

# Forged from Fire

*The making of the Blacksmiths' Tree – a community response to loss and grieving.*



*Designer and metal artist Amanda Gibson gathers a team of seasoned blacksmiths from the world over to forge a life size stainless steel and copper gum tree within a community traumatised by fire. The Blacksmiths' Tree was not without its challenges, but what it became for the people who anticipated its completion is something no one could have imagined.*

***A film by Andrew Garton in collaboration with The Tree Project  
and the Australian Blacksmiths Association (Victoria).  
A Seccession/Films production.***



*Financed with the assistance of the Documentary Australia Foundation*

## Introduction

This document describes the background, production status and outreach strategies, including a summary budget and commentary from the Director towards the completion of our 55 minute non-fiction film **Forged from Fire**. A short format version of the film, OUR TREE, was completed with support from Regional Arts Victoria and the City of Whittlesea. This was incorporated into a three channel video exhibition that was screened daily at the 2014 Human Rights Arts and Film Festival, Melbourne.

## Black Saturday Fires

On Black Saturday, 7 February 2009, townships north-east of Melbourne were threatened by fire-storms. Considered Australia's worst ever natural disaster it resulted in the highest loss of life and injuries from a bush-fire in Australia. The conditions in which the fires were ignited and burnt were extreme. After the horror of immediate losses, people had naturally embarked on various journeys of repair and recovery. The Blacksmiths' Tree was one of them.



*Kinglake after the fires, Camera – Mike Wilkins*



*Detail Blacksmiths' Tree, Camera – Mike Wilkins*

Producer / Director - **Andrew Garton**  
Director of Photography - **Mike Wilkins**  
Editors - **Andrew Garton & Jary Nemo**  
Colourist - **Mike Wilkins**  
Titling - **Amanda Gibson**

Budget / Finance management – **Auspicious Arts**  
Production Assistant - **Laura Emerick**  
Community Liaison - **Mahony Kiely**  
Music - **Invention in Time, Charles Brown, Neatly Folded Goat**

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## Forged from Fire

...tells the story of how an Australian and international community of blacksmiths, welders, artists and volunteers responded to the devastating Black Saturday bush-fires by creating perhaps the most ambitious public artwork and memorial in Australia - a three tonne, 10 meter tall stainless steel and copper gum tree – The Blacksmiths' Tree.

**Forged from Fire** is a film about the personal journeys of these artisans and volunteers and how an organic, unconventional and creative response to trauma continues to unite fire affected individuals and families.

## The Film

**Forged from Fire** tells the story of how an Australian and international community of blacksmiths, welders, artists and volunteers responded to the devastating Black Saturday bush-fires by creating perhaps the most ambitious public artwork and memorial in Australia - a three tonne, 10 meter tall stainless steel and copper gum tree – The Blacksmiths' Tree. Blacksmiths from 23 countries forged 3500 copper, silver and even a handful of glass gum leaves, whilst the Australian crew forged the branches and a solid stainless steel trunk. **Forged from Fire** is a documentary about the personal journeys of these artisans and volunteers and how their creativity united fire affected individuals and families.

Leading the Blacksmiths' Tree project is artist, graphic designer and the 2014 Nillumbik Citizen of The Year, Amanda Gibson. Teaming up with seasoned blacksmiths she not only navigated the emotional contours of communities in grief, she drew on skills and capacities she had not known were available to her. Amanda faced technical and logistical challenges whilst handling the increasing aspirations of all who had joined her, from the women who learnt to weld and help to complete the project to the thousands of people who contributed financial and voluntary support, many whose testimonials are stamped into the leaves that comprise the canopy.

**Forged from Fire** builds on a 12 minute exhibiting documentary that describes the creative and personal stories that led to the inaugural public unveiling of The Blacksmiths' Tree on 30 November 2013. With the addition of liberal access to the final stages of the creative process - dramatic scenes of industrial welding and the critical skills involved in its install – the full length documentary unpacks the motivations and post-traumatic growth experienced by the many people both involved, and who have subsequently come into contact with The Blacksmiths' Tree.



*Installing the Blacksmiths' Tree  
Doug Tarrant – Blacksmith / Surveyor  
Camera – Andrew Garton*



*The Blacksmiths' Tree, Camera – Mike Wilkins*

Cameras in the hands of welders, engineers, blacksmiths, volunteers, the general public, videographers and a handful of film-makers captured key moments in the creation of The Blacksmiths' Tree. Complimented with interviews, observational, aerial and time-lapse footage, exceptional cinematography and underscored by music written by musicians who survived the fires, a tender and far reaching story is told of perseverance, resilience and transformation.

The Blacksmiths' Tree was an unusual, inspirational and instinctive response to the devastating effects of loss and the life that was seen to flourish in the aftermath of the Black Saturday fires. **Forged from Fire** plumbs the depths of this heart-warming human response, documenting a remarkable social history - one that will hopefully never have cause to occur again.

## Production status

- Over the five years it has taken to construct the Blacksmiths' Tree an estimated 350 to 400 hours of both professional and amateur footage has been shot and archived.
- A public call out through rural and social media continues to yield new material.
- Much of this material has been digitised, though not all of it has been logged.
- Interviews with project leads and volunteers were shot throughout 2014.
- Documentary Australia Foundation approves financial support through which tax deductible donations can be made towards the completion of the film.

## Production requirements

We are seeking up to AUD\$38,000 in financial support and broadcast and distribution partnership to complete post-production, outreach and public screening of the film. Completing the film includes a final shoot that covers:

- Follow-up interviews with project leads
- Public interactions with the Blacksmiths' Tree
- Completion of the memorial grounds

## Post production includes

- Transcription of interviews
- Shot logging
- Writing
- Editing
- Commissioning original music
- Recording and mix
- Post-finishing
- Marketing and publicity



*Amanda Gibson – Project Manager The Tree Project, with  
DOP Mike Wilkins  
Camera – Andrew Garton*



*Amanda Gibson and Peter Peter Drofenik - Architectural  
Steelworker, Welding Instructor  
Camera – Mike Wilkins*

## Nurturing Audiences

In an environment of increasingly frequent catastrophic natural disasters around the world, **Forged from Fire** offers communities an insight into how lives evolve throughout the aftermath of such an event, and perhaps forecasts pathways through such tragedies that may prove helpful and hopeful to others, now, and in times to come.

**Forged from Fire** is a film we intend to take direct to audiences via mediated local, regional and rural screening events; safe and respectful spaces in which the film can be screened and open floor discussions take place. Audiences are expected to include the bereaved, their friends and families, sponsors who have donated to the project, international contributors, artists and artisans, locals and blacksmiths from around the world.

These screening events would be self-funded, created in collaboration with regional and rural outposts of the Uniting Church and individual chapters of the Country Fire Association.

The few screenings to date of the OUR TREE short have seen audiences moved to express their own responses to Black Saturday, often for the first time. These include:

- stories of personal loss shared at the 2014 Human Rights Arts & Film Festival screening launch;
- intimate screenings at the Hurstbridge Uniting Church;
- non-fire affected audiences at both the 2014 Community Development Conference in Glasgow and the Internet Rights are Human Rights Workshops in Barcelona.

Time and again audiences responded with cheers, applause and tears.

*This story of loss and recovery seems to remind people of an innate urge to be with each other, to be held safely within the spaces our films are screened, intimate spaces in which people have felt safe to grieve and speak openly about their feelings irrespective of who they are or where they came from. I have found people want to share their concerns openly, and in doing so, whether they are fire affected or not, these genuine moments of intimate sharing binds communities together at a time when so many are fractured. Audiences are to be nurtured and respected, not led.*

**Andrew Garton, Writer / Director**



*Photo courtesy of The Daveys*

In producing this film we have found the project already bringing people together, particularly those that gave generously, by way of financial donations and voluntary labour to the creation of the Blacksmiths' Tree. They have come to meet many people from fire affected communities. This sense of connection, healing through openness, frank discussion and the support these opportunities afford, is significant in the healing process and its social impact is invaluable.

## Recording impact

We intend, for reporting and marketing purposes, to measure the impact of our film by tracking invited and curated screenings, audience numbers, DVD sales and audience feedback. However it is the qualitative impact that we are really interested in. Such impact may be measured in responses to the film through direct contact with audiences, recorded and documented testimonials such as hand-written testimonials that may be left in a "reflections book" at screenings, sourced online and through various community publications.



Photo courtesy Amanda Gibson



Photo courtesy Amanda Gibson

*I feel so honoured to have watched this project grow and succeed. My leaf is a little treasure and I was left speechless seeing the tree in person yesterday. It talked to me like it was a living breathing thing. My three heartfelt photos that sum up my presence at the launch are attached. Thank you!*

**The Daveys**

## A few words on Outreach

The Blacksmiths' Tree was made possible by way of an international collaboration and a vast network of local volunteers from fire affected communities in Victoria. The Black Saturday fires, the devastation, the pain and loss felt by a few was some how felt by many. The Blacksmiths' Tree gave form to that. In terms of outreach it has already begun and will continue as knowledge of The Blacksmiths' Tree reaches out beyond the tiny hamlet of Strathewen where it has been installed.

In keeping with the local context in which The Tree was conceived, forged, assembled and installed the production of **Forged from Fire** is marketing itself. Everyone who has contributed to the project is not only local to the region from which The Blacksmiths' Tree grew, we are each of us affected by the Black Saturday fires.

This process of collaboration and outreach will continue through post-production. For example, a call-out to local composers and song-writers to contribute to the documentary soundtrack, that will no doubt describe their personal experiences during and after the fires. Production initiatives that engage with local artists will

further knowledge of the documentary, building anticipation for its completion and the screenings to follow.

**Forged from Fire** will be available on DVD and/or BlueRay, packaged as part of a book being written about the Blacksmiths' Tree. The book will be marketed through local, regional and international networks.

Targeting festivals that are focused on human rights, social change and community development will greatly increase the capacity for audience outreach, both locally and abroad. These events will provide opportunities for all facets of the project to be marketed and distributed, from the proposed book to the completed film.



*Public Unveiling of The Blacksmiths' Tree, Whittlesea Showgrounds, 30 Nov 2013  
Photo courtesy Neil Grant*

## Project collaborators

This film would not have been possible without the support of:

- The Tree Project
- The Australian Blacksmiths Association (Victoria)
- City of Whittlesea

## Acknowledgments

Regional Arts Victoria, i-Drone, Dunmoochin Foundation, Baseline, Uniting Church, Hurstbridge, Wattle Festival, Hurstbridge, Mahony Keily, Sue Green, Charles Brown, Warwick Page, Barry Thomas, Quentin Fogarty and Quotable Productions, Invention in Time, Black Saturday Museum.

## Director's statement

In February 2009 I had returned from Europe to commence an artists' residency at Clifton Pugh's Dunmoochin in Cottles Bridge. The day after I arrived in Melbourne the entire north-east was devastated by fire-storms of a magnitude never seen before. With the impact of the fires so severe it would be seven months before I made the move. The Black Saturday Fires had impacted profoundly on the people with whom I would come to know as neighbours and friends.

During the residency I met Amanda Gibson, the courageous and compassionate project lead behind The Blacksmiths' Tree. I would hear talk of the complexities of manufacture, the massive stainless steel taper that would engage the largest forge in the country, the call outs for volunteers and the women who would learn to weld and join the blacksmiths in their quest to complete their work - the multifaceted human story that would pound the Blacksmiths' Tree into shape. Myth was talked up every day and the Tree became something mystical.

By late 2013 The Blacksmiths' Tree was nearing completion. Numerous amateur and professional film-makers had had a go at documenting its creation. I chipped in to bring some continuity to growing archive of video and stills. With so much footage available I looked into the possibility of pooling this material into a single documentary with a view to completing it with The Tree Project team and the communities that had gathered to support them. I grew to become part of the team, trusted to shoot at both the momentous and intimate closing stages of the project. It would prove to be an enriching, illuminating and emotional undertaking. It would be the most significant and challenging documentary I had made.

On 30 November 2013 The Blacksmiths' Tree was unveiled at a public event on the Whittlesea Showgrounds. Thousands of people saw the Tree for the first time. It would also be the last time they would view up-close its canopy of 3500 leaves; poems, testimonials, well wishes and the names of those who perished in the fires stamped onto them.

On that day I filmed the complex move from the factory in which it was assembled and the public's reaction to it. I collected photos and video clips the public had taken and with announcements throughout the day, I met a good many people who not only shared their photos, but told me harrowing stories of escape, loss and grieving – and many did so whilst touching the stainless steel trunk. I'd observed countless people seeking to touch the Blacksmiths' Tree, reaching out across the safety fence to place their hands onto it.

There is a real urge to relate to The Blacksmiths' Tree. Volunteers found themselves dedicated to seeing the Tree completed and those following its progress on social media found a means to elevate their hopes beyond grief, beyond suffering, beyond the personal losses so many had, and continue, to endure.

As The Blacksmiths' Tree neared completion it was evident it was having an effect on the wider community, among fire affected individuals and families, that revealed a deeper story, a story where the impossible became possible. The Tree grew to be a symbol for healing that gave many people the courage to overcome their grief, allowing this unique stainless steel and copper sculpture to connect them to each other, irrespective of the differences that may have existed prior to Black Saturday. This is the story we are telling in **Forged from Fire**.

Andrew Garton 2015

## Summary Budget

The following is a summary budget towards the completion of **Forged from Fire**; a rounded-off total of AUD \$38,000.00.

| <b>General production costs</b>            |              |
|--|--------------|
| Equipment hire                             | 2200         |
| Data storage and backup                    | 1000         |
| Sound, studio recording, narration and mix | 3200         |
| Post-production script                     | 1500         |
| Licenses                                   | 600          |
| <b>Sub-total</b>                           | <b>8500</b>  |
| <b>Post-production costs</b>               |              |
| Post-production crew                       | 13635        |
| Delivery masters                           | 250          |
| Composer commissions                       | 4000         |
| Titling                                    | 1350         |
| Grade                                      | 900          |
| On-costs (e.g. taxes, superannuation)      | 2485         |
| <b>Sub-total</b>                           | <b>22620</b> |
| <b>Below the line costs</b>                |              |
| Marketing, publicity, administration       | 3220         |
| Administration                             | 1360         |
| Auspicing                                  | 2300         |
| <b>Sub-total</b>                           | <b>6880</b>  |
| <b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>                        | <b>38000</b> |

## Summary Schedule

|   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| Completion of forged benches on memorial grounds  | August 2015                  |
| Completion of landscaping on memorial grounds     | July 2016                    |
| B-roll shoot, final interviews and aerial footage | August - Sept 2016           |
| Post-Production, Marketing                        | October 2016 – February 2017 |
| Masters delivered                                 | March 2017                   |
| Launch screening                                  | TBC                          |

## Filmmakers

### Producer / Writer / Director – Andrew Garton



Andrew Garton is a writer, director and producer graduating with a Master of Arts in Interactive Media at RMIT University. He co-founded the community media production house Round House Communications in the late 1980s after which he joined the pioneering Pegasus Networks overseeing the roll-out of computer networks for civil society throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

In the mid-1990s he co-founded the media arts group Toy Satellite producing on and offline installations such as SENSORIUM CONNECT with the artist Stelarc, TAT FAT SIZE TEMPLE, AUSLANDER MICRO and performance documentaries such as UNDERCURRENTS which opened the

Taipei International Arts Festival in 2001 and the video story-telling engine D3 for ACMI in 2003.

Garton went on to become Open Channel's inaugural Program Director in 2005 and EngageMedia's Operations Manager in 2009. He has produced 14 short format documentaries, writing and directing 10 of them. This includes the BAMIYARRA and SARAWAK GONE micro-docs series; and THE LIGHT SHOW about legendary projection artist Hugh McSpedden. He has also Executive Produced 8 short films under Screen Australia's Raw Nerve initiative and was Creative Producer of the Cooperative Research Centre project Home Lands v2 in collaboration with La Trobe and Swinburne University's, the City of Melbourne and the Cultural Development Network.

Garton has also written, directed and produced an ongoing series of ethnographic studies and documentary dramas including TONG TANA for Austrian broadcaster ORF/KunstRadio. His next film, Ocean in a Drop, commenced production in New Delhi, Jan 2015.

### Director of Photography – Mike Wilkins



Mike is an independent video producer and director of photography with an extensive post-production background. As a DOP he has shot documentaries, TVCs and numerous video products for organisations ranging from Tourism Australia, global mining companies, universities and Australia's biggest banks.

His work has taken him to locations such as the Atacama Desert in Chile, Burma, Nepal, and The Simpson & Tirari Deserts in outback Australia. In 2004 he filmed a 400km return journey by catamaran riding the flooded Warburton river through the Australian outback to the normally inaccessible Lake Eyre.

Mike's post-production background includes working on feature films & documentaries and as a post-production supervisor and online editor. This work has also included colour grading and vfx work on TVCs, documentaries and corporate videos.

## Co-Editor – Jary Nemo



Jary Nemo is Co-Director of Wind & Sky Productions, an independent production company specialising in short form documentary. Jary has worked in the entertainment and media industry for more than 30 years.

He has a history in music, theatre, documentary, animation and multimedia delivery. His roles have included Lighting Designer for live theatre, Rostrum Camera Operator for Hanna-Barbera delivering animation domestically and internationally for both broadcast and theatrical release, Director of Animation and Special Effects for a documentary TV series released internationally and Head of development for online media production in a Melbourne based advertising agency.

Since 2008 Jary has headed up production for Wind & Sky, working hands on through every stage of documentary production. Acting as Producer, Director, Cameraman, Sound Engineer and Editor Jary has produced more than 25 short form documentaries over the past seven years. Samples of his work may be found on the Wind & Sky Productions web site.

## Production Assistance - Laura Emerick



Laura Emerick has a Masters in Cinema Management from the University of Melbourne, Australia and a B.A. in Film, Television & Theatre from the University of Notre Dame, USA. She was the former Director of the Panama Film Commission within the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Panama where she lobbied on behalf of the country's film industry professionals for international and local co-production and funding opportunities.

At the Film Commission she also provided support to various audiovisual production companies filming in Panama, providing production support as well as guidance on the various fiscal and labor incentives for filming in

Panama. She was on the advisory board of the International Film Festival of Panama and successfully lobbied for its funding of \$1.1 million from the Panamanian government.

Laura also worked briefly at the Panamanian Tourism Authority promoting tourism in Panama and developing investment opportunities for the organisation's audiovisual department. Laura was a founder and President of the Academy Awards' Best Foreign Language Film Committee of Panama and she is still a member, collaborating toward its recent development as the official organisation that oversees the nomination of Panamanian films for various international film awards.

She has worked at two independent feature film distribution companies (Kino-Lorber Films and Zeitgeist Films in New York City). She has varied experience working at international film festivals and is currently working in Melbourne as a Film Programmer for the Human Rights and Arts Film Festival.