An Australian Pooleyville?
Fred Pooley’s 1981 visit to Australia and its impact

Victoria Kolankiewicz
Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning, University of Melbourne
vko@student.unimelb.edu.au

David Nichols
Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning, University of Melbourne
nicholsd@unimelb.edu.au

When ‘quiet voiced pragmatist’ Fred Pooley (1916-1998) visited Australia as guest of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in the summer of late 1981, he was recently retired from practice; a past president of the RIBA and seemingly best known for his role – such as it was – in the development of Milton Keynes. Indeed, Pooley himself was far more formative in the creation of MK’s unrealised precursor, the futuristic North Bucks New City, also known as ‘Pooleyville.’

Pooley’s visit was planned so that he might address audiences in all state capitals, as well as Darwin, Cairns, Townsville, and Canberra; this last he praised as ‘an outstanding example of city planning.’ It might be surmised that both planning and architecture – and the symbiotic relationship that so often exists between the two, particularly in new purpose-built township and city environments – was sufficiently developed in Australia in the early 1980s that Pooley is unlikely to have strongly affected its direction. He was almost a decade on from presidency of the RIBA, and ‘Pooleyville’ was almost two decades in the past.

But do these facts negate the value of Pooley’s experience – or of Australia’s experience of Pooley? This paper examines the Pooley visit and its outcomes at a time when Australia, having all but abandoned its interests in new town construction, was nonetheless continuing to explore mechanisms to expand and extend its existing cities and house an increasing population. The milieu of the early 1980s, Pooley’s message, and his own response to Australia, are examined in detail in this paper.

Keywords: Fred Pooley; 1980s Australia; public architecture; town planning

Fred Pooley and his wife Hilda travelled to Australia in October-November 1981. It seems hardly in doubt that it was a whirlwind visit, planned and announced in such a hurry as to be almost
whimsical. The proof of this lies largely in the lack of publicity the journals of various chapters of sponsoring body, the RAIA, mustered in the months leading up to it.

Naturally, this does not make the trip unworthy of historical analysis – the limited reportage of the Pooley visit is merely an aspect of the whole. Not only is Pooley a fascinating figure in himself, his career peaking in a series of important roles in the last ten years of his working life; he was also visiting Australia at a key moment in public architecture, particularly but not exclusively in changes not only to the way public housing was conceived. His visit in late 1981 allows us to take a snapshot of the places he visited, accompanied by his reported responses to at least three of them.

Pooley’s career was diverse. As architect for Buckinghamshire County during the 1960s, he had presided over an extraordinary plan for a ‘North Bucks New City’ announced by Buckinghamshire Council in 1964 and intended to house 250,000 people, none of them more than five minutes’ walk from a ‘free’ monorail. Two years later, ‘NBNC’ was abandoned in favour of Milton Keynes, the last of the second iteration of the British New Towns. ‘When the Milton Keynes Development Corporation was formed,’ recalls Bill Berrett, who worked on both NBNC and Milton Keynes with his friend Pooley, ‘he was appointed Special Adviser. He always thought it was a way of involving him without his being able to influence things’ (B Berrett 2015, pers. comm., 8 November). Pooley had also, in the decade prior to his Australian trip, been Controller of Transport and Planning at the GLC from 1974-1980 and for the last two of those years additionally GLC Chief Architect. His roles in London allowed him to work extensively in one of his areas of greatest interest and experience – public transport – and also saw him ‘in on the ground’ in the initiation of the London Docklands development.

As mentioned Pooley’s Australian visit, a lecture tour, seems to have been presented as a fait accompli to the RAIA’s chapters; there is no recorded mention, for instance, in the RAIA’s Victorian chapter archives that he is expected, or any request or proposal regarding the advisability of his visit. The extent to which his arrival was a surprise might be deduced from a letter from the President of the RAIA in Victoria, Peter Sorel, to Gerhard Murjahn at the Goethe-Institut regarding the glass artist Ludwig Schaffrath’s visit to Australia in November; Sorel advises that the RAIA cannot find room for Schaffrath ‘within its present program’ (Sorel 1981). Yet there is no mention in the RAIA’s Victoria Chapter’s minutes or correspondence anywhere of Pooley’s visit until 6 November of that year and ‘The Executive recommendation THAT a Cocktail Party be held at RRH at 6.00 p.m. on November 11, 1981 for Councillors and their wives, Board Chairmen and their wives to greet Mr. and Mrs. Pooley’ (RAIA 1981a; 1981b; 1982c).

Similarly, there was no discussion of the Pooley visit in most journals after the fact, with exception of those of the Queensland and South Australian chapters, which published the same text – an edited version of Pooley’s address in Brisbane. Architect and Builder, the journal of the RAIA’s South Australian chapter, did not publicise Pooley’s visit in its September or October issues; even more tellingly, it published sections from his Brisbane address in its January 1982 issue with an ‘Editor’s Note’ requesting ‘any comments or impressions of S.A. architects concerning Fred Pooley’s visit here.’ Indeed this ‘Editor’s Note’ is so phrased that it may indicate Pooley did not speak in Adelaide at all, and editor David Ness speculates that he may not even have visited (and that the ‘here’ referred not to Adelaide, but to Australia) (D Ness 2015, pers. comm., 10 November).
We can only assume Pooley gave the same talk in all the cities he visited; though he did not publish, Bill Berrett advises that he was a skilful verbal communicator. In his Brisbane address, Pooley spoke of the future, best viewed in 1981 when ‘society’ as he saw it was ‘in a transitional stage.’ He detailed his own life experience, beginning work as an architect in the early 1930s ‘at the height, or depth, of the Great Depression’, his career then interrupted by war. In the late 1940s, he was a part of a reconstruction executing ‘policies which emerged to fashion the brave new world’ which ‘required not only imagination, but also a day to day continuity of advice.’

**Tracing the Pooleys**

In April 1982, the Canberra Times (27 April 1982, p. 7) – which had not reported on Pooley’s visit at the time it happened – suggested that Pooley had travelled to Perth, Adelaide, Darwin, Cairns, Townsville, Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, and Hobart. There is no concrete reason to believe that the Pooleys visited these cities in the order listed here, though it is a logical route. Berrett suggests that Fred disliked long-haul travel, which makes Perth a likely start point. Evidence also points to the probability that Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart were visited in the same week, and Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, and the Gold Coast in two days (RAIA 1981d).

A note from Hilda Pooley to Peter Sorel in the RAIA Victorian Chapter archives indicates that she (but not Fred) was in Melbourne on November 13, and a memorandum from the Information Division’s Anthea Norman to chapter presidents and other interested parties dated 24 November, thanking them for their assistance in the success of the Pooley tour, indicates it was complete by this time. The Queensland Chapter News of the RAIA in September that year suggested a timeframe spanning October 17 through to November 13, although this was later altered to accommodate Pooley’s presence in Brisbane for the Chapter Awards Night – the sole reference to his prior travels being an acknowledgement of his hosts in Cairns and Townsville, RAIA members Bob Cleland and Nigel Daniels respectively (RAIA 1981c; 1981d).

It is for certain that Pooley arrived in Brisbane on the 28th of October, and was hosted by Graham Hobbs. Alf Kamols, Chief Architect from the Department of Works, organised for Pooley to tour the restoration of the Queensland Parliament House and its Annexe, in addition to a non-specified ‘Cultural Centre’ – most likely the Queensland Cultural Centre, which opened in 1985 after many years of construction – with each project exemplifying the activity of private architects within the public sphere, a keen interest of Pooley’s (1981d).

Had Pooley had such an empathetic and perceptive guide to show him through new developments in Perth in October 1981, he might have seen (for instance) Tony Brand’s Two Rocks town centre, Ronald Ferguson’s redesigned early 20th century ‘rag trade’ building group Murray Mews in Perth (Bronze Medal 1979) or the recently completed Art Gallery of WA and its adjacent Cultural Centre, a blend of historic and new public buildings (Australian Institute of Architects WA Chapter 1980). The RAIA’s West Australian journal The Architect was happy to publish the views of Stan Mosjeld, US Visiting Fellow to WAIT’s School of Architecture and Planning, on Perth’s present state (Mosjeld 1980), a fact mentioned merely as evidence that the journal was not averse to taking advice, criticism and opinion from visitors.
The South Australian Building and Architecture journal for September 1981 contains notice of forthcoming events up to the 21 October, with no mention of Pooley. If he progressed thence to Darwin, he must surely have been shown the early development of the city of Palmerston, launched the previous year and then in its very early building stages (Northern Territory News 10 November 1981, p. 2). His voice would have no doubt lent to the debate surrounding reduced plot sizes so to facilitate housing mix – with the Northern Territory News deeming town planners to be ‘as popular as warm beer’, the relative silence on Palmerston is open to speculation (Northern Territory News 10 November 1981, p. 7).

Cairns appears to have been next on his agenda, yet there is, however, no mention of Pooley in the October or November issues of the Cairns Post. This is particularly perplexing given that it was circulated in a city in which town planning – its use and value, particularly in relation to height and density requirements at a time when property values had leapt by as much as 40% in a year (Gunaratne 1981) – was an ongoing interest, if not obsession, and fears of the kind of dehumanised modern urban environment Pooley campaigned against for decades were a frequent concern (Brock 1981). Townsville, almost certainly the next City Pooley visited, was similarly unresponsive. Only a short excerpt of Pooley’s Brisbane talk, a lone relic of his Queensland visit, was published to ‘whet’ the appetite of its professional audience (the full text being available for a small fee) (1981f). This sermon of sorts bore little relevance to Pooley’s stay; rather, he further espoused the need to ‘focus attention on that fairly large group of architects and look at future directions for public architecture’ (1981c, 1). Pooley suggested he would ‘like to look for a moment at the sort of organisation necessary to promote these qualities’; a statement that, without further clarification, reads as though he had travelled to find such an entity, rather than to construct a hawk-eyed and critical dissemination of public architecture and development of 1980s Australia. Devoid of localisation – at least in the Sunshine State – his talk may have suited virtually any spatial context experiencing bureaucratic malaise.

**Pooley in Sydney and Hobart**

There were only three cities where Pooley impacted on the mainstream media at all: newspapers in Sydney and Hobart reported on his visit while he was there, and Canberra did so some time after he left.

Pooley’s city-by-city peregrination featured in the ‘Wednesday Real’ section of the Sydney Morning Herald (11 November 1981, p. 21), situated between advertisements for mortgagee auctions, and a single article on the construction of Marrickville Plaza. Deeming Pooley ‘distinguished’ the paper detailed his approval of fledgling NSW Housing Commission projects, a veritable trifecta of The Rocks, Waterloo, and Woolloomooloo, at great length. The latter project, led by Sydney architect Graeme Goodsell, was described by Pooley as ‘very encouraging. It has red blood in its veins.’ Pooley’s litmus test, it seemed, rested upon his willingness to reside in that locale: ‘the answer is “yes”.’

Pooley may have had some forewarning of the controversies generated at Woolloomooloo if only through the report, prepared in the mid-1960s by two London-based firms (Tait, Wilson and Reay, and Nathaniel Lichfield) stemmed ‘from a new kind of interest shown by the City of London in redevelopment in Sydney’ (Tait et al. 1964). Goodsell recalls that ‘Previously, the Housing
Commission had pursued a project of high rise, in the urban renewal sense; my understanding was that Fred Pooley was very aware of that sort of work... in Britain, as well as here.’

Goodsell adds:

He was wheeled around to three major Housing Commission projects of the time. He looked at Woolloomooloo, the Sirius Building at the Rocks – a high rise apartment building – and the twin towers at Waterloo. The then chairman of the Housing Commission, Jack Bourke, wasn’t terribly happy with the low rise things that were being pushed in Woolloomooloo – the high rise was more to his liking (G Goodsell 2015, pers. comm., 15 October).

Goodsell notes that the Woolloomooloo project was an outcome of a confluence of the Green Bans and the Whitlam government’s interest in maintaining ‘perfectly good housing stock’; ‘the federal government under Gough Whitlam and Tom Uren realised they could chuck some money and federally owned land into the pool’, he says, adding ‘that’s how we ended up talking to Fred Pooley about something that was low-rise infill housing and reasonably low density.

“He was a very charming man, and he had a huge knowledge of public housing in Britain.”

Pooley’s Australian voyage saw him opine on the advisability of returning architectural practice to a more human scale; much of his career (particularly in his NBNC days) had focused on the needs of the ‘ordinary chap.’ His excursion to a high-density Housing Commission development in Waterloo provided the impetus to espouse such rhetoric: the divisive nature of multi-level living prompting the argument that, although at times inappropriate, ‘architecture is to do with how people react to it.’ This attention to human experience of the urban landscape emerged in opposition to rigid architectural practices, attributed to the influence of the ‘Modern Movement’ which pervaded RIBA’s upper ranks. It was Pooley who, in his first speech as RIBA President in 1973, coined the phrasing ‘community architecture’, initially calling for the public-sector to markedly increase community-responsive development (Wates & Knevitt 2013).

Typical of Pooley, the focus of his commentary leapt from relatively small-scale, architectural maladies to more pressing issues of urban growth and population. Demonstrating a common link – and a sensitivity to local circumstance not observed in Pooley’s earlier Brisbane speech – between western Sydney and the UK New Town programme’s third wave, he detailed the resolution of this common ill through the development and diversification of employment sectors. The 1968 Sydney Region Outline Plan had largely coordinated growth in the years preceding Pool ey’s visit, only to be abandoned by the Wran government in 1977, resulting in a proliferation of housing throughout Sydney’s west, commercial land uses concentrated along radial railway lines, and enthusiastic subdivision – residential and industrial – elsewhere (Australian Institute of Urban Studies 1972). Noting this imbalance, a 1972 report produced by the Australian Institute of Urban Studies further revealed large discrepancies in quality of life, in part attributed to the rapid and uneven development of these new urban spaces. With manufacturing a stalwart foundation for New Town growth (Daniels 1976), these overspill spaces – both in the UK, and Australia – suffered considerably throughout the 1970s. The erosion of this economic base for Sydney’s west led to a tumultuous era, vulnerable to myriad social, economic and political externalities, but also left in the lurch between
planning policies – it wasn’t until 1988 that another coordinating vision for the city was prepared, with planning directives evidently failing to heed Pooley’s words in good time. Unlike the New Towns of the UK, which had diversified local industry significantly, outer-western Sydney was no closer to ‘being solved.’

Despite Pooley’s commanding position in New Town discourse, The Sydney Morning Herald article made little reference to Pooley’s role in designing North Bucks New City – rather, his successes were largely ascribed to his work for the Greater London Council, and advisory role in the planning of Milton Keynes. Pooley visited an Australia which had effectively very recently abandoned a New Town program of its own, a scenario he does not appear to have commented on with reference to his own experiences: an oddity mirrored in his Brisbane address, during which he described North Bucks in extensive detail but not once acknowledging it by name, nor that it existed only on paper.

Pooley in Canberra

Pooley’s trip to Canberra was, once again, not reported upon in the local press at the time, though we know he was received by the RAIA there because it is noted in RAIA files that he presented the Association ‘with a volume about early settlers in Australia entitled UTOPIA printed in 1694.’ If this is, in fact, an early (albeit 180 years after the original) edition of Thomas More’s Utopia, the President’s description of this work as such is either wry or ludicrous; it may have been another work.

Fred Pooley’s Canberra foray is, however, most interesting because it gave rise to one of only three known publications under his name (aside from the excerpt published in the RAIA South Australian and Queensland chapter journals, he had penned a foreword to a book on shopping centres). On his return to Britain he published a page-long opinion piece on Canberra in the RIBA’s official journal; in a move which might now seem patronising by proxy, the journal published it amongst descriptions of new cities in other former British colonial possessions.

This tangible product of Pooley’s sojourn was a defence of Canberra: a short-form article, published in July 1982, and with subsequent reiterations in The Canberra Times throughout that year (Pooley 1982a; The Canberra Times 21 April 1982, p. 7). Criticisms of the city had deemed it ‘soulless’ and ‘six suburbs in search of a city’, with the latter remark attributed to a range of figures – from ‘some wit’ (Wilson 1951) to ‘urban sophisticate[s]’ (Davidson 2013) and residents (The Age 8 December 1952, p. 2) – purported to represent national consensus. Sir Robert Menzies (1955) summarised the view which marred Canberra: that ‘every penny spent on Canberra used to be grudged.’ It was during Menzies’ time as Prime Minister that the capital city transformed from a laconic and provincial township to a metropolis reflecting its national significance (Holford 1972).

Pooley recalls this process, in addition to the city itself, as an ‘outstanding example of the intelligent use of the 20th century’s more mature concepts of urban development’ (The Canberra Times 3 July 1988, p. 13). The temporal conditions were optimal for the incorporation of best-practice planning activity, necessitated by initially insufficient growth. By 1957, the population of Canberra nudged just half of the total number of residents accommodated for in the initial Griffin plan – actioned in 1925 – and the realisation of this by one John Overall led to the establishment of the National Capital Development Commission (Morison 2000). In 1965, the Commission formulated a document
entitled Future Canberra which, whilst upholding the Griffin plan, advocated the proliferation of self-sufficient new towns surrounding the metropolitan region, connected by a network of freeways and bus services. Pooley’s (1982b) assessment of Canberra in part addressed the retention of the Griffin plan, also reiterating his keen interest in the human scale:

[Canberra’s] achievement is remarkable not only because the government and advisers have been brave enough not to tamper with a brilliant composition designed 70 years ago, but also for the sensitive regard for human requirements with which they have, and continue, to carry out that plan (p. 49).

A transportation plan for Canberra was subsequently developed by Alan Voorhees, who proposed the linking of townships, new and old, with a ‘public transport spine’ (Morison 2000). This 1969 strategy came to be colloquially known as the ‘Y Plan.’ This vision prompted a rethink of the traditional neighbourhood unit model which, in conjunction with the 1970 NCDC plan Tomorrow’s Canberra, further rejected traditional grid form and density-driven development (Brown 2014). Self-contained, low-density townships were to be placed alongside vegetated parkways, extending outwards in a linear fashion from the ‘Beaux Art’ centre (Pooley 1982b), ultimately recreating Canberra as a ‘long, thin city with the countryside everywhere at hand’ (National Capital Development Commission 1970). Rebuking aforementioned views of Canberra as ‘soulless’, Pooley argued the contrary: that ‘...[c]ity planners have successfully overcome the sterility which so often blights other new cities built on virgin land’, creating ‘characterful’ townships on the periphery (NCDC 1970). Pooley’s 1982 article thereby lauded the decentralised ‘Y-Plan’ townships of Woden-Weston Creek, Belconnen, Tuggeranong, and Gungahlin (the plan for which incidentally owed something to Milton Keynes) for exemplifying:

...the most up to date planning techniques and imaginative and sensible attention to detail [...] with amenities which range from children’s cycle paths giving safe access to all parts of the city, to the Sunday attraction of Belconnen’s market (p. 49).

This urban change marked ‘a “new society” where bureaucracy is to know its place as the servant, rather than the master of democracy’ (Pooley 1982b). Pooley’s complimentary assessment revealed parallels between his own work and that of the NCDC. His positive appraisals for centred commercial development – ‘Belconnen has a beautiful new shopping and office centre’ – and utilitarian housing – ‘an avoidance of the worst of excesses of architectural fashion’ – reiterated design motifs apparent in NBNC. It is worth noting, however, that the dust had long settled upon these towns, with Pooley’s visit occurring ten to fifteen years following their construction. It is therefore strange that Pooley described the year 1982 to be a ‘new high point in the continuing development of that city.’ Canberra’s National Gallery, another pet project of the NCDC, was to open 19 years after its inception (McCann & Heriot 2013), finishes and materials for the new Parliament House were being chosen, and the City deliberated over whether to build its very own casino (Ling 2013). What made this unremarkable year a ‘high point’ in Pooley’s mind is unknown – and, like many aspects of his trip to Australia, open to further inquiry.

As late as 1988, following the completion of the new Parliament House, the NCDC still proudly trumpeted Pooley’s assessment of Canberra as ‘an outstanding example of the intelligent use of the 20th century’s more mature concepts of urban development’ in its advertising, under the banner of ‘Canberra: The best postwar new town in the world’ (Canberra Times 3 July 1988, p. 13).
Melbourne and Hobart

It is difficult to be clear on the exact dates of the Pooleys’ travels in mid-November for the unusual reason that both the Hobart Mercury and the Sydney Morning Herald carried reports of his visits on the same day, Wednesday 11 November; a day which, it appears, they were in Melbourne – the date of the RAIA’s Victorian chapter’s cocktail party in their honour.

Melbourne’s three daily newspapers ignored Pooley’s visit entirely, once again an inexplicable omission given that the city itself had just launched a new ‘vision’ for its future development – surely something that it might have sought the recently retired GLC Architect’s opinion on – and also given strong debates about public housing and urban renewal which had taken place a few months prior. The relevant minister acknowledged ‘the shortage of welfare housing in Victoria’ (Kennett 1981, p.9) and the recalibration of the ‘Demolition Inspection Team’ to renovation advisors within ‘an impressive upgrading program.’ (Kennett 1981, p. 15). Yet others (including the man who would shortly become a minister charged with alleviating some of the problems he described, in the new Cain government elected in April 1982) noted a ‘lack of community, with a minimum of facilities for community development’ in public housing (McCutcheon 1981, p. 29). The question of private (‘trendification’) and public renewal remained pertinent in the minds of government officials and commentators who noted ‘Government renewal’ in state-owned areas of 19th century housing ‘where a combination of renovation and infill created the possibility of some low key renewal in conjunction with provision of some public housing of a villa/townhouse concept’ (Aron 1981, p. 6).

In Tasmania, the issue of renovation and maintenance of old housing stock, rather than demolition and renewal, was also a topic for discussion (Southern Metropolitan Housing Authority 1980, p.4-3). There was also, however, a perceived pressing need to build new housing in new Hobart suburbs such as Rokeby and capital city satellites like Gagebrook, in many instances to the innovative ‘flexi-lot’ model. This was devised by the Tasmanian Housing Department for ‘the promotion of social integration’ with the ‘minimisation of costs’ (Graham and Associates et al. 1982, p. 4).

Hobart, and Tasmania, were in a slump. The week of Pooley’s visit was, indeed, a time of tumult in Tasmanian politics; within days of Robin Gray becoming opposition leader, Premier Doug Rowe was ousted and Harry Holgate installed in his place (Mercury 12 November 1981, p. 1). He was to remain state leader a mere seven months before losing to Gray. All took place against a backdrop of the highly controversial plans to dam the Franklin which were arguably key to the election of the Hawke government 18 months later.

Housing was a core issue in Tasmania, and particularly Hobart, at the time of Pooley’s visit. The Fraser government had disappointed its Tasmanian counterparts in allocations via the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, leaving, Minister Darrel Baldock wrote (Housing Department 1982, p.1), funds at an ‘inadequate level,’ limiting ‘innovative housing measures.’ ‘Not only is the cake reducing in size, but Tasmania’s slice is getting smaller,’ claimed the booklet Baldock’s remarks prefaced (Housing Department 1982, p. 16). Papers given at a conference hosted by the Southern Metropolitan Housing Association almost exactly a year prior to Pooley’s visit painted a bleak picture of ‘inequality in housing provision’ which, Ray Tickner told attendees, ‘reflect the social divisions of society and social inequality generally’ (SMHA 1980, p. 3-7).
Pooley did not directly address the subject of housing in Tasmania, but he was clearly at some point shown through the offices of the Department of Housing and Construction where, he told the Hobart Mercury, ‘Architects... were progressive and had to be told little’ (Mercury 11 November 1981, p. 15). Described by the paper as ‘one of Britain’s most distinguished architects and planners,’ and as an ‘innovator and a powerful force for change in public sector architecture in Britain during the past 50 years,’ Pooley praised the ‘public architects’ of the state as being ‘on the right track and the important thing is they get the end product done on time and within the cost controls...’ Cost controls were clearly an issue much on the minds of the men and women working in housing design he would have encountered in Tasmania at that time. He continued, however, to praise the locals beyond his brief: ‘The Department of Construction is lively, enthusiastic and has imagination and taste.’

It is de rigueur that visitors to an Australian city would be asked for their impressions, however brief their visit had been thus far. Pooley told the Mercury that ‘although he had not had time to inspect many Hobart buildings, he was impressed with the six-year-old Supreme Court buildings in Salamanca Place. “They have simplicity, are timeless and are weathering well.”’

The brutalist sandstone Supreme Court buildings were, at this time, a decade old. Architect Peter Partridge claimed a range of ‘design principles’ when discussing these buildings in 2011; amongst these were to allow nearby St David’s park to ‘flow through the site’; ‘randomness’ for the purposes of de-institutionalisation; and to showcase local materials and craftsmanship. Partridge had studied in the UK in the mid-1960s and practiced in Cambridge, not far from Pooley at that time. Whether the Supreme Court complex’s reputation had preceded – or even motivated – Pooley’s visit is unknown. Partridge did not meet Pooley and did not attend his talk (P Partridge 2015, pers. comm., 26 October) but it is clear the two men would have had at least one thing in common (alongside their British origins): their belief in giving buildings and places human scale.

**Conclusion**

The Pooleys had left Australia by the 24th November, at which point Anthea Norman, the RAIA’s Information Director, wrote to Chapter Presidents, Secretaries and state Information Directors ‘to thank you all for the work that was done by your Chapter to make Mr. Fred Pooley’s visit a successful one.’ She added:

> I know that both of them [sic] were impressed by the hospitality they received while in Australia and by the organisation of their itineraries in each of the Chapters.

> I am grateful for your support and contribution to this Information Division program.

A hand-written note in the RAIA Victorian Chapter’s archives addressed to ‘Peter’ (almost certainly Peter Sorel, Victorian Chapter President) adds a small element of poignancy to the enterprise. It reads:

> Dear Peter

> Thank you so much for the lovely posy, and for the thought which prompted it – a sure tonic for any flagging spirit!
I’m disappointed, not being able to keep up with Fred after all – his resilience has always annoyed me.

It was been such a pleasure meeting you. Thanks from us both for all your help, and warm wishes for the future.

Sincerely, Hilda.

There was, it has to be said, a hesitant tone to the final mention of the Pooleys in RAIA records: ‘The Executive was advised that the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Pooley was successful in terms of the attendance at his talks in most Chapters, particularly by Government Architects.’ (‘Info. Executive’ 1981). Government Architects were, surely, not the core audience reached for by the Information Division of the RAIA: as a publicity trip for government architecture and/or the housing, transport and low-rise living options he might be expected to espouse, Fred Pooley’s sojourn in Australia was unremarkable in terms of his own impact. However, he visited the country at a time, 35 years ago, when Australia itself was undergoing valuable reassessment of its own engagement with modernism and with the future uses of its own ‘legacy’ built environment. In this regard, and despite the lack of any ‘Pooleyville’ in Australia, mooted or otherwise, the 1981 visit was an intriguing one, worthy of further study.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded as part of ARC Discovery Project DP0984223 Cultural sustainability in Australian country towns: amenity, mobility, and everyday life.

References


Housing Department (Tasmania), 1982. Tasmania’s Housing Needs: Increasing Demand, Decreasing Production. Housing Department: Hobart.


Pooley, F. 1982a. Canberra’s design bears the test of the years. Royal Institute of British Architects Journal, 89(7), 49.


Royal Australian Institute of Architects. 1981b. Overseas visitors. MS 9454 Box 139.


