



Wamuran History and Shri Mataji's involvement

Recollections of the purchase and building of the Wamuran Collective property and Ashram by Albert and Pam Lewis.

In 1985 there was a World Expo in Brisbane. Many investors bought real estate in Brisbane in anticipation of a substantial profit. The ashram that we had established at Highgate Hill was one of these properties.

As the value at the time was below the investor's expectation, it was put up for auction. Our small collective at the time had approached several lending institutions, however, the general requirement at that time was one individual to be responsible for the mortgage. None of the fourteen residents were in a position to fulfil this criteria.

As Shri Mataji was beginning her Australian tour in Perth, Western Australia in 1992, we requested that the hosting collective ask Shri Mataji as to what we should do. Shri Mataji's reply was: "It's alright, I have something else in mind". There was no hint as to what that was.

On her arrival in Brisbane She settled into her room and requested the Brisbane newspaper, the Courier Mail. She began to peruse the real estate sales columns. From there on we guessed something serious was about to happen. Some attending yogis suggested properties close to the ocean. Shri Mataji warned us not to buy near the ocean. Then She said: "Go and have a look at this one".

Two carloads of yogis travelled to the property which She had suggested. It was raining and the road off the D'Aguilar Highway was gravel at that time. We ventured up a very muddy driveway.

We parked in the area which is now the new Puja Hall and met two of the current residents, motor bike enthusiasts. The building was a rough galvanised iron shed with a dirt floor; tree trunk uprights supporting the roof; wood stove in the corner; axe & chopping block nearby; small bathroom & toilet in the corner; punching bag hanging from an exposed beam; occasional mats on the floor; a couple of old cupboards containing motorbike leathers;

several sleeping bags scattered around the floor; a Harley Davidson in the process of being assembled; that sums up the vision that lay before us.

Outside there were two rusty cut open galvanised tanks, one used as a chicken coop and the other as a pigeon nesting area. There was an old live-in caravan and washing tubs where the present BBQ area stands. The water supply was pumped from the two dams on the property.

On our return to the ashram, we enthusiastically began to tell Shri Mataji what we had seen, however She proceeded to tell us all about it.

Following are the comments She made at the time.

“Live up there and you’ll know what’s needed”.

“Brick it up, brick it up”.

“Don’t worry about the snakes, they know”.

“Put screens on the windows”.

“Your meditations will improve, the children will love it and you won’t have to worry about noise because you are a noisy lot”.

“Put fish in the dam and make it a living dam”.

Later on, on two separate occasions we added Australian native fish fingerlings to comply with this directive. However the huge number of cane toads and their toad poles in the dam at the time must have contaminated the water because they didn’t survive. Water lilies were added and they thrived for several years but various recent deluges separated the roots from the dam floor and they haven’t survived.

Shri Mataji asked how many yogis would live there and how many bedrooms would be needed. We mentioned five couples that might live there and She said to make it six bedrooms.

At the time I imagined that the sixth bedroom would be for Shri Mataji.

Shri Mataji proceeded to purchase the property. The sale price was \$125,000 and the sale went through at \$122,500. During Her future Australian tours She instructed that puja money collected was to be used for the construction of Wamuran Ashram.

Once the purchase was finalised, our small collective spent many weekends making the building habitable. The earth floor was cemented and four small bedrooms were created in the previously open area. This left a small area in the centre for a kitchen, dining and lounge common area. The fifth couple set up in the live-in caravan.

On moving in to the premises it became obvious that it just wasn’t viable to brick it up. The building was an illegal structure, not even shown on council plans. There was a limit of twelve persons to live on an acreage of this size. We amounted to more than twelve persons once the five children attending ISPS came home for holidays.

Regardless of the fact that caravans were not allowed to be lived in while building, we proceeded to set up an extra two caravans to accommodate the children.

To comply with Shri Mataji’s directions it became obvious that we needed to start afresh.

Shri Mataji had already asked uncle Michael Fogarty to design the changes to the existing building and once the decision was made to start afresh he went about designing a new

building. I took him on a tour of the old established suburbs of Brisbane, showing him several styles which we considered suitable.

Shri Mataji had previously expressed interest in Paddington Lace and I knew of two foundries that produced this cast iron effect in aluminium. She requested me to collect some brochures with pricing. On perusal of the pricing She concluded that it would be too expensive.

She then commented that she would describe the new building as rustic.

The design that uncle Michael Fogarty presented was of a light framed house raised off the ground which looked very attractive on paper. Having lived on the property for some time it was decided that it was unsuitable due to the possibility of snakes & bandicoots etc from taking up residence between the stumps.

A local architect was commissioned to design a waffle pad slab at ground level, passive solar, single storey dwelling. This design was passed by council. The possibility of the use of mud bricks had been discussed previously and we were able to inspect an existing mud brick house in the area.

We loaned a hand press mud brick maker to trial. It was then decided to build a hydraulic ram to compress the mixture. We acquired an old Volkswagen motor which we mounted on a frame with two wheels to move it around. The mould was positioned at waist level for ease of lifting. Two holes in the bricks allowed for rods which tied them from slab to roof plate.

The mixture needed to be approximately thirty percent clay and sixty five percent sand with five percent cement powder. This particular mixture was known as a cement stabilised mud brick and council required them to be tested and passed by a recognised testing authority. The front dam on the property proved to contain this desired proportion of sand and clay. A suitable machine was hired to scour it out and load it into trucks that dumped it at the brick making site. Our pergola now stands on this site.

Each brick was formed individually in the motorised hydraulic press after the mixture was sieved to break up lumps of clay. We used an old style bed spring for this purpose. Water was added to the mix. If we added too much water the mixture would not compress. If insufficient water was added the brick would fall apart on removal.

Twenty days was allowed for the bricks to cure on pallets. On inspection the testing authority stated that the bricks were one of the best they had tested. Testing consisted of spraying water at pressure on the brick and rubbing the corners to see if they disintegrated. After receiving the certification we proceeded to produce approximately 14,000 bricks.

Shri Mataji visited Brisbane for the final time in.

We prepared the shed to accommodate Her and She slept here for one night. However it became obvious to us that the facilities were inappropriate for our Holy Mother. We arranged for Her to stay in the Astor Apartments in Brisbane for the rest of Her visit.

At that time the slab had been poured and eleven bricks laid. We presented one of the bricks to Her and mentioned that white ants were a problem and mud bricks were

impervious to them. Shri Mataji responded; "White ants! No problem, vibrated water and kum kum".

While perusing the plans in the shed Shri Mataji asked me three specific questions; She asked who had designed it as one storey. She then proceeded to alter the plans by adding an extra storey for dormitories and bathrooms, accessed by stairs from the main entrance.

At that stage I was trying to gain more floor space for the dining room. Shri Mataji warned me not to make it too big because the yogis will all sit around and talk and not work! She then enquired as to why the walls separating the bedrooms were brick. She said we would save two foot of floor space if the walls were wood framed.

Her final query was regarding the position of the septic system. I explained there was a ridge running through the property with the east side draining into the bush and the west side draining into the dam.

Shri Mataji replied; "OK, drainage is important".

Before driving down to Brisbane we drove Shri Mataji around the property, showing Her the brick maker and the concrete slab with the first bricks laid. It was then She mentioned to cut down the trees as there were plenty of trees here. After Shri Mataji had left for Brisbane we added an ensuite bathroom to the sixth bedroom which was to be Her bedroom.

We invited the local sawmill manager to the property to advise us as to which trees we could use in the construction. Many of the trees were unsuitable, however thirty two were earmarked to be felled. These logs were then transported to Wamuran sawmill to be stored until needed.

During Her stay at the Astor Apartments Shri Mataji requested a meeting of all the builders. As the small apartment was becoming crowded with yogis, Shri Mataji smilingly said; "Such a lot of people". She knew how yogis look for any excuse to be in Her presence. We were all huddled around Shri Mataji as She was explaining the plans, about the importance of being on Mother Earth.

It was suggested that I apologise to Shri Mataji for having drawn a single storey structure. My opportunity came to do this quietly when we were in a clothing shop in Brisbane. Shri Mataji was seated on a chair while the attending yogis were looking for garments for Sir CP. As I kneeled to apologise, yogis gathered from around the shop.

Shri Mataji said: "It's all right, it's all right, it's just that I've lived in plenty of houses and I know that bricking up is better". I remember feeling very relieved!

A New Zealand yogi was asked by Shri Mataji to come & work on the building. His focus was mainly on bricklaying. During the following Australian tour by Shri Mataji, at Bundilla

Scoutcamp, I was called into the cabin where She was staying. She told me She was sending Mark to work on the building.

Shri Mataji requested that only yogis work on the building as much as possible, however we had to employ qualified electricians and plumbers when necessary to satisfy building regulations.

After some time word came through that the Golden Builders would be coming from Sydney to help complete the project. During this time the property was a hive of activity. Yogis would come and stay in tents while they helped out. The ladies cooked meals so as to allow the workers to continue uninterrupted.

A yogi living in Darwin informed us that the Navy Stores there were being demolished. There were loads of seventy year old Jarrah and Tallowwood being sent to the tip and could it be used at Wamuran?

My reaction was that it couldn't be much good if it was going to the tip. I turned the offer down at the time and two weeks later another call came saying there was a lot of interest in the timber. Less than two weeks later a semi trailer laden with the timber arrived at Wamuran.

From memory three hundred dollars was paid for the timber and we paid twelve hundred and fifty dollars transport. It was not neatly stacked on the truck, looking like a mobile demolition site. From then on various yogis would spend the weekends sorting and denailing the enormous pile.

All the surrounding frameworks for the windows and doors were constructed using this Jarrah with Tallowwood bases. The stairs and the kitchen benches are also solid Jarrah. The kitchen cupboard doors are recycled fence palings.

I could envisage parquet floor tiles made from different timbers from the huge pile of offcuts which were earmarked to be burnt. So we made a jig and began making floor tiles. Originally they were meant to be four hundred millimeters square, so three tiles were glued every day, being very fussy about them being square. When we assumed we had made enough they were stacked in the foyer to acclimatise to the moisture content in the area to be laid.

I was living in Brisbane at the time and Shri Mataji appeared in a dream and told me: "Your tiles are not square".

I couldn't sleep after that so I drove to Wamuran at midnight to check the tiles. The house wasn't locked & the dogs recognised me, everyone was asleep. After checking the diagonals and with a tee square, I concluded the tiles were square. I couldn't figure it out and drove home. Later on one of the residents had started to lay some of the tiles and they curled up on the edges. It was obvious they were too big so we decided to cut them into four, making them two hundred millimeters square.

We organised a collective effort to lay the tiles, however I was late arriving and found some of the tiles had already been cut. They had not been cut accurately and were obviously not square.

There were suggestions made to rub sawdust and glue in the joins to hide the sloppy cuts. It was then I had to tell about the dream of Shri Mataji telling me the tiles were not square.

I measured several tiles to see what could be salvaged. They were all now one hundred and ninety five millimeters square and we proceeded to lay them.

Once the Golden Builders had put the roof on we were able to move in and begin paying rent. There were many things in the house that were not yet finished including lining the upstairs ceilings, bagging and painting the interior walls, concreting the verandah and completing one of the upstairs bathrooms.

All the downstairs floors were bare concrete and the kitchen cabinets had no doors. The hat was passed around frequently and we had a food stall at Woodford Folk Festival to raise enough money to gradually complete the ashram.

