

Sharing the fires at Warriparinga - a place for conciliation

Georgina Williams + Gavin Malone + Nigel Koch discuss where the `re' is

Warriparinga — is a place, a spirit and a process. Located in the south western suburbs of Adelaide the 12 hectare site is managed by the City of Marion and the Kurna Aboriginal and Community Heritage Association. It is a very significant place for Kurna being a meeting place, burial area and a special site within the Tjilbruke Dreaming. It includes remnant sections of the Sturt River before it becomes a concrete drain, a newly constructed wetlands, and significant European settlement heritage, such as Fairford House, outbuildings and remnant orchards and vineyards.

The Kurna peoples' lands extend from Cape Jervis in the south to Crystal Brook in the north with the Mount Lofty Ranges and St Vincent Gulf forming the eastern and western boundaries. These lands include the Adelaide Plains and the City of Adelaide.

The genesis of this paper has been based around discussions developed over the last year after attending friendship fires at Warriparinga, and the outcomes of the South Australian Institute of Landscapes Architects Regional Seminar titled 'Indigenous Landscape Architecture'. As a member of the organising committee I began the road to learning the complexities of the Kurna community, appropriate consultation processes, and most of all an understanding of the many issues facing the Aboriginal people, particularly in the cities. I must confess it was a conflicting, frustrating, but extremely enriching experience. I recall the first time I arrived at Warriparinga in the dark, to attend the full moon fire. I was apprehensive and nervous by the presence of Georgina and her people. Clearly out of my depth I knew nothing really. Determined to learn, Georgina and Gavin guided me along the way.



Figure 1 Sturt River-Warri Parri in full flow

Landscape and reconciliation, Red Gums, and all things past.

Nigel Koch — What do you learn from Warriparinga?

Georgina Williams - It's about walking into another space in your mind. It's an awakening. The fires help us to remember the living landscape that once was — animals, winds, and clear horizons. Where has it all gone now? Houses are everywhere.

Europeans must feel at a loss with their own spirit. The full moon fires at Warriparinga represent the spirit and humanity in what's called reconciliation. Although I was never married to you, but that's what the words kind of means to me, so we'll call it a conciliation process. It would be the understanding of our spiritual and cultural connection to the land, and through that, our connection to each other, it all comes through the land.

NK - After living in Warriparinga, what have you learned from this experience?

Gavin Malone - There are many things we can learn from Warriparinga. I used to say that Warriparinga represented the three main histories pertaining to land, the ecological/geological, the Aboriginal and the

European. Georgina corrected me. You cannot separate the first two. This connection cannot be escaped. It's about relationships between people and people, and people and the land, that is very important. The basis for decision making.

Education

NK - One thing I have learnt working with the indigenous community in Adelaide, is the complexities of where designers stand in respect to consultation protocols, intellectual property, and the boundaries of gaining knowledge. Can you suggest a rationale why the communication process and awareness is difficult?

GW - Nungas learn in different ways, and it hurts us that we have to learn in the way that European minds work. It separates us from the things that are dear to us and we suffer because of that. I hope that when you work in Aboriginal design, that this is acknowledged. Landscape architecture can influence through even small gestures.

You never know when politicians will sit down on one of your benches and look into your landscape and form a different thought to the one they had before because they might connect more to the land and the people of the land.

We are the oldest people in the world, and you are the newest. You can learn from us. Instead of concrete and everything staying in just the square of a city, landscape architects can incorporate a deeper understanding of landscape, culture and spirit.

Whites, Rights and Fires - Small things count

NK - It is ironic Georgina that in your talk at the Seminar you said Ansett would go down after locating their Call Centre adjacent to Warriparinga. On reflection how do you feel?

GW - Watching the machines dig up our ancestral lands and take the soil and dump it elsewhere causes traumatic distress for me and other Kaurna people, the constant attacking of the psyche. I have to keep dealing with this trauma all the time, but governments don't acknowledge it. Ansett and John Olsen did not ask us if we wanted the Call Centre on our spirit land, they just offered a few jobs and some money. First we said yes, but then we said no. The Government just went and asked someone else to get their necessary response. Now it's closing down and Ansett is in chaos, they did not pay proper respect to Kaurna people and our spirit story in the land, they were just interested in making money.



Figure 2 Looking through the Tjirbruksi Gateway to call centre site. Georgina Williams tending Spirit Fire



Figure 3 Machines at work, Ansett Call Centre construction

GM - The Ansett Call Centre dominated, it was a 24-hour operation with 350 car parks. The Olsen State Government lacked vision, empathy and a true commitment to Aboriginal people. It had a wonderful opportunity to advance the cause of conciliation by providing the land as a site for the Kurna Living Cultural Centre but it didn't, it chose a short-term economic outcome. No one decries Ansett having a Call Centre and the creation of 350 jobs, but the land had other values, it was culturally and topographically part of Warriparinga. This was not properly recognised by the State Government nor Ansett Australia. The land was desecrated and the building and landscape design is just poor design, it has no respect for the physical or cultural topography of the site. It pervades and we now have to live with it forever, despite the collapse of Ansett.



Figure 4 Georgina Williams, protest fire, Warriparinga & Ansett Call Centre from Warriparinga

Urban Aborigine, Lost space and Caravan Parks

NK - For many people, moving from the country to the city opens a spectrum of cultural, employment, and social possibilities. For us three, you Georgina from Point Pearce Aboriginal Reserve, Gavin from the Mallee country, and I'm from the Flinders Ranges, the city is now our landscape. Would you agree?

GW -There is an identity crisis which most of our Nungas are actually experiencing right now. We are entering into that kind of crisis now as the urban people. We have gone through several dispossessions. First, it was having our land wrenched from us, then it was the Protection Act, then it was denial of citizenship under Federation, then the Assimilation Act and then it was integration policies. Before the 1967 Referendum we were not citizens of Australia, we had no freedom of movement, we had to get permission.



Figure 5 Kurna cultural presentation, Warriparinga. Paitya Dance Group, Karl Winda Telfer, lead dancer

Now we are part of the Australian Community, being on our own land, but not owning any of our spirit places which are still being destroyed as in the Ansett Call Centre. We have to make all these adjustments as urban people, to live with what's happening to our land.

GM - The urban space places a great pressure on Aboriginal people particularly in the case of the Kaurna who were culturally decimated by colonisation and have a difficult task renewing their culture in cities and the urbanised landscape. My 'natural landscape' is one of concrete, steel, glass and bitumen. It is difficult for us to then connect with the spirit of our land, the silences, subtle winds, colours, textures and smells of the environment.

NK - Last time we met we were discussing how caravan parks were symbolic of nomadism.

GM - The Tjilbruke Dreaming follows the coast south of Adelaide along the Fleurieu Peninsula. It is curious that caravan parks have been built at almost all the significant sites. It gives you an indication of human attraction to a place, its inherent qualities.

GW - It is ironic that caravan park sites were significant places of Tjilbruke Dreaming, and our last bush tucker places. For the Goonyas (white people), they were the last natural pieces of the ground because they did not want it. It was swampy and no good for farming.

NK - In the profession of landscape architecture there are less than a handful of indigenous landscape architects in Australia. What can assist in developing this? Indigenous people have an inherent connection with the land that would be highly regarded, and ideally suited to landscape architecture.

GW - It is very difficult for Aboriginal people to get through University education, we have to deal with lots of trauma from dispossession, deaths, drugs, abuse, everything. Now we are trying to learn all the white fella's ways, but keep our own spirit and culture too. Landscape Architects could help train some of our people in their ways, and we could help each other look after the land and the spirit in the land.



Figure 6 Spirit Fire Gathering, Warriparinga

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