



Hunters Hill Trust Journal

April 2011 ISN 0310-011 Volume 49, Number 1

A Visit to Thomas Muir's *Huntershill*, Scotland

Beverley Sherry

In an earlier article, *Thomas Muir and the Naming of Hunter's Hill* (Hunters Hill Trust Journal vol. 47, Number 2, October 2009), I showed that the Sydney suburb of Hunters Hill does not derive its name from Thomas Muir's ancestral home, *Huntershill* in Scotland. However, in the course of research, I became very interested in Muir, the most charismatic of the five "Scottish Martyrs", Australia's first political prisoners. Campaigning for parliamentary reform, they were sentenced in Scotland for sedition in 1793-1794 and transported to Sydney

in 1794 and 1795. Muir was twenty-eight, the leading orator in Scotland's fledgling reform movement and a gifted barrister who fought for the underprivileged, for electoral reform, universal male suffrage, and freedom of speech. He was not a revolutionary, but this was the era of the French Revolution and a time of paranoia in Britain when even owning a copy of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791-92) might be deemed sedition. The members of the jury at Muir's trial were stunned at the extreme severity of his sentence, fourteen years transportation.¹

Continued p.4



Huntershill House (c. 1765), in the Glasgow suburb of Bishopbriggs, ancestral home of Thomas Muir.



*Preserving Australia's
Oldest Garden Suburb*

April 2011
ISN 0310-011

TRUST CONTACTS:

President: Tony Coote
Secretary: David Gaunt
Journal Editor: Sally Gaunt
Postal Address:
Website:

9817 3466 or tonycoote@tonycootearchitect.com
9816 4047 or david@gleebooks.com.au
Send contributions to sallygaunt3@gmail.com
PO Box 85, Hunters Hill NSW 2110
www.huntershilltrust.org.au
Contact Kate Russell at humanly@zeta.org.au

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Heritage of Hunters Hill
Vision and the Struggle

\$15.00 (25% discount to members)
\$15.00 (25% discount to members)

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESKTOP

Tony Coote



Living in Bonnefin Road these days is very much like living in a building site. There are currently three major building jobs going on and more are slated for the future. Most involve the demolition of existing cottages and their replacement with brand new mega-houses.

Every day our street is crowded with tradies' utes and there are frequent visits from large mobile cranes, skip trucks, concrete mixers, huge earth moving trucks and massive excavators.

One of the knock-downs in our street has a unique slightly redeeming feature. The stone that has been excavated from the site has been cut up into blocks for reuse – this should be mandatory for people making large holes in Hunters Hill's sandstone.



However another job, which was featured in the April 2010 Journal as an example of foreshore destruction, has crushed all the sandstone and trucked it away from the site. This house is still a long way from completion after almost 2 years of continuous building (which is already nine months more

than the time it took to build The Empire State Building in New York in 1931).

The two-storey house is reputed to have a \$5 million budget. Despite eighty years of inflation its per square metre building cost still compares unfavourably with the Empire State Building which, with a total cost of \$24 million, is 102 storeys high and has a footprint of 7,240 square metres.

Those of us who have lived in the street for a few decades have become part of a tribe noted for its lack of interest in major domestic renewal. As an elder of this tribal I can identify with the story in The Green Book from Keith Willey's When The Sky Fell Down. This tells of the destruction of the way of life of the original people of Hunters Hill by a white-faced tribe from across the seas, whose demands on the landscape were dramatically different from those of the Wallameda people.

In an attempt to control the impact of the building process on a neighbourhood I propose that every Development Application for building work should include a statement of how long the building project is going to take. Any project that goes over 6 months should incur a per diem nuisance tax and that tax rate should increase every week after that.

HUNTERS HILL HOTEL

Over the last few months The Trust has been involved in a number of issues. These include the final resolution at a Land and Environment Court conciliation conference of the Hunters Hill Hotel development. This marked the end of a process that began more than ten years ago. Some of The Trust's objections to the proposal were addressed, however our main concern was that the proposal is an over-development of the site and that it does not comply with the planning controls, particularly that any development in the Hunters Hill Village should be of a two-storey scale in its presentation to the street. The controls allow for and a third storey but say it must be set back 3.5 metres from the face of the building. The hotel proposal presents three storeys to the street and has a setback fourth storey on top of that and there was no change to this at the Court.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT IN THE VILLAGE PRECINCT

The hotel has also submitted a DA for the redevelopment of the site occupied by the two former bank buildings for street level shops, residential units above that and underground parking set 8 metres into Hunters Hill sandstone together with its own parking access just west of the new parking entry into

Continued p.3

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESKTOP

the. They are arguing that it is OK for this to be 4 storeys high because it will match the Hotel development.

As we said in our submission:

This proposal shows a flagrant disregard for the wishes of the Hunters Hill community regarding new development in the Hunters Hill village. It completely ignores objectives and controls of the planning policies developed by the Hunters Hill community over more than a decade.

The excesses of the proposal indicate that its main objective is to maximise the profits for its developers at the expense of the amenity of both the community and the future occupants of its accommodation.

Demolition has already started on the proposal to redevelop the site next door to Burt's Pharmacy and there are other proposals in the pipeline including the redevelopment of Mapledoram's corner and Grant's butcher's shop (Casey's Buildings) opposite.

All these developments will have to include their own underground parking and vehicle access. The existing low-key character of the village will be massively changed by this requirement alone, as multiple vehicle entry points will need to cross the footpath and each development will present to the street a two-car wide vehicle entrance to access its carpark.

It is clear that the planning for the village has been a total failure and that the Do-Nothing Option, which was never properly considered, would have had been the best outcome.

HIGH SCHOOL FENCE

The other recent development that has exercised our wrath has been the construction of the security fence around Hunters Hill High School. We only became aware of the fence when a workman was seen one morning setting it out.

The High School's principal and the P&C supported and lobbied for the construction of this fence, which indicated a strange priority in the school's spending of scarce education funding. In addition to the objections that we submitted to the Council, the Education Department and various politicians, we wrote to the Principal and the secretary of the P&C. They both seemed completely unaware of the history of the site and of the creation of the Three Patriots Walk along the foreshore.

They seemed unaware that it is of regional significance, is part of the The Great North Walk, and that in 2000 the Federal Government recognised it as a Bicentennial Project with a \$50,000 grant.

We pointed out that The Hunters Hill Trust was one of the main instigators of the Three Patriots Walk and we were deeply involved with the Education Department, the School and the Council in its planning and implementation and that a significant part of the original plan was for the fence adjacent to the school should be low-key and no more than 1200mm high.

They do not seem to understand the uniqueness of the High School's beautiful waterfront location and that the community's informal access to the oval is a positive attribute that has helped make Hunters Hill High different from other "inclosed" educational institutions. It has allowed the community a special sense of ownership of what was once "The Pleasure Grounds". As well, we pointed out, they do not seem to be aware of the efforts of the Hunters Hill community over the last 40 years to maintain Hunters Hill as Australia's oldest garden suburb and that Council has planning controls to help preserve its special character, that the High School is within the Municipality's Conservation Area No 1.

If it were any other development in Hunters Hill, it would be subject to the controls contained in Council's Local Environment Plan, the special controls in Council's Foreshore Protection Zone and Council's specific guidelines for fences. It would also be subject to the controls in the Sydney Regional Environment Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005, which is supposed to ensure the protection of the harbour, among other things: "as an outstanding natural asset, and as a public asset of national and heritage significance for existing and future generations."

At the time of writing, as a result of The Trust's objections, the objections and lobbying of a number of nearby residents and a lawyer's letter from Council, the work has been stopped. (See construction barrier in Mount St) Don't hold your breath hoping for a resolution to the impasse that will result in the Department pulling down the detention centre style fence that has already been built across the school's waterfront.



This is my last missive from the President's Desk-top as I will be standing down from the presidency at the upcoming AGM, but doubtless will still be making comments from time to time.

Tony Coote

A Visit to Thomas Muir's *Huntershill*, Scotland

Continued from p.1

Today, a group of people in Scotland, the *Friends of Thomas Muir*, are dedicated to recovering his reputation and promoting him as the father of Scottish democracy. John Watson and his family are the prime movers and his daughter Angela and son Alex visited Sydney, including Hunters Hill, in January 2010, keen to have some memorial to Muir erected. When the Watsons invited me to visit them in Scotland in May 2010, I gladly accepted. They operate a family business in the Glasgow suburb of Bishopbriggs and across the road stands Muir's old home, Huntershill House (c.1765). I had thought that there was a village of Huntershill in Scotland but *Huntershill Village* is the name the Watsons have given their commercial complex which houses a variety of businesses, including the *Thomas Muir Coffee Shop*.

The Watsons welcomed me with exceptional hospitality, and invited two historians who have written on Muir.² After lunch we were entertained by John Watson with his customary public talk on Muir and by Davey Waterston singing ballads about Muir. We saw a collection of Muir memorabilia and a cairn erected in his memory. Then we walked across the road to Huntershill House. I had hoped to see inside but, unfortunately, this was not possible. The house was boarded up, with no sign outside, and is now on Scotland's Register of Buildings at Risk. The grounds too were sadly neglected and vandalised. The *Friends of Thomas Muir* continue to lobby the East Dunbartonshire Council, owner of the property, to restore it.



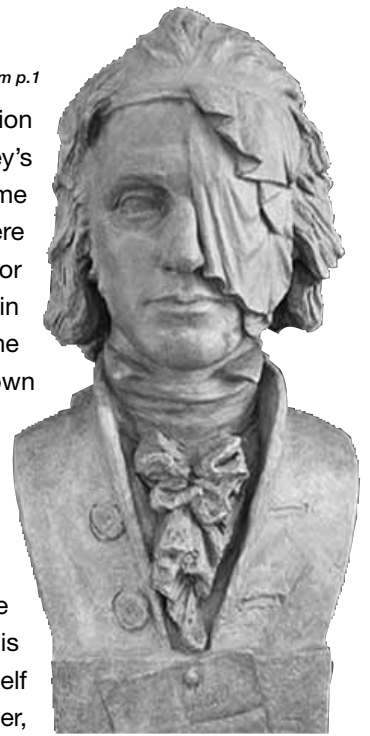
Beverley Sherry (left) with John Watson and Judy Cochrane in the neglected grounds of Huntershill House, Bishopbriggs, May 2010.

During my visit, the question of Thomas Muir and Sydney's Hunters Hill inevitably came up, and I explained that there is no historical evidence for a connection. Muir wrote in a letter from Sydney that he had "a neat little house" in town and had purchased another "two miles distant, at a farm across the water".

Whether he called it Huntershill after his old home we do not know, though it is entirely possible. Muir himself did not say so in his letter, although others have made the claim. The name Hunters Hill, in any case, was in use before Muir arrived in Australia (see my article, "Thomas Muir and the Naming of Hunter's Hill"). Which direction "across the water" his farm was we do not know. Milsons Point has long been proposed, but also inland from Rozelle Bay. More recent research has uncovered yet another claim, by George Burnett Barton (1836-1901), journalist and lawyer and older brother of Sir Edmund Barton. His papers in the Mitchell Library (MSQ 107 Dixon), dated 1897, consist of mounted press cuttings of his articles from the Sydney Evening News, arranged in chapters and entitled *The Scottish Martyrs*. They are very much in rough draft form, but in one chapter Barton states emphatically that Thomas Muir and William Skirving, a companion Martyr, "secured adjoining farms, situated on the north shore of the harbor between the Lane Cove River and Ball's Head" (Barton's underlining). Unfortunately, no documentation is given to support this, so the claim remains only assertion.

One known fact is that Muir and the three other Scottish Martyrs who arrived with him on 25 October 1794 came ashore in November, were each assigned a brick hut, and these huts stood in a row on the east side of Sydney Cove.³

It is to be hoped that the City of Sydney might erect a plaque in that location to commemorate them. An interpretive sign in the Botanical Gardens, headed "A Scottish Political Martyr", already recognises the fifth Martyr, Joseph Gerrald, who arrived



Bust of Thomas Muir (2003) by the Scottish sculptor Alexander Stoddart, Bishopbriggs Library, Scotland. Muir escaped from Sydney in February 1796 and in April 1797 he was badly wounded and lost his left eye. A bronze cast of this work, made in 2008, is on permanent exhibition in the Museum of Australian Democracy, Canberra.

Continued p.5

A Visit to Thomas Muir's *Huntershill*, Scotland

Continued from p.4

in Sydney on 5 November 1795 and died on 16 March 1796. He was allowed to purchase a small house and garden at Farm Cove and, at his request, was buried there. The Museum of Australian Democracy in Canberra honours Muir as the father of Scottish democracy and has on permanent exhibition a bronze bust of Muir made in 2008 by the Scottish sculptor Alexander Stoddart (a cast of Stoddart's sculpture in the Bishopbriggs Library). The Scottish Martyrs will also be recognized in the *Dictionary of Sydney*, and I am currently preparing the entry on Muir.

Meanwhile, the *Friends of Thomas Muir* in Scotland are indefatigable in their ongoing campaign to educate the public about Muir, and a Thomas Muir Festival is planned for May 2011 in Bishopbriggs, at which historians will speak. During his trial in the High Court of Judiciary, Edinburgh on 30 August 1793, Muir said, "I have devoted myself to the cause of the people. It is a good cause – it shall ultimately prevail – it shall finally triumph."⁴ Today we take for granted the freedoms Muir fought for.

Dr Beverley Sherry is an Honorary Associate at the University of Sydney and author of the bicentennial history Hunter's Hill: Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb.

1. Christina Bewley, *Muir of Huntershill* (Oxford, 1981), p. 81. This book is the fullest history of Muir and his times.
2. Michael Donnelly, author of *Thomas Muir of Huntershill* (Bishopbriggs, Scotland, 1975), and Nigel Leask, author of "Thomas Muir and The Telegraph: Radical Cosmopolitanism in 1790s Scotland", *History Workshop Journal* 63 (2007): 48-69. Both works are accessible on the internet.
3. David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales* (London, 1798; reprinted in facsimile Adelaide, 1971), p. 399; *Historical Records of Australia Series 1*, vol. I, p. 772. From evidence given in a law suit of 1796, John Earnshaw calculates that the huts "stood midway along the present day O'Connell St" – *Thomas Muir Scottish Martyr* (Cremorne, NSW, 1959), p. 17.
4. Cited in Bewley, *Muir of Huntershill*, p. 79.

Trust Cruises for Heritage Week



The Trust organised two cruises for Heritage Week, with the help of Phil Jenkyn and Graham Percival. Here is The Sydney Heritage Fleet's 'Protex' making its way up the Lane Cove River.

In the rooms of Kings

Chris Hartley

King Henry VIII was a man of considerable appetites and Hampton Court Palace is where he entertained both himself, his court and visiting dignitaries. Wine, women and song until the cesspits filled up (to be later dug up and sold as night soil to farmers) and the Court moved on.

Until an old lady and a bed time candle resulted in a devastating fire in 1986, part of the Palace was still used as 'grace and favour apartments', normally for those who had served at Court.

Although there are no longer 'grace and favour' courtiers in the Palace, through the Landmark Trust, you can now actually stay in some of the remaining apartments on a self catering basis.

Although somewhat idiosyncratic (built and altered subject to whim over several hundred years) they are clean, comfortable and very atmospheric. The added advantage is that, alongside the security team, you get private access to the famous maze, the great Hall of 1600, King Henry's apartments, the Royal Chapel and the mediaeval kitchens, when the Palace is closed to the public.

Walking the halls at midnight is an experience made more special by sounds that could only come from a huge ancient building with so much history.

Cobblestones, chimneys and corners make all that history come alive whatever the age of the guests.

That the Landmark Trust can leave such a light hand on the provision of the apartments adds, rather than detracts from the appeal of staying there - an historical privilege.

Shocking safety breaches in overseas holiday accommodation

In Australia we are fully protected from some of the more obvious dangers recently experienced in holiday accommodation near Heathrow in the UK.

Entry to the property was along a narrow cobblestone walkway worn by age and untreated with 'anti-slip' material. Either side, three story high parapets were capped with unsecured tiles of unknown age. The front door to the property was considerably smaller than the standard entry with stairs running immediately to the left. No hand rail was provided, only a rope secured to the wall as one climbed upstairs. The stairs themselves were not the standard width and, indeed, seem to vary in both breadth and height.

No 'change of level' indicators were used on the flooring. Once in the accommodation (three bedrooms on three levels in all) it was clear that the exposed timbers had been exposed to various wood boring insects and that the small pokey windows were both insecure and gave easy access to the roof and considerable falls.

Interior fittings were clean but clearly dated. Floor levels were anything but and the ceilings suffered from similar faults, none of the walls in any of the living and bedrooms were straight.



Inter party walls appeared thick but noise insulation did not appear to have been used in construction given the sounds heard, particularly at night.

Much of the wiring was surface mounted rather than hidden behind the walls.

Satisfactory holiday accommodation would probably require a rebuild, this standard of tourist provision would never be allowed in Australia.

COMMUNITY LANDS UNDER THREAT IN HUNTERS HILL

Brigid Dowsett and Alister Sharp

RIVERGLADE RESERVE

Over the summer Hunters Hill Council has expanded the number of marked soccer fields at Riverglade Reserve from two to six. With an assortment of sizes, the marked soccer fields now cover the greater part of the open area below the ponds, and extend to within meters of the waterside path.

Not necessarily. But the changes, and how they are being made, certainly run counter to Council's Plan of Management for this reserve, and to the concept of democratic process.

The Plan of Management, originally prepared in 1999 (i.e. during the construction of Huntleys Cove), describes Riverglade Reserve as 'a rich recreational resource owing to the diverse mix of natural ecosystems and open space, both of which are precious in urban Sydney'.

The Plan states that 'Current recreational use of Riverglade Reserve is relatively low key with minimal conflicts occurring between different uses. Future use of Riverglade Reserve should be broadly consistent with that occurring at present'.

In August 2009 the Plan was amended to add that 'However, there is a need to delineate/demarcate areas of appropriate use for specific activities. To facilitate enjoyment of the Reserve, the following are considered necessary'

- a formalised walking/cycle track through the centre of the Reserve (recently incorporated into Council's 6km Recreational Bike Route as a shared-user path for cyclists and pedestrians through the upper part of the reserve, and along the water's edge,
- a boardwalk to span sensitive ecosystems in a new entry path from Manning Road,
- interpretive signage,
- specific areas of low-key use to enjoy views, sounds and ecosystems,

- designated dog off-leash areas; and provision for community garden activities subject to satisfactory feasibility assessment,
- construction of an amenities building,
- construction of a fenced children's play area.

Unlike the Plan of Management for Gladesville Reserve (on the other side of Victoria Rd), which allows for active recreation (cricket, soccer, netball and skateboarding) in addition to passive recreation and off-leash dog exercise, there is no provision in the Plan of Management for Riverglade Reserve (either in the original or in the amendments) for organised sport apart from recognition of the pre-existing playing field East of the footbridge. There is no allowance for increasing its use for organised sport.

Perhaps most worrying is not just that the changes are inconsistent with the Plan of Management, but that the changes have been made without consultation with either local residents or other users of the Reserve.

Continued p.8



Riverglade Reserve playing fields.

COMMUNITY LANDS UNDER THREAT IN HUNTERS HILL

Continued

This despite the fact that the POM states (p18) that: 'Community participation in the Plan of Management is one of its objectives. This is consistent with broader community interest, involvement and participation in Riverglade Reserve.' Before increasing the intensity of use of the reserve there needs to be discussion of any potential problems, including:

- the safety of other reserve users during organised sport, especially of children and the elderly using the waterside path,
- the increase in noise experienced by neighbours, especially during evening training sessions
- parking problems in surrounding areas,
- damage to adjacent areas being reinstated as bushland,
- the need for changing and toilet facilities

The Trust calls on Council to suspend the use of the additional soccer fields at Riverglade Reserve until such time as there has been proper consultation with local residents and users of the Reserve. And, If there is a consensus on increasing the number of soccer fields, then a full safety audit should be carried out on the likely effect of these changes before any such change is implemented.

The Trust wrote to Council detailing its concerns on 18th February; to date it has received no reply.

Note: The Plan of Management of Riverglade Reserve (and other Council reserves) is available on Council's website.

BORONIA PARK

In spite of constant reassurances from Hunter's Hill Council that there was no progress on the proposal from the Hunter's Hill Rugby Club to lease an area of land adjacent to Boronia Park Oval No 3 to build a hall for their needs, the last Ordinary Meeting for the year on 13 December 2010 told a different story.

The recommendation to the Councillors was that "Council advise the Hunter's Hill Rugby Club that it supports 'in-principle' the proposal to construct a community hall and the provision of a long-term lease of 20 years over the subject site". Council will also seek concurrence and comments from the Land & Property Management Authority (formerly Dept of Lands) prior to commencing the formal procedures for granting such a lease.

Thanks to the input from a concerned community, the Plan of Management for Boronia Park (PoM 2002) is specific that any Community Hall needs to be "a low-key social event location, not a licensed facility and not threaten the security and peaceful ambience of the park and surrounding residences". It could also be an "educational and interpretive centre or meeting place". And parking must be strictly controlled.

In fact, access to the club will be down Princes Street, adjacent to the bushland, and it is impossible to believe there won't be negative effects, from encroachment, noise pollution, traffic and litter.

The facility required by the Rugby Club would necessitate amendments to the Plan of Management. This proposal will be scrutinised as it progresses and any alienation of land will inevitably be opposed by a vigilant community wishing to protect the integrity and values of a vital public space with important adjacent remnant bushland.



HUNTERS HILL TRUST AGM

**Notice is hereby given
of the Annual General Meeting of the Hunters Hill Trust,
to be held on 22/6/2011
at 7.30pm.**

Venue: Fairland Hall, 14 Church St, Hunters Hill

Our guest speaker will be Kirsty Ruddock,
Principal Solicitor with the Environmental Defenders Office.
She will talk on the EDO's role in helping community groups protect the natural
and built environment, including its work on Catherine Hill Bay and Barangaroo.

Light refreshments will be served.

*Please come along, and bring interested friends.
If you'd like to nominate for a committee position, please send in the nomination form,
or let us know on the night.*