

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESKTOP

Tony Coote

Sydney University Boatshed facility at Cunninghams Reach

Since the last issue of the journal The Trust has become aware of several significant development proposals that have the potential to threaten the character of Hunters Hill and its surrounds. One of these is the Sydney University Boat Club"s proposal for a brand new facility in the little park at Cunninghams Reach, which is on the north western end of the Figtree Bridge. As well as an access road, increased parking and a pontoon extending out into the river, the proposal involves the construction of a building that is two storeys high and almost 60 metres long, plus extensive parking.



The Trust made a submission to Lane Cove Council opposing this development and joined in the concerted campaign waged by the Friends of Cunninghams Reach to have it rejected by Council. We also addressed a meeting of Lane Cove Council, where we put the view that Cunninghams Reach is a site of much more than just local significance and is the gateway to a virtually unspoiled river and bush environment, which starts at Figtree Bridge and runs through 5 different Council areas to the back of Macquarie University and beyond.

We argued that, as well as alienating public land for the benefit of a small elite group, the Boat Club proposal will destroy the unique character of the park at Cunninghams Reach and in this part of The Lane Cove River and adversely impact on Boronia Park, which is a schedule 6 Heritage item in Hunters Hill's LEP and is directly opposite.

At the September meeting of Lane Cove Council the University asked for a deferral of Council's assessment of the application, which is where the matter now stands.

Proposed Boronia Park development

Another cause for concern is a proposal to build a "community facility" within Boronia Park. This proposal has only just come to the attention of The Trust and nearby residents.

From the drawings which were circulated prior to an onsite meeting on Sunday 13 Sep 2009, the building is to be sited on a steep slope between Ovals 2 and 3, with the two storey structure turning its back to Princes Street. There is also a proposed extension to the existing parking area that adjourns Oval #3, with parking for an undisclosed number of cars, to be accessed from what is at present the closedoff portion of Princes Street.



Preserving Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESKTOP (continued)

It would seem that "community facility" actually means a restaurant and lounge area with a bar, kitchen and toilet facilities, which comprise around 70% of the building.

At present there is no formal development application before Council. However it is clear that preliminary consultations between Council and some undisclosed interested parties have already taken place. The Trust believes it is essential for the wider community to be involved the discussions about the need for such a facility and its location from the outset. We have sent Council a number of questions about the proposal and the answers will allow us to make a proper assessment of the need for the proposal and its impact on the park and its surrounds.

A new classroom block at Hunters Hill Public School

The Trust is also very concerned about a proposal to construct a new classroom block at Hunters Hill Public School. After reading a "consultation letter" that the builder, Bovis Lend Lease, sent to the next door neighbour and after speaking with Council's manager of development and environment it would appear that the builders do not intend to submit the plans to Council for an assessment of the proposal and have argued that under the Economic Stimulus Plan there is no requirement for them to do so.

This is clearly the downside of the Federal Government's attempts to ride out the Global Financial Crisis by supposedly "cutting through red tape" for "shovel ready" schemes. The Trust has written to the school principal pointing out that the school is located in one of the most historically important precincts in Hunters Hill, that it has two Schedule 6 Heritage Items within its grounds, is within

Hunters Hill Council's Conservation Area No 1 and has a number of other Schedule 6 heritage items in the near vicinity. Because of this, in normal circumstances, Hunters Hill Council would be required to assess the impact of the development application on any heritage item and on the Conservation Area. And this is the process that was followed when the school most recently applied for approval to build additional facilities.

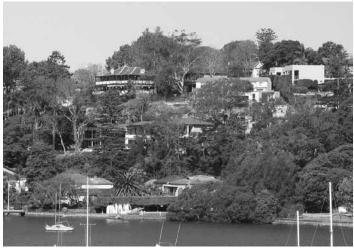
The Trust has urged the school to insist that Bovis Lend Lease does submit a development application to Council so that a proper assessment of the proposal can be made. This is something that would be expected from such a long-standing institution in the Municipality. It would also set an example to its junior citizens that the school is as interested in heritage and conservation as its website masthead, which prominently features its two heritage buildings, would suggest.

The loss of Hunters Hill's Trees

There is no question that the tree covered character of Hunters Hill is its most enduring asset and that a good tree can soften the impact of even bad building. So it is disturbing to note and increasing trend for trees to disappear almost overnight. This is particularly noticeable around the waterfront.

I have seen trees with drill holes in the bases of their trunks where poison has been injected to open up a view of the water. What a pity people don't realise the beauty of a tree framing a house or how a view framed by the foliage of a tree is enhanced. And what a pity Council appears to have such limited power to enforce illegal tree destruction.





Here are two views of Mount Street with Ferdinand Street on the ridge. They were taken from the Figtree Bridge about a year apart - the less tree covered in September 2009.

THOMAS MUIR AND THE NAMING OF HUNTER'S HILL

Beverley Sherry





Left to Right: Captain John Hunter, second governor of NSW. Thomas Muir, Scottish activist and convict.

Recently the notion that the Municipality of Hunter's Hill derived its name from Thomas Muir's Huntershill has been resurrected, suggested by Don Beresford in an address to the Hunter's Hill Historical Society. Thomas Muir (1765-1799) was one of the five so-called "Scottish Martyrs" transported to New South Wales in 1794 for sedition. 2 He and his fellow prisoners brought money with them and were not treated as felons. Two convict servants were assigned to Muir and he was able to purchase land. In a letter to a friend in London of 13 December 1794, he describes his situation in Sydney, and this description, followed by the complete concluding text of the letter, was published in the London Morning Chronicle of 29 July 1795. 3 Muir writes: "I have a neat little house here [in Sydney town], and another two miles distant, at a farm across the water, which I purchased." He does not name the farm, but Peter Mackenzie, in his 1831 biography of Muir states, without documentary support, that he called it Huntershill after his home in Scotland. 4 This has been repeated. In a 1926 essay, Maybanke Anderson quotes Muir's letter (inaccurately); a fact not noted before is that she adds a sentence of her own: "This house I have called after my father's house in Glasgow, 'Huntershill'." 5 This too has been repeated.

The precise location of "two miles distant,... across the water" has been disputed. An early researcher suggested Milsons Point, but no records exist for the purchase of a farm there by Thomas Muir. ⁶ The individual researches of James Jervis and James Scott, both in 1960, cast doubt on this location. Scott quotes a letter from one of the other Scottish Martyrs, the Rev. Thomas Fysshe Palmer, of 15 September 1795, which refers to the dwellings of Muir, William Skirving (another Martyr), and himself: "our houses at Sydney are contiguous, as also our farms in the country", and Palmer's farm was accessed via Rozelle Bay. ⁷

There is some doubt, then, over the location of Muir's farm house. More importantly for the present enquiry, and whether Muir called his farm *Huntershill* or not, the name Hunter's Hill

(as two words) was used in government documents before Muir arrived in Sydney. As early as 3 October 1794, three government grants were issued in "the district of Hunter's Hill", whereas Muir arrived on the transport *Surprize* on 25 October 1794, coming ashore with the other Scottish Martyrs in November.⁸ So, when Muir arrived, the name Hunter's Hill was already in use, and designated the high ground on the north shore, around Gore Hill.

These historical facts were pointed out by James Jervis in 1945 and again in 1960. Don Beresford takes no account of them, or of the most recent histories of Hunter's Hill. The claim for Muir's Huntershill has been repeatedly rejected: by Isadore Brodsky, in Hunter's Hill, New South Wales 1861-1961(1961); by R. Hamilton in Hunter's Hill Pre-1835 (1970); by the Hunter's Hill Trust in all four editions of their Heritage of Hunter's Hill (1969,1977, 1982, 2002); by P.R. Stephenson and Brian Kennedy in The History and Description of Sydney Harbour (1978); by Meredith Walker & Associates in the Hunter's Hill Heritage Study (1984); and by myself in Hunter's Hill: Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb (1989).

Brodsky devotes a subsection of his book to "The Myth of Thomas Muir." Stephensen deals with the question at greater length, and concludes: "There has been no need to seek such an odd and unconvincing explanation of the name Hunter's Hill, which was in official and popular use, as a well-deserved compliment to Captain John Hunter, of H.M.S. *Sirius*, before Thomas Muir was ever heard of at Sydney." I will consider the case for Hunter shortly, but the faulty history about Muir was given impetus by Maybanke Anderson's essay of 1926. She was evidently ignorant of the land grants in "the district of Hunter's Hill" of 3 October 1794, before Muir's arrival. Lacking this knowledge and calculating that Muir had a farm at Milsons Point called *Huntershill*, she deduced that the suburb of Hunter's Hill derived its name from Muir.

THOMAS MUIR AND THE NAMING OF HUNTER'S HILL

(continued)

Dates alone preclude this derivation. Moreover, any name for Muir's farm was hardly public knowledge. No mention of it appears in the lengthy collection of contemporary documents on "The Scotch Martyrs" preserved in the *Historical Records of New South Wales*. ¹² Nor do Lieutenant-Governor Grose, Governor Hunter, or Judge-Advocate David Collins, in their reports on Muir, refer to a *Huntershill*. In his *Account of the English Colony in New South Wales* (1798), Collins records that Muir "chiefly passed his time in literary ease and retirement, living out of the town at a little spot of ground which he had purchased for the purpose of seclusion." ¹³

Prompted by Don Beresford's address to the Hunter's Hill Historical Society, a suggestion has been made to erect a commemorative plaque to Thomas Muir in Hunter's Hill; readers in Scotland who have accessed Beresford's paper on the internet have also expressed enthusiasm. ¹⁴ Does Muir deserve this? First, historical facts prove that the name Hunter's Hill predates his arrival. Second, there are no moral or civic grounds to warrant a memorial for him. What did Muir do for Australia? Despite his privileged life style, he absconded as soon as an opportunity arose. Sixteen months after his arrival, he escaped on 18 February 1796 by the American ship, *The Otter*, as recorded by Collins and the shipping records. ¹⁵

This is not to deny Muir's eminence as a champion of human rights in the era of the French Revolution. He was a radical ahead of his time, and is deservedly commemorated at the village of Huntershill near Glasgow and in the imposing monuments to the Scottish Martyrs in Edinburgh and London. As the Scottish historian Michael Donnelly shows in his biography of Muir, he was "a man of principle" in his practice as a lawyer, "prepared to take on the most unrewarding and difficult cases and even occasionally foregoing a fee when petitioned by a destitute client"; and his trial in Glasgow in 1793 was "a classic example of the political abuse of the judicial process." ¹⁶ Donnelly records Muir's transportation and his "uneventful" term of confinement in Sydney:

Unlike his companions, or indeed his father, Muir had little or no taste for farming and with an eye to ultimate escape from the settlement, he purchased a small hut and several acres of land on the opposite side of the bay. By this means he was able to remove himself from the direct observation of the Governor and his soldiers and at the same time was provided with a legitimate excuse for keeping a small boat. (Donnelly, pp. 17-18).

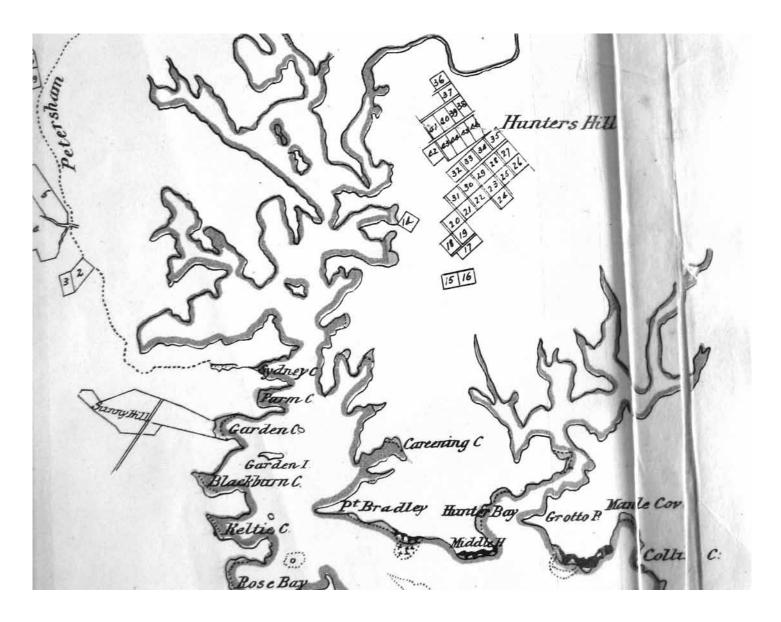
It was by means of this boat that he and his two convict servants managed to row out through Sydney Heads on the night of 17 February 1796 and were picked up the next day, at a predetermined site offshore, by *The Otter*. After tremendous hardship, Muir reached France, where he died in 1799, far too young at the age of thirty-three.

In his work in Scotland, Ireland, and France, Muir was a hero of the dispossessed and the downtrodden, but there is no evidence that he identified with or provided inspiration for the shackled convicts of Port Jackson or that he aired his ideas on liberty. In fact, upon their arrival, Lieutenant-Governor Grose ordered the Scottish Martyrs "to avoid on all occasions a recital of those politicks" which had reduced them to their present "unfortunate situation." ¹⁷ So Muir lived, as Collins notes, away from the public eye. He and his fellow Martyrs were "gentlemen of leisure", "pampered prisoners" (Stephensen, p. 258); as the historian Christina Bewley writes, they "were separated by education and background from almost the entire community." ¹⁸

The question remains, where did the name Hunter's Hill come from? It is unlikely that it was named for hunting in "the district of Hunter's Hill", where farming was carried on. The most likely origin is another Scot, Captain John Hunter, later Governor Hunter. This is now the general consensus, and what follows is based on my history of Hunter's Hill. ¹⁹

In contrast to Muir, Hunter did a great deal for Australia. As Beresford acknowledges, one of his enduring legacies is as an artist and naturalist, a shining example of his work being The Hunter Sketchbook. From the first days of the settlement, Hunter contributed to the making of the colony. On 28 January 1788, two days after the First Fleet arrived at Sydney Cove, he set off in a six-oared boat to survey the harbour, an undertaking which took several months, was meticulously done, and involved not only continual depth soundings but careful observation of the Aborigines; the latter is invaluable information recorded in Hunter's Journal (1793). Parts of the harbour were named after Hunter's officers and are so indicated on his chart - Bradley's Head for Lieutenant Bradley, Ball's Head for Lieutenant Ball; Hunter Bay is also marked, although this later became known as Balmoral Beach.

The name Hunter's Hill, however, went into permanent usage. The high ground which was known as "the district of Hunter's Hill" before Thomas Muir arrived in Australia is clearly marked on Hunter's map of the New South Wales settlements preserved in the Mitchell Library. ²⁰ "Hunters



Detail, Deputy Surveyor General's *Plan of the Settlements in New South Wales* (1796). "Hunters Hill" then designated land north-east of Lane Cove. Thirty-three farms are marked, numbered 14 to 46. In the complete plan, their acreage (25 to 30 acres) and owners' names are listed. Thomas Muir is not named anywhere on the plan nor does his supposed farm at Milsons Point, *Huntershill*, appear. Reproduced from *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. 3, fold-out following title page.

Hill" is written in Hunter's small, neat handwriting on the area of today's Gore Hill, "Mount Hunter" in the area of Camden. When the County of Cumberland was divided into parishes in the 1830s, the name Hunter's Hill shifted to designate the land between the Lane Cove and Parramatta Rivers and as far west as Ryde. When the Municipality of Hunter's Hill was formed in 1861, the name moved eastwards, to define the municipality.

Hunter was less than successful in the difficult job of Governor of the colony (1795-1800), but he achieved much as a navigator, cartographer, and explorer, whether sounding the depths of the harbour, recording his observations about the Aborigines, tramping through bush and wading through swamps from Pittwater to Middle Harbour, or bringing back provisions from the Cape of Good Hope in 1789 to the starving colony. In 1788, he and his assistants, in that six-

THOMAS MUIR AND THE NAMING OF HUNTER'S HILL

(continued)

oared boat, were the first Europeans to lay eyes on the area now known as Hunter's Hill, and his chart shows thirty depth soundings around the peninsula. ²¹

The Municipality of Hunter's Hill did not derive its name from Thomas Muir; of that there is strong historical evidence. While there is no absolute evidence that it was named for Captain Hunter, the name did not come out of thin air, and Hunter is manifestly the most likely origin.

Dr Beverley Sherry is an Honorary Associate of the University of Sydney and author of *Hunter's Hill: Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb*, a history commissioned by the Hunter's Hill Council for Australia's bicentenary.

Notes

JRAHS: Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society HRNSW: Historical Records of New South Wales

- Don Beresford, "Was it Thomas Muir or John Hunter?" Bunk (Journal of the Hunter's Hill Historical Society), vol.8, Issue 1 (February, 2008), pp. 2-5; this paper is a transcript of Beresford's address to the Society on 3 December 2007.
- On Muir's life, see John Earnshaw, Thomas Muir Scottish Martyr. Studies in Australian and Pacific History No. 1 (Cremorne, NSW, 1959) and Earnshaw's entry on Muir in the Australian Dictionary of Biography online; H.T. Dickinson's entry on Thomas Muir in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography online; Michael Donnelly, Thomas Muir of Huntershill (Bishopbriggs, Scotland, 1975) and Donnelly's entry on Thomas Muir in Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals, ed. Joseph A. Bayllen and Norbert A. Gossman (Hassocks, Sussex, 1979), vol. 1, pp. 330-34; Christina Bewley, Muir of Huntershill (Oxford, 1981); and Jonathan Wantrup, The transportation, exile and escape of Thomas Muir (Melbourne, 1990), a translation, with Notes and Introduction, of Histoire de la Tyrannie du Gouvernement Anglais, exercee envers le celebre Thomas Muir, Ecossais (Paris, 1798).
- Extracts of the letter were reprinted in HRNSW, vol. 2, p. 870. I am indebted to the University of Sydney Library for obtaining a copy of the Morning Chronicle letter of 29 July 1795.
- ⁴ Peter Mackenzie, *The Life of Thomas Muir* (Glasgow, 1831), p.33. Mackenzie's biography has numerous mistakes and is generally regarded now as unreliable.
- Maybanke Anderson, "The Story of Hunter's Hill", JRAHS 12 (1926): 142. This essay totally lacks references.
- ⁶ J.H. Watson, "Notes on Some Suburbs of Sydney", JRAHS 13, Part 1 (1927): 25-27.
- James Scott, "The Scottish Martyrs' Farms," JRAHS 46, Part 3 (1960): 166.
- J.S.Cumpton, Shipping Arrivals and Departures Sydney 1788-1825 Parts I, II and II (Canberra, ACT, 1964), p. 29, where Muir is listed among the passengers; David Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales (London, 1798; repr. Adelaide, 1971), pp. 395, 399.
- James Jervis, "The Origin of the Names in Port Jackson", JRAHS 31 (1945), 397 and "Settlement in the Parish of Hunter's Hill", JRAHS 46, Part 4 (1960), 187-88.
- ¹⁰ Isadore Brodsky, *Hunter's Hill 1861-1961* (Sydney, 1961), pp. 9-11.
- P.R. Stephensen and Brian Kennedy, The History and Description of Sydney Harbour (2nd ed., Sydney, 1980), p. 258; for the full account of the question, see pp. 255-59.
- ¹² *HRNSW*, vol. 2, Appendix F pp. 821-86.
- Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, p. 457.
- ¹⁴ Bunk, vol. 9, Issue 2 (April 2009), p. 1 and vol. 9, Issue 3 (June 2009), pp. 1, 3.
- ¹⁵ Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, p. 457; Cumpton, Shipping Arrivals and Departures, p. 31.
- Donnelly, Thomas Muir, pp. 7, 13.
- Letter from Grose to the Rev. T.F. Palmer, 26 October 1794, HRNSW, vol. 2, p. 868.
- ¹⁸ Bewley, Muir of Huntershill, p. 122.
- ¹⁹ Beverley Sherry, *Hunter's Hill: Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb* (Balmain, NSW, 1989), pp. 18-25.
- ²⁰ [New South Wales sketch of the settlements 20th August 1796] [cartographic material] / [by Governor Hunter].
- George Raper, Chart of Port Jackson . . . Survey'd by Capt.n Iohn Hunter. . . 1788 [Mitchell Library]

BORONIA PARK REFLECTIONS: A CONVERSATION WITH ARTHUR MASHFORD

Sally Gaunt and Brigid Dowsett

In light of the current threat to the integrity of Boronia Park as public open space, as outlined on p.1 of the Journal, it was illuminating to have a conversation recently with a long-time resident of Park Road. Arthur Mashford, a bright nonagenarian, is currently working on a book on the history of Boronia Park, on track to be published next year.

Arthur has lived in the area all his life. He grew up in Ross Street, Gladesville, near the Parramatta River, the son of the first postmaster in the area. His working life was spent at Weil's Hardware on Victoria Road. As a young man he was given two important pieces of advice: never pay rent, and never owe money. Consequently he saved up one hundred pounds and purchased a building block on a new subdivision on Park Road in 1938.

After getting married Arthur and his bride moved into their new house overlooking the reserve where he still lives with his daughter, Rae.

Arthur was able to throw some interesting light on the reserve and its past incarnations. Boronia Park was originally the eastern extremity of the Field of Mars common, which stretched as far as what is now Marsfield. From soon after the inception of the colony, this area was used for farming, grazing and wood collecting by the Sydney settlers. It was also the scene of other more nefarious activities, such as sly grog running, being well away from the public gaze. Not illegal but with a severe impact on the native flora was flower harvesting. There are early records of barges laden with Christmas Bush and Christmas Bells being towed back to Sydney each December. (These species are now quite rare in Boronia Park). Below Tipperary Falls a tannery was located and the fertile flat land was used for vegetable farming. The produce from this and from far afield would be carted down Princes Street to the wharf and loaded onto craft for the trip to the Sydney markets. Princes Street was the most used thoroughfare in the Hunters Hill district in the early 19th century.

Probably in order for the Government to better control the area, Boronia Park was declared a Public Park in 1887 "for the purpose of public recreation, convenience, health, or enjoyment" as specified in the Public Parks Act of 1884. Trustees were appointed to oversee its management. (NSW Government Gazette, Friday 16 December, 1887.)

This did not stop the reserve being used for all manner of activities that did not fall within the specified purposes. Council made use of it for storage depots and for garbage and nightsoil disposal. Its nightsoil contractor Don Finlay had a large area in the centre of the park for keeping his horses and equipment, now mistakenly referred as "Murphy's Paddock". This area is still so compacted and contaminated that nothing will grow there except stubby grass. The area below the end of High Street was used for nightsoil disposal. Further down was the dunny pan station. Here the empty pans would be rinsed with high pressure steam and then painted with molten pitch. The remains of a steam boiler can still be seen covered with blackberry and other weeds. After

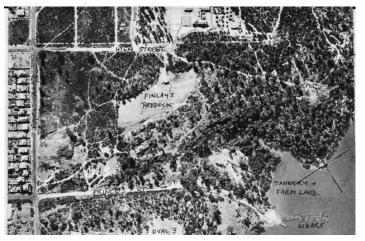
the sewer line was put through in 1935 the pans would be tipped directly into it.

For many decades the area adjacent to Ryde Road made a convenient rubbish tip, now converted into the three ovals. Many of the local children, including Arthur's daughter Rae, kept ponies and rode them in Boronia Park. Horses were still adjisted there as recently as the early 1990's, and the old horse watering trough still stands at the corner of Park Road and Princes Street.

Arthur can remember the reserve being in a terrible state. It was covered with kunzea scrub and blackberry and criss-crossed with tracks, with very little tree cover (See map below). He dates the start of the park's improvement from the days when Roy Stuckey took over as Town Clerk, and put a stop to many of the depradations. The Friends of Boronia Park was set up in the 80's, and has been working continuously ever since, now under the leadership of Rae Mashford. Much of the original bushland has regrown, tracks have been covered over, and lots of the weeds have been eradicated. Wetlands have been installed to control weed infestations and pollution down the drainage lines, and the pond below Tipperary Falls has been dredged.

Princes Street has been closed to public vehicles below the Park Road intersection, and the reserve, apart from the high-usage oval area, has been given over to passive recreation and conservation and is a popular destination for walkers with and without dogs. The Great North Walk traverses the reserve and many people access it by walking down Princes Street to the waterfront. It would seem retrograde to reopen Princes Street and allow high-impact use for a small interest group when the park has come so far. As Arthur pointed out to us it is probably outside the uses prescribed under the Parks Act of 1884. However as he said, "there's always some reason why people want to take over parts of the park".

Our thanks to Arthur for an entertaining and informative interview, and we are looking forward to seeing his published book and learning a great deal more about Boronia Park.



An old aerial photograph of Boronia Park with the location of some historic features marked.

THE TRUST'S NEW WEBSITE

Thanks to the great efforts of committee member Kate Russell, a new look website is up and running. The new site is much more topical and we aim to keep it up to date with information for members and the public at large.

Please visit us at our updated website: www.huntershilltrust.org.au where you will be able to find:

- news about the Trust's current concerns, projects and activities of the Trust
- · details about upcoming events
- · ways to contact the committee
- · an album of photos that we are trying to expand
- · records of old battles
- · copies of old journal articles
- · membership application and renewal forms
- · publications available for purchase
- · links to other useful websites.

Over time, we aim to have a complete record of the Journal and a collection of photos and other local records. Please let us know if you have records or photos that you would be willing to lend us for scanning and inclusion on the site.



HUNTERS HILL TRUST CHRISTMAS PARTY



The Trust's Christmas cocktail party is coming up. Please come to our annual get-together.

When: Friday 27/11/09, at 6.30pm

Where: "Wyaldra", 3 Madeline Street, Hunters Hill, the home of Alice and Conrad Oppen

Speaker: to be announced

Cost: \$35.00 per person

RSVP with cheque to The Secretary, PO Box 85, Hunters Hill , 2110, OR

phone Sally Gaunt on 9816 4047 or email sallygaunt@bigpond.com and pay at the door