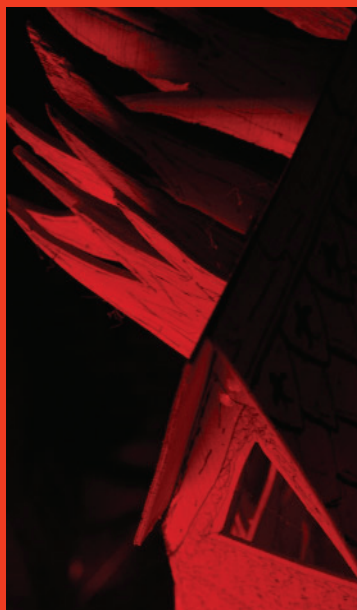


Michael Rostig  
*Hinterborough*



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# A SLICE OF PROVINCIAL ENGLAND..

'A slice of provincial England off the coast of Australia' the narrator says as he first introduces us to the town of Hinterborough. A town that is simultaneously charming, quaint and sinister. As he later states, it embodied "a righteously upstanding exterior filled with a dark, unscrupulous core." Hinterborough is a film that grapples with a side of Australia shaped by an obsessive preoccupation with England's culture and traditions, one untethered from the nation's true origins. It's a searing examination of the darker impulses that have taken root – an arrogant nationalistic pride tethered to another country's history, a stubborn adherence to archaic systems of order ill-suited for the present, and a rigid moral code that marginalises and oppresses. Through metaphor and haunting visuals, the film lays bare an Australia still wrestling with the shadows of its colonial past, one that prioritises tradition over progress and clings to an idealized Englishness at the expense of its own identity. It's a potent critique of the sinister undercurrents that can fester when insularity and xenophobia go unchecked.

#### SALES PITCH.

Experience the captivating and haunting world of Hinterborough, a groundbreaking film that pushes the boundaries of storytelling and craftsmanship. This one-of-a-kind cinematic masterpiece invites you to witness the consequences of upholding tradition at any cost, as a meticulously crafted diorama village becomes engulfed in flames, symbolizing the disastrous impact of hubris and injustice. Hinterborough is a labor of love, a monumental achievement that took years to create. Painstakingly constructed from balsa wood, nails, glue, and ink, every inch of this miniature world is a testament to the artisan's unwavering dedication and attention to detail. As the camera pans through this frozen-in-time diorama, a gripping narrative unfolds, narrated with a captivating intensity that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

Through the lens of a post-mortem investigation, you'll delve into the twisted history of Hinterborough, a supposed utopia that harbored dark secrets beneath its idyllic façade. As the flames engulf the village, the truth is laid bare, and the lines between salvation and damnation blur, inviting you to ponder the consequences of allowing injustices to persist. Hinterborough is a triumph of artistic vision and storytelling prowess, a film that demands to be experienced. Prepare to be entranced by the intricate details, the haunting beauty, and the profound exploration of human nature that lies at the heart of this extraordinary work.

Whether you're a cinophile, a connoisseur of artistic craftsmanship, or simply someone who appreciates bold and inventive narratives, Hinterborough promises to leave an indelible mark on your soul. Brace yourself for a cinematic journey like no other, where reality and imagination collide in a blaze of wooden splendor, igniting a poignant commentary on the perils of unchecked tradition and the pursuit of justice.

#### DIRECTOR'S BIO.

Michael Rostig is a multi-media artist living in Adelaide, South Australia (Karna Country). Primarily working in animation and music, Michael has produced many works for public building projections, music videos and video art for galleries. His work is one of a wide-ranging oeuvre, spanning from comedic, satirical writing to scathing social critique to whimsical, family-friendly endeavours.

#### ORIGIN.

I've always been fond of dioramas.

I don't remember ever having to make one at school but always wanting to.

As a teacher I've set them as a project probably more often than I should have.

Hinterborough itself, this big hulking diorama of a town ablaze, like many of my projects was made over an exceedingly long gestation period. One in which it went from being purely aesthetic, to vaguely humanitarian before finally becoming scathingly political.

On a purely aesthetic level I like fire. Every animation project where I could depict fire, I jumped on it. It has been so regularly deployed as a cliché metaphor by me that it has probably lost all of its potency. I first depicted a village on fire in February 2010 as a last minute entry in a two week intensive art course that I needed to complete to finish my degree. The course at that point was certainly not focused on any sort





of sculptural technique or anything similar, rather it had mainly been charcoal drawings and entry-level art stuff. I drew five to six buildings on buff cardstock with artline pens making sure that they were covered in flames. There were people on fire, cartoony bodies with looks of despair. I only coloured the flames in and planted each of the buildings into the base (a rather sloppily cut piece of cardboard from a box I had lying around).

I submitted this piece and received a 'credit' for it, the professor described the work as 'awkwardly brilliant', my inability to take a compliment really made me focus on the 'awkward' part.

I don't have any photos of this primordial soup of how Hinterborough started but I wish I did because the idea never left me.

#### PRE-PRODUCTON.

Around 2017 I trialed some buildings using sheets of balsa wood that I drew directly on with the same Artline pens, many snapped instantly. Eventually I got good at making basic structures with a workflow. I was listening to the Kinks 'The Village Green Preservation Society' a lot at the time and the quaint little cottages seemed a perfect fit for the embarrassingly conservative and NIMBYish protectors of 'culture' in the song. If you're unfamiliar, the Village Green Preservation Society also features groups called the 'Custard Pie Appreciation Consortium' and the 'Office Block Persecution Affinity' who 'conserve the old ways from being abused' and protect 'little shops, china cups and virginity' amongst other things<sup>1)</sup>.

The fact that I had something of a narrative or satirical idea for the project increased my enthusiasm for the work. I put my animated film 'Reynaud' (still in production) on hold and went all in on 'Untitled Satirical English Village Project'. At the time I hadn't even thought of this as a film. I certainly wasn't going to animate anything on it. My idea was to approach it as a diorama, a moment frozen in time that could be analysed as a post-mortem of a society so hell-bent on conservation that they lost it all.

The buildings were made with balsa wood rods as building frames which were then covered with pre-illustrated planks of balsa cut to shape with pen-knives. They were held together with a combination of nails and glue, some more stable than others.

I aimed to finish the diorama in time for a prestigious art prize and wrote a script for a voice over that would be played during the viewing of it. This narration eventually became the narration in the film proper. This is where I onboarded my first collab-

orators, Patrick Rea helped build a chest of drawers (the only piece of the entire diorama I didn't produce with my own hands). Anthony Kelly taught me about LED strip lighting whilst we were working on the 2019 edition of Area 53, an experiential theatre piece, for the Adelaide Fringe. I started lining these throughout the buildings and making a complex web of circuitry timed to the narration (it was finicky and never worked properly). Eventually Paul Hockey, helped by cutting the tables that the entire island sat upon and helped affix the legs.

The diorama did not get accepted into the art prize.

#### FILMING.

So there I was, in my reasonably small home. With a giant sculpture filling up our dining room and a baby about to be born, living with my best friend, love of my life and ever-so-patient producer, Michelle Wilby. With this cumbersome thing I couldn't store anywhere.

Somewhere around this time I watched Rithy Panh's film 'The Missing Picture' an incredibly poignant documentary about the Khmer Rouge. Some of the film included news footage and other recordings but a significant amount of the documentary is filmed stagings of clay sculptures in dioramas depicting scenes that happened or recreations of Cambodian accounts of the genocide. This work was simultaneously impressive and harrowing but spurred the idea that this is what I could do with my village, create a film depiction of the narrative that would serve as a more potent look at the piece than I had envisaged.

I transported the whole work to a school that generously allowed me to film in the holidays at night, by this time my son had been born. Most people know how much of a fever dream the first year of a child's life are for the parents and I was no exception, so it was notable that the night of the filming was the first time I had ever left him and his mother alone since he was born. I had one night in March 2022 to film the movie with the help of friend and director of photography, Stu Nankivell (the owner and operator of Blue Goanna Digital) and without a definitive shot list he went around sequentially filming every angle of the island in near pitch blackness, me flickering a red LED to create shadows and the illusion of the inferno.

We shot the whole thing in about five hours and I endeavoured to finish the post-production in a short window of time.. life got in the way; working, parenting, maintaining some semblance of a social life. The film wouldn't be ready for another year and a month in May, 2023.

1) Davies, R. 1968. The Village Green Preservation Society. Incidentally there is some debate about whether or this song is satirical - I can't hear it as anything but.



## STORY.

Hinterborough is about a lot of things but its core concept is all about hubris. A group of people thought that they knew the best, they were so confident that they ignored all outside influence. They allowed their reluctance to change, listen and respect be the end of them.

The idea of Hinterborough is that a group of people so wanted to hold onto Australia's British identity that they moulded their image into a quaint English town, they formed their own council, installed their own electrical grid, lead puritanical (though hypocritical lives) and isolated themselves from everyone else. When disaster struck, which happened on the night this film depicts, they had no one to turn to and none of their heroes; the town founder, their local priest nor God themselves came to save them. As the town burns the mayor and patriarch of the founding family, William Turner, flees the town, procuring a boat for himself and speeding away to the mainland as the faint red glow of the fires lapping up everything behind him fades into the background.

## POLITICS.

Australians are famously contrarian when it comes to success, elitism and pretension; we call it 'Tall Poppy Syndrome' which is just the state of cutting down someone who is standing too tall through humour or outright criticism. My initial conception of the story involved something more like a class struggle where the 'upper crust' felt themselves unimpeachable and ignored the folly of their elitist ways. This was a good start but not something close to my heart.

I then thought of the story as something of a humanitarian work about the terrible plight of natural disasters. Eventually, as things often do, I came to think of it as an explicitly political work. The reason for this was two-fold;

1. in 2019 the Liberal and National Coalition successfully reformed government at a devastating election.
2. Also in 2019, the 2019-2020 summer bush fire season proved to be one of the worst ever.

The Liberal Party <sup>(2)</sup> I have no love lost for. In general terms they are an unambitious lot, content to roll around in the muck of yester-years. They naysay anything that wasn't their idea (even if they proposed it originally, they'll use an issue to create a wedge), they'll manufacture all sorts of moral panics or whole-cloth fabrications (see: the death tax). Furthermore, after being in control of the parliament for nearly a decade they continued to blame the Australian Labor Party for all their failings, set-backs and poor management of the country. And they did it all with an embarrassing lack of vision for what our country could be. One of the three prime ministers that was instated during their tenure offered a knighthood to Prince Phillip - fancy being such a monarchist that you knight a royal? This was exactly the kind of Australian traitor that I was writing about in Hinterborough. The

ones who think of this country as a small offshoot of a no-longer existant empire. A light skewering of the commemorative-plate-set owning, Union-Jack-flying anti-antipodeans.

That was a topic of interest to me: a small island that slavishly, as if it had stockholm syndrome, gazed lovingly at the colonising force and for some reason, despite loving it so much, having no particular drive to go back there. The hubris imbued in the notion is strong and definitely when I meet people of this ilk, their self-determinism that this is some sort of natural order is somewhat baffling and, at times, outright offensive.

Furthermore, the Tories in England hit a rather prescient notion while I was working on Hinterborough; Brexit. A true isolationist fumbling. Medieval protectionism in a contemporary age. I, like the world, was confused at the choice. As were many of the residents of the UK as it turned out, the number one internet search the day after the vote went through? "What is the EU?"

Actual insanity.

So, as you can see that was quite a fitting place to start but then everything took a much stronger and starker focus in the form of the bushfires.

These bushfires were predicted. The ALP had put a price on Carbon with an emissions trading scheme in their previous term of government which was quickly kiboshed when the Coalition gained power. The clowns that escaped the circus decided that the concept of climate change was so ludicrous that it would be hilarious to wave about a piece of lacquered coal in the lower house, laughing and performatively not being scared of it (as if that was what anyone had ever posited). The smirking fool that held the prop? Then treasurer, soon to be Prime Minister, Scott Morrison.

The increased regularity of major weather events, such as bushfires, has been tied to climate

(2) It's probably notable here to mention that in Australia the Liberal party is not 'liberal' in the progressive-left sense but rather the right-wing 'corporations would do so much

if we allowed them to be more *liberal* with their spending' sense. The fact that they are in a perpetual coalition with people willing to refer to themselves as the 'National Party' should tell you all you need to know.





# Hinterborough

A POST-MORTEM OF A HUBRISTIC TOWN  
HINTERBOROUGH

011  
2023

change. So for respected politicians to joke around about coal or, as (current leader of the Coalition) Peter Dutton did, water lapping at the doors of Pacific Islanders' homes is reprehensible.

This is what Hinterborough came to be about. The idea that the privileged can destroy everything and leave in its wake unscathed. Such is the way it went for William Turner, escaping disaster with little consequence.

#### MUSIC.

Like nearly everything in Hinterborough, the score emerged from a deeply personal place. I composed it myself, envisioning a symphonic approach that, while synthesised, drew inspiration from Danny Elfman's signature arpeggiated string arrangements. The music, much like the town it represents, refuses to settle – a deliberate choice reflected in its perpetually shifting chord progressions that never remain in the same key for more than three changes. This creates an underlying sense of unease, a musical metaphor for a community unable to find its true foundation.

The composition process began simply enough at the piano, testing chord after chord in root position, playing I III V arpeggios before moving restlessly to the next. But the seemingly straightforward foundation soon grew more complex, incorporating unexpected elements like guitar feedback recorded by placing my instrument as close to the amp as possible – creating a sound eerily reminiscent of emergency service sirens, a fitting accident for a town about to face disaster. The score is structured around three main sections, each named to reflect the town's fatal flaws: "Exceptionalism," "Elitism," and "Island Superiority." While they share the same core progression, each iteration features distinct instrumentation – a mournful cello pull suggesting a whale passing the doomed island, or a mellotron counter-melody adding new layers of complexity. At the end of each section, violent string stabs punctuate the progression in irregular rhythms, providing jarring punctuation marks for the visual editing to emphasize moments of tragedy.

Two instrumental departures from this structure offer different perspectives on the unfolding catastrophe. "Empire's End" introduces a gentle piano figure that plays as Gordon's Butcher Shop and the Turner House succumb to flames, extending through our tour of The Hinty pub. The score's conclusion, "Sanctuary & Safe Harbour," might be my proudest achievement thus far as a composer – it deconstructs all those earlier, unstable chords,

breaking them into strange, unfamiliar fragments before reassembling them in an unusual piano groove. As ethereal harmonies and string arrangements join in, the camera makes its final sweep of the island, the music serving as both eulogy and indictment.

The score was mixed by Jesse Miller at Col-orwheel Studios in Minneapolis – an unexpectedly international collaboration for such an Australian production. Our connection, formed through a shared appreciation of Elephant 6 <sup>(3)</sup> music and years of sharing our respective bands' work (his "The Curiously Strong Peppermints" and my "Concentric Circus"), proved invaluable. Jesse's mixing and mastering expertise brought the synthesised instruments to life, lending them an almost organic quality that bridges the gap between artificial and authentic – much like Hinterborough itself.

#### SOUND.

The sound design for Hinterborough embraces a deeply textural approach, one that acknowledges and enhances the film's unique format. Rather than attempting to literally recreate the sounds of a living, breathing town – an approach that might have undermined the diorama's artificiality – we sought to suggest action through carefully curated atmosphere. Water lapping at the shore was recorded by the beach, while creaking floorboards and footsteps from my own home provided subtle hints of human presence.

The narration itself evolved alongside the project's transformation from art installation to film. Initially, I envisioned finding a voice actor who could capture the formal, precise tone of 1950s and 60s Australian Broadcasting Style – that distinctly proper manner of delivery that itself echoed our colonial preoccupations. But as with so many elements of Hinterborough, I ultimately took on this role myself. The voice moved from an attempted Phillip Adams-style conversational tone to something more menacing, settling into a register that regular viewers might recognize from my narration work on our web series *Misadventure Adventure*.

The narration was recorded at home alongside the musical score, allowing for intimate control over its integration with other sonic elements. Perhaps the most poetic aspect of the sound design lies in the fire effects. Sections of the village that couldn't be kept due to size constraints were burned in our home fireplace, meaning that in many cases, the crackling and popping you hear are the actual sounds of the very objects you see burning on screen. These recordings were then pitched and time-shifted to create variety, while split pieces of

(7) A quick and necessary mention of the E6 Townhall. Every millennial has their formative forum.

balsa wood provided sharp cracking sounds for structural collapse. This approach – using the actual materials to create their own destruction sounds – adds an extra layer of authenticity to the film’s metaphorical burning.

The ambient soundscape was built through a similar commitment to material truth. The pub atmosphere was crafted from pool table ambience and clinking glasses, while other environmental sounds were sourced directly from their real-world counterparts. Background voices, performed by Claire Glenn and Anthony Kelly, were improvised while watching the film, including darkly comic moments like attempts to coax Gordon from his reverie with calls such as “it’s just a leg of lamb” as his butcher shop burns.

#### CONCLUSIONS.

Ultimately, I’m terribly proud of this film. Though we didn’t get every shot that I wanted (none inside the church - remember to storyboard, everyone). I think it communicates its point quite well and, thanks to Stu and Jesse, looks and sounds amazing.

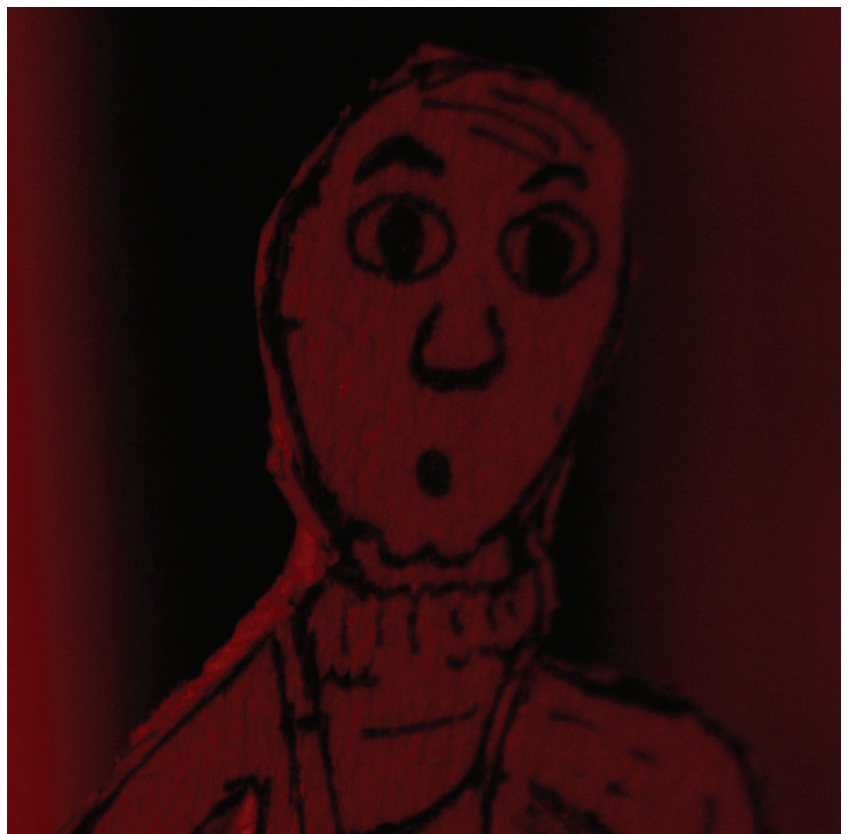
I want to thank you for reading this and showing an interest in Hinterborough. I hope you’ll follow me for future forays into the arts and filmmaking.

Next year a much lighter film should be coming from me, Functional Block Diagrams is an animated short filled with bright colours and dancing geometric shapes. I hope you all get to see it in festivals and beyond.

-Michael Rostig

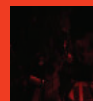


(15)



(16)

(15) & (16) Gordon looks on as his livelihood and legacy burns.



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