

# THE VERY LONG YEAR

**Michael Young Dip Arch (Qld) Msc (Lon) FRAIA RIBA**

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Like many young Australians in the 1960s, including Clive James, Germaine Greer and John Howard, I set sail from Sydney Harbour on a four and a half week voyage to see the rest of the world; my intention was to be away about a year I had left school at 15 and had studied Architecture at night classes at the Central Technical College (now QUT) in Brisbane, during that time I had worked in architects' offices in Brisbane and the Gold Coast and had qualified as an architect just over two or more years before I sailed with two friends, Jan and David, to the UK. We sailed into Southampton Water on a foggy March morning, as we were passing the Isle of Wight the fog lifted and we suddenly saw the lush green of England, the daffodils and the old buildings, it all looked as if it had just been all done and dusted for our arrival.

After a quick trip up to Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow to visit family David, Jan and I travelled around the UK and Europe together in a Ford Cortina estate (we are still great friends to this day despite the miles which now separate us and we visit one another whenever we can). After our travels we each started work, Jan in Edinburgh, David in Switzerland whilst for me it was London. In due course we all returned to Australia but I had been offered a lectureship in London, which I eagerly accepted as I had always wanted to teach and, at that time, there was little opportunity to do this on a full time basis in my field in Australia. I returned to the UK in 1966 and started my career in education within the building industry.

After two years at my first college (now the College of North West London) I applied for, and obtained a post at the Brixton School of Building which had a reputation of excellence amongst the various building professions and trades, not just in London but throughout the UK and abroad. By now, having tired of paying rent, I had bought a small flat in Putney and also, as I was an only child my parents had decided to return to the UK to be nearer to me (we had originally migrated to Australia from Edinburgh in 1949). Slowly but surely I was becoming locked into the UK. Initially my parents found it difficult to settle back into the UK - they missed the sun very much and, a couple of times they actively considered going back to Brisbane. On one occasion I said that if they went back I would follow as soon as I could get a job there in education. Fate intervened, in the form of a new job for my father, and this never materialised.

In addition to lecturing I was able to continue with architectural practice and by 1970 I was working for Purcell Miller and Tritton who specialise in historic

buildings work, an area completely new to me and which I found fascinating. I thoroughly enjoyed the teaching at Brixton and was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1971. By then the professional studies side of Brixton School of Building had been absorbed into the newly formed South Bank Polytechnic. This was both a good thing and a bad thing. Brixton had been one of a number of specialist building colleges founded in the early years of the 20th century to educate at all levels of the industry and it was therefore sad and, to some extent, detrimental for us to sever our ties with the trades side. On the other hand the Polytechnic enabled us to mix with other disciplines to the benefit of all.

The 1970s were a decade of growth in the Polytechnics and I found myself involved in developing more degree courses and, in particular, introducing Design and Building Conservation studies into the courses of surveyors and building management students. I became a Course Director on the day I moved from my flat to the house (still in Putney) in which I still live. As course Director I ran the part-time degree in Building Surveying - the first in the country. I always had a soft spot for part-time students, having been one myself and I had a great respect for these young men and women who managed to juggle work with study and family responsibilities. In architectural practice I had become an associate and was offered a partnership, which I felt that I could not accept because of the potential conflict between practice and the polytechnic.

1977 was a key year in that I was promoted to Principal lecturer and I also embarked upon an MSc at University College London, again this was by part-time study and, at this point I found it necessary to withdraw from architectural practice. I completed my MSc in 1979 and I was very proud to be awarded a Distinction. My links with Australia continued with one of my term papers being a comparison between speculative housing in Australia and the UK. On completion of my MSc I decided that it was time for a trip back to Australia and fifteen years, almost to the minute, after I first arrived back in the UK the Qantas plane bearing my partner and me landed at Sydney Airport. We had a wonderful month with old friends in Sydney, Mackay, Brisbane and environs. For many of my friends my partner was the first overseas visitor they had ever entertained in their homes and we were given a right Aussie welcome. I was very sad as the plane finally left Brisbane for our return journey as I wondered how long it would be before I was able to return.

As a Principal lecturer I became more involved with the administration of the polytechnic joining both the faculty board and the academic board. I became an examiner for the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and I sat on the Special Entry Panel of the Royal Institute of British Architects. I also became an external examiner/moderator for the Business and Technician Education Council (now

Edxel). During 1986 I had a short sabbatical, which enabled me to return to Australia where I gave a lecture at RMIT, NSWIT, Canberra college of HE and, to my great joy, my old 'alma mater', by then, QIT. Whilst in Australia I did a study of Retirement Housing, a subject that I was researching in the UK, and on my return to South Bank I gave a faculty lecture on Retirement Housing in Australia and its lessons for the UK.

During the late 1980s our faculty entered into an arrangement with the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology to enable students from there and from South Bank to do part of their course and their practical training in the other country. As a result I was pleased to welcome some young Australians onto our courses and to visit our students in Australia on my visits there.

I was always conscious of the lack of any textbooks on architectural design aimed at the other professions in the building industry and during the 1980s I embarked on writing a book on architectural design, which was published in 1986. I was also the co-author of another book on

British Standards and Specifications. In 1988 I was appointed Head of Department of Building Economics but already the 'winds of change' were blowing through Higher Education in general and South Bank in particular. To be frank I did not enjoy my time as Head of Department, I was a much better second in charge and had served three heads in that role. When, at the end of 1989, a major economy campaign resulted in generous offers of early retirement to senior members of staff I could not get my signature on the offer fast enough!!

With a decent pension and still young I could indulge in other interests, not least in frequent trips back to Australia, including one in 1991 when, following the death of my father, I was able to take my then 82 year old mother back to see her many old friends. This was her second trip back and she thoroughly enjoyed it. I still continued with lecturing but now on a part-time basis. I was a visiting lecturer at South Bank, which had now become South Bank University and also at Greenwich and Brighton Universities. It was wonderful to be back in the classroom with the students again as my sole responsibility, I had originally entered academia to teach and it seemed ironic that, in order to be back on the 'chalk face' again I had to retire, and return part time, but that seems to be the way of so many organisations nowadays. My work with the Business and Technician Education Council continued and, with more time, I was able to take on more moderating and external examining. Over the years I was involved with most colleges in southern England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which provided building and housing courses. I also became an external examiner at Portsmouth and Middlesex universities.

I continued lecturing until 1998 when the school at Greenwich University, in which I taught, moved to their campus near Dartford, which would have meant a pretty torturous journey whether by car or public transport and so I reluctantly retired. My examining continued until 2001 when I finally retired totally.

I was fortunate that my retirement was gradual which gave me plenty of time to develop outside, but related interests. The church has always been important to me and I became Church Secretary for Trinity United Reformed Church in Wimbledon. Here we are very much occupied with a £1.5m redevelopment project, which I am very much involved in. I have also become a governor of my local FE college (South Thames) where we are also involved with major redevelopment in which I am playing my part. Education and building are still very much part of my life but now in a voluntary capacity. In addition to this I play an active part in the Friends of the City Churches and regularly 'sit' in one of the delightful City churches to enable it to be open for worshippers and visitors. I always take great pleasure in being able to show fellow Australians around when they pop in and to be able to show them Australian links in the churches. One church has a window dedicated to Dame Nellie Melba whilst another has a memorial stone to the Rev Richard Johnson who sailed with the First Fleet and became the first chaplain to the colony of New South Wales. One morning a small group of Australian teenagers came into the church in which I was 'sitting', they had just arrived in London and were fascinated by all the old buildings. I showed them the Nellie Melba window (complete with peaches indicating the desert which was dedicated to her), they were not sure whom Nellie Melba was so I explained. I asked which way they were walking and they replied 'towards St Paul's' so I said that they must go into St Mary-le-Bow and see the memorial to Captain Arthur Phillip with the serious mistake in the inscription, again blank faces so I asked if they knew who he was, one thought an explorer but the others did not know, another short history lesson from me and they went happily on their way. No doubt they knew much more about other aspects of Australia's rich history and heritage than I did but, to someone educated in Australia in the 1950s, I was sad that this important episode in Australia's life seemed not to have been given much weight.

One of the great attractions of living in London has been the proximity to mainland Europe and, over the years I have made many trips to the various countries there. France has always been a particular favourite and, it is there that one of my Australian quirks comes to the fore. I learnt French at Brisbane State High School and I still speak same with a strong Australian accent! Another part of the continent which I have become quite fond of is Gibraltar which reminds me very much of Australia in the 1950s.

Over the years I have played host to many of my Australian friends, feeding and accommodating them and showing them around London. In later years this has extended to their children and now their grandchildren. Earlier this year the first great grand child came with her boyfriend for dinner!

Also this year I was delighted to be able to conduct the then Vice-Chancellor and the Head of Alumni Relations of the Queensland University of Technology around one of the churches in which I sit.

And for the future? I plan another trip, perhaps two, to Australia in the next few months and, at the back of my mind there is always the yearning of an exile to return to the land where he spent his formative years. Alas permanent residency is not open to me as, along with over 99% of all emigrants from the UK up to the 1970s I had not registered as an Australian - the need to do so, born out by the figures, was one of Australia's best-kept secrets! The irony is that had I been given the correct information when I enquired of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs both in 1964 and 1966 and registered but had become a pauper, I would be able to return to Australia and live off the state. But, because I was not told of the need to register and thus did not do so, I cannot return despite being comfortably off with a good index linked pension and much still to contribute to Australia. I cannot even buy a second hand unit to use as a base in Australia on my frequent visits there!

Most of my UK friends and almost all of my colleagues have always seen me as Australian, I like to think that I have always been a good ambassador for Australia, at work I was able to draw on my Australian experience and, by drawing comparisons with UK practice, was able to come up with better solutions to problems than would have been the case had my experience been limited to one country.

Once on a plane to Australia an Australian fellow passenger asked me if this was my first trip to Australia, I replied that I had grown up there and she said 'So you are going home' my response was that I was not sure where my home was, perhaps it was on a Qantas plane somewhere over the Bay of Bengal!

How have I found Australia on my return visits? Australia has developed incredibly over the years, Brisbane has changed from a sleepy overgrown country town into an elegant world city, its citizens confident and prosperous, it has, however, lost its innocence and, this is true of the UK as well, has become a little too much Americanised.

I still love Australia and I have many very dear friends there. The Australian people are so wonderful, kind and hospitable. I think that the Southern Cross Group is doing a fantastic job in raising the awareness of the value to Australia of Australians living abroad, I have long felt that the attitude of officialdom in Australia

is that if you leave (whether you are an Australian citizen or not) you are somehow betraying Australia and that you will face all sorts of obstacles when trying to return.



**Michael Young** was born in Edinburgh in 1939 and immigrated with his parents to Australia at the age of ten. He qualified as an architect in Brisbane in 1962 and returned to the UK in 1966 to lecture. He remained in education at London South Bank University until his retirement. He has maintained a very close relationship with Australia and returns frequently.

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