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# Hunters Hill Trust Journal

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## Amalgamation Fears

In 1974, after public outcry, plans to amalgamate Hunter's Hill with other local government areas were shelved. Now the State Government has instructed the Boundaries Commission to examine present areas and recommend changes needed. Meetings were held between representatives of Councils (Hunter's Hill was included with Ku-ring-gai, Willoughby, Mosman, North Sydney and Lane Cove) and the Boundaries Commission, at which Councils were told to submit proposals for amalgamation. Proposals against amalgamation, they were told, would be obstructionist and would not be considered.

Only one proposal has been submitted (South Sydney Council) to our knowledge, and most Councils appear to be quietly organising their forces to oppose the Boundaries Commission's proposals for large-scale amalgamations. Despite the State Government's declaration that amalgamations will not be made just for the sake of a principle where conditions indicate against, the Boundaries Commission's apparent attitude that opposition to amalgamation is being made only by those who wish to preserve their positions (aldermen) or in localities where selfish silvertails are concentrated (Hunter's Hill), has created considerable unrest in local government circles.

**The Local Government Association** wrote in January 1977:

*So far, the Government and the Boundaries Commission have not done their homework. They have not undertaken thorough and impartial research into the question of overall effects of amalgamations . . . The Government seems determined on a drastic course of amalgamations which could do fundamental damage to the rights of the citizens of the Sydney Metropolitan area, and which will cost them money as well. The Association will use every possible avenue to draw to the Government's attention the real consequences of its policy, and to alert the public, the press and members of Parliament from all parties to the tragic mistake which, we believe inadvertently, is being enacted.*

While the Local Government Association might be expected to fight changes which will virtually take the "local" out of local government, no one could accuse the Hunter's Hill Trust of seeing the matter only from within the sphere of local government. The Hunter's Hill Trust has actively opposed Hunter's Hill Council on some issues, and yet the Trust feels that the continuance of the Municipality is vital to the preservation of Hunter's Hill as an historic village.

If it is different now for Hunter's Hill to secure a town plan which will protect the area from eager developers, how much more difficult will it be to resist medium or high density development if Hunter's Hill becomes a minority area under the administration of a council or councils who already have such development? How could "Hunter's Hill" fare in resisting future zoning changes which would bring in more

in rates to that government body?

**The National Trust** wrote, in 1973:

*The National Trust believes, and has stated on many occasions, that Hunter's Hill has special and unique qualities. It follows that any area containing such a wealth of buildings of historical and architectural importance is, in every sense, a special case. There is evidence enough that the residents of Hunter's Hill have a real interest in preserving the character of their environment and a heightened sense of community involvement. The Hunter's Hill Trust obviously believes that it can better preserve the physical character and architectural excellence of the district by retaining a cohesive social identity, rather than absorbed in some larger social and political unit.*

This statement was part of the Hunter's Hill Trust's submission to the State Committee on Local Government (the Barnett Committee), entitled "The Myth of Bigness".

The Hunter's Hill Trust Committee was directed by a resolution passed unanimously at the May Annual General Meeting to conduct an active campaign against the amalgamation of Hunter's Hill with any other entity. Hunter's Hill is an important part of the nation's heritage, as the Heritage Commission has indicated, and a responsive, informed and involved community is as essential to its preservation as is a specialised town plan. Out plea to the State Government is simple:

Let Us Continue.

# Amalgamation Fears, continued

## Are we being sold down the river?

Hunter's Hill first meeting with representatives of the Boundaries Commission indicated that thought was being given towards amalgamation with Municipalities to our east and north. Hunter's Hill is very much the mouse in such a big league.

	Population	Ratio of Representation
Ku-ring-gai	102,000	one alderman per 10,200
Willoughby	53,750	3,583
North Sydney	53,000	3,533
Lane Cove	29,332	3,259
Mosman	28,680	2,390
Hunter's Hill	14,000	1,555

Amalgamation with any of these Municipalities, so much larger, would inevitably change the character of Hunter's Hill over the years. None of these Councils has indicated that it wants to be amalgamated with us; several have strongly and consistently opposed such a move since the last threat. Possibly such a uniform negative reaction has influenced the Boundaries Commission, because the Commission is now investigating the union of Lane Cove, Willoughby, North Sydney and Mosman.

## Or Up?

Where will Hunter's Hill be linked? The only other municipality with which we have substantial boundaries is Ryde. Ryde would have a great deal to gain from the high rateable areas of Hunter's Hill, especially if increased areas were zoned for home units.

	Population	Ratio of Representation
Ryde	92,800	one alderman per 8,436

Hunter's Hill and Ryde have co-operated on ventures in the past, as they do now in Library and Garbage services. There are many advantages to be gained in some areas of service by co-operation by Councils. But it is a long way from co-operation to amalgamation, and many services which are best run on a small scale would be affected, such as Community Aid.

How far will you go for:	Baby Health Centre
	Immunisations
	Library
	Council Office (dog tags, tip permits, building application forms, etc.)
	Council meetings
	Payment of rates

Residents of Hunter's Hill value present sharing arrangements with other areas, but naturally wish to preserve community identity on a local scale and to remain a self-determining entity.

The State Government must be helped to realise, through

groups such as the Hunter's Hill Trust, that amalgamation of this community would be detrimental to it. Nothing has changed since 1973, when the Trust wrote in its submission "The Myth of Bigness":

*We are convinced that this (historic) character, sense of community and pride in identity would inevitably be damaged were the Municipality to be merged with any other, and such an amalgamation would cause a sense of irreparable loss to its inhabitants . . . We are not aware of any compensating benefits that might accompany such a destruction of our corporate identity. We believe that arguments based on premises such as "bigger is necessarily better", or a belief that amalgamation would lead to greater economic efficiency, will not bear close examination. We would argue in any case that economic efficiency is only a means to an end and that its unquestioned pursuit has led to much human unhappiness.*

## Precedents

According to a Special Report of the London Sunday Times, the staff of enlarged borough Councils has increased 20% full-time and 15% part-time since the re-organisation in 1965, while the total population has decreased 6%.

Enlarged Councils in Britain have found that increased size with increased workload leads to specialisation and the setting up of departments within the Council Administration. This in turn leads to higher salaries for department heads in keeping with their new status and then the hiring of assistant staff to ensure the new "empire" has sufficient importance within the corporate structure.

A Council of Europe questionnaire elicited the following returns:

*In Denmark enlargement of areas brought no lowering of running costs or rates;*

*In West Germany there was no lowering of costs, but services improved as expectations went up and therefore rates increased;*

*In Belgium rates went up equally in newly amalgamated areas and those untouched;*

*In Britain some rates went up as much as 150% while others came down 30%, but overall there was a significant increase in rates and costs.*

In the last ten years in New South Wales, Federal taxes have risen 170%, State taxes have risen 220%, while local rates have risen 140%. One reason for increases in taxes and rates has been the desire for increased facilities and services. If ratepayers are prepared to pay, Hunter's Hill Council can extend its services; the decision now rests with Hunter's Hill rather with a larger, more distant and less responsive body.

## Economies of Scale

The Local Government Act itself will ensure that there are no immediate savings because Section 20C protects staff from the effects of redundancy by saying that no one can be dismissed for two years after amalgamation unless leaving voluntarily through early retirement or resignation. If he stays, he must be paid at the same level as his previous job prior to union regardless of the job performs for the new Council - i.e. a Town Clerk is paid as a Town Clerk and not as a Deputy. If he leaves, he is paid compensation based on previous salary and seniority as well as, according to the Asprey Report, a consideration for his decreased chance of promotion or opportunity outside local government. The new Council is responsible for these compensation payments and the extra staff over the first two years.

In Britain it was necessary to set up Council sub-offices to handle the day to day business of Council for ratepayers who could not easily get to the new Town Hall.

The following table shows that there is no necessary or inevitable relationship between the rates charged, the amount available to spend per capita of the municipal population, and the size of the population:

\$ per capita Council income	rate assessed
Ku-ring-gai \$ 72	cents in the dollar .927
Ryde 128	1.4445
Willoughby 103	1.135
North Sydney 117	1.346
Lane Cove 103	1.212
Mosman 83	.9353
Hunter's Hill 111	.848

Hunter's Hill compares favourably with other areas, especially when it is noted that it did not qualify on the basis of need for a Federal Grant.

## Party Political

Local government is the last bastion of non-party political activity. A person can campaign for election in a small district and be elected by people with personal knowledge of him or her. If amalgamation takes place, candidates will necessarily campaign over a larger area; personal knowledge will take second place and expensive publicity campaigns will prove more effective than personal effort. In the end, it is the political parties who will win the elections by virtue of their resources; preselection will be conducted by them, and independents will be rare in local government.

We ask the State Government what benefits we could expect from amalgamation which could outweigh the combined force of these losses?

THE HUNTER'S HILL TRUST, therefore, is opposed to the amalgamation of Hunter's Hill and to the enlargement of its boundaries. To preserve Hunter's Hill, we must preserve the Municipality of Hunter's Hill.

"There is a large body of expert opinion that, beyond a threshold population of between 10, and 20,000 people, value for money is inversely correlated with the size of the municipal unit."

Prof. R.C. Gates

## Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting took place on May 25th, preceded by dinner and followed by an excellent illustrated talk by Howard Tanner, author of *Restoring Old Australian Houses and Buildings* and *The Great Gardens of Australia*.

The following Committee was elected:

President	Ewan Cheyne-MacPherson	89-1959
VicePresident	Helen Sheffer	89-1712
Secretary	Alice Oppen	89-5175
Treasurer	Alec Dircks	89-2110
Membership Secretary	Anne McNally	89-2035
Social Secretary	Tanya Challenor	896-1075
	Ron Barrelle	896-1497
	Tony Coote	89-1384
	Joan Croll	89-1692

The following members have been co-opted:

Trust Centre	Marjorie Fitzgerald	89-2147
	Fred Hinde	896-2971
Minute Secretary	Martin Terry	89-4652
	Yvonne Wilson	896-2150

Trust members willing to help in Trust activities are invited to contact Committee Members. In particular, Mrs. Fitzgerald needs several people in order to complete the Centre roster, and Mrs. Challenor is seeking people to join the Social Committee.

*26th June*

### KELLY'S BUSH DAY

11:30 to 4:00

Barbecue

(B.Y.O. Food)



## The President's Report

The past year has been a good one for the Hunter's Hill Trust.

**THE TOWN PLAN:** Hunter's Hill Council has submitted to the State Government its final version of the Town Plan. After considerable pressure from the Hunter's Hill Trust, reports which were used in formulating the Plan have been released to the public. As a result, the Trust will have a firm basis for future requests for improvement as the Plan is modified in the coming years. This Committee is of the opinion that the Plan is inadequate for the preservation of Hunter's Hill, in that it lacks the power to enforce provisions relating to what can be done to old buildings and their surroundings. The Historic precinct which has been included appears to be tokenism — it is a small area around the Town Hall — and neglects other important concentrations of period architecture. Council's decision to zone Kelly's Bush for residential development appears likely to be overridden by the State Government. The foreshore building line has been placed closer to the water's edge; Council's recommendation is for a mere 10 metres.

Despite these severe limitations, it appears to be a good sign that the Town Plan is nearing completion. Hunter's Hill has been vulnerable without a town plan, as we saw when a house in Mary Street was demolished this year to make way for playing space for St. Joseph's College. The Trust has been agitating since its inception for the completion of a Town Plan which will preserve the historic character and village atmosphere of Hunter's Hill.

To this end, this Committee made contact with Mr. Paul Landa soon after he became Minister for Planning and Environment, and submitted to him a full history of town planning in Hunter's Hill as well as suggestions for improvement.

**AMALGAMATION:** The threat of amalgamation with other areas of local government is worse now than it has ever been. The Boundaries Commission seems even more determined than the State Government to bring about forced marriages, and appears to have been looking at losing Hunter's Hill in an area which would stretch from Ku-ring-gai to Mosman and North Sydney. (One wonders how we would supply part of an alderman for our share of representation — elections would take on new character.) Alternatively, we could be merged with Ryde, an area with noticeable home units. What chance would Hunter's Hill have of escaping a rate-hungry system of zoning?

The Trust supported the Save Hunter's Hill Committee in 1973, and has been doing so again this year. It is the

Trust's opinion, however, that arguments against amalgamation should be presented to the public *now*, in order that the Government might be made aware of widespread antipathy to the effectual destruction of local government, before plans proceed any further. I suggest, then, that this meeting voice its support for a Hunter's Hill Trust campaign against amalgamation and that the new committee be directed to take up such a campaign.

**MARSHALL HOUSE:** Marshall House is, at long last, being restored. The Trust has made contact during the year both with the architects and the school, and has sighted plans which indicate that the building is being preserved and restored to very much its original state, for use by the school.

**KELLY'S BUSH:** The fate of Kelly's Bush is still uncertain, but an offer by the State Government to pay half the purchase price has made defenders of the bush more hopeful. A.V. Jennings, the developers, have become more hopeful too, and have raised the price. The Hunter's Hill Trust and the Battlers for Kelly's Bush held a House Inspection which raised about three and a half thousand dollars for a fund under the auspices of the National Trust. Other donations, tax free, are being sent through us to the National Trust to contribute towards "the other half".

Hunter's Hill Council has, apparently, made no decision on whether to take up the Premier's challenge to pay a share towards the purchase of Kelly's Bush. We urge all Trust members to donate what they can to ensure that we will have bushland in Hunter's Hill.

**THE OLD BUILDINGS OF HUNTER'S HILL:** This book has been completed and is being printed now. We would like to thank all those who have contributed to it.

**THE TRUST CENTRE:** The Trust Centre in the Gallery is being managed by Mrs. Marjorie FitzGerald, and we are all very grateful to her. Anyone who would like two hours to peruse the Trust library in tranquil surroundings should contact Mrs. FitzGerald and offer to be on her roster. The Centre is attended on Wednesdays from 10 until 12, and on Sundays from 2 until 4. Anyone wishing information at other times may contact members of the Trust Committee.

**THANKS:** We wish to thank everyone who has staffed the Centre, helped at House Inspections, printed and delivered the Journal and attended Council Meetings. Four members of this year's Committee are retiring — Richard Barbour, Kerry Bennett, Kay Fairfax and Chris Coulman. Each has contributed enormously to the Trust and deserves our warm thanks. Finally, I personally would like to thank the Committee as a whole and Trust members for an enjoyable two years as President.

Respectfully submitted,  
*Alice Oppen, President.*

### 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*