

EXHIBITIONS

ON OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY TERRY NAUGHTON OC

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Exhibition of photographs by Terry Naughton QC, Gallery Savah, Paddington, New South Wales, 3-25 August 1991.

In a previous volume of this Journal there appeared a review of the book *Places of Judgment, New South Wales*. See (1988) 62 ALJ 101. The book, with a historical introduction by Dr J M Bennett, was largely a vehicle for the black and white photographs of New South Wales courthouses taken by Mr Terry Naughton QC of the Sydney Bar.

The book captured city, suburban and country courthouses old and new. Now a new collection of Mr Naughton's photographs has been exhibited in a Sydney gallery. The exhibition was opened on 6 August 1991 in the presence of judges, barristers and artists.

Many of the features noted in *Places of Judgment* can be seen in the new selection of photographs offered by Mr Naughton. The collection on this occasion was divided into photographs of public buildings (mostly courthouses) and a new series showing outdoor scenes particularly on beaches in New South Wales and Queensland. Some of the beach scenes

were particularly vivid, with the sharp images of sand dunes and fishing nets sprayed with sand being the most outstanding.

It is exactly a hundred and fifty years since the first known photograph was taken in Australia in 1841. The photographer, a Frenchman, believed to be Jude Beausejour, was commander of the French Barque *Alcide*, then discharging cargo in Port Jackson. Even at that time, the natural beauty of Sydney Harbour captivated the photographer. Watchers of the television series *The Civil War* are astonished at the number and variety of photographs taken twenty years later during that great struggle. The exotic character of Australia made it the subject of many photographic expeditions from Europe. Working with wet plates in difficult outback conditions, photographers sent images of the Australian colony around the world. The first recorded exhibition of photographs in Australia took place in 1849. One of the keenest early photographers was William Macarthur, son of the explorer John Macarthur. A hundred and fifty years later instamatic cameras produce near perfect shots for the millions. But a small group of artists remain for whom photography is a form of art. Their prints are selenium toned with a texture that no automatic camera can achieve. Terry Naughton of the Sydney Bar is one such artist.

Of greatest interest to lawyers in Mr Naughton's exhibition were the further examples of Mr Naughton's photographic art, capturing public buildings and courthouses, many this time beyond New South Wales. With a skilful use of light and perspective, Mr Naughton's camera catches familiar

scenes of Sydney and Newcastle architecture but presented in a dramatic way and from unfamiliar angles. A photograph of the colonial buildings in Bent Street, Sydney and of Court Chambers near the Court House in Newcastle stand out as still-life reproductions of the ornate stone buildings of the last century. There are similarly interesting photographs of lighthouses, seaside chapels and workers' cottages.

However, the most interesting and novel development in the new collection - which sets it apart from the images recorded in *Places of Judgment* - are "roofscapes" and ceiling pieces of courthouses. Mr Naughton has taken the trouble to lift his eyes from the ornamental bench and bar table of colonial courtrooms to the ceilings. There, the usually unremarked but marvellously proportioned handiwork of colonial architects and tradesmen can be seen. It is a reproach to most lawyers that they have rarely, if ever, cast their eyes to the ceiling of the courtroom to see the ordered beauty of the cornices and lightfitting decorations which are such a feature of colonial courtroom architecture. Most lawyers are so preoccupied with the predicament of their clients - or perhaps their own predicament - that they scarcely have the time to lift their eyes to see the architecture about them. It is Mr Naughton's sharp eye that takes lawyers and others to the detail of courtroom design, to see it, as it were, for the first time.

In this collection of photographs the most unusual prints are certainly those of ceiling decorations. Typically, these vary from circular plaster moulds around central light fittings to whole ceiling decorations. In a grand courthouse (Bathurst, NSW) the internal decoration of a

rotunda is shown. A bored judicial officer may have cast his or her eyes to the ceiling - sometimes in despair at counsel's bold but futile thrusts. Occasionally the advocate may have looked there for inspiration. Sir Francis Burt, former Chief Justice of Western Australia, remarked on his retirement that, in the boring bits of cases, he had kept himself awake by counting and recounting the panels at the back of the court. The problem for modern judges is that, all too frequently, the aseptic circumstances of courtrooms provide no panels, and certainly no ornamented ceiling decorations, to catch the eye, or lift the spirit during the more humdrum moments of the courtroom. Now, they have only lawyers to look at.

It is to Mr Naughton's credit that he did look up. And once he saw the beauty of some of the detail there he embarked upon a project to photograph them. The result are ceiling pieces from the Launceston Supreme Court in Tasmania, the Murwillumbah Court House, the Bathurst Court House in New South Wales and many others.

The photographs provide a symphony of light and elegant display of a kind that is unlikely to be reproduced in courthouses of the 21st century. The restrained designs defy the reputation of the nineteenth century for imperial vulgarity. Instead it is the austerity and symmetry of a mosque pattern that greets the eye.

Following the bicentenary of modern Australian government and approaching the centenary of the Federal Constitution, it is likely that the interregnum will be filled with some attention to the builders of Australia in the 19th century. It is to be doubted that the builders of

the 20th century have left monuments which will be so enduring. It is virtually certain that their buildings will not bear such close examination a century hence. It is absolutely clear that, when examined, most of the monuments of glass and steel today will fail to give the delight which the handiwork of the colonial architects does, captured by Mr Naughton for those who see his splendid photographs.

So far, Mr Naughton's photographic lens has accompanied him to parts of Queensland, Tasmania and throughout New South Wales and Norfolk Island. It may be hoped that his legal practice will take him to other parts of Australia. Armed with his camera, there are doubtless magnificent ceiling pieces and other details to be caught in the other cities between busy days in court. And in the little towns of the 19th century, small, still used, courthouses ply their trade. They deserve to be caught before developers' plans or abandonment sweep them away.

It may also be hoped that in future photographic essays, Mr Naughton will include some of the flesh and blood of the law which swirls around the courthouses and sweats under the ceiling decorations as cases are daily decided. The omission of human beings from his photographs gives them a timeless, architectural quality. But as this reviewer has previously observed, the law is nothing without humans. Mountains and rivers, left alone, need only the laws of nature. The messy, untidy, complicated affairs of humanity are the stuff of the law. It is as if Naughton, with his depiction of things past and things enduring, is under the spell of W B Yeates' poem:

"Once out of nature I shall never take

*My bodily shape from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come."*

Here certainly are the shapes of things past and passing. The very continuity of the law suggests that they will still be there in many years to come. Where are the countless unknowable advocates who rose to their feet in the cause of persuasion under the elegant ceilings captured by Terry Naughton's lens? Reflecting upon that question teaches the lesson that the work of advocates is ephemeral in the extreme. A judge's pearls may occasionally be preserved in the law reports. Even in this regard, legislation has made judicial contributions more and more temporary. What endures? Art. The perceptive eye of the artist who sees and records beautiful forms snatches at permanency in a way no advocate's flourish ever can. In years to come Mr Naughton's legal skills may be forgotten. But the record of his photographs stands a good chance to endure.

With a little luck this collection of photographs at the Savah Gallery will form a nucleus of a new national collection of portraits of the courthouses of Australia. There is no doubt detail in the courthouse at Broome, at Derby, Roma, Cootamundra and Shepparton which deserve the attention of Terry Naughton's lens. With a growing sense of Australia's history, and a determination to record and describe it, there is more than enough to provide a further book. And if this collection has no other result than to cause lawyers who see it to look about them in their

courtrooms, that will be no bad thing.

MDK*

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