

President's Report for period from January 2011 to August 2011
The Glebe Society Annual General Meeting
Benledi Meeting Room

28th August 2011

This report covers the period from January 2011 till today's Annual General Meeting.

I would like to thank Lesley for her great stewardship of the Society over her term and pay tribute to the work she did on two mammoth issues, Harold Park and the Bays precinct.

But it was also Lesley who backed me into a corner and begged me to help fill a presidential hiatus. So I am something of a Claytons President. Yes, I have been around the Society for a while but I see myself as a background facilitator, not front of house.

Helping me through this year were Bruce Davis and Jan Macindoe and I am profoundly grateful for their help and wise counsel. And if thanks are to be put in their rightful place – at the top of the agenda, rather than at the end - let me also pay tribute to the members of the Management Committee for their extraordinary expertise, generous support and their willingness to jump in and help in a crisis. While it is unfair to single out individuals, I would nevertheless like to mention

- Neil Macindoe's work in planning and in the ongoing task of ensuring the new City Plan is geared to Glebe's 19th century heritage streetscapes and also keeping a watching brief on Harold Park
- Also the two people who so ably manage the "public face" of the Society, our Bulletin editor, Edwina Doe, and our Website Coordinator, Phil Young, and
- Dorothy Davis and her team who have offered us such an interesting mix of events and who carried them off with such style.
- Lastly, I want to pay tribute to the late David Mander Jones who was a valued and much-loved member of the Management Committee.

I want to touch on some issues confronting us this year, which fell outside the specific agendas of our Subcommittees. Subcommittee issues have been covered in the various reports which have appeared in the *Bulletin* and I see no advantage in going over the same ground. However, I will talk later in general terms about the remarkable contribution of our Subcommittees.

2011 began with the closure of the Glebe Post Office. This outraged Glebians and galvanised them into waging what was a model campaign of protest against the Australia Post decision. It was heart-warming to see Glebe people rallying in an attempt to protect the amenity of our suburb.

Sadly, the campaign led by Jan Wilson and her team was in vain – we lost our purpose-built post office. And when the police eventually move to their new headquarters in Leichhardt (and although there will still be a small shop-front police

presence in Glebe), this may mean that none of this trio of civic buildings (the post office, the court house and the police station) will be serving their original purpose.

These three purpose-built civic structures carry evidence of James Barnet's love of classical architecture but they also have a directness and lack of pretension which sits well with Glebe. On the other hand, Ambrose Thornley's Italianate Town Hall in St Johns Road, currently undergoing restoration by Council, is a far grander affair. Nevertheless it will be a welcome addition in 2012 to the paucity of usable community spaces currently available in Glebe.

However, one such space, in the Walter Burley Griffin Incinerator, took up a significant amount of time and effort this year to try to achieve some sensible modification of the conditions of use which Council was threatening to impose. The outcome was less generous than we hoped but we achieved some amelioration. Special thanks are due to Bruce Davis for carriage of this issue.

Jan Macindoe kindly coordinated our pre-election meeting with candidates. The early signs from the O'Farrell government are encouraging in relation to issues such as land-based planning and their approach to the master planning of the bays as well as the importance of community consultation in such processes. But their eventual actions will speak louder than their verbal assurances. The election also brought about a change in the electorate's representation at State level. We look forward to the opportunity of working constructively with the new member for Balmain, Jamie Parker.

Jan Macindoe was also instrumental in bringing to fruition the Glebe Walks project. It was a huge step for the Society to turn its old paper-based walking guide into something more tech-savvy. We have had very positive feedback from those who have undertaken the walks (both physical and virtual). The websites of the City of Sydney and Tourism NSW now carry links to Glebe Walks. With this project, we have expanded our offerings not only to members, but also to the wider public and tourists.

Of course, the advent of the Glebe Walks section of our website has led us to look with a more critical eye at other parts of the site. A small group has been wrestling with how best to manage and present the history and heritage resources of the Society. In this context we have had discussions with Lyn Milton not only about the extent of our archival holdings but also about more support for our Archives. We have also consulted widely on the project, including with the Dictionary of Sydney, but are yet to get to grips with how best to present this wealth of material in a way which is economical, both in terms of workload and cost.

The Society has, through Bruce's diligent efforts, accumulated comfortable reserves against a rainy day. The PO campaign and our website walks project (which was part-funded by the Royal Australian Historical Society) have fallen into the rainy day category and as a consequence have made a small inroad into our reserves.

It was in the course of the history/heritage project consultations that Dr Lisa Murray made the comment that the Glebe Society is a standout because of the number of issues we cover. As I mentioned at our New Members' night (and I hope those who were there will bear with the repetition), we are an amalgam of an historical society, a family history resource, a resident action group, an environmental group, a social club, and an active participant with other local groups. We

have been involved with the Coalition of Glebe Groups and the Blackwattle Bay Coalition. We have valuable links to local schools, the Royal Australian Historical Society, The National Trust NSW, and the Walter Burley Griffin Society as well as a range of resident action groups within the LGA. In addition to our many interactions with the City of Sydney, we are undertaking the Glebe and Forest Lodge component of their wider and fascinating project of recording local plaques in the LGA.

That we can operate across such a broad range is in large part due to the strength of our subcommittees who do so much to spread the load. Convenors and Subcommittee members have an extraordinary range of expertise, are thoughtful, wise and have valuable contacts. They have helped the Society win credibility and respect at Council and government level. The same can be said for the project teams which periodically coalesce to deal with an issue of the moment and disperse quietly. So our flexible structure allows for continuity on on-going issues and an ability to deal with short term projects. This mechanism allows for stability but also offers the opportunity for time-pressed members to get a taste of the Society at work and contribute to our efforts in different ways.

And spreading the load is hugely important. Yes, we deal with a broad range of issues but to do so in an organised, thoughtful and professional manner does require a little effort. The Management Committee and Convenors can and do draw on a significant pool of members.

Overall the Society's membership remains fairly steady although there is a certain level of churn as people move in and out of the suburb - and we can even boast of longstanding outposts in Germany, the UK and New York. And this year, Glebe Society membership has achieved a "valued gift status" with parents bestowing it on offspring and sellers gifting new membership to incoming owners. At the recent New Members Night, we had a great turnout of people who had joined the Society over the last two years. On the other hand, some of our members can - at least in theory - tick off attendance at 42 Glebe Society AGMs. But I think they would agree that although the Society has changed along with changing conditions, it has stayed true to its early ideals of maintaining our heritage values and history and improving the amenity of Glebe.

And finally, I note that while continuity is good, the need for organisational renewal must be balanced against it. These days, voluntary organisations need to be 'professional' not only about their strategic objectives and dealing with day-to-day issues which arise but also about succession planning; about valuing volunteers and about fulfilling membership programs. We have gone some way but I am sure the next President of the Society will be ably qualified to sharpen the focus.

Liz Simpson-Booker

August 2011