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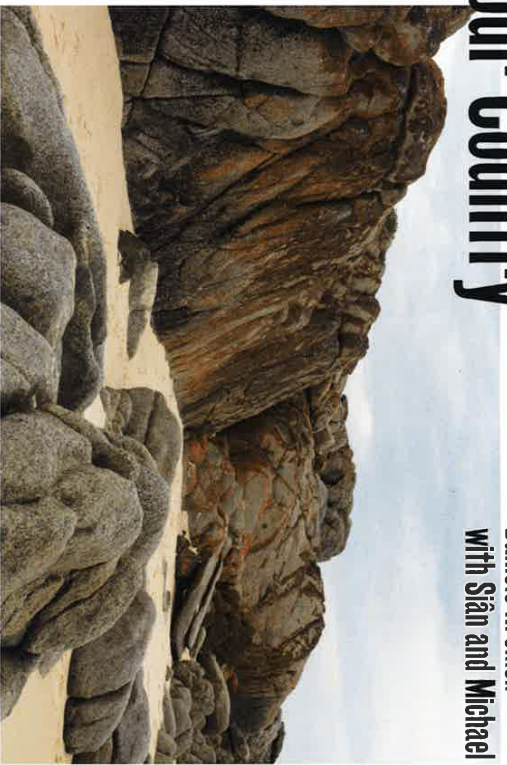
LOST SYDNEY THE PAST & FUTURE OF ARCHITECTURE



Lost Sydney

Sensing materials of our Country

Danièle Hromek
with Siân and Michael Hromek



Granite formations at Grey Rocks Beach near Moruya, NSW

On a ferry from Circular Quay to Cockatoo Island with my siblings Siân and Michael, we recollected our family story that connects us to that place. As we passed under the Sydney Harbour Bridge we remembered that parts of our Country – Yuin Country on the New South Wales south coast – form its pylons. In fact, parts of our Country are all over Sydney, including the columns of the Sydney GPO, the Cenotaph in Martin Place, the base of the Captain Cook statue in Hyde Park, and the facade and side walls of the head office of the Bank of New South Wales.

Granite from Yuin Country was mined for the Sydney Harbour Bridge from the northern banks of Moruya River between 1925 and 1932 at the Moruya Granite Quarry. According to the bridge's chief engineer John Bradfield:

The appearance of the [Moruya] granite was in its favour, the black biotite mica giving the stone a pleasing appearance, sparkling in the sun and so enhancing the beauty of the white quartz and feldspar. The quality was all that could be desired ...¹

Like the granite, the concrete used in the construction of the abutment towers of the main arch and the piers of the approach spans were also made from crushed granite sourced from Moruya.

In the late 1800s, our third great grandparents were dispossessed of their traditional lands in Yuin Country, making an impossible decision to move north to a place called Eungai, which lies between Gumbaynggirr and Dungutti lands on the mid-north coast. They were

following a familiar songline that has been travelled for millennia by our ancestors and runs between the Queensland and Victorian borders along the coast. They made the decision to take this journey amidst massacres of kin, governmental policy changes allowing the removal of paler children, and restrictive reserve managers. After moving they were unable to care for their Country as they had always done: for them and for us it has been heart-breaking to be off Country.

Yet if you scratch under the surface of this story you will find two sisters, Elizabeth and Catherine Marshall, who did whatever it took to keep their families together – dispossessed, certainly, but together. This decision shaped the rest of their lives, as well as those who came after them. Our third great grandmother Elizabeth Marshall was born in Moruya in 1859, and so we feel a particular connection with that land. Could she have known what impacts were about to be inflicted on her life and her Country? Mary Gilmore, wife of a Scottish stonemason who came to work in the quarry, recalled:

Where a few years before the only sound heard there was the call of the wild birds flying overhead to their feeding grounds in the swamp, the laughter of the kookaburra and the music of the magpies in the bush, there was now the roar of machinery and the sharp sound of automatic drills in the hard rock, cranes lifting boulders and the occasional blasting of the huge rock.²

Photo: Natalie Boate @ 123RF.com



Photo: Arthur G. Foster, National Library of Australia, 8061D 3069543

Construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge (1923-32) with pylons of granite blocks sourced from the Moruya Quarry in Yuin Country

'We are supersensitive of the materiality of that site and its built structure, knowing it also as geology, culture and heritage. There is the memory of our Country encased within the construction, creating a heightened sense of connection for us.'

The changes wrought upon our Country were immense. The disembodiment of Country creates disturbed locations, as certainly were the changes for Gaddgal Country, where the Harbour Bridge stands.

Nonetheless, there is a strange comfort in having parts of our Country placed within the structure of one of the most iconic landmarks in not only Australia, but the world. 173,000 blocks of granite were quarried, cut, dressed and numbered, then taken to the wharf by rail to be shipped to Sydney. This material, like my siblings and I, is dispossessed of its Country. This dispossession has unquestionably created a built icon, which helps to shape Australia's identity. But it has made us, as Yuin people,

hyperaware of the material aspects of Country: knowing where they are from and the stories they hold. We are supersensitive of the materiality of that site and its built structure, knowing it also as geology, culture and heritage. There is the memory of our Country encased within the construction, creating a heightened sense of connection for us, knowing that even here in Sydney our Country is within reach. We are hypersensitive to the dispossession of the materials of our Country; and we know the stories of Country and of our family who were born of that land.

In capturing our Country in built form, we note the stories that are encased in the bridge itself and its site. Not only is our Country encased in this way within the structure, but many other Countries as well. Layers of knowledge are embedded into the form and for us as designers, design becomes our vehicle for revealing the latent stories and history of sites.

So too might other architects and designers engage with Aboriginal people and communities in their projects to unearth hidden stories of sites. Stories of Country lie waiting to be rediscovered and reconnected, and design offers a chance to elevate them. Architects can create individual connections with people from a community, with genuine engagement and allowing enough time to rediscover their stories and histories. Once again, bringing them into the light.

Danièle, Siân and Michael Hromek are descendants from the Dubawing clan of the Yuin Nation. All three trained in design and architecture, and together they run a consultancy called Balaari (Yuin) Design.

1. John Bradfield in 'Materials used in the Sydney Harbour Bridge construction', *Border Watch*, 14 January 1928 (Moruya and District Historical Society Inc)
2. Quote by Mary Gilmore's great granddaughters Christine Adams in 'To make a bridge, where did the granite of the Sydney Harbour Bridge come from?', *Focus*, 19 April 2014