

- o Open Foundation ~
- Australian History
- o Lecturer: Margaret Henry

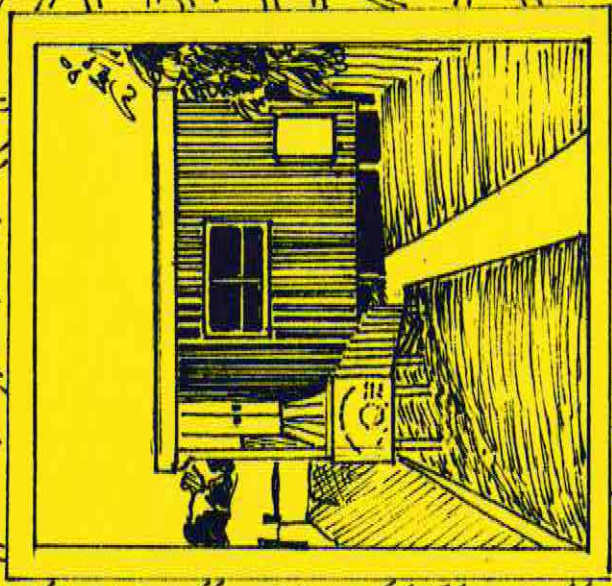
Oral History Project ~

Taped Interview ~ Transcript

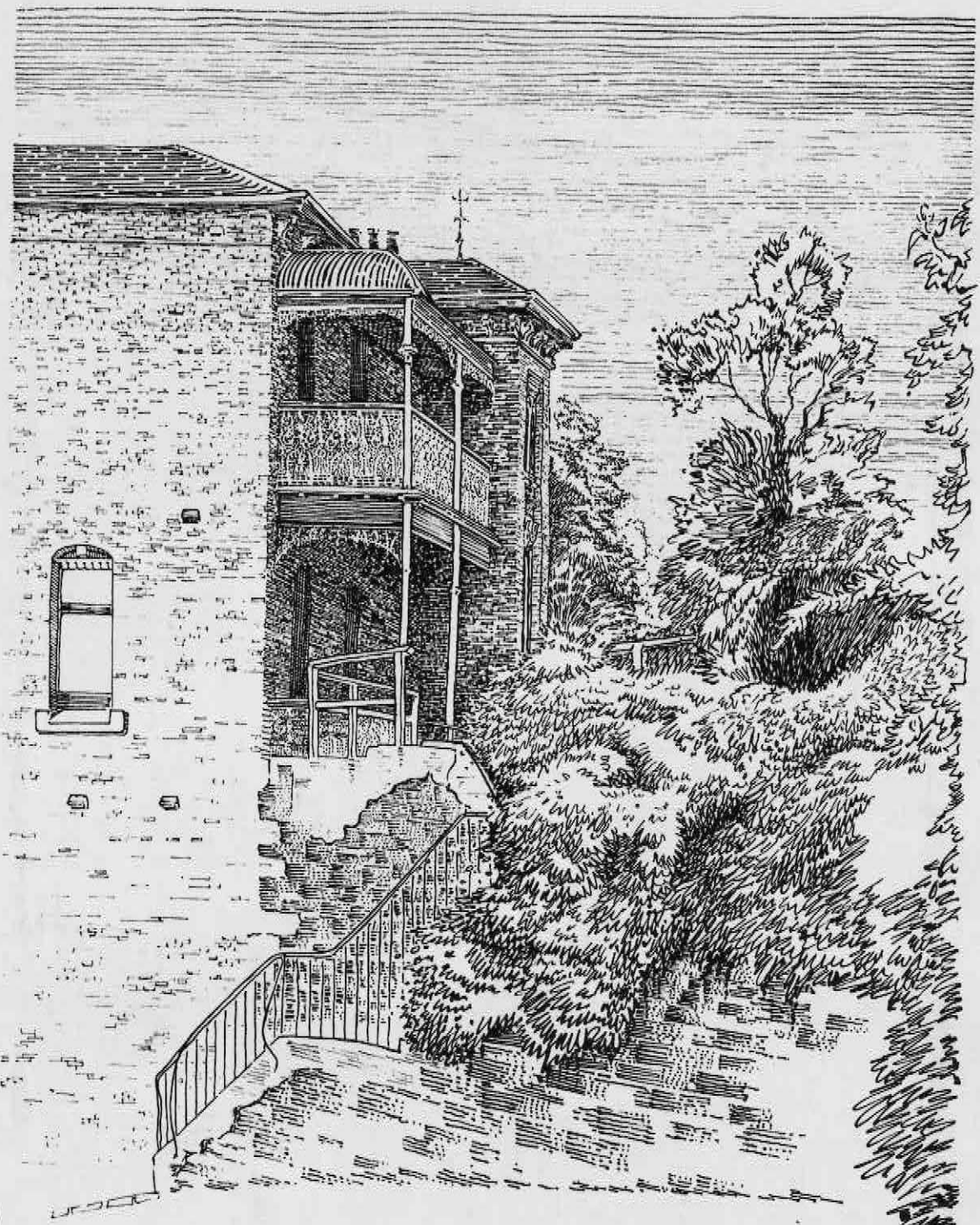
with Mr. Robin Winston

by Lee Williams

on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1989

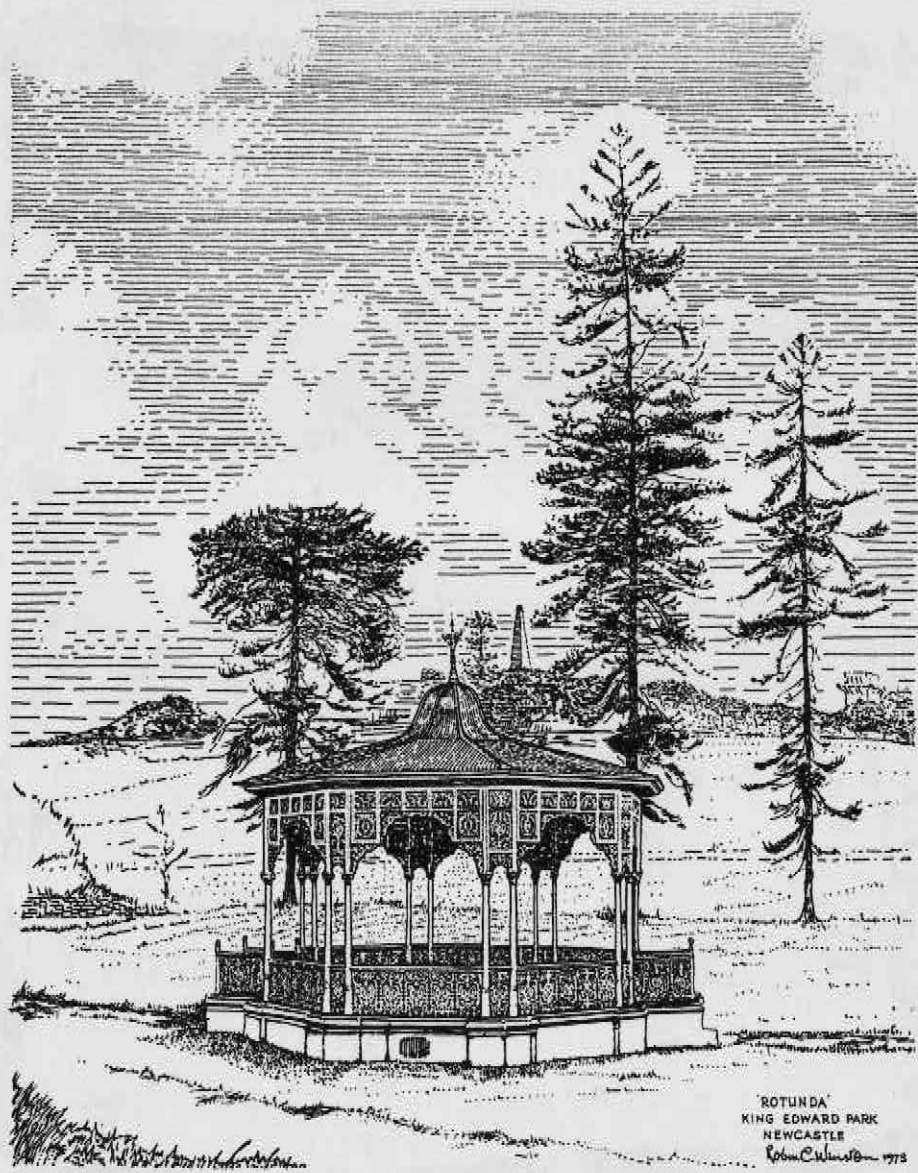


**Newcastle  
Printmakers  
Workshop**



Robin L. Winston 1976

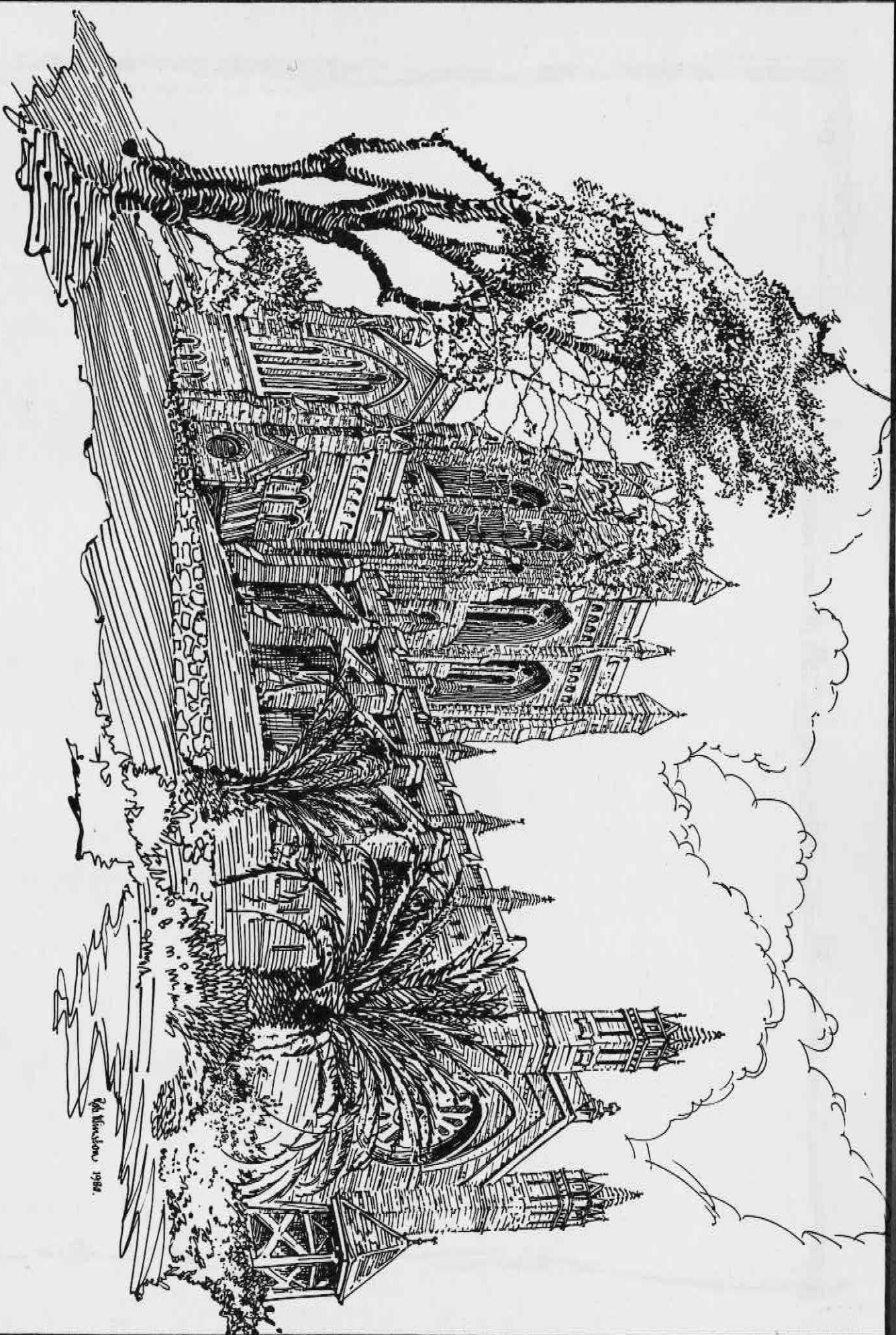
CHURCH ST  
NEWCASTLE



ROTUNDA  
KING EDWARD PARK  
NEWCASTLE  
Robin Chisholm 1973

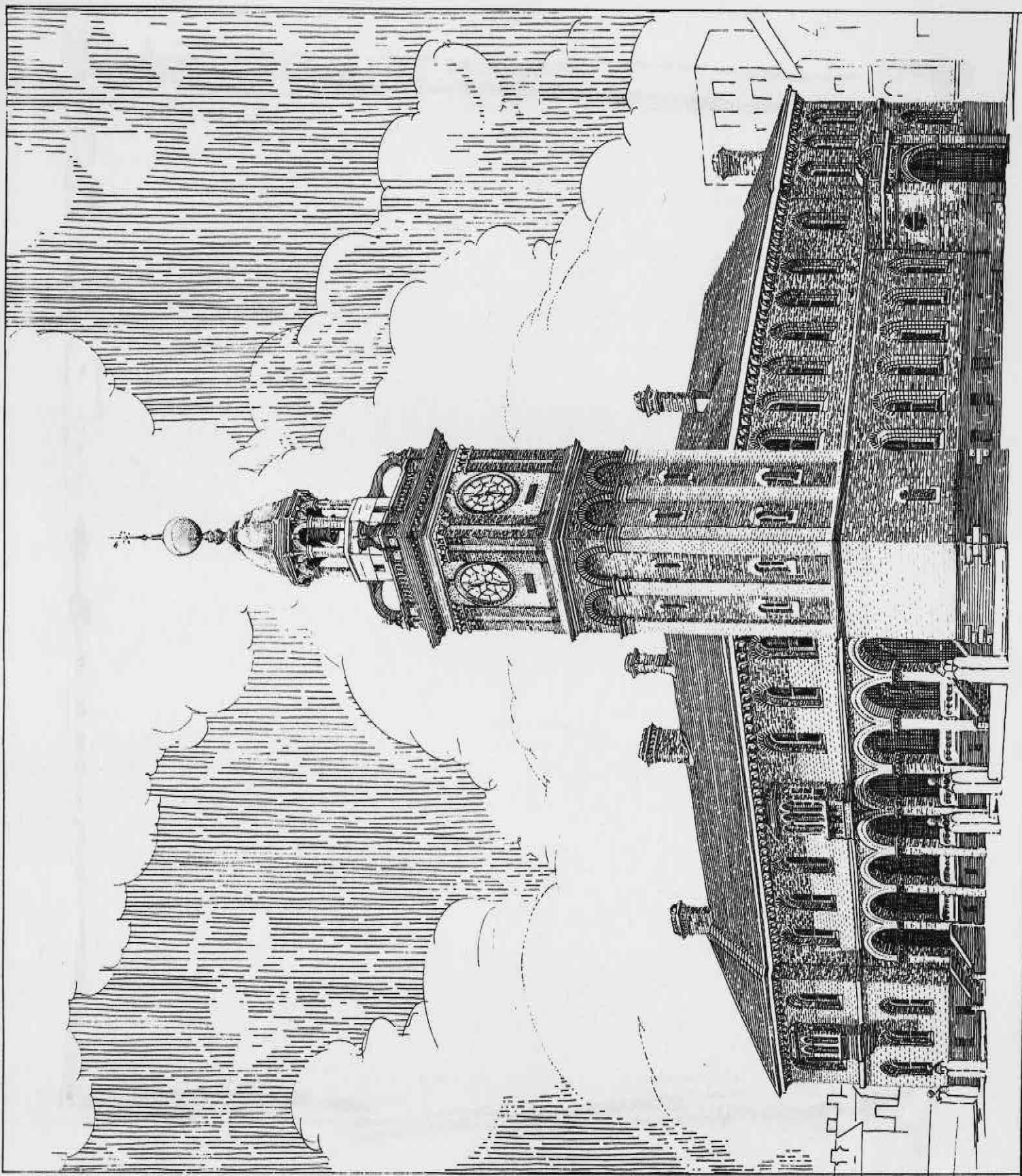


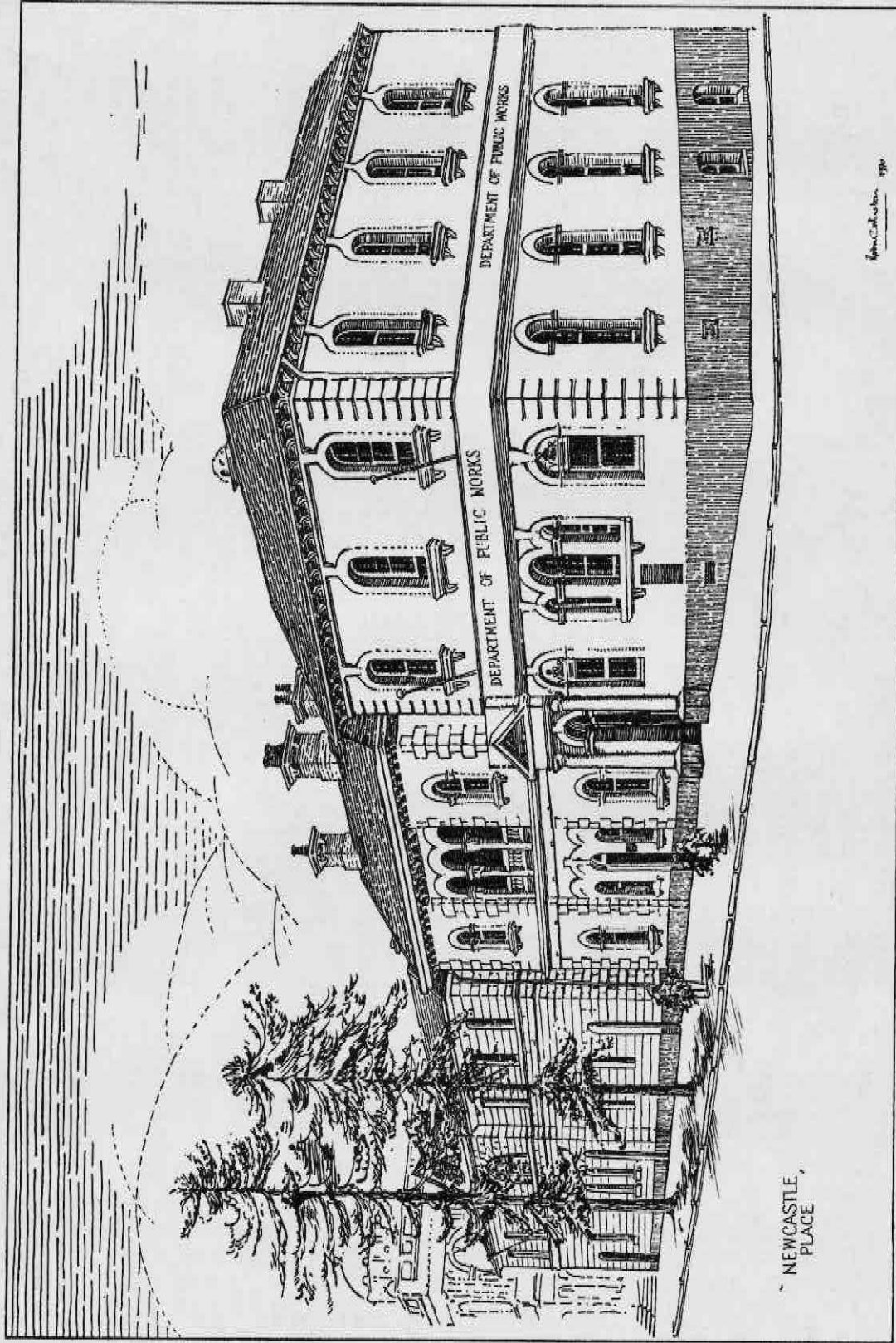
"THE PRINCE WHO GOT AWAY" ~ ROBIN WINSTON 1980



Ed. Henderson 1982

*an exhibition of original artists prints from newcastle printmakers*

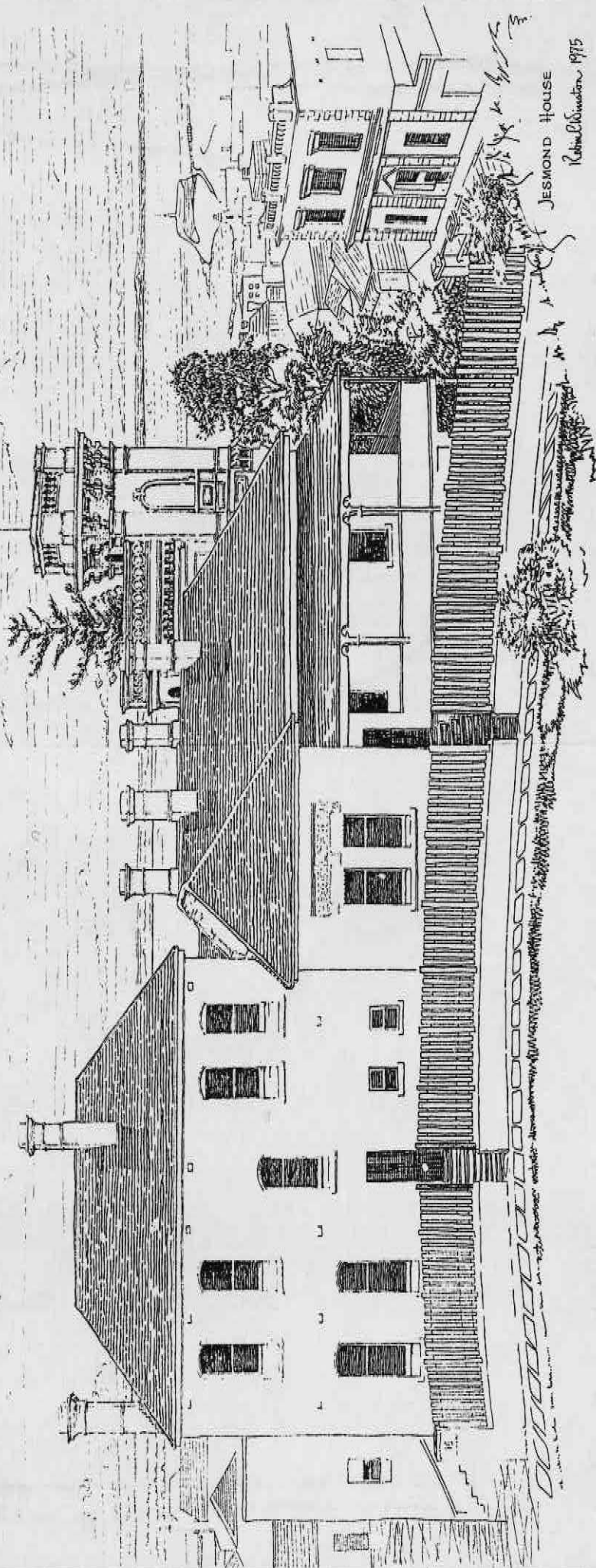




NEWCASTLE PLACE

James C. ... 1910





JESMOND HOUSE  
Ralph Robinson 1975

NEWCASTLE PRINTMAKERS WORKSHOP

ANNUAL EXHIBITION 1980



*COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE  
OF NEWCASTLE*

*UNION STREET &  
PARKWAY AVE*

*This Drawing for the Printmakers by Brigitte Hansen*

## HISTORY

The Newcastle Printmakers Workshop Inc. is a community based group of printmakers who work in all media. Established in 1979 as an independent, non profit organisation, it's aim is to provide access to equipment and workshop space for the benefit of practising artists, students, ex-students and beginners.

The group started in 1977 when a grant to run etching classes was made under the Community Arts Programme to the Newcastle Society of Artists. The first moves to form the NPW were made by participants of these etching classes, along with students, staff and recent graduates of the Newcastle College of Advanced Education, culminating in its formal constitution as a non profit community based workshop. Beginning with 15 paid up financial members, NPW membership is now approximately 60.

Current membership subscription rates are

Membership - \$30.00 per year.  
Concessional membership - \$15.00 (students unemployed and pensioners)  
Payments due 1st October.

## FACILITIES

EQUIPMENT - Two etching presses, hotplate aquatint box, etc., suitable for all types of etching, collagraphs and block prints.

Silk screen and dark room facilities.

A member hiring facilities also has the use of such auxiliary equipment as silk screens, squeegees, acids and aquatint as well as a small selection of rollers and hand etching tools... although these are usually supplied by the member. One is able to purchase grounds, bitumen, paper, zinc through the workshop at near cost price.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS include access to workshop facilities on a low fee paying basis. Current workshop hire fee is \$10 per day. a special rate is available to members for unlimited usage, \$75 per year, paid in advance. Hiring fees help cover workshop costs such as electricity, rates, etc. The workshop operates on a 24 hour basis requiring the fee to cover workshop key. This presently \$5 and refunded on the return of the key.

Membership also entitles printmakers to exhibit in annual exhibitions and to participate in weekend workshops and a variety of other projects.

Members also receive a workshop newsletter distributed quarterly in which members are encouraged to contribute, articles, information, cover designs, etc..

## 1989 THE AMAZING DECADE EXHIBITION CALENDAR

JAN.-19/FEB.5 Turpentine & Tar. Exhibition of Prints, Paintings Drawing & sculpture. Contemporary Gallery.

JUNE 4th & 5th.. GALA GALAH II  
N.P.W. 27 Popran Road, Adamstown.

AUGUST 4th to 21st..IN THE ACT Mini Print Show. The Heritage Centre, Hunter St, Newcastle.

SEPTEMBER 1st to 23rd. PRINTMAKERS AT THE LAKE, EXHIBITION. LAKE MACQUARIE GALLERY, SPEERS POINT.

DECEMBER 1st to 23rd THE AMAZING DECADE EXHIBITION, von Bertouch Galleries Newcastle.

# Newcastle Printmakers Workshop

WORKSHOP: 27 POPRAN RD  
ADAMSTOWN  
CORRESPONDENCE:  
P.O. Box 102, ADAMSTOWN  
2289

Today is Saturday, the 26th of August 1989. My name is Lee Williams and today I'm speaking to Mr Robin Winston at his home in Merewether. I'm interviewing Rob as a part of my Open Foundation - Australian History class. I'll be talking to Rob about the Printmakers Cooperative and how he has been involved with it over the years.

Lee: Firstly Rob, could you tell me how you did become a Printmaker?

Rob: Yes, thanks, uh, Lee. I suppose my beginnings in printmaking were, in the latter part of the 70's when we were working up at, uh, Tyrrell Street with the, uh, oh, just a group of us up there doing etching. Ah, I went up there with Gitte Hansen and there were about half a dozen of us there. Ah, we used to meet every Saturday at the, this was the uh, the Society of Artist's, uh, premises in those days, and we, we just used to meet there every Saturday and make prints.

Lee: Umm!

Rob: Ah, and from that it, it grew, more people came, and eventually we had, uh, a group. We got ourselves a constitution and set ourselves going. That would have been about 1979, I think, we finally got our constitution set up, and we were

working there at, uh, at Tyrrell Street until they took the buildings off us and that would have been about 1980 I suppose. After that we moved down to Parkway Avenue, ah, and the printmakers' workshop was set up down there in, as part of the Community Arts Centre, and that went on there for some years.

Lee: Right, um, what sort of techniques could you tell me about, well, what sort of techniques did you use in the printmaking, has it, and has it changed much over the years?

Rob: Well printmaking, well no, I would say that printmaking is one of the most traditional forms of art - we haven't really changed techniques. I guess some of the materials we've got today are, are more scientifically put together than they ever were in the old days, but printmaking goes right way back, centuries, you know, and it started off because many of the early artists, uh, who had done paintings, uh, there was no other form of reproduction much in those days, no colour lithography like we've got today. So they used to make uh, uh etching prints of their, ah, best paintings and, uh, they would make those prints for sale. So it goes back quite a long way, back to the, almost to the history of printing.

Lee: And what sort of tools do you use?

Rob: Well, um, the process of printmaking, there are 3, there are 3 forms of making prints, basically. Ah, one is called 'intaglio', one is called 'planematric', that is a surface type of printing, and the other one is the, ah, 'lino-block' type. Now, ah, the intaglio is the normal etching, and in that what you use is a groove on the plate that holds the ink and that, the paper is pushed into that groove, that inked groove and it takes the image out that way. Um, the planematric type of printing is the silk screen type, where there really isn't any, ah, any, uh, surface. Ah, the other sort is the lithograph - that is planematric too. There isn't any change in the dimension of the surface that you're printing from, okay? Ah, the other one if uh, the letter press type of printing, which is, ah, the thing like lino-block, where you roll up the surface and print from the surface onto the paper. Do you follow that?

Lee: Yep - sort of. (Laughter)

Rob: So there are basically three. So when you start looking at, ah, etching as a form, basically the things you use there are ah, um, a, a plate which can be either a zinc plate or a copper plate. In

the old days, they all used to use copper plates, now we use mostly zinc plates. Copper's become too expensive I suppose.

Lee: (Laughter)

Rob: The zinc plate then, you, you put a ground on that or a wax surface on that, and you work through the wax surface with, some sort of knife or blade, or scraper or pen or something, when you move the, ah, you draw the image through the wax onto the plate. And where you've scratched, scraped the wax off, of course, where you put the plate into the acid bath, then that's where the acid affects the plate, and cuts them, and then will take, ah, make a deep groove from the acid, and from that of course, then, you ink up and print from it. The most important part I suppose in all the printmaking is the press, ah, and the press is what really ah, brings the magic into prints.

Lee: Um, and so how did you, er get together all these machines, and, oh the printing press to ...

Rob: Yes, I guess that's one of the things about printmaking that's most important is that you need the, the equipment, and as a result of that, ah, it becomes more of a community type of art than

most others and ah, it all sort of revolves around the press, the whole thing and I guess we, we, it means that once you get your cooperative together or your group of people together then you can start acquiring more expensive types of equipment that you couldn't have personally and, ah, we got our first press. The first press we had was one that belonged to the Society of Artists that were working up in Tyrrell Street and, ah, we eventually bought that from them, and, ah, later on about 1985 I guess it was thereabouts, we, we had a grant from the Commonwealth Government to buy the big press that we've got now, ah we were at that time out at the Parkway Avenue, um I think you're aware that Parkway Avenue, sort of the Community Arts Centre moved from there and at that time the printmakers, would have been about 2 years ago, purchased a little hall out at Adamstown where they're all working now, and so ....

Lee: So you've moved around a bit .....

Rob: Yes, we've moved around a bit, I think we've settled down out at Adamstown now, and in the course of all of that also, when we started to acquire property, we, uh, set ourselves up as a company, so, it's a, it's a, formed as a company



it is an area, ah, of which we're much more aware now, of the beginnings of things. I guess that was partly why the, why the printmakers started work there on that project. The idea of the project was to talk to all the community, document what they had to say about the history of the place, and also for all the printmakers that were involved in that project, they produced their own images, ah, they did their own work looking back into, ah, the history of Newcastle East; developed their own images and made their own prints, and made their own kind of interpretation of the thing. That was finally put together in an, ah, in a .. exhibition that was held at the Gallery here - matter of fact it was an exhibition they asked me to open it. They got me into that because, as you know, I'm involved in town planning, (Yeah!) and I guess being a printmaker and a Town Planner as well, they thought - well Rob Winston should be able to do something about - know something about Newcastle East. So we had a couple of meetings up at Newcastle East during the whole of, during the preparation of the work, and then ultimately it was opened at the Gallery. That opening, that particular thing, that was very interesting and it was quite well attended. The Gallery was full, uh, for the opening and, uh, a lot of people from New....you know there had been

now under the Societies Act.

Lee: Um ...

Rob: So it's well established.

Lee: Right, um, they've been, oh, with printmaking ..It does document history?

Rob: Yep!

Lee: Yeah, you've done a couple of er, bigger workshops like the Newcastle East End and the Store. Would you like to tell us a bit about inspiration perhaps or your involvement with the East End- before and after.

Rob: Well, I never had too much involvement with the East End and after myself, it was done, um by, uh, the printmakers. What they were interested in was the social history of Newcastle East in many ways. That was an area in which, um, there had been, ah, a lot of controversy about the future planning of Newcastle East and there had from that, and also it was an area with a lot of history, a lot of social history, a lot of, ah a lot of background to Newcastle East. It was the beginning of European settlement in Newcastle, so,

of what happened with the Store, and how it grew and prospered and became what it was and how it eventually withered away. So it was quite an interesting exercise for the printmakers, and ah, again they put on an exhibition - it was the first exhibition for the new museum here (Right!) - the Newcastle Regional Museum. It was the first thing that was put up in there - so, uh, they got up, were the first there. But uh, that was again a lot of work, a lot of, ah, people documenting history and so forth.

Lee: Well, how .... what sort of time are we looking at to prepare for something like that, for an exhibition?

Rob: With the kind of resources printmaking's got, you'd probably be looking at, um, 8 months.

Lee: 8 months, ummm!

Rob: To get all that together - ummm. You don't produce either, you don't produce your editions of etchings and prints in 5 minutes either.

Lee: And how much would .... or how big an edition would you print on each particular thing? You wouldn't ....

a lot of people from Newcastle East and from Newcastle that were featured in a lot of the drawings and so forth, so it was, it was quite popular.

Lee: So they talked to people who had lived there, and for a long time in that area.

Rob: That's right. Part of the thing was to make tapes of the old identities there and to interview them and to get their thoughts down on paper about the early days there and also to, uh, they made a videotape, uh, which documents some of the history of Newcastle East. The exhibition itself has been um, acquired by the National Gallery, and uh, in Canberra, so the printmakers did quite well out of that.

Lee: What about, uh, with the Store, what was the, or the ideas or ....

Rob: Well, that was a similar kind of ...

Lee: Same, similar type of thing?

Rob: Yes, in a way. It's again using art to look at social history and the environment. And they were interested then in, uh, doing, uh, a documentation

and so forth - but it's a lot of fun.

Lee: Yeah, it must be quite a, a sensation too when you finally do get that print through (Yes!) for the first (Yes!) time - see what it looks like.

Rob: I guess that's one of the things about printmaking - there is a magic between what you've got on the plate and what, and what you produce as the print, print. You know, really, there is some magic that happens there. And, again you know, when you start making them, and you start off with a new plate, you, um, it becomes a challenge in the end, because things go wrong or, or things change, and then you've got to adapt that plate to get the image you want and uh, really you've got to learn to live with that plate and make it work. You know, so it's, it becomes quite a challenge. Of course, by the time you get to the edition stage, so you do a lot of proofs, (Yeah!) a lot of changes in adaptation of the plate.

Lee: And do they - what do you think would probably be the most widely used in Newcastle form of printing - like are colours used very often or is it mainly .....

Rob: This is gravure printing. (Ummm!) Well, most of

Rob: No, uh, generally I think most printmakers, you know, in local area like Newcastle would probably do about 20 prints, you know 20-25 prints at the biggest for an edition. Depends how well known you are I suppose, and how many you think you're going to sell. So that's a fairly important think in printmaking, of course the paper is quite expensive too, so you don't want to be doing a ... and it's a, it's a big effort to do an edition of prints. You have to prepare all your paper in advance - that has to be done a couple of days ahead of the actual editioning, and then each print is produced by hand. You've got to ink up your plate, and uh, each plate then is, each print is produced on the press by putting the paper over the plate and running it through. It's, um, you know, you'd be producing each print would probably take a quarter of an hour or 20 minutes I'd say, so if you're doing 25 it's quite a big ....

Lee: Umm, quite time-consuming ...

Rob: It's a long day's work

Lee: Yeah, burning the midnight oil (Laughter).

Rob: You walk hundreds of miles around and round that press cleaning the plate - and inking things up

art has been seen as the, the painting, that's painted and hung on a wall or put in a gallery or whatever. But there are a lot of other forms of art which are variously referred to as public art or whatever and a lot of that's been statues and things like that that are put in parks. That's not exactly what I'm talking about. What I'm talking, ah, about is the form of art, ah, that would help to express the identity of place. And, it's something that people should get involved in, ah, the sort of thing where one would, perhaps, get a Town Artist or employ a person to get ..... or an artist to get involved with the community, ah, and to research the identity of an area ah, and then come up with, with an image or a concept that would express that identity in some sort of art form. And, it could be any kind of work, um; for example, the, we've been talking about fibre art at one ... earlier and that's, that could easily be a form of um, of town art, in the sense that we could, well we have seen a number of tapestries done for various public places and I suppose today with the numbers of ah, areas that are available, which are enclosed, we've got all our shopping centres and places like that with large spaces of enclosed um, public area where you could have fibre arts hung, ah, tapestries, and, and indeed a lot of fibre art can be of a

them, ah, you can use colour printing for uh, for etchings, but, they generally, uh, that means you've got to have a separate plate for each colour and there's a lot of work in it.

Lee: Ah, sounds a bit harder too.

Rob: The other forms - well uh, mostly the silk screen printing is done with uh, with colour. (Ummm!) There's quite a lot of that - um, they have ah, some silk screen, screen equipment at the printmakers, but uh, it's mostly etching that they, they get interested in.

Lee: Okay. In your role as the Assistant Director of Town Planning, in what ways do you think art contributes to the community?

Rob: Well, Newcastle, ah, has been, the council has been fairly interested in looking at ways of introducing art into the environment, I guess, um. It's, we've, we've got what we call a town art committee at the moment which we've been ah, looking at various ways in which we can get a better sense of identity to our town. It's, it's not an easy process and it's, it's been slow to get anything going at all with it. But what I'm talking about here is the fact that traditionally



lines, you mean more community orientated where people get in there and .....

Rob: Mind you, town art can be anything. (Ummm!) It can even be an art festival if you like or a (Yeah!) festival in the town .....

Lee: Yeah, or like musicians in the park (Yeah ...) or that sort of thing (....that sort of thing!) Yeah!

Rob: It can be a wide range of expressions; and you know, there's been a lot of talk about, you know, kids painting murals on, on boards (Ummm!) and fences.

Lee: There's some down the bottom of west end there, isn't there.

Rob: That's right, yes - so what we're looking at there is a way of getting the community involved in what they see around them.

Lee: Ummm, are, are Newcastle people - do they tend to get involved in community type things?

Rob: Yes, I think so - I think we've got a very strong uh, .....

sculpture type; and, there are other sorts, there are ceramic arts and all those kinds of things that can be out in the environment instead of hung up in galleries. Ah, that's, that's one of the important things that I see - to do with ah, improving our environment and it has to do with the urban design of our cities. Ah, so, ah, I see that as something fairly important - what we're leading to in the council is to ah, set up a system whereby an artist can approach the Council with a concept for an area and, ah, if it's a public place, then the Council can look at it and see whether that particular concept is acceptable and that piece of artwork would be acceptable to the Council. Cause you'll understand there's been a degree of embarrassment about some of these things in the past, where people that were artists have come to the Council to give them a gift of some artwork or other and it may or may not be suitable. So, what we're doing is setting up the guidelines to enable those sort of things to happen, without there being embarrassment (Right!) or that kind of thing, and indeed, to involve the community.

Lee: Ummm, like people like, I think I've seen church groups and things get together and make big (Yep!) tapestries and that sort of thing - so along those

the, round about that time we left Tyrrell Street, we were all pretty keen with the Society of Artists to set up a Community Arts Centre. And ah, the Dept. of Education, the Regional Director at that time, ah, said we could use the Parry Street area, and ah, so we all moved down there when Tyrrell Street was taken back as a school, and they, ah, they did it up and made it, it was a ah, rather a magnificent building in the end, ah, it wasn't like that when we were there, but it, it is a, a historic building and it was restored and put back as a school. We left there and went down to uh, to the Parry Street area there and uh, set up the Community Art Centre there as well. And, uh, again I was an early chairman, well I was the original chairman of that.

Lee: How many people do you think were, or how many people were at that time involved with the printmakers? That ...

Rob: Oh, we didn't have too many then - I think we had about uh, oh about 25 or so. Now I think they've got upwards of 80 or so.

Lee: Ummm, so it's growing?

Rob: It's growing, yes - oh, it's become quite strong

Lee: Bond, or ....

Rob: No, we've got a very strong lot of artists in this town. I guess that's one of the important, uh, things about Newcastle. We've had two art schools, we've had the Tech. College and the, um, what was formerly the C.A.E., now the H.I.H.E., producing a lot of artists in this town over a long period of time. So uh, there's a lot of ability and a lot of skill out there which we need to be tapping into. Well, of course, the Town Art side of things is fairly important from an economic point of view, in that a lot of writers and researchers have, have pointed out the, the value of this to the town in terms of bringing tourism in and bringing life to the city.

Lee: Well that was another reason that the printmakers, um, you know you've got all these people coming out of art courses and things, that was another reason that you, you formed that workshop so they'd have somewhere to, to go. (Yeah!) Is that right? Yeah!

Rob: That was the idea of it - and the other thing that I've been involved in, see I've, I guess between Gitte Hansen and myself - I, I was the first foundation chairman of the ah, Printmakers. And

couldn't spend any money on them. In the end, the Tech College acquired the site and they've turned it into something else now. But luckily for the Community Art Centre, the Council has now stepped in and they've acquired St Aloysius High School and the Community Art Centre is establishing itself there right now. So we're hopeful that that will be, what shall we say, the centre of where we begin with our town art work for council - to bring the community together.

Lee: Very good, and is it very hard to become a member of the printmakers or be a part of the Community Art Centre?

Rob: No. The printmakers - anybody can join.

Lee: Like, I mean to say, I'm just sketching or etchings and think, I might like to learn more about it?

Rob: And as part of their constitution one of their objectives is to involve the community in what they're doing. And, they get some funding, and if you get any funding from the Australia council or from the office of the Minister for Arts, well you are involved as part of that funding in getting community involvement in the whole procedure. So,

now. (Yeah!) There was a period there when we thought it might not continue, ah, ....

Lee: That'd be sad ...

Rob: Well, it would have been .. you kind of .... with a lot of those things, you put so much work into them that you feel, you know, ah, worried about them if they, if they start to, ah, to founder, but we were uh, ah, it, it really has, it has to depend on, on a group. It can't be the same people all the time. So um, ..... um, early 80's I got rather more involved in the Community Art Centre and the printmakers sort of carried on, and, and really has gone from strength to strength. I think it's quite well established now.

Lee: That's good.

Rob: The Community Arts Centre I can't quite say the same about. It's been struggling. It's main problem was, having moved out to that area down there at Parkway Avenue, um, the Education Dept. then was uncertain about what sort of tenure they were prepared to let it have. The buildings became rather run down, and since the Community Art Centre didn't have any tenure over them, they

printmakers.

Rob:

Yeah, sure. It goes back a fair way now, horrible to admit it, but it's true. I started work up in Queensland in fact, with the survey office there. I started as a cartographer, that was in the fifties. In those days we used to draw maps by hand, a lot different to what's done today. I guess from that it became - it was part of my work there to learn how to use Indian ink and a pen, and do precise lettering on a map. And I guess, I guess that was part of my first skills in being able to put penwork down and do linework and drawing and ah, later on that career developed, I also got involved in Brisbane before I left there with the Twelfth Night Theatre doing, ah, a lot of backdrops and so forth, and I used to do decore and stage management and all that kind of thing so that was a lot of fun too. But when, I came to Newcastle, that was 1960, I came here to work for the old Northumberland County Council in town planning. And, subsequently that became the State Planning Authority, which has not a great deal to do with art - but I guess when you get involved with town planning, you are involved with aesthetics a lot, and maybe they're environmental aesthetics and so forth, but it is important to have a background of being able to judge on

Printmakers do run workshops and, I think they've got one on this weekend as a matter of fact, and they have their own functions, workshops; they have training sessions for people - and I guess for anybody who wanted to join you would take out membership, you would be able to do some courses, they wouldn't let you at large with their workshop until you had been trained and supervised and knew what you were doing. (Yes!) After that it's open, and you can go in there, you need to pay for the time you use the thing of course but ah, you can go in there and use the workshop and do your own printing, so it. As well as those community things, it's open to the printmakers to go in there at anytime and work on their artwork. So it does have a degree of community involvement - they run several workshops a year - they run a number of shows of prints during the year. They have a number of exhibitions - they have one at Lake Macquarie Gallery shortly to open in a couple of weeks time, so they're pretty busy.

Lee:

Well, Rob, we didn't really get to talk about your background - so before we finish, if you don't mind, if you could tell us something about the development of your career and how it sort of incorporated your involvement with the



do a bit of work for it - not doing the art work as much as running the organisation.

Lee: We need people like that.

Rob: I guess so. But nevertheless, I think that both those two things that have been started here, the Community Art Centre and the printmakers, have been important to the city and the next things I would like to see going, as I say, is the Town Art idea and I want to see that pushed a lot further. So that we can get with some of our bigger developments, so we can get some reasonable artwork, environmental artwork, prepared with it.

Lee: Is part of that really keeping together heritage, like you know, the buildings and things like that?

Rob: It all relates to heritage because - and I guess that's one of the things we could say about Newcastle is that it does have a lot of heritage building. It was lucky to escape, I suppose, lucky to escape the demolition and change that occurred in most cities in the sixties and early seventies. So, we've still got a lot of our earlier buildings still intact here so we were fairly fortunate in that. They've been a couple of close shaves you know, where we've nearly lost

aesthetic things. I then went and did further studies which took me further into my interests in art, I guess. So that more recently I've been doing a course in fibre art at the C.A.E. or H.I.H.E. as we now call it.

Lee: How long a course is that?

Rob: It's been a four year course and I'm in my last year of it now. So I know something about fibre art now. Fibre art is to do with weaving, tapestries --anything to do with fibre -- with art that uses fibre so paper making, printing on cloth, so we do a lot of printing there too, really not too far removed from my printmaking experience I guess.

Lee: And you have an Arts degree as well, don't you?

Rob: Yes, that was well back in the sixties. So it's been an interesting career; it's sort of been, been mostly to do with town planning - but as I say, I've always had an interest in the Arts and that's why I've been involved with printmakers and the art world. Somehow or other, I don't know quite why, whenever I get involved in these sort of organisations I finish up being at some stage being Chairman or something like that, having to

you know, the most important elements, but we've managed to keep them, and I think now it's one of those community values, that you shall not touch a historic item. I think people's attitudes have changed quite a lot over the last ten years. But as I say, there is a place, I think, for the artist in urban design, in environmental art, as well as art that hangs on gallery walls.

Lee: Well, that's great. Thank you very, very much Rob for this afternoon. You've been wonderful - and for all your help in putting it together.

Rob: Thanks very much Lee. It's been really ... I've really enjoyed doing this. Bye now.

Lee: Bye.

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OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

LECTURER: MARGARET HENRY

TERM 2 RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

DUE: 30 / 8 / 89

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TOPIC

HISTORY OF THE NEWCASTLE PRINTMAKERS WORKSHOP

1000 WORDS

BY LEE WILLIAMS

TIME LECTURE: 7.00 - 9.00 p.m. WEDNESDAY

The relationship between the artist and the general community can often be a fragile one. Despite the acknowledged aesthetic values of the artistic domain, there still exists the idea of art as a mere diversion; an entertainment, with little relevance to the day to day lives of the average citizen. Perhaps the cultural wealth of the community itself can be estimated by the interweaving of the aesthetic and mundane, to provide something of lasting interest and relevance to a significant proportion of the community.

The Newcastle Printmakers Workshop, (NPW), created initially as a forum for the devotees of the craft has developed over a decade into a flourishing co-operative. It seeks its inspiration, in part, from the local geography and history of the Newcastle area. Utilising the rich sources of Newcastle's earlier years, the individual printmakers have produced not only artistically valid works, but also have allowed their talents to highlight a historical perspective of our city far removed from the usually staid historical journals. The development of NPW is a vibrant example of the relevance of art to the community, and indeed a model for the structure of many community based organisations.

The Newcastle Printmakers Workshop was officially inaugurated in June, 1979. Its foundation had its origins with a small group of etchers who met semi-regularly on Saturday afternoons in the Tyrrell Street Arts Centre. The necessary communal basis of printmaking as an art form encouraged the formation of a more permanent entity. The group was formalised

and a constitution was drawn up. The aims of the workshop can be encapsulated as follows:-

"The Newcastle Printmakers Workshop is a community based, non-profit organisation with the objective of providing a facility for printmakers to meet and work, as well as a means for greater community understanding of, and interest in, this art form."<sup>1</sup>

A ready supply of interested participants from the Technical College and the College of Advanced Education coupled with the general community saw a rise in the number of interested people, with the result that by mid-1980, there were approximately 25 people involved in the group. The hardware eg. the printing press, was on loan from the Newcastle Society of Artists, with most other prerequisites supplied on an individual level by each artist. As is the case for many community based organisations, the Workshop relied heavily on the good graces of various government bodies. When the Department of Education reallocated the Tyrrell Street premises for use as a school, the Printmakers and the Artists' Society were rehoused in the old Teachers' College site at the corner of Union Street and Parkway Avenue, The Junction. The NPW remained as part of this Community Arts Centre till mid to late 1987 when they purchased their own workshop premises at 27 Popran Rd, Adamstown from the Newcastle Photographic Society. This permanent home has provided a firm foundation for the group, as its fixed tenure there has relieved

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<sup>1</sup>. Constitution - NEWCASTLE PRINTMAKER'S WORKSHOP 1st edition, June 1979

the nagging worry of forced relocation. With the problem of accommodation solved and with necessary capital equipment eg. presses, acquired from the proceeds of both government grants and enthusiastic fundraising, the Workshop has begun a more productive period, turning its attention to greater community involvement.

The art of printmaking encompasses four different techniques. Basically these are letterpress, intaglio, planigraphic and stencil. Letterpress is the form used by wood block or lino block in which the image is printed directly from relief surfaces i.e. inked surfaces. Intaglio is a generic term which includes engravings, dry points, mezzotints and etchings. An intaglio plate is one that has been engraved or cut into by acid. Like letterpress, it depends upon differences in relief of the printing plate, but it is directly opposite to letterpress. Ink is held in grooves and the paper pressed by means of a roller into the grooved lines to receive the image. Etched plates are printed in this manner.

Lying halfway between letterpress and intaglio are planigraphic processes, which are also known as lithographic from the stones originally used, in which the plate surface is neither grooved nor raised. Instead this method is based on the principle that grease and water are mutually repellent. Thus the image is developed in greasy ink on the plate and washed from the non-greasy parts with water during the printing process. The final method referred to, stencil printing, is used in techniques

such as silkscreen, where the image is developed by making the screen either pervious or impervious to the ink. The number of prints made from each plate i.e. the size of the edition, is a matter for the artist, however, there are technical limitations depending upon the process and materials used by the artist. These various techniques of printmaking have existed in the same basic form for centuries.

Most of the members of the NFW are primarily interested in etchings. Although etching has been practised from as early as the 15th century, it wasn't until the time of Rembrandt and his contemporaries that it became a developed art form. Etching differs from other forms of art such as sketching or painting in that the artist does not actually work on the print itself but on a metal plate. Rob Winston recalled the old days when either a copper or zinc plate was used, but nowadays, due to the expense of copper, zinc or steel is more commonly utilised.<sup>2</sup> This plate eventually becomes the tool whereby any number of prints can be produced. The plate itself is not an etching, but is referred to as the 'etched plate'.<sup>3</sup>

The equipment used has, of course, advanced on a technical level, but the principles involved have remained unaltered. The tools required for the printmaking process are capital intensive, especially the printing press, and it is rare that an individual

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<sup>2</sup>. Transcript of Taped Interview with Robin Winston  
26-6-87 Lee Williams

<sup>3</sup>. Manly Banister Etching and other Intaglio Techniques  
Littlefield, Adams & Co. New Jersey 1974 p.4



artist could finance such a framework on a personal level. Thus printmaking becomes a more community type of art than most others, and tends to centre on the press itself. Rob Winston believes ".....the most important part in all the printmaking is the press ... and the press is what brings the magic into prints."<sup>4</sup> Usually it is governmental education bodies which possess the necessary capital to finance these acquisitions, but working too dependently with these organisations can be frustrating, as the Printmakers found during their enforced relocations. The acquisition of their own press and workshop area was perhaps the most crucial factor in assuring the permanence of the NPW. From the half dozen or so individual printmakers meeting on a Saturday afternoon, the group has swollen, using the skills of such identities as foundation chairman Rob Winston and local artist Gitte Hansen among others, to its present status as a flourishing local concern with membership around the seventy mark.

The growth of the NPW over the years has brought it into close contact with the community at large. Many regular and successful exhibitions have been held, highlighting the talents of the Workshop's members.<sup>5</sup> Over recent years, the NPW has been involved in a number of more communal projects which have taken a historical look at our area, with interesting interpretations afforded by the individual printmakers. They have undertaken two

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<sup>4</sup>. Transcript of Taped Interview ...

<sup>5</sup>. Andrew Sayers Hunter Valley Printmakers - Newcastle Region Art Gallery 1984 p.5

main projects: a social history of the Newcastle East End area in the early 80's, and a major Bicentennial project examining the history of the Newcastle Cooperative Store, from its inception to its demise in 1981. The coordinator of both these projects was Therese Kenyon.

It is worth considering these projects in some detail as they exemplify the manner in which the NPW has made a contribution to the community outside the usual exhibition platform. Both the projects examined subjects close to the heart of Novocastrians - one was a geographical area under threat, while the other was an economic and social structure which finally gave way to the competition of the ever-expanding consumer society. The East End, the area of the first European settlement in Newcastle was, and is, under threat of commercial and residential development. Newcastle East as described by John Turner is one of the most historic areas in Australia.... And the whole area has the greatest national significance.♣ The living history inherent in both the buildings and residents of the area was presented to a public that too often forsakes all that is past for their perception of better things to come. Co-ordinated by Therese Kenyon, the Printmakers brought their individual artistic talents to bear on the riches of the East End to create an impression of the area as it was in years gone by. As well as the visual artistic representations of the printmakers, interviews were carried out with local identities and residents

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♣. John Turner Photos of Old Newcastle Stockton 1979  
p.19

of the area, and a video tape was compiled of these interviews. The whole project was presented in an exhibition at the Newcastle Gallery, and its success led to it being acquired by the National Gallery.

The use of art to examine social history and the environment was strongly in evidence in the NFW's Bicentennial project. The project had two aims -

" ...to allow our printmaking group the opportunity to work within the community ..... and to explore the co-operative ethic .... in particular the Newcastle & Suburban Co-operative Society." <sup>7</sup>

The people who were part of this retail institution were aging, and the opportunity to collect and record information was invaluable. The information collected provided the stimulus for the printmakers to document the history of the Store, flavoured by their own particular artistic interpretation. As with the East End project, interviews were carried out with former employees of the Store, and many photographs and memorabilia were loaned to the exhibition. The exhibition was the first held at the Newcastle Regional Museum, and presented a comprehensive documentation of the history of the Store; and indeed, a history of Newcastle itself.

These two projects are prime examples of the contribution the Newcastle Printmakers Workshop has made to the Newcastle area.

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<sup>7</sup>. Margaret Hughes and Joy Longworth The Store A Co-operative Phenomenon Newcastle 1988 The Store A Co-operative Phenomenon p.39

The use of individual talents, funded by public support, adds considerable interest to the study of our local society. Projects such as this serve to break down the barriers between the artist and the community.<sup>8</sup>

The future of the NPW seems assured. Membership is around seventy and a permanent location has been settled. The growing appreciation by the general public of 'the finer things in life' ensures that exhibitions of the future will be well supported. The Printmakers themselves are constantly involved in the training and development of novice printers. For example, a series of workshops for young Hunter Valley artists was conducted this year. These were designed to provide tuition in etching, screenprinting, lino and woodcuts and collograph and will culminate with an exhibition at the Hunter Heritage Centre in October.<sup>9</sup> In the true spirit of the co-operative, the techniques of the craft are passed on, for the benefit of the community as a whole. One must remember that society must make room for the arts. Without the contribution of the Printmakers and their kin, the community would be a barren place indeed. Community art is more than decoration; it makes a statement as to the health and well-being of the community itself. The Newcastle Printmakers Workshop has in the past and will in the future provide this insight into Newcastle and its people. This year, 1989, celebrates a decade of successful operation and the .....

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<sup>8</sup>. Ibid. p. 42

<sup>9</sup>. Newcastle Printmaker's Workshop Newsletter, July-Sept. 1989 Newcastle

"growing recognition of Newcastle Printmakers for both its standard of work and its efforts in promotion of the art."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>. Newcastle Printmaker's Workshop - Chairman's Report to the Second Annual General Meeting - Robin Winston  
18-7-81 p.2

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Hunter Valley Printmakers, Newcastle, 1984
- Turner, J.,            Photos of Old Newcastle Stockton , 1979

### Newsletters:

Newcastle Printmakers' Workshop - Newsletter July-Sept, 1989

### Unpublished Documents:

Constitution - Newcastle Printmakers' Workshop, 1st Edition, June, 1979

Newcastle Printmakers' Workshop - Chairman's Report to the 2nd Annual General Meeting, Robin Wilson

Transcript of Taped Interview with Robin Winston, 26/8/89 by Lee Williams

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

LECTURER: MARGARET HENRY

TERM 2 : RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

DUE: 30 / 8 / 89

SUMMARY OF TAPED INTERVIEW WITH ROBIN WINSTON

500 WORDS

BY LEE WILLIAMS

TIME LECTURE: 7.00 - 9.00 p.m. WEDNESDAY

Robin Winston began his career in Queensland in the 1950's as a cartographer. Maps during this period were drawn by hand and it was a part of Rob's position to master the use of indian ink and pen in order to produce precise lettering on these maps. Before leaving Brisbane, Rob also enjoyed a stint with the Twelfth Nights Theatre where he helped in the preparation of backdrops and stage sets. In 1960, Rob moved to Newcastle, and began working for the old Northumberland County Council in town planning. He has had an interesting career which has lead him to his present position as the Assistant Director of Town Planning and enabled him to incorporate both his interests in the environment and the art world. He has had much influence in the development of both the Newcastle Printmakers workshop, (NPW), and the Community Art Centre and is enthusiastic to see the introduction of town art into the environment.

The NPW had it's beginnings in the Society of Artists premises in Tyrrell Street towards the later part of the 1970's. Half a dozen people or so including Rob Winston and Brigitte Hansen would meet each Saturday to partake in their love of printmaking. This small group steadily grew and by 1979 a constitution was drawn up establishing the NPW. In 1980, a move became inevitable and the NPW was relocated to Community Arts Centre at Parkway Avenue. This was to be their home for approximately seven years before a small hall was purchased at Adamstown from the Photographic Society. During the course of this the NPW started to acquire property and formed a company under the Society's Act.



A number of workshops are conducted each year and during the course of its operation the Printmakers have produced some highly successful exhibitions. The Newcastle East End Before and After was one such workshop and part of its inspiration lay in the controversial future planning of Newcastle East. The printmakers were interested in capturing some of the social history associated with this historic area. The idea of the project was to talk to members of the community, to document their thoughts and memories of the area, whilst at the same time producing their own images and interpretation through prints. The exhibition itself was acquired by the National Gallery.

The Store - A Co-operative Phenomenon was a similar approach and Rob described that once again it was a way of using art to look at social history and the environment. Ex-employees of the Store were interviewed and the printmakers also produced their own images of days gone past. They were keen to document this landmark of Newcastle, to deal with its prosperous beginnings, how it grew and later withered away. This was a Bi-centennial project which was to be the first exhibition for the new Newcastle Regional Museum. Generally for an exhibition of this size, eight months would be required for research and preparation.

The Newcastle Council, according to Rob, is looking at ways of introducing town art into the environment. A Town Art Committee has been formed with a view to achieving a better sense of identity for the Newcastle area. Traditionally art is recognised

contribution to Newcastle has been significant. Newcastle is fortunate to have preserved many historical buildings which survived the demolition trend of the sixties and seventies. Now people's attitudes have changed and historical buildings and our heritage in general are valued. The role of community and environmental art in urban design is becoming more accepted and valued; thus the Printmakers will continue to play a vital role in the future of Newcastle.

## HISTORY

The Newcastle Printmakers Workshop Inc. is a community based group of printmakers who work in all media. Established in 1979 as an independent, non profit organisation, it's aim is to provide access to equipment and workshop space for the benefit of practising artists, students, ex-students and beginners.

The group started in 1977 when a grant to run etching classes was made under the Community Arts Programme to the Newcastle Society of Artists. The first moves to form the NPW were made by participants of these etching classes, along with students, staff and recent graduates of the Newcastle College of Advanced Education, culminating in its formal constitution as a non profit community based workshop. Beginning with 15 paid up financial members, NPW membership is now approximately 60.

Current membership subscription rates are

Membership - \$30.00 per year.  
Concessional membership - \$15.00 (students unemployed and pensioners)  
Payments due 1st October.

## FACILITIES

**EQUIPMENT** - Two etching presses, hotplate aquatint box, etc., suitable for all types of etching, collagraphs and block prints.

Silk screen and dark room facilities.

A member hiring facilities also has the use of such auxiliary equipment as silk screens, squeegees, acids and aquatint as well as a small selection of rollers and hand etching tools... although these are usually supplied by the member. One is able to purchase grounds, bitumen, paper, zinc through the workshop at near cost price.

**MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS** include access to workshop facilities on a low fee paying basis. Current workshop hire fee is \$10 per day. a special rate is available to members for unlimited usage, \$75 per year, paid in advance.

Hiring fees help cover workshop costs such as electricity, rates, etc.

The workshop operates on a 24 hour basis requiring the fee to cover workshop key, This presently \$5 and refunded on the return of the key.

Membership also entitles printmakers to exhibit in annual exhibitions and to participate in weekend workshops and a variety of other projects.

Members also receive a workshop newsletter distributed quarterly in which members are encouraged to contribute, articles, information, cover designs, etc..

## 1989 THE AMAZING DECADE EXHIBITION CALENDAR

JAN.-19/FEB.5 Turpentine & Tar.  
Exhibition of Prints, Paintings Drawings & sculpture. Contemporary Gallery.

JUNE 4th & 5th.. GALA GALAH II  
N.P.W. 27 Popran Road, Adamstown.

AUGUST 4th to 21st..IN THE ACT Mini Print Show. The Heritage Centre, Hunter St, Newcastle.

SEPTEMBER 1st to 23rd. PRINTMAKERS AT THE LAKE, EXHIBITION. LAKE MACQUARIE GALLERY, SPEERS POINT.

DECEMBER 1st to 23rd THE AMAZING DECADE EXHIBITION, von Bertouch Galleries Newcastle.

# Newcastle Printmakers Workshop

**WORKSHOP:** 27 POPRAN RD  
ADAMSTOWN

**CORRESPONDENCE:**  
P.O. Box 102 ADAMSTOWN  
2289

- o Open Foundation ~
- Australian History
- o Lecturer: Margaret Henry

Oral History Project ~

Taped Interview ~ Transcript

with Mr. Robin Winston

by Lee Williams

on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1989