

Sydney Architecture Agency:

the case for a new Sydney-based
agency, devoted solely to promoting
great architecture and design in
the nation's largest city

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Journal Series
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NSW
Architects
Registration
Board





The Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarships Journal Series is a select library of research compiled by more than 160 architects, students and graduates since 1951, and made possible by the generous gift of Sydney Architect and educator, Byera Hadley.

Byera Hadley, born in 1872, was a distinguished architect responsible for the design and execution of a number of fine buildings in New South Wales.

He was dedicated to architectural education, both as a part-time teacher in architectural drawing at the Sydney Technical College, and culminating in his appointment in 1914 as Lecturer-in-Charge at the College's Department of Architecture. Under his guidance, the College became acknowledged as one of the finest schools of architecture in the British Empire.

Byera Hadley made provision in his will for a bequest to enable graduates of architecture from a university in NSW to travel in order to broaden their experience in architecture, with a view to advancing architecture upon their return to Australia.

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Hannah Tribe was awarded the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship in 2011.

Cover image: *Agents for Architecture*. Illustration by Chloe Goldsmith

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**Image a new
organisation in
Sydney that just
promoted great
architecture.
Hannah Tribe
makes the case
for exactly that.**

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Using the London Architecture Foundation (LAF) as the model, Hannah Tribe argues for a new, not-for-profit, Sydney-based agency with the sole purpose of promoting architecture and design to the wider community.

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Introduction

This report is a study for a new not-for-profit, Sydney-based agency that will promote architecture in the wider community. For the purposes of this report, the new agency will be referred to by the working title of the Sydney Architecture Agency (SAA).

The idea for the agency comes from my Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. Along with architects Andrew Burns and Matthew Chan, I was honoured with the award of a 60th Anniversary Emerging Architects Scholarship which included an exchange program hosted by the London Architecture Foundation (LAF). Burns, Chan and I were very impressed with the LAF's clarity of purpose, effectiveness and agility as an organisation in support of architecture.

This report begins by introducing the LAF, its structure, function and successes. The second part sets up the case for the establishment of a similar Sydney-based organisation. It identifies existing organisations in support of Sydney architecture and identifies opportunities for a SAA to be active.

PART I: THE LONDON ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

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I.1 MISSION

"The Architecture Foundation is a non-profit agency for contemporary architecture, urbanism and culture. We cultivate new talent and new ideas. Through our diverse programmes we facilitate international and interdisciplinary exchange, stimulate critical engagement amongst professionals, policy makers and a broad public and shape the quality of the built environment. We are independent, agile, inclusive and influential. Central to our activities is the belief that architecture enriches lives."

Mission Statement from the website, <http://www.architecturefoundation.org.uk>

The projects and partnerships of the LAF are distinguished by a real commitment to collaboration, excellence and social engagement. They have actively cultivated new talent and new ideas through the commissioning of very young, inexperienced practices and the organisation of a broad range of competitions and events. These events, as well as the products of many of the competitions, have also provided the British public with unique opportunities to engage with their cities and with the architectural community.



1.2 BACKGROUND

The LAF was established in 1991 as Britain's first independent architecture centre. It is a registered charity, with a board of Trustees composed of individuals from a wide cross-section of interests and professions including architecture, the arts, media, education, social activism and business. The Foundation is currently located in a Carmody Groarke-designed headquarters in Southwark.

1.3 PROGRAM

The LAF organises a diverse and cross disciplinary program of events including:

- events such as film screenings, lectures and debates
- exhibitions that experiment with representations of architecture
- competitions for buildings and public spaces
- awards that celebrate excellence in contemporary architecture and urbanism
- Education projects, focussing on young people considering further built environment study
- other projects including the London Architecture Diary and the London Festival of Architecture

Part 1.6 will detail a selection of projects curated by the LAF. Part 2.1 will identify which of the LAF's functions are currently represented in the Sydney Architecture scene and identify new opportunities for the promotion of architecture through a Sydney based agency.

1.4 STRUCTURE

The LAF is a not-for-profit agency funded principally through donations and subscription fees from members and partners. It is administered by a Board of Trustees, made up of established architects (including former trustees Zaha Hadid and Richard Rogers), artists, activists, academics and professionals from a range of other fields.

The LAF is now among 20 similar organisations supporting Architecture in the UK with a collective staff of over 98 as well as over 450 volunteers. The organisations are spread across the country operating in their local areas at different sizes and with different focuses. BEAM, for example, is a Wakefield based agency with a focus on Arts in the public realm. It has been involved in successful commissions and collaborations with architects in the Wakefield area since 2009. The Architecture Centre Bristol on the other hand, focuses more on public education with a program of lectures, seminar, exhibitions and training events.

The organisations are all independent however an umbrella organisation known as the 'Architecture Centre Network' permits close collaboration and resource sharing as well as running a website which compiles events and public resources from all of the members.

The LAF has thirteen permanent staff members and five interns. We were hosted by Sarah Ichioka (Director), Moira Lascelles (Curator - Special Projects), Joanne Jolley (Marketing and Membership Coordinator) and Justin Jaeckle (Curator - Public Programme).

The SAA presented in this report would not have the same scope of program or staffing requirements.

1.5 FUNDING

The LAF is funded by donations, partnerships and member contributions.

Major sponsors include developers, furniture retailers, property management companies, architecture practices, architectural support companies including model-makers, communications companies and consultants. The LAF also seeks funding in the form of grants through other not-for-profit agencies.

Individual programmes attract specific sponsors, for example local councils and local chambers of commerce often underwrite projects in their areas.

The LAF also operates in an advisory roll to larger organisations. For example the LAF acted as a facilitator for the 'Better Bankside' project and the 'Oikos Project' helping them devise and deliver architecture competitions, negotiate with authorities, seek expert consultancy and facilitate project delivery.

1.6 LAF PROJECTS EXAMPLES

This section looks at recent projects facilitated by the LAF.

1.6.1 The Oikos Project: A Salvaged Stage in the Heart of Southwark

The Red Room in partnership with The Architecture Foundation, in association with The Junction, commissioned a new temporary theatre building.

"Oikos (pronounced ee-kos) is the root word of economy and ecology. Embracing these principles, in 2010, we embarked on an exciting theatre project: a unique mix of public-made art, architecture and performance that explores how a new sustainable society can flourish in a world altered by climate change. Last summer, minutes away from the South Bank in the heart of London, award-winning Berlin-based architects Köbberling and Kaltwasser worked alongside volunteers created The Jellyfish Theatre, the UK's first fully-functioning theatre made entirely from recycled and reclaimed materials."

from website <http://www.theredroom.org.uk/projects/unstated/oikos/>

Topher Campbell and Brian Savery from the Red Room presented their Oikos Project to the visiting BHTS emerging architects. A temporary theatre was built out of local waste, using local volunteer labour in a regenerating part of London. Two original plays were commissioned for the theatre and produced before the theatre was dismantled and recycled at the end of the Summer.

As Campbell and Savery stated, the LAF was instrumental in the realisation of this project. They assisted the unconventional, foreign architect in negotiating the tricky local government approvals process, compliance with codes and they sought local expert advice regarding structure and safety.



1.6.2 Installation - Just the Flip Side

During our visit to the LAF, the public space of their offices were occupied by an installation called 'Just the Flip Side of the wall' by Melissa Appleton and Matthew Butcher (Post Works).

The LAF has offices on busy Tooley Street, Southwark with an multi-purpose room on the street frontage and offices behind. This space is used for lectures, screenings and installations.

Installations are often directly commissioned by the LAF, as a means of inviting interesting, emerging foreign practices to construct something in London. Installations, such as 'Just the Flip Side of the Wall' by Post Works, are also procured through competition.

It is a clever example of a means of promoting emerging architects through the commissioning of small, affordable, ideas-based installation work. It brings attention to the foundation and creates opportunity for young firms.



1.6.3 South Kilburn Studios

South Kilburn is an area of London characterised by public housing, generations of under-employment and disenfranchisement issues. It is surrounded by more affluent areas.

The LAF initiated the South Kilburn Studios project. A disused demountable on a vacant lot near high rise housing commission was ear-marked for a community health centre by Council, but the project was delayed due to lack of funding.

The LAF procured a budget of £17,000 and ran a competition for submissions for the adaptive reuse and delivery of a new social use for the space.

The winning scheme saw the transformation of the demountable into sixteen studios leased to small creative companies. The companies were to pay no rent or amenities on two conditions:

1. That they took on a local 'apprentice.'
2. That they ran an open community workshop on their area of work once every 2 months.

This project is a great example of how architecture and strategic architectural thinking can be engaged to create social opportunities at very little cost. It creates opportunities for locals to gain exposure to a wide range of creative employment opportunities, while giving creative start-up companies an opportunity to build their businesses at low cost.

The formal architectural outcome is modest. A dramatic signage band creates a strong brand identity and place-marker for the project. The interiors are modest, with delightfully whimsical light fittings made from Chinese plastic colanders.

The social outcome and the vibe are awesome.



1.6.4 Olympic Kiosk Competition

One of our exchange partners, Studio Octopi, was the winner of the Stratford Kiosk Competition.

The Stratford area is undergoing rapid change and an ambitious programme of public realm works designed to improve the quality of the town centre for those that live, work, and shop in the area, whilst also preparing to welcome the millions of visitors who will come to the area during the 2012 Olympics.

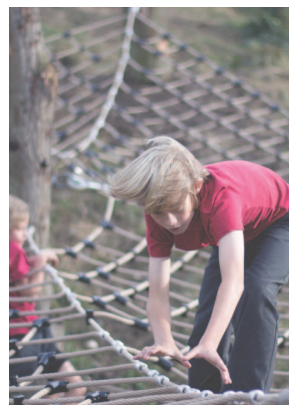
The design competition was open, but not limited to: architects, designers, artists, product designers, and related disciplines. The London Architecture Foundation (LAF) encouraged design teams to suggest flexible and innovative yet realisable designs for a permanent kiosk structure at a critical transport interchange.

The LAF facilitated the competition with the partners above, writing the brief, hosting site visits, running Q&As and then organising an exhibition of entries.



1.6.5 3 Mills

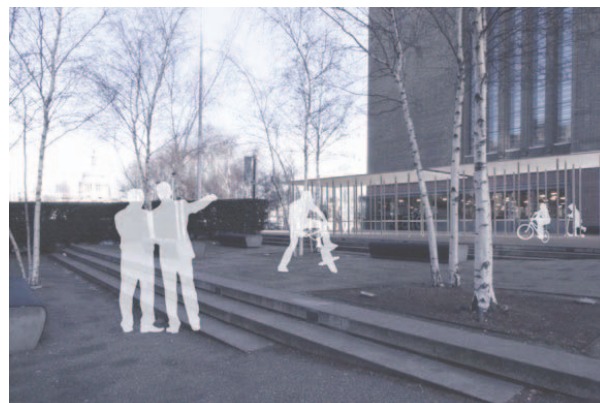
This playground design competition facilitated by the LAF, 3 mills was won by exchange partners We Made That. The competition was facilitated by the LAF on behalf of The legacy List, the Olympic Park Legacy Company and the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (site owners). This is another example of the LAF's role as an agent for architecture, facilitating competitions for varied stakeholder bodies.



1.6.6 Bike Shelter

This competition for a Bike Shelter in Bankside was facilitated by the LAF on behalf of Better Bankside. Better Bankside is a Business Improvement District (BID) aiming to improve Bankside a 'thriving place to work, live and visit.'

Studio Meda together with Marshalls Street Furniture focused on developing a competitively priced system that is now commercially available, and will be affordable within the cost parameters of many public projects such as schools and hospitals.



PART 2: A CASE FOR
THE SYDNEY ARCHITECTURE AGENCY

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2.1 THE SYDNEY SCENE

Sydney has a lively architectural scene. There are talks, exhibitions and festivals run by the Australian Institute of Architects, the Architects Registration Board, the Universities, independent galleries and firms. The city is not short of cultural events in support of architecture. A SAA would need to augment existing services and not replicate or compete with the excellent work already being done by many organisations and individuals.

I see its role, rather, as acting as an agent for architecture with other organisations, as the LAF does with community groups, government, businesses and event organisers.

The key function of the SAA would be to identify, design and run design competitions for real architectural projects. Its aims would be to identify opportunities for architecture and to make sure that those opportunities came to built fruition. As such, it would be promoting architecture in the general public and creating opportunities for architects. It would ultimately be a market-maker.

It would identify real opportunities, seek real briefs from stakeholders, ensure budget exists, write the competition briefs including sourcing/commissioning base materials (surveys, existing plans etc), promote the competitions in conjunctions with partners (stakeholders, site owners, councils), put together juries that include eminent architects and stakeholders, judge the competitions, award winners, assist client and architect reaching fee agreement for project, act as liaison as required to ensure that projects get built.

The following table (2.1.1) shows the cultural activities of the LAF plotted against existing Sydney organisations. It can be seen that some functions of the LAF are very well represented by existing architectural and cultural organisations in Sydney.

The table also shows that the competition function of the LAF, with its real projects, budgets, and stakeholder liaison ability is completely unrepresented. This presents an exciting opportunity for a SAA to fill a unique role as agent for architecture and really make a meaningful contribution to improving our built environment.

2.1.1 TABLE
WHO'S DOING WHAT, WHAT'S LEFT TO DO?

| FUNCTIONS OF LAF | SYDNEY ORGANISATIONS | AIA | ARB | AAA | Universities | Galleries | Publishing | Festivals | Other |
|--|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|--------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------|
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Talks | | • | • | • | • | • | | • | • |
| Exhibitions | | | | | • | • | | • | • |
| Promotion of events and Festivals | | • | • | | • | • | | | |
| Commissioning Installations | | | | | | | | • | |
| Cultural Exchanges | | • | | | • | | | | |
| Tours | | | | • | | | | • | |
| Ideas Competitions | | | | | | | • | • | |
| Competitions for real projects | | | | | | • | | | |
| Identifying opportunities for Potential projects | | | | | | | | | |
| Awards | | | • | | | | • | | • |
| Education (for non-Architects) | | | | • | | • | | • | |
| Promotion of Architecture | | • | | | | | • | | |
| Calendar of events | | • | | | | | | | |
| Education for Architects | | • | • | | • | | | | |
| Lobbying Government | | | • | | | | | | |

2.1.1 TABLE REFERENCE

| | |
|--------------|--|
| AAA | Australian Architecture Association |
| AIA | Australian Institute of Architects |
| ARB | Architects Registration Board |
| Universities | University of Sydney, University of NSW, UTS |
| Galleries | Museum of Contemporary Art, Powerhouse Museum, Boutwell Draper, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation |
| Publishing | ArchMedia, Niche Media |
| Festivals | Sydney Architecture Festival, Vivid |
| Other | Surry Hills Library, Local Councils, Historic Houses Trust |

2.2 A SYDNEY ARCHITECTURE AGENCY MISSION

Given that most of the functions of the LAF are already covered in the Sydney architectural scene, a Sydney Architecture Agency would have a much more limited and focussed mission, for example:

The Sydney Architecture Agency's mission is to make Sydney a better city through excellent architecture.

•

The SAA believes that architecture can enrich lives.

•

The Sydney Architecture Agency finds opportunities for architecture in Sydney.

•

The Sydney Architecture Agency helps client bodies find the best architect and/or architectural solution for their project.

•

The Sydney Architecture Agency acts as consultant, liaison and lobbyist in its mission to facilitate excellent architecture for the general public.

•

The SAA is an independent, not-for-profit agent for architecture.

•

2.3 FUNCTION

The function of the organisation can be broken down into architectural key tasks:

2.3.1 COMPETITIONS FOR REAL PROJECTS AND ADVOCACY

2.3.1.1 Identification of potential architectural projects

The SAA would act as consultant to bodies that commission buildings to help them identify opportunities for architectural competitions.

Local Government Example

For example, a representative of the SAA would present to every elected local council in Sydney annually, and meet with relevant council officers to identify infrastructure and amenity projects that would benefit from architectural input. Every year, the SAA would prepare a list of potential projects suitable for architectural competitions.

2.3.1.2 Brief Writing

The SAA would assist client bodies preparing briefs for commissions and competitions that encourage excellence in architecture.

Local Government Example

Having identified the need for 5 new amenities blocks in a local park, the SAA would assist the Local Council in the preparation of a good architectural competition brief. This would include compilation of site material, stakeholder interviews, accommodation scheduling, allocate prize money, determine appropriate project budgets, nominating juries comprised of architects and community stakeholders etc.

2.3.1.3 Running Competitions

The SAA would assist in running the competitions, including the promotion of competitions to the architectural community. The SAA would organise the confidentiality requirements, questions and submissions. It would facilitate the jury process and assist the client body in the awarding of winners.

2.3.1.4 Assistance beyond the Competition

Sydney architects complain that competitions don't move beyond the awarding of winners, that is, they never get built. (See Architecture Bulletin November/December 2008: Architecture Competitions Surveyed).

A key function of the SAA is to assist the architect and client body move into the procurement phase of work. The SAA would help to negotiate the client-architect agreement and assist the client in putting together a project control team. The SAA would then be on call for the life of the project as required in a negotiating/consulting capacity.

In this vision for an SAA, Councils like Ryalmere would never again build amenities buildings like this:



Instead, our city could have amenities like this:



Durbach Block

or this..



Lahz Nimmo

or this..



Richard Leplastrier

2.3.2 ARCHITECTURAL ADVOCACY

The SAA would act as an advocate and lobbyist for better design in our city.

It would use its networking strength garnered in competition process to create dialogue around architecture.

It would work with the AIA to lobbying government action.

It will be a high profile, accessible organisation.

2.4 FUNDING

The SAA could initially be staffed by two people. It would need a salary and marketing budget.

Funding could be sought from:

- other architectural advocacy organisations such as the ARB and AIA
- private industry including developers, consultants, building companies, suppliers, architects
- State and local government
- Membership

2.5 POTENTIAL COLLABORATORS

The SAA would seek potential projects in the following areas:

2.5.1 Local Council

The SAA would meet with strategic planners in local government to help them assess future infrastructure needs and architectural opportunities for competitions.

These might be small, straight-forward projects including amenities buildings, street furniture, play parks, shade structures, bus shelters, lighting installations, bridges and walkways, kiosks, picnic shelters.

They could also extend to larger, more complex community functions like libraries, recreation centres, youth centres, urban design, public domain upgrades, etc.

There could also be a social dimension to the design competitions. The SAA and planners may identify areas with social problems, allocate a budget and set a more open design competition. (see Kilburn Studios)

Council gets the benefit of a design competition, including the exhibition of exciting work, publicity for doing good, great design outcome and range of design possibilities without enormous cost.

The local community gets exposure to a range of architecture, democratising design and creating better general public engagement with architecture.

Emerging architecture practices gain experience in public building types. Unsuccessful entrants gain portfolio material. Successful entrants gain that all-important first foot in the door to public work. The benefit to the community is more choice in architectural practices providing good work.

2.5.2 State Government Departments

Similarly to LGAs, the SAA could target state government departments and institutions to identify areas where design competitions might add significantly to the public realm.

For example, the Department of Education could commission a competition for better shade structures and play areas across its whole portfolio. It could also run individual competitions on a needs basis for new school buildings. Hospitals could commission design installations for their public domain.

State Government departments could use the SAA to help it identify under utilised or empty facilities and run competitions for their adaptive reuse.

2.5.3 Large Developers

When a huge project is underway, the SAA would identify opportunities within it for smaller projects that may be run as competitions. This would diversify the language of architecture in a big project, and provide opportunities for younger, less experienced players. It also adds a critical edge to a project.

Building types might include public toilets, park pavilions, bridges, parks, individual community buildings.

2.5.4 Organisations with Building Stock/Leftover city spaces

The SAA could assist organisations with empty or under utilised building stock and run competitions for temporary uses, like the LAF's Kilburn Studios.

2.5.5 Historic Houses

Historic Houses could commission installations in its building stock, for example we saw 'We Made That' present a delightful project in London where they had inserted a fabric architecture into an historic house.



CONCLUSION

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Sydney has a lively and active architectural scene. We have great choice for talks and a growing culture of architecture exhibitions and festivals. We have many awards programs and a great design discourse in our local publishing.

What we don't have that we saw at our exchange with the London Architecture Foundation is an active architectural advocacy organisation identifying opportunities for architecture and facilitating the process of realising great projects.

A Sydney Architecture Agency could do just that. Identify organisations where the opportunity exists and help those organisations to realise excellent architecture.

The result would mean more opportunities for emerging practices. It would mean better architectural outcomes for our city. It would mean more public critical engagement with architecture.

IMAGE REFERENCES

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PG 12. The Oikos Project -Folke Koebberling
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PG 13. Just The Flip Side of The Wall - Post Works
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PG 14. South Kilburn Studios - Practice Architecture
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PG 15. Olympic Kiosk Competition - Octopi
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PG 16. 3 Mills - We Made That
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PG 17. Bankside Bike Shelter - Studio Meda
- <http://studiomeda.co.uk/index.php?project/bankside-bikeshed/>

PG 26. Olympic Park Amenities - Durbach Block Jaggers
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PG 26. Centennial Park Amenities - Lahz Nimmo Architects
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PG 26. Mosman Headland Amenities - Richard Leplastrier
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PG 29. Croome Withdrawing Room - We Made That
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