

## Bringing Back Brookes Jetty

### Anatomy of a community campaign 2015 - 2021

The construction of the viewing platform at Brookes Jetty was the culmination of a five-year community campaign.

#### Phase 1

It started with an emotional public meeting of about fifty people when it was discovered that Parks Victoria was about to demolish Brookes Jetty (or 'Brooks Jetty' as it was spelled at the time). There had been no prior notice (a notice went up only on the day work commenced).

The group decided to try to stop the demolition. Under the banner "Save Brooks Jetty" a Facebook page was set up, a petition was raised, an email list created, and Parks Victoria, the City of Port Phillip, and the local state member were quickly engaged with phone calls and emails.

We were shocked to discover that Council had done nothing to resist the demolition when it was quietly put to them by Parks Victoria some months earlier. In our view, councillors had been blind-sided by an exaggerated safety issue. Now, both they and Parks Victoria insisted there was no option but to demolish the jetty. The local member, Martin Foley, initially took the discouraging view that with demolition already proceeding it was too late to stop it.

As we watched, the perfectly sound decking was torn off, and soon all that was left was a skeleton of piles. Within days that was mysteriously festooned with yellow ribbon. Yellow became the colour of the campaign.

When our pleas went unanswered we resorted to direct action. Five members of BBBJ clung to the piles and were arrested and charged by Water Police. While that did not prevent the demolition it did generate political capital that drove the campaign onward.

By early November 2015 the wooden jetty was completely gone. All that remained was the concrete drain to which it had been attached.

#### Phase 2

Instead of accepting defeat, we changed our campaign to "Bring Back Brookes Jetty". We solidified our organisation and started monthly meetings. Our new objective was to rebuild the jetty.

From the beginning we accepted that the struggle would take years. Parks Victoria was adamant that no new jetty would be constructed there, and the Council and the State Government seemed to agree.

We needed to find out more about Brookes Jetty (by now our historical research had revealed the missing 'e' in Brookes). The jetty was named after Fred Brooke, the fisherman whose boat shed preceded the construction of both the drain and the jetty.

Historical research was crucial to our public argument that Brookes Jetty had long been part of the identity of St Kilda Beach. These stories gained the attention of people who had been familiar with the jetty but knew nothing about its origins and associations. For decades, until the 1960s, the jetty and the two-storey boatshed that once stood next to it, had played a major role in the swimming, sailing, and social life of St Kilda.

Our tactic in this phase was to reverse the positions of Port Phillip Council and the local member and to neutralise Parks Victoria. We argued that Parks Victoria had deliberately let the jetty run down and had demolished it not for the claimed safety reasons but to save the expense of further repairs.

This meant serious political organising and lobbying. Two of our people who had been arrested—David Brand and Dick Gross—stood for Council and were elected. Their presence on council, with support from other councillors who realised they had previously dropped the ball, led to a change of mind by the City which now offered financial support for our advocacy for a replacement for the jetty but at the same time insisted the City would not pay for a new one. Port Phillip then assigned a manager who would serve as our inside contact and advocacy adviser.

We also began to engage with the other player, Melbourne Water, which was responsible for the Shakespeare Grove Main Drain outlet that formed the stump of the jetty. Research revealed that it was the drain's wooden predecessor that was the first iteration of the jetty: the drain was both materially and historically part of Brookes Jetty.

The drain now became the meeting place for our regular "Bashes" which revived a custom from the 1950s of people casually gathering there for fish and chips, a drink, and some music. The mid-winter bash was particularly popular: it spoke to our determination and to the pleasure of friendships formed in the campaign. This social element was crucial to sustaining the struggle.

We now refined and sharpened our argument. A 12-page response to the reasons relied on by Parks Victoria to justify its action was circulated to all the stakeholders. A full-page op-ed in *The Age* also spelled out our case, demolishing the 'safety' argument and weaponising the rich history of Brookes Jetty.

From a well-attended public strategy meeting we began to draw on the deeper political experience of other local activists especially Community Alliance Port Phillip. The germ of another approach came from John Gollings: he suggested we run a design competition to attract attention to the possibilities a rebuild offered.

Over the years we discussed many ideas about what sort of structure might replace the old jetty. We knew it could never be as narrow simply because there would need to be disabled access but some people held out for something as like as possible to the old wooden

structure. We also proposed a curving promenade that would link to the marina, and we were excited by a fantastical idea developed by then seventeen-year-old Sunny Brearley for an octopus-like structure. We were also aware that in the Urban Design Framework, to which both the City and Parks Victoria were signatories, it was proposed that Brookes Jetty be replaced by a "recreational structure".

First, we had to prove that it was safe to rebuild. In November 2017 we received from Pitcher Environmental Management a positive risk assessment for constructing a new jetty at the Brookes site.

Given the intransigence of the major stakeholders, the body most capable of financing a new jetty and with the power to do so seemed to be the Victorian Government.

The 2018 state election provided a chance to put pressure on the local member. We secured a meeting with Martin Foley. He suggested we broaden our support by approaching the St Kilda Events and Tourism Committee, consisting of businesses on the St Kilda foreshore, as they were effective lobbyists. We took his advice and also drew the support of the Acland Street Traders. John Perkins bolstered this shift by developing a business case persuasively arguing that a new jetty would increase visitation. This was supported by a survey of visitors to the Brookes Jetty site.

At our request, Foley also brokered, via his cabinet colleague Minister d'Ambrosio, a meeting between us, Parks Victoria, and the City of Port Phillip. Parks had refused to meet with us and the meeting produced an important result: Parks put on the record that while they would not build a new jetty they now had no objection to someone else doing so.

This meant we had now corralled the three stakeholders—Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and the City of Port Phillip—into the same position. This was an advance but also left a huge obstacle—the money. We knew roughly what it would cost because, using money granted to BBBJ by Port Phillip for 'advocacy' we commissioned West Australian jetty builder M.P. Rogers & Associates to prepare concept drawing and costings for a concrete jetty the same length as the original. They estimated the cost at about \$1.2 million.

All we had to do was to find the someone.

### Phase 3

Our attention now shifted to Melbourne Water which we had long understood was intending to replace the aging Shakespeare Grove Main Drain. When this happened, would they be prepared to add a jetty? While they had always maintained that building a jetty was not their remit, our argument was that as it was their predecessor, the M&MBW, that had been responsible for the original iterations of Brookes Jetty and that their own Cultural Heritage Strategy boasted of the high value they placed on M&MBW relics, there was good reason for them to honour the heritage of the jetty in some material way, hopefully a jetty.

In March 2019, on safety grounds the drain was enclosed in a cage so ugly that it provoked a universal cry for something more attractive on the most visited beach in Victoria. It was also a signal that Melbourne Water was preparing to start work on replacing the structure.

We now formed the view that if we were to achieve anything it would probably be via Melbourne Water in association with the drain works. Since 2017 we had been presenting our case to them and had been keeping them apprised of developments. Their responses, from senior management, had been sympathetic but all they would commit to at this stage was a process of community consultation when the time arrived.

In our early correspondence we had drawn their attention to the UDF recommendation that Brookes Jetty be replaced with a recreational structure. In turn, Melbourne Water had promised a consultation process that would include us.

In April 2019 we met Melbourne Water representatives at the St Kilda Town Hall and James Brearley presented a concept for a 'wavy' outlet, a way of reimagining the drain in less stark utilitarian terms. The meeting was arranged to precede a Melbourne Water meeting with City of Port Phillip officers about the timeline to replace the drain outlet.

The clock was now ticking.

In August 2019 we took part in a comprehensive Values Workshop at Melbourne Water headquarters in Docklands. This was attended by engineers, designers, landscape architects, engagement officers, and representatives of the City of Port Phillip, Lifesaving Victoria, Parks Victoria, some beachside traders and us.

Melbourne Water explained that there was room in the budget to go beyond mere utility (usually 1-2% of overall cost, which we did not know) to allow for aesthetic and 'liveability' enhancement. The object of the workshop was to begin a process to agree on what this should be.

We laid our own objectives: that the outfall itself be allowed a more attractive design (such as the wave form proposed earlier by James) possibly linked to a related structure that distracted from the utility of a drain; that the outlet itself be longer and that it be designed with the possibility of a future extension such as a promenade that restored the amenity and attractiveness of the former jetty. Such a structure would reflect well on Melbourne Water and would be appreciated by the public.

The workshop produced a consensus in favour of a promenade that would be aesthetically pleasing, attractive to visitors, would complement the beach, and would provide the sunset viewing for which the old jetty had been famous. On the basis of these recommendations, Melbourne Water commissioned three concept designs.

Wanting to excite interest in the possibilities the site offered, James Brearley began working on the brief for an international design competition. This was later named the Leighton Prize after the benefactor, John Leighton, who provided the \$5000 prize money.

In December 2019 Melbourne Water sent us the three concept designs and invited us to a second workshop to table our preference. BBBJ decided in favour of the platform proposal, originally titled the Circle of Reflection. This choice was confirmed by the workshop attendees but the three concepts then went out to a wider community consultation. That vote again confirmed the Circle of Reflection as the most popular design.

We were informed that the 20-metre diameter viewing platform, which also added length to the drain, would cost considerably more than was covered by the standard liveability percentage. Persuaded by the merits of the proposal, the Melbourne Water Board committed to the extra funding. We do not know how much that was, but as the final cost of the whole Drain project has been declared as \$15 million, the platform must have cost well in excess of \$300,000 and possibly twice as much. As anyone who watched its construction could see, it was a major addition to the works undertaken.

The Leighton Prize was a singular achievement of BBBJ and took eighteen months to prepare. It was strongly supported by the architectural community. The brief encapsulated all that we had discovered about the history of the jetty and the character of the site and was an invitation to architects and designers, including students, to exceed our wildest imaginings of what might have been possible. It attracted more than 100 spectacular entries and the winner was the Portuguese design team JJs Architectura, Porto.

The February 2021 award presentation in the Stardust Lounge at Luna Park was a major event on the Melbourne architectural calendar. The Age reported on the winning design, it was reported internationally in architecture media, and was covered by the Radio National program "Design For Living".

#### Phase 4

Work on the drain began in March 2021 and finished in March 2022.

During this time, we were largely occupied as observers of the year-long process of construction. BBBJ maintained a watching brief. There was residual communication with Melbourne Water with respect to indigenous recognition and disabled access. When wooden piles from a previous iteration of the jetty were revealed during the demolition of the drain, BBBJ arranged for a selection of them to be kept.

Some of us felt the work was done, that we had achieved as much as we were likely to; others kept on, still driven by the dream of a jetty extending into the bay.

The viewing platform is not a jetty, but a sign on the foreshore still identifies the site as 'Brooks Jetty' (with the old spelling!). This is historically accurate as the platform is attached to the drain which has always been an integral part of Brookes Jetty. There are, of course, different opinions as to the Brutalist aesthetic of the whole, but the generous viewing platform is unquestionably a major community asset and an enhancement to St Kilda Beach. It is already proving a magnet to locals and visitors alike. And it is a perfect spot to view the sunset. As it turns out, we got the "recreational structure" designated in the Urban Design Framework.

If our campaign is judged solely on whether we achieved a jetty that extends out into the Bay, then we failed. A few people hold this position. If the positive response of the public is the touchstone, then we succeeded. For one thing is clear: had we not campaigned so hard and so long, adjusting our strategy to changing circumstances, there would be no viewing platform, but simply a new concrete drain. Before we were consulted there was no intention by Melbourne Water to build anything like it.

But the campaign produced much more than the viewing platform. In the first place we created a group that had sufficient integrity and organisational drive to persist through five years of fluctuating fortune. Initially we did this in the face of implacable opposition. Through gaining mastery of the narrative and with persistent lobbying, we wore the negative forces down. We developed lobbying skills. This involved learning how to deal with different levels of government and with different agencies, all with their own agendas. We had to persist through disappointments. We had to develop PR skills. We had to raise tens of thousands of dollars. It is telling that BBBJ is regarded by other community activists as a very successful campaign.

Above all we realised we had to think more broadly. This was about more than an old wooden jetty. More than the injustice of its destruction. In bringing back the story of Brookes Jetty we restored to public knowledge a lost part of the history of St Kilda Beach.

Although we had a Facebook page with up to 850 supporters and an email list of about 50, it was really the small group diehards meeting monthly and tirelessly shaping and pushing our case that kept BBBJ going. The membership fluctuated over time but included Gabrielle Bullard, John Perkins, Di Kilsby, David Brand, Brenda Richards, Geoffrey Love, Graham Chappell, James Brearley, Susanne Wells, Peter Holland, Eva Sifis, Bill Garner, John Gollings, Jen Edge, Dick Gross and other people who passed through. Our troubadour, Mal Webb, wrote a wonderful song about Brookes Jetty that he sang many times, adapting it to the changing situation.

Over time the group developed an identity apart from its ostensible purpose. Knowledge was exchanged, coffee was drunk, friendships formed and networks interconnected. Continuing to meet became a secondary aim of the campaign and one of the reasons its members will probably continue to meet at the occasional Bash in the future. As now veteran community activists it seems apt that our monthly meetings were held at the St Kilda Army & Navy Club.

As for the viewing platform itself, the public has already made up its mind. It likes it. And that is pleasing. It wasn't, after all, just for ourselves, for the sake of the campaign, that we stuck it out—it was because we wanted to restore to the community something that had been snatched away. We resisted. We organised. We got a result. We can feel good about that.