

The Conversion Story

The concept of a civic square in front of the GPO was proposed by town planners George Clarke and Geoffrey Faithful in 1954 to counter the increasing congestion of people and traffic.

In 1966 architect Don Gazzard in his book 'Australian Outrage' supported this idea and as a result Clarke, Gazzard and partners, in association with Professor Denis Winston, then Professor of Town Planning, Sydney University, submitted a proposal subsequently supported by the City Council.

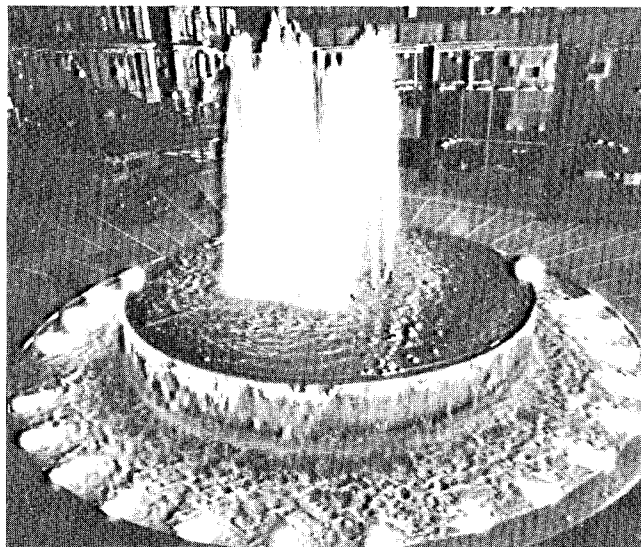
The project was referred in October 1969, to the Council's City Development Committee, chaired by Alderman Andrew Briger, then in 1970 to the Martin Place Sub-Committee, chaired by the late Alderman Leo Port.

Following approaches to the State Government, Martin Place between George and Pitt Streets was closed to motor traffic on a trial basis from July 1, 1970 and permanently on December 18, 1970. Work began by the Council on Stage 1 of the conversion early in 1971.

Stage 1 plaza in front of the GPO, opened on September 10, 1971 by the then Lord Mayor,

Alderman L E (now Sir Emmet) McDermott, was such a success that Council in 1972 gave its approval to the extension of the pedestrian precinct between Pitt and Macquarie Streets.

Stage 2 was opened in July, 1976, stage 5 in September 1977, and stages 3 and 4 were deferred to coincide with the completion of the Martin Place railway station.



Total cost of the project was \$4,053,604.

Throughout all stages the use of the now-familiar pink Tarana granite paving, with contrasting strips of Travertine marble, has given the project a colourful touch.

Spectacular fountains, bold foliage native plants and flowers highlight the setting to make a breathtaking vista which is the culmination of imaginative planning and skilled workmanship, backed enthusiastically by the City Council.

Martin Place has been transformed into a restful and exciting area for people and Sydney is proud of it.

Martin Place Sub-Committee of the Council of the City of Sydney.

1970-1974

Chairman: Alderman Leo Port, MBE; Alderman Andrew Briger; Alderman Sir Nicholas Shehadie.

1975-1977

Chairman: Alderman Alan Bishop; Alderman Andrew Briger; Alderman Peter Leney.

Architects: Donald Gazzard and Associates.

Major Contractors: Melocco Bros. Pty Ltd.

Supervision: City Council Engineers & Parks Depts.

History of Martin Place

For more than 100 years visionaries had seen what is now Martin Place as a pedestrian precinct in the heart of Sydney.

In 1870 the Valuer-General suggested that a 'nobler street wider than George Street' could be made from George Street through to Pitt Street.

Contemporary prints of the period show pedestrians strolling before the GPO colonnades after the first section of the Post Office, fronting George Street and extending east as far as the Tank Stream, was opened in 1874.

In 1884 a bill was introduced to Parliament authorising a pedestrian square before the Post Office about 180ft wide and the full length between George and Pitt Streets.

The idea was defeated but even as late as 1891 it still had some currency when the National Mutual Life Building was built on the northern corner of George Street and Chisholm Lane (now Angel Place). The southern facade of this building was intended to border a grandiose piazza.

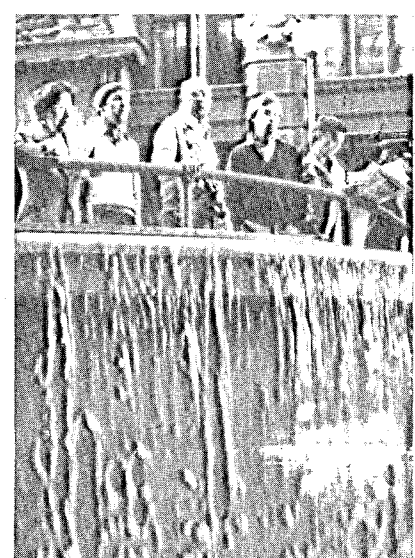
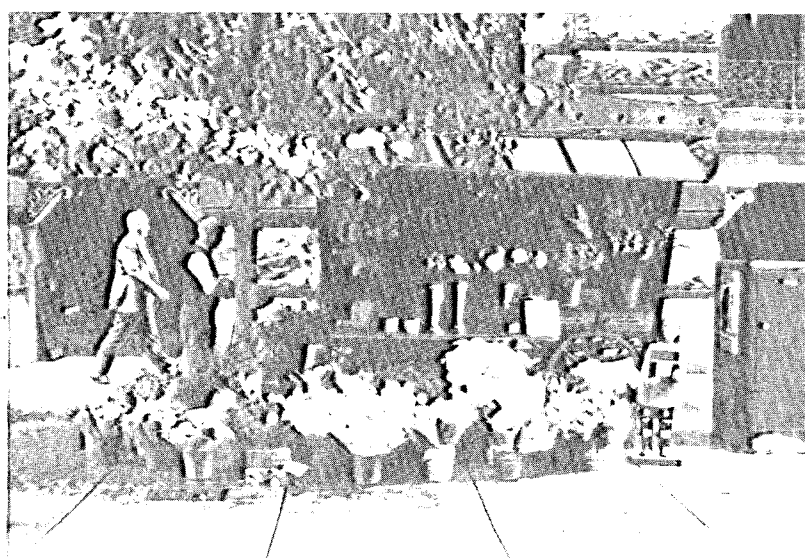
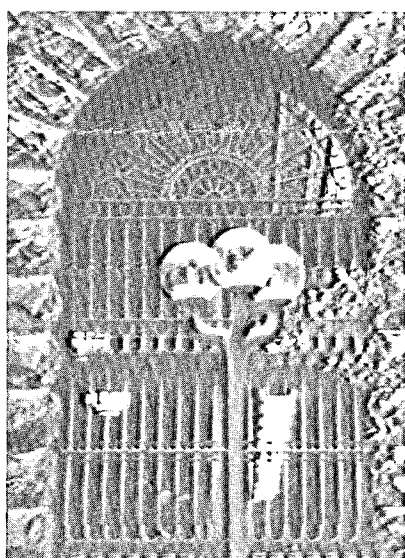
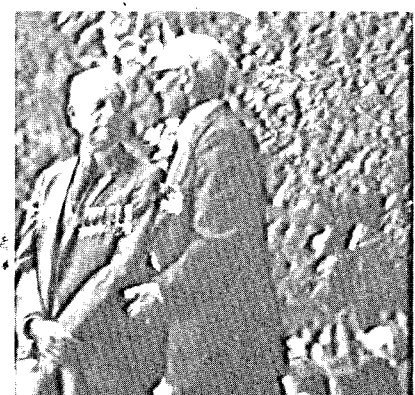
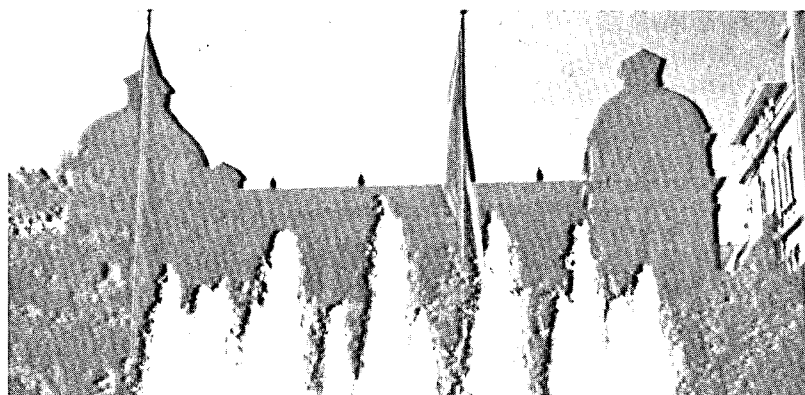
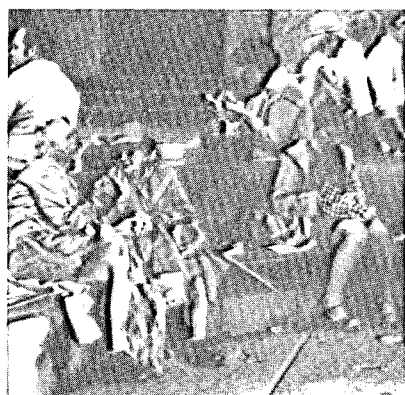
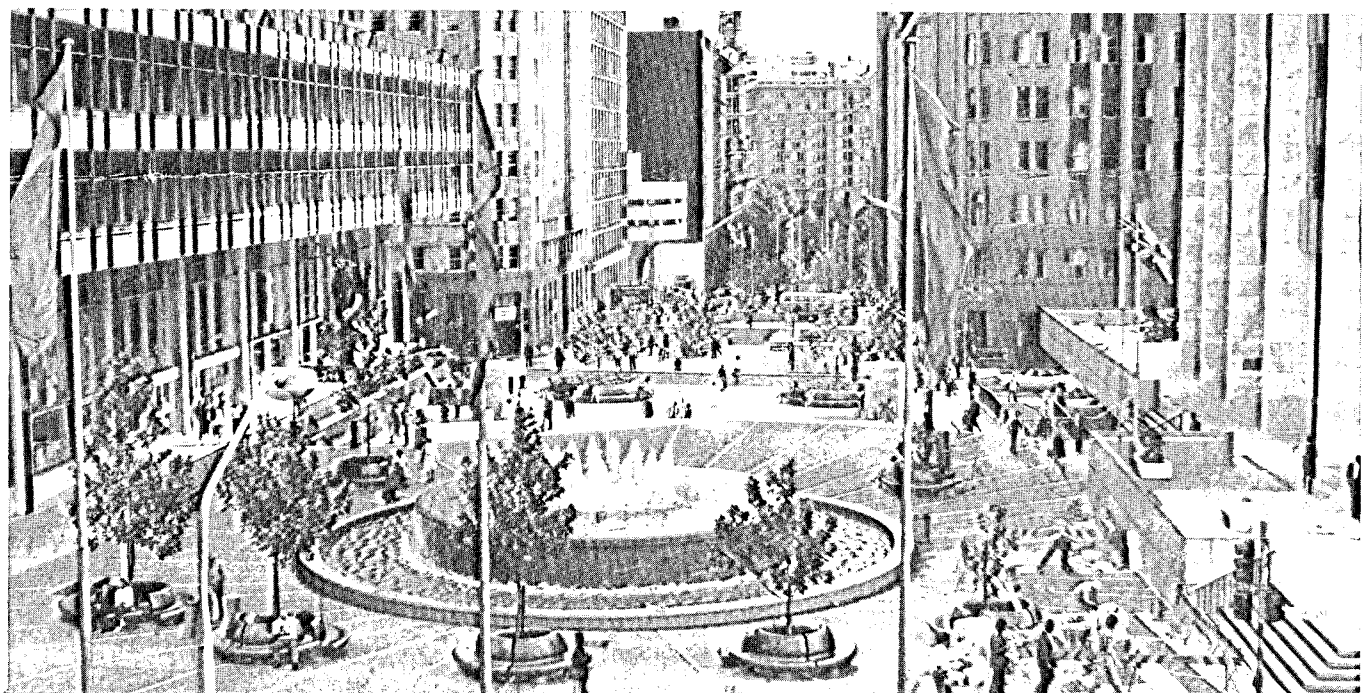
After the Great Fire of Sydney, between Pitt and Castlereagh Streets in 1890, public agitation forced the Government to pass a special Act empowering the Council to resume enough land to widen Moore Street (then known as Foxlow Place, the only route from Pitt Street to Castlereagh Street) so that it would be a continuation of the first section from George Street to Pitt Street.

Foxlow Place and Moore Street were engulfed in the widening extension of Martin Place in the 1890s, but Moore Street remained the name of the eastern section of Martin Place until the 1920s.

Martin Place was named after the Chief Justice, Sir James Martin, a former New South Wales Premier and Attorney-General. The name originally referred only to the section between George Street and Pitt Street.

The Cenotaph was built in 1927 on a site selected by the RSL as a memorial to Australian servicemen as 'many had enlisted there, it was in the heart of the City and had a close association with servicemen and war activities.' Designed by Sir Bertram Mackennal it was built under the supervision of Dr J C C Bradfield.

The final extension of Martin Place as a roadway to Macquarie Street was not completed until 1935.



Conversion of Martin Place to a Pedestrian Precinct by the Council of the City of Sydney

Official Opening by The Rt-Hon. The Lord Mayor, Alderman Nelson Meers, LL.B., of Final Stages 3 & 4, May 7, 1979

Stage 5

The main feature of Stage 5, between Phillip and Macquarie Streets, opened in September, 1977 is a spectacular 18m-diameter fountain with a circular ring of jets shooting water vertically.

Radiating lines in a contrasting colour to the pink granite paving focus on the fountain, making the area the visual climax of the vista seen from lower down Martin Place.

The block has been split into two sections. The upper section on the Macquarie Street level has been joined to the lower section by a curved flight of stairs.

On the Macquarie Street side of the fountain is a curved line of trees with seating underneath. Seating is provided also at the edge of the fountain.

The lower section on the Phillip Street side will become a meeting place for passengers coming to and from the station.

Stage 4

The area between Elizabeth and Phillip Streets, known as the Grove Block although it contains the entrance to the Martin Place railway station, in contrast to more intensely developed blocks, is the most open area. This paved, tree-lined area will provide space for much-needed activities which cannot satisfactorily be staged in other parts of Martin Place, such as outdoor displays of City planning development, art and crafts and other cultural interests.

It is expected this will add immeasurably to the versatility and the community use of Martin Place.

Stage 3

The area between Castlereagh and Elizabeth Streets is paved from building to building following the present shallow slope.

The dominating feature is a large raised garden area located in the central part and planted predominantly with bold foliage native plants such as Bangalow palms, Gynea lilies, tree and bird nest ferns and scented ground cover supplemented with seasonal flower displays.

This dense, green landscaped central feature provides a back-drop for seating more than 100 people seeking rest and relaxation. There are more seats under two deciduous shade trees on the Elizabeth Street end.

A feature of the area will be an information centre at the Castlereagh Street end incorporating tourist information, city maps, shopping guides, details of historic walks, a guide to city welfare agencies, calendar of city events and exhibitions, etc.

Newspaper and confectionery sellers who have been in this area for many years will be accommodated in new kiosks of a design identical with those operating in the George-Pitt Streets section.

Eventually this area will become an open light vent to an underground arcade of shops running from the amphitheatre opposite the MLC Centre to the railway station.

Stage 2

Stage 2 was to have had an open-air restaurant but escalating costs forced the City Council to abandon the proposal and replace it with a sculpture terrace, a sunken amphitheatre and an illuminated semi-circular waterfall.

The waterfall was largely financed by public subscription organised by artist Dr Lloyd Rees who donated his services and guaranteed \$75,000 towards the construction cost.

The total cost to Council of Stage 2 was \$960,000.

A difference of more than 6 metres in the levels between Pitt and Castlereagh Streets allowed the raised terrace to be built on the Pitt Street end, overlooking the ceremonial plaza around the Cenotaph and the sunken amphitheatre at the Castlereagh Street end.

The amphitheatre has become a focal point for frequent entertainment, especially at lunchtime.

Stage 1

The plaza between George and Pitt Streets, with its red fibreglass covered concrete seats, pink granite paving and towering poplars, has become one of the most popular spots in the City as a haven of rest for pedestrians.

Freedom of design was restricted by the presence of the Cenotaph. A formal, open simple layout was required in keeping with its sacred nature and also to accommodate the ceremonies associated with it, and, in particular, to allow ranks of men six abreast to march through this section on either side.

Presence of the Cenotaph also restricted the use of this area for public gatherings and entertainment.

