

CIRCULAR QUAY AND WOLLONGONG'S OSBORNE ARCHITECTURE

One of the delights for me of Frank Osborne's article in last month's Bulletin was that it put names to particular structures in Wollongong. I had not realised that so many Osbornes were involved in the building game. One comment of Frank's, however, I can't let pass. After mentioning that George Osborne erected the first School of Arts building in Smith Street where the Surf Lifesaving HQ is now, Frank goes on to remark that as a builder he left one significant mark in Wollongong: he was the builder of Wesley Church, the last surviving building of note in Crown Street.

Architectural taste is subjective, of course, but I must insist that the original School of Arts building still standing in Smith Street is surely George Osborne's greatest architectural legacy to Wollongong. It is a remarkable 1861 structure and after its recent paint job real-

ly looks a picture. Unbelievably, it has been very pointedly set off by the erection of a rather undistinguished set of home units right next door.

But even if we want to stick to Crown Street alone, I feel that the existing commercial premises on the north west corner of Crown and Corrimal Street (currently a Lebanese Coffee) is probably the oldest and most interesting nineteenth century structure in all Crown Street. Despite much research, I've been unable to date the building precisely so it may actually date from anywhere between 1840 and 1880. My guess, however, is that it is an exceedingly early Georgian Structure which has had what was probably its original symmetrical proportions somewhat drastically altered over the years. Could it be another Osborne structure?

But what could these buildings have to do with the current nightmare being erected at East Circular Quay?

Well, one of the few issues that does not seem to have been sufficiently canvassed in the massive correspondence in the Sydney Morning Herald, is what this horrendous development means for local Heritage Groups like our own.

What hope do we now have when writing to Council's Planning Manager and arguing that, "This Wollongong building is very important to both its local and the Nation s heritage and shouldn't t have yet another large and revolting development erected close by."

Well, now the reply is likely to be: More important that the Opera House?

And, of course, our only honest answer can be: "Probably not."

If the Opera House and environs (an architectural site of World Heritage Status) can not be defended and the emerging monster torn down then I fear there is little hope for saving any site that remains in Wollongong.

Amid the whole Opera House debate I constantly hear my late father s favourite phrase ("Nationalisation WITHOUT compensation") as the only answer to the current Circular Quay debacle.

Joseph Davis