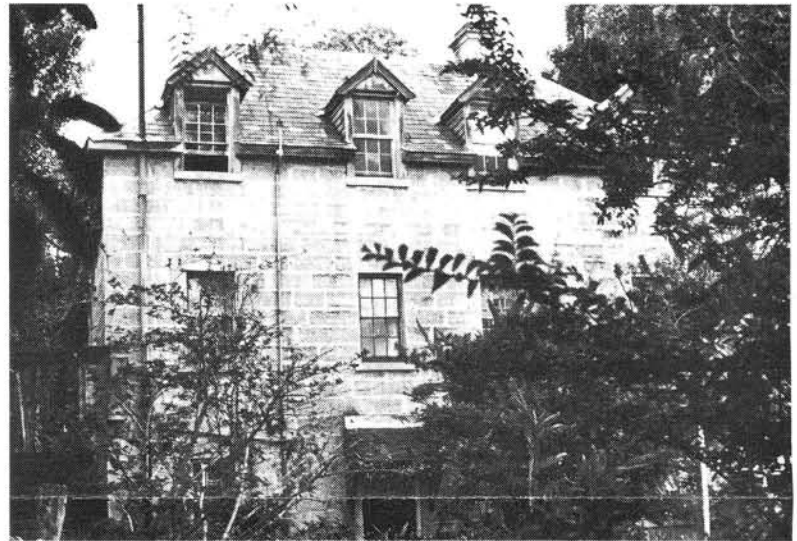
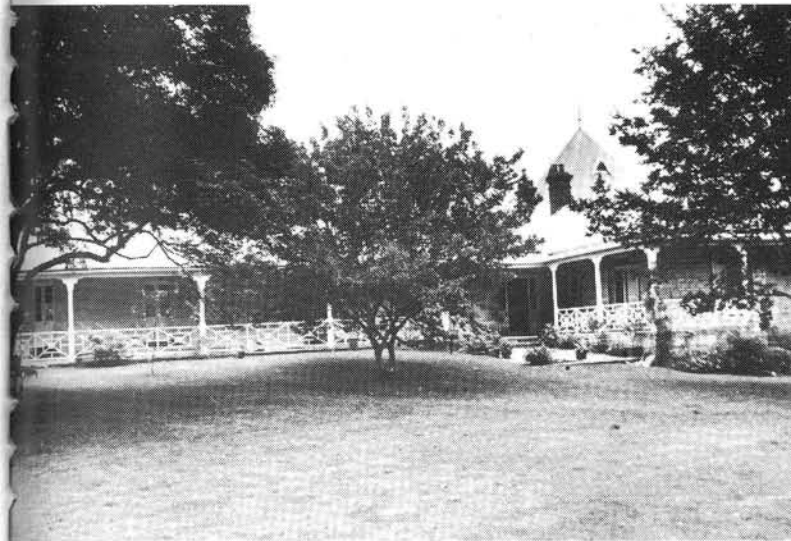




Hunters Hill Trust Journal

Volume 6, No. 1 — March 1977



JOUBERT HOUSES OPEN

Two Joubert houses will be open for inspection on April 3rd, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tickets will be available at the Trust Centre, Hunters Hill Gallery, and at Figtree House on the day of the inspection. The supporters of the conservation of Kelly's Bush are most grateful that, through the interest and generosity of Mr. R. J. Challenor, two of the most interesting old houses still standing in Sydney will be open. Proceeds from the inspection will go to the National Trust's Kelly's Bush Appeal.

Perched on the original Figtree site, 'Figtree House' has long been a familiar sight to Sydneysiders. The house was built by two members of a family well known in this area, Didier Numa Joubert and his son, Numa. Some information on this house was printed in the December, 1976 JOURNAL.

The history of this area goes back to 1835, when John Rochester and Mary Reiby bought land between "Tarban and the Lane Cove River". Mary Reiby was that remarkable business woman of early Sydney who was transported to the colony as a child of thirteen for "horse-stealing", but who later married Thomas Reiby and became a woman of wealth and ability. She established a farm on the Lane Cove River, Figtree Farm, which by 1838 consisted of "110 acres, a house in the rough and two cottages for the men, also

unfinished; a garden of 6 acres in cultivation, planted with all kinds of fruit trees". This "very pretty Figtree Farm of Mary Reiby" was offered for auction in 1838, but there were

evidently no buyers and the farm was then offered for lease at forty pounds a year for three years, with an option to buy at any time for £500. Joseph Fowles, a well-known artist of early Sydney, was one of the first lessees, and in his Journal he described his life and work on Figtree Farm.

Mary Reiby never lived permanently in Hunter's Hill, but perhaps Reiby Cottage was her "country retreat", for it was not until 1847 that Figtree Farm was sold to Didier Numa Joubert for £500 on quarterly installments for four years. The original receipts for this transaction are in the Mitchell Library.

D. N. Joubert extended Figtree House by adding first a timber room, sloping to fit the roots of the big Port Jackson fig tree, and then later a two-storey extension. His son, Numa, had the timber tower built much later (1870's) along with three bedrooms and a nursery and bathroom on the west side of the house. To preserve the old fig tree, the bathroom was built round one of the branches of the tree. This building was carried out by Mr. Joseph Howard, a shipwright, whose descendants are well known in Hunter's Hill.

The Joubert estate stretched from the quarries of Mount Street to Augustine Street, from Church Street and Gladesville Road, along the Lane Cove River. His brother, Jules, owned property directly east of Mount Street. D. N. Joubert had various houses built with the help of stone masons brought out from Italy. Some of these were rented and others were family homes for the Jouberts. 'St. Malo', the last of Didier's homes, was built in the early 1850's, next to Reiby Cottage, (the "house in the rough"). While this house was being built, the Jouberts lived in Reiby Cottage. 'St. Malo' stayed in the Joubert family for over a century, when the building was demolished, along with Reiby Cottage and several other historic homes, to make way for the new Figtree Bridge and expressway.

The Joubert brothers had been born in Angouleme, Charente, France, Didier in 1816 and Jules in 1924. Jules Joubert wrote in his *Shavings and Scrapes from Many Parts* of the disreputable character of the area, saying that this had "the effect of keeping the price low — there laid the speculation. I bought the place (the area where 'Villa Floridiana' and 'Walshale' stand now) with a perfect and thorough knowledge of its foul reputation, and set to work in real good earnest to redeem it — the position being good, the proximity to town an advantage, and above all the fact that this peninsula, with a main thoroughfare on the top of the hill, running from Ryde to Onion's Point, admitted of subdivisions giving deep water frontages to every allotment. All that was needed was some easy mode of access to and from the city and, if possible, the closing up of the Field of Mars Common". He worked out a scheme of selling the disreputable Field of Mars Common as building allotments to finance bridges so that people might have easy access to Hunter's Hill, which he proceeded to develop. In this humorous and heroic description of his life, he curiously seldom mentions his brother, Didier. Didier, a wine and spirit agent for Barton Fils, arrived in Sydney in 1837. He had bought, sight unseen, some land in the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, and was on his way to inspect his property. He married, in New Zealand, Louise Bonnefin, daughter of a Captain of Frigate, and in 1840 a son was born to them at Macquarie Place, where they probably met Mrs. Reiby, and he started his career as an estate "Developer". He lived for a while in Balmain while commencing his building operations at Figtree Farm, adding two stone rooms, a verandah, a basement kitchen and the side steps. Houses known to have been built by Didier are 'Figtree House', 'Coorabel', 'Annabel Lee', 'Warrawillah', and 'The Bungalow'.

D. N. Joubert and his brother set up in 1871 and operated the Lane Cove River ferry service, having broken a previous monopoly of the Parramatta River service, which they described as having a hopeless schedule and exorbitant rates. When Didier died in 1881 his son, Numa, returned to Hunter's Hill and continued to run the ferry service until the early 1900's.

An earlier way of life is evident in both 'Figtree House' and 'Annabel Lee'. Of the two conjoined cottages in 'Figtree House', the one on the right is noticeably more primitive in structure than its neighbour, both made of stone and rubble with separate bush sapling and shingle roofs. Each cottage consisted of two rooms, the cooking being done on open fires. Later, when they were joined as one house and the basement kitchen was added, food was passed up on a hand lift through a trapdoor in the verandah floor.

'Coorabel' and 'Annabel Lee', now visually separated from 'Figtree House' by the Bridge, are still accessible by footway under the Bridge. The two houses consisted of 23 rooms in all, and were connected by a covered walk, burned down comparatively recently. 'Annabel Lee' was used as servants' quarters for the handsome, gabled house in front of it. Evidently the kitchen was in the servants' quarters and food carried into the house. The houses were let for many years; the first tenant was Mr. Levick, ironmonger, whose descendants still live in Hunter's Hill. James de Villiers Lamb, a squatter, lived here for many years. He called the house 'Rhondebosh' in 1882.

'Figtree House' has been restored by Mr. Challenor, and 'Annabel Lee' is about to be his next challenge. Members of the Trust and all those interested in old houses are fortunate to be given these glimpses of the past being restored to excellence in the present.

REQUIEM

7 Mary Street, a house listed by Council and the Hunter's Hill Trust for preservation, has been demolished by the Trustees of the Marist Brothers. Rumour has it that this site will be used for tennis courts by St. Joseph's College, when the dust settles.

A member of Council staff explained to the Trust that, until the Town Plan is gazetted, Council can use little more than moral persuasion in some cases. The Trust would be very interested to know what the penalty, in this world, will be in the Town Plan. This demolition, perfectly legal, highlights a present inadequacy in the un-gazetted Town Plan.

The Decisions made by Hunter's Hill Council on the Objections made by the Hunter's Hill Trust to the Certified Planning Scheme

The Trust's Planning Subcommittee has made an interim report on the decisions made by Council on the Trust's formal Objections. These decisions took the form of adoption by the Council of recommendations made by its General Purposes (Town Planning) Committee. In making its recommendations, Council Committee had before it two documents:

1. the Report prepared by Mr. W.A.C. Dale after he had heard all objections; Mr. Dale was the Commissioner appointed by the Council to hear the objections.

2. a Report prepared by the Town Clerk summarising Mr. Dale's recommendations on the objections and recording the Council's Consultant Town Planner's and the Town Clerk's comments.

To find out precisely what the Council has done, one must read the Committee's recommendations in conjunction with the two Reports.

In accordance with the Local Government Act, the Council's decisions have now been communicated to the Planning and Environment Commission, which will itself make recommendations to the Minister, Mr. Paul Landa. The Minister will either accept or modify the Planning and Environment Commission's recommendations, and then the Planning Scheme will be gazetted and become law. It is thought that the gazetting is only a few months off, and so a Town Plan is imminent. Whether that Town Plan will rise above the stereotyped format of the Certified Plan, and be instead an original plan specially tailored for the needs of historic Hunter's Hill, is now irrevocably in the hands of the Planning and Environment Commission and the Minister.

The Trust fears that some of Council's decisions, if adopted by the Planning and Environment Commission, would leave the Plan in the stereotyped format of the Certified Plan. As it was the Planning and Environment Commission, in its earlier form as the State Planning Authority, which emasculated the Trust-inspired Draft Plan and replaced it with the Certified Plan, the Trust suspects that the remaining hope of the Town Plan rests in the Minister. The Trust has forwarded copies of its key publications on the Town Plan to Mr. Landa, who has assured the Trust that he will give these submissions thorough consideration before making his decision on the Plan.

Some of the Trust's objections to the Certified Plan have been met by Council's decisions, and in these areas Council deserves the commendation of Hunter's Hill residents and the approval of the Minister. The chief example of innovative planning is perhaps Council's willingness to seek provision for a Townscape Advisory Committee written into the Plan, rather than being content to trust in its establishment by successive councils. How such a Committee would be constituted will be a matter of continuing interest to the Trust.

The Council's favourable decisions, however, would not be sufficient to take the Town Plan out of that defenceless rut of unimaginative sameness (i.e. similarity with a hundred other town plans) which the Trust must go on deploring.

The rejection, save for a small token area around the Town Hall, of the Trust's concept of historical districts or precincts, will have a damaging effect on long-term planning in Hunter's

Hill. 'Spot' preservation of individual houses or public buildings has often proved inadequate, as anyone walking around Hunter's Hill can see — the effect of the building preserved is often destroyed by incongruous development around it.

Consider also the Trust's request that the Town Plan embody a Preamble dedicating the Plan to the retention of a preponderance of historical buildings and settings. The Council has decided that there should indeed be such a "Statement of Intention", but its version is a watered down, weaker affair.

The Trust's minimal version:

"The Hunter's Hill Plan sets out to implement the controls over land use which are the commonly exercised town planning controls, and in this case is distinguished by two main aims in regard to the district. The first main aim is to retain the high proportion of family houses with gardens, which characterises the district and whose gardens contribute to the public landscape. The second aim is to preserve the old houses and mature landscape which makes Hunter's Hill unique in Sydney and important at a national level".

The Council's version:

"The scheme is intended to provide a means of so regulating and controlling land use as to ensure that the municipality will remain substantially a low density residential area of detached housing and that the existing total environment which is unique to Sydney and important at a national level will be preserved and enhanced."

Two major defeats are the decision to zone part of Kelly's Bush for residential development, and the reduction of the foreshore building line to 10 metres. Kelly's Bush, however, appears likely to be preserved. The foreshore building line plays a large role in determining the treescape of the area, as a very high proportion of Hunter's Hill borders on the water.

Site coverage and floor space ratios are not sufficiently restrictive to control the impact of development on the surrounding buildings.

In conclusion, it is the Trust's opinion that the Town Plan which the Council has sent to the Planning and Environment Commission lacks teeth. In this form, the Town Plan could, in the hands of an unsympathetic or non-directional Council, turn the preservation of the district into the demolition of an endangered species.

HOUSE INSPECTION

KELLY'S BUSH APPEAL

Donations towards the purchase of Kelly's Bush are being received by the Hunter's Hill Trust and forwarded to the National Trust's Kelly's Bush Appeal Fund. The Hunter's Hill Trust has contributed \$100 and hopes that individual members will substantially increase this amount. Donations to the National Trust are tax deductible.

AMALGAMATION

The Hunter's Hill Trust has two representatives on the "Save Hunter's Hill" Committee, Dr. Richard Temple, and Professor R. T. Martin. The Trust will, as well, be forwarding its own submission on the problems and disadvantages of amalgamation, to the Boundaries Commission. Suggestions for inclusion from members may be sent to P.O. Box 85, Hunter's Hill 2110.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

May 25th, 8p.m.

DETAILS WILL BE POSTED TO MEMBERS- RENEW NOW!

TRUST CENTRE

The Centre will be open at any time by appointment (Telephone 89-5175, 89-2240, 89-1703) and on Wednesdays from 10 to 12, and Sundays from 2 to 4. Helpers for the Centre are always welcome. There will be a rotating display of books from the Trust Library. Items for sale include note cards, maps, guides to Hunter's Hill and books.

RECYCLING

The Hunter's Hill Trust has donated \$50 to the Boy Scouts in their appeal for improvement of their bottle collection area in Durham Street. The Trust published in the JOURNAL (August, 1975) suggestions for the recycling of refuse such as bottles and is glad to encourage such efforts now.

MEMBERSHIP FORM — 1977 fees due March 1st.

Name Telephone

Address Postcode

Willing to help with

Type of Membership: Single — \$2.00
Family — \$4.00
Pensioner \$1.00
Youth — \$1.00

*The Hunters Hill Trust,
Box 85, Hunter's Hill, 2110*

*The Trust Centre
The Hunter's Hill Gallery*