



Making good in Australia

John Goddard reflects on life as a British building surveyor in Australia

It is funny where you end up living. I never intended to work anywhere but England; I had grown up in Surrey, then Norfolk, where I could immerse myself in my passion for sailing dinghies and timber yachts.

I studied building surveying at Thames Polytechnic and qualified as a chartered building surveyor while working in London for Richard Ellis, then moving to Chicago with the firm. It was on my way back to London the long way round that I stopped in Sydney.

My summer job in a boatyard at Sydney's Spit lasted a carefree three months until I left to take a position at Jones Lang Wootton, now JLL, as a building surveyor. I was project manager on the upgrading and subdivision of three large, light industrial premises, and I also inspected buildings and managed repairs.

Doing my own thing

After three years at JLL, and a short spell with my boss when he set up by himself, I started my own business. Building Consultancy Pty Ltd provided building surveying advice to commercial property funds and owners.

Until that time in the mid- to late 1980s, there were few practising chartered building surveyors in Sydney. The surveying requirements for commercial and industrial pre-purchase inspections were rudimentary – buildings were inspected and reports prepared, but there was little checking of services and no consideration of environmental issues.

Working closely with Schrodgers, a professional property fund, we developed an inspection process that included assessing a building's services as well as its fabric and regulatory compliance.

Then the Australian Corporate Law Reform Act 1992 required that: "An officer of a corporation shall at all times exercise a reasonable degree of care and diligence in the exercise of his or her powers and the discharge of his or her duties." Technical due diligence inspection in Australia was born.

After 18 years, my firm was acquired by CBRE; by then, I and two other directors employed 10 people.

Experienced and green

I stayed with CBRE for three years but longed to be independent again and work with like-minded clients on projects where I could use my broad commercial building consultancy and management expertise and follow my growing passion for sustainability in the built environment.

The profession's own burgeoning interest in this area was marked by the advent of energy ratings, the rise of the green building movement and the establishment of the Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA).

Throughout the years, I have been an active committee member of the RICS in Sydney, and in 2006 I ended up chairing the organisation's newly formed Sustainability Group for Oceania. We gave presentations, wrote guides and have been promoting better standards for sustainability in commercial property ever since.

Our sustainability guidance includes:

- *Choosing and Managing and Energy Efficient Space: A Best Practice Guide for SME Commercial Office Tenants*
- *Guide to Environmental Performance Clauses: Commercial Property Leases, Australia*
- *Sustainability and the valuation of commercial property (Australia)*
- *Greening Make Good Australia* (which

covers the reduction of material wastage at lease end)

- *Green roofs and walls* guidance note.

While at CBRE, I also worked closely with the City of Sydney's and WWF's representatives on the first ever Earth Hour, which began in Sydney in 2007 with the idea of encouraging people to turn off lights in all buildings for 60 minutes on a particular night of the year. Surprisingly, until that time building owners did not have the controls to turn off their lights, so we aimed to encourage them and their tenants to install systems for doing so.

Alongside Earth Hour, the introduction of the National Australian Built Environment Rating System – which requires mandatory disclosure of a commercial building's energy ratings in advertising when the space transacted is more than 2,000 sq. m – the formation of the GBCA and fiercer competition between property funds saw an increase energy efficiency in commercial properties. Property funds even began to publish the efficiencies of their portfolios; currently, Australian funds are among the highest ranked of the world's most sustainable property funds (<http://bit.ly/2cBxmUS>).

Warm welcome

A chartered building surveyor's skills travel well to Australia. The business language is broadly similar, as are the culture, companies and certain qualifications. There are many chartered surveyors here – both locals and those from the UK – making newcomers feel at home from the start.

RICS has a well-established network in Australia with offices in the major cities, all of which are staffed by friendly people who run training, professional

development and social events, so making local connections is not difficult. Many people you meet will have made the same journey and so come across the same issues.

The challenges of working in Sydney lie more in the traditional areas of chartered surveying; there are always challenges, but none of them are particularly related to working in Australia.

Dilapidations differences

However, the area of dilapidations in Australia sometimes still resembles the Wild West. RICS has produced local guides on this and also runs training, but many building owners and their managers think that they can achieve whatever they write in their lease – ignorant of or deliberately overlooking laws in New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory that restrict the owner's ability to claim to their loss in reversionary value, as in UK law.

Ill-informed and forceful building owners and managers can and do bamboozle tenants into paying far too much when they are threatened with holding over and not repairing dilapidations to their 'standards'. In Victoria, Western Australia, Tasmania,

South Australia and Australian Capital Territory, the wording in the lease is taken at face value.

Project management works similarly to the way it does in the UK, as does contracting; but construction detailing and terminology can be quite different, as the following questions demonstrate.

● **Which is the warm side of the insulation?** In the UK it is the interior, but in many parts of Australia it can be the exterior. Vapour barrier detailing needs to be carefully considered, and if in doubt, the insulation should be protected from both sides.

● **What are ant caps?** These are galvanised steel-plate caps fixed to the tops of brick piers that prevent termites from travelling up through the centre of the pier, forcing them to build their galleries in the open air.

● **Why are more roof screws required in tropical areas?** High winds and cyclones in the tropics mean that roofs need to be extra secure.

● **Why are the gutters in buildings and pavements so big, especially in Sydney and further north?** Rainfall of 150mm per half hour and 800mm per day is not uncommon, and drainage needs to be designed to cope.

● **What is the effect from thermal shrinkage when a southerly buster drops the temperature from 40°C to 15°C in half an hour?** When shrinkage can be about 16mm, large roofs and facades need careful detailing.

● **What is a GPO?** This is a general purpose outlet or power socket.

Titles and descriptions also differ:

● **building surveyors** in Australia are registered private certifiers of building code compliance, or work for councils as building compliance inspectors

● **a schedule of dilapidations** is widely used to describe the condition of premises, whereas UK surveyors would call this a **schedule of condition**.

But as well as these differences, the sheer variety of projects in Australia is fascinating, as the range of my current workload shows:

- project managing an office warehouse extension
- waterproofing the roof of an iconic 1950s office building
- upgrading of a natural heat rejection system
- improving the energy efficiency of a major Sydney office building
- making good and building inspection works.

Making myself at home

When you are no longer so conscious of these differences, you can call the place you have moved to your home. For me, this moment probably came when I was flying back into Sydney and I saw the setting sun shining on the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge.

I was pleased to be back after a tough few days inspecting a shopping centre in the middle of Queensland, far from the coast. It had been more than 40°C at midday, so roof inspections had to be carried out at 6am. I finally realised that Sydney was now my home. ●

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John Goddard in
Sydney