

Australian Planner is the Journal
of the Royal Australian Planning Institute.
Published quarterly

RAPI

Volume 36 Number 4, 1999

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ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES

Direct all advertising enquiries to the Associate Editor

PRODUCED BY

The Federation Press

PO Box 45, Annandale NSW 2038

Telephone 61 2 9552 2200

DESIGN

Art direction: Graham Rendell

CAD production: Paula Kelly

Cover design: Joe Allen

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ISSN 0729-3682

Print Post Approved No. PP255003/01199

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N O T E S . T O C O N T R I B U T O R S

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The manuscripts of articles should be supplied on floppy disk in IBM-DOS format (Word 6 or 7 preferred) or by email with two paper copies on single-sided A4 pages. Laser copies or original illustrations in a form able to be easily reproduced should be provided rather than photocopies. Photographs must be clear

and crisp. Tables and figures can be supplied separately on computer disk and must have captions. A simple bar scale is preferred for maps and a north arrow should be used.

Language should be direct, concise and targeted for a wide-ranging audience. First order headings should be in lower case bold with second order headings in upper case. Third order headings should be avoided but, if necessary, they should be lower case bold. There should be minimal use of capitalisation, punctuation and emphasis (ie. limit the use of bold words and italics) in the text.

Abbreviations and acronyms should be spelt out in the first instance with the abbreviation following in parentheses and then

used in the main text. No indentations are required with the exception of a 2cm indent for points.

References used should be cited in the text (eg. Roberts 1995) and alphabetically listed using the Harvard system. Punctuation should be minimised in the reference list. The name of the book or journal should be in italics. Journals need to show volume and page numbers. An example is: Roberts B 1995 'Managing the tourism product', *Australian Planner* 32:147-153.

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All contributions are subject to peer review.

IM COLMAN is a Sydney-based consultant and Past President of RAPI New South Wales.

A PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTE TAKES A STAND

The Royal Australian Planning Institute (NSW Division) and the 1970s battle for The Rocks precinct in Sydney.

George Clarke was NSW Division President

Almost 28 years ago (June 1972) the NSW Division Committee of the Royal Australian Planning Institute made a detailed submission to the then Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority. The document presented the Institute's views on the redevelopment proposals that had earlier been adopted by the NSW State Government for The Rocks area. In August of the same year the writer (who at that time was the Honorary Secretary of the Institute) joined other speakers on the rostrum at an over-flow public meeting in the Abraham Mott Hall in Argyle Street, Sydney, when community feeling opposing the redevelopment was reaching a peak. There was no doubt about it: RAPI was taking a public stand on the matter.

This paper covers the role of the RAPI in the campaign to "save The Rocks" during the decade 1971-80. In so far as the records permit (and subject to further and more targeted research) it also touches on the interactions between the Institute and the SCRA, the National Trust, the Builders Labourers' Federation and other bodies associated in one way or another with the campaign to 'save' this unique *quartier* of early Sydney.

Meredith and Verity Burgmann (1998) devote a chapter of their *Green Bans, Red Union* to a discussion of the way the then New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation used the tactic of the 'green ban' to frustrate inner-city development projects in Sydney during the early 1970s. Quoting from the 1978 work of Roddewig (*Green Bans: The birth of Australian environmental politics*), they remind us that in Sydney's Rocks area in particular,

there were issues which were more fundamental than those associated with earlier, greener campaigns such as the one which saved Kelly's Bush in the harbour-side suburb of Hunter's Hill.

According to Roddewig, the Green Ban in The Rocks 'was a challenge to the very nature of Australian urban planning and development, and the support it enjoyed evidenced more clearly the wide disillusion with a political process that gave some interest groups no chance to be heard' (emphasis added).

In Chapter 10 of their book the Burgmanns offer their version of what happened at The Rocks, Woolloomooloo, Victoria Street, Waterloo and other inner-city redevelopment locations during the 1970s. And on page 199 of that book, reference is made to a June 1972 report on The Rocks proposals by the Royal Australian Planning Institute NSW.

This present paper is in the nature of a personal memoir by someone who was directly and intimately involved in the preparation of that RAPI report. The full story of the Institute's involvement in this turbulent and historic phase in Australian urban politics remains to be told. In the meantime I offer this shorter, somewhat anecdotal version.

Why tell this old story at this time?

I cite several reasons. The Parliament House Sydney launch of the Burgmanns' book in 1988 brought to the surface many memories and not a few questions relating to RAPI and its activities during the period under review and since. Shortly after that launch, an invitation from the Historic Houses Trust of NSW to participate in the February 1999 Sydney

forum on the green ban movement provided a second stimulus.

The Institute's own Code of Professional Conduct (1998 version) provided yet another provocation for my inquiries. The preamble to the Code talks about "the interests of the community" and explicitly reminds practitioners that their responsibility to the community "must take precedence over sectional interests". I suggest that the challenge to Australian urban planning to which Roddewig refers was in fact an invitation for the Institute of the day to take what can now be seen as an unusually proactive role in the community interest.

History will tell whether or not the Institute's actions during the Rocks controversy constituted a unique example of professional intervention, seen as an inescapable if not obligatory social responsibility by the Division Committee of the day. At the risk of generalising, my own view is that at the institutional level the planning profession - like other mainstream urban professions in this country - has lost any appetite it might have had for manning the barricades when controversial environmental disputes are on the table.

The exceptions - and again I generalise - usually involve issues on which it is possible to make broad statements of concern on policy aspects without getting too involved in detail, and where implied or explicit attacks on the work of colleagues can be avoided.

In the design professions - architecture, planning, landscape architecture, civil engineering - the tendency seems to have been for the

professional bodies concerned to stand clear of controversies which involve major and lengthy confrontations (with government in particular).

A search for reasons for this conservatism must wait for another time and place. But within the Planning Institute I suggest that there may be a correlation between "reluctance to engage" on the one hand, and the job loyalties of senior committee members on the other. Since the mid-1960s, the RAPI NSW has had some 14 presidents, 9 of whom held senior public sector positions at the time of their presidency. It is perhaps less than coincidental that at the time of its most active involvement in The Rocks controversy, both the President and the Secretary as well as three other committee members were private consultants who were free of the constraints and loyalties associated with government employment.

The background to the Institute's involvement at The Rocks

Any attempt to explain the rationale for the RAPI to engage in direct confrontation with a major government agency – this being the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority – must involve an examination of contemporary events, politics, personalities and influences. The following are worthy of mention.

- During 1970-71 the federal Labor party was in the ascendancy. Gough Whitlam and Tom Uren were both

courting the urban professions with their promises of a new deal for the cities. The 1972 election brought them to power, and for the first time ever in this country, inner-city planning and development issues were on a national government agenda. This reformist energy soon flowed into the planning profession, and is reflected (for example) in the choice of Hugh Stretton as the RAPI Sidney Luker Memorial Lecturer in 1972, when he spoke in Sydney on his ideas for Australian cities.

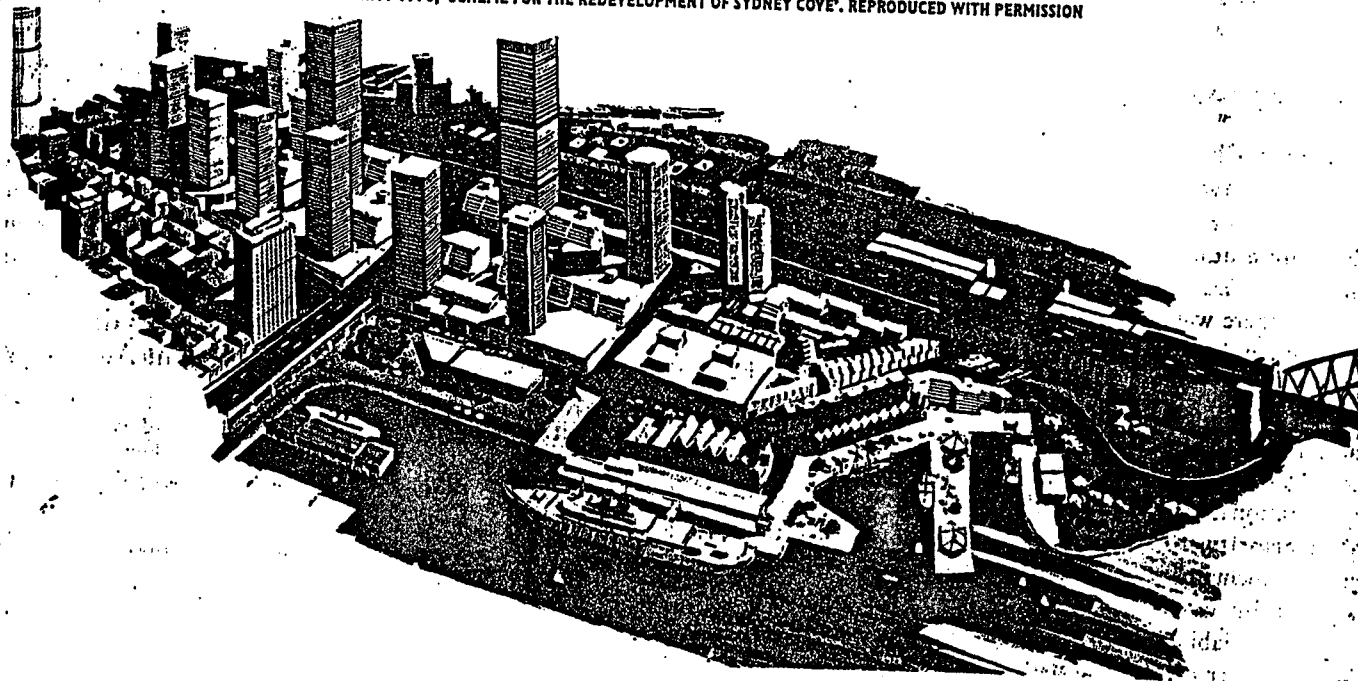
- Concern for "the environment" (green and brown) was growing globally, following the 1972 UN Stockholm conference. The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the Australian Institute of Urban Studies (AIUS) had both been established in the mid-60s, reflecting new non-government concerns for the natural and built environments. Preparations for the first UN Habitat Conference on Human Settlements in Vancouver were well under way – strongly supported by the federal Labor Government and by bodies such as AIUS.
- In the heritage field, the National Trust NSW was into its third decade. The Sydney City Council was starting to think about historic buildings; and there were the beginnings of pressure on the NSW State government to introduce heritage legislation (culminating in the Heritage Act 1978). It is significant that at the time

of the Rocks controversy there was no such legislation in NSW. The sole occupier of the heritage horizon was the National Trust, there being no Heritage Council, no National Estate Report, no Australian Heritage Commission, no ICOMOS. (Curiously, the record suggests that the National Trust's initial position vis-a-vis the SCRA and its scheme for The Rocks was supportive).

- There was a development boom – aided and abetted by a Liberal state government whose values coincided nicely with those of the property development industry, but whose response to a new national Labor government was understandably less than cooperative. There was a major philosophical difference between national and state governments in regard to city development. The climate for conflict was ripe; and within the building trades in particular there was plenty of fuel for the conflagration that was soon to erupt in regard to working conditions and pay (amongst other things).
- There was a near-scandalous overnight rush in State Parliament to pass the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority Act 1968, with no prior White paper and minimal debate. There was no time nor opportunity for citizen input.
- There was concern amongst many Sydney professionals about the appointment of a Melbourne-based consultancy (UDPA – an offshoot of the

FIGURE 1: SCHEME FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF SYDNEY COVE.

SOURCE: SYDNEY COVE REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY 1970, 'SCHEME FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF SYDNEY COVE'. REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION



Authority in this way. Members of the Committee at that time included David Briggs, Sam Lipson, John Roseth, Gus Spielman, and myself – with Jack Nicholls as President. Magee responded on 17 March, and the first of several meetings between RAPI and the Authority took place on 28 April 1971. It was attended by myself as "spokesman", Sam Lipson (convenor of the Division's Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee) and one or two others. The Authority was presented with a list of topics for discussion.

During the following 4 months a RAPI sub-committee chaired by Sam Lipson worked on a submission on the exhibited Rocks scheme. By letter of 20 September 1971 the Division Committee sent copies of its interim report to SCRA (Magee), the State Planning Authority (Peter Kacirek), and others for information. The report was confidential at this stage, and was not issued at the Institute's weekend school that took place on 25-26 September, even though the whole question of city redevelopment was on the School's program.

The detailed 10-page interim report was signed off by Sam Lipson on behalf of the Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee that comprised David Briggs, Maurie Edwards, Wally Abraham, Gus Spellman and myself. Its message was clearly stated on its final page:

...The Authority's proposals are unimaginative and based on economic and sociological assumptions which will not satisfy significant planning principles pertinent to the context of this unique site... we strongly recommend that the Authority reassess its objectives...

On 1 November 1971 the SCRA acknowledged receipt of the interim report in a terse one-paragraph letter signed by its Secretary P Solomon. No concessions were offered. The scene was set for continuing confrontation.

Undeterred by the Authority's uncompromising stand, the Committee resolved on 19 November to advise the Authority that it did not intend to curtail its study on the matter. It further resolved to seek yet another meeting with the Authority and its consultants. That meeting took place in the SCRA offices on 11 February 1972 – only a fortnight or so after Rocks residents led by the late Nita McCrae had confronted the bulldozers in Gloucester Street.

Whilst these events were unfolding in RAPI, things were 'hotting up' outside. The Rocks Residents' Group – established

in November 1970 and chaired by McCrae – was by now an active political force, in touch with federal Labor (through Tom Uren) and with the trade union movement. It was getting media coverage, especially in regard to housing issues. Jack Munday of the NSW Builders Labourers' Federation wrote to the Residents' Group in October 1971 suggesting a meeting. The result was the now historic November 6 BLF announcement of a ban on the project. The union vowed that "it would not move a single brick until the 416 residents forced to move had been satisfactorily rehoused..."

The union was not only concerned with resident housing. Its ban also targeted the threat to heritage. The RAPI committee was clearly influenced by these unprecedented moves, and by the growing civic and political turbulence surrounding the entire project. December and January were holiday months but there was no holiday spirit within the Rocks community whose members were facing eviction and the demolition of their houses.

On 17 March 1972 I reported to RAPI on the meeting with SCRA and advised that the finalisation of the Committee's Rocks report was imminent. In the event it was not until June that the document was finished. It was immediately released to SCRA, and 80 copies were distributed to government and the public in July. It was formally adopted as Institute policy on 18 August 1972 under the chairmanship of George Clarke.

The 1972 RAPI Report

In the words of the Report itself, the Division Committee's assessment of the SCRA 'scheme was concerned with two lines of thought:

- a review of the (Scheme's) objectives...; their validity and relevance; and the extent to which the plan satisfies those objectives
- an evaluation... of the status, role, and responsibilities of the Authority, and its position relevant (sic.) to other official agencies concerned with planning in the metropolitan centre'.

The year or so during which the Committee prepared its interim and final report was one of the most turbulent in the city's history. The BLF, led by Jack Munday, Joe Owens and Bob Pringle, had been successful in placing a green ban over The Rocks precinct and numerous other downtown redevelopment sites.

Dozens of long-time residents received eviction orders whilst Premier Askin and his coalition government openly threatened arrest and legal action against unionists and residents alike.

Against this troubled background the Institute produced its June 1972 report and policy statement, soon to be formally adopted and released over the name of president Jack Nicholls. Today – almost 30 years after, and at a time when the disposal of government property is in top gear – they make interesting reading. For the historical record alone I reproduce them here in full.

- "The Rocks area is not a privately owned piece of real estate to be exploited in the most profitable way. The land in question has been acquired or is controlled by the Government on behalf of the people of New South Wales. It is part of the national heritage, paid for many times over by the generations since the continent was first settled.
- The area north of the Cahill Expressway should include major public open park land designed to afford full integration with the historic buildings and places which are to be retained in the present scheme; this refers particularly to the area bounded by the Cahill Expressway and Argyle Street.
- The area south of the Cahill Expressway could be developed commercially along the lines proposed by the Authority.
- The provision of a limited public housing component in the northern sector of the site is desirable, providing that noise and pollution problems can be solved.
- The whole question of movement within, to and from The Rocks area requires complete re-assessment in the light of the City of Sydney's Strategic Plan (released in 1971) and the likely outputs of the Metropolitan Transportation Study (a later State government initiative which virtually came to nothing).
- The State Government, as the custodians of the area, and as the body responsible for establishing the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority, should take steps to amend the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Act to provide for better consultation, public participation, and occasions for the exhibition and seeking of public comment on the policies and proposals of the Authority."

mainstream architectural firm of Bates Smart and McCutcheon) to lead the production of the master plan for The Rocks. Understandably, the question arose: why hire interstate experts when there are competent locals available and ready to move on the job?

- Within the RAPI itself, membership was largely representative of academic, state government and consulting interests. Local government planning was in its infancy, and hence the Institute was perhaps able to be more interventionist when local and city planning issues were on the table. Paradoxically, the President at the time the Institute decided to formally investigate the Rocks scheme was Jack Nicholls, then Chief Planner of Sutherland Shire; but Nicholls was UK-trained, probably seen as a neutral figure in the city planning scene, and employed by a city-fringe council. He had nothing to lose by his endorsement of the Division's position in the ensuing conflict.
- The next Division President (1972) was the redoubtable and very energetic George Clarke, then consultant to the Sydney City Council – a Council, which had seen its control over The Rocks, captured by a powerful statutory authority. There was no love lost between the two bodies. Clarke's loyalties to his client Council were unlikely to be diluted by the odd skirmish with the SCRA.
- Public participation in planning was just beginning to become acceptable, if not tolerated and encouraged in some circles. The seminal Skeffington Report in the UK was starting to influence Australian practice and participation was the buzzword of the age.

How and why did RAPI get involved?

There are a number of threads to the answer.

First, there was a growing sympathy with the concerns of the National Trust about the loss of heritage buildings in the city generally. When the SCRA placed its consultants' scheme on public display in January 1971, it soon became evident that conservation of heritage buildings was not a priority. Nor was it in earlier schemes, including the concept prepared by Sir John Overall who had made himself available from his position as Commissioner of the National Capital

Development Commission to advise the State government a couple of years before. Despite this official disinterest, there was growing grass-roots concern about destruction of heritage buildings in the city and elsewhere.

Within the City Council itself, there was a parallel concern. On 8 February 1971 Alderman Andrew Briger, Vice Chair of the City Council's City Development Committee, wrote to the Trust and RAPI (amongst other bodies) inviting representation at a conference "aimed at determining an Action Plan to aid the preservation of the remaining historical buildings" within the City.

George Clarke's firm (Urban Systems Corporation) in association with McConnel Smith and Johnson and W D Scott, had already been engaged on the preparation of the strategic plan for the city, and heritage conservation was on their agenda. The meeting in question took place on 23 February 1971 at the Town Hall; I was the RAPI representative. I believe the Trust was represented by Professor Max Freeland, Director Reg Walker and Assistant Director John Morris. From that meeting onwards, there was considerable informal liaison and interaction between RAPI and the Trust – coming on top of what was probably a sizeable membership overlap.

Second, the Institute saw the scheme for The Rocks as being contrary to the public interest, and dependant for its implementation on a number of proposals which were not based on sound town planning principles. The Institute's report on the redevelopment proposals for the East Rocks Area, released in June 1972, sets out the Institute's concerns in some detail. Public interest issues were of paramount importance.

Third, I believe that amongst a majority of the Committee of the day there was a view that the Institute could not risk being seen as indifferent to the Rocks proposals as exhibited. For a professional body committed by its constitution to 'advancing the art and science of town planning' to be seen as turning a blind eye to such a major urban planning proposal was not an option.

Fourth, I think that the Institute was beginning to realise that there was an opportunity for it to assume a quasi-leadership role in the ensuing months – given its prompt initiative in arranging the briefing from the SCRA. It was also perceived that the public profile of the planning profession had been enhanced

(in part at least) by the city's strategic planning program.

Whilst there were no formal alliances, RAPI was seen by other groups as a key player. The Institute was approached in April by the then Civic Design Society of the University of NSW, chaired by Elias Duek-Cohen. A joint meeting to discuss The Rocks project was foreshadowed. Later, a link with the NSW Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects was also established. Such links were made easier at the time because of the considerable degree of membership overlap that prevailed between these various bodies, and especially between RAPI and RAlA. Six of the 13 members of the RAPI committee were also members of RAlA.

Fifth, there was a high degree of empathy amongst a group of RAPI committee members; not only did they sit on the same committee but they socialised together and knew each other as friends. This facilitated their decision-making and their committee work generally.

Sixth, RAPI involvement was consistent with the new messages that were starting to come from Canberra. The McMahon government – soon to be replaced by Whitlam and his team – was starting to show an interest in the cities. Urban planning was at last on the national political agenda and RAPI believed that its time had come.

Finally, within some professional circles there was a growing distrust of the State coalition government. This government was seen as being overly sympathetic to the development industry in general and a number of its prominent figures in particular. The government had been reluctant to engage in consultation over the Rocks legislation, and it had failed to appoint a RAPI representative to the board of the SCRA. These perceptions and realities helped to create a climate of cynicism and distrust of the government and of its gung-ho decision to transform The Rocks into a mini-CBD.

Interaction with the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority

On 19 February 1971 – a little over a month after the Rocks scheme had been placed on exhibition – the NSW Division Committee took action by resolving to contact the Chairman of the SCRA, Owen Magee, with a request for "a private consultation" and briefing. I believe that it was the first outside body to approach

The August 1972 public meeting in The Rocks

The Division Committee meeting of 18 August was a significant one in the history of RAPI involvement. At the Institute's invitation, Austin Chapman of the SCRA addressed the Committee on the latest proposals for The Rocks and spoke to the Authority's formal response to the Institute's report which by then had been received. Chapman's presentation did little to improve the cool relationship that had developed between the two bodies.

The Authority's new proposals were then referred to Sam Lipson's sub-committee for further assessment. In addition, the meeting discussed recent correspondence from The Rocks Residents' Group and Jack Munday (BLF). The latter requested George Clarke and myself to attend a public meeting in the Abraham Moit Hall on Monday 28 August. My memories of that meeting suggest an overflow attendance, a poorly orchestrated and ill-judged presentation by Chapman and other SCRA executives to an angry and hostile audience, forceful yet passionate speeches by Nita McCrae and Jack Munday, (and possibly Ted Mack), and resolutions which signalled a continuation of the battle and of the green bans.

For RAPI it was the first – and possibly the last – occasion on which the Institute shared a public stage with representatives of groups which were seen by many outsiders as rabble, as communist sympathisers and irrational anti-development freaks. I spoke for about 7 minutes, and concluded by offering 2 propositions. Firstly, the Rocks battle had shown that the State Government could not be trusted to act in the public interest when it came to the management of public lands, heritage and social equity. Secondly, we were dealing with an imperfect real estate market that ignored social and cultural values, and was turning our city into a concrete jungle.

A conclusion was that the Rocks scheme had no democratic basis, had been approved by Cabinet without public debate, and should be withdrawn.

The story continues...

The Institute remained involved. On 27 October it wrote to the SCRA and on 24 November it resolved to make public the contents of that letter. SCRA responded with unusual speed, and its reply was

discussed by the RAPI executive on 6 December.

The Institute at the time was also aware of the current initiative by the Rocks Residents' Group to prepare a "peoples' plan" for the Rocks – involving Neville Gruzman, Nita McCrae, Meredith Walker, Eva Cox, Pat Howard, Zula Nittim, Neil Runcie and Andrew Jakubowicz. RAPI as a body did not participate in that project, although Zula Nittim was an Institute member.

In the streets, the deadlock continued into 1973 and beyond. The People's Plan was released in April on the day of the annual Rocks celebration. A major step was taken by Tom Uren (who had by then become Honourable through his position as the first Federal Minister for Urban and Regional Development) to include The Rocks in the inquiry into the National Estate. The NSW government and SCRA remained largely unmoved, however; and when demolition of the Playfair site commenced in October 1973, the BLF immediately responded by placing bans on several major city-centre building sites. The bulldozers and protesters were facing each other again.

RAPI's involvement with the SCRA and also with the residents' group continued throughout 1973, with intermittent contact between these bodies. In particular there was a formal meeting between RAPI and SCRA on 6 April. There was also liaison with the Royal Australian Institute of Architects through Sam Lipson and Bob Meyer. By this time, the RAIA had prepared its own submission on the SCRA scheme, and RAPI had received a copy.

Towards the end of 1973 it seemed that a breakthrough was in the air as evidence grew of a willingness on the part of the Authority to contemplate changes to the scheme. In September 1974 RAPI was able to state, in its Annual Report for the year, that

"the Division is not persuaded that the proposals, updated although they are, constitute a sensitive and understanding approach to this most important part of the City. The Divisions's views in certain fundamental respects differ with (sic.) the SCRA, and in this regard the Division has the support of the RAIA... (however) it now appears that changes are being seriously contemplated" [emphasis added].

By 1975, the Authority had clearly changed tack, and the RAPI annual report for 1974 -5 was able to record the Institute's general support for the

"rehabilitation work being undertaken by the Authority...". RAPI urged that "this treatment be continued in the area immediately north of the Cahill Expressway, and that residential development be encouraged. Intensive office type development was suggested to be confined south of the Expressway, enabling a link with the CBD"

The Institute was also able to report that SCRA was reviewing its total scheme, and seemed to be following the direction suggested in the submissions from the two Institutes (RAPI and RAIA).

Beyond 1975, RAPI action regarding the Rocks must await further inquiry and documentation. However, the files reveal that the Institute continued its push for reform until the early 1980s.

Conclusion

The record shows that RAPI was continuously involved in the Rocks controversy for the decade from January 1971 to June 1981 and possibly beyond. There is clear evidence that the Institute's position over those years – in parallel with that taken by other bodies – was influential in achieving a significant shift in the policies being pursued by State Government in general and the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority in particular.

It can be argued that the circumstances surrounding the Institute's involvement were so unusual that the possibility of a precedent does not arise. On the other hand, one might postulate that for whatever reasons, RAPI has over the years become more concerned with the planning process and less concerned with the likely physical outcomes of that process. And as for its commitment to the interests of the community as a whole, history will be the judge... ■

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author acknowledges with thanks the assistance given in the preparation of these reminiscences by Dr Shirley Fitzgerald, Sydney City Historian, and the Council's archival staff. The RAPI Secretariat in Sydney provided generous access to files and records of the day. Other sources included my own private papers, and the then Sydney Cove Authority (now absorbed into the recently-created Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority).

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Historic Houses Trust 1999 Sydney Forum, on the Green Bans Movement.