

Making money at Properties, the National Trust way

**A presentation by
Richard Wesley, Director of Museums and Properties**

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“Money is a good servant but a bad master”

Sir Francis Bacon 1561 – 1626

For those in the audience who see the world in terms of the glass being half full I can argue that fundraising at properties is based on the premise that we are in the illusion business, or to put it another way, the careful management of cheographed film sets that are so powerful that the public want to spend their special time at our places.

For the students among the audience the definition of an illusion is “an erroneous perception of reality”, which is particularly appropriate when you consider that either our crumbling facades are hidden behind new lime wash, new coats of plaster and paint or hauntingly photographed in manner that makes gentile decay appear sexy.

Those among us who wear rose tinted glasses and see the half empty glass as half full, can happily dismiss this argument as they believe the 38 properties managed by the Trust are no illusion but a powerful and direct link with the past. Their design, intrinsic qualities, patina and finished nature stand as a bulwark against the wave of unsettling modernity and the terracotta rash which is spreading across the landscape and even beginning to surround our rural properties including Tomago and Cooma Cottage

Either way, many Trust properties possess enormous power to create special memories for which the public will pay generously. Let me provide a few examples

- Between now (late February) and December, Everglades has 42 weddings booked, each generating an average of \$600 dollars. The draw card is neither the manager's charm nor the quality of catering but the sheer magic of the gardens, a beautiful event in a beautiful setting.
- Last Saturday the Jazz in the Gardens event at Norman Lindsay Gallery, managed and run by the Friends was sold out. A total of 830 individuals heard Galapagos Duck amongst the magic of the grounds, raising some \$17,000. In the last ten years, the event has been sold out on seven occasions. Yes, the event is only possible because the Friends committee are savvy, hardworking and committed but it is also true that I doubt you could find a more sophisticated, culturally alive and atmospheric setting between Penrith and Bathurst than the grounds of Norman Lindsay Gallery.
- Staff and volunteers at Lindesay each day traverse the property with expectant brides to be and glamour photographers in tow, they earnestly discuss how the big day could work and explain how models are allowed to sashay through the gardens with the harbour as the ultimate backdrop. The odd camera shoot costs a \$1000 a day and wedding hire around \$4,000. Yes, it is Darling Point but enormous time, trouble and investment has gone into ensuring the property looks beautiful, full of old world charm and free of ostentatious displays of wealth found in nearby mansions. No wonder many a bride's father has willingly signed the cheque on the spot.
- In the 1980s the Trust acquired Harpers Mansion, a beautiful house on the edge of Berrima set in a paddock. Once restored it was set up as a house museum... and failed. Not

through lack of effort from Trust members, but I would argue, through lack of the X factor. Put out to tender to an inspired landscape gardener, Mr Jackaman, the grounds were transformed through terrific personal effort and a substantial investment in plantings over a ten year period. Mr Jackaman created a garden of great interest on a substantial scale but unfortunately for him, not a business. Today a vigorous and inspired Friends of Harpers Mansion can and already have proudly built on this wonderful canvas, with fairs, open days, weddings and special events planned for the foreseeable future. Cinderella was given a ball gown and found her prince.

- Miss Porter of Newcastle understood a thing or two when she gave her house and contents to the Trust as a house museum. She understood that a house without its contents is like a man without a memory and that money makes money. Miss Porter had a dream, that her families life would be frozen in time, and that for the story to be interesting, all elements had to be told. The house, the furniture, the washing up liquid, the bills, the clothes, they all had to be kept if her family life was to be interrogated by future generations. The set had to be meticulously dressed. She also probably suspected that money was always going to be tight with the National Trust and they mightn't always have money for the plumber so she gave the complete package, house, contents and a \$100,000 for an endowment. Over a decade later Miss Porters dream is alive and well and is the Trust's smallest but most perfectly formed house museum.

The point of these observations is to reinforce in the minds of all Trust supporters that effective property management and effective fundraising are two sides of the same coin. By managing a property in such a way that the visitor conjours up in the minds eye images of summers long gone, of family, grand hospitality or intimate friendships, we as the current custodians are creating the perfect environment for generous giving.

The skill for the fundraiser is to transmute the sense of calm, pleasure and timelessness that all our properties exude into a financial transaction whereby the visitor, or guest willingly contributes to their upkeep. In this context the activities we all organise and promote, whether they be concerts, fairs, weddings or wakes are simply opportunities for our friends to give and give generously. So yes, as Trust fundraisers, we, in the words of Nick Carraway in the Great Gatsby, "... beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past..."

Thank You