



FOUNDATION EXPO '88

Progressing the World Expo '88 Vision

– A non-government not-for-profit entity celebrating Brisbane's World Expo '88 –

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Interview with Frank Pitt 'Friends of the Pagoda Committee' at the Nepalese Peace Pagoda

South Bank Parklands, site of World Expo '88

John McGregor, Executive Director, speaks with Mr Frank Pitt, volunteer during World Expo '88, and member of "Save the Pagoda Committee", now "Friends of the Pagoda Committee", about his role in saving the Nepalese Peace Pagoda for the City of Brisbane

[INTERVIEW START]

Here we are with Frank Pitt, of 'Friends of the Pagoda Committee', at the Pagoda....now, where were we.....you were saying just a few seconds ago....you were talking about the carvings on the outside of the Pagoda.....



Frank Pitt stands at the entrance to the Nepalese Peace Pagoda, noting the commemorative plaque which dedicates the Pagoda to the City of Brisbane, and the historic role of the 'Save the Pagoda' Committee

....Yes, they all have a meaning – that for example on the outside is a buffalo eye – and the buffalo is always awake...We could go on for hours about each thing.....but the whole thing comes back to how I got involved with this...

I was a volunteer during Expo and got to see one Pavilion one day, and another the next...and so on.

Then I went out one day and came home to see the news on Channel 10 [Exec Dir Note: Brisbane Channel 10 was official broadcaster for the Expo] which said the Nepalese Pagoda would be pulled down the next day and sold to Japan, as they couldn't raise \$30,000. I said to Myra [my wife] 'Did you hear that? We've got that money put away...we could cancel the trip to South America...we could do something to make the Pagoda to stay....'.

Well,... and just like that she said 'Right!' – 'Now, who is in charge of the Pagoda?' 'David Hinchliffe' 'How can we get on to him?' So we contacted David Hinchliffe [Exec Dir Note: Councillor David Hinchliffe, also prominent Brisbane artist, is now Deputy Lord Mayor and Majority Leader in the Brisbane City Council] – and he was really interested – and to make sure I wasn't pulling his leg - he

said 'Look, I'm really busy - give me your phone number and I'll ring you back.' Smart man – I guess he wanted to make sure it wasn't a hoax call!

They later met Sunday night – and then by 1.00 a.m. Monday morning they had a decision regarding our offer. Monday morning I had a note in my letter box thanking me and to make arrangements to have a meeting at 'Expo House' [Exec Dir Note: 'Expo House' was a low-rise office block located at the southern end of the World Expo '88 site – and is now a part of the Griffith University College of Art. During the Exposition, it was home to the Offices of the World Expo '88 Authority, the Media Centre, as well as "Club '88" – where official VIP and Corporate Visitors to the Exposition were entertained – overlooking the rest of the World Expo '88 site].

We then had another meeting at Expo House – and I had told them it was to be an anonymous donation. However, when we came out of the meeting – two TV cameras – and FM104 [Note: popular Brisbane radio station] – and The Courier Mail [Note: one of Brisbane's leading newspapers, and joint-official newspaper sponsor for World Expo '88 with The Sunday Mail – part of the Queensland Newspapers and Murdoch 'News' Group] were there. I got rather a shock or surprise!...then, as the news had got out – I found out that someone had spotted it as a news item – and we had quite a turn out.

...So the article covered both Myra and myself – and I'm pleased now it turned out that way – we've met a lot of nice people under the banner of 'Save the Pagoda' – and as I said to the Manager of Southbank early on – "Did we do the right thing by saving it?" He said "You certainly did – it is certainly the most talked about thing – and photographed thing in Southbank."

So this was in late '88 - just a few days after the Expo closed?

Yes, the Expo had just closed...the newspaper dates should give you a better clue...then we got together one Cynthia Oates who worked in the Pagoda the whole six months – she became our Secretary, and we formed the Committee of 'Save the Pagoda', which later became 'Friends of the Pagoda' – and I'm the Treasurer of it.

Now then, later on, you notice over there – that goddess with 42 arms and 3 heads – 5 heads I think it is – people throw money in there, and I get this money to spend on the Pagoda. Every 3 months they ring me up and clean it out...I built that special enclosure around it – people have smashed the glass around it twice – now we have a special protective glass which was very expensive. I built that cage around there – not thinking they'd be throwing money! – but I'm very pleased they did.

So here we are, with it today – before I built the cage around it – I was shaking the hands with them...and there are brass supports, and they looked worn out, so I took it home, drilled it out and put brass metal threads...

So you must feel you have a very close connection with the Pagoda – and treat it as your own in a way...

Well, it is a part of my life now...much, much...being Treasurer and getting money to spend on it, getting approval, and what ever I come up with I take it to Southbank Corporation...

And once all the money got raised...because I do know they were looking for that last \$30,000 and you generously provided...now, when that agreement was made, was that in early 1989 – January/February 1989....?

Well, I can't remember exactly – but it was when Expo was being pulled down...they had to get rid of it all...

Do you know how they moved it to this place?

Yes, I have videos and tapes of it...

And they did it in one piece, or...?

Ahh...it is three-story high – the top piece is 6 ½ ton – so all together it is about 9 ton in weight...

In fact, it wouldn't have taken much of a rock on the trailer to tipple the thing over...so they lifted that off...brought it down here first...and then went back up and...there were a lot of people were around of course...then they said we won't be shifting it till tomorrow...and they said to me 'Stick around, we'll be shifting it this afternoon...we don't want all these people...'

So they lifted up this big mobile crane, backed the trailer underneath it...and you couldn't walk around... they drove it down, because the ground was that rough...and they set it down here...and some organization said 'We will shift that Pagoda free of cost as long as we get the publicity and TV coverage on it'so they must have done it...

So they moved the top floor first?

Yes, just the top piece, and then the rest...

And, did that happen in just one day - was it just one day's work?

They took the top off first, brought it down, and then went back and lifted it up, backed the trailer underneath it...and just gradually brought it down...the ground was very rough...because they were tearing this up and tearing that up...there were no roads or anything anymore...

Now the Pagoda itself...I remember you were telling me before it took over 2 years to make....60 Nepalese....?

160 families – 1 million hours of work...200 people...300 people.....it was all built over there, and put it in a 40-foot container and they sent it to Colombo – to be shipped to here...

...but when it got to Colombo they didn't have a crane big enough to lift the 40-ft container – so they had to take it back to Bombay, and transferred it all into 20-ft containers, because the only shipping that could bring it here was coming from Colombo.

Once the Pagoda had arrived at the Expo site, they would have brought some of their own craftsmen to do the completion....did that take many days do you know?

Yes, but how long it took – I don't know....

OK, well, I think that's all....what are your dreams for the future of the Pagoda – how would you like to see it remembered and preserved for the future?

Well, I think what they're doing now is a grand thing....it gets a coat of oil every year...and, they're really looking after it...it's going to be preserved...and you can call it an icon of Southbank now – from Expo days...

OK, well I think I might stop it there....

[INTERVIEW END] THIS INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED ON 15 AUGUST 2005 - AT THE NEPALESE PEACE PAGODA, SOUTH BANK PARKLANDS, BRISBANE, AND PUBLISHED TO THE FOUNDATION EXPO '88 WEB-SITE ON 21 APRIL 2006. THIS EDITED AND UPDATED VERSION WAS PUBLISHED TO THE FOUNDATION EXPO '88 WEB-SITE AND THE FRIENDS OF THE PAGODA PAGES AT FOUNDATION EXPO '88 HTTP://WWW.FOUNDATIONEXPO88.ORG/FRIENDSOFTHEPAGODA/ ON 26 JUNE 2006.



THE VALLEY LEGEND

...of Nepal...
 ...fiction...
 ...legends say - and geologists agree - ...
 ...the Kathmandu valley floor...
 ...probably drained it... but legends always...
 ...says a god drained it, cutting through...
 ...with his sword... and taking a burning Lotus...
 ...transformed it into the hill called...
 ...site of the 2,000 year old Buddhist Temple...
 ...affectionately known as 'The Monkey Temple...
 ...the central stupa is genuinely believed to hold...
 ...the body of a Buddha who died in 486 B.C...
 ...the great dome of Swayambhunath with its spir...
 ...old begins to glow... as if the Lotus still...
 ...long silver trumpets chant while pilgrim...
 ...the with prostrations - a human prayer wher...
 ...in motion for 2,000 years...

THE INKAWASAR PAGODA

A genuine Nepalese piece, hand made by the...
 ...process, and the subject of much...
 ...discussing that often took place...
 ...usually in the Pagoda Tea Room...
 ...Saturdays nights.

...workers often explained the story...
 ...The Goddess signified the many ways she...
 ...people in their daily lives.

...has many heads, some with varying...
 ...eyes, noting her different aspects se...
 ...line at the top is finely toothed and...
 ...so when things went wrong in man's...
 ...the Goddess could be appeased by laying...
 ...offers her.

...many Multi-armed Gods and Goddesses...
 ...included in our Pagoda carvings.

Local Art

...a courtyard would not be the same...
 ...the brass bell on its peaceful hand...
 ...one supports. Once again the brass was...
 ...the last wax method. Such bells were...
 ...by worshippers to call the Deity's...
 ...to their presence and their prayers.

...of hand carved stone, the Stupa was...
 ...the rear of the Pagoda during Expo...
 ...that faith, a Stupa represents the...
 ...Its base, square or round represents...
 ...its base is the Vault of Heaven, and...
 ...topography surrounding it is the path...
 ...flow on the journey to Enlightenment.

Nepal...
 ...never forgot the sight of Swayambhunath...
 ...did on a hill overlooking Kathmandu. The...
 ...temple here is genuinely believed to be one...
 ...old relics of Gautama Buddha who died in...

**SEE PEACE PAGODA IS...
 ...OF PEACE FROM A PEACEFUL COUNTRY...
 ...DIPLOMATS WERE TAKEN FOR A PETITION...
 ...IN AUSTRALIA...
 ...IF THE PAGODA WILL CONTINUE TO CARE...
 ...FOR THE PEOPLE AND ENSURE ITS SURVIVAL AND RECOGNITION...
 ...AS A RARE AND SPECIAL CULTURAL MASTERPIECE OF...
 ...THIS CITY.**

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1989



RATHER than taking a trip to South America, Frank and Myra Pitt donated \$30,000 to the Save the Pagoda fund to give Brisbane something to remember from Expo 88.

Brisbane set to keep Expo landmark

EXPO'S Nepalese pagoda will almost certainly find a permanent home on Brisbane's South Bank.

Frantic public fund-raising and extensive negotiations between all levels of government are said to have saved the pagoda.

A Save the Pagoda committee spokesman, Alderman David Hinckliffe (ALP, Spring Hill) said late last night the members had received verbal confirmation of a \$100,000 Federal Government grant.

"By 9am Wednesday we should have two signatures — one from the Federal Foreign Affairs Minister, Senator Evans, for \$100,000 and another from the Lord Mayor, Alderman Adkinson, for \$50,000, which is conditional on Senator Evans' positive reply," Alderman Hinckliffe said.

"But this incredible saga, which has involved weeks of negotiations between Expo, the council, the Federal Government and the pagoda's owners in Munich — not to mention raising \$52,000 in public funds — will not be resolved until the final moments."

A \$30,000 donation from a Holland Park couple, Mr Frank Pitt, 66, and his wife Myra, 63, last week was a vital turning point in the fight to keep the pagoda from going to Japan.

Mr Pitt said last night they decided to use the money they had saved for a trip to South America because they thought it was the only decent reminder of Expo.

"I'm a cabinet maker and I do a bit of carving and I think this building, which took 160 Nepalese craftsmen two years to build, should be kept here for all Queenslanders to enjoy," Mr Pitt said.



26 June 2006....extra.....extra.....extra.....

Join with Mr Frank Pitt, Custodian of the Pagoda, on Sundays at the Pagoda (between 11am and 2.00pm), also attended by The Friends of the Pagoda Association Member volunteer attendants, and Secretary, John McGregor.

For this, and more information on the newly launched The Friends of the Pagoda Association, including how to join with us as Members of the Association, visit the new The Friends of the Pagoda Association pages at Foundation Expo '88 - <http://www.foundationexpo88.org/friendsofthepagoda/>

Membership is easy - just fill in the forms at The Friends of the Pagoda pages, forward to the Secretary, and pay on-line - or - hand in your completed form and cash payment at any Meeting of the Association - held last Sunday of each month 2-4pm at Cafe San Marco, South Bank - just 100 metres from the Pagoda itself.

Contact Secretary John McGregor at 04397 34018 (Australia) for further information. Join Today!