

# Hunters Hill Trust Journal

## SOME OF THE LOST WHARVES OF HUNTERS HILL

*Kate Russell*

Ferry travel is quintessential Hunters Hill. 150 years ago, the network of ferries was Hunter's Hill's main link to the rest of Sydney. The first regular ferry service was established by Didier Joubert in the 1850s. Joubert wanted boats that could carry drays so that farmers could *'start to market with their produce at five in the morning, and return home by seven in the evening. Instead of now starting at 12 o'clock at night, and returning at five the next evening, and being during that time at the expense of keeping themselves and cattle in Sydney.'* Sydney Morning Herald, 5th July 1856.

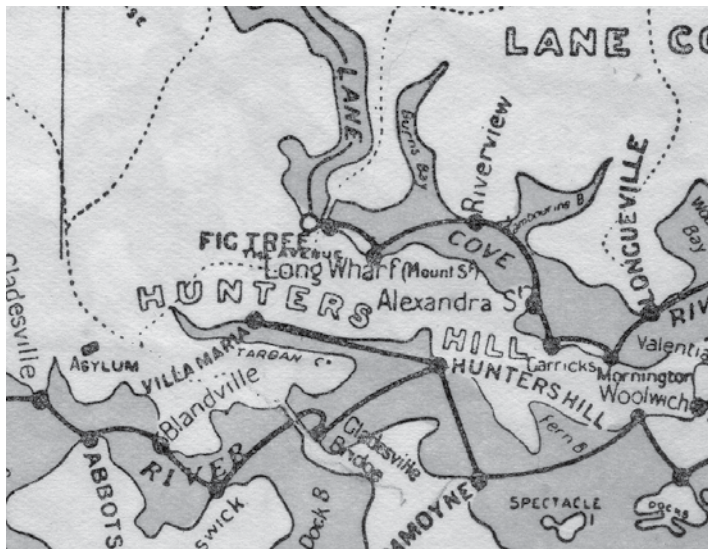
Before the Sydney Harbour Bridge was opened in 1932, the Sydney Ferries Limited was the biggest ferry company in the world. According to Bill Allen, ferry researcher, the company provided 47 million passenger trips every year. The steamers of the early 1900s were *'small single-ended craft, quite open on the top deck, with curtains of canvas which were lowered in wet weather; and were illuminated at night with a few kerosene lamps'* Captain Albert Heesh of Longueville. They took about an hour to run from Erskine Street in the city to get to Fig Tree.

Today the only active ferry wharves are at Valentia Street, Alexandra Street and Huntley's Point, but old maps show more than 20 public wharves in Hunters Hill. These include Ady Street, Alexandra Street, Crescent Street (Garrick's wharf), De Milhau Road (Villa Maria wharf), Ferry Street, Fig Tree, Fern Bay, Gale Street, Dick Street, Herberton Avenue, Margaret Street, Morningson, Mount Street north (Long Wharf) and Mount street South, Park Road north (Mary Street north), Princes Street east, Pulpit Point, Punt Road (Bedlam Point), Serpentine Road, Valentia Street (Onion's wharf) and William Street.

## Ferry Street terminal

The Hunters Hill wharf was built at the end of Ferry Street in 1855. Only a parapet, stone steps and waiting shed remain today. Up until 1927 the Sydney Ferries Limited provided a free service between Villa Maria and Ferry Street where passengers could join other ferries to Parramatta or the city. The Una, pictured, used to collect passengers from wharves at Villa Maria, Herberton Street, Huntley's Point, Mount Street and Cambridge Street.

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*Una at the Ferry Street terminal, 1915*



## Preserving Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb

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# From the President's Desktop

Tony Coote

Included in this Journal is The Trust's submission on the draft Local Environment Plans and Development Control Plans for Gladesville and Victoria Road, which have been prepared by Hunters Hill and Ryde Councils.

In it we point out that the big picture planning issues of global warming, an unsustainable "continuous growth" economy, peak oil and population growth have not even been acknowledged let alone planned for. We also point out that the plans are out of step with the NSW Department of Planning's latest advice regarding the health impacts from living near major roads.

As well, the Plans do not contain any details as to how an objective such as "provide an elevated connection across Victoria Rd to Council and RTA satisfaction" is to be achieved. Effectively all the Plans' objectives rely entirely on private developers being prepared to accept a couple of carrots to leaven their proposals with a teaspoon of public benefit. This is much more like wishful thinking than planning.

Our submission did not address the fact that the Plans make no allowance for a possible railway station at Gladesville, which may or may not be part of a State Government "Metro" scheme. But this may be a unique example of the Plans' foresight, particularly when you read yet another example of Metro madness like the one that appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald of March 24, 2009:

*MORE than 20,000 people an hour could be stranded at Rozelle in the afternoon peak when they get off the proposed \$4.8 billion CBD Metro.*

*The state's top transport agency has revealed no examination has been undertaken on how the metro will integrate with a separate \$162 million upgrade of Victoria Road,*

*potentially creating bedlam at the end of the metro line at Darling Street at Victoria Road, one of the busiest intersections in the country.*

The metro will be able to carry up to 30,000 people an hour to Rozelle. But when they get off the metro, the Government only has room for about 3100 people an hour on buses to take them home.

In a letter to the Department of Planning, the Ministry of Transport has raised concerns about "potentially competing objectives" between the hurried metro proposal and the plan to duplicate Iron Cove Bridge.

Planning documents used to justify the road upgrade were prepared while a different metro proposal - for one along Victoria Road to Denistone - was policy.

Putting all this together, it is clear that the planning process in NSW is in a state of disarray and Barry O'Farrell is right when he says that Premier is: "making it up as he goes along, scribbling notes on the back of lemon-squash coasters and presenting that as some hope for the public of NSW." This is not to say that Mr. O'Farrell has any plans of merit himself, which only further adds to the sense of gloom.

On top of all this comes the Downturn. But there may be a silver lining in these dark economic clouds. After all, much of Sydney's existing heritage, including the 19th century houses of Paddington, Woollahra, Balmain and Hunters Hill have survived because of neglect during periods of economic downturn when scarce development money was spent elsewhere. This of course is the do-nothing option, an option that was not canvassed in any of the planning proposals above, but one that is often the best and the cheapest.





## OUR SUBMISSION ON

# The Ryde/Hunters Hill Local Environment Plans and Development Control Plans for the Gladesville Town Centre and Victoria Road Corridor.

25 February 2009

The Hunters Hill Trust does not support these plans for a number of reasons, which are outlined below.

### **Failure to address the major issues of our time**

The basis for the Ryde Hunters Hill plans is the state government's planning policies for the necessary accommodation of projected massive increase in population over the next decades, particularly in Sydney. The population increases in turn are based on projections to serve a continuing expanding economy, which includes the provision of increased numbers of consumers, increased consumption and an increased workforce to service all this growth.

Such a model is entirely at odds with the realities the world is facing now. With Peak Oil already reached, resource depletion continuing a pace, climate change a reality which is already impacting on our lives, there is a clear need for an economic model that is sustainable.

The current global economic crisis shows how badly the whole system is founded and a clear warning about the dangers of relying on the impossible goal of continuous growth.

The Ryde Hunters Hill plans do not even begin to address these major issues. Rather they are designed to compound the problems arising from the antiquated, inadequate and irrelevant planning policies of the state government.

### **The plans are already out of date**

Even in relation to the latest guidelines of the NSW Department of Planning, the Gladesville Town Centre and Victoria Road Corridor plans are completely out of date, for example:

*The NSW Department of Planning (DOP) recently convened a group of experts to come up with practical advice for development near roads carrying high volumes of traffic. The group's recommendations have informed new DOP guidelines and influenced a shift in focus away from the concept of 'renewable corridors' published in the 2005 Metropolitan Strategy.*

*Renewal corridors were loosely defined as areas 500 metres either side of major transport corridors. The policy has shifted. Instead, it is preferred that new residential development will be concentrated in a series of centres near (but not directly on) major roads, with increased housing density still within walking distance of high-frequency public transport but with less sensitive uses lining the road.*

*The DoP expert panel identified a number of health impacts resulting from living near major roads:*

- *Fine particles and nitrogen oxides from motor vehicle exhaust affects the lungs and heart;*
- *Nitrogen dioxide also affects the lungs and can aggravate asthma:*
- *Volatile organic compounds are associated with a range of effects including headaches, eye irritation, cancer and impaired lung development in children,*
- *Road traffic noise has well documented psychological and physiological effects; ne of the most concerning of these is sleep disturbance that leads to learning impairment in children, however, traffic noise can affect all age groups\* (to say nothing of a greatly increased risk of injury from traffic accidents because of the proximity of the major road).*

The report notes that, ***the best way of mitigating the effects of traffic noise and omissions is to locate sensitive development away from the direct impacts of major roads.***

The controls contained in the Ryde and Hunters Hill DCPs and LEPs are in response to the Master Plan, which in turn was directed by the NSW government's 2005 Metropolitan Strategy.

The plans are designed to facilitate the construction of mostly "mixed use" structures along Victoria Road to heights of 19 and 22 metres - that is six and seven stories. Most of these new, mixed-use structures are anticipated to be residential. All will be directly along one of Sydney's busiest roads with minimum set backs from the kerb, making them entirely inconsistent with the NSW Department of Planning's good design principles.

### **The failure of the plans' objective**

The plans thus fail to fulfil their objective to create a "safe and attractive environment".

Instead they will facilitate the creation of a clearly unhealthy environment, and one, with its proximity to speeding traffic, which is far from safe.

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## SOME OF THE LOST WHARVES OF HUNTERS HILL (continued)

### Pig escort to Fig Tree ferry

Eugenie McNeil tells the story of how in the 1890s her father Hippolyte Delarue and one of the young Jouberts used to walk to Fig Tree wharf every morning. They wore frock coats and carried sticks with elaborate silver tops which they used to salute other gentlemen. Apparently they doffed their toppers and bowed deeply when they encountered ladies. *'their self esteem was in no way pricked by the fact that Monsieur Joubert's pet pig used to follow at a respectful distance and after seeing them safely onto the ferry, would run squealing all the way home'*. (Eugenie McNeil *A Bunyip close behind me: recollections of the nineties retold by her daughter Eugenie Crawford, 1972*).

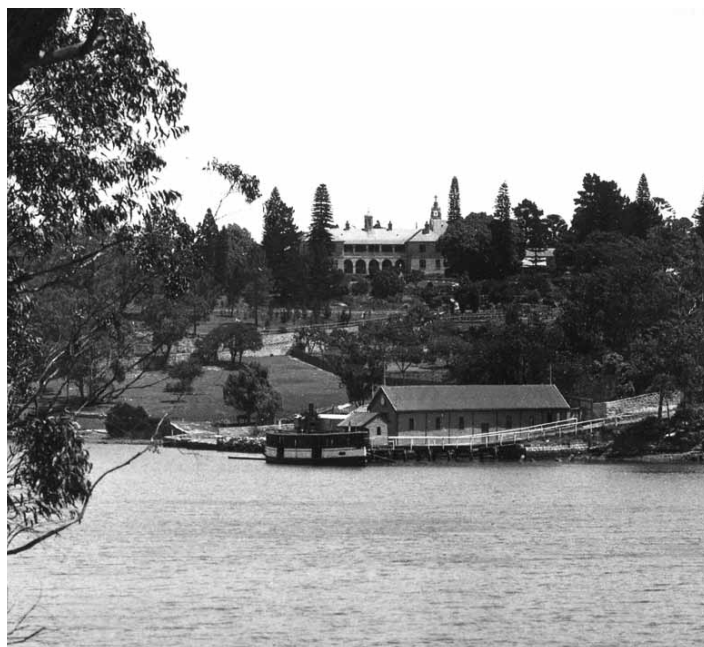
### Ferries to remote region of Killara

The recreational potential of the Lane Cove River opened up when the Joubert family started the Hunter's Hill and Lane Cove River Steam Ferry Company in 1871. The Sydney Morning Herald extolled the virtues of the river's *'calm, secluded bays and cool retreats for picnic parties and pleasure seekers'*. The service operated from Figtree House where people could make use of the Avenue Picnic Grounds or hire boats and fishing tackle *'so that a cheap and novel excursion could be had'*. The 1888 Illustrated Sydney News described how *'a romantic looking stone bathing house projects into the tide, and one of the most magnificent fig trees in the colony overhangs the bank.'*

Thomas Ashcroft of Joubert Street sought permission to build wharves and landing stages along the Lane Cove River above Fig Tree Bridge. *'I am asking you to grant me permission to erect these wharves charging only a very nominal rental say one shilling per wharf per year and reserve to me the right to run a launch plying for hire for otherwise, chartered to these wharves'*. Sydney Harbour Trust records, 1908.

Two launches Native Rose and Killara ran a feeder service to Killara from the Figtree steam ferry terminus. *'On week days, they provided the only regular link with Sydney for residents of the remote regions of the headwaters; at holiday times they carried pleasure seekers to popular excursion grounds like 'Fairyland'*. The launches carried groups of 60 to 70 people up to the Fairyland Pleasure Grounds. When silting became a problem in the river, the Upper Lane Cove Ferry Company's launches were replaced by Fairyland's own single deck, shallow boats, the Escort and Twilight.

Fairyland was an enormously popular picnic ground where hundreds of people gathered for fun. There were organised activities such as cricket, dancing, tug-o-war, sack races and egg-and-spoon races. The play equipment included boat swings, a flying fox and razzle-dazzle. The Swan family created picnic areas by planting exotic plants, including pines, phoenix palms and soft ferns. Eventually, in 1978 Fairyland became part of the Lane Cove River State Recreation Area.



Una at Villa Maria wharf, 1915



Lady Denman at the Figtree ferry depot, 1925





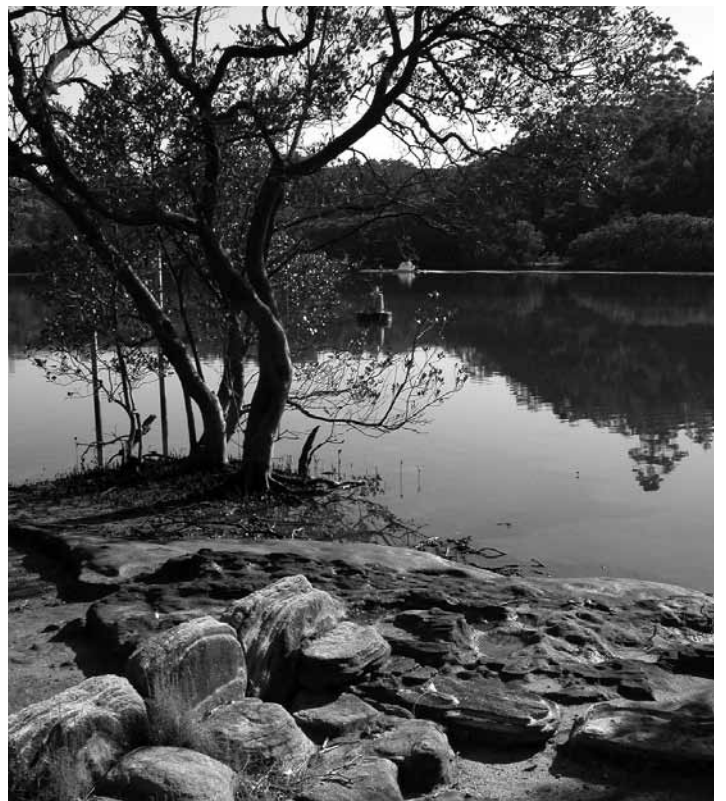
*Avenue Picnic Grounds adjacent to Figtree House, circa 1920*

**Park Road wharf today  
(previously known as Mary Street North)**

People who use the Great North Walk in Boronia Park will know a tiny sandy beach where the crabs scuttle in the mangroves and wading birds poke about the mud. But they may not know the story behind the regular pieces of sandstone that are lined up at the edge of the Lane Cove River. These stones are all that is left of the old Mary Street wharf. At one time, what is now known as Park Road was called Mary Street. Between 1908 and 1920, passengers could take a ferry from here to travel up the Lane Cove River to Fairylands, or go east to another lost wharf at the end of Princes Street and then to Figtree wharf.

A large wedge of public land links Barons Crescent, to the Great North Walk and the Lane Cove River. Council, with the help of a State government grant, has recently organised for weeds to be cleared from this land. What is needed next is for funds to be found to repair the eroded track and clearly signpost it so that people can access this public space and get down to the river.

The Mary Street wharf was in operation for just a few years, but the nearby midden heaps remind walkers of the Walumeda and Camaraigal people who lived by the river for millennia, with plentiful supplies of oysters, fish, crabs and waterfowl.



*Remains of the Park Road wharf*

Hunters Hill Trust is always interested in building the local archives. Please contact us if you have any old photos of Hunters Hill ferries, wharves and harbour activities that we can borrow to scan and include them in the collection.

## OUR SUBMISSION (continued)

In supporting the current proposals, Hunters Hill and Ryde Councils are potentially opening themselves up to liability issues down the track through their failure to care for the health of thousands of residents despite their knowledge of the problem.

### **The creation of a ghetto**

Who on earth would choose to live alongside one of Sydney's busiest roads? There is little doubt that the proposed housing development along Victoria Road will become the abode of last resort for those at the bottom of the housing market. It will become a ghetto of low income renters in multi storey tenements owned by absentee landlords. This will adversely impact on them directly as well as those living in the existing suburban streets nearby.

### **Gladesville Town Centre Conservation Area under pressure**

The inclusion of the Conservation Area in the Town Centre and the inclusion of additional heritage items in the plans are to be commended. However the building height and floor space ratios in the Town Centre will inevitably ensure the demise of the essential two-storey character that Paul Davies refers to in his report.

The creation of *contributory buildings*, as recommended by Davies, has not happened. This further reduces the potential to maintain the character of the existing shopping centre and diminishes the heritage values of the study area.

### **Problems of scale**

The plans allow for building heights of generally around 19 and 22 metres with some areas of 25 metres and one area of 33 metres. At a floor-to-floor height of 3 metres, the various height controls allow for 6, 7, 8 and 11 storey buildings. These will be from 3 to 5 times the height of most of the buildings in the study area, which are mostly single or two storeys. The height controls will ensure the complete destruction of the existing character and are totally inappropriate.

The scale of such buildings will have a major overshadowing impact on surrounding houses and streets and will overlook existing backyards causing loss of privacy for the residents there.

### **Problems of aesthetics and good design**

Apart from setting a number of numerical standards, there is no real way the plans are able to control the aesthetics and design standards of new building in the study area. The most recent development in Massey Street is an example of the sort of architecture that can be expected in future developments.

The housing development along Victoria Road, which will be pitched at the lower end of the market, will result in cheap construction and an even lower standard of design.

### **Problems of traffic**

The increased density will increase traffic. Increased traffic along Victoria Road will have an adverse impact on traffic flow along this major traffic artery. It will also have a major impact on traffic and parking in the surrounding streets, particularly around the Town Centre. For example the problems currently faced by the residents of Cowell Street will be doubled or tripled by the future development.

### **Problems of consultation and communication**

The plans bear little relationship to the ideas that were discussed in the working groups during the development of the Master Plan. Where, for instance is the plaza behind the shops near the shopping centre and where is the park opposite the RSL club?

The presentation of the plans for Gladesville and Victoria Road is unnecessarily complex, hard to read and difficult to access. It required 19 separate downloads from the web. As well, Hunters Hill's plans are separate from Ryde's plans and each Council has a separate set of zonings, LEPs and DCPs, with no overall plan showing the total development. To understand the proposal requires an incredible effort and endless cross-referencing between documents.

I sincerely hope that this level of complexity was not a deliberate ploy to make the understanding of the proposal so difficult that most punters would have given up the attempt.

### **Conclusion**

The Trust urges Ryde and Hunters Hill Councillors to think again about these plans and to take a long view. We urge you to consider their impact not only on our children but also on our children's children.

In 2030, what on earth will people say about the fact that we facilitated the creation of the Victoria Road slums and caused the third-world levels of health and life expectancy of the people who live there? And why is there nothing left of the 19th and 20th century character of the area except a church and an old stone post office?

*Tony Coote, President Hunters Hill Trust*

\* The items in italics are quoted from an article in the January/February 2009 edition of the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects Bulletin.

## VALE FOUR OF HUNTERS HILL'S FINEST

Brigid Dowsett

It is sad to report the loss in the last year of several of the Trust's passionate advocates and earliest members. Those remembered below are notable for the contribution they made to the campaign to protect the best of Hunter's Hill's special heritage from unsympathetic and over-development, some by becoming successful candidates in Council elections and all by taking up an active involvement in the early days of the Trust. We honour their memory.

**Sheila Swain** was widely known and respected having lived in Hunter's Hill with husband Geoff since 1954 and always active and interested in her local community. Elected to Council in 1971, Sheila served for 20 years including two terms as Mayor - the first woman to do so. A lifelong member and great supporter of the Trust and its activities, Sheila was also involved with the preservation and management of the National Trust's Vienna Cottage.

**Ewan Cheyne-Macpherson** was elected to Council with Sheila Swain, the only two of the nine Trust-endorsed candidates to be successful in 1971 (an election that attracted 30 candidates!). Ewan was also President of the Trust from 1977 to 1979 and a life member. He was Scottish to the last as well as a proud local resident, very much at home in the Batemans Road house which was built in the early 1880's and owned by the family for many decades.

**Charles Martin** resided in Hunter's Hill for only 5 years but his influence in the early days of the battle to save our local heritage and in the formation of the Trust was immense. Born in the USA in 1924 he became a highly respected academic and philosopher. He came to Adelaide University - via positions at both Cambridge and Oxford - in 1954 and to Sydney University in 1966, later becoming an activist within campus with Professor Charles Birch opposing the Vietnam War. During this time he was also a forceful founding member of the Trust, urging Council to plan for prevention of further destruction of historic buildings and to protect Clarke's Point as public open space.

**David Abotomey** was at the inaugural meeting to form the Trust on 4.1.1968 and on the First Permanent Committee elected in July that year. He was also successfully elected to Council's East ward in December 1968 - the year the nine Trust-sponsored candidates swept the poll with 55% of all primary votes cast (there was a very high turn-out - and no compulsory voting then). David was a young conservation-minded builder and restorer who, so incensed by the destruction of old houses in Church Street, bought one before it was demolished and re-erected it stone by stone on land at 6 Lot Lane where it stands today.

For more detail on the history of the Trust's early days, "**The Vision & The Struggle**", an account of the Trust's first 20 years, is recommended reading - available from HHT at a discount to members.

## FOUR STOREY LIMIT

My favourite reference book on planning and architecture is *A Pattern Language*, written by Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein in 1977. In it the authors set out a series of "patterns", which they have quite subjectively arrived at to provide a sourcebook of a timeless way of building.

The patterns relate to towns, buildings and construction. For example, pattern number 125 "*Stair Seats*" states: "*wherever there is action in a place, the spots which are the most inviting are those high enough to give people a vantage point and low enough to put them in the action*". Other patterns out of a total of 252 include "*Shopping Street*", "*Old People Everywhere*", "*Windows on Two Sides*" etc and each pattern gives an argument as to why it is important to include these considerations in planning either a town or a house.

Pattern No 21 is "*Four Storey Limit*". In this pattern it is argued that there is "*abundant evidence to show that high buildings make people crazy*". Studies are cited to support this assertion, including a Danish study comparing children from high and low residential blocks, which showed that kids from the high blocks started playing out of doors on their own at a later age than the low block kids and that the percentage of kids playing out of doors on their own decreased with the height of their homes.

The pattern concludes that a four storey limit is "*an appropriate way to express the proper connection between building height and the health of people*" and quotes a Glasgow children's verse that relates to flinging a "*piece*", a slice of bread and jam, from a window to a child in the street. This has been a recognised custom in Glasgow tenement housing.

*The Jelly Piece Song*  
By Adam McNaughton

*I'm a skyscraper wean, live on the nineteenth floor,  
On' I'm no' gaun oot tae play ony mair,  
For since we moved tae oor new house I'm wastin' away,  
'Cos I'm gettin' wan less meal ev'ry day,*

*Oh, ye canny fling pieces oot a twenty-storey flat,  
Seven hundred hungry weans will testify tae that,  
If it's butter, cheese or jeely, if the breid is plain or pan,  
The odds against it reaching us is ninety-nine tae wan*

*We've wrote away tae Oxfam tae try an' get some aid,  
We've a' joined thegither and formed a "piece" brigade,  
We're gonny march tae London tae demand oor Civil Rights,  
Like "Nae mair hooses ower piece flingin' heights".*



## BOAT TRIP

Sally Gaunt

While we're on the subject of wharves, the Trust conducted a very interesting boat trip on Saturday April 4th as part of Heritage Week. Once again, the good ship "Reliance" was our conveyance, and we set off on an overcast afternoon from Huntley's Point to explore the Parramatta River. On board was our knowledgeable guide Graham Percival, and as a bonus, we were joined by David Meggitt, who was able to give us an illuminating run-down on his family's linseed oil milling business, started by his grandfather, Harold, in 1923. The business, known as Halmeg, continued running till 1974 on the shores of Looking Glass Bay, taking in what is now Banjo Patterson House and the Reserve.

We continued upriver past Homebush Bay as far as the sadly polluted Duck Creek, calling in at interesting bays and byways. It's fascinating what a different perspective you get from the water. If any members haven't been on one of our Reliance trips, we recommend you look out for the next one which will be in November.



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Members are invited to attend the Hunters Hill Trust's AGM  
at the RSL Hall, corner of Ady and Alexander Street,  
on Friday 12/6/09 at 6.30 for 7pm.

Our guest speaker will be **Colleen Morris**,  
author of the popular "Lost Gardens of Sydney",  
who will speak about her research and show slides.

Her book explores Sydney's rich and diverse gardening heritage,  
much of which has been lost to our growing need for real estate.  
Discover the fascinating history of Sydney's lost gardens and garden  
styles, from the native bush and significant colonial gardens to  
corporate rooftop gardens and threatened gardens of today.

The book will be available for purchase at a members' discount.

Drinks and canapes will be served.

Entry is free to all Trust members, and \$10 for visitors.