role of the former office will continue to provide expert strategic advice to government, as well as help guide the private sector with project delivery.

As part of the closure, Merrima, the GAO’s indigenous design unit, will also be wound up. This year it would have celebrated twenty-one years in business having been established in 1995 with myself as its single founding member. At the time, it was unique as the only office in the country operated by an indigenous architect. Following a slow start, momentum grew when Kevin O’Brien and Alison Page joined. By 2000 both had departed to set up separate private practices although continued to work collaboratively with Merrima when opportunities arose. Notable work post exit from each include Alison’s tour de force the Coffs Harbour-based Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance launched in 2011, and Kevin’s outstanding *Finding Country* exhibition at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale. Michael Mossman came on board at this

crossover period of their departure, working with me up until the finish. Michael has now taken a position as senior lecturer in architecture, design and planning at the University of Sydney. I intend to forge ahead within government and keep focussed on supporting indigenous communities. Merrima completed over 30 projects working with indigenous communities throughout the breadth of NSW and occasionally across the borders into Victoria and Queensland. Merrima’s first design project was Girrawa Creative Work Centre (NSW AIA President’s Award 1998) for indigenous inmates at the Bathurst Correctional Centre. It was created from the client’s response to recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The design was an exploration of zoomorphic architecture interpreting cultural references and the lace monitor – a local Aboriginal totem. Another memorable project was the Wilcannia Hospital Redevelopment (NSW AIA Blacket Award 2002), which questioned western based architectural design theories, reflected socio-political imperatives important to indigenous communities and uncovered why preconceptions should be avoided. The project also revealed that feeling is more important than seeing in architectural design. To finish on a high, Merrima collaborated with non-indigenous architects from GAO to design five Aboriginal Child and Family Centres (ACFC) for communities in Nowra, Gunnedah, Brewarrina, Lightning Ridge and Western Sydney Doonside – with Gunnedah being awarded the Blacket prize in 2015. This program responded to recommendations for Closing the Gap, a COAG agreement made in 2008 to address disadvantage within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Each centre provides a social hub as well as one-stop shop for health and childcare facilities.



1 Burrawang Walk, Kamay Botany Bay National Park, Kurnell, 2009. GAO in association with Freeman Ryan Design & Merrima. Photo: John Gollings
2 Girrawaa Creative Work Centre at Bathurst Correctional Complex (project architect Dillon Kombumerri, 1997)
3 Wilcannia Hospital Redevelopment (project architect Dillon Kombumerri, 2002). Photo: Brett Boardman
4 Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre, Gunnedah (project architect Cathy Kubany, 2013)

Anyone who has worked on indigenous projects will know fees are often not enough to cover the effort required to do the job properly, including consultation. While the private sector has demonstrated success working with indigenous communities, shrinking fees and increasing work scope may over time influence the market to only deliver what is asked for, rather than imagine what has not been thought of. This is a challenge for both non-indigenous and indigenous architects. It is presumptuous to think indigenous architects will do it best, particularly if the comparison is based solely on skill, methodology and experience. However, if added consideration is given to authenticity then it could be argued there is a difference between the two. Authenticity is just as important within the built environment as it is for other creative forms such as art and performance. The telling and retelling of cultural stories by indigenous people reinforce their identity and how they are perceived by others; it also helps to realise self-determination and build enterprise. Merrima to this extent has brought authenticity to *indigenous* architecture – by definition the architecture is conceived by indigenous designers and architects. All architects must go beyond just finding an architectural solution or satisfying their pecuniary interests in a project. Serious thought should be given to community development, skills transfer and professional collaboration. Aboriginal Elder Max Dulumunmun from the Yuin nation declares ‘you have to give it away to keep it’ when referring to Elders passing on their knowledge to the next generation, but it can also apply to architects working with indigenous communities. Having a voice within government has allowed a fledgling group of indigenous architects with uncertain beginnings to mature into a confident and articulate coterie. GAO’s institution has given gravitas to the advocacy role Merrima has undertaken in conveying the

importance of an indigenous perspective within the built environment. Merrima has also incubated research, explored and developed unique ideas and methodology not considered by non-indigenous architects; there is potential for mutually beneficial partnerships. With still only a dozen or so indigenous architects nationwide there is a worrying underrepresentation within our profession that needs to be addressed. One dilemma to overcome is the common indigenous community impression that university is not a place for them. The Wingara Mura Bunga Burrabugu strategy at the University of Sydney is a good example of how to harness indigenous knowledge and culture and reflect it within the teaching curriculum, design of buildings and open space planning as well as student/staff life on campus. Many other education campuses around the country are also undertaking similar programs and with this there is a chance to increase the number of indigenous architects. Juhani Pallasmaa’s *The Thinking Hand* wonderfully expresses the inextricable link between the thinking brain and the doing hand and that both inform each other. Therefore, I hope for a future where indigenous architects and design thinkers occupy all levels of decision making and project delivery of built and natural environments particularly those affecting them. So as GAO closes down, let’s not think of these moments lost in time like tears in rain ... because Toto I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.

Dillon Kombumerri is the principal architect for indigenous design at the NSW Government Architect’s Office

NOTE
1 Ross Gittins, ‘Broken public service leads to broken governance’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December, 2015



In resonant action and enlightened advocacy

March 30, 2016 marked the 200-year anniversary of the appointment of Francis Greenway as the first NSW Civil Architect, a position that in turn became the Colonial Architect (CA) (1822–1890) and after restructuring in 1890, the Government Architect (GA). The bicentenary of an important public office is celebrated by a major exhibition at the Mitchell Library for their contributions to this state. Amongst a number of interviewees in a film screened at the exhibition, Richard Johnson, although not himself a former GA, most lucidly set out the agenda and scope, in short the imperative for a Government Architect.

In contrast to many of the enduring works showcased in the exhibition, we live in a period when governments seem to have decidedly lost their sense of purpose and direction. With major urban projects like Barangaroo,

Darling Harbour and the Bays area there is a stunning inability to conceive of the city in the best interest of all, to demonstrate what I would call ‘public imagination’, enriching initiatives that prise open future opportunities.

Instead, outsourcing and downsizing are the ideological obsessions of successive governments since the 1980s, particularly across the Anglo-Saxon world. When it comes to architecture and the city, this has led to the gutting of government as the agent of public good and instigator of enlightened intervention, with the capability to conceive and act, as opposed to weakly regulate, flog or rubber stamp.

Just follow the recent peregrinations of the Government Architect’s Office (GAO), from the long-time bastion within Public Works, then shopped under an unsound fee-for-service model into an impoverished Department of Commerce, and now hoicked to a nook in the Department of Planning and Environment – an agency not hitherto noted for either strategy or action. That Planning just waived away the polite critique by the Government Architect’s Panel of the casino application at Barangaroo is a bad portent.

During my working life, there has been a sharp decrease in architects working in the public sphere, across all tiers of government. Contrast this with our allied professions of planning and engineering, which retain whole ministries. This obviously weakens our influence in shaping the built environment and bargaining power as a profession.

As an architecture student in the early 80s, undoubtedly the best place to land a job was the Government Architect’s Branch (GAB) as it then was, in the venerable Department of Public Works. It offered three clear advantages: the pay was up to fifty per cent higher than private practices, it boasted the then revolutionary flexi-time, and there was a pool of talented architects working on outstanding projects (my predecessors in the previous year’s intake were Virginia Kerridge and David Haertsch, now respected award-winning architects). As Richard Johnson reminded us, in the period from 1962 to 1990, of a total of twenty-three Sulman Awards given (in ten of those years no award was given), twelve were won by the Government Architects’ works. This illuminates not only their skills and capacity but also successive governments’ manifest commitment to the quality of public institutions.

Working in a public agency also attracts the idealistic and the principled. Consider the ethical stand of the GAB staff who, at the height of the Opera House controversy, signed a letter to the NSW Government to bring back Utzon.

This great institution that has served Sydney so well over two centuries has recently been diminished to a point of weakness not seen since the 1820s and 30s, when Sydney was but a juvenile town. The GAs have weathered and rebounded from other barren periods such as between the wars, and after 1988. The leading 19th century Colonial Architects Lewis and Barnett both left under a cloud, while Vernon was engaged to outsource public work, only to agilely renege and grow the office.

Today the GAO’s capacity and influence have been wantonly savaged, their workforce shriveled from hundreds to three currently, with the hope of nudging back to perhaps fifteen. ‘Strategic thinking’ is peddled as today’s best course. But the CAs and GAs right back to Greenway, always provided strategic thinking, to Sydney

and the State’s enduring benefit. But they didn’t so limit themselves to that as they effectively realised their strategies in city-making projects. Greenway’s composition of brick solids gave form to the southern end of Macquarie Street and definition to Hyde Park, celebrated in many early paintings. Lewis’s foresight extended the city’s street grid to the new semi-circular quay – you can’t imagine contemporary Sydney without this most strategic of physical plans. Barnett’s great GPO spawned Martin Place, while Vernon was a commissioner on the 1909 Royal Commission into the Improvement of Sydney and its Suburbs and champion of major urban schemes including the new Central Station. Another particularly fruitful period was from the post-World War II era until the end of the 1980s, when Parkes, Farmer and their successors rebuilt the GAB into a wondrously productive instrument of Government and progressive public projects, such as the State Office Block, Macquarie Street and Circular Quay revitalisations.

The GAs have long been protectors of the public interest, advocates for high-quality design in architecture, urban projects, landscape and heritage. And they built most of the distinguished public buildings in Sydney up until the 1980s. Consistent quality and civic memory are amongst the Office’s greatest legacies.

While advocacy, strategic thinking, design review and expert advice all should be essential aspects of our work as architects, it is unwise to confine a role to these without undertaking projects in parallel, for actual projects are where we interrogate, test and learn from experience, where we extend ourselves as architects. Without delay, we must rebuild the GAO so they can create outstanding design into the 21st century rather than just talk around it – to act not chat. Think of their recent initiative for Sydney’s Green Grid – such clear-sighted and well-researched projects need time and skilled resources to develop, then sustained advocacy to disseminate and implement over years through a plethora of means to activate inert agencies.

A way of rebuilding the prestige of the GA could be to draw on the outstanding expertise and experience of recent AIA Gold Medallists (and NSW now has a particularly rich resource of such eminent architects) either as the next GA, or to play a Harry Rembert-type role leading a revitalised design office charged with producing remarkable architecture.

For as architects we face the twin challenges of producing good work and of articulating architecture’s enduring place in the public culture of city making. In both resonant action and enlightened advocacy, a substantive Government Architect’s Office remains as essential as ever.

Philip Thalís is principal of Hill Thalís Architecture + Urban Projects and co-author with Peter John Cantrill of *Public Sydney: Drawing the City* (Historic Houses Trust and UNSW Press, 2013)

UTS Ku-ring-gai College (former William Balmain Teachers College) Lindfield (project architect David Turner, 1978). Photo: Max Dupain © Max Dupain & Associates. Source: GAO

‘While advocacy, strategic thinking, design review and expert advice all should be essential aspects of our work as architects, it is unwise to confine a role to these without undertaking projects in parallel, for actual projects are where we interrogate, test and learn from experience. Without delay, we must rebuild the GAO so they can create outstanding design into the 21st century rather than just talk around it – to act not chat’

Designing public buildings for regional NSW

With the transition from Colonial Architect to Government Architect in the 1890s came an expansion in the range of buildings types designed by his office, reflecting the expansion of the colony of NSW. Under the newly appointed Government Architect Walter Liberty Vernon, the reconstituted Colonial Architects Office initially continued to design buildings for colonial administration and justice: police buildings, courthouses and post offices. Once the worst of the depression of the 1890s was over, the NSW Government Architect managed to



1 View showing the breezeway to Bourke Court House, NSW Government Architect Walter Liberty Vernon, late 1890s. State Records of NSW, Series 4326

2 View of Argent Street, Broken Hill exhibited in the NSW Court at the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition in London. The newly completed Technical College and Museum is shown, with the Town Hall and Post Office in the distance. State Records of NSW Series 14086

3 View of the substantial additions to Narrandera Courthouse designed by the NSW Government Architect Walter Liberty Vernon, c 1900. Note how the eaves and verandah shade the building. AIA Register item 4701675

successfully convince the Minister of Public Works that the competition system was unworkable and that the design of public buildings could be undertaken more cost effectively in-house. The NSW Government Architect’s Branch (GAB) began to design a much wider range of buildings across the state: country Land Board offices, suburban fire stations, country and metropolitan schools, university facilities, onshore facilities for the Navy, public housing and model factories in the Observatory Hill Resumed Area and buildings for recreational use, including facilities at tourist attractions, such as Jenolan Caves and Mount Kosciuszko. Official functions such as Land Board offices, that used to occupy a single room in regional courthouses, had expanded to the degree that new buildings within each Land Board area were required to process land registrations.

Under Vernon, the GAB began to experiment with a wider range of construction types and materials, seeking to erect buildings that were not only fire- and vermin-proof, but could also cope with the climate of country NSW. To combat the heat of the Australian summer, both John Sulman and Vernon trialled filling corrugated iron sheeted stud walls with sawdust (in the Bishops Palace and the Land Board Office at Hay respectively). The series of country Land Board offices designed between 1890 and 1910 show the GAB to have been refining the methods of keeping a building cool. In the initial ones designed in the early 1890s, motifs from the English ‘Queen Anne’ style, utilised by Vernon prior to his move to Australia, were combined with colonial methods of climate

control: verandahs, shutters, wide eaves and vented roofs.

In 1896, the NSW Government Architect returned to England on a study tour to visit contemporary public buildings, fulfilling one of the conditions that he had made a requirement of his taking on the role. Vernon visited a wide range of buildings in England, Scotland, France, Belgium and Scandinavia, eventually reporting back to the Minister that in his opinion, the design of public buildings in NSW by his branch could hold its own against these overseas examples. For much of the work that Vernon and his branch undertook in country NSW, the contemporary buildings that he visited on his study tour did not provide a useful

prototype. In his papers is a collection of photographs of architect-designed buildings in England and traditional buildings he saw en route back to Australia, such as the fountain court of houses in Cairo. Following his return from his study tour, Vernon’s office made far more use of colonial and vernacular precedents; precedents more suited to the climate of the areas of NSW that the office was designing new facilities for.

The new public buildings at Bourke, the Court House and the Land Board offices, erected in the late 1890s, are the most elaborate of the GAB’s

designs intended to combat the extremes of the climate in inland NSW. In the design of the Bourke Lands Board office, precedents from Hill Station architecture seem to have been employed. Erected, like the other buildings in this series, with of sandwich construction of corrugated iron sheeting (as building materials were limited in Inland NSW), this Land Board office is raised off the ground and has encircling verandahs and shuttered windows. Frequent dust storms were the reason for the raised floors of the new public buildings erected in Bourke in the late 1890s.

The most revolutionary feature of the design was the water-cooled updraft cooling system. Water from a well was used to cool the air, which passed through the offices and was expelled via the roof lantern. An attempt at water cooling the earlier courthouse at Bourke had already been made in 1893. These attempts at air-conditioning have yet to be incorporated into the chronology of the development of building services in Australia, and should be considered revolutionary, as it was during the late nineteenth century, that the attempts were made internationally to ‘condition’ the air in public buildings. In the design for Bourke Courthouse, the typical floor planning for a courtroom – a central double-height courtroom flanked by corridors and offices, employed since the days of Mortimer Lewis – was abandoned. The rooms in the complex at Bourke open off three sides of a central fountain court; the fourth side, which is the entry to the courtyard, is a breezeway raised above street level. The main corner is not marked by a clocktower like country post offices, rather the Oxley Street corner is marked by a ‘chatri’ or shade canopy, a motif drawn from Indian and Indo-Saracenic architecture. The wide eaves supported on brackets shade the windows of the offices and the characteristic Diocletian windows of the courtroom. The roof ventilator to the courtroom survives today.

The Dalek-like roof lanterns that characterise many of the buildings designed by the GAB from 1890 until the 1920s, such as the Fisher Library and School of Agriculture at the University of Sydney and the regional technical colleges and museums such as Broken Hill, housed the outlets of the network of ventilation tubes. Air from wall vents rose up through shafts in the walls and was expelled via tubes laid above the ceiling via the lantern. A cross section of the lantern intended to the Technical College at Maitland was published that shows the ventilation tubes, however cost cutting measures saw the design curtailed.

One of the important legacies of the NSW Government Architect’s Branch are the carefully designed public buildings in country NSW, many of which are still in use. Their innovative solutions to ventilation and climate control remain relevant today. Recent works to the Parliament House complex in Adelaide have shown that system of roof ventilators to public buildings can continue to be utilised. The ceiling vents and tubes above the ceilings can be incorporated into a modern displacement air-conditioning system.

Dr Noni Boyd, Heritage Officer, NSW Chapter

Champions of Change

Launched twelve months ago by Elizabeth Broderick, Champions of Change is the first initiative of the AIA NSW Gender Equity Taskforce, a program that promotes advocacy at a leadership level within the architecture profession. Nine Champions from large practice began the last year by signing a charter demonstrating their commitment to equity in composition, leadership and pay, as well as making active steps towards a flexible and consultative workplace.

The signing Champions were **Joe Agius** (COX), **Michael Banak** (Crone), **Ray Brown** (Architectus), **Gerard Cocoran** (Hassell), **Bill Dowzer** (BVN, now replaced by **Brian Clohessy**), **Adam Haddow** (SJB), **Gary Power** (Woods Bagot), **Troy Uleman** (PTW) and **Philip Vivian** (Bates Smart).

Under the guidance of facilitator, Dr Jess Murphy with the support of the NSW Chapter President, Shaun Carter, the Champions started the year with sessions focused on:

- listening to understand the facts on gender issues within their practice
- learning through engagement with peers of both genders; and
- leading through small but impactful actions.

Through these sessions, the Champions were encouraged to own the problem, developing a detailed and targeted understanding of what the issues and barriers currently are, and then developing a series of initiatives that all practices involved have committed to. The ten action items are:

1 Mainstream flexibility: understand existing flexible work patterns in their

practice, list what tasks cannot be performed flexibly and move towards implementing a workplace where all roles are flexible.

2 Modify culture of being always available: survey and share existing work patterns to understand average work day and uncover hidden expectations and barriers to flexibility; draw up a template for change.

3 Plan careers early: commence monthly career development discussions with one woman; Champions collectively implement quarterly group mentoring, and six-monthly career reviews to track development and status of progression.

4 Enabling successful career breaks and part-time work (on and off ramp): support parental leave through two-year career breaks and contact program; better understand the reasons why some staff will choose not to return post parental leave.

5 Reflect on personal leadership style using leadership shadow model: seek feedback from at least three women and set two to three goals, to be shared amongst the group, based on feedback and reflection.

Women contribute in so many ways, but it is still about power. Women still face a lot of hurdles that men won't have to face. If you ensure that female talent stays – it will have a positive economic outcome and the outcome will be superior in design.

Elizabeth Broderick

6 Launch a panel pledge campaign within the architectural and construction industry: commit to promoting the inclusion of women in speaking engagement and industry panels.

7 Plus one: senior management to invite a female colleague to every industry event they attend.

8 Submissions ratio: include at least one female staff member in each submission and subsequent interview; analyse gender representation across submissions.

9 Networking calendar: collectively prepare a transparent calendar of networking events to be shared; chart networking attendance on a quarterly basis for a twelve-month period.

10 Activate networking: include networking and business development as part of the job function for every employee and to monitor and provide support to develop networking skills; host one annual networking event.

Champions were invited to share their insight on the program:



Why did you agree to be a Champion?

Troy Uleman I've been pursuing these ideas for many years and it is certainly something my wife and I constantly discuss. I see people struggling in our practice trying to balance parental or care responsibilities or students who are trying to manage university, work and life. I think there is a broad need in the industry to deal with this issue of a balanced life.

Brian Clohessy The opportunity to participate in a process that will have such a fundamental impact on our industry was an exciting prospect. My personal understanding of the difficulties of juggling work with the demands of a young family heightened my awareness of the problems faced by many of our colleagues. Every day we solve problems for our clients and create environments that have a huge cultural impact and here was something we can do for our people.

Michael Banak I felt my participation in the Champions of Change would have a number of positive effects on the office culture. It would show that Crone encourages women to progress equally with men in management positions. It would help reduce staff attrition and encourage new talent to the company. We want to create an environment where females can thrive and know their opportunities for career development are limitless.

Through your participation in the program, what have you discovered on the status of gender equity in your practice?

Brian Clohessy This is not about any individual practice but about our responsibility to the collective culture of architecture. When considering equality from this perspective I found it confronting that no studies clearly evidenced with supporting data why we lose so many experienced female architects from our industry. How did we collectively find ourselves in a situation where highly skilled women who contribute enormously to what we do just disappear?

Rebecca Donoghue, Stefanie Hughes, Emily Wombwell, Millie Lakos from SJB Architects

Philip Vivian In the last ten years, Bates Smart has been very encouraging of women coming back to the workplace after having children. However, under the previous arrangement, it was very hard to come back and be a team leader. Our challenge now is to show that people can work successfully in a part-time role as a team leader.

Troy Uleman I thought that it would be easier than it is. I thought that buy-in would be simple. We all agree on how important and valuable gender equity is to address, but the detail of how we get there at times meets speed bumps. We have two female directors who are well regarded and experienced within the industry. Now it's a matter of trying to get exposure for younger people in the office, to let them have a voice in the industry.

The ten action items signed by the Champions have the potential to have a concrete impact on gender equity. Which action will have the greatest impact?

Joe Agius I think the Submissions ratio will have the greatest impact on our industry. It's an affirmative action that asks practices to put their money where their mouth is. In requiring a practice to meet a target of one female candidate per submission, each practice must ensure the pipeline of talented female staff is supported to be the best candidate for a project. As a single item, it will have an enormous, tangible impact on our practice and the public face we show the industry.

Michael Banak Mainstream flexibility and modify culture of being always available. To be sustainable, the future of the profession needs to promote flexible hours. Our current technology allows this to easily happen. To work in different environments. Sometimes working in a new environment can be even more productive than working in the office, particularly for the design profession where we take pride in being creative. Crone provides a daily 'staff whereabouts' email that shows all our staffs flexible working arrangements, thereby promoting the companies stance on flexible hours. We work through these arrangements with individuals to tailor their flexible working arrangement's with their needs and the needs of the company.

Brian Clohessy I don't think any one action will have a huge impact independently. I believe that the acknowledgement of gender equity within our industry will be the greatest catalyst for change. What's really refreshing about the Champion programme is that we are all collaborating as a team to tackle the issues with the power of the collective. I am hoping that we can build on these relationships, allowing our industry to come together more often to explore the challenges we face, rather than look at them individually.

Natalie Lane-Rose is studio director at Bates Smart and Monica Edwards is an associate at Cox. Both are founding members of the Gender Equity Taskforce that initiated the Champions of Change program

malechampionsofchange.com
aca.org.au/article/champions-of-change
archiparlour.org/get-going-male-champions-of-change



Turning pages

Last year I had the pleasure of assisting Architext Bookshop manager Anne Proudfoot in the store where she had worked for the last twenty-eight years. In December 2015, the Institute announced that they would be closing both Architext stores in Sydney and Melbourne as they were no longer sustainable businesses. Shortly after the closure, we had lunch at the Botanic Gardens Restaurant, where we admired the building¹ and talked about her time at Architext, how things changed and what could have been done to save it.

Shop window photo: Stephen Pierce

Ricardo Felipe **Could you give a brief history of Architext Bookshop?**
Anne Proudfoot Architext began in 1981 in Bouverie Street, Carlton near the University of Melbourne. It was the brainchild of [a group of people].²The purpose of the store was to offer members and students access to architectural publications, both professional and technical. At the time, the Institute was also publishing monographs on Australian architects and practice texts, so the bookshop was a way of promoting these.
The Sydney store came into being at Tusculum Villa in 1987, along with the NSW Chapter, which was next door in the newly completed building designed by Durbach & Levine. We later moved to the new building, as the space offered better lighting and visibility to passing traffic.

What services did Architext provide to Institute members and the general public?
The bookshops were entirely owned by the members as a service: we offered discounts on all titles, made special orders, attended conferences and trade fairs, held book launches and occasionally visited some universities and architectural offices as a pop-up store. We also attracted a wider audience who appreciated our specialised range on housing design.

And the Sydney bookshop had close ties with the Melbourne store as well.
Yes, we were always on the phone to each other, keeping each other supported. When there were requests for something in Melbourne, we could transfer it down overnight. It was like having an extra warehouse and we could share our stock.

In the final weeks, I understand that Published Art did a surprise buyout of all the remaining stock.
Yes, that was in the last two weeks. We had a sale continuing on from late January and then Julian [Brenchley] and Rebekah [Lawson] from Published Art came in and offered to buy our remaining stock. And they want to continue the tradition of a specialist architectural bookshop.

They are opening a new store in Surry Hills on street level. They intend to grow it from what it has been. For two years it was on the first floor of where their office was, as he’s an architect. And I believe they are going to stock Danish design products as well.³

Will there be a new model for an Institute bookshop that may emerge?
I can’t see that happening in the near future. But who knows, in the next few years things may return, demand might come back and there may be a merger with other professions. In this competitive market with Amazon and Book Depository, it is hard to sustain just one specialist subject, without having a secondary form of income.



Niche bookshops like Architext, act as cultural hubs for the access of new ideas and contribute towards progressive change as well as the chance encounter with peers. I remember that people would often browse and chat in the bookshop before an event at Tusculum. Can you say more about bookshops as cultural hubs?

Well, they are very meaningful in that they give people – even if they are not aiming to buy anything – a chance to to widen their knowledge and get inspiration, or have a break from working in their studio or get random ideas.

How have things changed over the years?
In the last few years, my customers had been discerning and discriminating. There was less interest in coffee table, flashy books that some publishers have produced in the past, and more emphasis on books of quality, meaning and content. Like *Public Sydney* by Peter John Cantrill and Philip Thalís. I was thrilled to have it in the shop and it is an example of what Australian publishing and our authors can produce. ... We were always able to courier and post things out, but a good website would be a key factor to any business or bookshop, to really facilitate mail orders so that people needn’t come in.

In hindsight, besides a new website, what could have been done to prevent the closure of Architext?
I would say involving the customers and the members more ... more ownership by the architects in the bookshop. So there could have been some ideas come forward to save it. An awareness to the fact that it was struggling in the last couple of years. But it comes down in the end, to that there weren’t enough people buying regularly. Younger architects don’t seem to need the book as a resource anymore. That is the big change I’ve noticed. The internet does really bring a lot of information that you would have found in a book. It doesn’t replace it but it does devalue it.

I think the bookshop as an entity ... people are feeling the losses and are coming back to the book.

Readings is opening up two new stores in Melbourne, and it was recently awarded International Bookstore of the Year [at the London Book Fair].

Well, it is no doubt that both you and Architext Bookshop will be missed. What are some things that you will miss?
Conversations with people ... and the sometimes quite tricky requests. I love chasing down a burrow for a challenge. Especially things like when you feel part of the building [process]. You see a building being built and you know that you may have helped that firm find a book, which may have helped them build that building. In an indirect way, I feel like I was part of the excitement.

And what is next for Anne Proudfoot?
If I had lots of money I would love to start afresh and stock exactly my favourite books, like *Public Sydney*. I would just start from scratch with only the best.

- NOTES
- 1 It was later discovered that the Botanic Gardens Restaurant was designed by the GAO (project architects Andrew Andersons and David Churches in association with Ancher Mortlock & Woolley) in 1978. Incidentally, Anne had recognised Ken Woolley’s handiwork over lunch.
 - 2 Anne later recalled that Architext was originally set up by the following people in Melbourne: John Dean, National Education Director, RAIA; Celia Lamprell, who became the first Bookshop Manager; Michael Peck, National President, RAIA; Judy Vulker, RAIA Education Publications Director; and Robert Caulfield, Archicentre Director.
 - 3 Published Art will be opening their new Sydney store in mid-June 2016 at Mary Street, Surry Hills in collaboration with Normann Copenhagen (their first Australian concept store). Published Art are expanding their architectural titles and will be filling the gap that the closure of Architext left behind.

Archibooks

On 16 May, the National Office Canberra made this announcement about a new service called Archibooks:

In recognition of the importance of architectural books both as an inspiration and as an essential tool for the practice and appreciation of architecture, the Institute has sought out alternative suppliers that we believe come close to meeting the high standard previously set by Architext. All of these stores have both a physical and online presence with extensive catalogues of architectural and built environment titles. Between them we trust that you will find what you are looking for. For the more obscure or rare titles feel free to contact the recommended stores to place a special order.

The current participating stores are: **Boffins Books** in Perth, **Folio Books** in Brisbane, **Metropolis** in Melbourne and **Published Art** in Sydney. Each of these stores is offering Institute members the same ten per cent discount previously available to members through purchases from Architext.

architecture.com.au/services/archibooks



Pyrmont Fire Station

Between 1890 and 1911, Government Architect **Walter Liberty Vernon** designed and delivered over fifty projects in NSW, some of which are still standing and in use. One of those is the Pyrmont Fire Station located on the corner of Gipps and Pyrmont Streets in Ultimo, Sydney. It was built in 1906 to address the compounding fire danger posed by an intense growth in industrial development in the area during the first decade of the 20th century.

The original building is Federation Free Style and constructed of red clay face brick in English bond with lime mortar over a rusticated sandstone plinth and has decorative sandstone detailing emphasising door and window openings and other features. The colours and textures of the brick and sandstone are in stark contrast. The Pyrmont and Gipps Street facades have a strongly-defined base, middle and top with several asymmetrical features.

Inside, the building originally consisted of two engine bays with attendant stables, a family size officer apartment and single men's room on the ground floor. There were also apartments for six families on the second and third floors with a laundry, drying yard and watch tower at roof level.

After the building had closed and re-opened twice, Fire and Rescue NSW commissioned **GroupGSA** in 2013 to refurbish the derelict upper floors and extend the operational fire station to provide office accommodation for staff as part of their relocation program from their current head office in Elizabeth Street, Sydney.

Major works included upgrading the building's structural integrity to a Category 4 seismic stabilisation. This was achieved with a design by **Birzulis** with construction by **Artel Constructions** and **MAXBuild** installing new steel portal frames to shore up and protect the existing heritage envelope including the corner bell tower. The portal frames span two floors and tie to reinforced joist flooring, which is braced to the frame with a series of flat bar cross bracing. The external façade is then tied to the perpendicular walls with a **HeliBar** system.

A new extension was also added to the building over the three floors. The contemporary addition is inspired by design methodologies adopted a century ago – innovation, decoration and social creation.

The choice of interfacing materials complement each other and flow between internal and external spaces in an asym-

metrical fashion much like the building before it. Original concrete floors have been topped with white concrete, marking the extent of the original building footprint and in contrast, grey concrete floors define the extended premises.

Vertical circulation zones are clad in zinc, linking all three floors and the diverse departments of the organisation.

GroupGSA and the team of multidisciplinary consultants have ensured that the work of the former Government Architect Walter Liberty Vernon continues to function as it was intended but now more aligned with contemporary work processes.

Janine Graves is an associate at GroupGSA and was project architect for Pyrmont Fire Station

Project: Pyrmont Fire Station
Architect: GroupGSA
Client: Fire & Rescue NSW
Project manager: Public Works
Completion: 2016
Photos: Tyrone Branigan

- 1 The facade was cleaned down following structural works where brick dust was collected to colour match and conceal holes in the brick work. The bell tower boarding will be removed and replaced with glazing.
- 2 Zinc cladding accentuates the vertical circulation. It will become a timeless feature, aging with the original building for another century to come.



Rondo + The William

The conversion of an iconic Melbourne office building into a high end apartment development has been underpinned by wall framing systems from **Rondo**.

Originally built in 1966 as an office building, 'The William' has been turned into a vibrant 531 apartment building in the heart of Melbourne's legal precinct.

Completed in February 2014, the two-year, \$100 million dollar project was undertaken by building company Built, contractor EXPOCONTI and Bruce Henderson Architects for developers Hengyi. It comprised the conversion of one existing building into an apartment development, with four additional storeys added to make the building level with a completely new additional building.

The project includes: 54 one bedroom apartments, 380 two bedroom apartments, 36 three bedroom apartments and 77 one and two bedroom serviced apartments. It also features retail space including a small supermarket and 15 shop sites, as well as a roof top pool.

Rondo Sales and Business Development Manager Charlie Khoury confirms the company was called in to provide a design solution for all external walls, with challenges including that initial drawings specified a stud wall with compressed fibre cement only, with minimal information documented, while high wind load requirements were also a factor.

Initially, Built had investigated a number of façade options, including having full height and width windows, but doing this would have required an internal stud wall adjacent to the window to support the plasterboard. Rondo was asked to step in and provide expert technical advice as a solution for a



heavy gauge structural system which would not affect internal apartment areas and substrate strengths.

'Using our MAXIframe External Wall Framing System, we were able to provide a full design specification for the entire external façade that met wind load requirements, and also allowed one stud wall to accommodate both internal and external linings,' says Khoury.

This delivered a more efficient installation process in terms of both labour and material. Contractor, EXPOCONTI was able to complete all works, both internal and external, efficiently allowing for full control of each stage, and fewer tradesmen required on the site.

Rondo's technical and sales teams made regular on-site visits, offering both design and installation solutions. Specifically, the team ensured all the external walls met the required wind loads, along with designs for all 5-8 metre high external walls for the shop fronts.

'We provided a full design specification for the entire external wall system, meeting the required wind loads, along with designs for all five to eight metre high external walls for the shop fronts. Our solution was more efficient in comparison to the alternative full size windows.'

'It also enabled one stud wall design to take both internal and external linings and offered a more efficient installation process in terms of labour and material,' Khoury adds. 'While reducing the requirement for additional tradesmen, waiting times between trades were also reduced significantly. In addition, the system enabled the contractor's full control of the construction time line. With only one plastering company needed to complete all works, both internal and external, one warranty was provided for all plastering works.'

'The exciting development at The William in Melbourne proved a great example of how Rondo's innovative systems can be deployed to save both time and money, while offering a world-class outcome.'



- In total, the following Rondo products were supplied to 'The William':
- 8000 m² of Rondo KEY-LOCK Concealed Suspended Ceiling System
 - 195,000 lineal metres of Rondo Steel Stud and Track (72,000l lm)
 - 55,000 lineal metres MAXIframe External Wall Framing System
 - 1000 x PANTHER® Sound-Rated Access Panels

- Rondo provided external wall design for the entire project supplying:
- Rondo Steel Stud and Track (64 mm x .50 BMT) internally
 - Rondo Steel Stud and Track (64 mm x 0.75 BMT) (30,000 lm)
 - Rondo Steel Stud and Track (64 mm x 0.50 BMT) (72,000l lm)
 - Rondo Steel Stud and Track (76 mm x 0.55 BMT) (63,000l lm)
 - Rondo Steel Stud and Track (76 mm x 0.55 BMT) (30,000l lm)
 - Rondo MAXIframe External Wall Framing System for all external walls (55,000 l/m of 92 mm MAXIjamb Stud and 92 mm Wall Stud)
 - Rondo KEY-LOCK Concealed Suspended Ceiling System (8000 m²)
 - Rondo PANTHER Sound Rated Access Panels (1000 SRAP3045BLFE)

A comprehensive solution for an innovative practice

A relatively new player in the Australian market, UK based **Union Square** is positioned as an alternative information management solution for practices specialising in the built environment. It claims to benefit everything a professional services company does from billing to BIM (building information modelling), but how real are these claims? Architects in particular are reporting tangible benefits from the system, with practices including Scott Carver, Smith & Tzannes, Designinc, Peddle Thorp, Fulton Trotter, Nettleton Tribe and TKD having adopted it. AB spoke to Rodney Paesler, Managing Director of Scott Carver, about the operational and cultural improvements gained from implementing Union Square.

Scott Carver is a Sydney based practice offering urban design, architecture, landscape architecture and interior architecture services. It operates throughout Australia and internationally to deliver a broad spectrum of projects spanning the civic, commercial, hospitality, public domain, residential, retail, sports, and tourism markets.

Just under three years ago Scott Carver identified the need for a solution to meet its

requirement for a comprehensive document management and workflow system that would improve productivity and enhance collaboration.

Managing Director Rodney Paesler confirms the company already had an ERP System in place but had always been on the lookout for ways to improve on its existing solution. A seminar run by Union Square, demonstrating the benefits experienced by an existing user of the system, proved the catalyst for change.

He says a number of factors allayed any concerns with implementing a system from a relatively new player in the Australian market.

'Union Square clearly had an international track record as a leader in comprehensive practice management solutions for architects, so its credibility wasn't in question. What struck me about the system, aside from its all-encompassing reach, was in the areas of document management and customer relationship management or CRM.'

'Prior to implementing Union Square, we'd been using a project accounting system which was great for time management, invoicing and forecasting. However while

this worked effectively in terms of productivity, there was one major issue with it, which was that it really only worked for the business leaders, around 10 to 12 individuals in a company that at the time numbered around 50 staff [Scott Carver has since grown to around 70 staff].'

'By contrast, Union Square's cloud-enabled interface is used by all members of the practice, from receptionists and administrators to senior management. In particular, the document management capability is highly fluid and intuitive to use for our designers. As a design practice our documentation output is considerable, easily around four gigabytes a day, and spans anything from invoices to high res photos and complex graphics. Union Square can easily handle those volumes, and its image-friendly interface is a plus in a design environment.'

'The fact that the system can easily collate and present all data from invoices to imagery relating to a particular project is also a great benefit in terms of customer relationship management. It has transformed how we use technology from a transactional to a relational approach, enhancing the way we deal with customers.'

'We're also able to use the system for marketing purposes. For example if we're planning an event targeting a certain sector of the industry; we can easily pull all relevant contacts together to form the guest list. Or if we want to market to a specific segment, say age care developers in the Brisbane area, we can mine the relevant information to pull an EDM campaign together.'

Rollout and customer support

Rollout of the system was a major project entailing the transfer of around 10 years' of data encompassing around half a million hours of work and \$90 million of transactions. The practice pre-planned for three months prior to implementation and did around one month of testing before the system went live.

'Throughout this we had full support from Union Square to ensure the process was expedited smoothly. Since implementation, Union Square's help desk support has been highly effective; they've also worked with us to tune the system to suit our particular needs.'

Clear productivity gains

At the time of the implementation Rodney knew that he needed to justify the cost of such a major investment. 'At that time, with 50 employees, I calculated that Union Square could save five minutes a day for each person in the company, which would equate to \$150,000 charging time per annum. In assessing the current benefits of the system in a company that now numbers 70 employees, I'd say hours and days are being saved rather than minutes, and productivity turnover per person is up 10 to 15 per cent on what it was previously.'

A solid business case

'By implementing Union Square we've saved time and productivity across the whole office,' he adds. 'The system has also reduced pressure on project leaders by making all information relevant to a given project easily accessible to all employees. It has really improved the way the practice

implements a project, from design and concept through to building, by enhancing all aspects of the process, from document sharing, to collation of external contacts, to resource planning and project management. It has also made forecasting and planning much easier. I use it to forecast and resource-plan a couple of years in advance. I can plan future revenue streams and future costs and the resources required. The forecasts can then be transformed into invoices when it's time to bill the client.'

Positive uptake by employees

Rodney says the Scott Carver practice has readily embraced Union Square, which has enhanced intra-practice cooperation.

'For young architects it's a really natural and fluid way to manage their work and while senior staff may have occasionally needed some initial guidance, overall they've found the system empowering. A real plus is that there is no 'clean up' or filing required at the end of each project as Union Square intuitively keeps files organised and items can easily be searched by key words or attributes. It's really a 'set and forget' approach that allows you to easily organise data, manage work flow, focus on the project and move on to the next thing.'

He describes Union Square as a comprehensive management system for forward-thinking design practices. More than that, he notes that its ability to support building information modelling (BIM) workflows has enhanced Scott Carver's working culture.

'As someone who really believes in the power of technology to improve productivity, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Union Square to any architecture and design practice with a commitment to collaboration and innovation.'

unionsquaresoftware.com.au



1 Netball Central - Sydney Olympic Park
2 Scott Carver Managing Director, Rodney Paesler
3 Marina Square - Wentworth Point Sydney



Kaynemaile takes car park design to next level



The striking new facade of an iconic Gold Coast shopping centre harnesses innovative seamless mesh technology from [Kaynemaile](#).

The facade - believed to be the largest kinetic mesh facade in the southern hemisphere - is made from Kaynemaile's award-winning polycarbonate seamless mesh and is part of an A\$670 million redevelopment of Pacific Fair Shopping Centre on the Gold Coast. When completed, the centre will be the largest in Queensland and the fourth largest in Australia.

Set to run the length of the upgraded 6,500-space car park, the facade was designed collaboratively by Kaynemaile and Scentre Design and Construction, which is managing the design and construction of Pacific Fair Shopping Centre's redevelopment for owner AMP Capital.

It features two Kaynemaile products: a kinetic 3D facade and large scale Building-Armour architectural mesh panels. The facade comprises 188 multi-layer seamless mesh panels, totalling 1,850 square metres, and two Building-Armour flat panels, totalling 600 square metres. The largest panel is 50 m wide by 9m tall and was installed by hand in one lift.

The kinetic facade's visual impact is caused by light hitting each of the 10 million rings used in its construction at a different angle. The two layers of Kaynemaile mesh are executed in aqua and champagne, giving a dynamic moiré effect. At night the facade is lit from below, creating the impression of an undulating wave. During the day, the 3D surface is reminiscent of a shimmering fish skin.

John White, Senior Development Manager, AMP Capital, confirms this compelling visual statement is key to the project brief.

'This car park facade sits hard on the boundary of the site on its busiest road frontage. The building is very prominent to passing traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular. The brief was therefore to give the building an interesting aspect for passersby, to create

interest in the shopping centre. The intention always was for the facade to have a kinetic nature.'

The project also answered a number of challenges, he adds. 'Representations had been made to stakeholders about the concept design very early in the project. When the time came to execute the design, a number of challenges were encountered, including limited space on the boundary to locate a facade system and a difficult work site to install the facade system - adjoining roads, a bus interchange, a footpath and trees.

'Capital cost was another consideration, mostly related to supporting the alternative steel screen system and delivering the kinetic aspect of the brief in a corrosive coastal environment where moving metal parts are prone to seizing up.

'Kaynemaile allowed us to deal with each of these issues, being a lightweight, easy to install, non-metal system. In particular, the opportunity to use the existing car park structure without any additional support framing saved significant cost.'

Stephen Simpson, Regional Manager Design Projects, Scentre Group Design, says he came across Kaynemaile when a colleague learned about the company at a conference. With the initial concept under review, Kaynemaile provided solutions to many of the issues encountered.

In particular, Kaynemaile mesh offered benefits at the construction stage. The mesh is lightweight and doesn't require a crane for installation. Screens over 50m wide or 50m high can be erected by hand in a day, unlike metal mesh, which has to be unrolled in limited widths and lifted by crane or heavy equipment.

He adds Kaynemaile mesh offered a number of other benefits. It is non-combustible and meets the requirements for natural ventilation of car parks. Sustainability was a concern for AMP Capital, and Kaynemaile was able to meet and exceed all its requirements. In

addition, the product maintains outlook, so drivers can see from the inside out, while the 3D mesh gives 80% visual privacy.

'We were also really impressed by the speed with which Kaynemaile expedited the project,' he adds. 'The usual timeframe would be eight months to a year, but the timeframe for this facade was six months and Kaynemaile succeeded in delivering within four.

'I would certainly use Kaynemaile again on the basis that it's a great-looking material that's great to work with and has a diverse range of applications. I should also note that this was a custom project for Kaynemaile and we were really impressed by the way the team there was able to work collaboratively with us to come up with the right solution.


'Using Kaynemaile really invigorated this project for us. It turned a car park into a compelling architectural statement. To sum up, Kaynemaile takes car park design to the next level.'

Kaynemaile founder and New Zealand national Kayne Horsham invented Kaynemaile as a modern version of chainmail. While working as artistic director for Weta Workshop on the Lord of the Rings films, he was required to produce lightweight, robust and authentic-looking chainmail. Having found that traditional chainmail suffered weakness at the join where the rings are connected, Kayne created a seamless polycarbonate mesh. Since then Kaynemaile has evolved into a cutting-edge architectural product with unique aesthetic and functional benefits.

Special thanks to Austaron Surfaces


[kaynemaile.com](#)

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