



2.



4.



Fête-champêtre

The true founder of the Darlington Arts Festival is Robin Juniper. She took up Guy Grey Smith's idea of artists' exhibitions in the Darlington Hall, marshalled the forces of a small but enthusiastic group of friends and laid the foundations for these fifty years of history. With her magnetic enthusiasm, intelligence, skills as a journalist and amazing energy she brought prestige and a discerning audience to the early Darlington festivals, promoting the work of a generation of artists. A passionate believer in the idea of community life, she enriched this community in many ways.

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Cover: Kitty Shenton
Old Vineyard Darlington
15.10.1920
Watercolour
Courtesy Royal Western Australian
Historical Society

2. Edmund DuCane
1830-1903
Toodyay, Greenmount
1854
Watercolour
National Gallery of Australia
The Wardsworth Collection
Purchased 2010

3. Florence Fuller
1867 South Africa-Australia 1946
A Golden Hour
c1905
Oil on canvas
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2012

4. Robin Juniper
Photograph Richard Woldendorp
c1968

Celebrating 50 years of the

Darlington Arts Festival
1963 - 2013

50 years

Festival: a feast

A gala event
that celebrates some unique aspect of a community
offering a sense of belonging

Darlington

When you drive into Darlington there is always a sense of arrival. Each of the roads leading into the tiny town centre is full of character: down steep hills, curving around Greenmount, the original winding track beside the Helena, and the tree-lined corridors sweeping in from the highway. I first saw the shady green passage through the arched trees on a Sunday drive with an aunt when I was a child and then she reeled off a list of writers and musicians who lived in this leafy paradise.

There isn't a real centre in Darlington, but there is a genuine PLACE: no borders but the bush, enclosed by tree-covered hills, bush and gardens edging the narrow, winding roads, the houses mere hints amongst the trees: just a scattering of unassuming public buildings: and no visible advertising signage. There is an authentic sense of place. This contradicts a central dictum of modern urban planning: that commercial activity creates community life. Darlington, since its beginning, has demonstrated the opposite: bush tracks past houses, the discreet deli and post office, the schools, and most of all, shared pleasures at the hall and oval, exchanging a few words on walks, in gardens, in houses, on verandas, with a glass of wine as the sun goes down.

The soldier Robert Dale first explored the path through the hills. Surveyor Philip Chauncy built the well at Bilgoman, an Aboriginal water hole. Edmund DuCane painted the view from Greenmount. For influential and wealthy early settlers, land was a sort of currency and the influential Shentons owned a sizable piece of Darlington, while the powerful Dr Waylen built his fifty acre vineyard and country house the 1880s, soon followed by the railway line. When the Shentons subdivided their land, numerous pretty houses were built on the hilly slopes, joining the holiday shacks, boarding houses, cottages of the farm, timber mill and quarry workers and, legend records, mistresses. Darlington became a destination for Sunday School Picnics and weekend trips to the hills, with swimming in the rock pool near the school in summer and, in spring, everybody returning with arms full of wildflowers when the train driver tooted to announce his departure. A small group of permanent residents trod the bush tracks to the station and took the train to work in the city. Prominent architect George Temple Poole and the malign AO Neville, with his Aboriginal servant in a hut at the bottom of his block, retired here.

The rocks of the hills are old, exposed and eroded since the earth's beginning, the Scarp one of the earliest cracks in the old continent of Gondwana. The ancient, leached soils are the source of one on the greatest flowerings of botanical diversity in the world, with more species on a hillside than in the whole of Europe. Logging, farming, weeds, nostalgia for English landscapes and the changing

style of house building have all shaped Darlington, but the local desire to value nature and history have preserved good things from them all. Fierce local campaigns to retain a rural atmosphere in the face of 'progress' began many years ago. In the early 1960s Robin Juniper led the locals to sit down in front of the bulldozers that came to widen the roads. Energetic, committed and passionate, she saw that the artists' exhibitions could become a small arts festival to support a much needed kindergarten. An inspirational leader, she enlisted Jan Pritchard, Lyn Woldendorp, Gail Gregson, Margaret Button, Sheena Wheeler, Charity Haynes and many others to help. Since then numerous local groups have worked to protect the history, the environment, the community and the ethos of this place, for instance Watsonia eradication, citizen botanists' replanting of the Railway Reserve with indigenous plants, Mezzanine Arts' weekend exhibitions and a book about the history of houses.

The longevity of the Arts Festival is remarkable community achievement. From 1971 to 1983 the 'Arts and Crafts Festival' was organised by the long-lived Darlington Theatre Players, later becoming the 'Darlington Arts Festival' with its own committee. It has evolved dramatically from the tiny exhibition-centred, Sunday-only gatherings of the 1960s, to sprawling events, filling the whole oval, opening on Friday evening and running over the entire weekend, returning in recent years to a more culturally focussed festivity.

The first Grey Smith exhibition was organised so that Guy and Helen Grey Smith could sell things they made. They invited other artists and offered afternoon teas as fundraising for the Fire Brigade (i.e. responding to a siren near the post office, neighbours had damp hessian bags and saplings to belt out the flames). I remember the first exhibition – low planks supported on bricks, covered in Helen's printed textiles and Guy's pots, paintings on the walls, leather, wood crafts and silver smiths' wares on other benches. The red wine flowed, consumed in chunky Grey Smith mugs, as the locals mixed with enthusiastic visitors. All the pottery sold in no time, along with printed tablecloths, lengths of fabric and other crafts. The paintings sold too, some to future important collections, many to local families who have treasured them ever since.

The Grey Smiths' inspiring idea of the arts being central to life and contributing to the economic and spiritual well-being of everyone, artists and community alike, is the single most important thing that has sustained the festival for so many years. It is an important and idealistic aspiration for any community. It has come to represent Darlington and Darlingtonians identify with the idea. They have supported the festival that celebrates it for 50 years.



3.

The Art of Darlington

The sky was pure, crystal pure and blue, of a lovely pale blue colour: the air was wonderful, new and unbreathed: and there were great distances. And not a sign of life – not a vestige. Yet something. Something big and aware and hidden! He walked on, had walked a mile or so into the bush, and just came to a clump of tall, nude, dead trees, shining almost phosphorescent with the moon, when the terror of the bush overcame him.....It must be the spirit of the place. Something fully evoked to-night, perhaps provoked, by that unnatural West Australian moon. Provoked by the moon, the roused spirit of the bush. He felt it was watching, and waiting.....biding its time with a terrible ageless watchfulness..... This was how (he) figured it out to himself, when he got back into safety in the scattered township in the clearing on the hill-crest, and could see far off the fume of Perth and Freemantle on the sea-shore, and the tiny sparkling of a farther--off lighthouse on an island. A marvellous night, raving with moonlight - and somebody burning off the bush in a ring of sultry red fire under the moon in the distance, a slow ring of creeping red fire, like some ring of fireflies, upon the far-off darkness of the land's body, under the white blaze of the moon above.

DH Lawrence: Kangaroo

Anyone who has driven home to Darlington at night, towards the huge moon rising over the hills – can feel the power, the timelessness, the liberation that Lawrence felt. He also reminds us of some factual history – once there were clear views over the coastal plain from much of Darlington: it had been cleared and logged and farmed. Now the trees have grown again. We can still experience the elemental forces in this landscape and even catch a fleeting glimpse of dark figures among the trees, bringing to mind Aboriginal beliefs in the intertwined truths of environmental management and economic and spiritual well-being on this land.

The place is one thing, but to see it reflected in the words of a great writer in a great novel – to see our place as art - enriches the way we experience it and enlarges the way we think about ourselves and our place. Katherine Susannah Pritchard in Greenmount in the 1920s was one of many writers here and there were literary and musical gatherings, from the earliest days, in Darlington houses. Edmund DuCane sketched the top of Greenmount, Kitty Shenton brought her watercolours and Florence Fuller painted the hills.

In this 50th year of the Arts Festival we can look back on a younger generation of home-grown painters, sculptors, craftspeople, curators, photographers, instrumentalists, singers, composers, conductors, writers, poets, actors, dancers, directors, and more. Many have been helped by the 22 year old Mundaring Scholarship for the Arts, now The Robert Juniper Arts Award and the Mundaring Arts Centre has long supported the festival. Most important of all has been people's commitment to the arts, taking notice of what artists do, buying their works and buying tickets to their performances. Nothing is so valuable to artists as an informed and receptive audience and everyone needs cultural re-creation of some sort. Activity in the arts is a fragile and mysterious thing – something or someone blossoms, to be followed by another art form, another individual, another group, while something we thought would always be there dissolves into history. In the late 50s and early 60s

a group of Darlington artists brought new energy to painting and people flocked to the early Darlington exhibitions to be part of it.

So many disparate things play a part, making things happen, provoking them, as Lawrence might have said, or, making it impossible for them to happen. A generation of young musicians took their first steps towards prestigious professional careers in a tiny, long lost, music programme at Darlington Primary School. Now Jon Tooby, one of them, has created a concert series bringing the cream of Australian music to the Darlington Hall. This present example of excellence is now something to treasure, to support and to protect. The November festival is really an annual celebration of diverse activities that go on all the year, that are built in to Darlington and are the fabric of its day to day life, its well-being and its identity.

I believe in the power of planning - of thinking, writing and drawing things into existence, especially as there are such long-lived and determined community groups in Darlington to pursue them for our general good. Darlington's history and reputation as a place for the arts is a valuable and empowering legacy.

We have 50 years of tradition and experience where the arts have defined Darlington's identity and have been celebrated in a widely respected festival. The annual festival has served us well but we could now pioneer the next step: a secure and excellent home for activities of all sorts – exquisitely designed, in tune with Darlington's environment and ethos, providing enrichment for a community that has proved its interest, commitment and loyalty, and bringing opportunities for everyone. It would secure the future for Darlington as a place for the arts, with a sense of belonging and identity for the 3,000-odd people who live here, and contributing something unique, valuable and full of Darlington character to our neighbours in the hills, and to the city and the state. Our annual festival will continue to celebrate the life-enhancing activities in our midst for the next 50 years.

Philippa O'Brien