

Remembering resistance:

Traversing the memoryscape of
Sydney's green bans movement

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Abstract

From 1971 to 1974, the 'green bans movement' captured Sydney's attention, for its novel coalitions holding up development for social, ecological or heritage reasons. The historical period has become part of a narrative that Sydney likes to tell about itself, told and retold everywhere from state funerals to union trainings. Cultural memory emerges in plaques, murals, buildings, places names across the city, and in films, stories, depicting the city. How does cultural memory structure our understanding of Sydney's 1970s green bans? Memory can seal off the past or mobilise it in pursuit of a different future.

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Abbreviations

ACF: Australian Conservation Foundation

ACTU: Australian Council of Trade Unions

ALP: Australian Labor Party

BL: builders labourer

BLF: New South Wales branch of Australian Building Construction Employees and Builders Labourers Federation

BWIU: Building Workers' Industrial Union

CFMEU: Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union

CPA: Communist Party of Australia

CRAG: Coalition of Resident Action Groups

DMR: Department of Main Roads

DURD: Department of Urban and Regional Development

FEDFA: Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association

HHT NSW: NSW branch of Historical Houses Trust

MBA: Master Builders Association

MWU: Miscellaneous Workers Union

NSW TLC: New South Wales Trades Labour Council

NT: National Trust of Australia

RAG: resident action group

ROW: Residents of Woolloomooloo

RRAG: The Rocks Resident Group

SCRA: Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (later SCA)

SPA: Socialist Party of Australia

SPA: State Planning Authority

VRAG: Victoria Street Resident Action Group

WRAG: Woolloomooloo Residents Action Group

WWF: Waterside Workers Federation

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Introduction

Police embroiled at The Rocks

Police broke through barricades set up by green ban demonstrators and arrested 77 people in a partly demolished building in The Rocks yesterday.

Unionists, resident action group members, students and others had moved into the site, the subject of a Builders

77 PROTESTERS ARRESTED

rived and began making arrests. Some protesters poured drums of oil over rescue squad members who tried to remove them.

Mrs Denise Bishop; and the vigilance officer of the Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation, Mr R. Divers. The arrested appeared

"What the meeting tomorrow must decide to do is work to attract as many people from as many different walks of life as possible to our cause of environment protection and defence of the inner city area, to add to the legions it has already attracted," he said.

The "Herald" Civic Reporter writes that according to the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority



The outgoing secretary of the Builders Labourers Federation, Mr Munday, is carried away.

Figure 1: SMH 24/10/73

Early on a cold autumn morning in The Rocks in October 1973, protestors settled in for a day-long demonstration at Playfair Garage, an industrial building slated for demolition and under a 'green ban'. A few hours after the occupation begun, 60 police officers arrived and arrested 77 people.¹ Fairfax's Robert Pearce was one of many press photographers in the line of action. This photograph of Jack Munday appeared on page three of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) the next day (Fig. 1). Munday was the secretary of the New South Wales branch of the Australian Building Construction Employees and Builders Labourers Federation (BLF), who had placed the 'green ban'. The article cried 'Police embroiled at The Rocks', reporting dramatic scenes of the occupiers injuring police. In the eye-level shot, Munday is carried by one constable and two rescue squad members. News footage from the event shows Munday joking with the chief policeman, the two were clearly acquainted.² Aware of the photographer, Munday nonchalantly clasps his hands, smirks and looks off camera, enjoying leaving the policemen to carry his weight. The composition was no accident. Protestors perform for the

¹ Jack Munday, "Millers Point Oral History Project," interview by Siobhán McHugh, *NSW Department of Housing*, 16 August, 2005, audio, 24.11. <https://www.sydneyoralthistories.com.au/jack-munday/>.

² *Rocking the Foundations: A History of the New South Wales Builders Laborers Federation 1940-1974*, directed by Pat Fiske (Bower Bird Films: Sydney, 1985).

camera, and photojournalists are incentivised to provide captivating images.³ Whilst this photo and its reportage fail to give Munday a voice, they both make him visible. Munday's unfazed expression aligned with *SMH*'s reporting: Munday was using industrial action to hold Sydney to ransom.

These arrests were part of a two-week 'Battle for The Rocks' which was a turning point for the green bans movement.⁴ This movement was a period from 1971 to 1974 where unions placed bans for social, ecological or heritage reasons. The origins of the movement are traditionally explained thus. During the 1960s and 1970s, cash flow, technological changes, and a sympathetic state government led to fast, rapacious development in Sydney. It was a period of corporate adventurism and extractive capitalism. Parks were being concreted over, low-income tenants forced out of inner-city residences and heritage buildings razed. This boom was reorganising Sydney and its patterns of life, not least the labourers'.

Without heritage, conservation, and consultation legislation regulating the boom, a crop of concerned residents emerged. After heavily publicised co-operation between housewives and builders labourers in Sydney's leafy Hunters Hill, many resident groups appealed to the union for 'black bans', a type of work stoppage. By dropping tools, these bans allowed 'breathing space' and forced developers back into negotiations with those affected. By 1974, 40 bans had been placed across Sydney. These were novel coalitions including residents, unionists, students, heritage activists, environmentalists, architects, planners, engineers, actors, and even famed novelists such as Patrick White. These episodes pushed the BLF and its leadership into national headlines. The Rocks ban was one of the most prominent. Working-class residents had approached the BLF in 1971 to pause the government development that

³ Ann Rigney and Thomas Smits, "Introduction," in *The Visual Memory of Protest*, eds. Ann Rigney and Thomas Smits (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 12; Red Chidgey and Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Museums, Archives and Protest Memory* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2024): 45.

⁴ Jack Munday, "Jack Munday," interview by Amanda Tattersall, recorded 8 April 2015, posted 8 October, 2015, YouTube, 12:18. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAidqyj0SPM&ab_channel=CharlesFirth.

promised to turn the fabled area a new business district.⁵ This two-week ‘battle’ of October 1973 was shouted across the Sydney dailies and evening throwaways, inviting more enemies and more fame.⁶ The *SMH* spent four editorials in the next two weeks criticising the union.⁷ This public outcry led to further ostracisation. Some resident groups wanted to distance themselves, the Labour Council disowned the BLF and resentment grew between the BLF’s NSW and federal branches.⁸ The Master Builders Association (MBA) filed to deregister the union. This ‘industrial anarchy’ also helped smooth Premier Askin’s path to re-election. The green bans were successful in ‘saving’ The Rocks’ architectural heritage, but not their social heritage; the residents were still moved on.

This green ban history quickly became part of Sydney’s popular memory. The National Museum of Australia considers it one of ‘Australia’s Defining Moments’.⁹ The green bans had many ingredients for ‘commemorability’; a raffish hero, nationalist pride, novel coalitions and environmental and heritage values that quickly became mainstream. This image has become the movement’s ‘iconic photo,’ appearing everywhere from Marxist posters, architects and mayors’ obituaries to state funerals.¹⁰ Contemporary historians, unions and leftist groups tell this story and use this photograph’s ‘radical force’ to inspire dissent in their posts, events and programmes.¹¹ Heritage groups and environmentalists can use it to bolster their cause of defending the built and natural environments. Urban planners and geographers consider the

⁵ Anthony M Paul, “The Rocks - new role for the cradle of a nation,” *Readers Digest*, 1973, Building Workers’ Industrial Union of Australia Records, Box 364, Z291, NBAC.

⁶ “A tale on the Rocks”, *The Builders Laborer* (September-December 1973): 20-25

⁷ “Labor-bashing,” *SMH*, 1 November, 1973, 6; “Emergency powers,” *SMH*, 7 November, 1973, 6; “State lackeys,” *SMH*, 8 November, 1973, 6; “Endorsing sabotage,” *SMH*, 9 November, 1973. An editorial the day of the protest also criticised the union, “Green in judgement,” *SMH*, 6 November, 1973, 6.

⁸ “Labour Council disowns BLF,” *SMH*, 26 October, 1973, 1.

⁹ National Museum of Australia, “1971: First green bans imposed in Sydney,” *Australia’s Defining Moments*, 2019. <https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/first-green-bans>.

¹⁰ The Rocks Museum, “The Battle for The Rocks - 50th Anniversary,” 24 October, 2023. <https://uat.therocks.com/editorials/the-battle-for-the-rocks-50th-anniversary>; Darcy Byrne, “Vale Jack Munday,” Instagram, 11 May, 2025. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CABrSVhgkGT/>; NSW Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet, “State Memorial for Jack Munday AO,” 10 March, 2021. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/about-nsw/state-services/state-memorial-for-jack-munday-ao>.

¹¹ Jim Colman, *The House That Jack Built: Jack Munday, Green Bans Hero* (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2016), 155-6; Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann, *Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation*, 1st ed (Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press, 1998), 259; Rigney and Smits, “Introduction”, 20.

importance of people in planning. Institutional bodies, like councils and authorities have also used this image to spruik their values. How has the image and story had such high valency?

The ‘Battle for The Rocks’ is commemorated *in situ*. In 2002, the Geographical Names Board signed off on the decision to name a new pedestrianised part of Argyle Street after Jack Munday, as requested by the National Trust. In 2009, the Sydney Cove Authority, the institution that Munday was protesting in 1973, tacked this photograph onto an information panel explaining the new place name (Fig. 2). This history is now passively consumed by Sydneysiders stumbling out of nearby pubs and tourists alike. The greyscale image, with didactic text positions this moment in a dissimilar past. No longer a threat to law and order, the image depicts a larrikin-like working-class Australian willing to defy authority for his principles. It's narratively strong; Australia's heritage and environmental conscience were sparked by some plucky media-friendly unionists. Sydneysiders can be proud it was a hard-fought battle and that now we get a say in planning. The panel reminds tourists that The Rocks, including its recent history, matters to Australians, making the area more authentic.¹² Historical turbulence collapses behind the regularly cleaned plastic. This historical episode has not been remembered for what it did for the Sydney of the 1970s, but for the Sydney of today. The green bans did not ‘save’ The Rocks, rather the heritage preservation helped the area become commercially successful.

In 2020, the theatrical file picture illustrated glowing obituaries for the man who ‘saved’ Sydney, from major mastheads and frozen-in-time communist sites.¹³ *SMH* bloviated about Munday's iconic status, and activists recounted the reasons for his iconicity. A year later, the photo was projected onto Sydney Town Hall's screens during Munday's state funeral, attended by Australia's blue rinse and fellow travellers alike. But nostalgia is a dishonest friend. This

¹² Gordon Waitt, “Consuming Heritage: Perceived Historical Authenticity,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 4 (2000): 835–62.

¹³ Nick O'Malley, “The union giant who helped shape the city of Sydney,” *SMH*, 11 May, 2020, 8-9.

consecration of Munday and his campaigns would suggest the mainstreaming of the green bans' ideas. These principles – saving heritage, retaining parkland, community consultation, low-cost inner-city housing – have been popularised and enshrined in legislation ... bar the last one. 1970s protests may have saved some of Sydney's heritage fabric but they failed to keep low-income housing in the inner-city; a failure affirmed by the Sirius and Millers Point protests in the 2010s. The ideas that the green bans movement vocalised are now depoliticised and declassified.

This story is a case study in remembrance. This canonical memory has paved over the historical complexity of the green bans, sanitised injustices and excluded important actors to present a teleological story. Political mandates, external events and activist grunt work have changed this memory. How did the green bans, their ideas, places, stories, and leaders, become 'urban heritage'?¹⁴ By de-normalising this popular memory, we can re-politicise the past.



Figure 2: Munday in 2009.

¹⁴ Christian Wicke, “Memory ‘within’, ‘of’ and ‘by’ Urban Movements,” in *Remembering Social Movements*, eds. Stefan Berger, Sean Scalmer, Christian Wicke (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2021), 134.

Approach

This thesis will track the cultural memory of the green bans from their 1970s inception to now. The memory of this historical period has been scattered across place, textual and imagistic evidence, community bonds, personal histories, artistic and filmic creations. Shortening ‘memory’ and ‘landscape’, the concept of a *memoryscape* will be used to encompass this scope. ‘Memoryscape’ defines a physical *and* discursive plane where memory is created, circulated and negotiated.¹⁵ The flowing streams of activist lore, popular mythology, and state-sanctioned memory run parallel and sometimes puncture, but depart from very different ideological points. This broad conception of memory will avoid getting stuck in the binary of state-controlled memory and activist stories.

My approach was two-fold. To understand the workings of memory, I first returned to industrial, community archives, reinvestigating commonly-cited sources and press coverage. This emboldened my analysis allowing me to understand what exactly articulations have forgotten, simplified or emphasised. I was able to understand how the movements members, academics, writers, artists, governments, activists, filmmakers have constructed historical cultures. As each form has its own intentions, narrative tendencies, receptions and remediations, I also became familiar with commemorative, artistic and screen production contexts across the 50-year *memoryscape*. By becoming intimately aware of these stories, it becomes apparent *why* and *how* these stories are retold. This thesis will analyse how memory operates in each, and what it tells us about how the significance of the green bans has been constructed.

The plethora of archival material (as indicated by my extensive bibliography) demonstrates the breadth of this movement. Crucial material has been found at the State Library

¹⁵ Daniele Salerno, “Memoriscapes of Liberation: Activist Mnemonic Labour in the Queer Press,” *Cultural Studies* 39, no. 1 (2025): 115–41.

of NSW, City of Sydney Archives, the Noel Butlin Archive Centre at the Australia National University (NBAC), the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), the Powerhouse and the National Library of Australia (NLA), as well as university libraries. While not an ‘official archive’, Sydney Trades Hall, former home of the BLF, has been a repository for precious documents. The ad hoc collection houses memorabilia including posters, badges, pamphlets, photographs, and an extensive collection of union banners. Oral histories will also be used and adjudicated on their terms – people speaking in the present, influenced by their current preoccupations and desires to be perceived.¹⁶

The BLF’s archival material is kept at the NBAC and in 173 boxes at the State Library of NSW. These records are tricky to decipher; unlike parliamentary statesmen, unionists were not minute-taking with posterity in mind.¹⁷ There are also restrictions as some of what happened was illegal and will not be disclosed in written material. Similarly, activist, radical, civil organisations and trade unions haven’t tended to have formalised record-keeping practices.¹⁸ I have specifically consulted the files of Woolloomooloo Resident Action Group, The Rocks Resident Action Group, adjacent groups and sought out resident-recorded histories.

However, this issue of unclear documentation is ameliorated by the surfeit of published material. I made significant efforts to go beyond the Sydney dailies and televisual coverage and understand the perspective of those involved by looking at local papers, activist-produced tracts and ephemeral material. This documenta has been literally found across Sydney, community newsletters at the rarely visited City of Sydney archives, left-wing magazines in university libraries and in various archival boxes at the State Library. Sydney’s 1970s radical literary, artistic, and filmic worlds created more, varied evidence. Screen-printed posters were

¹⁶ Paula Hamilton, “The Oral Historian as Memoirist,” *The Oral History Review* 32, issue 1 (2005): 15.

¹⁷ Meredith Burgmann, “A new concept of unionism: the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation, 1970-1974” (PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 1981), 17.

¹⁸ Sam Wallman, “Pink and Green Bans with Sam Wallman,” streamed live 30 November 2023, NLA, YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJg4H2iCdTw&ab_channel=NationalLibraryofAustralia.

used for street mobilisation and were posthumously to recognise past battles.¹⁹ Documentarians have provided a corpus of televisual historical records. Together, this significant textual, cinematic, and artistic production testifies to the importance of this moment.

The story of archival preservation is part of this thesis. Many of the BLF's records were stolen when the Federal branch turfed them from their Trades Hall offices.²⁰ Then academic and BLF supporter, Meredith Burgmann is credited with saving around 40 boxes and finding others dripping with beer in a pub basement.²¹ Recently, residents saved three boxes of Woolloomooloo Residents' Action Group files from a skip and donated them to Trades Hall. Similarly, Jack Munday chose to give much of his personal archive — a textual collection of news clippings, speech notes and correspondence — to Trades Hall instead of a more official institution.²² The accession of protest material like pamphlets, badges, and posters into state-run institutions like Powerhouse has been part of the 'institutionalisation'. Still, unfortunately, much of this history exists within the movement's participants, or in their attics.²³

As this thesis will tell the story of popular commemoration, and sketch out the production, reception and textual details of memorials, I must venture beyond reliable fonds. This thesis will critique this fetishisation of the institutional archive, by looking at websites, activist blogs and digitised films on YouTube.²⁴ These unstable, less 'traditional' sources and their remediation are important for understanding cultural memory.

The city is itself also an archive that tells the stories of the movement. It records people's centripetal and centrifugal movements, of the fracturing of planning and extractive

¹⁹ Susan Rothnie, "The Case of the Vanishing Mediator: Seventies Art in Australia," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 12, no. 1 (2012): 140–60; Therese Kenyon, *Under a Hot Tin Roof: Art, Passion, and Politics at the Tin Sheds Art Workshop* (Sydney: State Library of New South Wales Press, 1995), 36–40; Olga Tsara, "The art of revolution: political posters in the RedPlanet archive," *The La Trobe Journal*, no. 75 (2005): 108.

²⁰ Greg Mallory, *Uncharted Waters: Social Responsibility in Australian Trade Unions* (Annerley, QLD: self-published, 2005), 146.

²¹ Burgmann and Burgmann, *Green Bans, Red Union*, xi–xii.

²² Neale Towart, "Archive of Jack Munday (Builders Labourers): Campaign "Green Bans"", 54th Annual Conference of the International Association of Labour History Institutions (Paris, France: IALHI, 2024)

²³ Wicke, "'Memory 'within', 'of' and 'by' Urban Movement," 151.

²⁴ Mike Jones, *Artefacts, Archives, and Documentation in the Relational Museum* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022).

and exploitative machinery of capital. This lofty idea will sit in the background as this thesis examines conscious forms of remembrance. This will be a thesis about the city, its people, their collective power and ideas.

Literature review

One of the main trajectories of this memoryscape has been academia. From its inception, the green bans movement attracted interest from historians, environmental analysts, and geographers, but the ample historical literature has been written by those sympathetic to the cause or those involved. Many of these have been written by actors or activists themselves like Jack Munday's memoirs.²⁵ The official academic record is *Green Bans, Red Union* written by Meredith and Verity Burgmann, two sisters involved in the movement. This cast the green bans story as the outcome of the BLF's 'exceptional' brand of left-wing unionism. Verity Burgmann has since written journal articles largely repeating the insights of their book, including in international interdisciplinary journals.²⁶ Labour historians have dealt with the BLF extensively, often considering them in a longitudinal story of building unions or their ideas of 'social responsibility'.²⁷ This dominance of labour histories have aggrandised the actions of union men. Recent Australian historians have focused on press representation, Patrick White's engagement in the movement, worker control, and shone a light on green bans placed by the

²⁵ Pete Thomas, *Taming the Concrete Jungle: The Builders Labourers' Story* (Sydney: NSW Branch of the Australian Building Construction Employees & Builders Labourers' Federation, 1973); Jack Munday, *Green Bans & Beyond* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981); Kevin Cook and Heather Goodall, *Making Change Happen: Black and White Activists Talk to Kevin Cook about Aboriginal, Union and Liberation Politics* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013).

²⁶ Verity Burgmann, "'A Rare Shift in Public Thinking': Jack Munday and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation," *Labour History*, no. 77 (1999): 44–63; "The social responsibility of labour versus the environmental impact of property capital: The Australian green bans movement" *Environmental Politics*, 9, no. 2 (2000), 78–101; "The movement of the green bans," *Movements* 80 (2014): 13–23; "The Green Bans Movement: Workers' Power and Ecological Radicalism in Australia in the 1970s," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2, no. 1 (2008): 63–89; Verity Burgmann, and Andrew Milner. "Ecotopians in Hardhats: The Australian Green Bans Movement," *Utopian Studies* 22, no. 1 (2011): 125-142.

²⁷ Paul True, *Tales of the BLF: Rolling the Right!* (Paramatta, NSW: Militant International Publication, 1995); Humphrey McQueen, *We Built This Country: Builders' Labourers & Their Unions, 1787 to the Future* (Port Adelaide, SA: Ginninderra Press, 2011); Greg Mallory, *Uncharted Waters*.

BLF's Queensland branch.²⁸ Old (and persistent) leftist infighting has coloured some histories.²⁹ Beyond labour-heavy analyses, the green bans have been slotted into histories of radical politics, heritage campaigns and environmental struggles.³⁰ In some stories, especially in the trade press, figures come out in shades of moral grey.³¹ Interestingly, there is very little academia on Juanita Nielsen, an iconic figure in this movement. Instead, it has been left to the trade press and news media to highlight her cultural importance.³² Unlike the BLF, the residents' participation in the green bans movement have been mostly recorded by themselves.³³ The green bans period also intersects with many other pieces of Sydney history, from gentrification to squatting movements, and has been found across Australian historical literature.

This historical episode has been a *topic de jure* for geographers, sociologists, heritage scholars and urban planners. Most analyse in a causal, rationalistic manner, with their disciplinary foci adjudicating the narrative arc. Particularly notable is Australian geographer Kay Anderson and renowned American urban geographer Jane Jacobs feminist analysis of the media narratives and activist techniques.³⁴ Recently Australian geographers have compared

²⁸ Peter Ferguson, "Patrick White, Green Bans and the Rise of the Australian New Left," *Melbourne Historical Journal*, no. 37 (2009): 73-88; India Anderson, "'Whose Green Bans? The Builders' Labourers' Federation, the Trade Union Movement and Green Bans in Queensland in the 1970s'," *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*, no. 20 (2015): 26-37; James Hogg, "Green Bans Forever: The Public and the Press in the 1970s Sydney Green Ban Movement," *Melbourne Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (2021): 42-54.

²⁹ Socialist Party of Australia, *Six Turbulent Years: Lessons from the Rise and Fall of the N.S.W. Builders Labourers' Leadership and Building Industry Struggles, 1969-75* (Sydney, NSW: Building Industry Branch of the Socialist Party of Australia, 1975); Brian Boyd, *Inside the BLF: A Union Self-Destructs*. (Melbourne, VIC: Ocean Press, 1991).

³⁰ Terry Irving, and Rowan Cahill, *Radical Sydney: Places, Portraits and Unruly Episodes* (Sydney, NSW: 2010); James Lesh, *Values in Cities* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2023).

³¹ Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy: The Life and Death of the Sydney Push* (Melbourne, VIC: Penguin Books, 1996).

³² Peter Rees, *Killing Juanita* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2004).

³³ Brenda Humble, *Woolloomooloo: Save the 'loo Now* (Sydney, NSW: Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development, 1976); Zula Nittim, "The Coalition of Resident Action Groups," in *Twentieth Century Sydney: Studies in Urban and Social History*, ed. Jill Roe (Sydney, NSW: Hale & Iremonger, 1980), 231-47; Edmund Campion, *Rockhoppers: Growing up Catholic in Australia* (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin, 1982); Honora Wilkinson, *Watch on the 'Loo 1920-1980* (Sydney, NSW: Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development, 1983). Margaret Shaw, *The History of the Battle to Save Kelly's Bush and the Green Ban Movement in the Early 1970's* (Sydney, NSW: A Buckley's Publication, 1996); Pip Kalajich, *The Battlers for Kelly's Bush* (Woolwich, NSW: Cercus Designs, 1996).

³⁴ Kay Anderson and Jane M Jacobs, "Geographies of Publicity and Privacy: Residential Activism in Sydney in the 1970s," *Environment and Planning A* 31, no. 6 (June 1996): 1017-30.

divestment of inner-city public housing to the 1970s green bans.³⁵ The episode received considerable international attention immediately from legal, industrial relations and environmental policy academics.³⁶ An American conservation scholar published a comprehensive, though slightly inaccurate account, in 1978.³⁷ The period holds a folkloric status in urban planning, with its embodiment of Henri Lefebvre's 'right to the city' ideas.³⁸ The episode has also been considered in light of energy policy and non-violent resistance.³⁹ This diverse interdisciplinary attention often repeats the same tired lines of the green bans narrative, and in the process, simplifies the story.

This scholarship has provided the background to the memoryscape I will be analysing. Much has been written about this era of Sydney's history, but not about how it's been remembered. One chapter has been most instructive, Dutch political historian Christian Wicke wrote on green bans memory in 2021.⁴⁰ Wicke looked at the overlapping use of memory *within* the movement, the memory *of* the movement, and the activists' creation of memory. Wicke highlighted how 'movement elites' (leaders, academics and participants) have continued to

³⁵ Michael Darcy, and Dallas Rogers, "Place, Political Culture and Post-Green Ban Resistance: Public Housing in Millers Point, Sydney," *Cities* 57 (2016): 47–54; Nicole Cook, "More-than-human Planning: The Agency of Buildings and Bodies in the Post-political City," *Geographical Research* 56, no. 4 (2018): 368–81.

³⁶ Leonie Sandercock, "Reform, property, and power in the cities," *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 2 (1974): 120–128; *Cities for Sale: Property, Politics, and Urban Planning in Australia* (Carlton, VIC: University of Melbourne Press, 1975); Mark A Haskell, "Green Bans: Worker Control and the Urban Environment," *Industrial Relations* (Berkeley) 16, no. 2 (1977): 205–14; Jack Munday, "Die "green ban"-Bewegung in Australien," in *Stadtkrise und soziale Bewegungen: Text zur internationalen Entwicklung*, eds. Margit Mayer, Roland Roth and Volkhard Brandes (Cologne, Germany: EVA, 1978): 247–253; Quintin Johnstone, "Australian Green Bans: Trade Union Activism Restricting Urban Development," *Urban Lawyer* 10, no. 1 (1978): 115–129.

³⁷ Richard Roddewig, *Green Bans: The Birth of Australian Environmental Politics: A Study in Public Opinion and Participation* (Sydney, NSW: Hale & Iremonger, 1978).

³⁸ J R Short, "Construction workers and the city: 1. Analysis," *Environment and Planning A* 20, issue 6 (1988): 719–732; Amelia Thorpe and Lee Stickells, "Beyond Protest: Activism and participation in 1970s Sydney," *UHPH 14: Landscapes and ecologies of urban and planning history* (2014): 797–814; Kurt Iveson, "Cities within the City: Do-It-Yourself Urbanism and the Right to the City," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 3 (2013): 941–56; Kurt Iveson, "Building a City For 'The People': Kurt Iveson, "The Politics of Alliance-Building in the Sydney Green Ban Movement," *Antipode* 46, no. 4 (September 2014): 992–1013.

³⁹ Ed Atkins, "The Structural Power of Workers in Influencing Energy Transitions: Examples of the Green Bans (Australia) and the Lucas Plan (United Kingdom)," *Energy Research & Social Science* 96 (2023): 102944–102960; Wendy Varney, "Green Nonviolent Resistance in Australia," *Peace Review* 19, no. 3 (2007): 381–87; Paul Bleakley, "Unconventional Labour: Environmental Justice and Working-Class Ecology in the New South Wales Green Bans," *Studies in Social Justice* 15, no. 3 (2021): 458–74.

⁴⁰ Christian Wicke, "Memory 'within', 'of' and 'by' Urban Movements," in *Remembering Social Movements*, eds. Christian Wicke, Stefan Berger, and Sean Scalmer (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2021) 133–55.

shape memory and historical cultures. Wicke also sketched out the use of this historical memory as a political resource. This thesis will build upon Wicke's thoughts and serve as a meeting point for prior histories. Instead of writing another history, I will turn a critical eye to how these academics have constructed a history.

This thesis will take Sydney as its object of analysis, as well as the labour movement, social movements, and environmentalism. The ideological breadth warrants a specific approach. Australian historians Janis Bailey and Ross Gwyther have suggested contemporaneous labour and environmental historiography as they are 'mutually reinforcing'.⁴¹ Looking to urban histories, Peter Spearitt and Grace Karskens have both highlighted Sydney's history of inequality.⁴² Both instruct us to look at experiences collectively, draw out similarities and pay attention to the silences.⁴³ Cultural historian Catriona Elder extends this understanding of space in Australia, illuminating the history of 'purifying', and the recent declassing of our language around space. Taking heed, I will pay attention to residential and tenancy patterns and draw upon urban geography to explain these demographic and economic changes.⁴⁴

As Australia was torn from its British yoke in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a considerable rethink of national identity.⁴⁵ The country's cities were no longer colonial outposts, they were to be globalist spaces attractive for capital. Unionists went from a core proportion of the population to ostracised baggage handlers. Australia, like other Western countries, has forgotten about trade unions and their fundamental role in 20th century political

⁴¹ Janis Bailey and Ross Gwyther, "Red and Green: Towards a Cross-Fertilisation of Labour and Environmental History," *Labour History* 99, no. 1 (2010): 4.

⁴² Maurice Daly, *Sydney Boom, Sydney Bust: The City and Its Property Market 1850-1981* (Sydney, NSW: George Allen & Unwin, 1982).

⁴³ Peter Spearitt, *Sydney's Century: A History* (Sydney, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 2000), xii-xiii; Grace Karskens, "Tales of Sydney and the Telling of Sydney Histories," *Journal of Urban History* 28, no. 6 (2002): 788.

⁴⁴ Alistair Sisson, Dallas Rogers, and Chris Gibson, "Property Speculation, Global Capital, Urban Planning and Financialisation: Sydney Boom, Sydney Bust Redux," *Australian Geographer* 50, no. 1 (2019): 1-9.

⁴⁵ See James Curran, and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia after Empire* (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 2010).

life.⁴⁶ The green bans memoryscape travels through these grooves; national, civic and activist group identity.

Memory theory

This thesis requires an understanding of history and memory, and a perusal of memory studies ideas. From early on, analyses of memory were concerned with their distinction from history. Walter Benjamin's early 20th century theses argue for the permeability of memory and history. Benjamin wrote 'articulating the past historically does not mean recognising it *the way it really was, it means* appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger'.⁴⁷ Pierre Nora's ideas are also instructive, the French historian drew out the schism between the two: 'memory is a perpetual current phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past', only to conclude that both are victim to nationalist, political objectives and selectivity.⁴⁸ Due to these porous boundaries, I will not be referring to memory and history as antitheses, but will hold a rightful suspicion of memory. I have chosen to write a history of 'memory' to explore how the shape of this event has changed over time. This will show how people conceive of this past and reveal its current today.

Hence, I will be using the term 'memory' to mean collective or cultural memory. Collective memory is more than collated personal memory, it is normative 'claim-making' about the past.⁴⁹ Cultural memory is similar, defined as public and institutional discourses.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Stefan Berger, "Activist Memory and Trade Unionism," in *Dynamics, Mediation, Mobilization: Doing Memory Studies With Ann Rigney*, eds. Astrid Erll, Susanne Knittel, and Jenny Wüstenberg (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2024): 355-359; Frank Bongiorno, "The changing nature of protest in Australia: Historical reflections," *Australian Quarterly* 92, no. 1 (Jan-March 2021): 15-17.

⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings Vol 4. 1938-1940* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006): 391.

⁴⁸ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 8.

⁴⁹ Ross Poole, "Memory, History and the Claims of the Past," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 2 (2008): 149-66.

⁵⁰ Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilisation: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Aleida Assman, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilisation: Arts of Memory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Until recently, memory and social movements have been studied separately.⁵¹ This thesis will take inspiration from these contemporary titles, with particular attention paid to movement commemoration in visual, spatial and embodied forms.⁵² Pre-eminent memory scholar Rigney has significantly shaped the field, developing the heuristic ‘memory-activism-nexus’ that describes memory activism, memory *of* activism and memory *in* activism.⁵³ This threefold tool understands how the past is constructed (memory of), how memory is used (memory in) and the work undertaking to implant certain pasts in cultural memory (memory activism). Wicke used a similar framework, and I will be extending upon this and focusing on memory *of* activism and memory activism.

The first, **memory of activism** will explain how green bans history has been constructed by various actors. Sociological memory scholars will help structure my analysis of how memory is mediated and remediated. It’s often said the news media creates ‘the first draft of history’ and instructs institutional discourse.⁵⁴ The green bans were made by the media, and re-made; post-1974 coverage used brief historical context which limited historical understanding.⁵⁵ In the longer term, the memory has been sustained by a wide range of bodies like institutions and historians. A few other sociological terms will be useful. Armstrong and Cragg, have provided hermeneutic tools like ‘commemorability’, ‘institutionalisation’ and

⁵¹ Stefan Berger, Sean Scalmer and Christian Wicke, “Memory and Social Movements: An Introduction,” in *Remembering Social Movements: Activism and Memory* eds. Stefan Berger, Sean Scalmer, Christian Wicke (UK: Routledge, 2021): 1-6; Carl J Griffin, Briony McDonagh, eds. *Remembering Protest in Britain since 1500: Memory, Materiality and the Landscape* (Cham, Switzerland, Springer International Publishing, 2018); Lorenzo Zamponi, *Social Movements, Memory and Media: Narrative in Action in the Italian and Spanish Student Movements*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018); Yifat Gutman, and Jenny Wüstenberg, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism* (United Kingdom, Routledge, 2023); *Memory and Social Movements in Modern and Contemporary History*, eds. Berger and Koller (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024); Astrid Erll, Susanne Knittel, and Jenny Wüstenberg, *Dynamics, Mediation, Mobilization: Doing Memory Studies With Ann Rigney* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2024).

⁵² Ann Rigney, “Remaking Memory and the Agency of the Aesthetic,” *Memory Studies* 14, no. 1 (2021): 10–23; Nicole Doerr, “Memory and Culture in Social Movements,” in *Conceptualising Culture in Social Movement Research*, eds. Britta Baumgarten, Priska Daphi and Peter Ullrich (New York, US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 206–226.

⁵³ Ann Rigney, “Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism Beyond the Traumatic,” *Memory Studies* 11, no. 3 (2018): 368–380.

⁵⁴ Chidgey and Hansen, 35; Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011): 1-10; Jill Edy, “Journalistic Use of Collective Memory,” *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 2 (1999): 71–85.

⁵⁵ Lorenzo Zamponi, *Social Movements, Memory and Media: Narrative in Action in the Italian and Spanish Student Movements*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

‘mnemonic capacity’ to explain why certain moments stick around.⁵⁶ Jansen’s explanation of institutionalisation — the governments ‘capture’ of protest memory through the glorification of certain figures — will prove instructive when analysing Munday’s commemoration.⁵⁷ Rigney has warned that ‘too canonical or consensual a memory can be a recipe for quiescence and sanitisation’, an idea that will be discussed in Chapter 3.⁵⁸ Relatedly, there’s considerable theoretical understanding about officialised memory, and activists’ resistance to it but not what happens in between.⁵⁹ This thesis will help fill this gap.

The second, **memory activism**, also known as ‘memory work’, describes how activists labour to ensure histories remain in collective memory.⁶⁰ Among others, Chidgey and Garde-Hansen have recently highlighted the extensive activist labour behind remembrance, ensuring ‘protest afterlives’.⁶¹ Such efforts are a part of contemporary activism.⁶² This concept speaks to the wealth and breadth of labour undertaken to memorialise the green bans. A couple of other terms are important. The categories of ‘archival memory’ and ‘working memory’ provoke considerations of whether these records are dormant or actively circulated.⁶³ This scholarship will help narrow down which pieces of green bans memory labour have public sway or just laid dormant.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Armstrong, and Suzanna Crage, “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth,” *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 5 (2006): 726–727.

⁵⁷ Robert S Jansen, “Resurrection and Appropriation: Reputational Trajectories, Memory Work, and the Political Use of Historical Figures,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 4 (2007): 953.

⁵⁸ Ann Rigney, “Afterword,” 302.

⁵⁹ Lorenzo Zamponi, “Collective Memory and Social Movements,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013), 2.

⁶⁰ Robert Jansen, “Resurrection and Appropriation: Reputational Trajectories, Memory Work, and the Political Use of Historical Figures,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 4 (2007): 953.

⁶¹ Chidgey and Garde-Hansen, 12-14; Ann Rigney, “Afterword,” in *Remembering Social Movements: Activism and Memory* eds. Stefan Berger, Sean Scalmer, Christian Wicke (London, UK: Routledge, 2021): 299-304.

⁶² Samuel Merrill and Ann Rigney, “Remembering Activism: Means and Ends,” *Memory Studies* 17, no. 5 (2024): 997–1003.

⁶³ Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2008), 97–107.

This thesis will cover unique ground by connecting ideas of memory, unions, protest and the city.⁶⁴ Australian memory studies, an emergent field, has historically been focused on nation-building, though there are a few recent pieces on unions.⁶⁵ This thesis will focus on ‘place memory’, taking note of Nora’s *lieux de memoire*, where ‘memory crystallizes and secretes itself’.⁶⁶ Three forms contribute to this spatialised memory – material commemorations (plaques, memorial structures, murals and toponyms), visual recollections (documentaries, mainstream cinema, artistic renderings) and embodied manifestations (activism, occupation, walks).

Material commemorations are ‘more likely to be stumbled upon than sought out’, becoming incidental engagements with the past amongst urban chaos.⁶⁷ Australian historian Sarah Pinto’s recent monograph on commemorating Indigenous history in Melbourne has been particularly instructive in analysing different memorial forms, their creation and their potential to aid historical consciousness.⁶⁸ Australian literary scholars Toby Davidson and Donna Houston have pointed to memorialisation’s teleology; they can symbolise ‘cultural or national advance’ to encourage collective pride in the present.⁶⁹ These ideas are complemented by Ian McShane’s analysis of bureaucratic processes behind official recognition.⁷⁰ Importantly, this time period includes the opening up of commemorative landscapes, broadening beyond

⁶⁴ Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, “Memory and history in twenty-first century Australia: A survey of the field,” *Memory Studies* 6, no. 3 (2013): 370-383; Clark, *Making Australian History*, 110.

⁶⁵ Anna Clark, *Making Australian History* (Sydney, NSW: Vintage Books Australia, 2022), 98-116; Vanessa Whittington, and Helen J. Waller, “‘The siege of union street’: Working class urban heritage and the politics of remembrance,” *Historic Environment* 31, no. 1 (2019): 82-95; Liam Byne, “Memory as political intervention: Labor movement life narration in Australia, Jack Holloway and May Brodney,” in *Remembering Social Movements: Activism and Memory* eds. Stefan Berger, Sean Scalmer, Christian Wicke (UK: Routledge, 2021): 199-218; Sean Scalmer, “Remembering the Movement for Eight Hours: Commemoration and mobilisation in Australia,” in *Remembering Social Movements: Activism and Memory* eds. Stefan Berger, Sean Scalmer, Christian Wicke (UK: Routledge, 2021): 219-239.

⁶⁶ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7.

⁶⁷ Hamzah Muzaini and Brenda Yeoh, *Contested memoryscapes: the politics of Second World War commemoration in Singapore* (2016) quoted in Sarah Pinto, *Places of Reconciliation: Commemorating Indigenous History in the Heart of Melbourne* (Melbourne, VIC: Melbourne University Publishing, 2021), 24.

⁶⁸ Pinto, *Commemorating Indigenous History*, 74.

⁶⁹ Toby Davidson and Donna Houston, “Mapping Australian Literary Commemoration in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra: Problems and Prospects,” *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 18, no. 1 (2018): 5.

⁷⁰ Ian McShane, “Regulating Memory: Commemorative Structures and Urban Governance in Australian Cities,” *Historic Environment* 24, no. 3 (2012): 43

colonial history, imperial fealty, and military recognition.⁷¹ Some of the green bans recognitions are ‘counter-memorials’, those which contest dominant historical narratives.⁷² Despite this democratising, the commemorations I’ll discuss are some of the only official recognitions of labourers and unions in Sydney’s streets, civic space is not easily given to the working class.

Visual cultures will be analysed for their ability to impart historical consciousness. Social movements and cities are in many ways ‘visual phenomena’ and engaged with through sight. I will draw upon historiographical and sociological work to analyse how film, memory and history understand each other.⁷³ These visual records are important to analyse, not just use illustratively.⁷⁴ Art’s position within activism, and in commemoration has been historically complex. I understand that all these articulations of the past – in material, filmic, textual forms – cannot be read as narratives independently from each other, they must be considered together.⁷⁵

This thesis will construct the green bans memoryscape chronologically. **Chapter 1** will recall the historical narrative of the green bans period from 1971 to 1974, and then the immediate memory from 1974 to 1980. Media narratives created the green bans, stitching together novel, cross-class coalitions and regionally separated strikes into one term. The country’s fish wrappers sensationalised the union, in a moral outcry about communist unionists skirting democratic process. This coverage established the allegorical figures and ideas. On the other side, activists went to solid lengths during and after the movement to document and commemorate. Popular remembrance became individualised, packaged in the rugby-playing, regionally-born, larrinkesque unionist, Jack Munday and Juanita Nielsen, the disappeared

⁷¹ Paul Ashton, Paula Hamilton, and Rose Searby, *Places of the Heart: Memorials in Australia* (Melbourne, VIC: Australian Scholarly, 2012), 2-3; McShane, 46.

⁷² Tim Edensor, and Shanti Sumartojo, “Reified Monuments, Counter Memorials and Anti-Memorials: Contested Colonial Heritage in Melbourne - Commemorating John Batman,” *Postcolonial Studies* (2023): 560.

⁷³ Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 4th edition (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2024)

⁷⁴ Chidgey and Garde-Hansen, 35.

⁷⁵ Doerr, “Memory and Culture in Social Movements,” 209.

‘heiress’. At the close of this period, the passage of environmental, heritage and planning legislation across Australia meant most of the green bans principles and ideas were mainstreamed.

Chapter 2 analyses the remembrance of this period, from 1980 to 2000. The memory was politicised popular culture. Munday became a national hero and Nielsen the city’s salacious tabloid star. The green bans story, fit with the 1980s Australian cinema’s interest in national memory, and the story found itself in two mainstream films Donald Crombie’s *The Killing of Angel Street* (1981) and Phillip Noyce’s *Heatwave* (1982). Activist artists worked with the Woolloomooloo community to render local stories of the green bans in bright murals. Similarly, documentarian Pat Fiske was driven by a personal commitment and the resulting film *Rocking the Foundations* (1985) has been vindicated, serving as one of the most important public histories of the movement. Unsurprisingly, governments were reluctant to officially commemorate the movement. Meanwhile, Sydney’s built and social environments were rapidly changing.

Chapter 3 analyses the memoryscape from the turn of the 21st century until now, wherein the green bans became a romanticised historical episode. It starts with the final episode of Munday’s reputational trajectory—a state funeral. The chapter then will backtrack through the institutionalisation of green bans memory, in accolades given to Munday and cultural dominance. Many of the material commemorations to the green bans movement take ‘banal’ forms in The Rocks. Unlike previous anniversaries, artists and community figures led the 40th anniversary commemorations, using memory to affirm urban identity and demonstrate success. This chapter will also talk about memory used *in* activism, how it confines, mobilises, legitimises and provides ready-made media narratives. The Sirius and Millers Point residents mobilised the memory of the green bans past, to no avail. Memory is still a didactic tool but doesn’t provide a playbook to counter today’s commercial forces.

The green bans story is made visible through historical retellings. Their effects can only be seen in *absence* of construction: the low-rise, sandstone buildings in The Rocks, the existence of fig trees in the Botanic Gardens and the luscious Centennial Park, and CBD's heritage buildings. Their failures are also marked by *absence* of community. The Italianate terraces on Victoria St were priced out of the pockets of those who fought for them to be retained, and this history is now perversely used for marketing.⁷⁶

Activists have fought on two levels; for the memory to occupy the cities and nation's memorial space, and for a continuation of the green bans, emulating the tactics and ideas of the movement. In 21st century Australia, just after their 50th anniversary, did the green bans actually matter? Much ink has been spilled, films produced, plaques inlaid, photographs circulated and posts made. But is such memory merely nostalgic fodder for activists and feel-good pub stories for Sydneysiders? The following pages will problematise and assess the green bans memory cultures, and the history they create. In doing so, I will recount the history of the city and the stories we like to tell about it. This history can simultaneously be used to nourish activism and hide the need for such action.

⁷⁶ Jason Boon, "The Green Bans in Potts Point", *Jason Boon Real Estate*, 24 September, 2020. <https://jasonboon.com.au/local-news/the-green-bans-in-potts-point/>.

Chapter 1

Immediate recollections and the foundations of myth:

The green bans memoryscape 1971-1980

From 1971 to the close of the decade, black bans became Green Bans, Munday and Nielsen became heroes and their actions entered mythological terrain. The press reportage created the ‘first draft of history’, which sensationalised the role of the ‘communist’ union.¹ The media built up a cult of personality around the union’s secretary Jack Munday, and the disappeared ‘heiress’ Juanita Nielsen. Nevertheless, the media made the green bans movement by piecing together a geographically, ideologically, chronologically and tactically diverse strike wave. During and afterwards, the activists would also mythologise themselves through film, art and literature. Before we can understand these dynamics, we must traverse the historical period.

Recounting the green bans movement 1971-4

Sydney was growing upwards and outwards in the 1970s. De-industrialisation, low inflation rates, a development-focused state government, technological changes and inundation of overseas funds drove a development *blitzkrieg*. The city’s population increased by over 50,000 per year.² By 1970, 60% of NSW lived in Sydney.³ Pre-eminent Australian urban planning scholar Maurice Daly wrote of the 1968-74 boom, ‘Sydney would never be the same again’.⁴ The government wanted to change Sydney from a provincial British dominion city to a burgeoning, capital-attractive metropolis. This led to a contradiction; there was an oversupply

¹ Chidgey and Hansen, 35.

² McQueen, 297.

³ Roddewig, 41.

⁴ Daly, 1.

of unoccupied office space while the Housing Commission waiting list was 50,000.⁵ There was wide anxiety, from different corners and classes about ‘avaricious’ development.⁶ Across the city, citizens converged in ‘resident action groups’ (RAGs) concerned with the speed and unbalanced nature of development, even forming the Coalition of Resident Action Groups (CRAG) in 1971⁷. Each RAG’s inability to gain communion through political pressure led to appealing for help elsewhere.⁸ The unions, an established part of the country’s political life, were one port of call.⁹

One industrial proponent for politicised strikes was the NSW branch of the BLF, with around 11,000 members.¹⁰ By 1971, the BLF was run by Jack Munday (secretary) and Joe Owens (assistant secretary) with Bob Pringle (president). This leadership troika was involved in the New Left Movement and the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), encouraged militant unionism and the ‘social responsibility of labour’.¹¹ They enjoyed relative legal immunity with the 1969 ‘O’Shea strike’ removing penal provisions. While the union was small, boom conditions gave them significant bargaining power. There was a labour shortage and the builders labourers were involved with the paramount tasks of demolition, excavation and concrete pours.¹² Moreso, the BLF’s prior industrial success in ‘civilising the industry’ – improving the pernicious and fatal conditions on city construction sites – lent the leadership loyalty.¹³ Open door policies encouraged confidence between membership and leadership. The Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association (FEDFA) were in a similar position.¹⁴

⁵ Burgmann and Burgmann, 38.

⁶ Thomas, 99-105.

⁷ Zula Nittim, “The Coalition of Resident Action Groups”, 231.

⁸ Roddewig, 52-56.

⁹ Roddewig, 63.

¹⁰ Thomas, 64.

¹¹ Mallory, 101-109.

¹² Roddewig, 68; Burgmann and Burgmann, 19-20.

¹³ Thomas, 12-16.

¹⁴ Colin Lynch, “Larrikins in the Labour Market: Masculinity, Class Struggle and Union Leadership in the NSW Building Industry”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies* 2, no. 2 (1997): 80.

The origins of the green bans movement is attributed to **Kelly's Bush** in Hunters Hill. In 1970, 13 concerned women formed the 'Battlers for Kelly's Bush', to save a bushy outcrop in the upper-middle-class area from the paws of developer AV Jennings. This group went through the traditional routes, lobbying their council and state parliamentary members. With no progress, on 3 June 1971, the women contacted FEDFA and the Miscellaneous Workers Union. Afterwards, the NSW Trades and Labor Council resolved in support, and the BLF sent Pringle to examine.¹⁵ Pringle reported back that he had asked the women to hold a meeting and demonstrate community support. Around 600 people showed up, and a 17 June meeting of BLF delegates resolved to place a 'black ban', a type of work stoppage.¹⁶ The episode received considerable national and international media attention due to these 'unlikely allies'.¹⁷ Kelly's Bush was eventually handed to the council.

The second ban was at **Eastlakes**. In October 1971, construction materials appeared on a space promised for parkland.¹⁸ The residents held a meeting and invited the BLF who promptly stopped work. The third ban at **The Rocks** was one of the most prominent. The Rocks was an important built environment as one of the first sites of British settlement. It had long been home to the working class and public housing, and subjected to various 'slum clearance' policies. During the 1970s it was considered a 'blight' on the harbour.

In 1968, the state government created the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (SCRA) to manage the area's urban renewal. The SCRA, with a board dominated by business interests, proposed the resumption of two-thirds of the land for commercial office blocks, and the eviction of many tenants.¹⁹ In early 1971, The Rocks RAG (RRAG) formed, led by resident

¹⁵ Burgmann and Burgmann, 174-5; "Minutes of Executive Meeting", 15 June 1971, Box 15, Joe Owens Collection, Z235. NBAC.

¹⁶ Burgmann and Burgmann, 8-9.

¹⁷ Margaret Jones, "Suburbs in revolt", *SMH*, 10 July, 1971, 20; "Workers to the rescue", *Sunday Times (London)*, 24 December, 1971; McQueen, 289-294.

¹⁸ Alison Wishart, "A park for the people: Jack Munday and the Eastlakes green ban", *Overland*, 23 June, 2022. <https://overland.org.au/2022/06/a-park-for-the-people-jack-munday-and-the-eastlakes-green-ban/>.

¹⁹ Roddewig, 18-20.

Nita McCrae.²⁰ Late in 1971, a RRAG meeting attended by figures like soon-to-be federal minister Tom Uren, architect Neville Gruzman, the National Trust's John Morris, voted for a green ban.²¹ FEDFA and Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU) joined the ban in 1972. The RRAG began working with CRAG, and academics to create a plan establishing conditions for lifting the ban.²² However, in October 1973, demolition began. Activists retaliated and physically defended various sites of over the two week 'Battle of The Rocks'. With media coverage of dramatic street scenes, this became an inflection point.²³ RRAG theorised the then NSW Premier sent in scab labour, then police to create a situation of 'industrial anarchy', to help his own 'law and order' electoral campaign.²⁴ Nevertheless with the public attention, the SCRA changed their plans to align with the desire for a residential and historical precinct.²⁵ The ban was lifted after a compromise was reached: the SCRA and Housing Commission would construct a medium density tower.²⁶ This was to be Sirius.

The fourth ban came in March 1972, when the BLF announced a stoppage on the **Opera House car park** project. Original plans had forgotten to design parking, and in 1972 planners suggested slotting a carpark into the Botanic Gardens cliff face. This would destroy three historic fig trees and impose health risks to the community. By December no solution had been found and the public works minister cried Munday was 'holding [Sydney] to ransom'.²⁷ A few years later, the state government resolved to build the parking underground.

Another media flashpoint was the **Centennial and Moore Park** ban. To strengthen a potential 1988 Olympics bid, the state government proposed a sports complex. These plans

²⁰ Roddewig, 22.

²¹ Jack Munday, "From Red to Green: Citizen Worker Alliance", in *Green Politics in Australia: Working Towards a Peaceful, Sustainable and Achievable Future*, ed. Drew Hutton (Sydney, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1987), 112.

²² The Rocks Peoples' Plan Committee, *A People's Plan for the Rocks* (Kensington, NSW: The Rocks Peoples' Plan Committee, 1975).

²³ *The Rocks Rapier*, 2; Roddewig, 56.

²⁴ *The Rocks Rapier*, 4.

²⁵ Roddewig, 25-27.

²⁶ Roddewig, 26.

²⁷ Burgmann and Burgmann, 183.

would have annexed parkland, destroyed homes and created traffic issues.²⁸ Major academic, political and literary figures became involved, including author Patrick White, opposition leader Pat Hills, and prominent economics professor Neil Runcie. In front of a 3500-strong crowd in June 1972, Munday announced a ban.²⁹ Due to the park's popularity, and place in the national imagination, this ban had far broader support than those concerned with low-income housing.³⁰

Of all Sydney's green bans, the most successful concerned **Woolloomooloo**. One of Sydney's oldest suburbs, the 'Loo', as it was affectionally known, was home to artistic, naval and literary communities. All this came under threat when the Sydney Planning Authority (SPA) slated the locale for 'comprehensive redevelopment', prompting speculative activity.³¹ A RAG formed in 1972 led by priest Edmund Campion, and requested a green ban which was placed in February 1973.³² After two years of negotiations between residents and the newly-formed Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD), they settled on a redevelopment plan that would preserve the low-income communities and historical buildings. This was one of the only bans lifted without compromise. The residents credit both FEDFA and the BLF for saving the 'Loo'.³³ This successful government intervention led the Church of England to approach DURD to acquire its Glebe land reserves, which became one of the country's biggest social housing projects.³⁴

The **Victoria Street** ban was another major boiling point. A developer, Frank Theeman had bought up several properties on the 'bohemian' Kings Cross street and began evicting residents in 1972. The Victoria Street Resident Action Group (VRAG) formed to protect low-

²⁸ Roddewig, 29.

²⁹ "Moore Park for the people", *South Sydney Observer* 1, no. 45, 22 June, 1972. City of Sydney Archives.

³⁰ Burgmann and Burgmann, 181.

³¹ Roddewig, 86.

³² Burgmann and Burgmann, 203.

³³ Humble, *Woolloomooloo: Save the 'Loo Now*, 3.

³⁴ Roddewig, 89-90.

income housing and requested a green ban which was placed in April 1973.³⁵ In mid 1973, activists, including those from literati The Push, began squatting.³⁶ During this period, there were arson attacks, beatings, a kidnapping, a suicide, and the uninvestigated death of Indigenous woman Esther George.³⁷ Activists publicised clear links between police, organised crime and developers.³⁸ In January 1974, police and ‘controllers’ moved in to evict squatters.³⁹ The ensuing ‘Battle of Victoria St’ captured press attention with high-octane scenes of chimney protestors.⁴⁰ The last-remaining resident, seaman and musician Mick Fowler, became a local legend. The ban is primarily remembered for its relation to Juanita Nielsen’s disappearance. Nielsen, who ran the local newspaper *NOW*, had expressed political support for the BLF and green bans activists, especially those in the Loo.⁴¹ After the BLF fractured, activism died down, developers’ interest payments accruing, Nielsen was the last hurdle as she agitated for the Water and Sewerage Employees’ Union to place a ban on the street.⁴² Nielsen was last seen on 4 July 1975. A coronial inquest later deemed that she had been killed.⁴³ Nielsen’s disappearance became a defining inflection point of the green ban era, both in terms of popular imagination and escalating violence between developers and protestors.⁴⁴

Upon request, the BLF placed blanket bans on 1700 sites listed by the National Trust, which had struggled to stop the rampant destruction of heritage buildings.⁴⁵ In addition to these bans, the union fought to retain certain sites. In February 1972, the BLF banned work on the

³⁵ Burgmann and Burgmann, 207.

³⁶ Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy: The Life and Death of the Sydney Push* (Melbourne, VIC: Penguin Books, 1996), 303.

³⁷ VRAG, “What now?”, *Now or Never*, 22 February, 1976, 4; VRAG, “Intimidation in vic. st.”, *NOW or Never*, 30 July, 1975, 2, 8; “Victoria St Fire”, *Scrounge* 9, 1; Juanita Nielsen, “Another Victoria Street Tragedy...”, *NOW*, 11 September, 1973, 2.

³⁸ *The City Squatter*, January 1974, 4-5.

³⁹ “Eviction of the squatters”, *Victoria St Rag*, 5 January, 1974, Joe Owens Collection, Box 32, Z235. NBAC.

⁴⁰ *Newspaper clippings*, Woolloomooloo Mural Panels Records, MLMSS 10896, SLSNW.

⁴¹ David Nichols, “Boiling in Anger: Activist Local Newspapers of the 1960s and 1970s”, *History Australia* 2, no. 2 (2005): 41-4.

⁴² Rees, 82-94

⁴³ VRAG, “The present state of the inquiry”, *NOW or Never*, 30 July, 30, 1975, 2, 8.

⁴⁴ Wendy Bacon, “Juanita, the story behind the story”, *SMH*, 14-20 October, 1983.

⁴⁵ Burgmann and Burgmann, 231.

Pitt Street Congregational Church which was slated for demolition.⁴⁶ The green bans prevented the destruction of Lyndhurst in Glebe and Helen Keller House in Woollahra. ‘Cultural’ bans were placed on the Theatre Royal, Regent Theatre and Newcastle Hotel. Munday claimed over 100 historical buildings were saved.⁴⁷

Green bans were also placed on the state government’s expressway projects. The **Northwest Expressway** threatened housing in Ultimo, Leichhardt, Glebe, Annandale, and Balmain. The government pushed on with ‘scab’ labour, but physical defence intensified the struggle and roads were re-routed.⁴⁸ The BLF also placed green bans across Sydney and the state, from Waterloo, to North Newtown, to Mount Druitt, to Newcastle. Bans were also declared in Melbourne, Adelaide, Newcastle and Perth.⁴⁹ The process was relatively ad hoc, but the BLF would place a ban if the community demonstrated support in a public meeting and their membership voted in support it.

The BLF also placed bans in support of feminist issues, gay liberation, Indigenous peoples’ equality and prisoners’ rights.⁵⁰ In June 1973 the BLF banned construction at Macquarie University because the administration had removed an openly gay student from a college. The BLF also banned construction at the University of Sydney after the administration didn’t allow a feminist philosophy course.⁵¹ This politically progressive support was later named ‘Pink Bans’. Emboldened by the idea of ‘social responsibility of labour’ and the New Left environment, the union mobilised their labour to support causes, uncommon to the industrial action.

⁴⁶ Burgmann and Burgmann, 232-3.

⁴⁷ Munday, “From Red to Green”, 115.

⁴⁸ Burgmann and Burgmann, 219-221, 266-267.

⁴⁹ Anne Summers, Wendy Bacon, Dave Morrissey, Ruth Gregory, and Syd Shelton, *The Little Green Book: The Facts on the Green Bans* (Glebe, NSW: Tomato Press, 1973).

⁵⁰ Burgmann and Burgmann, 133-145.

⁵¹ Munday, “From Red to Green”, 111.



Figure 3: The Rocks Resident Action Group poster, 1973.

Each green ban held a very different character. For example, The Rocks ban confronted the state's nation-building project directly, undermining the notions of public consensus and bureaucratic planning process, to fight for tenants rights. Meanwhile, Kelly's Bush and other parkland bans did not invoke the 'right to the city' argument or contentious issues around class. Across all, they stilled development, providing 'breathing space' to renegotiate plans.⁵² The green bans were most successful and popular when it came to heritage and parklands.⁵³ One commonality across these bans was the use of memory. Activists used the semiotic and discursive appeals of heritage, collective and personal stories of the past and even national memory to legitimise their pursuits (Fig. 3).⁵⁴ While there are various numbers, there were around 40 bans placed and \$3000 million (in 1974 terms) held up in the three year period.⁵⁵

⁵² Burgmann and Burgmann, 231.

⁵³ Roddewig, 80.

⁵⁴ Roddewig, 80.

⁵⁵ Munday claimed 58 at the height of the green bans with 12 lifted, one English researcher found 43 and Gallagher claimed 48. Roddewig, 157.

Many people were involved: students, architects, planners, engineers, unionists, conservationists, and public figures, capturing significant public attention.

Throughout the entire saga, there was a climate of fear. Threats were made to Munday, his son and his wife Judy.⁵⁶ A WRAG activist was attacked, and others were instructed to go to meetings by themselves.⁵⁷ Victoria St activist Ian Milliss chillingly described the atmosphere:

I learned when I was twenty-one, if you really challenge their power, they'll kill you. Don't delude yourself about it, do not delude yourself about it, ever. And it makes you look paranoid, and a conspiracy theorist, but be an adult, be serious about what you're dealing with.⁵⁸

By mid-1973, the property boom was waning. Projects were abandoned and developers insolvent.⁵⁹ With unemployment 'at a post-Depression high' and inflation 'its highest' ever, BLs could no longer afford to politically pick their jobs.⁶⁰ The BLF and RAGs had made significant enemies including state politicians, the press barons and other building unions.⁶¹ But, it was a call from within that destroyed the green bans movement. Relations between the BLF's NSW and federal branch had worsened after the MBA threatened to deregister the whole union.⁶² As the green bans were placed, acrimony deepened and the federal branch sought to turf out the NSW branch.⁶³ In late 1974, federal executive Norm Gallagher established a replacement branch.⁶⁴ While the BLF fought hard, they were disempowered and industrially isolated.⁶⁵ In March 1975, to a teary town Hall meeting, the former BLF executive

⁵⁶ "Call For Action Against Fascist Terror Threats," *Tribune*, 21 January, 1975, 2; Judy Munday, "Judith Munday interviewed by Alice Garner for the Australian political and social activists oral history project," interview by Alice Garner, National Library of Australia, 10 November, 2023, audio, tape 3. 2023.

⁵⁷ WRAG Files. Trades Hall Association.

⁵⁸ Kate Louise Williams, "The Audience That Acts" (PhD thesis, Sydney College of the Arts, September 2016), 153.

⁵⁹ Turnbull, *Sydney: A biography of a city*, 354.

⁶⁰ Roddewig, 129.

⁶¹ Iveson, "Alliance building," 997.

⁶² McQueen, 302-312.

⁶³ John Elder, 183-5.

⁶⁴ Mallory, 146.

⁶⁵ John Elder, 178.

acknowledged the NSW branch was over.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the tenuous alliance between resident groups was faltering, and without the industrial muscle the movement fractured along class lines.⁶⁷ Gallagher reduced bans to only those for ‘intrinsic historical value’ or requested by the National Trust, and lifted most NSW bans.⁶⁸ *The Australian* eulogised the union; and the green bans had already passed into history.⁶⁹

Making the green bans

First and foremost, the green bans were a media spectacle. Their novel gender and class coalitions, involvement in nationally important sites and disruption to process, attracted a moral panic from the dailies.⁷⁰ The media made the green bans; the neologism was first used by Munday in a mid-1973 interview with *The Australian*, replacing the industrial connotations of ‘black bans’.⁷¹ While there were some sympathetic accounts, the press were resolutely against union action, demonising the bans as violent attempts to undermine democracy.⁷² Across 12 days in August 1972, the *SMH* castigated the BLF in five editorials.⁷³ One mocked the BLs for ‘setting themselves up as the arbiters of taste and protectors of our national heritage’ (Fig. 4).⁷⁴ The media was also the developers’ play toy; the SCRA placed ads chastising the BLF and activists, while Theeman announced ‘ANARCHY REIGNS!!’.⁷⁵ RRAG supporters theorised the SCRA used contacts to quash resident stories.⁷⁶ One journalist concurred, saying that editors had stymied sympathetic pieces.⁷⁷ Public criticisms often devoted more attention to the

⁶⁶ McQueen, 318.

⁶⁷ Andrew Jakubowicz, *Was There a Green Ban Movement?* (Wollongong: A Jakubowicz, 1982).

⁶⁸ Roddewig, 106-7.

⁶⁹ Cited in Haskell, 213.

⁷⁰ Mallory, 110.

⁷¹ Munday, *Green bans and beyond*, 105.

⁷² Hogg, 42.

⁷³ Thomas, 117-8; Burgmann and Burgmann, 248.

⁷⁴ “Editorial,” *SMH*, 23 August, 1972, 6.

⁷⁵ *The Rocks Rapier*, 3; cited in Rees, *Killing Juanita*, 84.

⁷⁶ *The Rocks Rapier*, 4.

⁷⁷ Marion Hardman and Peter Manning, *Green Bans: The Story of an Australian Phenomenon* (East Melbourne, VIC: Australian Conservation Foundation, 1976).

unionists and Munday than residents.⁷⁸ This ignorance of RAGs and democratic unionism, meant the newspapers could paint 'communist conspiracy'.⁷⁹ The RAGs were union stooges, and the union was a façade for the CPA.⁸⁰

Munday took the leading role in media reportage, almost devoting as much attention to him as they did the PM of the time.⁸¹ Munday's story was a masterclass in public relations narrative-building: a regionally-born footballer becomes a union leader, using his industrial muscle to campaign for upper-middle-class ladies. This inflation of Munday's agency also helped argue authoritarianism and ingenuine community support. According to VRAG activist Wendy Bacon, the 'best' the media did was set up Munday's cult of personality (Fig. 5).⁸²

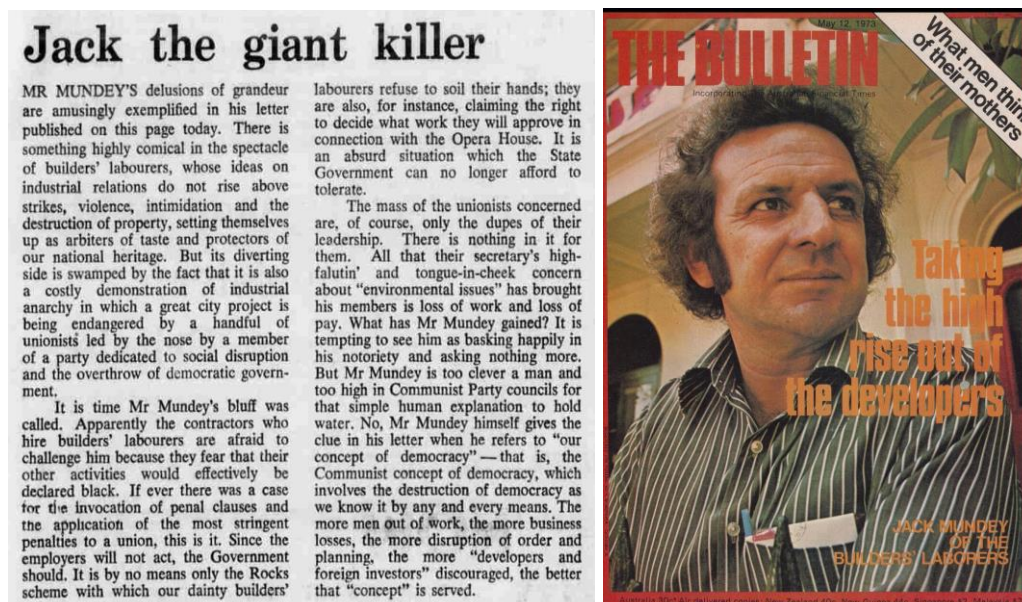


Figure 4: SMH 23/08/1972. Figure 5: *The Bulletin* 12/05/1973

Academics have attributed the green bans' notoriety to the BLF's handle of the news media.⁸³ One scholar attributed this utilisation to the BLF's central role, and the diminished

⁷⁸ Cited in Mallory, 117.

⁷⁹ Hogg, "Green bans forever," 29.

⁸⁰ "Editorial", *SMH*, 14 August, 1972, cited in Thomas, 122; Roddewig, 149.

⁸¹ Sandercock, *Cities for Sale*, 207.

⁸² Wendy Bacon, "The heroes of the green bans," *National Times*, 1985, MLK4272.

⁸³ Burgmann and Burgmann, 12; Verity Burgmann and Andrew Milner, "Ecotopians in Hardhats: The Australian Green Bans Movement," *Utopian Studies* 22, no. 1 (January 2011): 136; James Hogg, "Green Bans Forever: The Public and the Press in the 1970s Sydney Green Ban Movement" (Honours thesis, Melbourne, VIC, University of Melbourne, 2019), 6–10;

role of FEDFA.⁸⁴ The BLF themselves acknowledged the media was unsympathetic but had to be utilised.⁸⁵ Australia's news media had long engaged in union-bashing, forcing activists to use theatrical gimmicks to gain visibility.⁸⁶ The BLF and RAGs used the classic 'myth-making techniques' in the activists' wheelhouse; telegenic figures, photo-ops, press releases and stunts.⁸⁷ The growth of television in the 1970s helped, for its dramatic mediation of the 'political gimmick'.⁸⁸ The BLF played off different TV crews to ensure a favourable nightly run for the union.⁸⁹ One scholar has claimed the BLF's leaders selected bans on the possibilities of acquiring media coverage.⁹⁰ Such activities led to some positive coverage by the end of 1973, where the unionists were acting upon the mandate of the people to protect national heritage, parkland and community rights.⁹¹ This served internal union goals and set them up for a successful remembrance.⁹² The residents also utilised the media; the Battlers spruiked their conservatism for the press.⁹³ However, the mostly-female led RAGs ended up with less media attention than the unionists, which would affect the cultural memory.⁹⁴

Media was the activists' object of discontent *and* their practice. Green ban supporters weren't just subjects of the media, but were creating their own, publishing short-run or one-off newspapers, and writing for the union's circular.⁹⁵ Supporters also wrote for sympathetic left-

Quintin Johnstone, "Australian Green Bans: Trade Union Activism Restricting Urban Development," *The Urban Lawyer* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 118.

⁸⁴ Hogg, "Green bans forever," 43-4.

⁸⁵ *Builders Labourer* 4, no. 19 (September-October 1969): 31.

⁸⁶ Sean Scalmer, *Dissent Events: Protest, the Media, and the Political Gimmick in Australia*, *Dissent Events: Protest, the Media, and the Political Gimmick in Australia* (Kensington, NSW: University of New South Wales Press, 2002).

⁸⁷ Caleb Williams, "Protest, Police and the Green World View: The Search for a Brave New Paradigm," in *Protest! Environmental Activism in New South Wales 1968-1998*, ed. Caleb Williams (Sydney, NSW: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 1998), 9.

⁸⁸ Bongiorno, "The changing nature of protest," 13.

⁸⁹ Jack Munday, "Jack Munday," interview by Amanda Tattersall, 12:10.

⁹⁰ Roddewig, 143.

⁹¹ Mallory, 153.

⁹² Lynch, "Larrikins in the labour market," 80.

⁹³ Shaw, *The History of the Battle to Save Kelly's Bush*, 31.

⁹⁴ Nittim, "The Coalition of Resident Action Groups," 231.

⁹⁵ Papers produced by green bans activists included: *The Rocks Rapier*, *The City Squatter*, *NOW*, *Scrounge*, *Now & Again*, *Victoria St Rag*.

wing, community or student weeklies.⁹⁶ Two long-form works were also created to shore up documentation. Written by Victoria St activists, *The Little Green Book* was published in late 1973 and distributed widely (Fig. 6).⁹⁷ The 32-page booklet covered various green bans and their vested interests, providing accessible information to inspire activism and counter confusing media reportage.⁹⁸ By 1977, this was still ‘the most complete account’.⁹⁹ The BLF also commissioned a book, *Taming the Concrete Jungle* (1973), which offered a glowing representation.¹⁰⁰ Despite their slant (or maybe due to), these texts remain useful to historians and activists.¹⁰¹ These publications may have been the result of self-importance; that the green banners ‘would one day be the object of historical research’ or just well-worn motivations of documentation.¹⁰² Nevertheless, these efforts show green supporters were interested in memorialising themselves, and helped found the contours of cultural memory.

⁹⁶ Examples include: “Green bans and Askin’s poll,” *Tribune*, 23 October, 1973, 4; “Fighting on: the many trails blazed by NSW Builders’ Laborers,” *Tribune*, 8 April, 5; Grant Evans, “How Green Is Your Alley? An Interview with Joe Owens,” *The Living Daylights* 1, no. 2 (October 23, 1973): 16–17; “If you’re in trouble ring the union,” *Thraunka*, 2 August, 1973, 9; Richard Wilson, “Trouble in the building industry,” *Honi Soit*, issue 3, March 17, 1975, 4-5.

⁹⁷ “The Little Green Book,” *Tribune*, 20 November 1973, 12.

⁹⁸ Summers et. al, *The Little Green Book*, 32.

⁹⁹ Ken Ayers, ed. *An Environmental Impact Study on Green Bans, Environmental Studies Program* (North Ryde, NSW: Macquarie University, 1977), 9.

¹⁰⁰ Laurie Aarons, “The ‘BL story so far,” *Tribune*, 4 September 1973, 11; Leonie Sandercock, “Taming the Concrete Jungle. The Builders Laborers’ Story by Pete Thomas Review,” *Labour History* 26 (May 1974): 102.

¹⁰¹ Meredith Burgmann, “Vale Pete Thomas,” *Tribune*, 24 August, 1988, 11; Coombs, 319.

¹⁰² Richard Vinen, *The Long ‘68: Radical Protests and Its Enemies* (London, UK: Allen Lane, 2018), 7, 11.

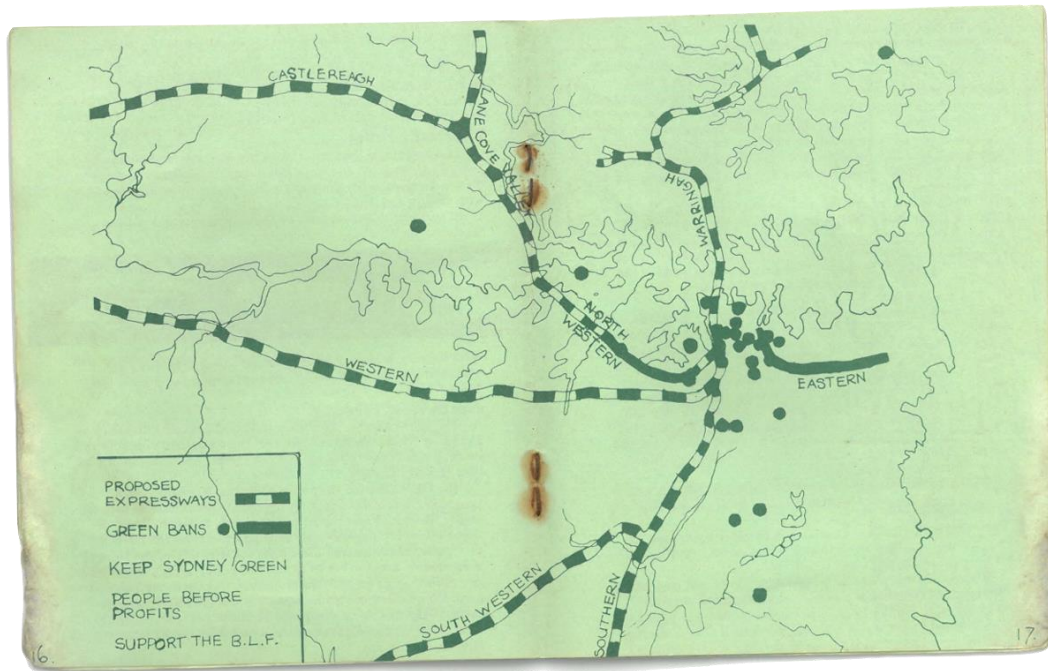


Figure 6: *The Little Green Book*, 1973.

The beginnings of the memoryscape

The green bans became an international story of Australian union and environmental success.¹⁰³ Behind closed doors, the Australian Government worked to dismantle this glorification; the Australian Consulate informed one heritage organisation that the bans were a ‘social twitch, not to be taken seriously’.¹⁰⁴

The history became associated with two names in particular: Juanita Nielsen and Jack Munday. Nielsen’s disappearance had played out in the press, and there was clear wrongdoing on the part of the police, government and developers.¹⁰⁵ Her story became a sensationalist obsession; the glamorous ‘heiress’ who fell victim to the gritty worlds of corruption and late-

¹⁰³ Barbara Ward, *The Home of Man* (London, UK: Deutsch, 1976).

¹⁰⁴ Australian Consulate, cited in Colman, 133.

¹⁰⁵ Rees, *Killing Juanita*.

night crime in the Cross.¹⁰⁶ Activists pushed for justice and demanded a royal commission, but Premier Wran denied police malfeasance.¹⁰⁷

With the media's draft, Munday's cult of personality continued. He was simultaneously a spokesperson for unionism, heritage and environmentalism.¹⁰⁸ Patrick White dedicated his Australian of the Year speech to Munday and fictionalised him in a play.¹⁰⁹ Munday was invited to speak at several high-profile events, like a UN Conference and the Sierra Club in San Francisco.¹¹⁰ These opportunities allowed him to speak and write his own story. One British journalist named Munday 'the best-known unionist and ... conservationist in the country'.¹¹¹ Due to his prominence as an environmentalist, he was regarded as 'almost a conformist' by 1978.¹¹² This individual glorification can be attributed to several things. Munday was close to Australia's old favourite larrikin stereotypes, which wore at the forefront of public discourses as Australia looked to develop a new national identity.¹¹³ Also, the conservation movement in Australia needed a spokesperson.¹¹⁴ Munday's communist stain ended up adding interest to his story, given there was no industrial muscle behind him.

Acrimonious relations between the Victorian/Federal branch and the old NSW branch continued.¹¹⁵ This period of BLF history is referred to as the 'Jack and Norm show'.¹¹⁶ The former leadership was rejected, perceived to have let members lose jobs and allow libertarians and RAGs to take advantage.¹¹⁷ Art was invoked to shore up Gallagher's version. The Federal branch commissioned colonial drawings of all the buildings saved. These 38 sketches were

¹⁰⁶ Zanny Begg, "Juanita Nielsen had a kitten called Charles F Arbuthnott Fuckwit the Third," *The Beehive* (UNSW Galleries, 2021), 18.

¹⁰⁷ Rees, *Killing Juanita*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Jack Munday, Ann Turner, and George Polites, *Union Power* (South Yarra, VIC: Heinemann Educational Australia, 1975).

¹⁰⁹ Ferguson, "Patrick White, Green Bans and the Rise of the Australian New Left," 85.

¹¹⁰ Munday, "From Red to Green," 118.

¹¹¹ Cited in Colman, xv.

¹¹² Alysen, "Filming the Green Bans," 278.

¹¹³ Wicke, "'Memory 'within', 'of' and 'by' Urban Movements," 142-4.

¹¹⁴ Colman, 80.

¹¹⁵ VRAG, "What now?," *Now & Then* (22 February 1976): 4; McQueen, 318.

¹¹⁶ McQueen, 315.

¹¹⁷ Roddewig, 107; Haskell, 212.

published and exhibited in a ‘Green Ban Gallery’. The accompanying text aggrandised Gallagher’s role and downplayed NSW successes (Fig. 7).¹¹⁸ This acrimony would continue but remain enclosed to leftist and union circles.

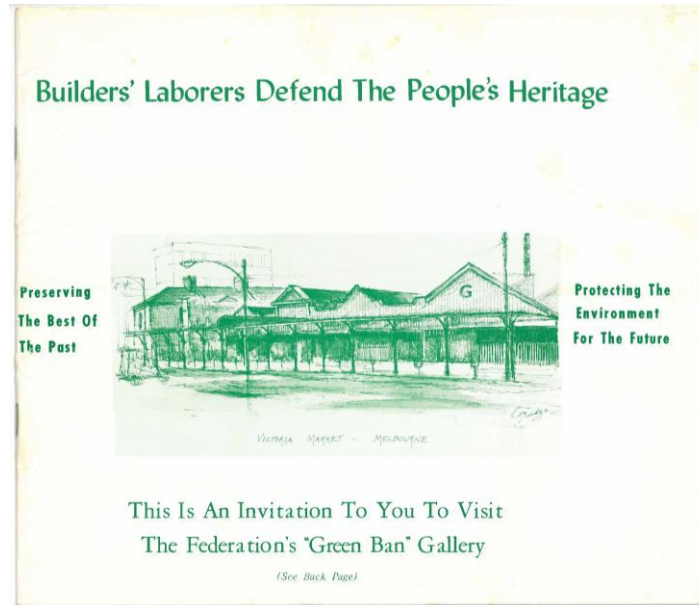


Figure 7: *Builders' Labourers' Defend The People's Heritage*, 1975.

The activists, on the other hand, were to remain concerned with writing their story. Filmmakers in the emerging co-op scene began playing a role in documenting the movement’s history. Both galvanised by the movement, Tom Zubrycki recorded Ultimo’s ban in *Fig St Fiasco* (1974) and Robert Lee Chittick followed post-green ban Victoria St campaigning in *Street Music* (1976).¹¹⁹ News cameraman Richard Cole created *Green City* (1978), a more accessible but dull documentary.¹²⁰ Worthy of particular attention is *Woolloomooloo* (1978), a 75 minute critically successful documentary created by green bans activists Pat Fiske and

¹¹⁸ ABCE&BLF, *Builders Labourers Defend The People's Heritage*, Joe Owens Collection, Box 57, Z235.

¹¹⁹ Tom Zubrycki, “From Video to Film and Back Again,” *Metro* 107 (1996): 49; “Filmmakers Cinema”, *Education* 58, no. 5 (30 Mar 1977): 105.

¹²⁰ Barbara Alysen, “Filming the Green Bans”, *Cinema Papers* 20 (March-April 1979): 276-8; “Green City”, *Advertising, Tribune*, 17 October, 1979, 10.

Denise White.¹²¹ The content was contentious; Film Australia and a television network were reluctant to hand over footage.¹²² Similarly, art became part of the cultural vocabulary of commemoration with posthumously celebrations of the green bans and their legendary figures in posters.¹²³ While some of these artistic productions have been circulated extensively, especially the posters below (Fig. 8-9), much of this is ‘archival memory’. In the cityscape, graffiti and stencils kept up the battle (Fig. 10).

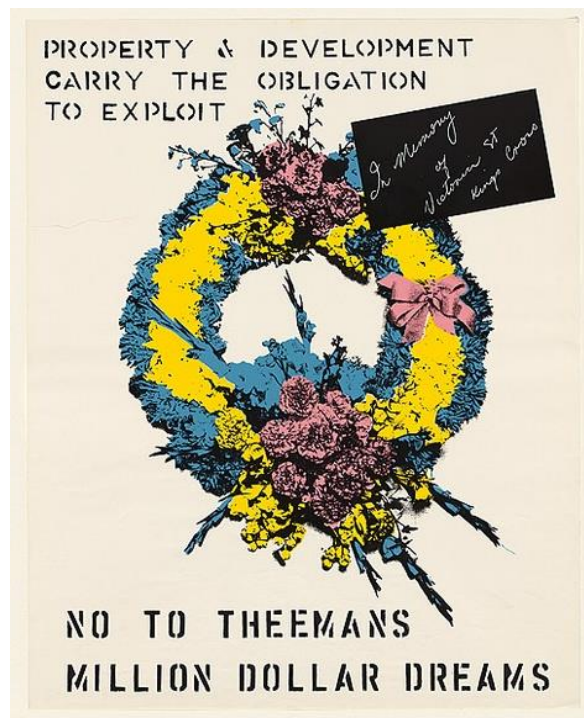


Figure 8: Jan Mackay, *In memory of Victoria Street, Kings Cross*, 1976.

¹²¹ Alysen, "Filming the Green Bans", 276; Sharon Connolly, "Interview with Pat Fiske" *Metro Magazine* 127/128 (January 2001): 67; Connolly, "Interview with Pat Fiske", 67-72; "New Films", *Filmnews*, 1 June, 1978, 12.

¹²² Alysen, "Filming the Green Bans", 279.

¹²³ Kate Yuill, *Girls at the Tin Sheds: Sydney Feminist Posters 1975-90* (Sydney, New South Wales: University Art Gallery, 2015), 70; Margaret Grafton, *BLF Green Ban Tree*, May 1973, Trades Hall Association; Barbara Hall and Jan Mackay, *Victoria St., April 1973 to now: bribery, thuggery, one week evictions, intimidation [etc.]*, 1976, Folder 1, Earthworks Poster Collective silkscreen posters, 1974-1980, PXX 511; Chips Mackinolty, *Remember Mick Fowler*, 1979, Powerhouse Collection.

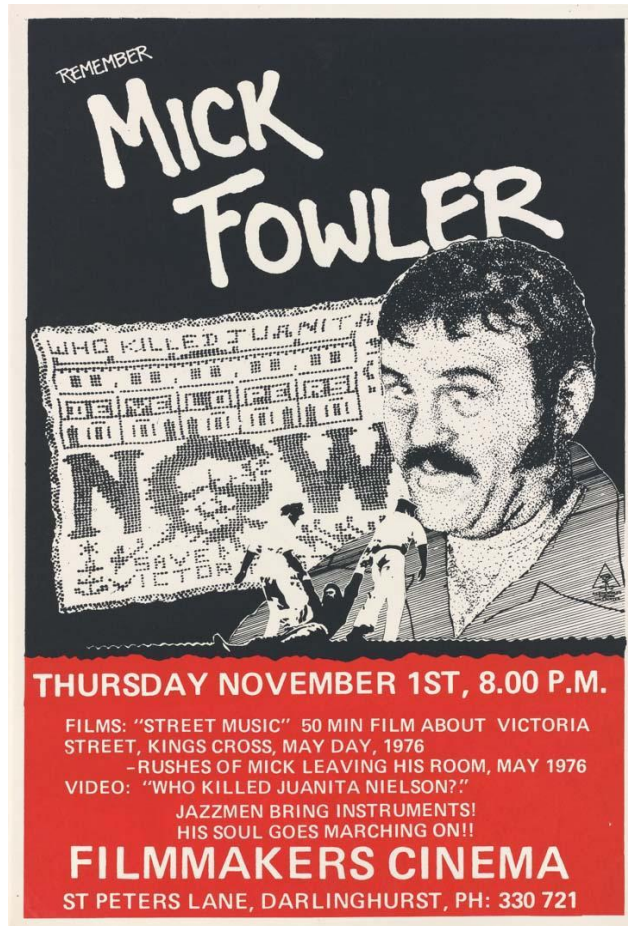


Figure 9: Chips Mackinolty, *Remember Mick Fowler*, 1979.



Figure 10: *Tribune* negative of Peter Kennedy's stencil, 1975.

In 1975, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) released a photobook, *Green Bans: The Story of An Australian Phenomenon*. Now an ACF board member, Munday helped launch the photo book. Monochromatic, poorly exposed photographs exhibited buildings, bodies, graffiti and banners in the beleaguered suburbs (Fig. 11). Expositional captions and congenial copy recorded a resident-focused history, countering the union-focused tale. This commentary mythologised the movement as ‘distinctively Australian’, likening it to Gallipoli and Eureka. Such sympathetic accounts invoked populist nationalist discourses of the hard-worn, masculine ‘battlers’ fighting the good cause and succeeding.¹²⁴ These greyscale images and allegorical text certified this history as ‘nostalgia’.¹²⁵

These sympathetic written, artistic, filmic histories were joined by an outpour of academic ink.¹²⁶ Saddled with the union’s files and impassioned by the deregistration, Meredith Burgmann began her doctorate thesis on the BLF. These academic productions were part of the cultural memory and remain actively used today.

¹²⁴ Anderson and Jacobs, 1020.

¹²⁵ ‘The Green Ban People’, *The National Times*, August 18-23, 1975, 32.

¹²⁶ Haskell, “Green Bans”; Quintin Johnstone, “Australian Green Bans”; Ken Ayers, *An Environmental Impact Study on Green Bans*; Caroline Graham, “Anatomy of a Revolutionary Union: A Post Mortem on the BLF 1968-1975” (Honours thesis, University of Sydney, 1975); “Property, Politics and Power: A History of City Planning in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney since 1900” (PhD, Canberra, Australian National University, 1974); “The BLF, Urban Politics and Inequality” in *Australian Politics: A Fourth Reader*, eds. Henry Mayer and Helen Nelson (Melbourne, VIC: Longman Cheshire, 1977).



Figure 11: *Green Bans: The Story of An Australian Phenomenon*, 1975.

The stage was set

This mythology hid the fact that the green bans had tapped into issues already prevalent. The boom had prompted significant social concern about opaque development and planning decisions, and the risks to the natural and built environment.¹²⁷ The late 1960s and 1970s were also a ‘nostalgia boom’, as cultural barometer Donald Horne noted, whereby conservation was in the public mind.¹²⁸ The green bans were the spark that helped foist urban, environmental and heritage concerns into policy conversations. Whitlam’s short-lived government established the Australian Heritage Commission, National Estate, DURD and mandatory environmental considerations in federal development decisions.¹²⁹ Neville Wran’s NSW government passed

¹²⁷ Ayers, *An Environmental Impact Study on Green Bans*, 35; Shaw, 2-5.

¹²⁸ Donald Horne, *Time of Hope: Australia 1966-72* (Sydney, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1980), 81.

¹²⁹ Roddewig, 73, 92-92; Nittim 231-5

the *Heritage Act 1977*, *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and established the Land and Environment Court.¹³⁰ By 1980, green bans ideas had become conventional wisdom.¹³¹

From 1971 to 1974, the green bans movement captured the nation's newspapers. The mediated events in the mainstream media cemented the frameworks for cultural memory. The story of remembrance had only just begun. With the moral panic about law and order somewhat ensconced in the past, and legislation in place; the beliefs the green banners fought for were largely status quo. This was fertile ground for mythology.

¹³⁰ Roddewig, 108-115.

¹³¹ Nittim, 245-246.

Chapter 2

Vindications, nostalgia, affirmations:

The green bans memoryscape 1981-2000

Fifteen years ago we were vilified for our Centennial Park Green Ban. Today we have been well and truly vindicated.¹

– Jack Munday

As the turn of the century loomed, the ‘green bans movement’ disappeared further into the past and remembrance became more melancholic. As Chapter 1 outlined, the press coverage, and alongside activists’ media techniques and communication labour, determined the framework of the memoryscape.² Chapter 2 will focus on the three streams of memory. In mainstream articulations like media and cinema, popular memory individualised this historical moment. Governments belatedly and reluctantly recognised the green banners in the odd plaque and place name, a staid, officious version of history. Activists remained committed to memory work and used cinematic and artistic forms to craft a heterogeneous memory. The green bans had become politicised popular culture; remembered nostalgically by activists, and cautiously by governments.

Various national events provide crucial context for this twenty-year memoryscape. After the green bans, there was re-evaluation of development, buoyed by some recessions.³ In NSW, the legislation that Wran’s government passed effectively institutionalised anti-development protest.⁴ The heritage campaigns were now comfortably led by the Vacluse-living ‘blue rinse’.⁵ Successive Labor PMs Keating and Hawke implemented arbitration and

¹ Munday, “From Red to Green,” 115.

² Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, “Introduction: Cultural Memory and Its Dynamics,” in *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 8.

³ Chris Maher, “The Changing Character of Australian Urban Growth,” *Built Environment (London)* 11, no. 2 (1985): 77.

⁴ Lauren N Costello and Kevin M Dunn, “Residents action groups in Sydney: people power or rat-bags?” *Australian Geographer* 25 (1994): 74.

⁵ Joseph Glascott, “Why the blue rinse is vital to our heritage,” *SMH*, 9 April, 1983, 36.

microeconomic reforms which effectively disempowered the union movement.⁶ The 1970s far left and revolutionary tenor significant quietened, and then dissipated with the fall of communism.⁷ In these 20 years, neoliberalism went from an emergent idea to the status quo.

As in the 1970s, Australian identity was being renegotiated. The old tenets of British patriotism or radical nationalism were no longer viable.⁸ With the breakdown of the cultural links with Britain, and an emergent confidence, Australia was searching for its identity. The metropolitan aspect of this exploration accelerated in the lead-up to Sydney's 1988 Bicentennial and 2000 Olympics.⁹ Australia was caught between projecting a larrikin identity and a modern one.¹⁰ In these shifting winds, the green bans were one of the pieces of Sydney's past that could be used and abused, mobilised or nostalgised. While initially only the community and activists wanted to promote this story, it began to serve the mnemonic interests of authoritative bodies. Remembrance of this story was now solidly mainstream, and mythical.

The public story

The making of Mr Munday

Continuing from his media star persona in the 1970s, Munday became the symbol of green bans commemoration. He'd been solidly disposed of by the Gallagher-led BLF in 1975 and had spent the latter half of the 1970s floating around on speaking tours. Angus & Robertson officialised movement history by publishing Munday's memoirs *Green Bans and Beyond* in late 1981.

⁶ Elizabeth Humphrys, *How Labour Built Neoliberalism: Australia's Accord, the Labour Movement and the Neoliberal Project* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

⁷ Jon Piccini, Evan Smith and Matthew Worley, "Introduction: The history of the far left in Australia since 1945," in *The Far Left in Australia since 1945* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 34-38.

⁸ Curran and Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia after Empire*.

⁹ Over 17 books were published about Sydney from 1999-2000. Karskens, "Tales of Sydney," 783.

¹⁰ Blaine, *Top Blokes*, 34.

The memoir sat tenuously in between two forms; Labor movement life-writing and reminiscences of a retired statesman. The memoir indulged Munday's agency, with garrulous accounts, apologia, and revelations of political intrigue. It befell the fate of memoirs; creating 'a past defined only by great men and populated by an otherwise inert and significant mass'.¹¹ It was also a weapon, besmirching Gallagher and score-settling with state politicians. The genre's narcissism casts the green bans as Munday's history while ignoring resident action groups and other unions. As the musings of a retired statesman, the memoirs consigned Munday's radicalism to history. The book's broad reception and attendance of intelligentsia at the launch vindicated this.¹² Munday spoke at the National Press Club, marking the official entry into Australia's dignitary pantheon.¹³ Through this period, Munday became more of a popular figure, profiled, painted and fawned over (Fig. 12).¹⁴ With no ability to hold up development, and no union mass behind him, Munday became a paper tiger, his iconography no longer a political threat. Moreso, courts found Munday's foes (Askin and Gallagher) corrupt, exonerating Munday and the former NSW branch.¹⁵ The CPA's folding and Munday joining the Greens in the late 1990s helped further tone down his radical image.

¹¹ Sean Scalmer, "The Rise of the Insider: Memoirs and Diaries in Recent Australian Political History," *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 56, no. 1 (2010): 102

¹² Deborah Hope, "Green Banners hail their hero," *SMH*, 23 November, 1981, 23; James McClelland, "Hero of the green bans," *SMH*, 28 November, 1981, 45. Peter Trundle, "Munday muscle kept it green," *The Courier Mail (Brisbane)*, 2 January, 1982. *Book review cuttings on the works of: Jack Munday*, 8620785. NLA.

¹³ Jack Munday, *Address at the National Press Club*, 19 November 1981, audio recording, National Library of Australia.

¹⁴ These are now held by the National Portrait Gallery. phra ajahn ekaggata, *Jack Munday*, 1985, type C photograph on paper; Lewis Morley, *Jack Munday*, type C photograph on paper, 1997.

¹⁵ Munday, "From Red to Green," 121.



Figure 12: Lewis Morley, *Jack Munday*, 1997.

Despite, and maybe due to, this glorification, Munday became more of a figurehead than an active leader in the 1980s. While Munday, Owens and Pringle had been re-admitted into the BLF, Munday failed to re-attain a leadership position and acquire labouring work.¹⁶ One friend aptly summarised: ‘They’ll put statues up for him when he’s dead but won’t give him a job while he’s still alive’.¹⁷ Only outside of the union movement would Munday find work. Munday served a brief term on the City of Sydney Council from 1984 until its unceremonious dismissal in 1987. Munday came back into view in 1995 when he was appointed to the Chair of Historic Houses Trust NSW.

Beyond these offices, Munday spearheaded conservationist struggles and advocated for more green bans.¹⁸ Munday used his public voice to criticise policy, denouncing the Wran

¹⁶ Jack Taylor, “Munday launches drive to win back union post,” *SMH*, 16 July, 1982, 1; Jack Taylor, “Munday: from green bans to black ban,” *SMH*, 27 March, 1984, 11.

¹⁷ Jack Taylor, “Munday: from green bans to black ban,” *SMH*, 27 March, 1984, 11.

¹⁸ Heath Gilmore, “Jobs first on wharf plan,” *SMH*, 9 May, 1993, 7.

government for introducing new legislation to overrule public opposition on major projects.¹⁹ Notwithstanding this continued critique, Munday was almost human-like heritage, even awarded the title of National Living Treasure in 1998. The media was more interested in historical anecdotes than his current positions.²⁰ Munday was nicely contained as a relic of the past, and he became a symbol used by various institutions to spruik their values.

Green bans memory also featured in the continuing criminal case of Juanita Nielsen's disappearance, now a sensationalised piece of Sydney folklore.²¹ Nielsen's 'green bans activism was largely pushed to the side as the story became about her unsolved disappearance. Media discourses cast her as a transgressive figure, as a 'seductress' and 'heiress'.²² The 1983 coronial inquest into Nielsen's disappearance verified police ineptitude and corruption. While there wasn't judicial closure about Nielsen's death, the popular narrative solidified into a myth of corrupt and criminal dealings in the Cross. The case remained in the public eye, and opened again in 1998.²³ Beyond Munday and Nielsen, other actors were pushed to the side. Pringle was forgotten and stuck in the past.²⁴

The movement's activists also wrote their own stories and published academic analyses. Two books were published on Kelly's Bush alone.²⁵ While these destabilised the Munday-centric official narratives they didn't get much traction.²⁶ Nevertheless, these

¹⁹ Munday, "From Red to Green," 117, 120.

²⁰ Mark Coultan, "What they did at the Town Hall," *SMH*, 11 May, 1984, 14; Geraldine O'Brien, "Jack Munday: doing all right on the road back," *SMH*, 19 November 1981, 7; Deidre Macken, "The leader a union abandoned," *The Age*, 9 April, 1981, 17; Deborah Tarrant, "Veteran revolutionary," *SMH*, 23 May, 1993, 17; Jane Hampson, "Jack on the blocks," *SMH*, 9 August, 1998, 56; The Smark Report, "Munday's back on centre stage in the inner-Sydney village," *SMH*, 13 May, 1985, 2.

²¹ Neil Mercer, "The best kept secret in Kings Cross," *SMH*, 19 November, 1983; Phillip Cornford, "Juanita's Lament," *SMH*, Spectrum, 1 July, 1995, 1; Philip Cornford, "Juanita Nielsen murder case reopened after 22 years," *SMH*, 3 March, 1998.

²² Anderson and Jacobs, 1020.

²³ Wendy Bacon, "Crusader of the Cross," *SMH*, 5 March, 1998, 13.

²⁴ John Clare, "After the green bans, a bit of poetry in the pub," *SMH*, 12 January, 1984, 9.

²⁵ Pip Kalajzich, *The Battlers for Kelly's Bush*, 1996; Margaret Shaw, *The History of the Battle to Save Kelly's Bush*, 1996.

²⁶ Edmund Campion, *Rockhoppers: Growing up Catholic in Australia* (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin, 1982); Some notable academic analyses from movement participants: Andrew Jakubowicz, *Was There a Green Ban Movement?* (Wollongong, NSW: A Jakubowicz, 1982), Andrew Jakubowicz, "The Green Ban movement: urban struggle and class politics," in *Australian Urban Politics: Critical Perspective*, eds. John Halligan, Chris Paris (Melbourne, VIC: Longman Cheshire, 1984): 149-166; Colin James, "Class War, Conflict and the Rebirth of Woolloomooloo," in *The Design of Sydney: Three Decades of Change in the City Centre*, ed. G Peter Webber (Sydney: Law Book, 1988).

publications demonstrated the activists' concern with legacy, as well as academic and commercial interest. Green ban supporter Meredith Burgmann had used BLF archives in a comprehensive doctorate.²⁷ This thesis was later converted to the book *Green Bans Red Union*, which would become the academic touchstone. In 1998, former PM Whitlam launched the book, the NSW Attorney General reviewed it, and the authors received puff pieces.²⁸ The book situated the green bans as outcomes of a democratically self-organised and radically left-wing union, that responded to 'the people'. While chronicling a wide spectrum of voices, the book focused on the Munday-Owens-Pringle triumvirate and painted the BLF as an exemplary and prophetic union, with the residents falling to the wayside. The book's historical contributions were important, but befell the fate of hagiography, as later acknowledged by Burgmann.²⁹

Green bans memory became institutional; even included in the inaugural *Australian Macquarie Dictionary*.³⁰ The Powerhouse acquired protest material, libraries conducted oral histories, and the government used the history to teach adult literacy.³¹ A Historic Houses Trust photographic exhibition memorialised the green bans in 1998.³² Academia contributed to and reflected this cultural prominence.³³ However, this scholarship begun to wash out elements the past. The Sydney histories that proliferated in the latter part of this period articulated the green bans' success in preserving parkland and buildings, by now a relatively uncontroversial

²⁷ Meredith Burgmann, "A New Concept of Unionism: The New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation, 1970-1974" (PhD, Sydney, New South Wales, Macquarie University, 1981).

²⁸ "UNSW Press invites you to...", pamphlet, Trades Hall Association; Hall Greenland, "The two of us," Good Weekend, *SMH*, 21 November, 1998, 12; Jeff Shaw, "From green ban to black ban – how Jack Munday shaped Sydney," *Spectrum*, *SMH*, 24 October, 1998, 11.

²⁹ Humphrey McQueen, "Jack Munday (1929-2020)," *Obituaries Australia*, 14 May 2020. <https://labouraustralia.anu.edu.au/biography/munday-jack-30343>. Accessed 23 May 2025.

³⁰ Macquarie Dictionary, advertorial, *The Age*, 28 September, 1981, 14.

³¹ New South Wales Adult Literary Information Office, *A History of the Green Bans* (Redfern, NSW: Adult Literacy Information Office, 1982); Jack Munday, interviewed by Ann Turner, 11 July, 25 August, 1991, transcript, ORAL TRC 1112/S1, NLA; Jack Cambourn, interviewed by Richard Raxworthy for Labor Council of New South Wales Oral History project, April 1988, sound recording, ORAL TRC 1948/31, NLA; Battlers for Kelly's Bush, interviewed by Vanessa Goodhew and Rosemary Block, 19 February 1992–2 March 1994, MLOH 104, SLNSW; "Green Ban" political badge, Object No. 89/572-7, acquired 19 December 1989, Powerhouse; 'Green Ban' badge, Object No. 92/107-47, acquired 22 January 1992, Powerhouse.

³² Jacqueline MacCarthy, "Green Portraits of Protest," *Sun Herald*, 1 December, 1998.

³³ Hugh Stretton, *Ideas for Australian Cities*, third edition (Sydney, NSW: Transit Australia, 1989), 272.

phenomenon.³⁴ Such histories wrote of movement participants as ‘conservationists’ or ‘urban heritage’ protectors, without acknowledging their class-centred aims.³⁵ This remembering distorted the history as a tale of protestors helping raise Australia’s awareness about the importance of the built environment. In very few of these tales, were the communities fighting for low-income housing, and against a market-led city, afforded much attention.

The honouring of this history didn’t extend to sympathy for contemporaneous union matters. Any sympathy was reserved for the BLF’s former leaders; union-bashing was ripe during the 1981-2 BLF Royal Commission and their 1986 deregistration. The BLF’s successor, Construction Forestry & Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) was also not immune. The green bans continued as trade union ‘repertoire of contention’ mostly protecting environment and heritage.³⁶ However, using the term ensured publicity, but not always legitimacy.³⁷ For example, the *Daily Telegraph* continually criticised the CFMEU’s Conservatorium ban.³⁸ The green bans stayed in the public eye; in reminiscences and as union actions.³⁹ The historical narrative of the green bans was becoming more commonplace, mythologised, officialised and institutionalised, but it wasn’t quite safe yet.

Mainstream cinema

The green bans story had enough social purchase to ensure the funding of two feature films; Donald Crombie’s *Killing of Angel Street* (1981) and Phillip Noyce’s *Heatwave* (1982). These

³⁴ Turnbull, *Sydney: Biography of a City*, 242.

³⁵ Tim Bonyhady, *Places Worth Keeping: Conservationists, Politics, and Law* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993), ix; Jennifer Taylor, *Australian Architecture Since 1960* (Sydney, NSW: Law Book Company Ltd, 1986), 54; Peter Webber, “Introduction”, in *The Design of Sydney*, ed. Peter Webber (Sydney, NSW: Law Book Company Ltd, 1988), 13.

³⁶ For example bans on Erskineville parkland, Toonagabee Creek, and CBD church. Geraldine O’Brien, “Green ban may save Scots Church,” *SMH*, 8 July, 1992, 5; Darren Horrigan, “Govt Action plan sparks off green ban,” *SMH*, 13 August, 1992; “News in Brief,” *SMH*, August 27, 1996, 2.

³⁷ Vic Smith and Jan Thornley, “We’re not just all nutters”, *SMH*, January 6, 2000, 8.

³⁸ Andrew Casey and Wanda Jamrozik, “Last charge of the BLF brigade”, *SMH*, 10 October, 1987, 11.; Tim Jamieson, “Unions lift green ban as new Con deal reached”, *SMH*, 23 December, 1998, 3.

³⁹ Joseph Glascott, “Rocks chief leaves his 15-year task”, *SMH*, 21 June, 1985, 11; Meredith Burgmann, “In memory of the BLF”, *SMH*, 18 March, 1995, 34.

fictionalised the Victoria St ban, focusing on Nielsen's disappearance. Due to commercial objectives and political concerns, both surrendered historical verisimilitude. The story was also dimmed by the nature of mainstream cinema which tends push away from politics and towards commerciality and state fealty.⁴⁰ The existence of two mainstream films on this matter reveals two dynamics; this history's *significance* to Australian audiences and its *profitability* during the 1980s national memory obsession. Like other cultural spheres, Australia's cinema was readily engaged in the nostalgic search for a national identity.⁴¹

The first, *Angel Street*, sets itself in a Sydney where Juanita has disappeared. The film follows Jessica, a lawyer returning home from abroad to find her upper-class father, B.C. Simmonds, leading a campaign against local development. Developers' men kill Simmonds in a suspicious fire that the police fail to investigate. Activists protest, and a resident links this murder to Nielsen's, stating 'everyone knows but nothing can be proven' (Fig. 13). Jessica takes up arms, working with charismatic union leader Elliot to place a 'ban' on construction, and is then kidnapped and threatened. Resisting a neat conclusion, the film ends with Jessica about to appear on television. The film makes patent a triangulation between corporate developers, their lackeys in government and their various muscle (police and strongmen). Phillip Noyce's noir *Heatwave* tried to be more subtle. In the fight against demolishing inner-city terraces, Mary Ford, a proprietor of a local newspaper goes missing. The film follows ecologically-conscious architect Stephen West and resident activist Kate Dean, trying to solve Ford's disappearance and save her street. In the background, a building union places a ban upon the residents' request but is quickly deregistered. *Heatwave's* final sequence embraces narrative closure: the developer is killed and Ford's body is revealed.⁴²

⁴⁰ Tom O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema* (London; Routledge, 1996), 24.

⁴¹ Jonathan Rayner, "Conflict and Conspiracy: Public and Personal Memory in Australian Film", *Post Script* 24, no. 2-3 (2004): 82-93; Brian McFarlane, *Australian Cinema 1970-1985* (Richmond, VIC: Heinemann Australia, 1987), 97.

⁴² Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema*, vol. 2 (Sydney, NSW: Currency Press, 1988), 195.



Figure 13: *Killing of Angel Street*, still.

Both films' allegiance to historical reality is rather wanting.⁴³ Critics found them 'simplistic and naive'.⁴⁴ *Angel Street* is stronger, directly referencing Juanita's existence. Importantly, the film's producers were committed to historical representation but due to various warnings (from journalists and those in high-level offices), they had to dim overt commentary.⁴⁵ *Heatwave* had less historical potency and barely focused on the green bans story.⁴⁶ Noyce was more concerned with capturing the city's paranoia, and dimmed the story's political content.⁴⁷ While they may not be as strong as a historian would like, the fact two commercial projects could 'tackle such themes' was an achievement for the time, and show that it could be used for entertainment.⁴⁸

⁴³ Helen Grace, Pat Fiske and Carolyn Strachan, "Towards the realm of the merely enjoyable," *Filmnews*, March 1, 1982, 8-10; "Doing the rounds", *Filmnews*, 1 October, 1981, 13; Brian McFarlane, *Australian Cinema 1970-1985*, 104.

⁴⁴ Annette Blonski, "At the Government's Pleasure: Independent Cinema," in *Don't Shoot Darling*, eds. Barbara Creed, Freda Freiberg, and Blonski (Richmond, VIC: Greenhouse Publications, 1987), 50.

⁴⁵ Ben Goldsmith, "The Killing of Angel Street," *Metro* 174 (Melbourne, 2012): 74.

⁴⁶ Denis Freney, "Judy Davis saves Heatwave from a meltdown," *Tribune*, 10 March 1982, 12.

⁴⁷ Arnold Zable, "Heatwave", *Cinema Papers* (June 1982): 221-3; Brian McFarlane and Geoff Mayer, *New Australian Cinema: Sources and Parallels in American and British Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 51-105.

⁴⁸ Geoff Gardner, "Film Reviews: Heatwave," *Cinema Papers* 37 (April 1982): 164.

The publicity resulting from the story's renown didn't save these films from poor box office performance.⁴⁹ The history loomed over reception; in Australia, both films were adjudicated for their (mis)use of the past.⁵⁰ Tellingly, overseas reviews paid little attention to historical context.⁵¹ In years past their release, the history doesn't feature much in reception and academic texts.⁵² While these films depict Nielsen's story, the fictionalisation confines their last power. While Crombie may have wanted a political statement, and Noyce entertainment, both films ended up less 'radical', and less dramatic than the history they fictionalised. These filmic commemorations reveal as much about this history's legacy as they do the contemporary screen cultures, where this story had entertainment value.

Reluctant and erasing memorials

Several tangible memorials – plaques, public art pieces, and public statuary changes – emerged in Sydney's cityscape, mostly instigated by activists and placed by reluctant civic bodies. Before I can map out the memorials, I must acknowledge the cityscape is the greatest tangible reminder of the movement. Guy Rundle said of the Birmingham Post Office,

The building stands as one of the thousands of monuments to the life of Munday ... and to Joe Owens and Bob Pringle, his deputies in the leadership, and to the thousands of building workers and activists.⁵³

⁴⁹ Chris Chase, "At the Movies," *New York Times*, June 10, 1983, 17; Grace, Fiske and Strachan, "Towards the realm of the merely enjoyable," 8-10; Geoff Gardner, "Film Reviews: Heatwave," *Cinema Papers* 37 (April 1982): 164; Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*, 195.

⁵⁰ Geraldine Brooks, "Angel Street demolished by trivial flaws," *The Good Weekend*, *SMH*, 24 October, 1981, 51; Denis Freney, "The Killing of Victoria Street," *Tribune*, 11 November, 1981, 12; Dougal MacDonald, "'Heatwave' a powerful romantic thriller," *The Canberra Times*, 29 June 1982, 17; Paul Fischer, "Heatwave," *Tharunka*, 1 March, 1982, 26; Denis Freney, "Judy Davis saves Heatwave from a meltdown," *Tribune*, 10 March 1982, 12; Bronwyn Watson, "Pick of the Day", *The Guide*, *SMH*, October 24, 1983, 42.

⁵¹ Vincent Canby, "The Killing of Angel Street [Review]," *New York Times*, 26 March 1983, 20; Dogo, "Film Reviews: The Killing Of Angel Street", *Variety* 304, issue 18 (November 4, 1981): 22; Geoffrey C Bolton, "The Image of Australia in Europe," *Journal of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce* 132, no. 5331 (Feb 01, 1984): 180; Christian Viviani, "HEATWAVE," *Positif*, 257/258 (July/Aug 1982): 90; Tim Pulleine, "Heatwave," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 49, issue 576 (January 1982): 200; Janet Maslin, "'Heatwave' Drama in Sydney," *New York Times*, 10 June, 1983, 17.

⁵² "Television", *The Guide*, *SMH*, 1 July, 1990, 179; Brian McFarlane, *Australian Cinema 1970-1985*, 104-6; Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema*, 193; Scott Murray, *Australian Cinema* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 97; Dean Biron and Tiffany Sutherland, "Dangerous Locations: THE MISSING PERSON IN AUSTRALIAN CINEMA," *Screen Education* no. 95 (2019): 64-71.

⁵³ Guy Rundle, "Jack Munday," In *Between the Last Oasis and the Next Mirage: Writings on Australia* (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Publishing, 2021), 344-345.

The continuance of certain buildings, parkland, the construction of inner-city public housing at Sirius and the redevelopment of Woolloomooloo, *was* the green bans' most prominent legacy. Sydney today offers few opportunities to understand this history; places like Victoria St quickly lost to high-rise.⁵⁴ With Sydney's streetscapes capturing patterns of change and construction, these plaques aid their 'legibility'.⁵⁵ Of the monuments that exist, their production histories are fraught, and futures are unknown. Each memorial had its own proponents, politics, longevity, and spatial context. Often anniversaries provided opportunities or political pressure for such commemoration.⁵⁶ While each commemoration has emerged from bureaucratic processes, they still attracted aspersions, indicating the highly-contested nature of civic memorial space.

The first commemorations were in Woolloomooloo. The press praised the redevelopment as 'living evidence' of the green bans' success.⁵⁷ Despite the residents' and unionists' advocacy, the first toponyms were reserved for a federal politician and professor.⁵⁸ Tom Uren Place was opened on 4 July 1981 remembering the federal minister who helped purchase Woolloomooloo. This date was the anniversary of Nielsen's disappearance and considered the suburb's 'independence day'.⁵⁹ The City of Sydney Council placed a plaque which vaguely honoured 'residents and certain trade unions'. The square was intended for community gatherings but has since accommodated homeless men unable to acquire a bed at the Matthew Talbot Hostel. The site has continuously been cast as a 'problem', and the government has initiated various strategies like a park (to simultaneously provide the men

⁵⁴ VRAG, "A tomb with a view," *NOW or Never*, 22 February, 1976, 4; Susan Molloy, "How Victoria Street lost to high rise," *SMH*, 27 April, 1987.

⁵⁵ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 54; McShane, 43.

⁵⁶ Ashton, Hamilton and Searby, *Places of the Heart*, 97.

⁵⁷ Joan McColl, "Why can't Melbourne plan like this," *The Age*, 5 May, 1980. 24.

⁵⁸ Neville Petersen, "National Appeal inaugurated: DENIS WINSTON'S INFLUENCE TO CONTINUE," *University of Sydney News* 13, no. 28 (27 October 1981): 239.

⁵⁹ *Woolloomooloo NOW*, issue 20 (July 1981): 1.

privacy and shield them from public view) and move on orders before the 2000 Olympics.⁶⁰ For all the successes of the housing estate, media perceptions quickly shifted back.

While the redevelopment was prompted by residents and unions, they would have to push for their own commemoration. WRAG convenor John Mulvenna, requested the Loo's new recreation centre be named after Nielsen.⁶¹ The Juanita Nielsen Community Centre opened in 1984. This toponym was explained by a plaque (Fig. 14). Nielsen's importance was officialised, now in the highly-regulated realm of place names, rather than ephemeral posters or guerilla graffiti.

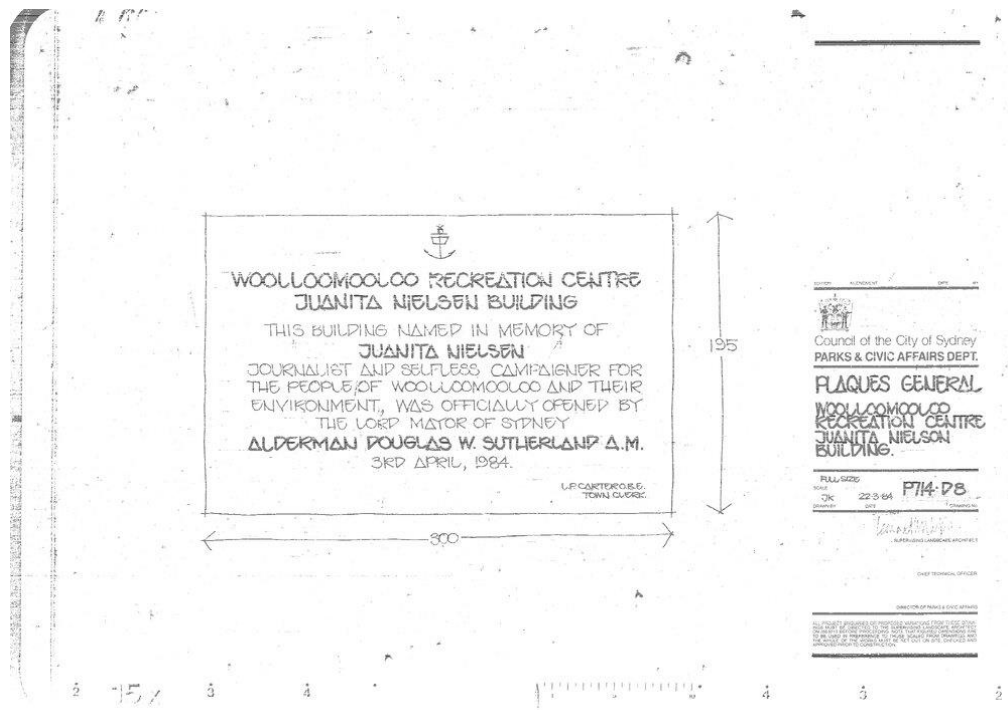


Figure 14: Design of Juanita Nielsen Community Centre plaque, City of Sydney Council, 1984.

⁶⁰ Deirdre Macken, "Desolation Row," *The Age*, 10 October, 1983, 2; Robert Thomson, "Homeless to have a place of their own," *SMH*, 27 September, 1983, 4; Kendall Hill and Linda Morris, "City's glory no fun for the homeless," *SMH*, 30 August, 2000, 9.

⁶¹ City Plan Heritage, "Juanita Nielsen Community Centre Conservation Management Plan, April 2013," A-01113526, City of Sydney Archives.

The site's location remembers her activism in WRAG, something often forgotten.⁶² While after its opening, Nielsen's name didn't need to be explained, as demographics shifted, the toponym erased Nielsen's significance. Place names are so common they begin to lose meaning, and without much explanatory material, the name relies on curiosity to take effect.

Up on the Darlinghurst ridge, the next commemoration of green bans associated figures transpired from similar memory activism. Green ban supporters asked the council for a plaque honouring the late Mick Fowler on Victoria St (Fig. 15).⁶³ The plaque was installed in 1982 at the top of the Butler Stairs, near his former residence at 115 Victoria St.⁶⁴ The memorial is intimate, dedicated 'from his friends' and sits in a prominent spot on the archway.⁶⁵ Without traditional insignia (logo, date or organisation name), this doesn't seem officialised. Its curious appearance and patina effectively destabilises the current Victoria St-scape. Elsewhere the central figure has been lost to the popular memory.⁶⁶ A park down the road was renamed from Mick Fowler Reserve to Embarkation Park. This plaque keeps the memory of Fowler alive and in place.

⁶² Scanned copy of Colin James police interview, 18 July, 1975, Peter Rees personal files.

⁶³ City of Sydney, "Minutes of 796th meeting," 15 February 1982, [https://meetings.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Data/Council/19820215/Agenda/\\$Council%20Minutes%20-%2015%20February%201982.pdf.docx.pdf](https://meetings.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Data/Council/19820215/Agenda/$Council%20Minutes%20-%2015%20February%201982.pdf.docx.pdf); "Minutes of 801st Council Meeting", 19 April, 1982, [https://meetings.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Data/Council/19820419/Agenda/\\$Council%20Minutes%20-%2019%20April%201982.pdf.docx.pdf](https://meetings.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Data/Council/19820419/Agenda/$Council%20Minutes%20-%2019%20April%201982.pdf.docx.pdf).

⁶⁴ *Woolloomooloo RAG*, issue. 32 (July 1982): 4.

⁶⁵ "Plaques - Memorial for Mick Fowler," *Plans of Parks, Reserves and Playgrounds [Municipal Council of Sydney / City of Sydney]*, A-00497659, CSA114796, City of Sydney Archives.

⁶⁶ Coombs, 299.

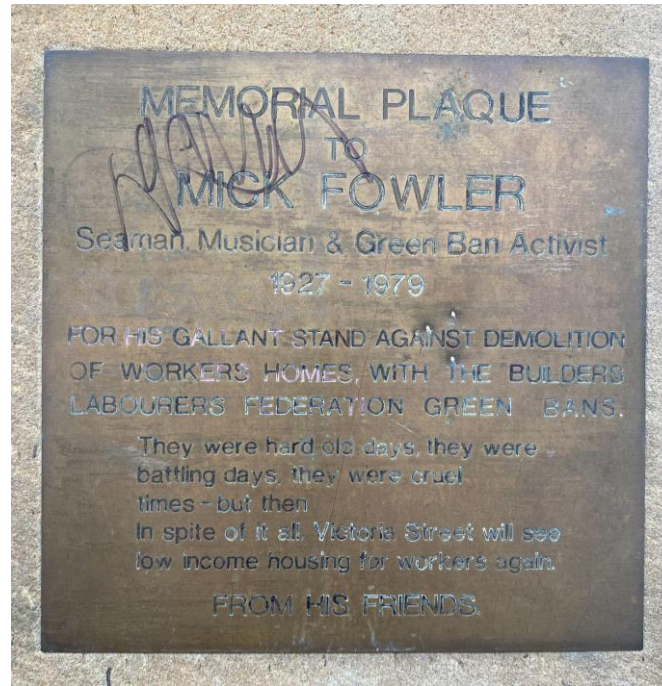


Figure 15: Mick Fowler plaque, City of Sydney Council, 1982.

Over at Kelly's Bush, the Hunters Hill Council were reluctant to acknowledge union contributions. When the park was opened in 1989 the council did not invite Munday and twelve of the thirteen Battlers.⁶⁷ The council's 1993 plaque honoured 'local residents' for helping save the parkland with no mention of unions.⁶⁸ A 25th anniversary stone placed in 1996 recognised the BLF but blanked out FEDFA. While the Battlers' actions were significant, this reluctance of union recognition was clearly politically motivated.⁶⁹

On the 25th anniversary of the 'Battle for The Rocks', a plaque honouring the green bans was unveiled (Fig. 16). The SCA, recently dropping the 'redevelopment' from the title, had undergone at volte-face; they wanted to 'note the positive change in role which the Authority adapted as a result of the Green Bans'.⁷⁰ Their new histories included the BLF but confidently ignored the RRAG.⁷¹ The bronze inscription honours 'the courage and vision' of

⁶⁷ Alan Kennedy, "Absent friends," *SMH*, 11 January, 1989, 29.

⁶⁸ Joseph Glascott, "Kelly's Bush stays green," *SMH*, 5 September, 1983.

⁶⁹ McQueen, 293.

⁷⁰ SCA business paper, March 1996, cited in Colman, 177.

⁷¹ Colman, 175; Max Kelly, *Anchored in a Small Cove*, 106-110; Sydney Cove Authority, *The Battle for the Rocks*, produced by Look Film Productions, 8 mins, 1995, VB 6824, SLNSW.

the 'local residents, unionists and environmentalists'. This devotion of civic space to the bans incurred criticisms. One commentator argued the SCA had 'fallen for the revisionist view of the thuggish BLF'.⁷² Sitting on The Rocks Centre, this plaque sits uneasily with The Rocks' many other heritage symbols, and undoubtedly its difference as 'counter-memorial' gets lost within the sandstone cobbled streets. The SCA also installed a more discreet plaque to campaigner Nita McCrae in 1996 on her former George St home.⁷³ The area's commercial success made honouring the historical process enabling this success, fairly uncontroversial. By the 1990s, The Rocks had become a touristic tribute to a colonial fantasy, and social housing residents were contained in Sirius and nearby terraces.⁷⁴

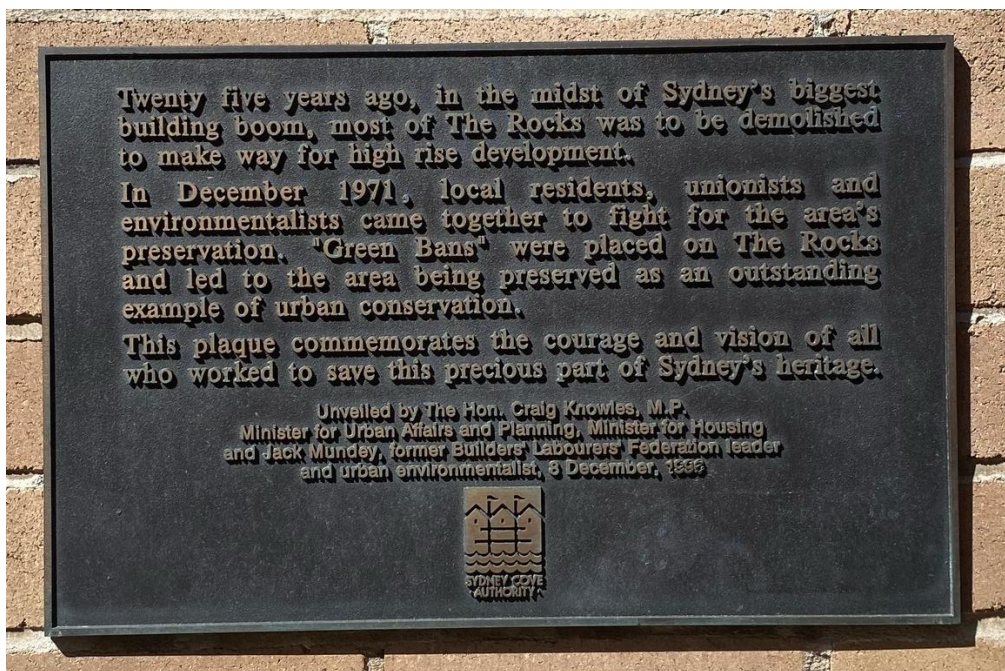


Figure 16: Green Bans plaque, Sydney Cove Authority, 1996.

⁷² Piers Akerman, "History's cradle rocked by leftist revisionism," *Daily Telegraph*, 10 December, 1996, 11; Piers Akerman, "Mythologisers of BLF are on rocky ground," *Daily Telegraph*, 17 December 1996, 11.

⁷³ Anderson and Jacobs, 1025. And

⁷⁴ Peter Spearritt, "On the Rocks: What Constitutes Good Design in a Heritage Precinct?" *Australian Construction Law Newsletter* 76 (2000): 75-77.

Elsewhere, there are hints of the green bans. A tablet, unveiled by the NSW Governor and a church minister in Pitt Street Congregational Church honours the BLF's role in saving the building.⁷⁵ In Erskineville for a post-1974 green ban, the local council initiated the signage and public artworks of the 'Green Bans Parks'.⁷⁶

These official marks of the past were a mix of the state's willingness and reluctance to commemorate the green bans. Just as they fought the battle for the city, they fought for the battle's remembrance in the city. The city's commemorative spaces were not given to the activists easily. These public commemorations were mostly instigated by individual crusaders. Yet their form limits the historical consciousness, compressing a broad movement into a sentence. Today, many of these plaques, murals and stones appear forgotten, bearing signage of the past and lacking explanatory material. Nevertheless, encased in bronze, and emboldened by council logos, this history has been made official.

Painted in time: The Woolloomooloo Mural project

The examples thus far have shown a rather speckled commemorative landscape. Unlike the ad hoc plaque, the following material commemoration was instigated, designed and implemented by community artists. The 'most impressive feature' of the material memoryscape were the *Woolloomooloo Murals*, a monumental public artwork created by Marilyn Fairskye and Michiel Dolk.⁷⁷ These murals constituted 17 panels placed upon the pylons of the above-ground Eastern Suburbs railway. Eight murals were created by the muralists, another eight were painted by commissioned artists and the seventeenth was a descriptive card. Fairskye and Dolk were inspired by the blank space of the pylons and wanted to commemorate the Loo's

⁷⁵ "Alan Gill, "Cannibals ... green bans: a church looks back," *SMH*, 13 September, 1983, 9; Munday, "From Red to Green," 116.

⁷⁶ Jim Piotrowski, interviewed by Sue Anderesen, 21 June, 2023, transcript, City of Sydney, 11.

⁷⁷ Wicke, 143.

recent history.⁷⁸ The artists worked with WRAG who determined the projects' scope and character.⁷⁹ Their purpose was to 'permanently record the unique history of Woolloomooloo' and brighten up the grey space.⁸⁰ The late 1970s and 1980s saw many community murals emerge across Sydney, but this artwork was born of particularly detailed historical practice.⁸¹

Common to visual memory, extensive pre-mediation processes often go unseen.⁸² The muralists' own archive demonstrates their extensive, almost year-long research phase.⁸³ Research avenues were broad, including union presidents, community figures, libraries, the Maritime Services Board and various films.⁸⁴ The muralists collected archival material and written histories, resulting in the project taking three years, with artists' working part-time to support themselves.⁸⁵ The murals received funding from government bodies, environmental organisations and residents.⁸⁶

On 10 July 1982, the *Woolloomooloo Murals* were officially unveiled, stretching upwards and across the large pylon spaces. The eight 'history' murals capture a multiplicity of Woolloomooloos, drawing from pre-invasion onwards. Collage-like composition places different stories, people and periods together and suggests synonymy. The first three record pre 1970s history; the First Nations resistance, immigrants' lives and wharf labourers. The next two depict street life. 'Women of Woolloomooloo' captures various green ban participants, Brenda Humble, Honora Wilkinson and Nellie Leonard's campaign against impending evictions.

⁷⁸ Michael Bogle, "DRAFT: History of the Woolloomooloo Mural Programme," June 2008, 4, MLMSS 10896.

⁷⁹ "Art Theory Courses for 1982," MLMSS 10896,

⁸⁰ "Appeal for Help \$\$ Woolloomooloo Mural Fund," MLMSS 10896.

⁸¹ David Humphries, "A People's Movement," in *The Mural Manual*, eds. in David Humphries and Rodney Monk (Sydney, NSW: Arts Council of New South Wales, 1982), 10.

⁸² Clara Vlessing, "Scarcity in Visual Memory: Creating a Mural of Sylvia Pankhurst," in *The Visual Memory of Protest*, eds. Ann Rigney and Thomas Smits (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 117.

⁸³ Uncatalogued correspondence, MLMSS 10896.

⁸⁴ Uncatalogued research material, MLMSS 10896.

⁸⁵ Susan Orr, "Woolloomooloo to record the battle and the battlers," *SMH*, 24 March 1981, 1, MLMSS 10896.

⁸⁶ Australia Council, "VISUAL ARTS BOARD (30 June 1980)," Annual report, no. 386 of 1980, 154, MLMSS 10896.



Figure 17: 'BLF Green Bans', *Woolloomooloo Murals*, 1982.

Three murals are of high importance to this study. 'BLF Green Bans' contains sundry vignettes of the past, embracing historical complexity (Fig. 17). The imposing figure of the 'Loo's developer Sidney Londish sits at the top, a diorama of his modern, white and sanitised development below. Around him are suitcases symbolising international investment banks. Next to him: Askin (with cigar), an alderman and anonymous town planner. On the other side are residents upon their graffiti-emblazoned balcony. The vector lines of the plan and the police's gaze lead downwards to a BLF banner and a phalanx of its marching executive, including Pringle and Owens. To the right, Munday holds a loudhailer speaking towards the

cluster of protestors surrounded. In the bottom quarter, the mural depicts an anonymous builder, gathered members of the WRAG and an elderly resident. Residents and unionists are in action, and women are afforded agency. The materiality of Woolloomooloo is given visual priority with brick finishings and ironwork of renovated terraces.

‘FEDFA Green Bans’ has similar visual codes (Fig. 18). Machinery and slogans crowd onto the frame. The top quarter contains a boom and labourers in front of a billboard advertising ‘extra reach for extra profit’. Green ban supporters occupy the bottom quarter; federal minister Tom Uren, architect Colin James, FEDFA’s Jack Cambourn stand together and FEDFA’s Vic Fitzgerald is in action below.

‘Victoria St’ tells the story from up on the ridge (Fig. 18). The first quarter is dominated by Theeman with his bank and main ‘enforcer’. Abe Saffron holds Eddie Trigg’s mugshots (the man prosecuted for Juanita’s disappearance). Below we encounter 115 Victoria St; its curvatures act as tombstones for Nielsen and Fowler. An A-frame for Tony Reeves (the journalist advocating for Nielsen inquiry and council alderman) is mounted on the balcony. Beneath, clusters of residents and unionists campaign; protestors are dragged away, and others (Pringle, Owens, and Wendy Bacon) are in action.



Figure 18: 'FEDFA Green Bans', 'Victoria St', Woolloomooloo Murals, 1982.

Those stories were self-explanatory to the communities, but to the modern eye, they capture protest and labour in undefined ways. They have been cited as a 'history'.⁸⁷ These functioned as 'counter-memorials', offering a view of the city that highlights contention between state and residents. The crowded montage manages to depict a complicated historical period, depicting the heroes, alongside the villains and community supporters. These three murals use the protest ephemera (signs, banners, placards, graffiti) as a motif, celebrating direct action. These murals keep the memory of the activists alive and in place, and as one local noted,

⁸⁷ Raymond Charles Rauscher and Salim. Momtaz, *Sustainable Neighbourhoods in Australia: City of Sydney Urban Planning* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 50.

‘surround Woolloomooloo with itself’.⁸⁸ Their physicality continues the green bans ethos, the locals’ memory has a right to the city.

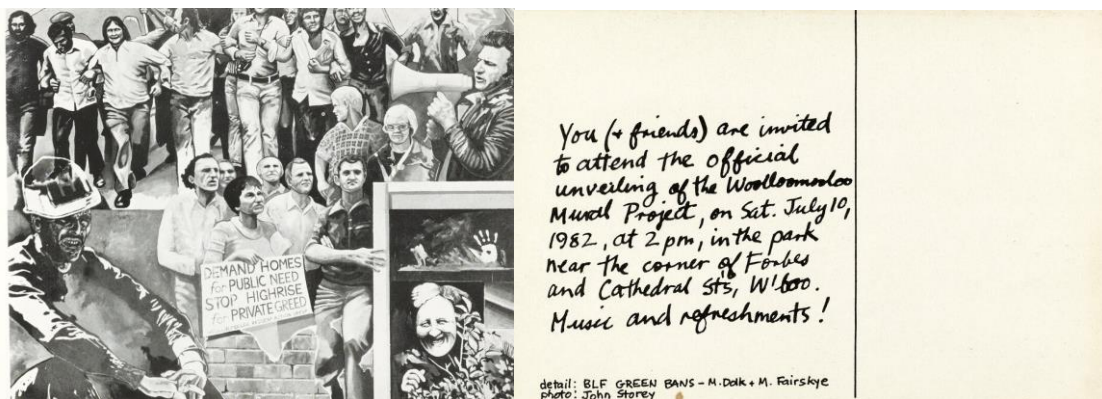


Figure 19: Invitation to the official unveiling of the Woolloomooloo Mural Project, 1982.

The murals’ representation of green bans history was a selling point (Fig. 19).⁸⁹ For previously-condemnatory *SMH*, the murals were lauded, and Munday and residents were Australian ‘battlers’.⁹⁰ By their well-attended opening, they were already nostalgic and their critical voice was muted.⁹¹ The murals signified ‘end of an era’.⁹² The event was living history, eyewitness speakers remembered depicted events and contested individualised narratives.⁹³ Speakers linked this memory to current activism for Indigenous rights, housing affordability and an inquiry into Juanita Nielsen’s disappearance.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Pam Johnston, “The Rat or the Swallow? A Discussion Paper on the Relationship between Artists, Communities and Institutions,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 2, no. 1 (2001): 129.

⁸⁹ “Invitation to the official unveiling of the Woolloomooloo Mural Project, 1982,” A-01211846, City of Sydney Archives.

⁹⁰ Susan Orr, “Woolloomooloo to record the battle and the battlers,” *SMH*, 24 March 1981, 1; Luis M Garcia, “These grey, blank faces of Woolloomooloo will become bright with colour,” *SMH*, 15 August, 1981, 3.

⁹¹ “Video - Opening launch event for Woolloomooloo Mural Project, Cathedral and Bourke Streets Woolloomooloo, 1982,” A-01211901, City of Sydney Archives; “Woolloomooloo Mural Project,” recording of Channel 7 1983, Youtube, <https://youtu.be/E0VULFqoyjU?si=20CseUkS9e3nAqgi>.

⁹² “Audio - Colin James speaking at the opening launch event for Woolloomooloo Mural Project, 1982,” A-01214410, City of Sydney Archives.

⁹³ “Audio - Vic Fitzgerald and Merilyn Fairskye speaking at the opening launch event for Woolloomooloo Mural Project, 1982,” A-01214412, City of Sydney Archives; Audio - Joe Owens speaking at the opening launch event for Woolloomooloo Mural Project, 1982, A-01214411, City of Sydney Archives.

⁹⁴ “Audio - Tony Reeves and Merilyn Fairskye speaking at the opening launch event for Woolloomooloo Mural Project, 1982,” A-01214409; Audio - Joe Owens speaking at the opening launch event for Woolloomooloo Mural Project, 1982, A-01214411.

The murals garnered further attention after appearing in Midnight Oil's *Power and Passion* music video.⁹⁵ While contemporary art critics disregarded them, documentation is now held by major institutions, suggesting a belated recognition.⁹⁶

In the years that followed, the murals were vandalised, removed due to rail and road construction, and placed in storage.⁹⁷ After community pressure, the City of Sydney restored them, in collaboration with the artists who requested 'preservation' instead of restoration.⁹⁸

Fairstyle wanted to crystallise the layers of time:

All the fading, the marks and damage, including burn marks where the homeless guys had lit fires underneath them, have become part of the story.



Figure 20: 'BLF Green Ban' in 2025.

⁹⁵ Midnight Oil, *Power and the Passion*, music video, 1983, Youtube. <https://youtu.be/6pKPNnk-JhE?si=SJtpALaaAuqN15pk>.

⁹⁶ Anna Cohn, "The murals of Sydney," *Art and Australia* 20, issue 3 (March 1983): 320-321; Keith Looby, "A kaleidoscope of artists: 'Australian Perspectives 1983'", *Art and Australia* 21, issue 2 (December 1983): 172; Michiel Dolk and Marilyn Fairstyle, *Woolloomooloo mural project. Documentation of community art project, photograph*, 1982, Object Nos. 185.1986.1–185.1986. Art Gallery of NSW.

⁹⁷ Michael Bogle, "DRAFT: History of the Woolloomooloo Mural Programme," June 2008, 4. MLMSS 10896.

⁹⁸ Michael Gormly, "Historic murals to live again," *CityHub*, 20 August, 2009, <https://cityhub.com.au/historic-murals-to-live-again/>.

This stabilisation, instead of complete preservation, enables us to see them as products of the past. They're still on the pylons, held by thick metal bars, but their colours are subdued (Fig. 20). Graffiti has crowded onto the populist paintings, layering affirmations of minority and community identity.⁹⁹ These frames also contain this protest in the area's past. Today, the faded, graffitied murals map a localised history and ways of being that are long forgotten. Emerging from the arduous labour of muralists and community workers, the murals provide an important memorial that refuses historical flattening.

Documenting the real: *Rocking the Foundations*

Activists similarly resisted monolithic storytelling by creating documentaries. While the former two films, *Heatwave* and *Angel Street*, had a broader audience, they presented a selective memory for mass consumption. On the other side of the market, Pat Fiske's *Rocking the Foundations* (1985) and Tom Zubrycki's *Waterloo* (1981) used factual filmic codes to mediate this history. Like other activist filmmaking, these cinema vérité films were avowedly Marxist and self-referential with both documentarians becoming resident-observers.¹⁰⁰ They were both for community affirmation and future inspiration, often shared in consciousness-raising groups.¹⁰¹ Zubrycki's *Waterloo* traversed through the suburb's history focusing on the green bans period, over 48 minutes.¹⁰² This was considered 'inspiring', as the struggle was ongoing.¹⁰³ Such a description indicates the medium's mobilising abilities, as opposed to more static, staid forms.

⁹⁹ Pam Johnston, "The Rat or the Swallow? A Discussion Paper on the Relationship between Artists, Communities and Institutions," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 2, no. 1 (2001): 125-6.

¹⁰⁰ Megan McMurchy, "The documentary," in *Australian Cinema*, ed. Scott Murray (Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin 1994): 179; Kathy Sport, "Save Our Homes: Activist Documentaries 1970-1985," *Metro Magazine* 135, no. 1 (2003): 138-147.

¹⁰¹ Anette Blonski and Freda Freiberg, "Double Trouble: Women's Films," in *The Australian Screen*, eds. Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan, (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin, 1989), 199.

¹⁰² Barbara Alysen, "Waterloo," *Cinema Papers*, issue 36 (February 1982): 17.

¹⁰³ Gary MacLennan, "Left Wing Documentary Film in Australia 1946-1996" (PhD doctorate, Queensland University of Technology, 2000), 261.

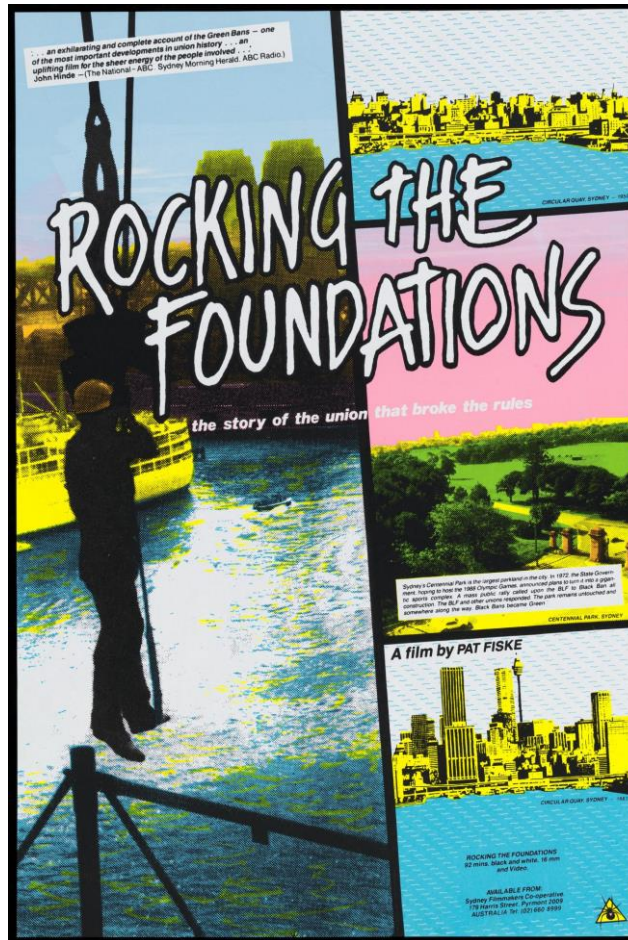


Figure 21: Rocking the Foundations poster, 1985.

A few years later, Pat Fiske’s *Rocking the Foundations* was released. The film’s subtitle, *A history of the New South Wales Builders Laborers Federation 1940-1974*, endorsed its historical intent. The film was long in the making. Including the production for Fiske’s prior film *Woolloomooloo* and another lengthy research period, the film took around 10 years. The film received most of its funding from the Australian Film Commission (AFC), and supplementary capital from the Push and various councils.¹⁰⁴ However, for the majority Fiske went without wages, driven by an emotional commitment to History:

It was a really important part of Australia's history. I was concerned and anxious for a lot of those years to get it right.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Gillian Leahy, “Rocking the Foundations: Interview,” *Filmnews* 15, no. 8 (November 1985): 13. MLK4272.

¹⁰⁵ Felicity Collins, “Ties That Bind The Psyche of Feminist Filmmaking: Sydney, 1969-1989” (PhD doctorate, University of Technology Sydney, 1995), 185.

The film is a kind of auto-history, told by Fiske, who at one point breaks her voice-of-god narration to tell her perspective as a female builders labourer. Starting with the BLF's corruption in the 1950s and 1960s, the film emphasises the victory of the militant rank-and-file usurpation, then moves to the building boom of the 1960s and 1970s, with its monocultural development plans and dangerous construction sites. The film peaks with the green bans movement, and spends significant time on The Rocks, Woolloomooloo and Victoria St ban and their street battles. 1974 isn't the endpoint as Rocking considers Nielsen's disappearance and deregistration disputes. Fiske's politics are patent; the film lionises Munday and his compatriots and villainises Gallagher



Figure 22: *Rocking the Foundations*, still.

Despite the political sympathies, Fiske still aimed to capture historical complexity. To create a heterogeneous 'cross-section', Fiske conducted over 30 interviews with residents, developers, activists, union members and union executives (Fig. 22).¹⁰⁶ Each filmed interview

¹⁰⁶ Leahy, "Rocking the Foundations: Interview".

serves as an oral history.¹⁰⁷ The motif of labour in both the filmed action and hand-drawn cartoons and title cards, accentuates human effort behind city-building (Fig. 23). Promotional material also defiantly depicted a dogman.¹⁰⁸ Fiske's historical representation was distinctively feminist, highlighting female BLs and using a female narrator.¹⁰⁹ Signifying this, the title adapts a woman BL's comment that the union's policies would 'rock the foundations' of Trades Hall. Through jumpy animation, cartoons, talking heads, and shots of building sites, the film records Sydney through the people who built it. This filmic representation of workers and unionists was and remains rare (Fig. 23).¹¹⁰



Figure 23: *Rocking the Foundations*, stills.

Overall, *Rocking* was praised.¹¹¹ Supporters enthused; 'most educational ninety minutes I've spent'.¹¹² The reviews provided insight into 1985 views of the green bans; a story

¹⁰⁷ Burgmann and Burgmann used Fiske's interviews for their 1998 book.

¹⁰⁸ *Rocking the Foundations*, promotional material, November 1985, Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association (FEDFA) Records. NSW deposit 2. N129, NBAC.

¹⁰⁹ Blonski and Freiberg, "Women's Films," 198.

¹¹⁰ Catherine Bridgen, "Representations of Labour: Images of Work and Workers in Film," in *Proceedings of the 22nd Conference of the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australian and New Zealand* (Melbourne, VIC: AIRAANZ, February 2008), 84-93.

¹¹¹ Debbie Coffey, "The city's threatened again..." *Tempo*, *SMH*, December 1, 1985, 165; Tony Mitchell, "Rock solid," *Cinema Papers*, undated. MLK4272.

¹¹² Letter from Gil Appleton to Pat Fiske, 28 November 1985; Letter from Tony Westmore to Pat Fiske, 23 December 1985. MLK4272; Margaret Jones, "Vigilance the price of harmony," *SMH*, 8 November 1985; Sian Martin, "Story of people power," *Daily News*, 20 March, 1986, 33; Hunter Cordaiy, "Rocking the Foundations," *Filmviews*, undated; "Green bans come to brutal life again," *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 December, 1985; FOC, "Greenies versus Gallagher," *The Catholic Weekly*, 11 December, 1985; Jilea Carney, "Rocking the Foundations," *On the Street*, 20 November 1985, MLK4272.

of Munday, heritage and anti-development campaigns, with only one reviewer touching on the ongoing struggle for public and low-rent housing.¹¹³ Reading closely, the documentary's positive reception was qualified.¹¹⁴ In 1985, the deregistration of the BLF was likely and unionism had a 'defeated odour'.¹¹⁵ While acknowledging *Rocking* was a 'significant source film for future reference', the ABC didn't run it.¹¹⁶ Channel 9 refused to review.¹¹⁷ These dismissals have been attributed to 'political sensitivities' and 'assumptions over target demographics'.¹¹⁸ This caution would continue. The ABC first screened *Rocking* in 1988 with no advertisement in a graveyard slot, a decision attributed to Aunty's nervous management. A former politician got involved and the ABC rescreened the film.¹¹⁹ This varied reception reveals the still highly political nature of green bans history.

Now far from the specific historical time depicted, *Rocking*'s universal qualities are more apparent. It hits the same plot points that the Burgmanns would in 1998 – a model union develops novel alliances with 'the people' only to be destroyed by the developers and state – but manages to make more universal claims about collective action.

Just like the green bans, the film has been vindicated. The documentary has long enjoyed a profit.¹²⁰ Pre-eminent Australian film historian Scott Murray argued *Rocking* was 'one of the most impressive labour-movement documentaries'.¹²¹ *Rocking* has been screened at institutions like the Art Gallery of NSW and even included in university curricula.¹²² In 2017, the National Film and Sound Archive selected the film for restoration. Beyond this institutional

¹¹³ Wendy Bacon, "The heroes of the green bans," *National Times*, undated. MLK4272.

¹¹⁴ Peter Galvin, "Rocking the Foundations", *Metro Magazine*, 212 (May 2022): 116.

¹¹⁵ John Wishart, *Rocking the Foundations*, Star Observer, 15 November, 1985. MLK4272.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Helen Zilko to Pat Fiske. MLK4272.

¹¹⁷ Correspondence, MLK4272.

¹¹⁸ Galvin, "Rocking the Foundations," 120.

¹¹⁹ Galvin, "Rocking the Foundations," 126.

¹²⁰ Galvin, 118.

¹²¹ Murray, *Australian Cinema*, 197.

¹²² Wicke, 144.

recognition, the film has lived out the life Fiske intended, becoming a mobilising device, consistently shown in activist groups and union trainings.¹²³

With its commitment to the period (and politics), *Rocking* has provided a crucial historical resource for remembrance. This film was not hampered by the selectivity, sanitisation and individualisation that maligned the other cinematic representations. This was green bans memory at its most active, not another book or poster left in a vitrine. *Rocking* mobilised nostalgia and became part of the Australian Left's repertoires of activism.

A nostalgic afterlife

With its beliefs wired into legislative and judicial processes, the green bans movement passed into Sydney mythology. From 1980 to 2000, storytelling moved out of activist productions and press, to mainstream cultural production and state-sanctioned material commemorations. The latter, official recognition flattened the past into a teleological narrative of Sydney realising the importance of parkland and heritage. While plaques, place names, and awards may have acknowledged the movement, they functioned more like tombstones. The material plaques remain, and present a monolithic history, ignoring the complex ecologies of those who used to be there. The commodification of the history in Phil Noyce's *Heatwave* (1982) and Donald Crombie's *Killing of Angel Street* (1981) reveals more about what would resonate with Sydney audiences. These cultural products provided interesting Australian stories to a literary and filmic market desperate for national re-imaginings.

Meanwhile, former green ban supporters and sympathetic artists attempted to capture history's heterogeneity and complicate popular memory. The *Woolloomooloo Panel Murals* still stand in the inner-city suburb and rise against the past as testaments of the movements' collective strength. This served (and serves) important purposes of community affirmation.

¹²³ Wallman, "Pink Bans".

Similarly, green ban supporter Pat Fiske tackled historical pluralism with her 1985 documentary *Rocking the Foundations*. Through tens of interviews and pastiche, Fiske's account centred on workers, their work and the importance of the built and natural environment. While the cultural products of the early 1980s would be politicised, by the release of *Green Bans, Red Union*, this history was a less controversial story. Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann's dense study would become the basis of future historical work. As the new century began and ushered in historical distance, politicisation fell away government-sanctioned reminiscence would proliferate.

Chapter 3

Co-optation and mobilisation:

The green bans memoryscape 2000-now

His life is written in brick and stone and timber and concrete, in the beautiful historic buildings in the ongoing lives of the construction workers who escaped death and broken bodies.

– Dave Noonan, CFMEU State Secretary

So fantastic seeing *Rocking the Foundations*, and so so sad really to see that we are still fighting the same battle about ensuring that we can keep affordable housing in our city.

– Lord Mayor, Clover Moore

On 10 May 2020, Jack Munday passed away. Obituaries inundated major Australian and international mastheads. The voice of the markets, the *Australian Financial Review*, praised ‘the man who reshaped Australia’.¹ Munday was honoured across the country by councils, governments, historical societies, activist groups and unions.² A note was left at Kelly’s Bush.³ This number and kind of obituaries showcased Munday’s high valency. A state funeral celebrated his legacy in 2021, a decision taken by then Liberal Premier Gladys Berejiklian. Speakers included former NSW Premier Bob Carr, Construction Forestry & Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) secretary Dave Noonan, Meredith Burgmann, widow Judy Munday, the longstanding Lord Mayor Clover Moore, former Greens senator Lee

¹ Andrew Clark, “The man who reshaped Australia,” *Australian Financial Review*, 14 May, 2020, <https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/arts-and-culture/the-man-who-reshaped-australia-20200514-p54sxt>.

² City of Sydney Council, “Decision: Vale Jack Munday,” Council meetings, 29 June, 2020; Commonwealth, “Notes – Presentation,” *Parliamentary Business*, Senate, 12 May, 2020, Mehreen Faruqi; NSW Government, “Community Recognition Statements – Jack Munday,” *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 12 May, 2020, <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1323879322-110396>; Commonwealth, “Adjournment – Munday, Jack AO,” *Parliamentary Business*, 12 May, 2020, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansards/e82a8a20-f72d-41d5-90fb-806930fffbba/&sid=0212; Rachel Evans, “Jack Munday Farewelled,” *Green Left Weekly*, no. 1303 (2021): 8; Vinnie Molina, “Vale Jack Munday,” *The Guardian* (Surry Hills, NSW), no. 1916 (2020): 2; Michael Easson, “Munday’s Legacy: Jack Munday: 17 October 1929-10 May 2020,” *Workplace Review* 10, no. 1 (2020): 47–50; Paige Cockburn, “Union Leader Jack Munday Dies Aged 90,” *ABC News*, 2020; Joshua Lourensz. “Social Services, Laudato Si’ and Jack Munday’s Legacy,” *Eureka Street* 30, no. 10 (2020): 23–25.

³ Hunters Hill Historical Society, “Jack Munday’s Hunters Hill legacy”, *Hunters Hill Historical Society* 21, issue 4 (June 2020), <https://huntershillmuseum.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Bunk-June-2020.pdf>.

Rhiannon and former HHT NSW Director Peter Watts. Two portraits lay on the Town Hall stage. Above, two screens showed excerpts of *Rocking the Foundations* and a photomontage including the ‘iconic’ picture.⁴ Carr highlighted his inspired decision to appoint Munday to HHT NSW chair, and (questionably) likened the departed to legendary American activist Rosa Parks. Munday may be the first and only communist and builders labourer to be honoured with a state funeral. Munday’s funerary accolades suggest the final point of canonised mythology. But behind this symbolism lay a different story.

Sydney’s popularisation of green bans memory is ironic. The adulation of this past contends with a dissimilar present. Their ideas – low-income housing in the inner city, community consultation, heritage protection and environment conservation – are not all hegemonic. While the latter three generally enjoy wide support, Sydney’s spatial and financial transformation has lost the first belief.⁵ While Centennial Park and Kelly’s Bush have remained, the state continued to sell off inner city public housing like green ban-created Sirius apartment building. Gentrification alongside the financialisation of housing assets has priced low-income communities out of the inner city. Some have argued by preserving Sydney’s heritage, the green bans expedited this gentrification.⁶ As history marches on, the victories of the 1970s look *pyrrhic*, and their failures ever more obvious.

Since the turn of the century, de-industrialisation has driven Australian workers from primary industries, and their powerful unions. Stringent industrial regulations have further diminished trade union power and almost eliminated the right to strike, making green bans essentially illegal to enforce and only effective for publicity. Since 1992, union membership

⁴ NSW Government, “State Memorial for Jack Munday AO”.

⁵ Alan Morris, *Gentrification and Displacement: The Forced Relocation of Public Housing Tenants in Inner-Sydney* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018), 109.

⁶ Chris Gibson, “Unchanging Places,” in *Companion Encyclopedia of Geography*, eds. Ian Douglas, Richard Hugget, Chris Perkins (London, UK: Routledge, 2018), 399-400.

has dropped 40%. Currently, 13.1% of the population belong to a union.⁷ This union legislation also fostered an environment antithetical to community and social movement unionism.⁸ In Munday's own words, the green bans cannot happen again unless workers 'return to their unions'.⁹ On the planning side, many scholars have noted that the bureaucratic institutions, that were set up in the wake of the bans, have ameliorated and *managed* dissent through consultation.¹⁰ The neoliberal era has structurally destroyed unionism and helped drive the commodification of space. So why does Sydney still remember the green bans?

This chapter is split into three sections. The first will cover the popular narrative of the green bans, now cemented in the individual legacies of Munday and Nielsen. Secondly, I will talk about the use of memory in the campaign to preserve public housing at Millers Point, and why it failed. Third, I will illuminate the considerable memory work ongoing in visual cultures to ensure remembrance. In between the government-sanctioned martyrdom of Munday and flattening of unity and activist-enforced mobilisation, lies a tense middle ground. Has the green bans legacy failed to prevent the past from repeating?

Popular memory: The looming figures of Munday and Nielsen

The green bans remained of considerable cultural interest. In 2017, *Rocking the Foundations* was restored by the NFSA. *Green Bans, Red Union* was also republished due to consistent national and international interest with the new subtitle 'The Saving of a City'. Australian historians have lauded the union into the 21st century, focusing in on the 'exceptional' union.¹¹

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Trade Union Membership: August 2024", 9 December, 2024.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/trade-union-membership/aug-2024>.

⁸ Michael Darcy and Dallas Rogers, "Place, Political Culture and Post-Green Ban Resistance: Public Housing in Millers Point, Sydney," *Cities* 57 (September 2016): 47–54.

⁹ Dale Jacobsen, "Review: The Flames of Discontent at Woodford Folk Festival," *The Queensland Journal of Labor History* 12 (March 2011): 46-47.

¹⁰ Cook, 2018, 372.

¹¹ Including Humphrey McQueen's and Greg Mallory's monographs, Verity Burgmann's considerable journal output, Cahill and Irving's *Radical Sydney* and various conference papers journal pieces, like Jeff Sparrow "The workers' flag is deepest green: Class struggles and the environment," lecture, 2004, *Class and Struggle in Australia Seminar Series*, Australian National University.

In line with mainstreaming of Indigenous and queer history; the pink bans and the BLF's actions for Indigenous housing have been resurrected.¹² Similarly, as the climate has more prominent in public discussions, the green bans history has been utilised by different groups to show that labourers can work in support of environmental action. The green bans have also entered academic urban planning, heritage and geography legend, both nationally and internationally.¹³ They have become 'shorthand' for the 'wider unrest' around the burgeoning cities.¹⁴ The green bans are also embedded into tertiary, secondary and primary curricula. The period is a 'depth study' in Year 9-10 history and focuses on its preservation of green and brown heritage.¹⁵ A recent children's book fictionalised the Victoria St green ban history.¹⁶ Activists have continually venerated this historical episode.¹⁷ It remains culturally relevant. Many Sydney writers include the green bans in their place-writing.¹⁸ Reminiscence has taken diverse forms, including poetry, soundscapes, typography, hip-hop music, experimental film, immersive theatre, and even a one-woman play in Scotland.¹⁹ This is an almost entirely

¹² Cook and Goodall, 35; Sam Wallman, "Pink and Green Bans"; Jeffrey Walker, *Riot!* (Werner Films Productions: Sydney, 2018).

¹³ John Punter, "Urban design in central Sydney 1945-2002: Laissez-Faire and discretionary traditions in the accidental city," *Progress in Planning* 63, issue 1 (January 2005): 60-61; Robert Freestone, *Urban Nation: Australia's Planning Heritage* (Collingwood, VIC: CSIRO Publishing, 2010), 29, 162, 228-30, 257; Drummond Pike and Margaret Cary, "Organizers Inspired by Australian Green Ban Movement," *Social Policy* 38, no. 4 (2008): 56-58.

¹⁴ Thorpe and Stickells, "Beyond Protest Activism and participation in 1970s Sydney," 798.

¹⁵ NSW Curriculum, "Stage 5 (Years 9-10)," 2025, <https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/stages/secondary/stage-5>.

¹⁶ Gabiann Marin, *The Battle for Victoria Street (My Australian Story)* (Gordon, NSW: Scholastic Australia, 2024).

¹⁷ Sam Oldham, *Without Bosses: Radical Australian Trade Unionism in the 1970s* (Melbourne, VIC: Interventions Inc, 2020), 80-101.

¹⁸ Vanessa Berry, *Mirror Sydney* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2017); Louis Nowra, *Woolloomooloo: A Biography* (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2017), 269, 316; Louis Nowra, *Kings Cross: A Biography* (Sydney, NSW: UNSW Press, 2013), 102-6, 338, 365; Louis Nowra, *Sydney: A Biography* (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2022); Elizabeth Farrelly, *Killing Sydney: The Fight for a City's Soul* (Sydney, NSW: Picador, 2021), 4, 153, 166; Max Easton, "Comrade Coleman" in *The Magpie Wing* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2021).

¹⁹ Kate Lilley, *Tilt* (Sydney, NSW: Vagabond Press, 2018); Pi O, "Green Bans (for Jack Munday)," *Arena*, no. 100 (2009); 27; John Falzon, "A poem for Jack Munday," *Arena*, no. 7 (2021): 35; James Lucas, *Jack Munday in Red Square* (Sydney, NSW: Recent Work Press, 2025); Sarah Barns, "Victoria St Soundwalk," audio, posted 2008, <https://on.soundcloud.com/YVgeVmdAZi3epFnw7>; Shaun Slifer, *Green Bans*, font, 2023, <https://justseeds.org/graphic/justseeds-font-pack-13/>; Dhopec, "BLF Green Bans," 16 November 2008, audio, <https://www.abc.net.au/triplejunearted/artist/dhopec/>; The National, "Alex Martinis Roe: It was about opening the Very notion there was a particular perspective," *The National*, 2017, <https://www.the-national.com.au/artists/alex-martinis-roe/it-was-about-opening-the-very-notion-that-there-was-a-particular-perspective/>. "Juanita Nielsen: The Final Days + earth.voice.body," *EastsideFM*, 25 September, 2023, <https://eastsidefm.org/juanita-nielsen-the-final-days-earth-voice-body/>; Mark Fisher, "The Bush review - one woman show about collective green action," *The Guardian*, 18 August, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2022/aug/18/the-bush-review-summerhall-edinburgh-environmental-action>.

canonised memory, only in isolated circles are there questions over hagiography.²⁰ This proliferation shows it continues to be an inspiring, interesting moment to many different groups.

Around the turn of the century, Munday became a respectable figure and moved from a radical subject to national object. Munday was bestowed with the Order of Australia in 2000, for his leadership during the green bans and his Historic Houses Trust position.²¹ Munday was also the subject of a NFSA documentary and two Archibald-entry portraits. Both realistic portraits render a wise, calm, thinking man. Portraiture was not just in sandstone institutions; Andrew Sibley's depiction hung in the East Sydney Hotel's bathrooms until recently—an intimate honouring in place.²² Another form of portraiture, Munday was the subject of a poorly-written biography in 2016. Jim Colman's *The House that Jack Built* idealised Munday's participation in heritage and conservation campaigns. More flattening is the ignorance of Munday's communist politics and pursuit of social housing.²³ Munday appears as the well-spoken unionist who prevented the destruction of heritage buildings against marauding forces of modernity.²⁴ All this honouring was distinctly nationalistic; Munday was one of the 'ace Australian men', embodying the 'fair go'.²⁵ Munday was also the mnemonic anchor for the movement, speaking at everything from Australia Day awards ceremonies to union delegate trainings, historical walks, and Sydney-themed exhibitions.²⁶ Munday's name has become synonymous with caution of ill development, often invoked on Twitter and in news media.²⁷

²⁰ Aidan Moore, "'It Was All about the Working Class': Norm Gallagher, the BLF and the Australian Labor Movement" (PhD thesis, Victoria University, 2013), 3-5.

²¹ Commonwealth, "Australia Day 2000 Honours," *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* S10, 26 January, 2000.

²² Colman, 185.

²³ Jon Piccini, "The House That Jack Built: Jack Munday, Green Bans Hero," *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 63, no. 3 (2017): 474-475.

²⁴ Bob Carr, "Foreword," *The House that Jack Built*, vi-vii.

²⁵ "Jack Munday," in *High Five to the Boy: A Celebration of Ace Australian Men* (North Sydney, NSW: Random House Australia, 2018), 102-106; Peter Hellier, "Our treasured fair go has gone out the window," undated, Jack Munday Files, Trades Hall Association.

²⁶ Plethora of items in Jack Munday Files, Trades Hall Association.

²⁷ For example: "Radical Domain plan a bad idea we've seen before," *SMH*, 8 September, 2022, 24; "Bushwalkers sent up the creek," *SMH*, 21 June, 2021, 21; Osman Faruqi, "Boycott outrage is misplaced," *SMH*, 13 January, 2022, 22.

The paucity of obituaries for Owens in 2012 and Pringle in 1991 indicated the extent Munday's heroization subsumed other historical actors.²⁸

Juanita Nielsen was also bestowed with iconographic status. The case was reopened in 2004 and has since incurred pleas and rewards for more information. In lieu of a formal judicial conclusion, myth has painted Abe Saffron and his lieutenants responsible for Nielsen's disappearance. This mythology may be remarkably close to the truth. The morbid fascinations in Nielsen have pushed her story further away from the 'green ban' element and towards the 'true crime' part focusing on her appearance, sexual relations and proximity to corruption. It is 'Australia's biggest murder mystery'.²⁹ Juanita has been remembered in books, various TV series, true crime podcasts, TV documentaries and popular media. Most notable was the 2021 ABC podcast series *Unravel True Crime: Juanita* condemned for its poor research. Another that received attention was Sydney artist and filmmaker Zanny Begg's 2018 experimental film project *The Beehive*.³⁰ Nielsen's story remains prominent but disconnected from the broader movement.

Official marks

Unlike the previous century, the city's various authorities now hijacked these figures and stories for civic identity and beautification. These decades have aligned with changes in the governmental process of memorials; there has been a focus on place-making through public commemoration, and the government's role has less 'dominant' and more open.³¹

²⁸ Bob Chisholm, "Mates farewell 'Green Ban' Bob," *Daily Telegraph*, 8 August, 1998, 18; "Joe Owen 1935-2012 Obituary," *The Journal (Newcastle)*, 25 October, 2012; Dani Cooper, "Front-line fighter for workers' rights: Joe Owens 1935-2012," *SMH*, 29 September, 2012, 20; Verity Burgmann, "Joe Owens 1935-2012," *The Hummer (Sydney Branch of Australian Society for the Study of Labour History)* 9, no. 1 (2014): 4-5.

²⁹ Neil Keene, "Kings Cross activist Juanita Nielsen's 1975 disappearance is Australia's biggest murder mystery," *Daily Telegraph*, 1 July, 2015, <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/king-cross-activist-juanita-nielsens-1975-disappearance-is-australias-biggest-murder-mystery/news-story/fa444e9567ce62928582adfc15b60315>.

³⁰ Steve Dow, "The lady vanishes: 'The Beehive' at Sydney Festival," *The Monthly*, 21 December, 2018, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/blog/lady-vanishes-beehive-sydney-festival>.

³¹ McShane, "Regulating Memory," 47-48.

The Rocks' rabbit warren streets hold the most consistent commemoration of the former unionist. In 2002, upon a request from the National Trust, the NSW Geographical Names Board elected to rename part of Argyle Street as Jack Munday Place.³² Signage went up in 2007, and former Premier Bob Carr unveiled the info panel in 2009. The panel features the 'iconic' image of Munday's arrest. The adjoining text erases the community action, positioning Munday as responsible for the green bans, as well as honouring his role as Chair of HHT NSW. Three large panels opposite the entrance to The Rocks Museum in Kendall Lane provide a more comprehensive history. The first discusses the green bans at Kelly's Bush, the following 'movement' and legislative outcomes. The next panel engages with the spectacle of The Rocks battle, displaying the *Daily Mirror*'s sensationalist arrest picture. The adjoining text talks about the SCRA's proposal, and resistance by the BLF and RRAG. The final panel highlights Munday's arrest photo once again, and profiles Munday, Nita McCrae and Colonel Owen Magee. Inside the museum opposite, lies the SCRA's original diorama and includes similar historical information. These panels appear as products of the early 2000s, forgotten about and now obscured by random plant pots. Importantly, they are *outside* the museum.

There are more belated commemorations. Munday's visage also turns up in a mural in Globe Street. The 2013 mural was initially part of Alexandre Farto (Vhils)'s street art exhibition, managed by the SCRA's successor Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority. The work includes two bas-relief wall carvings on the external and inner walls of a staircase, so people can 'enter' Munday's mind.³³ However, the representation is more abstract than it is figurative. To tourists, Munday's likeness, nor his name will not be familiar. With no adjoining explanatory material, the mural's historical value is limited. The artwork effectively beautifies and adds historical detail to a bland part of this touristic area. While these four – place name,

³² Colman, 310.

³³ Vhils, "Scratching the Surface project / Jack Munday Sydney," *Vhils*, 2013. <https://vhils.com/en/projects/scratching-the-surface-project-jack-munday>.

info panel, museum panels, and mural – are rightfully differentiated from the colonial heritage, they also appear out of place. The SCA’s (and their successors) acknowledgement of the more recent green bans history diversifies the commoditised convict detached history and reminds tourists of the area’s social value.³⁴ Nevertheless, this history is naturally selective, mostly avoiding the RAG’s contributions and entirely forgoing other unions’ solidarity.³⁵ These memorials are banal and ‘repetitively consumed without active reflection’, sitting amongst Disneyland-like old town sacraments.³⁶

Similarly to the 20th century, green bans supporters have also instigated memorials. Upon the request of a resident, the Leichhardt Council honoured the green bans with a 2011 plaque in an Annandale park.³⁷ In 2017, the City of Sydney Council acknowledged RRAG leader Nita McCrae with a park at the base of Observatory Hill in Millers Point. This toponym came from 20 of 27 public submissions, showing that the memory of Nita McCrae was still alive in the community.³⁸ A plaque and heritage marker further contextualised this naming. The heritage marker included the factual error that McCrae was a founding member of the Millers Point Resident Action Group, ironically revealing how the memory of McCrae had been utilised recently by the Millers Point community. However, this toponym also aligned with the Council’s agenda to publicly recognise ‘female campaigners’.³⁹

Similarly, at Kelly’s Bush, the continuous resident group has pressured the council for commemorations. One such sign, placed in 2010 comprehensively recorded the campaign, and credited FEDFA and BLF leadership (Fig. 24). Another sign with a photo of the 1996

³⁴ Gordon Waitt, “Consuming Heritage: Perceived Historical Authenticity,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 4 (2000): 835–62.

³⁵ Hardmann and Manning speak of solidarity from FEDFA, WWF, FDU, AMWU and BWIU.

³⁶ Wicke, 135.

³⁷ Kate Carr, “Thanks for the memories,” *Inner West Courier*, 12 October 2010, 7.

³⁸ City of Sydney, “Item 8. Naming proposal – Nita McCrae Park,” *Council Meeting*, 18 September 2017, X077323. https://meetings.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Data/Council/20170918/Agenda/170918_COUNCIL_MINUTES.pdf

³⁹ Julia Grove, “City of Sydney honour the women who championed a fairer and more equal city,” *The Fifth Estate*, 26 September, 2017, <https://thefifthestate.com.au/jobs-and-biz-news/in-brief/city-of-sydney-honour-the-women-who-championed-a-fairer-and-more-equal-city/>.

anniversary was erected in the park around 2014.⁴⁰ The 40th anniversary of the green ban was remembered with an event, a tree planting ceremony, one plaque unveiled by the NSW Governor Marie Bashir. The 50th anniversary was commemorated with another plaque, a memorial bench, and an event with speakers like Judy Munday and Meredith Burgmann.⁴¹ The organised Friends of Kelly's Bush, the Hunters Hill Trust and (now) sympathetic council provide fertile ground for consistent commemorations.



Figure 24: Kelly's Bush plaque, c2010.

Munday's death provided incentivisation for more place-based commemorations. In Eastlakes, the site of the second green ban, the local council has named a reserve after Munday. Heffron MP and Minister for Local Government, Ron Hoenig, proposed this renaming, keen to link himself to Munday's legacy.⁴² Nearby, on Anzac Parade, Randwick City Council and

⁴⁰ Personal correspondence with Liz Finton, Friends of Kelly's Bush.

⁴¹ Friends of Kelly's Bush, *50th Anniversary*, 31 October, 2021, <https://huntershilltrust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Special-Newsletter-1.pdf>.

⁴² Ron Heonig, "Renaming of Eastlakes Reserve at the Jack Munday Reserve," Youtube, 14 April, 2021, <https://youtu.be/r16s-pYeVMo?si=NB6FjhgsVJcRhRH0>

Waverley Council planted a memorial tree for Munday.⁴³ This fig tree was planted just next to the light rail, a place that no-one would see. In Croydon, where Munday lived, a councillor suggested renaming Croydon Park to Jack Munday Park.⁴⁴ Canterbury Bankstown also named one of their Australia Day awards after Munday.⁴⁵ One of these commemorations was particularly ironic. In 2024, Transport Minister Jo Haylen announced she was naming one of the new Parramatta River ferries after Munday.⁴⁶ Munday had led (a failed) campaign against ferry privatization in 2009. Such commemorations have given politicians something to announce, and credit for linking themselves to an iconic Sydney figure.

These scattered plates offer a sanitised past, written in bureaucratically decided lettering and resistant to political weathering. While there are honourable attempts at contextualisation in The Rocks and Kelly's Bush, the existence of many of these show that honouring the historical period has aligned with various councils and their civic branding. Munday's biographer complained of a plaque, 'nothing about the political infighting of the era or the scandals and corruption linking developers, ministers of the Crown and high-ranking officials'.⁴⁷ While I agree, Colman seems to misunderstand the monolithic form; official commemorations conceal as much as they show. The inlaid plaque is a remarkable way to depict a spirited movement.

Since the turn of the century, commemorations of Nielsen also have cropped up across the Sydney streetscape. Often these set the scene for more intangible forms of remembering,

⁴³ Randwick Council, "Jack Munday honoured with memorial tree planting," *News*, 15 June, 2021, <https://www.randwick.nsw.gov.au/about-us/news/news-items/2021/june/jack-munday-to-be-honoured-with-memorial-tree-planting>

⁴⁴ "Memorial for true heritage saviour," *Local News Plus*, 3 June, 2020, <https://localnewsplus.com.au/memorial-for-true-heritage-saviour/>

⁴⁵ Canterbury Bankstown Council, "Award honours heritage and environment hero," Media Centre, 16 November, 2020. <https://www.cbccity.nsw.gov.au/your-council/media-centre/award-honors-heritage-and-environment-hero>.

⁴⁶ NSW Government, Minister for Transport, "New Aussie-built ferry arrives at Sydney Opera House," NSW Government, media releases, 27 June 2024, <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/new-aussie-built-ferry-arrives-at-sydney-opera-house>.

⁴⁷ Colman, 72.

like walks, anniversary events, and murder mystery tours.⁴⁸ Early in the 2000s, the South Sydney Council and the National Trust placed a plaque outside Nielsen's former home at 202 Victoria St.⁴⁹ The inlaid brass slate honours Juanita with a brief mention for 'the others'. Further indicating the institutionalisation of memory, Nielsen's former home was afforded heritage protection in 2013.⁵⁰

As part of the City of Sydney's \$30 million upgrade to the Kings Cross streetscape, the myth of Nielsen was instrumentalised.⁵¹ This included the commemorative 'Strip on the Strip' project that was critically honoured for its rendering of community history.⁵² There are four brass plaques related to Juanita on the corner of Roslyn Street and Darlinghurst Rd, site of the former Carousel Club where Juanita was last seen. One provides information on Nielsen, and the other three recall her disappearance:

On July 4th 1975, Juanita attended a business meeting at the Carousel Club
on this corner...
And was never seen again.
Believed murdered.

These plaques present a history that is simultaneously safe and unsafe. In the current suburbanised, grey-toned streetscape, these plaques fetishise a bohemian, gritty, dramatic past. One commentator argued 'sleaze, nowadays, is celebrated only when it's historical'.⁵³ While informative, the plaques function like gravestones, marking the passage of this raffish past into the annals of memory. It is a memorialising of Juanita in place that makes the contemporary

⁴⁸ Gemma Jones, "Juanita Nielsen disappearance in 1975 remains a ... - Riddle with many twists", *Daily Telegraph*, 2 July, 2005, 14; Kate Hennessy, "Walk this way: Australia's urban tours find their feet by going niche," *Guardian (Online)*, 13 March, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2022/mar/13/walk-this-way-australias-urban-tours-find-their-feet-by-going-niche>.

⁴⁹ Personal communications with the City of Sydney Archives.

⁵⁰ Anna Anderson, "Heritage listing move on home of campaigner Juanita Nielsen," *SMH*, 21 December, 2013, 9.

⁵¹ Linda Jalvin, "From BoHo to PoHo," *The Monthly*, July 2005, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/july-2005/essays/boho-poho>.

⁵² Shirley Fitzgerald, *The strip on the strip: the stories that inspired the bronze street plaques of Kings Cross*, 2007 (Sydney, NSW: City of Sydney Council, 2007); Michelle Arrow, "Review of Streets on the Strip – Interpretive Signs," *History Australia* 2, no. 2 (2005): 49-2.

⁵³ Jalvin, "From BoHo to PoHo".

streetscape dissimilar. Yet contextualized in current political climes, the plaques package the rogue past into a treasure hunt, not a miscarriage of justice and neglect of police powers.

The City of Sydney has been keen to commemorate Juanita, toying with naming a short ‘Loo street after her.⁵⁴ In 2016, the renovation Juanita Nielsen Community centre made note of (obliquely) commemorating its namesake in stripey awnings. Lord Mayor Clover Moore unveiled the centre’s new plaque, connecting her legacy to Juanita’s.⁵⁵ In 2017, a Kings Cross hotel named a new bar after Juanita.⁵⁶ In 2023, a City of Sydney councillor suggested a statue of Juanita.⁵⁷

These examples show Juanita’s legacy is still alive, and part of the area’s civic image. It’s a repackaging of history, not a searing analysis of police misconduct and corruption. For both Nielsen and Munday, these plaques still offer a history, albeit individualised and simplified. The changes to the built environment have erased the history of the green bans, and their fighting communities. These plaques indicate what and who was there before. They provide an authoritative history, emerging from a highly-regulated bureaucratic process and cast in strong, official materials. As we will see, these official commemorations offer a schism between values and actions.

Activist commemoration

The memory of the green bans has been a symbolic political resource used by different left-wing groups.⁵⁸ With Australian unionism in a comparably enfeebled state, the stories of past

⁵⁴ Ian Walker, “Sydney City Council to rename Woolloomooloo street in honour of Juanita Nielsen murdered in 1975,” *Daily Telegraph*, 13 August, 2014, 9.

⁵⁵ Doug Conway, “City reopens the \$6.5 million Juanita Nielsen Centre at Woolloomooloo,” *Daily Telegraph*, 18 November, 2016, 5.

⁵⁶ Heather McNab, “The Butlers Hotel’s new bar pays tribute to the saviour of Kings Cross, Juanita Nielsen,” *Daily Telegraph*, 27 July, 2017, 3.

⁵⁷ Peter Fitzsimmons, “5 minutes with Fitz: Sydney councillor wants to put our women on pedestals Linda Scott,” *SMH*, 26 March, 2023.

⁵⁸ There are many articles, podcasts, honouring this period of history from left-wing, union and environmentalist groupings worldwide.

glory have become particularly important to nourish activism and garner support. The CFMEU have used this history to construct identity; celebrating green ban anniversaries in 2004 and 2011, naming their offices after Jack, mourning Munday and honouring the pink ban.⁵⁹ The union movement has used the pink bans to improve their standing in the queer community, now a greater political force.⁶⁰ By linking themselves to the exemplary union and lauded figures, the CFMEU could publicly enhance their status, and internally mobilise and inspire:

Long remembered and time-distorted histories of past struggles, physical contests, and the like provide symbolic and actual instruction to the young larrikins, with the Green Bans era a case in point.⁶¹

On the more institutional side, the Greens have consistently attached themselves to the bans and Munday in inaugural parliamentary speeches.⁶² Since 1974, ALP figures like Tom Uren, Bob Carr and Whitlam connected themselves to the green bans legacy as well. This rhetoric was a way of bringing history's moral authority and projecting their values. Some of these organisations have roughened up the memory and drawn it out to connect to present – like the CMFEU screening *Rocking the Foundations* recently — it remains more of a symbol.

However, the historical period still means the most to the communities affected in 1970s. The 40th anniversary involved the Woolloomooloo and Darlinghurst. In 2011, 'curatorial activists' organised the *Green Bans Art Walks* which comprised two exhibitions and five walks across Woolloomooloo and Darlinghurst were held. The curator, Jo Holder, described the exhibition; 'unless there is a conscious remembering of community history, it is

⁵⁹ Various CFMEU pamphlets, posters are in Jack Munday Files, Trades Hall Association; Alexander Driscoll, "CFMEU Marks 50th Anniversary of Sydney's Pink Bans," *Star Observer*, 19 October, 2023, <https://www.starobserver.com.au/news/cfmeu-marks-50th-anniversary-of-sydneys-pink-bans/226690>; Darren Greenfield, "The Legacy of Jack Munday and the Green Bans: A CFMEU Perspective," *Workplace Review* 10, no. 1 (2020): 7–12.

⁶⁰ Jeremy Fisher, "Fifty Years of Fighting: Dr Jeremy Fisher and the world's first Pink Ban", interviewed by Robyn Fortescue, recorded early 2023, posted 16 March 2023, YouTube, <https://youtu.be/7JgHzDys1Pw?si=Q2K0C6py4wWKbdh2>.

⁶¹ Lynch, "Larrikins in the Labour Market," 82.

⁶² Publications included Lee Rhiannon, *Green Bans: Inspirational activism* (Sydney, NSW: The Australian Greens, 2013). and Paddy Manning, *Inside the Greens: The Origins and Future of the Party, the People and the Politics* (Carlton, VIC: Black Inc., 2019). Speeches included NSW Government, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Council, 1 June 2007, John Kaye; Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 30 September, 2010, Adam Bandt; Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 24 August, 2011, Lee Rhiannon; Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 2 August, 2022, David Shoebridge.

inevitable that these things will be erased.⁶³ Straddling the museological and artistic, the exhibition remembered the movement's events through visual and filmic mediums. Commissioned works rendered archival documents in marbled watercolour. These were more self-congratulatory, an observation affirmed by the City of Sydney's acquisition.⁶⁴ The curators also presented archival material and Marion Marrison's fine print photographs. However, the gallery space recontextualised these materials and enhanced their aesthetic qualities. One artwork, a recreation of the 1970s Juanita stencil on Woolloomooloo's walls, managed to break free from nostalgia by using the low-fidelity, cultural production of the time (Fig. 25).



Figure 25: Mini Graff, *Juanita stencil*, 2011.

The five walks, accompanied by green bans activists like Munday, Wendy Bacon, Joe Owens, traversed Woolloomooloo and Darlinghurst and key sites of Victoria St and the Loo bans. With memory recalls in the place they were made, by the people who made them, these

⁶³ Jo Holder, "Green Bans," archived 21 July 2016, NLA, <https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/tep/159671>.

⁶⁴ Fiona MacDonald, "Art and Culture project," interviewed by Deboorah Beck, 30 May 2013, transcript, City of Sydney, 10. <https://www.sydneyoralhistories.com.au/fiona-macdonald/>.

processions encouraged an embodied, somatic understanding of local history. These reaffirmed the mnemonic dominance of Munday, but brought others Owens, Fairskye, community figures from VRAG and WRAG back into the historical narrative. This assemblage countered previous monodirectional records of history yet somewhat appeared as nostalgic musings from an older generation.⁶⁵ The socially engaged exhibition was remarkable for its compilation of research on the green bans, in a website.⁶⁶ The website compiles a considerable amount of information, broadening the well-trodden memory contours. The exhibition creatively and intimately re-imagined green bans history as continuous ‘art’ and affirmed individual and community actions.

The 50th anniversary was celebrated with a Munday-centric exhibition, created by Holder and Unions NSW, which toured regional centres.⁶⁷ These archivists and curators have served as the ‘caretakers of protest memory’.⁶⁸ While sentimental, these exhibitions articulated a conscious effort to preserve this remembrance by local communities.

The illusions of canonical memory

The political brownie points obtainable in green bans commemoration signify the ideas’ *lack* of threat to social cohesion. The following analysis of failed campaigns testifies to this absence of collective power. The CFMEU has continued to respond to requests for green bans for social, heritage and environmental issues, but they appear more as an image building exercises rather than political philosophy.⁶⁹ For example, the CFMEU’s 2016 green ban on Bondi Pavilion pushed them into the public eye and linked their contemporary leadership with Munday’s

⁶⁵ Ian Milliss “When is a walk art”, *RealTime magazine* 108 (April-May 2012): 42; Nicholas Jordan, “Green Bans anniversary looks to the future”, *City News*, 11 August 2011, 10.

⁶⁶ *Green Bans*, archived 21 July 2016, NLA, <https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/tep/159671>.

⁶⁷ Niko Leko, “Green bans honoured in new exhibition”, *Green Left*, 1 March, 2022. <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/green-bans-honoured-new-exhibition>

⁶⁸ Chidgey and Garde-Hansen, 36.

⁶⁹ “Unions impose ban on Redfern Oval”, *Daily Telegraph*, 24 June, 2005, 3; Patrick Hatch, “West fights to retain green space”, *Sunday Age*, 19 March, 2023.

grandeur.⁷⁰ The eventual victory, however, was credited to the council and celebrity-heavy campaign.⁷¹ The other notable CFMEU ban was on heritage site Willow Grove in Parramatta to prevent demolition for the Powerhouse project. The ban later revoked after construction work dried up during COVID.⁷² The campaigners went to the Land and Environment Court, but the building was demolished and ‘relocated’ to storage.⁷³ The legislative architecture failed contemporary green banners. This loss of a singular campaign is not notable, but the action of the green bans, nor its judicial legacy, could be utilised successfully. Across these 25 years, Munday lent his voice and visage to many campaigns across Sydney, for heritage, preventing redevelopment, and environmental action, to mixed success until his last days.⁷⁴

Green bans memory faltered when it came to fighting for low-income and affordable housing. On 19 March 2014, with no consultation, the NSW Government announced the sale of the Sirius and Millers Point public housing residences, and the eviction of 579 residents.⁷⁵ Sirius was the greatest tangible reminder of the bans. In the 1970s, the building appeared as a compromise between the activists and the government, to provide housing for those displaced by SCRA’s development. A broad group — representatives of the Premier, Housing Commission, RRAG, SCRA, councils, Maritime Services Board, the BLF and Jack Munday — settled on the final design. The Housing Commission stated the development was a practical

⁷⁰ Jon Piccini, “Bondi Pavilion ‘Green Ban’: Why Revive an Old Union Heritage Protection Tactic?” *The Conversation*, June 2, 2016. <https://theconversation.com/bondi-pavilion-green-ban-why-revive-an-old-union-heritage-protection-tactic-60200>; Garry Maddox, “‘Tell ‘em they’re dreamin’: How Michael Caton and friends helped save Bondi Pavilion”, *SMH*, 18 September, 2023; Liv Casben, “Protestors gather to announce ‘green ban’ on redevelopment at Bondi Pavilion”, *ABC News*, 29 May, 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-29/cfmeu-announces-green-ban-on-iconic-bondi-pavillion/7457052>.

⁷¹ Anne Davies, “Bondi Pavilion restoration to begin in June in rare win for community rights”, *Guardian*, 20 May, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/20/sydney-bondi-pavilion-restoration-to-begin-in-june-in-rare-win-for-community-rights-over-developers>; Angus Thompson, “Union lifts green ban on Bondi Pavilion, construction to start in June”, *SMH*, 20 May, 2020, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/union-lifts-green-ban-on-bondi-pavilion-construction-to-start-in-june-20200520-p54uuz.html>.

⁷² Guy Rundle, “Rubber necking with Andrew Charlton”, *Crikey*, 13 May, 2022. <https://www.crikey.com.au/2022/05/13/rubber-necking-with-andrew-charlton/>.

⁷³ Linda Morris, “Villa will not become ‘fake heritage’” *Sun Herald*, 10 September, 2023.

⁷⁴ Colman, 95-6; Wicke, 147.

⁷⁵ Alan Morris, *Gentrification and Displacement: The Forced Relocation of Public Housing Tenants in Inner-Sydney* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018), 10.

result of green bans.⁷⁶ Importantly, Sirius was different to previous social housing, marking the Commission's embrace of consultative planning.⁷⁷ The final design was one that successfully encouraged communal bonds, had details and furnishings that were (and are) not often found in housing commission, and provided for elderly residents and families.⁷⁸ However, the Sirius attracted criticism ever since its construction. The National Trust called the building 'the lump in The Rocks'.⁷⁹ Peeking over the Harbour Bridge, its modular pods have received much hate and ire since its 1981 opening — an aesthetic dislike that cannot be detached from their social housing provision.

Back in 2014, the NSW Government's announcement of the retrenchment of public housing stock was not shocking. This followed a long line of sell-offs of social housing tenements. Unlike the welfare state, many contemporary governments wish to liquidate assets and divest their provider role.⁸⁰ The NSW Government also wanted to ensure the nearby Barangaroo project would be attractive to business and high rollers.⁸¹ Residents fought back, using the memory of the 1970s. The Sirius campaign lent heavily on Munday and architect Tao Gofers, as well as the memory of RRAG leader Nita McCrae.⁸² Campaigners retold the historical period in film, book, and website.⁸³ At a 2016 protest, the CFMEU announced an 'interim green ban', and Munday and Meredith Burgmann spoke about the green bans.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ *Sirius* (Sydney, NSW: Housing Commission of New South Wales, 1980).

⁷⁷ Anne Warr, "The Sirius Building Sydney: Does It Demonstrate Intangible Cultural Heritage through Its Various Communities and Their Practices?", *Historic Environment* 33, no. 1–2 (2023): 140–54.

⁷⁸ Warr, "The Sirius Building Sydney", 15.

⁷⁹ Joseph Glascott, "Lump in The Rocks", *SMH*, 18 April, 1979, 2.

⁸⁰ Michael Zanardo, Alistair Sisson, Cameron Logan, and Rebecca McLaughlan, "Wilful Ignorance at Waterloo: Public Housing Quality and Political Stigma in Sydney's Largest Estate Renewal," *Planning Perspectives* 39, no. 6 (2024): 1207–39.

⁸¹ Morris, "The build up to the displacement," 56.

⁸² Tao Gofers, "I designed the Sirius building but I wish the government had knocked it down," *SMH*, online, 23 June, 2021. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/i-designed-the-sirius-building-but-i-wish-the-government-had-knocked-it-down-20210620-p582n2.html>. John Dunne, Ben Peake, and Amiera Piscopo, editors *Sirius* (Dawes Point, NSW: Piper Press, 2017), 12–17.

⁸³ Jasmine Crittenden, "Home on the Rocks: Blue Lucine on Displacement and 'The Eviction'," *Metro* 200 (May 2019): 110–113.

⁸⁴ Jim McIlroy, "Save our Sirius': March to save historic public housing building," *Green Left*, 23 September, 2016. <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/save-our-sirius-march-save-historic-public-housing-building>.

However, unlike the 1970s, the CFMEU ban was illegal to enforce.⁸⁵ The protest mobilised considerable attention. The media also framed the Sirius campaign in terms of green bans history but focused more on its brutalist heritage rather than social housing.⁸⁶ So, political pressure and heritage listing were the only real possibilities to protect Sirius. The NSW Heritage Council proposed heritage listing of Sirius, which was refuted by the minister on grounds of ‘undue financial hardship’.⁸⁷ While the activists took it to the Land and Environment Court who ruled in their favour, this again was dismissed by the minister.⁸⁸ Despite lobbying until the end, Sirius was sold in June 2019 for \$150 million.⁸⁹

The Millers Point campaign looked a bit different. While building unions offered solidarity, they could not place a green ban as there was no potential demolition or construction.⁹⁰ Three resident groups, including the continuous RRAG, formed an alliance.⁹¹ The tenants and media framed these actions in green bans history.⁹² Munday joined the campaign, former and contemporary union leaders spoke out in support. Campaigners found solace in green bans folk songs.⁹³ This stringent campaign didn’t have the same glory as Sirius’ and lost with one small success; the preservation of a 28-unit apartment building. The human cost was high, between 2014 and 2017 several people suicided or passed away from stress-related diseases.⁹⁴ However, the government pushed on and sold all homes by the end of 2018.

⁸⁵ Morris, “A brief history,” 56.

⁸⁶ Tom Oliver Payne, “Why it’s time to get Sirius about brutalist architecture,” *SMH*, 11 November, 2017, 32; Elizabeth Fortescue, Sarah Keoghan, “This is Sirius!” *Daily Telegraph*, 9 July 2016, 56; Michael Bleby, “Sirius Surprise,” *The Australian Financial Review*, 17 September, 2016, 34. Tim Barlass, “Barangaroo a plague on all their houses,” *SMH*, 25 August, 2013, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/barangaroo-a-plague-on-all-their-houses-20130824-2sied.html>.

⁸⁷ Kirsty Volz, and Alex Brown, “Heritage and Housing in the Post-Political City: Sydney’s Sirius Building,” in *Valuing Architecture: Heritage And The Economics Of Culture*, eds. Ashley Paine, Susan Holden, & MacArthur, (Valiz, Netherlands, 2020), 237.

⁸⁸ Volz and Brown, 233-5.

⁸⁹ Warr, 148.

⁹⁰ Darcy and Rogers, 51

⁹¹ Darcy and Rogers, 52.

⁹² Nicole Cook, “Performing Housing Affordability: The Case of Sydney’s Green Bans,” in *Housing and Home Unbound: Intersections in Economics, Environment and Politics in Australia*, ed. Nicole Cook, Louise Crabtree, and Aidan Davison (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 190–203; Tim Barlass, “Barangaroo a plague on all their houses”.

⁹³ Darcy and Rogers, 51-3.

⁹⁴ Morris, “Impact of the displacement,” 72-85.

While memory was a significant weapon in the campaign's armature, it could not contend with market-led governance.

This was partially a case of history repeating itself. Similarly to the 1970s, the government's co-ordinated media narrative pushed monetary aspects, emphasising the houses' maintenance costs and high asset price. It was in the 'public good' to move these aged residents, as they would construct 1500 new homes with the funds.⁹⁵ As prior, there was no consultation, tenants were once again 'invisible', their place attachments ignored in policy settings.⁹⁶ Under-capitalised land and public housing tenants were once again 'problems' for the state. However, the campaign's failure reflects the economic context. While there was considerable media coverage, in the era of the housing crisis, little sympathy existed for the tenants who had long-lived in waterfront housing.⁹⁷ The arguments to keep public housing residents in the inner city worldwide fails to gain credence in a neoliberal era.

To date, the NSW Government has failed to fulfil their promise of building 1500 homes. However, the social housing list lengthens.⁹⁸ Today, Sirius represents the limits of the green bans. The building was renovated; its greyness ameliorated by new applique 'copper pods' and repackaged as 'Sirius Sydney'.⁹⁹ Public housing history was even used as a marketing tool.¹⁰⁰ In the 'public' corridor through Sirius, several brown signs tell a washed-out history of the green bans and 2010s fight. The building incorporates this antithetical history into its very construction, presenting itself as an inevitable and legitimate outcome. This failed campaign indicates that the popularisation of the green bans, disguises their inadequacy to fight against current commercial forces.

⁹⁵ Morris, "Conclusion," 136.

⁹⁶ Morris, "Introduction and Setting," 10-18.

⁹⁷ Butler, 16; Louise Crabtree, "Unbounding Home Ownership in Australia," in *Housing and Home Unbound: Intersections in Economics, Environment and Politics in Australia*, ed. Nicole Cook, Louise Crabtree, and Aidan Davison (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 174.

⁹⁸ NSW Government, Department of Communities and Justice, "Social Housing Waiting List Data," 23 May, 2025. <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/families-and-communities-statistics/social-housing-waiting-list-data.html>.

⁹⁹ Miriah Davis, "Inside look into social housing block turned luxury apartments", *9News*, 18 July, 2024. <https://www.9news.com.au/national/sale-of-sirius-five-years-on/3911459b-f9f0-4096-bcea-8faa1883d2ec>

¹⁰⁰ Fiona McCarthy, "Star Turn," *The Australian*, 7 May, 2021, 74.

The final contours of the memoryscape

The failure of memory *in* activism suggests more than current economic and governmental structures and necessitates that we return to historical context. This memoryscape has curated the past, driven by various civic, political and ideological objectives. In the rush to hagiography, many historical details have been forgotten or deliberately excluded. Official commemorations are limited by their bureaucratic process and tend to sanitise the past. Meanwhile, mainstream cultural productions have sensationalised and embraced the mythological aspects. These problematic narrative arcs can be traced back to the 1970s media coverage discussed in Chapter 1. None of these dynamics are uncommon, but worth restating.

In the aggrandization of the leadership, many records have forgotten the historical conditions. The foreign investment-driven boom allowed the BLs to pick and choose jobs, giving them significant bargaining power. The bans can be considered an ‘aberration’ driven by a tight labour market.¹⁰¹ Moreso, the BLF’s green bans were more the result of a loyal membership. In Munday’s words, ‘30% understood or supported his philosophy’.¹⁰² This loyalty had incurred from wins in conditions. These were previously fatal; in one year, 12 dogmen died.¹⁰³ Such industrial deaths and labour have been lost from the popular conception of Sydney. The dominant individualistic view, of left-wing enlightened leaders, ironically pushed by union historians, the press and the government, sacrifices solidarity.

The popular memory has disregarded important historical actors. The initial media coverage is to blame; to paint the BLF as anarchistic, reportage ignored the RAGs and their requests for help.¹⁰⁴ Where the media did pay attention, it was largely sexist. Part of the moral

¹⁰¹ Harris, “The role of the local community in urban conservation,” cited in McConville, “In Trust?”

¹⁰² Leonie Sandercock, “Property, politics and power: A history of city planning in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney since 1900” (PhD thesis, Australian National University, March 1974), 359.

¹⁰³ Munday, *Green Bans and Beyond*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ Hogg, “Green Bans Forever,” thesis, 28.

panic was the allegiance of middle-class female resident activists with working class men.¹⁰⁵ Moreso, the male-gendered record of labour historians have aggrandised the BLF's role over the female-dominated RAGs, which render the BLF as heroes, whisking these women into the public eye and taking care of their struggle.¹⁰⁶ The focus on the BLF forgets that the resident struggle often continued long after the BLF's collapse. FEDFA as well as non-Munday BLF leaders have fallen away from the public story as well.¹⁰⁷

The historical tenor has also been scrubbed. There were numerous threats on Munday's life, and WRAG activists were instructed not to go meetings alone.¹⁰⁸ Moreso, disappearing from the record has been corruption. VRAG squatters made clear links between police, Theeman's 'thugs' and the government in their publications. The links between Askin and organised crime would be broadcast upon his death.¹⁰⁹ The making of *Killing of Angel Street*, with the warnings and threats, reveals the continued presence of such elements.¹¹⁰ Another developer murder has gone almost entirely underacknowledged. The death of Esther George on Victoria St in 1973 has been a footnote of historical retellings or told to explain Nielsen's radicalisation.¹¹¹ The coroner found that it was either a murder or accidental, yet it seems this case was quickly closed.¹¹² A nurse commented at the time, 'if it had been Wendy [Bacon] or one of the other white women in Victoria St, there would have been a terrific fuss'.¹¹³ It will take mnemonic labour to ensure that these people are not lost to history.

There's been a tendency to paint various bans similarly, as a utopian moment of cross-class alliances. Unlike the middle-class for whom redevelopment 'shattered the peace', state-

¹⁰⁵ Shaw, 34; Anderson and Jacobs, 1020.

¹⁰⁶ Nittim, 231; Anderson and Jacobs, 1021.

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm McDonald, "Green bans had more than one engine," *Australian Financial Review*, 19 May, 2020, <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/letters-union-s-role-in-green-bans-needs-recognition-20200518-p54u5k>.

¹⁰⁸ Woolloomooloo RAG Files, Trades Hall Association.

¹⁰⁹ David Hickie, *The Prince and the Premier: The Story of Perce Galea, Bob Askin and the Others Who Gave Organised Crime Its Start in Australia* (London; Angus & Robertson, 1985).

¹¹⁰ Goldsmith, "The Killing of Angel Street," 74-5.

¹¹¹ Rees, *Killing Juanita*, 92-3.

¹¹² "Open verdict on fatal house fire," *SMH*, 24 April, 1973, 17.

¹¹³ "Victoria St Fire," *Scrounge* 9, (September 1973): 1.

led redevelopment in inner-city working-class areas ‘imposed social costs’.¹¹⁴ The Kelly’s Bush activists could be considered as more concerned with *extending* their property rights. The Rocks residents didn’t ‘want a nature strip’, but their homes.¹¹⁵ Many establishment ‘greenies’ weren’t concerned with the poor’s plight against development.¹¹⁶ Reviewers of *Angel Street* reflected on the green bans historical period as emboldening ‘white folks’ land rights’.¹¹⁷

In line with class, this thesis has already raised the questions about the green bans’ ‘efficacy’. Their main beneficiaries were the wealthy, now gifted nearby parkland and preserved heritage facades.¹¹⁸ Showing that this was perceived early on, one town planner in 1981 assessed their impact as such:

Green Bans simply ensured that the ‘status quo’ was maintained, and that the rich kept their parks intact and prosperous suburbs retained their trees. The most the poor obtained from the Green Ban approach was *not* to have an expressway demolish their homes, *not* to be obliterated by office blocks, and *not* to be moved out to the fringes of the city for housing towers.¹¹⁹

Memory is, of course, plagued by presentism: we cannot see what urban renewal makes no longer visible. We must look to the present to understand the full history. When Munday died, he was not celebrated for his historical actions, he was celebrated for what he did for the Sydney of *today*.

A false dawn?

This chapter has alloyed a scraggly assemblage of memorials. The history of the green bans has been *useful* to activists and the state. Across the city, various governments, councils, and authorities have honoured this history. These work to neutralise, quieten and flatten these

¹¹⁴ Jacobowicz, “The Green Ban movement: urban struggle and class politics,” 159.

¹¹⁵ Burgmann and Burgmann, 196.

¹¹⁶ Sandercock, “Reform, Property and Power in the Cities,” 128.

¹¹⁷ Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*, 193.

¹¹⁸ Chris McConville, “In Trust? Heritage and History,” 70; Alistair Sisson and Kurt Iveson, “Yimby or Nimby? Both are worse...”, *Arena*, 23 November, 2023, <https://arena.org.au/yimby-or-nimby-both-are-worse/>.

¹¹⁹ Alan Fogg, “Public Participation in Australia,” *Town Planning Review* 52, no. 3 (1981): 264.

histories. The geographical extent of the movement, the coalition of various bodies, the female leadership, the contentions and corruption are all flattened to present a heroic ‘Sydney’ narrative. This narrative is individualized in the figure of Munday. It appears Munday signed a kind of Faustian bargain. In return for notable positions, Munday would be respectable, and forever a symbolic figure. On the other side of the memoryscape, activists have tried to enliven memory, through exhibitions and walks. Remembrance true to historical feeling, and class concerns, still required memory work.

This chapter has shown the limits of this mythology. In the 2010s, the memory of this movement was not enough to contest the governments’ privatisation agendas. This first appears ironic – this memory has become institutionalised at the same time as its very base has fallen away. However, this lack of threat to social cohesion, and various changes in public opinion, have enabled this conciliatory remembering. These commemorations can legitimise and shore up faith in government bodies, despite the fact they may not adhere to the values they purport.

The final paradoxes of this play out through ill-designed public art. Upon the redeveloped Sirius forecourt lies a six-metre-long bronze sculpture composed of 85 pieces of luggage linked together (Fig. 26). Commissioned by an investment firm, Isabel and Alfredo Aquilizan’s *Bound* purports narratives about migration. For those remembering the Sirius residents forced to pack their bags, they may view this work differently.



Figure 26: Sirius in early 2025 with *Bound* below.

Conclusion

To conclude, we return to the image of Munday on The Rocks' panel. In his attempt to occupy public space and defy his defined role as passive labourer, he has been captured. This attempt to wrest power from political elites resulted in both the photograph's capture and the capture of his memory. Now Munday resides in public space and bolsters our collective pride in the present. The thesis has demonstrated that this kind of commemoration of radical history needs to be interrogated. We must look beyond the council logo-emboldened plaques, the routine pomp of a state funeral and normalised place names. The dissimilar present makes reminiscence easier for governments — there is little risk of the 'movement' happening again — and more important to critique.

The thesis has shown the forces and processes leading to the fastening of this panel to The Rocks' storied walls. In the 1970s, the green bans captured Sydney's attention and were quickly mythologised as they had been succeeded by a shift in public opinion. As the next decade arrived, these two figures would be fictionalised in mainstream films, depicted in populist murals, activist films and authoritative plaques. At the turn of the century, the myth of Sydney's soul being saved from pro-capitalist forces by union men became canon. Governments went from reluctantly placing murals to actively seeking out commemoration to incur the story's glory. However, the memory revealed itself to be purely symbolic when structural change was attempted, such as the fight to keep public housing in Millers Point.

The green bans have become a *tabula rasa* in which parties – governments, councils, filmmakers, artists, conservationists, environmentalists, heritage activists, unionists, communists – can impose their ideas. This remembrance has taken on a life of its own, and it remains up to the historian to interrogate how these cultural grids of meaning have structured our understanding of the past.

These commemorations can be whittled down to a paradox. The state remembers the green bans because they are safe and unlikely to disrupt social cohesion, the activists remember them because they want that kind of direct action to happen again, and cultural productions remember them because it is an interesting story. Sydney, its activists, politicians, filmmakers, and newspapers have manufactured ways to remember this history. The public space afforded to Munday misleads us to think his ideas are well accepted.

This thesis has provided a case study of protest reminiscence and laid out some common trajectories. The state often institutionalises protest memories when they are followed by changing consensus beliefs, and activists often instrumentalise the past for affirmation and inspiration. What is uncommon is that the green banners are now remembered by the state they fought against, in the places they fought for. As historians, this gives us an important task. We should treat the affordance of public spaces to ‘radical’ figures with caution. To find out the full story of commemorations, I have considered the present and revealed contradictions between ongoing spatial injustices and the valorising of figures who historically campaigned against such programmes.

However, these dogmatic ideas about the ‘state’ have been complicated by archival research. Activist commemoration has similarly meant invoking the past for present causes. The green bans history’s symbolic power is a scarce resource, a union story without the stain of industrial violence, and with storied and respectable figures. In the pursuit of hagiography, activist productions have aggrandised certain figures and their effects. The green bans story, like many other leftist histories, is a narrative of defeat. More so, the nostalgic, mythological versions of this history detract from understanding the dissimilar present. The symbolic power may inspire activists, but it cannot substitute for new strategies.

Historians should pay attention to such public memory. Through memory, the past verges into symbols, stories and signs. We still need historical practices to rummage beneath.

However, the thesis has also determined that we can't place our faith in written histories. As historians, we must play in that in between space, in Benjamin's 'the constellation of time', to uncover the silences.

This breadth of historical research and memory analysis has uncovered the untapped emotions of the past. I've scoured the archives, listened to the oral histories, read community newspapers, spoken to many people and analysed sources not previously analysed. In doing so, I've realised what this history means to people. My mother tells me Juanita Nielsen came into my grandfather's Oxford St chemist on one of her last days alive. For many people, especially older Sydneysiders, these stories still hang over the city like a spectre.

In The Rocks, Munday's weathered face looks down the steep incline of Globe Street (Fig. 27). This, more so than the info panel, embodies the paradoxes explored by this thesis, and requires a more considered interrogation. Commissioned by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, it's an institutionalised history. It embodies the individualisation of this history into a story of Munday glory, who, as we've discovered, played a minor role in 'saving The Rocks'. However, Munday's visage, carved into Sydney's old town, is striking. This spatial recognition may individualise the movement, but it allows the past to interrupt the present. The mural's edges bleed into the brick wall; he's unfinished and in a state of change, just like the streets around him. The ever-changing city is a generative archive, not just a repository of memory.

Unlike many of the other material markers I've discussed, this mural invites reflection. Climbing the stairs within, you can see Circular Quay. Furthest away is the Toaster, whose construction Munday unsuccessfully campaigned against in 1998. On the left side are The Rocks, which used to house working-class, wharf-working families and now contains commodified colonial history. On the other side are the CBD's skyscrapers, no doubt home to unfortunate building accidents during their 1970s construction. Both cultural memory and historical interrogation have revealed these sites as unfamiliar.

The city is an archival witness—and now Munday, hollowed out in white, is part of that archive. Munday watches on, a haunting reminder of a radical past, but he cannot absolve Sydney’s ever-growing inequality. By making the invisible visible, memory can help us re-imagine the city.

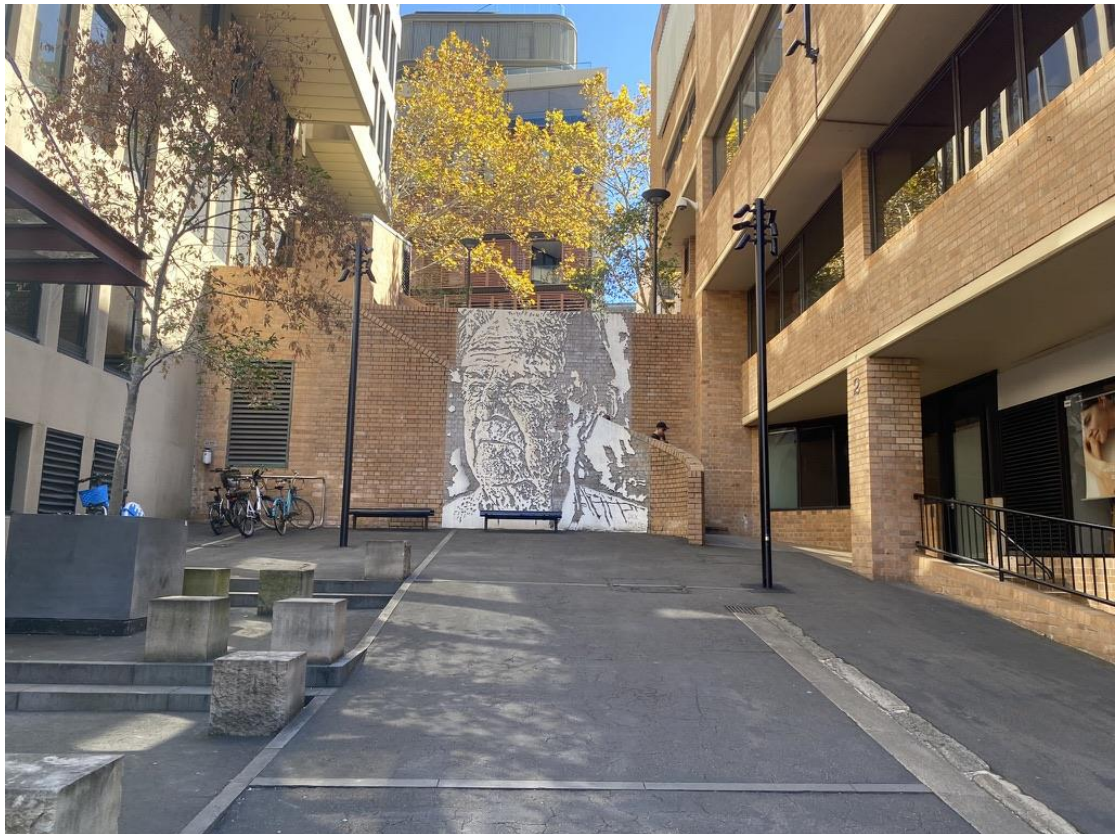


Figure 27: Vhlis, *Jack Munday*, 2013.

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