

Sydney, Australia – Day 50 Nov. 16:

This was our second day in Sydney and we woke up early to get a good start on the day. The sky was overcast but temperature was moderate so we felt comfortable in short sleeved shirts. We left the Amsterdam about 7:30am and walked down Circular Quay to where the ferry boats come in. The city of Sydney has mounted large brass

commemorative plaques about every 200 feet in the walkway along the quay. Each plaque shows the name of a famous writer who has made a contribution to Sydney and Australian culture. This morning we stopped and photographed the plaque for Robert Hughes, as shown on the right. Robert Hughes wrote “The Fatal Shore” and based on a recommendation by our friend, Jean, we read it a few years ago. The book provides an objective chronicle of how in the late 1700s through the



1800s England came to ship hundreds of people from their jails in England to penal colonies in Australia. Those prisoners and their guards became the primary English settlers in Australia for many years and firmly established Australia as an English colony. Robert Hughes seems rightfully acknowledged for his contribution to the world’s understanding of Australia and its prisoner heritage.

We continued on our walk to the Sydney Opera House. We found the expansive front steps cordoned off with construction barricades. Workers were removing massive slabs of stone that make up the steps.

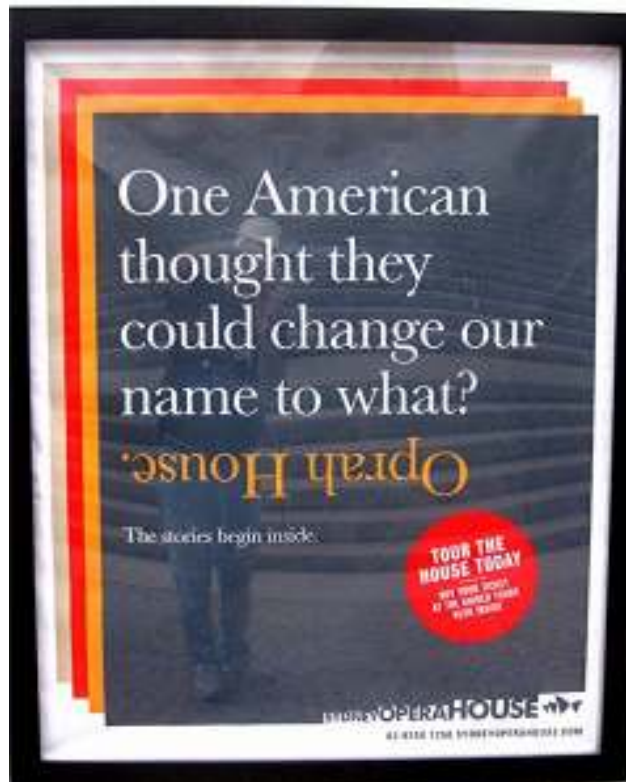


Once the steps were removed, they were applying a waterproof mastic material to the support structure below the steps. They were well along in this project that could be viewed from the hillside across from the Opera House, as shown on the left. The hazy sky color matched the color of the back two Opera House shells facing away from the steps and all that our camera recorded of them was the dark seam running down the ridge of each shell. A repair project

like this must be very costly. We learned from one of the Amsterdam passengers that the Opera House earns 80% of its expenses from operations and 20% of its support comes from Sydney taxpayers.

On the subject of Sydney Opera House costs it is interesting to note that the high cost of the Opera House construction was a big local issue during the building process. In fact the high cost led to public outcry from taxpayers and politicians to the extent that the architect, Jorn Utzon, resigned in 1966 and returned to Denmark. He didn't return to Australia even when the Opera House was completed. In retrospect the fact that the Sydney Opera house became an iconic symbol for Sydney around the world would seem to justify the cost. Utzon never returned to Australia but in 1999 he reestablished a business relationship with Sydney and after his death in 2008 a room in the Opera House was named in his honor.

On the construction barrier was a poster that got a chuckle out of us. It was based on a comment made during the visit of Oprah Winfrey to the Opera House about a year ago. She had a huge audience during a presentation on the Opera House Steps. Obviously she has an Australian following and had an impact on the local Sydney scene, at least during her visit. The poster, making a play on the similar sounds of "Opera" and the name "Oprah" is shown on the right. We weren't sure what the objective of the poster was but we appreciated the humorous connections with America and one of our stars.





We walked from the Opera House through the gates of the Royal Botanic Gardens. Along the way we admired some of the ancient banyan trees that grow on the grounds, as shown here.

Our walk took us by an interesting collection of stone carvings that have been salvaged from old buildings being torn down in Sydney. They offer a respectful testament to the skill and hard work of the people of Sydney who have gone before us. Below is a picture of some of the stones that have been put in



place. The nearby skyline of modern Sydney forms a back drop to these fragments of yesteryear.

From the collection of stone carvings we crossed over busy Macquaries Street and made our way to the Circular Quay where we waited for the free circuit bus that the city of Sydney operates to shuttle people around the business district.

While we were waiting for the bus a collection of fluttering banners wishing us a Happy Christmas caught our eye, as shown on the right.



Although some merchants in the US are already on the Christmas marketing bandwagon, the Australians seem to be about a month ahead of the US. We have developed a theory that the Australians are ahead of the US because in the US our efforts are diverted a bit by Thanksgiving, which comes about a month before Christmas. The Australians don't have this distraction.

Our circuit bus (#555) arrived and we boarded with many other waiting people. The bus ride took us on a loop run through the heart of downtown Sydney to the China Town area where it turned to return to Circular Quay. We caught a glimpse of posted gasoline prices and snapped a photo as shown on the right.

Here we can see the price of regular gasoline is \$131.7 Australian cents per liter which is about \$1.39 USD per liter. At the approximate 4 liter per gallon conversion this amounts to \$5.56 USD per gallon of gas in Sydney. This is essentially the same price we saw in Melbourne a several days ago.



We got off the bus in China Town and walked a short distance to Paddy's, a well known low cost "flea market" type place. Although we have been to Paddy's before we would have been lost if Cruise Critic friends Farol and Marleen hadn't been getting off the bus with us and they had directions to Paddy's. We followed them a few blocks and soon the familiar Market City building came into view, as shown on the right. The entrance to Paddy's is the second opening



on the right. Shown below is Barbara celebrating our find under the green Paddy's sign at the entrance.

We were looking for some more of the "touristy" 3 dimensional plastic pictures we had found in Vladivostok, Russia and Shanghai, China. Our room steward, Max, had been fascinated when he saw ours so we thought we would try to get him a couple. Another thing on the agenda was an Australian Aboriginal musical instrument called a didgeridoo. We had bought one in 2008 and use it as decoration at home. Our grandson, Andrew, had expressed an interest in having one to play so we were going to get him one if we could find it.

We were getting started on our search when we ran into Farol and Marleen who were already hard at work with their shopping, as shown on the right.



We inquired with the office about where we could find the 10 inch x 14 inch plastic 3 dimensional (3D) pictures. Without hesitation one of the men in the office said we should look in booth number 347. We went to both 347 and there we found a very pleasant Chinese lady and indeed she had the plastic 3D pictures we were looking for. She wanted \$5 Australian (\$5.25 USD) for each copy. Of course we tried to bargain with her and get the price down for volume buying and so forth. However, in the end she would not budge and we ended up paying the \$5 Australian for each of the 3D pictures.

Next we were looking for a didgeridoo so we kept meandering up and down the aisles in Paddy's market. In East Tennessee we would call Paddy's an upscale flea market. Finally we stumbled onto a very likely booth that had a good selection of Aboriginal items like masks and didgeridoos. We picked out the best looking didgeridoo in the lot and started a bargaining process while the proprietor demonstrated his skill on the didgeridoo in question. We complexed the operation by looking at some of his wooden masks and picking out a nice one with a minor flaw. After a drawn out session of haggling we finally agreed on a price that was higher than we wanted to pay but lower than the starting price. That was a victory of sorts so we walked away with our new didgeridoo and a wooden Aboriginal mask. We got a picture of the proprietor and his booth, as shown on the right.



Later, when we got back to the Amsterdam Orlin tested out the new didgeridoo, as shown on the left. He found it easier to play than a previous one we had bought but he still had the near miraculous breathing and blowing technique to master before it could really be played. The next challenge will be to get it shipped home with all the other goodies we have picked up on the cruise.

As we were preparing to leave Paddy's we were approached by a young man who said he had overheard our American accent and wondered if we would agree to participate in a project he was working on. It turned out he was basically a junior employee at a local radio station and he had been sent out to get interviews with strangers on tape. The interview sessions served as practice for his profession and they would be reviewed by his supervisors who would evaluate and critic his technique. His gave us his name of Phil Staley and he seemed sincere so we agreed to do the interview. With the audio tape running he proceeded to ask us questions on the general subject of why we wanted to come to Australia and what we had done while visiting here. A picture of Phil Staley and Orlin (holding his new didgeridoo) during the 5 minute interview is shown on the right.



With this history changing interview by Phil behind us we left Paddy's and



proceeded to walk in the direction of the iconic Queen Victoria Building (VQB) on George Street. In the process of getting to George Street we passed through a section of China Town and Barbara had to have a picture of the gate to that section of the city, as shown on the left.

We finally made it to George Street at the location of "The Pub". It had these



endearing "Say No Evil, See No Evil, Hear No Evil" monkeys perched over the entrance. It was tempting to drop in but we pushed on.

We continued walking down George Street and eventually came to the Queen Victoria Building which houses one of the finest department store malls in Sydney. Our main objective here was to get some refill pencil lead for Orlin's mechanical pencil and to see the gigantic Christmas tree they always put up in the main hall. We found the pencil lead and bought it at a hefty price of nearly \$9USD; more than twice what one would pay in the US at a store like Staples. As the Australians would say, "Not to worry!" we are here to support the economy and have a good time.

We continued with the "good time" aspect of our visit by checking out the Christmas tree that had been put in place only two days before we got here. The tree is anchored on the first floor and extends up to the height of the fourth floor through an opening in the main hall, as shown on the right.

Here are some views of the tree taken from locations on different floors.



On the right is the top section of the tree with the top star at the fourth floor height. It is truly a magnificent Christmas tree and a tradition we hope is preserved in Sydney.



Christmas tree “fix” at the Queen Victoria Building mall we went back onto George Street and continued waling toward Circular Quay and the Amsterdam. We passed by an Apple Corporation store as shown on the right. We couldn’t help noticing that the crowds of people enthusiastically packing the place looked very much like the crowds at the Apple store we had seen in Shanghai.



There was a bus stop in front of the Apple store. The didgeridoo and other items were getting to feel a bit heavy so we caught the free Circuit Bus (#555) which took us back to Circular Quay.

We were walking by the Captain Cook Ferry Boat dock when we saw an advertisement



for a special Captain Cook Cruisers event on New Year’s Eve, as shown on the left. Because of the International Dateline protocol, Sydney is usually the first big city that we in the US can watch on TV as they bring in the New Year.

They shoot off marvelous fireworks from the Harbour Bridge. It is a sensational sight on TV and it must be even better when viewed in person. The Captain Cook people have some beautiful ships outfitted for dining and we suspect that for the right price a person could arrange a New Years Eve dinner on Sydney Harbor capped off by a front row seat viewing the Harbour Bridge fireworks. We fantasized for a moment about flying over to Sydney just for the New Years event but fortunately reality quickly set in and we moved on.

After putting our purchases in our room on the Amsterdam we still had some energy that we used to visit the area near the Overseas Passenger Terminal known as The Rocks. This collection of buildings, mostly built in the 1800s is filled with charming shops, restaurants and pubs. We meandered around that area and visited one of our favorite shops called Natural Selection Souvenirs. The lady proprietor, Aviva Lacey was just as friendly and fun to talk to as when we first met her a couple years ago.

Later we were pleased to get a photograph of a group of school kids on an outing to this historic part of Sydney, as shown on the right.



During our stay in Sydney we hadn't found a really good venue for recording the visit of Barbara's library card. Time was getting short with departure coming up tonight and we were worried. We were very happy when we passed by a visitor information office in The Rocks that had a large banner we could use to identify our location. We quickly snapped a picture of the card, as shown on the left, and checked off this final goal of our outing this afternoon.

We returned to the Amsterdam for dinner and after a busy day of hiking around Sydney we settled down for the night. The Amsterdam got underway about 11pm and quietly sailed out of Sydney Harbour in darkness. It wasn't as exciting as a daylight departure but the Opera House profile and lights of the city were beautiful in the distance as we pulled away. Tomorrow will be a day at sea as we make our way northeast to New Caledonia and the next port of call of Iles des Pines in the French protectorate of New Caledonia.