

# Not all fun and games for some Londoners



Phillip O'Neill

WHEN the Great Britain team entered the arena on July 29, 1948, a roar lifted the roof of Wembley Stadium. More than 50 teams from around the world had gathered for the Games of the XIV Olympiad.

It was to be the first Games since 1936 in Berlin, where Adolf Hitler had used the occasion as a propaganda exercise promoting white German supremacy.

London 1948 was the austerity Games, an act of generosity by the hosts to reunite a war-torn world despite the massive costs of rebuilding its nation after six years of torrid war.

In today's money, the 1948 Games cost just \$30 million. Visiting teams were asked to bring their own food. Denmark kindly sent 160,000 extra eggs as a helpful gift.

The highlight of the opening ceremony was the release of 7000 pigeons from cages lining Wembley's cinders running track. Their flight cast a speckled shadow across the crowd and another roar showed its excitement and joy.

An Olympics spine-tingling roar will again fill a London stadium in 326 days time. We took the opportunity to visit London's Olympics construction site when we were in that glorious city last week.

This time round the Olympics are estimated to cost a whopping \$14 billion.

From the perimeter fence surrounding the Olympics site you can peer through the superstructure of the main stadium and see the ready-to-go red running track and the green lawn of the inner field. Even the seating is in place. Nearby, the swimming centre seems ready to go, like the cycling velodrome and the basketball stadium, and the athlete's housing blocks are well under way.

So it's easy to imagine the vast 100 hectare site coming to life on time. Trees, flowers and turf are bidding their time in greenhouses ready for planting in the new year. By July 27 next year, the site will be in full bloom, ready for the roar.

Also nearing completion is the giant Stratford Westfield shopping



SYMBOL: The London Olympics will be staged at great cost when some areas around the site are struggling.

mall which will become the gateway to the Olympics site. It will be Europe's biggest shopping mall and 70 per cent of visitors to the Games will pass through it. About 300 shops and 70 restaurants will bid for their patronage, an estimated 100,000 shoppers every day.

Visitors to London for the Olympics are expected to spend about \$3 billion during their stay. They will enjoy the extraordinary range of things that only London can offer. But most of all they will come to be part of the roar of an Olympics stadium. Some will pay \$3000 for the best seats.

However, in the stadium's shadows, on the opposite side to the giant shopping mall, away from the places ticket-holders will gather, across the slimy River Lea, or Bow Creek as it is known to locals, out among the housing estates of Hackney, Mile End and Bow - where we also walked - I wonder how the roar will be greeted?

Three weeks ago Hackney was one

of the sites of the London riots. Funny, the Hackney high street by day has historical charm. One can see, like in Hunter Street in Newcastle, the buildings of a once proud, thriving industrial district, the offices of engineers, the civic buildings of community coops, the grand shopping emporiums.

Now Hackney's high street is packed with one-pound shops, cheap national brand retailers and the offices of social support agencies. The surrounding neighbourhoods are dominated by social housing tenants, forlorn windswept playing fields untouched by an Olympiad dollar, but also by a flood of migrants from around the world eager to gain any sort of foothold in the world's most powerful urban economy.

The claim is these east London communities will thrive in the afterlife of the Olympics venues. And that places like Hackney will enjoy economic revival when creative and

high-tech entrepreneurial businesses move in and prosper. But there is also a cynical view, that these claims are simply hype to justify massive expenditure on elite sporting facilities which otherwise would appear obscene in the face of deep poverty and social and economic exclusion.

In 1948 an austerity Games gave hope to London's much deprived and war-shattered youth. They switched the lever from bleak to bright. If the riots are a guide, many of today's London youth have had their life levers locked to bleak settings for many years. Sure they will hear a \$14 billion roar from across the way. But, for them, it won't come with the promise of gold, silver, or even bronze.

Professor Phillip O'Neill is the director of the Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney.

## The stars hide the scars, but they're there

We put on a good face, but we're all fragile, writes Reverend Stewart Perry.

THANKS in part to a government grant, the oldest church building in Newcastle has a freshly painted ceiling. St John's Anglican Church in Cooks Hill turned 151 this year but up until last week it was at least 50 to 70 years since the ceiling last had a fresh coat of paint.

Now when you look up in the middle of a church service in prayer, praise or simply to take your mind off the sermon, you can enjoy a bright blue colour that is, according to our friendly heritage architect, close to the original colour scheme. We have even repainted the gold stars at the entrance to the sanctuary that had become a feature of our church building.

While on the surface everything looks bright, shiny and fresh, the reality is that the paint covers a 151-year-old ceiling which, even with some minor repairs before painting, is nowhere near its original condition.

The ceiling has endured 151 years of weather: heat, cold, rain, wind, storm and even earthquake. Superficially everything now looks fine but if you had seen it before it was painted, or if you look closely, you can make out the scars in the timberwork, the weak areas, and even some areas that may require more repair work in the near future.

It strikes me that our church's ceiling is somewhat representative of the society and culture we inhabit. We like to applaud the flashy and new, we like it when things look good, and we like to think that we live in a world where everything seems in order.

We celebrate success, wealth, happiness and beauty. If someone appears capable and reasonably together, I think our conscience is somewhat appeased in the knowledge that there is no special effort or attention required.

The reality is often somewhat less ideal. If we would take the time to pay closer attention we would find that beneath the surface, beneath the superficial smiles, each one of us has scars, carries burdens and has been hurt by experience, relationship or situation. Despite our "hardened up" exterior, we are all essentially fragile and broken.

For too many years the church has liked to present itself as the freshly painted ceiling with everything appearing as it should be. It will come as no surprise to *Herald* readers that this is far from the case. The church is made up the same scarred, fragile and broken people

that you will find throughout our community.

If the church is to recapture some of the relevance that has been lost then it would do well to be honest and even promote its flawed nature. I hope the church can also lead the way in moving beyond the superficial.

I want to be part of a society that takes the time to really engage with each other, regardless of our history or flaws, and that is more interested in what lies beneath that what is presented on the surface. I believe we can become robust and substantial through the power of relationships that are more than just superficial.

Reverend Stewart Perry is the priest in charge of the Anglican Parish of St John's Newcastle. Article submitted by the Hunter Churches Media Association.



### Going postal

News of an Aboriginal land claim on the derelict former Newcastle Post Office got people posting comments online.

Well at someone is interested in the CBD.

Tim from Dungog

What has the non-aboriginal community, government and private enterprise managed to do with the building? Nothing! It stands as the single biggest white elephant in the city. One would think the Awabakal Land Council would do a better job managing the resource; they could not do any worse.

Another Option

What a load of rubbish. Why aren't you trying to claim the KFC down the road? After all, it's the one that is supposedly significant.

judgedredd

This is unbelievable and the Newcastle council should do every thing it can so the title claim is recognised. To offload this white elephant will be a blessing. I just hope that the new owners will do all the restoration to restore the building to its original condition.

BJ

I really hope the native title gets squashed quickly. This is one of the most beautiful buildings in Newcastle and I'd hate to see its repair by a potential developer scared off.

here's an idea

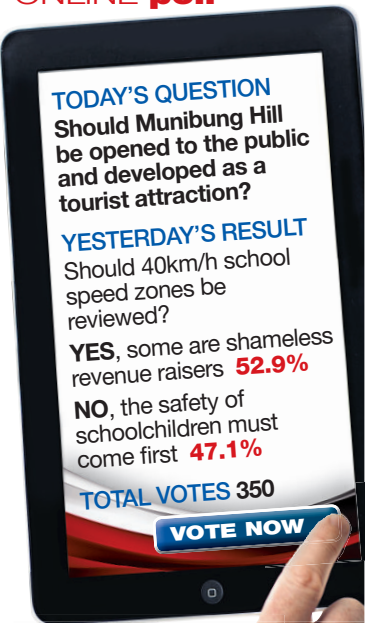
I am appalled at the blatant disrespect given to the original owners of this land. This sort of settler colonial ideology is hundreds of years old, where are the educated on this matter? The building has been empty for as long as I can remember and we have a group of people willing to make good use of it. Why shouldn't indigenous Australians enjoy the fruit of their ancestral lands?

Amanda

OMG. Wish they'd claim Parliament House, now that would be entertaining.

skigal

### ONLINE poll



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