



# Hunter's Hill Trust Journal

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*Hunter's Hill's priceless heritage of 19th and early 20th Century houses and streetscapes is acknowledged. But how much excellent, even interesting, architecture of the last 30 years do we have? The Trust proposes to conduct a forum to discuss recent architecture in the municipality. In the meantime, we asked three local architects . . .*

## YES, BUT DOES HUNTER'S HILL HAVE ANY INTERESTING *MODERN* HOUSES?



10 Thorn Street

### LEN CONDON cited 10 THORN STREET c.1960 – ARCHITECT: FRANK CAVALIER

This house was built for Walter and Wendy Hucher. Wendy (nee Roberts) had lived in *The Haven*. Her father – “Pound a Minute” Roberts, who had radio interests in the Riverina – would have lent them money for the house, but they preferred to build in stages. Stage 1 commenced about 1960.

The architect was Frank Cavalier (father of Rodney Cavalier, formerly Minister for Education, whose M.L.A. seat included Hunter's Hill). Frank Cavalier had previously built No.8, next door. He had graduated in 1948, a period of restrictions on building materials, when the maximum size allowed for a house was 12½ squares. These limitations

early in his career may have inspired his characteristic use of glass to increase a building's sense of space.

Frank Cavalier had absorbed the ideas of the Bauhaus, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier. The house features timber and stone. The plan bends with the river, of which every room has a view. Other features include: high cathedral ceilings; a hexagonal lounge room opening onto a triangular deck; a stone fire-place and a built-in hi-fi. A particularly novel design aspect was that each bedroom reflected the character of its occupant: the son's bedroom, for example, had a mezzanine floor and a rope ladder.

## ROBERT BAIRD cited 8 & 12 ELLESMERE AVE. – TWO HOUSES OF THE 1960s.

I first learned about Hunter's Hill in the 1960s when an architect friend described to me the concept of a French village constructed in the heart of Sydney. After marrying and graduating we lived there on and off for 15 years, renovating homes and building stone walls. In this time we never lived in a stone house or have an historic garden.

The truth is that many houses in this delightful area are neither historic nor old.



8 Ellesmere Avenue

Post-war construction brought red brick and tile, with few new inhabitants seeing the need for good manners when building amongst old established neighbours.

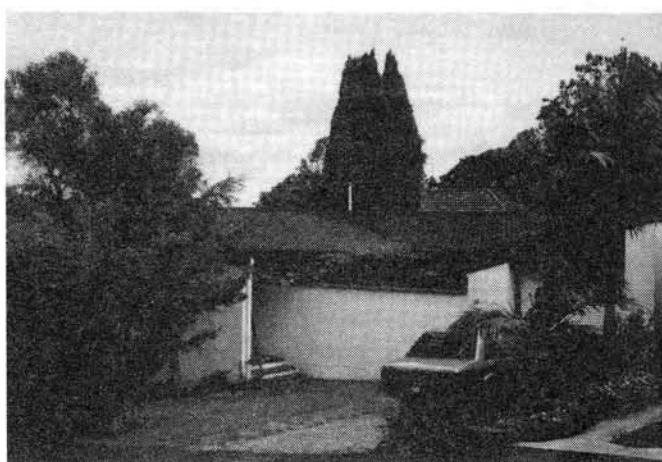
Some new styles of middle class homes did appear, however, which were different. Prior to 1960, almost without exception architecture good and bad was of the punched hole variety; that is, small windows in masonry walls. Light airy interiors were the prerogative of the 50s weekender and these were built up and down the coast well away from areas of traditional housing.

Two of these pathfinder houses can be found at 8 and 12 Ellesmere Avenue, just down from the Post Office. Both are adjoined by unsympathetic development and are easy to miss.

The influences on these almost adjoining houses could not have come from more diverse sources. No.8 is a style now exciting young renovators in the Los Angeles Hills. It has a very appropriate form well suited to the hilly slopes

of Sydney, and owes its beginnings to the "destruction of the box" theory championed by Frank Lloyd Wright. It has open interiors with big window panels allowing a feeling of being close to nature.

Built on a difficult corner site with a diagonal gully, it has the typical single incline roof, large glass areas and patchwork panels of stone, grey brick and painted timber.



12 Ellesmere Avenue

Separated from No.8 by a good ol' Aussie brick box on the opposite corner, No. 12 comes to the same conclusions about bringing the outdoors inside from a completely different starting point via the group housing styles developed in Denmark by architects such as Arne Jacobson and Joern Utzon.

In this early form, the soon to be familiar white bagged brick walls and stained timber trim of the "Sydney School" are already boldly in evidence. However the transition from cold Scandinavian climate to sub-tropical environment has not been made and it retains the typical sun facing glass wall opening to a protected courtyard which so influenced the design of many later townhouses here.

The quality of early buildings in Hunter's Hill has tended to obscure the good things about newer buildings. For young people for whom a stone mansion or cottage may be beyond financial reach, these buildings of the 50s and 60s have great appeal. Surprisingly, these are the next generation of buildings to be saved from the demolisher.

## KIM CRESTANI cited 47 THE POINT ROAD 1990-91 – ARCHITECT: ROSS HOWIESON

*(This house is still under construction, and Kim projected herself fifty years into the future to assess it.)*

It is the year 2040. The suburb of Hunter's Hill now has security coding at the peninsula. Water transporters, like the old water-skis, transport people into the city and out to Parramatta, Sydney's node City, but they are now silenced, like the jets which can get you to London in six hours. The history of Hunter's Hill is so visible that the suburb has achieved 5 star importance.

Back in 1990-1991, a Mr. G. Reed (a builder in Sydney at the time) and his wife built a residence at 47 The Point Road. The designer was Architect Ross Howieson.

It was built over three levels, the lowest obtaining majestic views over the Lane Cove River. There were three pools, one for swimming, and a spa pool which extended the views of water into the River. There was a gymnasium and a sauna; "fitness" was a buzzword of the 1990s.

On the upper levels were five bedrooms, a nursery and a hobby room. A large tennis court and terrace were tucked into the front forecourt, enabling the house to be set well back from the road. A very old palm tree was retained at the entrance, reminiscent of the area's older residences.

*(continued on page 5)*

# NANCY KEESING AND "THE HILL"

On Sunday November 19th 1989, writer and novelist Nancy Keesing A.M. launched the Douglas Baglin and Beverley Sherry book **Hunter's Hill: Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb**

She began by agreeing with the book's observation that the particular merit of "The Hill" was the degree to which it had retained its original character. She then recalled her early days in the area.

Mark Hertzberg my husband and I came to live here in 1956. My daughter and son were born here. Beverley Sherry came some twenty years later. She and I became friends and, in one way and another have consulted and helped each other, particularly when she was researching her excellent segment on Hunter's Hill for **The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia** which was first published in 1987 but, of course, researched for a long time before that. She was able to interview the poet R. D. FitzGerald (who died in 1987) and from him, and his wife Marjorie, gain valuable information about his family who lived here, his own work and his lifetime recollections.

For an important point is that, like any area, Hunter's Hill consists not only of buildings and gardens and streets but of people – historic figures and present residents; a few outstanding famous men and women, and everyone else from 90 to 9 months who **are** a suburb.

Dr. Sherry is not only a very highly qualified academic, but, what is rare, she writes entertainingly. Douglass Baglin is her collaborator in the truest sense, for his imaginative photographs of houses and places are complemented by those of people. Some have been chosen from his own imagination and vision; some gave me great delight – for instance to see Heck Howard again, and that somewhat mysterious landmark Mr. Horden who lived in Lyndhurst nursing home but spent his days, for many years, sitting on a seat in Alexandra Street; and Kath Lehany who worked so hard to preserve Kelly's Bush.

I was born and grew up on another peninsula, Darling Point, which also, as is explained here, has great historic significance, but has also greatly changed in character. To come to live on The Hill was, in one sense, like coming home. When I was small people used to point out Banjo Paterson to me; we already knew Robert FitzGerald and Marjorie and others. I valued eccentrics too, like the old lady who tapped my husband's shoulder and said "Excuse me sir, but have you by any chance a lemon in your pocket?"

My father, Gordon Keesing, was an architect who had trained in Paris and travelled widely in France. He often commented on the true provincial appearance of **Passy** whose still unaltered rear side features on the cover of this book, and **Coorabel** and other houses. He also, I'm ashamed to say, bored me almost witless explaining the techniques of stonework which is so much a feature of the houses, place and book.

He was a friend and colleague of Henry Budden who has a major place in these pages and whose sisters had a kindergarten (which Robert FitzGerald attended) and brought the children down to watch my house in Garrick Avenue when it was being built just after the War – long before we owned it. None of the children had ever seen bricks being laid or planks being sawn before.

Talking of architecture brings me to the architecture of this book, which is so firm and logical that to read it is a true progression of history, form and discovery.

Sherry and Baglin have set me exploring too. I've no doubt seen many cottonwood trees in America but have only truly identified one, from these pages – you will have to discover where that is in your reading. Exploring will be one of its delights though this will not supersede other smaller, lighter-to-carry publications, or more technical ones, but will enhance them all.

Lastly, publication of books such as this leads to discussion, prompts memories – for no writer can know or learn **everything**.

Robert D. FitzGerald was so much a man and poet of The Hill, I end by quoting one verse from his long poem "One Such Morning" from his book **Product**.

"Great days!" my father wrote. All days are good that open and are doors, and doors were wide in the old Irish-careless home that stood above a fringing cliff and riverside put there for youth and nature to divide between them as their province, and extending, surely, past any hour or mile or ending.



# HUNTER'S HILL REMEMBERED

Part 2 of an unpublished memoir assembled in the 1940s by ROBERT DAVID FITZGERALD III (1864-1950), of poet R. D. FitzGerald A.M., O.B.E. Part I appeared in the February **Journal**.



**Adrville** (later called **Croissy**) to which Robert D. FitzGerald III moved in 1871, as a seven years old boy. The house was demolished in 1960, but some of the trees planted by his botanist father survive in the area of Croissy Avenue.

*Photo: Douglass Baglin.*

Our house **Adrville** faced the Parramatta River. Between was a grass lawn side-sloping to a 15 ft. drop, then a level strip of some 30 feet, with a 30 foot cliff drop to high water mark. About 1880 the Hunter's Hill Council cut down and graded Ferry Street. With the aid of surplus material from this cut, the lawn was extended and levelled up, to form the first tennis court on Hunter's Hill. To save loss of balls into the river, a netting some ten feet in height, framed of a lower 2 ft. of wire netting, and the rest of small mesh (condemned) fishing nets, extended round the ends and river side of the court. The net effectually saved life on one joyous occasion, when a player from the country – one of the many Blaxland Tribe – tripped backwards, and hair on end, was held (gasping, and more than muttering,) suspended in the net over the 15 ft. drop. Unmercifully we held off a rescue when it was clear that the net was holding and the language still out of control. He was a Blaxland.

Then there was fishing – Blackbreem at night, and a big bull red breem about Sunset – Hunter's Hill wharf and Judge Jeffell's stone jetty for the former, and off Kilbey's boat shed for the reds. At this spot a submerged cliff existed with 15 ft. of water on the shore side, and a sheer drop of another 30 feet, giving about 40 feet of water at high tide. A very deep hole off Pulpit Point – quite 40 feet – was the pick for big red breem and jewfish.

A big Wobbegong shark resided in the deep water adjacent to the Hunter's Hill Wharf – Ferry Street and to our boat shed. The boat was slung some feet above high water mark.

We were frequently fishing at night. Having caught a good feed, my father was cleaning the fish below the shed, and throwing the guts into the water. I was pulling up the boat.

A mighty yell, and then a terrific splash, my father called out "All well" – He had been hand-fee Wobbegong in the dark, and washing a fish had put his hand into the shark's mouth and scraped along its teeth. His hand was bleeding.

We saw the beauty next day, in the same spot, fish, and we had no rifle.

Sharks were little thought of; the water was clean, and a good deal of swimming was done. Jeanneret and I once swam across Fern Bay and it was bravado, whereas nearly every summer Mr. J. Stopps, Jack Bassett, Peter Blake, Vessey Gerards, bathed in Tarban Creek. Vessey had a yacht anchored mid-stream off Mount St. Wharf, a small jetty a little upstream of the present wharf. Swimmers went round the yacht and back, and a shark got home. Lawrence Kelly every morning took a boat up Tarban Creek to bring back passengers from Gladesville to catch the 8.15 a.m. steamer to Sydney. Hunter's Hill Wharf – the Gerards, Thos. Salt, and a few strays; and almost invariably a lady school was taken up the Creek.

One momentous morning only one swimmer was in action, Mr. A. J. Stopps. He was extremely short in fact unable to see without his spectacles, was always tied on while swimming. No costumes then, nature only, and midway he lost the spectacles. He went ashore on the then oyster-strewn rocks, where he hid, and hoped for the best. Oysters and mud were his poor shelter. There he remained (like the oyster) while the boat and passengers passed each way. The boat was the Sweet Home in the nude. He was not discovered, and he confided the experience to my father.



47 The Point Road

Extensive landscaping which has now matured sets this house “in its garden setting”. Externally, the house fits into the late 1990s notion of “architecturally sensitively designed homes” which, although modern in design (with a flat roof, for example) still fit comfortably in their environment in terms of scale and materials.

The building used sawn sandstone facing (and not solid stone). The external detailing was comparatively complex, taking into account the type of labour available at

the time. The architecture was of the Classic Modern Style.

At a time when architects designed less than 5% of houses, the resulting residence stands as a very good example in the continuum of architecture within an architecturally and historically significant area, while at the same time not reverting to exact replicas of what went before. Along with many other residences in the area, this building will be retained as an architectural example of housing in the 1990s.

# THE THIRD RUNWAY

*The Hunter’s Hill Trust Committee determined that the Environment Impact Statement on the Third Runway at Sydney Airport left a number of central issues either inadequately answered, wrongly answered, or not answered at all. Accordingly, the Trust made submissions calling for an open, Public Inquiry into the Third Runway Proposal.*

**GEOFF GRACE**, of CRASH!, outlines the objections of that group to the Third Runway.

The proposed third runway would not only be a stop-gap solution to the runway needs of the Sydney region, but high cost, high risk, inefficient and environmentally damaging.

- Do you know that the third runway would:
- not be long enough for heavy international jets.
  - require landings over the top of terminals.
  - have a “displaced” landing threshold.
  - not allow take offs to the north but would force up to six times more onto the existing north/south flightpath, fanning out over northern suburbs.
  - suffer curfew restrictions.
  - suffer operational restrictions.
  - have serious petro-chemical hazards nearby.

- have serious bird-strike problems.
- cause airport infrastructure problems.
- spell the death knell for effective deregulation.
- entail a 5-km taxi distance from end of runway to the farthest terminal.
- preclude expansion of Port Botany.
- require \$800 million expenditure of the full \$1.7 billion airport costs just to find out if the plan can be completed.
- create massive environmental impact.

**A runway at Badgerys Creek would have no such problems.**

World recognised American airport consultant Ron Ahlfeld of P & D Technologies California prefaces a convincing report on the third runway: “It is a high cost, high risk and inefficient plan ... a better solution exists.”

(Continued on page 6)

## THE THIRD RUNWAY (Continued from page 5)

The third runway is the major element of the Federal Airports Corporation (FAC) Draft Strategy Plan for Sydney Airport. It is seriously flawed. This is why:

The plan proposes to first build the third runway, then experiment for two or three years to see if the Civil Aviation Authority and principal airlines would agree to downgrade the east-west runway. Because the airport is so tiny, the land occupied by the perfectly good, crosswind east-west runway would be needed to provide ground space for new terminals!

But an independent study of the meteorology of the Airport shows that unless the east-west runway remains as a "crosswind runway" there would be excessive impact on operations.

No crosswind runway for international or domestic aircraft at Sydney Airport would mean diversions to other airports or aircraft held on the ground waiting for better weather. But incredibly, if the east-west runway is **not** downgraded, the Draft Strategy Plan could not be completed!

Is there sanity in embarking on a \$1.7 billion plan which could fail after expenditure of about \$800 million yet even if the plan does proceed, would mean thousands of aircraft either held on the ground or diverted to other airports each year? Could this be one reason why Bryan Grey, Chief Executive of new entrant Compass Airlines has said publicly of the FAC "...they are as useless as tits on a bull"?

The Sydney Morning Herald editorial 7th January 1991 soberly comments: "It is quite possible that better management of Sydney Airport would delay the need for expansion for as long as it takes to build the new airport at Badgerys Creek.... And so, taxpayers are being invited to believe that there is no alternative to spending a fortune on an extra runway, **which is nonsense.**"

The serious environmental consequences of a third runway, particularly to Hunter's Hill and other areas around the airport, would only be matched by the disaster it would mean for the future of competitive, deregulated, domestic aviation. Ask the question - if the third runway proceeds, where would new domestic airlines go at the airport and how many new gates would be available for them?

If Sydney Airport is inefficient, (and with a third runway it would be **very** inefficient), then aviation Australia-wide will be inefficient. Should Federal Cabinet decide **for** the third runway, the words "micro-economic reform" will have been given new meaning. Through diversions, operational limitations, long taxi-ing times and ground congestion, Sydney Airport could become known internationally as the worst airport in the world. Every few minutes throughout each day, between 6.00 a.m. and 11.00 p.m., residents of Hunter's Hill along with a large slice of Sydney would be reminded.

There is still time to write your protest to Minister for Transport and Communications, Hon. Kim Beazley, and other cabinet ministers.

*Geoff Grace, of CRASH!, is a former Alderman of Hunter's Hill Council.*

### COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Nominations for the Trust Committee are invited. Nominations should be signed by two proposers and bear the written consent of the nominee. Nominations should reach the Secretary by 8th April.

### PROVOCATIVE TRUST SEMINAR

The Hunter's Hill Trust is presenting a seminar titled:  
**PLANNING: HAVE WE LOST OUR WAY?**

There will be a number of Speakers, including: Ald. Ross Williams, Mayor of Hunter's Hill; Mr. Jim Barrett, a resident of Woolwich and representative of Ipoh Gardens (developers of the Queen Victoria Building).

Topics include:

- The Land and Development Court;
- The Third Runway;
- The Castlereagh Expressway and the Rouse Hill Project;
- The continual threat to heritage items.

Date: TUESDAY, 23rd APRIL

Time: 8.00 p.m.

Place: Hunter's Hill Town Hall

Admission Free.

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING GUEST SPEAKER

The Annual General Meeting of the Trust will be held at Villa Maria Hall, Mary Street, on Wednesday, 8th May at 7.45 p.m.

The Guest Speaker will be DR. MILES LEWIS, Architectural Historian, and Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the University of Melbourne. He has written extensively on building history, urban conservation and housing policy, and is a member of the International Committee on Vernacular Architecture. He has won a number of architectural awards including the Walter Burley Griffin Award. He will speak on:  
**Architectural Detection: the Physical Investigation of Buildings.**

### TRUST MEMBERSHIP 1990-91

**MEMBERSHIP** fees are due on March 1 each year.  
Types of membership:-

Single \$10.00; Family \$15.00;

Pensioner \$2.00; Student \$2.00);

Individual and Institutional Life Member \$100.00.

Please post to:

Hunter's Hill Trust, Box 85, Hunter's Hill, 2110.