
Anon: Aboriginal girl camping in one of the Victoria Street houses (above Rowena Place) who died in a fire set by developer Frank Theeman's heavies in late 1974.

Art & the Green Bans (1971-1984)

Joseph Szabo, Stan Rapotec, Peter Upward, Ian Miliss and others lived on or near Victoria Street. In 1973, Szabo organized them into an exhibition fundraiser at The Stables (demolished.) The contemporaneous battle material is urgent, cheap and ephemeral, the most durable being Margaret Grafton's two-colour poster 'BLF Green Ban Tree' (1973, attrib.) Brenda Humble, a member of ROW, made an artist's book, Save the 'Loo Now (1977.) Later, big bright Earthworks Posters from the Tin Sheds appear, notably by Chips Mackinolty (Mick Fowler's Jazz send-off, 1979 with crochet by Francis Budden); for Pat Fiske's film of the BLF, 'Rocking the Foundations', 1985) and Jan Mackay ('Remember Juanita', 1975.) Margel Hinder's sculpture, 'Aphrodite', a bronze memorial fountain in Denis Winston Place (1981) celebrates their achievement. Apologies to those omitted. Please contact us!

Art & Woolloomooloo Unofficial Murals

Murals are a feature in the Loo. Matron Olive O'Neill, age 86 probably put up the first banner: Hands off! THIS COULD BE YOUR HOUSE! Nell Leonard said: We got these big pieces of board and wrote on it "homes for people not office blocks for foreign investors" and put them on the houses at night. (Fitzgerald, pers. com., in Sydney 1842-1992.) Brenda Humble and her two children painted "We love the loo" while her friend Susan Tooth painted "Robert Askin loves Laura Norda". The Rainbow Serpent appeared at 19 Harmer St (1973-4). The vernacular tradition continues with Wall Art at Sydney Place, at Dowling St Container Garden and Bourke Street Park.

Art & Woolloomooloo Official Murals
The newly institutionalised mural and community arts movements supported two mural projects. A vivid centrepiece is the Green Bans Murals or ‘Woolloomooloo History Murals’ (1982-1984) comprising 16 panels in two sections: 8 ‘renewable’ billboard panels by various artists; 7 permanent History Murals, one disappeared; panel 16 is by school children. The freeway disconnected them and the isolated, deteriorated panels were removed in 2005 and are in a council store. (‘No Nukes’ is missing.) The history panels telling the story of residents turning to the Builders Labourers Federation and the Federated Engine Drivers’ and Firemen’s Association to save Woolloomooloo are being restored. The ‘renewable’ panels will be renewed.

The removed murals feature in the video by Midnight Oil for the song *Power and Passion* (1983.) Merilyn Fairskye and Michiel Dolk painted the History Panels and co-ordinated the project. Two groups of Billboard Panels (removed) are by Robert Eadie, Bob Clutterbuck, Angela Gee, Tim Maguire, Ruth Waller, Toby Zoates, Robin Hecks and Grahame Kime and Vicki Varvaressos. This was initiated, supported and funded by resident donations, assisted by the BLF, FEDFA, Council, NSW Premiers Department and the Australia Council. The Housing Commission donated a large warehouse as a studio and State Rail the pylons. The Women and The Arts Festival Mural (1980-83), on the Domain Carpark wall, St Mary's Road: co-ordinated by Carol Ruff, designed by Jan Mackay, Marie McMahon and Ruff. Mural painting team was Carol Ruff, Jan Mackay, Marie McMahon, Nora Bindul, Helen Skye, Barbary O'Brien and Merilyn Fairskye. A City Sculpture Walk by curator Sally Coucaud included works referencing Woolloomooloo by Robyn Backen, ‘Archaeology of Bathing’, Nigel Heleyer, sound sculpture below Boy Charlton Pool and Debra Phillips, ‘Women Women and The Arts Festival Mural (1980-83), Domain Carpark wall, St Mary's Road.'
deregulation of planning heights by the Askin Government developers began buying up property in preparation of large-scale demolition, and more high-rise buildings.

Protagonists in the murals include Edmund Campion, the priest at St Columbkilles, members of WRAG (Nellie Leonards, Honora Wilkinson), journalist Juanita Nielsen and writer Tony Reeves (whose heraldic portraits appear on the Victoria Street mural), leaders of the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) and its popular leaders — Jack Mundey, Bob Pringle and Joe Owens and the vital Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association of Australasia (FEDFA). Jazzman, Mick Fowler is a hero. In 1973 tripartite committee, representing Federal, State and Sydney City governments was formed at the behest of Tom Uren and Alderman Briger, to plan future developments for the people in the Loo.

The Green Bans murals, like the struggle, are a parable about unequal power and the need for action and the breaking of a few rules and sometimes, as in the Loo, a violent confrontation with state power. For some time the real achievement of the Green Bans was in the Heritage Act and the EP&A Acts introduced by the Wran Labor Government. However, political pressure has seen these amended and disabled so that their intent of protecting heritage, environment and the 'little people' is again negligible.

Bob
NSW Liberal Premier intimately connected with developers and underworld figures; famous for saying “they’re mere labourers who do they think they are— proletariat town planners.” (Mundey talk, SMSA, 7/6/11.) Askin introduced new penal powers to arrest protesters.

Art & Wendy Bacon

Right: Wendy Bacon. Portrait by Marion Marison, 1974

Former editor of Tharunka, the students’ magazine of UNSW, living in Caldwell St Darlinghurst in March 1973, at the invitation of Arthur King also a member of the Sydney Push, attended the first meeting of residents at Arthur’s flat at 97a Victoria Street about eviction notices. She had her flat door broken down in the middle of the night by members of Squad 21, the vice squad and received a bullet and note: ‘Have a good day but avoid barbers’ shops.’ In 1973 she interviewed Jack Bourke, the chairman of the NSW Housing Commission, for Tharunka. She completed a law degree and became a journalist for the National Times in the mid 1980s. Wendy Bacon said: “There is nothing more frightening when legal and illegal violence are working together.” (In Anne Coombs, Sex and Anarchy: The life and death of the Sydney Push, 1996.)

Battlers of Kelly’s Bush
Betty James, Kath Lehany, Christine Lawson, Monica Sheehan had exhausted all avenues when they turned to the BLF for support in mid 1971. This was the first Green Ban.

BLF — NSW Builders or Labourers’ Federation
— BL’s
After a long struggle in the NSW BLF, rank and file activists rescued the union from its conservative leadership in 1968, when Jack Mundey, former Parramatta rugby league star and CPA activist, was elected secretary. With Bob Pringle and Joe Owens (also CPA) the new leadership built the NSW BLF into an "abnormally democratic and combative"
union. The 11,000 NSW BLF members were in control of the union. Elected leaders had limited tenure and received wages at the award rate. The NSW BLF went on the offensive, winning "substantial real wage rises, accident pay, paid public holidays, and improved safety and amenities" in the low wage, dangerous (around 40 builders labourers were killed each year in NSW) industry. They organised the job sites by forcing employers to accept a "no-ticket, no start" policy.

De-regulation of foreign capital and building heights led to a building boom. The combination of militant industrial tactics with the internal democracy of the NSW BLF won the involvement and fierce loyalty of the members. The Mundey team argued for the "social responsibility of labour", that the interests of the working class do not stop at the factory gate, that the "political" is inseparable from the "industrial". As well as Green Bans, builders labourers imposed industrial bans over prisoners’ rights, discrimination against a gay student at Macquarie University and in support of a women's studies course at the University of Sydney. The Green Bans were all approved by full branch meetings and never lifted even as economic recession kicked in from late 1974.

The end came in March 1975. The building bosses (as the MBA or Master Builders Association) found their saviours in the trade union officialdom of the federal BLF and other unions which felt under threat from the NSW BLF’s militancy, democracy and incorruptibility. When the MBA successfully applied for deregistration of the national and state BLF branches, Norm Gallagher, the federal BLF secretary and a leading member of the pro-China CPA (M-L) (which split from the CPA in 1963), moved in to bust the NSW branch in an operation financed by the bosses.

They re-elected the NSW Branch Executive in November 1970: Bob Pringle president and Jack Mundey secretary with Bud Cook, Don Crotty, Ron Donahue, Brian Hogan, Tom Hogan, Alan Luthey, Morrie Lynch, Joe Owens and Dick Prendergast.


Tim Bristow
Private investigator, said he had been offered the contract to kill Juanita Nielsen, that he had turned it down, and that the man who did it was Freddy Krahe, but as Krahe died in 1981 he wasn’t in a position to offer a rebuttal.

Edmund Campion
Journalist, writer and parish priest at St Columbkilles, Woolloomooloo. Was pulled back as first secretary of WRAG by St Marys powers that be after “there were phone calls to the Cathedral.” Two books talk about the Loo struggles, Rockchoppers, Growing Up Catholic in Australia and A Place in the City which is introduced by an A.D Hope quote: “Who would haves thought to see/ New fruit on so old a tree?”

Jim Cope MHR
Called the first street meeting to save residential housing at the corner of Cathedral and Forbes St near the Tree of Knowledge, on Sunday 8 October 1972. Also speaking was Albert Sloss, MLA and Alderman Len Devine. Chaired by Frank McDonald J.P. Attended by approx. 200 people.

CRAG
Coalition of Resident Action Groups. A coalition of 17 action groups formed in April 1971 to be more efficient against mass state development proposals.

Developers & the Big Boom
After the long post-war austerity period, they de-regulated building heights and foreign funds. The State Planning Authority’s Woolloomooloo Redevelopment Plan (1969) for the ridge and basin green-lighted big investment. They saw William Street as a ‘grand boulevard’, the basin as high-rise commercial (despite it being mostly residential) and Victoria Street as high-rise residential. Developers got height bonuses for packaging small blocks into large areas—up to 10:1. This compared with the maximum possible in the city of 12:1 in height.

Developers responded with gusto. On William Street, Westfield’s towers and hotel were already underway. Sid Londish of Regional Holdings proposed towers covered the basin. (In three years Londish consolidated 270 properties to 11 acres.) Frank Theeman’s Victoria Point Pty Ltd bought up on the city-side (from 55-115 Victoria St) with plans to demolish and build three 45-storey residential towers over offices, down the sandstone cliff to Brougham Street. On
the other side of the street, Parkes Development wanted a tower over Kings Cross Station (former Kings Cross Theatre) and beside 202 Victoria St (Juanita Nielsen’s two-storey worker’s terrace.) Spatial Holdings, Mainline and Cambridge Credit had high-rise plans for several other sites. In Darlinghurst, Ian Kiernan’s company I.B.K and Home-Units PL wanted to build massive Palisades high-rise towers.

Their supporters Premier Robert Askin, Leo Port in council and the Master Builders Association bitterly opposed the Builders Labourers’ Green Bans. They used their powers to bully, evict and arrest residents and protesters and to deregister the union. The media vilified them: “do they think they’re town planners?” Conservative unions sidelined them, supporting a take-over by Norm Gallagher, Federal Secretary of the BLF. This collusion lifted Victoria St Green Bans in 1975. The same year, the Commonwealth and State Governments signed an agreement to restore the area and changed the zoning of the area back to residential and funded council tasks.

Jim Donovan
Secretary of the Woolloomooloo Residents Action Group, born in William Lane and lived at 2 Rowena Place. He was the last to leave the area, just a week after Juanita Nielsen’s murder because of the fires and danger posed to his two young children. Became secretary of the Waterside Workers Federation (Sydney Branch) and has actively conserved the union’s rich art history including murals by Ralf Sawyer and paintings by Rob Eadie, Roy Dalgarno and Nan Hortin.

John Doran
Council’s City Planner (c. 1972) and helped change the Town Hall culture and stressed the need for non-intrusive medium density development in the Loo and to keep affordable housing in the city.

George Farwell
Writer who published “Requiem for Woolloomooloo” on the eve of its proposed demolition.

Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen’s Association (FEDFA)
Secretary Jack Cambourn stood by the BLs and crane drivers were key to the success of the bans.

Pat Fiske

Mick Fowler (1927-1979)

Seaman, entertainer and Green Ban activist. In April 1973, he returned home to find his house boarded up. He returned some days later with 50 members of the BLF and they barricaded themselves in. He refused Theeman’s money to move, stayed put and legally contested the eviction. Thugs harassed him and services were cut off. His courage rallied others to protest the banishment of working people from the inner city. In 1973 squatters
moved into the next-door houses but seven months later Theeman's thugs, watched by several hundred police, evicted them. Mick was the sole tenant for 3 years until they finally got him out in 1977. He left his house at 115 Victoria St in May 1976 after staging a mock burial and moved to Dowling St. His band Mick Fowler and the Fowl House Five played regularly at the Rock and Roll on Cowper Wharf Rd including Mick’s green ban songs. He took the first Western jazz band to Russia and organised a traditional Jazzman’s funeral for Louis Armstrong. He called for a Royal Commission into Juanita Nielsen’s disappearance but died at age 52 two years after his eviction. Victoria Street was closed for his funeral as the massed Jazzmen playing “his soul goes marching on”, led hundreds of seamen, conservationists, labourers, lecturers, musicians, public servants, anarchists and activists.

Plaque on McElhone Stairs leading down to Woolloomooloo reads: “Memorial Plaque/to/Mick Fowler/Seaman, Musician & Green Bans Activist/ 1927-1979/For his gallant stand against demolition / of workers homes with the Builders /Labourers Federation Green Bans/ They were hard old days, they were battling days they were cruel but then in spite of it all, Victoria Street will see low income housing for workers again from his friends.

Norm Gallagher
Secretary of the Federal branch of the BLF who succeed in having the NSW Builder’s Labourers de-registered and Jack Mundey, Joe Owens and Bob Pringle and about 50 plus members expelled. Gallagher’s first act was to lift the ban on Victoria Street.

Pat Geraghty

Seaman, activist, unionist and Darlinghurst resident. Pat Geraghty, veteran member of The Maritime Union of Australia (and formerly the Seamen’s Union) and resident of Kings Cross. In the portrait commissioned by the MUA, Tom Carment wanted to show how is neighbour encountered injustice in his youth and racism at sea (and in ports) and how it affected him and his politics. An honest man whose eyes are focused on a distant horizon line. From the exhibition Banners Held High looks at contemporary industrial relations from a cultural perspective, by drawing parallels between the art making process, artists working collaboratively, and the historic moment. The exhibition identified a strong critical and aesthetic strain within contemporary Australian art practice that is best described as a kind of neo-conceptualism, interacting with and responding to a wide array of global
concerns and local political topics on certain levels, however these are many not be a primary topics and may be symbolically, abstractly or ritualistically expressed. It records the flux of ‘old industry’ production and community processes as they are transformed by gentrification and development opportunism. While this tension is a particular Sydney issue, it is part of the uneven processes of globalization. One of the main waterside recruiting yards was in Forbes St, Woolloomooloo (near Cowper Wharf Road). Films by the celebrated Waterside Workers Film Unit of Sydney, courtesy The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and Unions NSW commemorate this history.


Art & Margaret Grafton (1931-2004)

Margaret Grafton established her Darlinghurst studio in 1965 in the manse of the Uniting Church (Stanley Palmer Cultural Centre, corner of Stanley and Palmer Streets). Active in the Green Bans period, she co-founded Darlinghurst Resident Action Group with architect Colin James and city councillor Robert Tickner in 1973.

As one of the few independent weavers in Australia, she worked on some 30 major public works commissions until the end of the 1980s often in consultation with architects like Andrew Andersons (the seven Heraldic Tapestries for Parramatta Court House, 1972–4) and later the State Coat of Arms for NSW Parliament (1980) and Phillip Cox. Grafton raised her three boys (Julius, Tim and Daniel) from her commissioned work.

From the outset Grafton’s practice was experimental in design and technique. Her first metallic weavings provoked such controversy she abandoned metal for twenty-five years.
This was her silver tapestry for the Supreme Court Building (commissioned by architects McConnel, Smith and Johnson, 1976–77) in Queens Square, which hung for four days before Sir Laurence Street, the Chief Judge, ordered its removal. It now hangs (cut down) in Newcastle Court House. Her last large-scale narrative tapestry had faith and feminism as themes and celebrates the founding of St Vincent’s Hospital by the Sisters of Charity. When her studio was in the famous Blackwattle Bay complex was threatened, her activism was again called into play.

Grafton turned her energies to philosophy and was awarded her PhD from the University of Sydney in 1997. Jane Burns, founding director of the Crafts Council of Australia calls Grafton: “undoubtedly one of the most significant figures in the history of the contemporary crafts in Australia.”


Margel Hinder

Margel Hinder

Right: Margel Hinder at site of proposed sculpture, Denis Winston Park, Wooloomooloo. Photo courtesy AGNSW Archives and Research Library.

University of Sydney raised funds for a memorial sculpture to commemorate the legacy of Denis Winston and the Wooloomooloo Estate. They commissioned eminent sculptor Margel Hinder to create a memorial to the achievement of the town planning movement to stand in Denis Winston Place, a square designed by Mike Ewings. Sir Hermann David Black, the university Chancellor, officiated at the turning on of the fountain and the grand opening of Denis Winston Place for the Housing Commission of NSW in October 1981.

Hinder’s playful work celebrates human scale, diversity in housing, landscaped spaces and sculpture as essential to the pleasures of urban living. It initially complemented a small children’s playground. Margel Hinder’s public sculpture has been compared by her biographer Rene Free to Barbara Hepworth, as both artists use form in an absolute sense. Hinder, uses symmetry as central to her art. Her large public sculptures include her masterpiece, the Captain Cook Memorial Fountain in Civic Park, Newcastle (1961-66).
New York born Hinder came to Australia in 1934 after she married Australian artist Frank Hinder with their daughter, Enid.

Links:

'Winston Square Opens', University of Sydney News, 21 October 1981. Download as pdf

**Brenda Humble**
Artist trained at East Sydney Technical College who lived at 179 Forbes Street, a derelict house in Woolloomooloo, from 1973 with two children and was an active member of ROW or Residents of Woolloomooloo. She was appointed cultural development officer by the Whitlam government. Her artist’s history book, "Save the 'Loo Now" (1977) is a good document of the conflict from a resident activist perspective. Read more: http://www.smh.com.au/comment/obituaries/artist-expressed-her-true-colours-20110715-1hhtu.html#ixzz3982S4Vwr

**Colin James (1936-2013)**

Left: "Sometimes the good guys wear the black hats" ... Col James in Redfern in 2008.

Col James was a giant who took great strides with gentle steps, followed a career-long path with clear direction and purpose, but always had time for a cup of tea and to listen to those seldom heard by the architectural world he loved.

This giant used the skills and endurance of a boxer to transform the idea of "house" from a design object into "housing", the actions that over time enrich people’s lives. In his own words, he "made housing a verb" for his anonymous clients, those people unserved by the benefits of a wealthy society.

Here was a giant who taught generations of students by using the University of Sydney design studio to work in the community for co-operatives, Aboriginal organisations and the homeless.

**Petra Kelly**

Kelly saw the Green Bans on untoward developments in Sydney and took the idea of Green Bans, or the terminology back to Germany. Although the term might have been used in the 1960s, Australian environmentalist Bob Brown claims this is where the word “green” as applied to the emerging Greens in Europe came from. See: Burgmann and Burgmann, *op cit*, pp9-10.

**Arthur King**

A teacher and member of the Sydney Push, who initiated a meeting of residents regarding eviction at his flat at 97a Victoria Street in March 1973 where they decided to form a residents’ association. His disappearance over a weekend pre-empted the nasty air of danger and intimidation that marked the three-year Victoria Street campaign. Arthur King later said the aim of keeping low-cost housing in the best streets in Sydney “had no chance of success.” Later King worked as an advisor to John Hatton, a NSW independent MP and anti-corruption campaigner.

**Elvis Kipman**

A former squatter, climbed onto a chimney on No. 113 at dawn on 4 January 1974. The ‘controllers’ (thugs) attempted to shift him by lighting a fire below. Elvis shoved his pillows and blankets down the chimney and smoked the men out of the building. The police climbed onto the roof, handcuffed him and proceeded to demolish the chimney around him. (Millis and Brennan, *City Squatter*, 1974.)

**Fred Krahe (1919-1981)**

A former policeman, organised the gangs of men employed by Victoria Point Pty Ltd to terrorise tenants who defied Theeman’s offer to vacate the premises. Krahe was also well known to Saffron and Anderson as a frequenter of another of Abe Saffron’s club, the Venus Room in Orwell Street (now Eva’s Backpackers.) The Parliamentary Joint Committee said: "There was a widespread rumour that Krahe had killed her.” Freelance journalists Tony Reeves and Barry Ward made similar claims. However there was no evidence to prove this claim. Krahe died in 1981.

**Nell and Jerry Leonard**

Nell lived in the Loo all her life and married Jerry, a boxer, in 1938; they were active ALP members who pushed for an alternative to private development of Woolloomooloo. They were attended the first street meeting and the Red Letter Days in 1975 with Tom Uren and Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. Nell Leonard said: We got these big pieces of board and wrote on it ‘homes for people not office blocks for foreign investors’ and put them on the houses at night. (Fitzgerald, pers. com., in Sydney 1842-1992.)

**Sid Londish**

Developer (especially the Kings Cross Tunnel); after the 1969 State Planning Authority proposed re-zoning Woolloomooloo from residential to commercial he bought up big; when this re-zoning was revoked he sold his land to the Federal Government for $17.5
Sidney Londish, who grew up in the Loo, acquires 8.5 hectares in three years, to become the largest landowner. Most is in the centre of the basin. He hoped to gain redundant council roads and laneways to give a total area of over 11 acres. The outlandish Londish proposal envisaged buildings 20-30 storeys high. By 1971 there were only a handful of buildings this height in Sydney. The land is held by companies controlled by Londish: Gateway Developments PL, Regional Investments PL, Davlon (Woolloomooloo) PL and Jesselton PL.

Peter Manning
Journalist covering the story; wrote Green Bans—the story of an Australian phenomenon, Australian Conservation Foundation, 1975 with photographs by Marion Hardman (Marrison.)

Nita McRae
Leader of The Rocks. Said: “No-one particularly liked standing in front of bulldozers. Thirteen went to gaol one day. None of them younger than 40. One dear old man plays the organ up at the Catholic Church. There are the staunchies and the weakies. … By 1973 we had been going since 1970. I would say: ‘Are you going to give up now? You might as well go all the way. Sometimes you’d knock on the door and they’d say ‘Get the union’ and I’d say, ‘No. It’s your ban. You’ve got to come out. And bring carpet to put on the ground.” In late October they arrested about 80 residents, age 10 to 80, and two BLs Joe Owens and Jack Mundey. Two years later the Green Bans still held.

The Rocks Resident Action Group

The Rocks a historic area on the western side of Sydney cove, has been the site of many disputes—often class-based and centred on control of the wharfs and later the privatisation of housing managed and often built by the former Maritime Services Board (MSB).

One of the most famous conflicts took place in the 1970s when the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority attempted to demolish the working-class residential neighbourhood. The Residents’ Action Group, led by Nita McRae who mobilised The Rocks community to protest against redevelopment plans which ignored the rich history of The Rocks and giving little consideration for long-term residents. Nita McRae formed an alliance with the Builders Labourers’ Federation led by Jack Mundy to apply a union-backed halt on development (or Green Ban) to the area.

On 23 October, 1973, 77 protestors were arrested in violent clashes with police on Playfair Street. This included the legendary shot of Jack Mundey being carried off site. Ultimately, the historic area was saved. But on 19 March 2014 when the NSW Government’s Minister for Housing Pru Goward sent the infamous “Get Out” letter to public housing residents. She announced the forced removal of all public housing tenants from Millers Point and The Rocks public housing (formerly Maritime Services Housing). This included the Sirius Building (purpose built for the elderly) and Nina McRae’s family home – Avery terrace at 2-4 Atherden Street, The Rocks and the historic terraces on either side of nearby Gloucester Street.
Avery Terrace is named after the Avery family. The family traces its history to Richard Byrne and Margaret Kelly who settled in The Rocks c.1807. Members of the Avery family lived in Atherden Street from c.1914 and in Avery Terrace at No. from c.1917-18. One or both of the houses was occupied by an Avery family descendant until 1993. Nita McCrae, an Avery family descendant, was brought up in Atherden St, living at 4 Atherden Street as a child, and as an adult from the 1950s until c.1969-70.


Left to Right: ‘Spontaneous action’ against proposed development on Playfair Street, October 1973 (Source: City of Sydney Archives SRC14791); Playfair Street Terraces (Source: environment.nsw.gov.au 5053185).

MBA or Master Builders Association

Ian Milliss and Teresa Brennan wrote an article ‘In Memory of Victoria Street’ in City Squatter, 1974. This describes Theeman’s eviction of Victoria St squatters, who over 7 months (from 10 June 1973) set up a model community. They barricaded themselves in. Flags were made in green (for bans), red and black. On 3 January 1974, over 100 police and thirty ‘controllers’ (Theeman’s hired thugs) evicted squatters. They jailed forty people while hundreds demonstrated in the street. Keith Mullins and Con Papadatos climbed on to the chimneys of No. 115. They came down after seventeen hours on the chimneys and were arrested.

John Morris

Director of the National Trust (NSW) who met with Mundey in secret as Trust members were “good people but conservative”. Morris took photos of Victoria Street in February 1973 and a few months later the street was listed. Michael Theeman, the developer’s son, quickly issued over 400 tenants, including protected tenants, with eviction notices. Much of Woolloomooloo was added to the Trust Register.

John Mulvenna

Retired Commonwealth car driver and life-long resident of Rae Place was in his fifties when elected president of the WRAG. He unveiled the plaque at Tom Uren Square on 4 July 1981, the anniversary of Juanita Nielsen’s disappearance and murder.
Under his inspirational leadership of the Builder’s Labourers Federation workers were given dignity and a say in their workplace and in issues to do with the environment, heritage and planning. Mundey, a former Parramatta footballer largely self-educated through the Communist Party, led the “rank and file” ticket to victory within the formerly corrupt Builder’s Labourers Federation. His 4 years leadership saw over 50 Green Bans including Victoria Street (in 1971) and Woolloomooloo (in 1973). Mundey’s estimate is fifty-eight at the height, but that 12 were lifted.

Mundey also worked behind the scenes with the National Trust to save over 100 listed buildings including Elizabeth Bay House, Queen Victoria Building and Haymarket. The personal integrity and incorruptibility of Mundey and the other BLF leaders is unquestioned. But they paid a huge personal price for their stand. By 1971 he was a national figure; elected city alderman (1984-87) and Chair of the Historic Houses Trust of
NSW.

So many things have been said about Jack Mundey that he is also officially an Australian Living Treasure. In 1998 a Green Ban Park was inaugurated in Erskinville, one of Sydney’s inner-west suburbs, on a site that was rescued from development. In 2009 they named Jack Mundey Place in The Rocks in his honour. Jack Mundy, the key organizer of the green bans of the 1970s, received an Order Of Australia medal for his services to the urban and natural environment. The Green Bans inspired the founding of the Greens Party in Germany and then in Australia.


Juanita Nielsen

Juanita Nielsen (1932-1975) edited and published her local newspaper NOW from her house at 202 Victoria Street. Her parents were Neil and Wilheminia or ‘Billy’ Smith divorced not long after her birth. Her father’s mother was a sister to Francis Foy who founded Mark Foys in Sydney in 1885 and built the Piazza Store (now the Downing Centre) in 1909 (architects McCredie and Anderson). English born Neil Donovan Smith therefore inherited the Mark Foys retail fortune via his parents: Chairman & Managing Director John Smith and his wife Kathleen Sophie Foy. Juanita was educated at Presbyterian Ladies College Pymble. She married Jorgen Fritz Nielsen a merchant seaman in a Shinto ceremony in Japan and the couple lived in Algeria but separated in 1965.
On her return she worked at Mark Foys until 1970 when she founded NOW with business partner David Farrell. At first she wasn’t impressed by the Victoria St squatting campaign, but by 1974, her position and that of her newspaper changed and she and merchant seaman and jazz musician Mick Fowler carried on a highly effective battle with developers. According to her friend David Farrell, Nielsen was seriously concerned that her activism was putting her in danger. Despite this, in 4 July 1975, Juanita Nielsen went to the Carousel Club on Darlinghurst Road (now the Empire pub) as the Club wanted to discuss advertising in her newspaper. The Carousel Club was owned by Abe Saffron and managed by James Anderson, a violent man who shot and killed a man in 1970, but no charges were laid. Abe Saffron, like Theeman, owned a lot of property on Victoria Street. 

Tragically, her disappearance was a week after the signing of the tripartite agreement to restore Woolloomooloo as a model for medium density residential housing. The inquest concluded that 38-year old Juanita Nielsen was murdered. Edward Trigg who worked at Carousel and two others were charged with conspiracy to kidnap and jailed in 1983. Later the Federal Joint Parliamentary Committee reported that Theeman lent Anderson $260,000 which was never repaid. The strain of the battle told on Mick Fowler who died in 1979, aged 50.

Information from Francis Foy (Jnr), 2011; see also Peter Rees, Killing Juanita: a true story of murder and corruption, 2004 and the fictional films Heatwave and The Killing of Angel Street.

Campaign to save Juanita Nielsen's Victoria Street terrace:  

Ted Noffs  
Founded the Wayside Chapel in Hughes Street and hosted the second meeting of the VRAG and there after supported the actions.

Matron Olive O’Neill  
Age 86 probably put up the first banner in response to Sid Londish’s scheme saying, Hands off! THIS COULD BE YOUR HOUSE!

Joe Owens
Succeeded Mundey as secretary BLF owing to an ideological decision to rotate all leadership positions; this possibly contributed to the deregistration and take over of the BLs by the Federal branch under the corrupt leadership of Norm Gallagher in league with the Master Builders Association. Joseph Owens, Trade union activist (period 1960–1992).


Bob Pringle
Union activist in the Rank and File group in the Builders Labourer’s Federation (period 1962–1974) and BLF president (1968 to 1974.) The NSW BLF supported Aboriginal land rights and opposed the apartheid Springbok rugby tour of 1971. Bob Pringle qualifying as "un-Australian of the year" for attempting to cut down the SCG goalposts with a hacksaw. Pringle was killed in a 1996 boating accident.

Leo Port
Lord Mayor of Sydney for the Civic Reform Party, a group representing commercial interests and developers. [DATES]
A couple of dozen Push people squatted in Victoria Street, joined by a whole range of people, from dedicated conservationists to followers of fringe political groups to the homeless just looking for a place to sleep. The Libertarians wanted two things: to protect the architecture of Victoria Street and to keep the area for low-cost housing ‘for knockabout students, sailors and all the sorts of people who used to live there’. The Push got involved at the invitation of Arthur King, elected first secretary of the Action Group and then kidnapped a week later. Thereafter the Push involvement was financed by Roelof Smilde and led by journalist Wendy Bacon.

Neil Runcie
Professor of Economics at UNSW and the prime mover behind the Save Centennial and Moore Parks Campaign.

Albie Sloss
State Member who spoke at the first Woolloomooloo meeting; locals called him Mr Slosh.

Roelof Smilde
Member of the Push and professional gambler who financed a lot of the Victoria Street activities. Says: ‘When it got to the point where there was literally only two or three residents left, that’s when we started the squats. That was our final tactic.’ The decision to squat was made when Mick Fowler was the only tenant left in the threatened buildings. It was a last-ditch attempt to prevent the buildings from being vandalised by Theeman’s men.

Nicholas Shehadie
Lord Mayor, 1973-75.

Joe Szabo
Painter and musician living on Victoria St who organised a fundraising exhibition at The Stables, 109 Victoria St with works from artists associated with the area including Charles Blackman, Sali Herman, Brett Whitley, Peter Upward, Stan Rapotec. For the opening, the Fowlhouse Five played Dixieland upstairs.

Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority
Planned to raze The Rocks, Australia’s oldest European settlement to the ground for office towers.

Sydney Region Outline Plan

Frank Theeman
The developer who joined forces with ‘underworld investors’ and brought up the low-income housing on Victoria Street in the 1970s. His Victoria Point PL offered many tenants favourable terms to leave; “controllers” with iron bars persuaded others. By 1974
Theeman claimed the hold up was costing $16,000 a week in interest payments. The tactics employed against the final residents and squatters became more dangerous, including the firing of houses, with or without people in them. In one such fire, an Aboriginal girl who was camping in one of the houses died. By mid-1974 most were evicted. The original plan designed by Stephenson and Turner was for three 43-story towers; the ‘third’ plan by Ken Woolley was acceptable to the National Trust and RAIA.

From 1979 to 1986 a new controversy raged over 55-99 Victoria St and only the façade was retained. Although he promised the BLF, Mick Fowler and residents that low cost housing and public space would be provided, Theeman’s promises were not kept. Resident action has kept Hordern Place and historic Hordern Stairs down the sandstone cliff to Woolloomooloo from being absorbed by one of the three gated Victoria Point complexes.

Robert Tickner
City councillor who in 1982 proposed a memorial, statue and an annual award on the anniversary of the death of Mick Fowler.

Edward Trigg
Ran the Carousel Club for Jim Anderson, a club owned by racketeer Abe Saffron. Juanita Nielsen disappeared after a meeting with Trigg to discuss an advertisement that he wanted to run in her newspaper. Trigg pleaded guilty to conspiring to abduct Juanita Nielsen and spent two years in jail. No one has ever been charged with her murder. At the inquest it emerged that not long before Juanita’s abduction, Frank Theeman paid Jim Anderson a sum of money to invest in a business.

Tom Uren
The Gough Whitlam Federal Labor Government elected in 1972 saw the Green Bans as a way of supporting heritage and urban renewal projects. Tom Uren (1921-2015) was Minister for Urban and Regional Development in the Whitlam and Hawke governments, deputy leader of the federal Labor Party. Planner John Mant was Uren’s chief advisor who appointed young architect Col James as the “residents advocate” for the re-development of Woolloomooloo. The Whitlam Government also introduced the breakthrough Environmental Impact Statements into law in late 1974. As Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Uren bought large areas of Glebe and Woolloomooloo, rehabilitated Fremantle and parts of Hobart, helped improve urban public transport and green western Sydney and decentralisation to Albury Wodonga. He opened Australia’s first bicycle path, in Canberra, and declared the Namagi national park in the Australian Alps. He helped stop the destruction of inner-city suburbs - notably Glebe and Woolloomooloo - from developers, cut the sewerage backlog and established the Australian Heritage Commission. Tom Uren Park and a small plaque honours his work in Woolloomooloo. In 2014, the NSW Government began selling Housing Commission Properties along Cathedral Street and a portion of Tom Uren Park was excised for a private development by City of Sydney.

Patrick White (1912-1990)
The writer and Nobel Prize winner, led Friends of the Green Bans. He addressed Victoria St residents at the Wayside Chapel in August 1973. His own street had also been threatened with demolition for a sports centre in Centennial Park. He said: Civilisation in not a matter of money and concrete. (Look at what’s become of the United States!) Civilisation, as I see it, depends on spirit—human beings—human values. (Printed in BLF magazine, ‘Civilisation, Money and Concrete’, 1973.)

He wrote when the Builders Labourers’ were being vilified: “It is rate to find a union with so advanced a social conscience but how much longer can the citizens of Sydney ask these men to enjoy the responsibility for protecting a citizens’ right to live comfortably and without anxiety.” (Letter, Sydney Morning Herald, 1973. Cited Mundey, 1981.)

Later he wrote: Why is Mundey anathema to the establishment at either end of the political and social structure? I think it is because he is one of those Australian mavericks with true creative gifts. And real creative gifts are feared, whether by the capitalist establishment of the Fraser Government, or at the other end the cut and dried union establishment. ... I see Mundey as a positive, not divisive force, as he proved when he united individuals of all classes in this divided democracy. From: Patrick White, ‘Jack Mundey and the BLF’ in Patrick White Speaks, 1989.

Honora Wilkinson
Lived on Crown Street and a former secretary to Cardinal Gilray; says "this place has soul, even outsiders feel that" (Farwell, 1971); a force on the first WRAG committee; her husband rang the bells at St Marys Cathedral. Wrote 'Watch on the Loo', 1989. A History of Wolloomooloo and the Green Bans.

Tony Reeves (1940-2013)

Right: Tony Reeves, centre, celebrates his 70th birthday with Jack Mundey, left, and Ian Alcorn.

The award-winning author and journalist Tony Reeves was your classic leftie, a genuine class warrior and true believer. He strove hard to be a modest and common man but was continually undermined by his uncommon compassion, commitment, larrikinism, humanity and grace.

He defied being pigeonholed but would not have objected to being variously labelled as a Marxist and a socialist - he would proclaim in a rare deviation from his unswerving atheism, “God forbid, call me anything but a rat and class traitor,

Denis Winston

First professor of Town Planning at Sydney University is honoured with a square in Woolloomooloo opened in 1981. Denis Winston Place: designed by Environmental Landscapes PL and planted with Jacarandas, Robineas and Peppercorns, "an oasis of green around a pair of existing trees". It honours Professor Denis Winston (1908-1980) the first chair of town and country planning in Australia. On 21 October 1981, the Chancellor of Sydney University also opened Margel Hinder’s bronze sculpture, named Denis Winston Library and launched a Memorial Appeal in his honour.

Denis Winston regarded human scale, diversity in housing, landscaped spaces and sculpture as essential to the pleasures of urban living. … He would have delighted in the variety of the housing enclosing the Place, new on two side, rehabilitated, though a century old, on the other two, with the elderly emerging form their houses to mix with the children form the others. (Text by Sir Hermann David Black, from Opening Invitation of Denis Winston Place, Housing Commission of NSW and the Denis Winston Memorial Committee of the Planning Research Centre, University of Sydney, October 1981.)

They raised funds for a memorial sculpture by Margel Hinder to stand in the square, designed by Mike Ewings. The square was recently flattened and “anti-sitting” structures installed.


Woolloomooloo Renewal Project Team (1975-81)
John Devenish (1944-1990), architect and urban planner, was invited to establish and direct a multi-disciplinary team to plan the Woolloomooloo Redevelopment Project for the Housing Commission of NSW. This project received eight design awards and international acclaim for effective community consultation and is a benchmark for design excellence in public building. The external architects included Michael Dysart, Wills, Denoon Travis, Conybeare Morrison, Donald Gazzard, John Andrew, Perumal, Neill, Barbara & Partners, Travis, Jackson Teece Chesterman Willis, Ancher Mortlock and Woolley, McConnel Smith & Johnson, Maurice Brown, Fisher Lucas, McCauley, Conran & Briger.

The appointment of Colin James as a resident advocate ensured a process of consultation in which residents' needs were built into subsequent agreements. In late 1974 the Federal Labor Government agreed to donate funds for the purchase of private land and granted Commonwealth owned lands for the residential redevelopment of Woolloomooloo. Green Bans were lifted in 1976 and the NSW Housing Commission began work on a unique consultative planning exercise with their own architects and engaging other leading architects of the day.

Urban planners from all over the world visit Woolloomooloo as an example of good urban planning practice. It is an international benchmark for best practice community consultation.
But now the fight is on again to save the Loo, including with some of the original developers involved. The struggle began in earnest at Millers Point when the NSW State Liberal Government’s Planning Minister, Pru Goward, announced to gathered media in March 2014, the forced relocation of an entire suburb (of over 500 people). An action on this scale is historically unprecedented. The aim appears to be to hand over all public land in the inner-city to developers.