

**M15/11 Miscellaneous Report  
Planning Committee 12 July 2011  
Feasibility Study for Restoration of  
Proud of Our Elders Mural  
Belmore Road, Randwick  
Carol Ruff  
May 2011**



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## Introduction

This report responds to a request from Randwick City Council to investigate restoring the mural known as *Proud of Our Elders*, which is located in Belmore Road, Randwick.

The mural was commissioned by Randwick City Council in 1981, and was an initiative of Randwick City Council's Community Arts Program. Randwick City Council funded the mural, with assistance from the NSW Division of Cultural Activities and the Community Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts.

The *Proud of Our Elders* mural is located in the busy street of Belmore Road, in the main shopping precinct of Randwick, not far from the civic precinct of the Town Hall, the Council offices, and the hospital. This area is an important hub for many adjacent communities.

The mural is on the side wall of a building facing an open courtyard adjacent to historic Sandgate Cottage. It enjoys high visibility from the street, both for pedestrians and traffic.

*Proud of Our Elders* is an iconic feature of the Randwick streetscape and much loved by residents, business owners and visitors to the suburb.

The mural is now in poor condition and requires substantial restoration works. This feasibility study sets out the process and estimated costs of the restoration project.



Elders depicted in the mural, Doris Hyde, Alice Gundry, Mina Wylie & Harry Reid at the opening, 1981

## Why the mural should be restored for the community

The notion of celebrating our senior citizens remains a key concept today. The mural was an early celebration of the multi-cultural make up of Randwick and pays tribute to the Indigenous and immigrant communities that helped establish its character. Although thirty years old, the mural still has contemporary cultural relevance and is a significant heritage site within the community.

A further theme of the mural is the celebration of local sports heroes. Included also is local native flora and fauna, and an image of an important historical structure.

The mural serves a civic education purpose. It contains a visual cultural history of the area, within the broader theme of being a tribute to the senior citizens of Randwick, Coogee and La Perouse. It is an iconic image, painted in a distinctive style that has references to the origins of the community as well as reference to the 1980s – the era in which it was designed.

The public murals of the 1980s are particularly significant in the history of artworks in public spaces, and this example is one that received national attention and critical acclaim, and should be preserved as a significant community work of art.

Since the original narrative of the mural has been somewhat lost in community memory, we propose an interpretative sign to explain the content, stories and significance in the work.



## Background

The contemporary community mural movement in Australia began in the mid 1970s. By the early 1980s it was receiving strong support from the general public and progressive City Councils. Many cities, suburbs and towns developed community mural projects and the resulting murals were often of significant social, cultural and artistic value.

The mural subjects often reflected social and political issues, or illustrated local topics and history. Murals were often subject of debate and in their best examples served to foster a sense of community, cultural identity and pride in place.

The *Proud of Our Elders* project was the concept of Robyn Hecks who was then the Community Arts Officer for Randwick Council. Robin identified the suitable site. At that time The Randwick and District Historical Society was located in Sandgate Cottage, adjacent to the mural site. The courtyard area in front of the wall had tables and chairs and the open space was used by the coffee shop opposite, as well as the general public, providing pleasant social ambience.

Robin Hecks organised the funding for the mural and engaged Carol Ruff. At the time of commissioning the artist Carol Ruff's recent public art works included murals in Mt Druitt and Townsville, which were considered innovative and had received positive critical acclaim. The Council suggested she design a mural with a local history theme and as a local resident Carol was keen to undertake the commission.

A team of artists, led by Carol Ruff, painted the mural. A civic celebration was held to officially 'open' the mural with Mayor John Ford and elected officials sharing the occasion with senior citizens and the subjects of the mural.

There was immediate positive critical response to the mural from participants in the contemporary public art movement of the time. It was recognised in *The Mural Manual, A guide to community murals in Australia* published by the Arts Council of NSW. There were photographs and articles in many magazines and in arts industry journals.



Artist Carol Ruff with Mina Wylie at the mural opening

## The design

The design process involved a number of consultations including with members of the Historical Society, residents of the aged care home across the road, the committee of Wylies Baths and swimmers at the Ladies Baths/Mclvers Baths, the Chinese Market gardeners and residents of the Aboriginal community at La Perouse, and other local residents as well as reading and researching the local history. The mural team proposed a mural design, which was to be a tribute to the elderly residents of Randwick, La Perouse and Coogee, one which celebrated local historical and cultural content.

Carol Ruff presented the design to a full Council meeting and the Council immediately approved it.

## The people depicted in the mural

The community arts philosophy is one which reflects not just famous or historically important people. It was decided that the mural be inclusive of a cross section of elders in the community including representatives of all walks of life and the broader community. The following people were selected to feature in the mural and all were 'living elders' of the district at the time.

**Mina Wylie**, or Miss Wilhelmina Wylie, of Coogee, held the world record for all styles of swimming for twenty years up to 1924. She won a silver medal at the 1912 Olympic Games held in Sweden when was only fourteen years old. The Wylies Baths in Coogee, where she used to train, are named after her. At the time Mina was living in a nursing home in Randwick and was thrilled to be pictured and attended the mural opening.



**Doris Hyde** OAM, nee Mclver, was president of the Randwick and Coogee Ladies Swimming Club for over 30 years and led the fight to preserve Mclvers Ladies Baths. The daughter of Rose & Robert Mclver, Doris devoted her life to the Club and to Mclvers Baths named in honour of her parents. She taught hundreds of children to swim, and was the winner of the Masters Older Age Group Olympics.



**Harry Reid** was an ex-jockey who had ridden countless winners at Randwick Racecourse. He helped to build the NSW University on the site of the old Kensington Racecourse, worked there as a patrolman, and at the time of the mural project, he was the University gatekeeper.



**Alice Gundry** was discovered by the artists working on the door of the Ladies Baths at Coogee/Mclvers Baths. At that time it cost \$2 to enter the Baths where Alice sat draped in a rug to keep warm. Alice lived near the baths and had worked there many years, and was almost blind. She was famous for having told a surf lifesaver, who was dashing through the entrance to save a drowning person, 'You can't come in, you have to pay!'



**Auntie Ollie Sims** was the oldest Aboriginal woman in La Perouse in 1981, and 'Auntie' to generations of children. The original owners of this land were the *Kameygal*, and their proximity to the coast meant that they enjoyed a plentiful supply of fish and shellfish. The area also had fresh water supplies and places of natural shelter. La Perouse is the one area of Sydney with which Aboriginal people have had an unbroken connection for over 7,500 years.



**Greta Fyson** lived in the nursing home near to the mural. She could be found daily feeding the pigeons in the park in Coogee Bay Road near the nursing home and was a

well-known character. She befriended the mural team and was in daily attendance watching the mural take shape

## Other elements of the mural

**The War Lee Chinese Market Gardens** in Bunnerong Road, La Perouse dated back to the end of the Gold Rush. According to social history, the gardeners were much respected in the area and image of 'Old Chow' (as the gardeners were termed) was a vivid one for many older residents. Sadly these gardens were squeezed out and in 1987 the Randwick City Council erected a plaque so their contribution to the area would not be forgotten.



**A map of the area** from Coogee Bay to La Perouse is depicted in the upper section of the mural, in the section behind Auntie Ollie Sims.



**Historic structure** at La Perouse



**Local flora and fauna** are coastal banksia, flannel flowers and Christmas bells which all grew in abundance in the area prior to European settlement.

The mural was signed by the artists who painted it as *La Loop Mural Group*, a historical reference to the Belmore Road tram tracks, which looped around near the mural site. The artists were Carol Ruff, Eve Glenn and Sarah McNamara. Local Aboriginal artist, Peter Yanada MacKenzie, from La Perouse, designed and painted the *Proud of Our Elders* flag using the then colours of the Coogee Surf Life Saving Club.

## Condition Report

The *Proud of our Elders* mural covers an area of 9m x 8m. It was painted in matt exterior acrylic wall paint in 1981. Given that the paint is estimated to last 10 – 15 years the mural is remarkably intact.

It is still clearly visible although the surface has deteriorated in some places more significantly than others.

The first assessment of the condition of the wall in 2009 proposed that the surface could be cleaned, the moss removed, and the image 'infilled' by painting into the cracks. On closer examination, and in view of its now rapid deterioration, it is clear that the only way to restore the mural is to completely repaint it.

There is a diagonal line across the mural, and the damp is occurring below this line. This photograph of the wall prior to painting the mural shows clearly that there was a structure which has been removed, hence the different qualities of the substrate, and the different states of deterioration in the paint.

The moss is growing in the lower section due to a lesser coverage of paint and larger raked joints. With appropriate preparation this will not recur.

Since 1981 the science of mural painting, including surface preparation and mural paint technology has greatly improved. In this situation, with the original artist available, and the original design fully documented the mural can be restored with total integrity and modern technology so that it will last well into the future.

Mineral Silicate paint technology is now used almost exclusively for mural painting across the world. It was invented in Germany in 1885 for exterior mural decoration in the Austrian Alps and is capable of withstanding extreme weather conditions.

The paint surface chemically bonds with the substrate forming a 'dry fresco' technique which repels moisture and chemical attack, and also fire, salt and ultra violet light. A mural painted with this technology will last many decades. There are some murals in Europe that are over one hundred years old.

Heritage buildings are now often painted in mineral silicate paint. Modern structures like airports water towers shipping terminals from Sweden to Africa now utilise this technology. This technology is available in Australia; it is probably double the cost of acrylic signwriters paints but will last more than twice as long.

## Process of restoration

The restoration can be undertaken by Carol Ruff and Peter Day of Environmental Art and Design. Carol has recently fully restored the Bondi Beach Public School Peace Mural and the Yeperenye Murals in Alice Springs. Peter has recently restored *The Great Southern Wall* a 400sqm mineral silicate mural at The Rocks KGV.

Please see [www.environmentalartanddesign.com.au](http://www.environmentalartanddesign.com.au)

and <http://www.carolruff.com> for examples of their public art and murals.

After this feasibility study the process of re-painting is one that is straightforward and comprises the following tasks.

Preliminary tasks			
Task 1	Negotiate agreement with building owners	Council	
Task 2	Supply final quotation and commission project	Mural team and Council	
Task 3	Complete insurance requirements / ensure compliances / risk and safety plan etc	Council with mural team	One month
Task 4	Assemble team and materials	Mural team	Two weeks
Task 5 Start 6 week repainting program with press release, photo of mayor and launch of the project with small celebration to launch the project.			
Task 6	Erect scaffold, install site shed, install tiger tails,	Contractors	1 day
Task 7	Key line the drawing	Mural team	Two days
Task 8	Water blast the wall / drying time	Contractors	Three days
Task 9	Reestablish drawings	Mural team	Three days
Task 10	Repainting	Mural team	Twenty five days approx

### Negotiate agreement with building owners

The Council will require an agreement, which will cover permission from owners to paint the wall and agreement not to paint it out or demolish the wall for a number of years. The Deed of Release will also cover which party will be responsible for costs and insurances and maintenance.

### Final quotation, commission project

An Arts Law standard contract will be used will be used between the Council and the mural consultants with any amendments required by Council.

**Keyline the drawing outlines.** The major drawing outlines and key compositional elements will be etched into the wall 2 mm by grinding groove over the painted outlines.

### **Pressure water wash**

Care will be taken to collect paint residue and have it disposed of in accordance with appropriate standards. The water washing will take place at a time to not inconvenience any residents or pedestrians.

### **Painting**

Undercoat, one coat on top section and 2 coats on bottom.

Mural painting coats, one base coat, 2 top coats



Diagonal line of damp showing across the mural

## Preliminary estimate

Based on a six week program the preliminary estimate of the costs is as follows:

Item	Cost exclusive gst
Hire of temporary fencing	750
Scaffold & shade cloth	7,500
Secure (tiger tails) electrical lines	980
Water blasting	5,000
Container site shed hire + transport	600
Paint	3,450
Artists fees for re-painting	30,000
Sub total	48,280
Contingency @ 5%	2,414
<b>Total</b>	<b>50,694</b>
GST component	5,069
Total with GST	55,763

### Budget details

#### Temporary fencing

To prevent youth from climbing up the scaffold. This is the minimal amount of hire available

#### Scaffold and shade cloth

A full scaffold is required not a mobile tower so that more than two artists can work at once, and the entire wall can be accessed, allowing work on particular areas in rotation. A full scaffold is more secure as a tower has to be stored at night. This amount allows for six weeks of scaffold hire + erection. Extension of scaffold hire, for example, if it rains is charged \$98 per day.

#### Electricity pole

Energy Australia charges

#### Artist's fees

Senior supervising artist and mural painter Carol Ruff daily rate \$400 / day, allowing for 30 days on site.

Senior technical advisor and mural painter Peter Day daily rate \$400 / day, allowing for 30 days on site.

Assistant mural painters daily rate allowing for 60 days on site total, daily rate \$200 / day

A firm quote will be provided from Carol Ruff when Council is ready to commission the work. It is anticipated that it would not vary substantially from this estimate unless there is a long time lapse or circumstances change.



Alice Gundry cuts the ribbon and opens the mural



Drawing up the design



Original wall site



Doris Hyde and the Ladies Baths swimming Club



Historic Sandgate cottage adjacent to the mural



Harry Reid and Carol Ruf

