



The 1960s Rocks Redevelopment Scheme – seemed like a good idea at the time.



SYDNEY HARBOUR FORESHORE AUTHORITY

Jack Munday Place 2009 – a vibrant celebration of the importance of local communities

Urban Planning in the Time Of Mad Men

by **Mike Collins** – Chair of Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority

One of the ways in which the television drama, *Mad Men*, successfully evokes Manhattan in 1960 is through little asides that cleverly satirise the social norms of the day. A mother chastises her son for playing with a dry cleaning plastic bag over his head, but out of concern for the dry cleaning, not the child. A taxi passes New York’s iconic Armoury and passengers question why it hasn’t been bulldozed yet.

The humour in these quips is that, whilst we gasp from our 21st century perspective, they sympathetically reflect the social norms of the time. There was much discussion about Sydney in the same period at the recent opening of Jack Munday Place, which Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority created to interpret and celebrate a cultural and community movement that is integral to the story of The Rocks.

Jack Munday Place marks the location of protests led by Jack Munday in 1973, but Jack himself will be the first person to tell you that Jack Munday Place is not about him. It is about a movement which, although local in ambition, was part of a wider shift in Australia’s national identity which saw Australians drawn to their own history, their own stories, their own communities.

The idea that what mattered was British, or that what was desirable was American, went out the window, as we found a new sense of identity in all aspects of our culture. Even, eventually, in the seemingly dry realms of town planning. In a striking example of how cultures shape cities – and not vice versa – notions of the ‘Manhattanisation’ of Sydney, notoriously exemplified by the 1960 Rocks Redevelopment Scheme, went out the window.

So much so that by the time of The Rocks protests, that scheme was stone dead, having been abandoned by the both City of Sydney and the State Government seven years earlier. Commonly misunderstood to be about ‘saving The Rocks’, the 1973 protests led by Jack Munday were in fact about keeping living, active communities in The Rocks, not just the buildings themselves.

But the movement that he led was the genesis of Green Bans, and an integral part of a major rethinking of planning in New South Wales, underpinned by a recognition that many of our places are of regional significance and must be managed accordingly. In 1977, New South Wales became the first State to enact legislation to protect places of State heritage significance in the form of the NSW Heritage Act. All other States quickly followed suit, showing a direct lineage between the protests that Jack led in Sydney and the birth of regulated heritage preservation around Australia.

The importance of The Rocks to people from right across the State underpins the very existence of Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, which works to preserve, interpret and, above all, activate the precinct for all Australians.

It is fitting then that since opening Jack Munday Place we have successfully brought our new ‘village square’ to life with food and fashion markets. These markets are carefully programmed to highlight small producers from Sydney and other communities of NSW. This is appropriate given the push to support local communities and local jobs that Jack Munday Place celebrates.

Although signage explains the name of Jack Munday Place and the events behind it, the sight of Sydneysiders relaxing and quietly enjoying a beautiful

space, whilst supporting small local businesses, is the most fitting tribute to the ideals that Jack and his contemporaries were fighting for in 1973.

It is also pleasing that these markets and other events have been so successful in reengaging surrounding CBD workers with the heritage beauty of The Rocks. The Foreshore Authority programs every event with the aim of keeping this precinct directly relevant to the life, economy and culture of Sydney. We do this to ensure that The Rocks can never again be seen as just a collection of buildings.

For as Jack Munday will tell you, when a building, no matter how special, is just a building, then someone can always try to argue for “something better”. And, like the social mores of *Mad Men*, buildings that will seem preposterous 50 years hence, can seem not only acceptable, but praiseworthy, in their day.

Mike Collins is the Chair of Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority and former Chair of the NSW Heritage Council. The Foreshore Authority hosts food and fashion markets on Fridays, Saturdays and Sunday in Jack Munday Place – at the junction of Argyle and George Streets, The Rocks.

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