

MOREE AND ITS SURROUNDING NORTH-WEST PLAINS HAVE BEEN home to the Kamilaroi people for thousands of years. Highly significant and ancient Kamilaroi artefacts, weapons, tools and carved stones continue to be found. Many of these are brought to the Moree Plains Gallery for safe-keeping. As well, there are sacred objects, such as carved tree stumps indigenous to Moree, which must not be seen by women but must be preserved and kept safely.

Our idea to establish a Kamilaroi Keeping Place in the Gallery gardens was inspired by Sydney architects Peter Myers and Alexander Tzannes. As well, there was the example for us of many highly successful keeping places across Australia, from Goondee and Tibooburra to Yuendumu and Kaltukatjara.

Living outdoor museums

Myers was responsible for the inspired Keeping Place and walkways over a rockface near Dural. In 1988 he won a Bicentennial grant for a walkway structure to keep farm tractors and vandals from desecrating age-old rock engravings of creatures and spirit figures. Alexander Tzannes brought a further dimension to our idea with his brilliant rotunda in Sydney's Centennial Park. In Moree we will use the rotunda idea as a way housing and showing special Kamilaroi objects and yet keeping an openness that allows a conceptual link with the land, trees and sky.

Tamworth architect Nicholas Brown of Hill Lockart is now designing our Keeping Place with the support of a Cultural Heritage grant from Canberra's National Library. Around the internal circumference of the rotunda will be waist-height steel storage cabinets, some with glass tops for viewing objects. The cabinets will be airtight and environmentally-controlled by museum-standard crystals and gel similar to the system used for Australia's copy of the Magna Carta in the Federal Parliament House. At floor level and below, the rotunda will house our carved tree collection in special storage boxes. Although the trees are not intended for general viewing, they will be available for special ceremonies of the Kamilaroi people. Lou Swan, Kamilaroi elder in Moree, has been appointed custodian and keeper of the keys to the storage boxes. Lou has long been a supporter of the Moree Plains Gallery and was largely responsible for collecting our stone implement collection with pieces dating back 40,000 years.

Sydney's Australian Museum now supports many New South Wales Keeping Places including sites at Armidale, Mindaribba, Giriwa, Brewarrina, Amaroo, Umbarra and Minjungbal. The Museum says though, that each Keeping Place is unique in accordance with the particular needs and requirements of its respective community. The variety of keeping places, says the Museum, reflects the cultural diversity of Aboriginal society.

Recent grants from the Federal Department of Heritage and Environment show the multiplicity of Keeping Places: Shellharbour City Council Aboriginal Heritage organisation was supported to assist indigenous communities to retain and interpret their key heritage places as 'living outdoor museums'. The interpretation, conservation and promotion of Indigenous heritage was said to contribute to the regeneration of local economies through education and tourism; at Yuendumu the Keeping Place supported was for Aboriginal sacred objects restricted to men. The grant enabled significant Aboriginal objects to be subsequently repatriated to Yuendumu; in south-east Queensland five traditional groups were granted funds to establish a small Keeping Place for returned artefacts, skeletal remains, maps and survey reports, as well as the production of oral histories.

A new Keeping Place

by KATRINA RUMLEY



Moree Plains Gallery supporters at the Gallery's first education program for Murri kids, June 2005. Left to right: Michael Knox, Justin Duncan, Matthew Munro, and Percy Ravenau.



Promoting Aboriginal pride & European understanding


As with many Keeping Places across Australia, Moree's Kamilaroi rotunda will provide a significant means for Aboriginal people to promote, protect and preserve their culture within their own community.

Importantly the Kamilaroi people themselves are actively involved in Moree's Keeping Place project and the realisation of the rotunda will be a result of their efforts. The project is a shared responsibility that is aligned to our Gallery's charter of uniting all peoples through art and culture. Flowing from the project comes Aboriginal pride and European understanding. ■

Katrina Rumley is the Director of the Moree Plains Gallery.

May – June

31 May

 *Hitler's Daughter* Youth theatre. Australian children questioning their world.

WAGGA WAGGA Civic Theatre
Tel 02 6926 9688

1 –3 June

 *A Terrible Beauty – On Being in Bali* A Charles Sturt University production of this original script. **BATHURST** Memorial Entertainment Centre Tel 6333 6161

3 – 11 June

 Celtic Thunder The 3rd annual Festival of the Celts. **COFFS HARBOUR** Showground Tel 02 6651 3399

3 – 24 June

 Ceramic Focus Group Works from the class. Regional Ceramic Gallery. **GULGONG** Tel 02 6374 1202