

## **COWRA ORATION 2023 – MARK BAILLIE**

**29 MAY 2023**

**COWRA JAPANESE GARDENS, COWRA, NSW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

If there is a word that describes Cowra, the Japanese War Cemetery, the Australian Cemetery and the Japanese Garden, that draws in the timelessness of Japanese culture amongst the vastness of the Australian landscape, it is the word respect.

Respect.

Such a universal human ideal and a fundamental characteristic of civil society.

The word comes from the ancient Latin ‘respectus’: to look back, to consider, and to notice with special attention.

That is what we are doing today. Paying respect.

So let me begin with my personal respects.

To the ancient peoples of this continent - to the Wairadjuri people who from time immemorial have fished the waters, scouted the land for food, and have nurtured these lands of blistering cold and blazing heat. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

To the memory of the Japanese and Australians who are at rest not far from here as well as those who eventually returned to their homes - the Prisoners of War and as well as the Australians who watched over them. All whisper to us about times past and their lessons for today.

To Japanese Ambassador Suzuki, welcome to Australia and welcome to Cowra, a place of special significance in the relationship between our two countries. I hope today, and during future visits, this town, and the memory of the ancestors whose remains are here - Japanese and Australian - will provide clarity and guidance when you need it.

To Bill West, Acting Chairman and the Board of the Cowra Japanese Gardens and Cultural Centre, thank you for inviting me to give this oration. Along with my family who join me today and those who aren't able to join us, we know this is your tribute to the work of my late father John Baillie.

For Dad, Mum and my brothers, Ross and Warwick, Cowra has always been part of our memory as a family, and as such, part of what it means to be home.

We lived on Cowra Road, Cowra, it didn't have a number as we were the only house on the street at that time.

The house was built by Don and Ted Kibbler and thus started a relationship and a friendship that endured through and beyond the conception, development, and completion of the Japanese Gardens.

Dad's accountancy practice was located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of 24 Kendal Street, the old sandstone building that still stands today. It was just opposite Austin's Newsagency, Drew's Chemist, the Garden of Roses Café and Johnny Rablah's Sports Store.

I undertook all my schooling in Cowra, through Cowra Infants, Primary and High Schools and was honored to be School Captain in 1980.

I say this by way of background and as a reflection on how important and formative an influence the Cowra community was on my family and me during the time we lived here.

I appreciate this opportunity to reflect on why Cowra and the Japanese Garden meant so much to Dad - as well as allow me to reflect on Australia's special relationship with Japan which has become integral to my work at the US Studies Centre at the University of Sydney.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF COWRA**

Every country and every people have their sacred places.

Places that draw out something of our humanity.

Some are places of natural wonder.

Uluru draws out a sense of awe. A reminder of our small presence in the timelessness of this planet.

Mt Fuji draws out a similar sense of awe at nature's majesty.

Some are places of human creativity that seek to interpret or reflect the divine.

The Christian Cathedrals in our capitals, like the shrines and temples of Kyoto – draw out a sense of stillness that move us beyond the present.

Others are places of community.

Our sporting cathedrals – the MCG in Melbourne and the National Stadium in Tokyo draw out of our communal yearn to celebrate, belong, and share in that quest to be faster, higher, and stronger.

And there are sacred places that make us pause, reflect, and remember what it means to be human.

Places where events confronted us, where choices were made, and where we reflect on what it means to be human.

The Cowra Japanese Garden, the Japanese War Cemetery along with the Australian War Cemetery and the Peace Bell are sacred.

They are places made sacred by so many.

By the Australian service men and women - the soldiers, nurses, medics, cooks, and guards who treated their captors with respect.

By the Japanese servicemen - who wrestled with what duty and honour and indeed shame and pride meant. Trying to keep faith with their country, their code of honour and duty, and the reputation of their families.

By the sacrifice of Australians and Japanese on a fateful night almost 80 years ago.

By the local servicemen who after the war's end tended the graves of their comrades and eventually their enemies - with tenderness and care.

It was made sacred by the community members who remembered the lives and stories of all who were part of Cowra at that time - and who saw the potential for Cowra to be a place of reconciliation and healing.

By the people who worked to design and cultivate the gardens and, in a way, bring the Japanese who remain and live in Australia back home.

And it is made sacred every day by those who visit, who bow their heads in respect, who pray and commit themselves to a world where enemies can become dear friends.

This is a place from which we draw strength, heal wounds, and shape the world.

The story of the Cowra PoW Camp, the breakout in August 1944, and the journey that resulted in this place, has become foundational to the modern Australian and Japanese relationship.

For that we must be grateful to all.

## **THE BREAKOUT**

But the vast openness of Cowra, the brutal extremities of weather, the rivers, and fields, away from the hustle and bustle of city life, mask the place it once was.

It was not always peaceful.

And though isolated from the places of battle, it did not escape the magnetic force of the Second World War.

The Second World War was the greatest trauma to confront our world...ever.

Nazism and militarism cost over 50 million lives directly and half that number again were lost through disease and famine.

Genocide was committed against people on the basis of religion, race, and political persuasion.

Both sides sought weapons that could eliminate cities in an instant.

And one side, the first to develop such weapons, eventually used them.

It was a time of ideology and indeed indoctrination.

Japanese soldiers were taught the Senjinkun - Lessons for the Battlefield.

Hugh Clark, in *Break-Out*, said the lessons were framed around shame and that "death was preferable to life in captivity and to the disgrace that captivity would bring to his family at home"<sup>i</sup>.

This was at the heart of the contradiction of Cowra.

A Prisoner of War camp, not just for the Japanese - but Italians, Germans, Koreans, Taiwanese and Indonesians as well.

A camp, where prisoners were well-fed, well treated, with access to medicines and respected in accordance with the Geneva Convention.

However, for many of the Japanese prisoners, these comforts did not shake the sense of shame, disappointment, and pointlessness of their imprisonment - and the fear that even if they triumphed in the war, they would still bring shame and dishonor on those they loved.

This shame was so profound that the Japanese prisoners all refused the repeated offers to write letters to loved ones at home. In their mind, it was far better for their families to believe they were already dead.

This shame, alongside of a soldier's sense of duty, created a restlessness that could not be shaken.

The renowned shame researcher Brene Brown describes shame in these terms:

“Shame is the fear of disconnection—it’s the fear that something we’ve done or failed to do, an ideal that we’ve not lived up to, or a goal that we’ve not accomplished makes us unworthy of connection. Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection.”<sup>ii</sup>

So the planned escape was more than a physical escape, it was about escaping the deep sense of shame they carried.

Reclaiming some resemblance of honour and self-respect.

According to their own traditions and culture, they sought redemption. As a Westerner and as an Australian I have to admit, I don't fully understand it.

But as someone who has become friends with many Japanese people, I respect their love of country, devotion to duty, and desire to honour their families. I can see that and respect it.

It is also worth reflecting that this sense of shame was something some of the Australian guards at Cowra also understood. For those in uniform at Cowra, there was an unspoken discomfort of not having seen active service, and of being denied the opportunity to serve - either because of age or being deemed not strong enough.

In this sense, we all see something very human in all of the men of Cowra - even if we believe, as I am sure all of us do, that this shame was misplaced.

So on 5 August 1944, the Cowra breakout occurred.

Most of you know the story.

As escape, not to flee cruelty or neglect or inhumanity, but an escape from the misery of shame.

Of the 1,104 Japanese who had occupied Compound B within the prison, 378 escaped over the wire of the outer perimeter.

In total, 231 Japanese were killed and 108 were wounded and four Australians were killed and four wounded.<sup>iii</sup>



Some escaped and then suicided. Two threw themselves in front of a passenger train, 11 hung themselves from trees and a number stabbed themselves or were killed by their compatriots<sup>iv</sup>.

For those who remained in camp, or were returned, what followed was what no One expected.

Meals were served as normal, wounds were tended to by nurses, and there were no retributions or interrogations, the camp continued as normal - according to regulations.

Nor was there any panic in Cowra. If anything, stories abounded of Japanese turning up on porches and tea being served as they awaited collection by the authorities.

## **WAR'S END**

After war's end, the surviving Japanese returned home.

Most of their families had been told they had died. They were ghosts in a new world.

One soldier who returned home visited his own grave site and read the inscription on the grave marker.

For the Australians, not that it was said then, it was also a time of reclaiming lost lives.

Veterans returned home and sought to resume their lives as best they could.

Here in Cowra, the RSL sub-branch started tending the graves of the four Australians who were killed in the outbreak.

Their actions were in stark contrast to those of officialdom who had been embarrassed by the escape.

Embarrassment that took the form of ignoring the Australian loss of life.

It took six years for privates Hardy and Jones, who were killed when their Vickers gun was overrun, to be given the George Cross for bravery.

And the cruelty of officialdom was inflicted on the widow of Private Charles Shepherd. Private Shepherd was killed in the breakout but the family, despite repeated requests, was not told how he died<sup>v</sup>.

Worse, he was deemed not to have died in a combat zone, as such there were no benefits for his widow or children.

Without financial support, his wife Linda had to give up their three children. She died eight years after his death, without financial support, without her children and without knowing the truth.

When you next visit the Australian Cemetery, spend a moment with Private Shepherd because his country let him down - and he should always be remembered.

And do you know why I say that and why I mention the mistreatment of the Shepherd family - because Private Shephard

fought for the right to say such things, no matter how hard they may be to hear.

His grave, along with the three other Australian graves, were tended by the local veterans from the RSL sub-branch.

Then something remarkable happened. The veterans started to tend the graves of the Japanese.

On weekends, the scrubs and weeds were cleared, fences were put in, and the graves received care.

The veterans didn't realise that they had stumbled on what psychologists now call horticultural therapy.

As many of us know, gardening is therapeutic.

In fact, the Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Association says that gardening can help people recover from trauma particularly grief and bereavement<sup>vi</sup>.

It's a practical way of showing tenderness and care, and of understanding the seasons of life and death - and a place where we can create order when there isn't any.

In the book "The well-gardened mind", the British psychiatrist and psychotherapist Sue Stuart-Smith writes that the power of gardens comes from symbolism and metaphor. She writes "we gain sustenance from nature's regeneration".<sup>vii</sup>

I suspect also from that work also came empathy, forgiveness, and the realisation that all suffer in war.

War leaves its trauma on the victors too.

The graves and eventually the gardens tended something deeper and that was the relationship between Australia and Japan.

Over time - and we are talking decades - the Japanese Cemetery took shape, the garden was built and Cowra became a special place in the Australian and Japanese relationship.

My understanding is that the Japanese War Cemetery in Cowra is the only one officially recognised by the Japanese Government outside of Japan.

As former Ambassador Yamagami, A very good friend of both Cowra and myself often said, “Cowra, the War Cemetery and the Japanese Gardens are the spiritual home of the Australian – Japanese relationship”.

I would like to thank and especially acknowledge former Ambassador Yamagami for both reconnecting me to the place of my upbringing and for the significant and important work he carried out whilst Ambassador, by strengthening and deepening the Australian – Japanese relationship across many different fields of common interest.

## **MY FATHER AND THE PLACE OF FAITH**

It was as a member of the Cowra Tourist and Development Corporation that Dad took an interest in the funding, development and building of the Japanese Garden.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1975, the 31<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Breakout, the Tourist and Development Corporation formed a Japanese Garden Committee.

The original Committee comprised, Neville Armstrong (Chair), Barbra Bennett, Gordon Austin, Graeme Drew and Dad.

At one level, Dad offered a skill that was needed - the practical ability to make such a project economically viable and sustainable.

But I think there was also something deeper.

When my father passed, I spoke of what I felt was THE essence of his character: resilience and self-reliance, loving devotion to family and duty, and humility.

He might not have explicitly understood it, but they are the same attributes I saw in the community of Cowra growing up and see in so many of my Japanese friends, and in the Japanese character.

And the building of the garden was also a practical expression of his faith.

When they lived in Cowra, he and my mother, VAL, attended and were deeply involved in Cowra Baptist Church when it was located in Brougham Street.

I said at his funeral, Dad was a man with a deep Christian faith. The guiding light of the Christian faith is forgiveness.

You see enemies can't become friends, unless there is forgiveness.

A willingness to wipe away the wrongs.

We don't talk much these days about faith in the public square, but that Christian ethos of forgiveness is at the root of the modern Australia and Japanese relationship.

Ambassador Suzuki, as you travel Australia in the years ahead, you will visit Darwin.

Darwin was bombed 76 times during World War II.

The first raids occurred on 19 February 1942, involving more than 240 Japanese aircraft and resulting in eleven ships being sunk<sup>viii</sup>.

It wasn't until the mid 1950s that the decision was made to clear the Harbour of shipwrecks.

The contract was awarded to a Japanese salvage team.

I am sure it was not easy for them - and indeed for the people of Darwin.

But like here in Cowra, hearts softened.

As the contract drew to a close, the salvagers wanted to do something for their newfound friends.

One of the wrecks cleared was the SS Zealandia, a cargo and passenger steamship and the ship's remains contained bronze<sup>ix</sup>.

Quietly the Japanese workers stripped the bronze of the Zealandia - and they melded it into seventy-seven Christian crosses.

This was a symbolic representation of Jesus's exhortation in the Bible when asked- "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" and He replies, "I tell you not seven times, but seventy seven times".<sup>x</sup>

The 77 bronze crosses were presented to Darwin Memorial Uniting Church being built on Smith Street.

During the war, the Smith Street site had housed the United States Military Headquarters and it had experienced a direct hit from Japanese bombers.

Now on that site is a church with 77 crosses.

Like Cowra, IT WAS A place of reconciliation.

In a new age of authoritarian indoctrination and where individual freedoms and the sovereignty of nations is not respected, I say the world could learn from this town and this place.

The town where enmity turned to friendship, and friendship turned to partnership.

## **THE AUSTRALIAN-JAPANESE RELATIONSHIP**

Last week, the Quad meeting due to be held in Sydney, was held, briefly in Hiroshima, Japan.

The leaders of Australia, Japan, the United States, and India gathered.

Whilst disappointing that the meeting was not held in Sydney, Hiroshima could not have been a better location given it provided a most poignant juxtaposition between the historical terror and tragedy of war with the current focus of the Quad working together to promote and defend the values that unite us as partners.

The Quad is an unusual arrangement because it is a partnership without a treaty.

The Quad is a not a binding agreement because a binding agreement is not needed.

That's because our values are aligned.

The original concept of the Quad was created out of a mutual desire to provide coordinated humanitarian aid in the aftermath of the Boxing Day Tsunami in December 2004.

It has evolved to a shared belief in the rule of law, in the sovereignty of nations, in the human rights of individuals, in the rights of countries to live free of economic coercion and cyberattacks, and bullying, and a belief in a world where the big don't seek to crush the small.

Interestingly during my time involved with the US Studies Centre, I have come to the firm view that a stronger relationship between Australia and Japan only serves to strengthen Australia's relationship with the United States.

Australia and Japan have chosen to learn from history, not repeat it.

We share a belief in an Indo-Pacific that is diverse, open, and free.

The partnership between Australia and Japan has been forged into one of extraordinary success and intimacy over many decades since the war.



It reinforces the view of former Prime Minister Scott Morrison that Australia and Japan are the “spine of the Quad.”

It was the interdependence of trade and commerce that led the way, beginning with the 1957 Commerce Agreement secured under Prime Ministers Menzies and Kishi.

This in turn laid the foundations for great shared endeavors associated with Australian resource development and Japan’s modern industrialisation – including the opening up of the great iron ore mines of the Pilbara, the coal fields of the Bowen Basin, right through to today’s critical trade in gas and other new energy sources.

These pathbreaking leaps of cooperation were as much investments in peace and security in our region, as they were in shared prosperity between our two nations.

Growth in tourism, finance and people-to-people links have thickened and enriched the bonds between us.

And in recent years, we have seen further steps forward both on economic cooperation – with a free trade agreement – and in the defence and security realm, working with friends and allies in the Indo-Pacific.

As a tangible outworking of this intimate relationship between our two countries, last year the Cabinet of the Japanese government approved a decision to acknowledge Australia as Japan’s most important security partner in the Indo-Pacific region<sup>xi</sup>.

This only serves to reinforce that what binds our peoples is that word I began with earlier: respect.

Respect for human dignity. Respect for human freedom, respect for national sovereignty, respect for a rules based order - and respect for divergent political views, privacy, and for the property rights of others.

## **CONCLUSION**

In recent days as I have reflected on this speech, I have thought much about the 523 people buried in the Japanese War Cemetery and for the four Australian soldiers.

I reflected on their war.

Their doubts, their treatment, their shame and indeed, their duty.

Most of the Japanese soldiers believed at the time of their death, their service had ended in ignominy and disgrace - embarrassment to their families and country. And the Australians, after their death, were treated little differently.

Yet together, these soldiers continue to serve their countries.

Fulfilling their obligations to self, family, country and indeed, history - in a way they could never have imagined.

Those countries are now partners in protecting the peace of the Indo-Pacific.

These soldiers are still on duty.

They too have become the guardians of a new world.

A world where enemies become friends. Where mutual respect is the foundation of our freedom.

The world can learn from Cowra - from those interred and from those who tended their memory.

May we continue to build a world worthy of them..

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- <sup>i</sup> Clark, Hugh, *The Japanese POW Breakout at Cowra*, Chapter 3, Capital Press 2017.
- <sup>ii</sup> Brown, Brene, *Dare To Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations, Whole Hearts*, Random House, 2018.
- <sup>iii</sup> Australian War Memorial, <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/cowra>
- <sup>iv</sup> McLachlan, Matt, *The Cowra Breakout*, Chapter 6, Hachette, 2017
- <sup>v</sup> McLachlan, Matt, *The Cowra Breakout*, Hachette, 2017
- <sup>vi</sup> The Australian and New Zealand mental health Association, [anzmh.asn.au/blog.therapy/horticultural-therapy](http://anzmh.asn.au/blog.therapy/horticultural-therapy)
- <sup>vii</sup> Stuart-Smith, Sue, *The Well Gardened Mind*, Harper Collins 2021
- <sup>viii</sup> Department of Veterans' Affairs [www.dva.gov.au/newsroom/latest/bombing-darwin-day-80-years-australian-came-under-attack](http://www.dva.gov.au/newsroom/latest/bombing-darwin-day-80-years-australian-came-under-attack)
- <sup>ix</sup> Darwin Memorial Uniting Church, [ns.uca.org.au/congregations/Darwin-memorial-uniting-church](http://ns.uca.org.au/congregations/Darwin-memorial-uniting-church)
- <sup>x</sup> Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-42976>
- <sup>xi</sup> DFAT, DFAT Country Brief 2023, Japan Country Brief