The House that Jack Built: Jack Mundey, Green Bans Hero by James Colman

The House that Jack Built: Jack Mundey, Green Bans Hero by James Colman (NewSouth Publishing)

Judges' Comments

James Colman has not simply produced a fine biography of the famous activist, conservationist, communist and unionist Jack Mundey. He has written a beautifully contextualised history of the urban environmental movement in Sydney from the late 1960s. Though other places in Australia and overseas are mentioned, this book is about Sydney and the overlapping communities that have contributed to maintaining the city’s built heritage and social amenity.

Colman lived through the times and events he writes about, and his philosophical and political positions on heritage and the environment are clear. But this is not a partisan account. Drawing on a raft of historical evidence, he provides a balanced picture of the last half-century of Sydney’s urban growth and activism. He pays particular attention to the turbulent 1970s, when Green Bans are the main focus. The ‘battle for The Rocks’ was perhaps the Australian heritage movement’s major urban coup. It destabilised the dominant ideology of progress, which had largely gone unchallenged throughout Australia’s past, and brought to the fore participatory democracy in civic affairs.


Links