



THE HUNTER'S HILL TRUST JOURNAL

PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST GARDEN SUBURB

Volume XXVI No.3

NOVEMBER 1997

ISSN 0310-0111



Members of the Gladesville branch of the Voluntary Workers' Association in front of a house built by the Association in Earl Street Gladesville ♦ 1920.

Photographer: Arthur Foster. Photo courtesy of Arthur Mashford

Forgotten heritage

Megan Martin

Early in the First World War, an organisation called the Voluntary Workers' Association (VWA) was formed in New South Wales. This state-wide organisation was the brain-child of ardent social reformer Richard Arthur and set out

to provide homes for war widows and partially disabled soldiers, using voluntary labour. By late 1916 there were over 50 branches of the Voluntary Workers' Association across the state, including a branch in Gladesville. Members of

this local branch included tradesmen, professional men, aldermen from both Hunters Hill and Ryde Councils and a large number of women.

In late October 1916 the Gladesville branch was busy building its first house for Mrs Ida Besanville, widow of Private Albert Besanville who was "blown to pieces by a shell at Lone Pine, Gallipoli while trying to rescue a wounded comrade". (*Cumberland Argus & Fruitgrowers Advocate* 28.10.1916 p.8) Ida had two young sons.

The house was in Tyrell Street, a brick house with stone foundations estimated to cost \$450. The honorary architect was V C Martin, well-known auctioneer Percy Chatfield was honorary surveyor and Victor Le Gay Brereton was honorary solicitor. Ryde alderman Rowland Sutton was honorary secretary and organiser. The house was completed and officially handed-over to Mrs Besanville on August 25 1917.

In October 1917 the Ryde branch of the VWA handed over a cottage in Gladstone Avenue to Mrs Margaret Madden, the widowed mother of a soldier.

A few months later the Meadowbank and West Ryde branch of the VWA completed a cottage close to Meadowbank station for a soldier's widow with four young children.

Then, in 1919, the Gladesville VWA began building a cottage in Earl Street Gladesville for Private Jack Simmons who lost both legs in the war. Working parties gathered each weekend, men with trades providing appropriate expertise while men like Mr Windeyer, mayor of Hunters Hill and a solicitor, served as labourers. The Gladesville Timber Yard provided timber gratis and the bricks were donated by the Ryde Brick Works. The women, inevitably, provided refreshments.

By June 1920 the state President of the VWA, architect William De Putron, estimated that the organisation has built over 400 homes in New South Wales. But the need for homes for returned servicemen and their dependants was estimated to be many thousand. It was a task well beyond the resources of the VWA branches and thus the War Service Homes Commission, a Commonwealth government body, took on the role of catering for these men and women.

Women members of the Gladesville branch of the Voluntary Workers' Association outside the Earl Street house built by the Association for Private Jack Simmons ◇ 1920
The women wear VWA armbands.

Photographer: Arthur Foster. Photo courtesy of Arthur Mashford.



Report on Council revisited

The February 1997 issue of the Trust Journal contained an article about the Department of Local Government's management overview report on Hunters Hill Council. The journal undertook to publish any answering documents and in the April 1997 issue we published a contribution from Mr Murray Butt, of 17 Mount Street Hunters Hill. In this issue we publish a further contribution from Mayor Bill Phipson.

The Editor
Hunter's Hill Trust Journal
Wednesday 14 May 1997

Dear Sir

I refer to the letters by Murray Butt, published in the April issue of the Trust Journal on the Management Overview of the Council's operations and request that you publish this reply.

Simply because their findings do not correspond with his own opinions, Mr Butt maligns the professional integrity, not only of Coopers and Lybrand, then Council auditors, but also Patrick Brown and Anneliese Pawlicka, authors of the report on the Management Overview, by alleging that they were influenced during their investigation of the Council affairs. These claims are offensive and, I am certain, without foundation.

Mr Butt makes allegations about the "conduct of audits going back to 1992". Readers should ask themselves why, is he is serious, did Mr Butt wait until September 1995 to bring his concerns to the attention of ICAC, after he ceased to be a member of the Council? What was the reply from ICAC? Why did he not bring his concerns to the notice of the Council itself during or following the formal presentation of Audit Reports and why did he not report to the then Mayor, Ross Williams? Does he imply the Mayor was involved? I should think not, although the Mayor was Chief Executive Officer of the Council, until the Local Government Act 1993 came into force.

Mr Butt claims that audit reports are missing from Council files. What sinister behaviour does he suggest by this? The truth is that the audit

reports are on file and all were tabled and recorded in the Council minutes, as required in the Act and as General Manager Barry Smith will confirm.

Mr Butt's justification of the Council's financial decline in 1995 does not stand up. He talks about redundancy payments being a "debt which would have to be expended some time". This is not so. Accumulated leave entitlements are calculated and funded every year and employees who resign or retire are not paid redundancy. Only three staff members were made redundant in 1994 and 1995 and one of these was merely a convenient way to end a contract.

I do understand Mr Butt's explanation that a Council, pursuing a policy against the intrusion of a certain class of development, could incur legal costs above and beyond the budget provision. I do not understand why the Council would then ignore that overexpenditure in preparing the next budget, make no provision to recover from that expenditure and reduce the budget provision to half of the previous budget and one fifth of the sum expended in that previous year. Could it be that the Council wanted to present a rosy budget picture to the electors?

In relation to Mr Butt's claim of influence being applied to the officers of the Department of Local Government, I can tell you that I have reported his insinuation to ICAC myself so that proper inquiries may be made. I wonder if he has done the same?

Finally, I am able to say that the current Council has arrested the nosedive in the finances of the Municipality and is now working to restore the asset ratios to the levels recommended by auditors Spencer Street and Associates. This will take some more time but we are now well on track.

Yours sincerely
Councillor W Phipson PSM
Mayor

Time to recognise 20th century heritage

The Hunter's Hill Trust committee has recently been discussing the need to prepare a comprehensive register of items of 20th century architectural heritage in the Local Government Area.

Recognition of 20th century architectural heritage challenges some simple assumptions about what constitutes aesthetic value. Roof lines are a case in point. We publish below a letter written to Council by Trust Committee member Tony Coote in July 1997:

SUBMISSION RE DRAFT DCP no.15 and in particular: Item 12(2) (v):

"Roofscapes should be designed to reduce bulk and dominance. Flat roofs may be appropriate, in limited circumstances outside the Conservation area with sections of the structure having pitched or low angled roofs."

This clause appears to prohibit entirely the use of flat roofs on structures within the conservation area and is very restrictive of flat roofs outside it. This is, I think, an unacceptable proscription and is in contravention of the ideals of the Burra Charter. It does not allow for the full palette to be used by the designer whether for new houses or alterations and additions. It discourages designs that are of the current era and encourages pastiches and mediocrity.

It also does not allow for the possibility of structures being reduced in height to improve the amenity of neighbours. It encourages the use of sloping balustrades to create the impression of pitched roofs. For an example of such an ersatz pitched roof see the DA for no.11 Lyndhurst Crescent.

The policy is a step back to the fifties - a time when, to quote from the book *The History and design of the Australian house*: "In conservative Australia it was difficult to have these radical ideas (ie. the open plan, living rooms facing towards the garden rather than the street etc) accepted. The flat roof, which appears in both the (Harry) Seidler and (Sydney) Ancher designs, was a particular point of contention, and clients

and architects were forced to contest local council's rulings against what were seen as aesthetically offending designs".

With this policy in place some of the most famous 20th century houses could not have been built in Hunters Hill and many 19th century buildings of distinction would also have been prohibited.

I submit that Council should scrap this provision from the DCP and enclose some examples of significant 20th century buildings from Sydney and the United States that have flat roofs to reinforce my argument.

Tony Coote

CHANGES AT THE GATEWAY

As reported in our July newsletter, the developer interested in the Hotel Hunters Hill site has withdrawn. This does not mean the end of changes at the gateway to Hunters Hill. Mobile phone antennae have been erected on both sides of the overpass, to service motorists on Burns Bay Road. These are linked to a portaloo type building on the eastern side. The pre-school further along Church Street objected, without success, to the placement of this facility.

On the other side, the new wedding cake top on the video store/solicitor/real estate building incorporates two mobile phone antennae disguised as blue and white icing.

VALE BAMBOO

There is no truth in the rumour that the scaffolding for this job was bamboo cut down from the car park at the Hunters Hill Club in Madeleine street. We don't know where that went. We only know that it has gone, despite requests to the club from residents to leave it there because they loved it. The club told the Hunters Hill Council that they wanted the land on which the bamboo stood re-zoned from open space to residential so that they could use the land as collateral for a loan.

Woolwich land



The Premier Mr Carr (at right), eavesdropped by microphones with Mr Neville Wran (left) and Mr Tom Uren (centre), at Woolwich on 19 August 1997.

On 19 August 1997, the Premier Mr Carr, announced the intention of his Government to block Commonwealth plans to develop Department of Defence Land at harbour sites, including Woolwich.

The four key points of the new Development Control Plan for the Sydney Harbour Foreshores are -

- ◇ maximum public access and use of land on the foreshore;
- ◇ links between existing foreshore open space must be retained and enhanced;
- ◇ all items of heritage significance must be retained;
- ◇ where possible retain maritime and related activities.

Apart from the fit of pique from the Minister for Defence Mr MacLachlan which greeted the

announcement, nothing further has been heard from the Federal Government. The Member for Bennelong, Mr Howard, has kept his head down, despite efforts by his constituents to get it up and focussed on the issue.

The Trust wrote to Mr Howard asking him to put aside political considerations and join with Mr Carr to revisit the spirit of the Wran-Fraser agreement in 1979 which established a number of Sydney Harbour Foreshore parks and generally get on with it.

Meanwhile Mr Fraser has withdrawn as a patron of Foreshores 2000, the local group behind the campaign to save the land. Mr Fraser said that the campaign had become political.

Mr Carr has to enshrine his proposals in legislation. The Defence Department has to consider its next strategy.

The Trust has written to the Hunters Hill Council, asking it to consider a strategy for the administration of the future park on the point. The issues are the interpretation of the parkland and the use of Morts Dock. We have favoured the "working harbour" concept. The Sydney Maritime Museum has told us that they want to move their ship restoration activities from two berths at Rozelle Bay to the dock. This work is of interest to visitors and a contribution to the maintenance of Sydney's maritime heritage.

The museum says that it would not require all of the space and that a commercial maritime activity could be accommodated. The museum does not require the graving dock to be restored, although many people think that the restoration of the graving dock, with the repair of the caisson and the pumping out of the dock would form the centrepiece of a great coming home ceremony for the handing over of the dock to the public. The dock could then be flooded and pumped out every few years to keep it in order.

Certain councillors have put about the idea that the Hunters Hill Council could not afford to maintain the park. This is timidity at its worst. The new park wouldn't be much bigger than what is there now. Because of its additional importance it could attract State and Federal funding for special projects. Heritage use of the dock would not necessarily be at a loss and properly managed could generate revenue.

The Trust has been active at every level of the campaign to save the army land from housing development, both with our own 60 page submission and by the contribution of trust members in their capacity as members of the Community Reference Group, Foreshores 2000 and the Friends of Kellys Bush. Trust members have also been responsible for interacting with the National Trust and with the group Defenders of Sydney Harbour Foreshores. The trust is a member of the Sydney Harbour and Foreshores Group.

Gil Wahlquist

VALE JEAN RANKIN

Hunter's Hill Trust is sad to note the passing of Jean Rankin, one of our founding members, in October. Jean was 93. She was a resident of Hunter's Hill for over 60 years. In her early years she lived at *Bayfield*, 3 Woolwich Road, one of four children of J Bowie Wilson KC. After her marriage she moved out of Sydney for a time, but then returned with her family and remained in Hunters Hill for most of her life.

Older members of the Trust will no doubt remember her as an energetic participant in the Women's Auxiliary, doing valuable behind-the-scenes work as a fundraiser and social organiser. She leaves behind many family members and friends in the area.

ugly footbridge

The removal of the rotting wooden footbridge from the middle of Tarban Creek reserve, adjacent to the children's play area resulted in the Trust writing to the council asking that it be replaced with a wooden structure in keeping with the character of the park.

Although the sandstone piers of the bridge are retained, the council intended going the whole hog by erecting a concrete bridge with iron railings, similar to the one for the bike track just under Pilkington Bridge. If the concrete bridge must go ahead, can we at least have wooden handrails?

Trust officers

Officers for 1997-98, appointed at the first meeting of the new committee are: President - Gil Wahlquist; Vice-president - Sally Gaunt; Secretary - Len Condon; Treasurer - Andrew Yew; Journal editor - Megan Martin. Committee members are Juliet Corish, Tony Coote, Robyn Christie, Moya Crane, Samantha Biggs and Matthew Baird. The committee meets on the second Thursday of every month at 8 p.m. at Vienna Cottage, Alexandra street, Hunters Hill. Please address mail to The Secretary, P.O. Box 85, Hunters Hill, 2110.

A taxing problem

The Hunters Hill Trust bought into the land tax argument because of the pressure it will put on large properties in the conservation area to be sold. Sixty people attended our meeting at the Hunters Hill RSL Hall on July 24 and we decided to write to both the Premier and Opposition Leader making the following points:

1. The unwelcome consequences arising from this tax would have come to light had a proper consultation been conducted with the community.
2. The concerns of Governments about preserving built heritage are expressed in the Heritage Act. The taxing of homes whose land value reaches \$1 million will in fact place a large number of heritage houses at risk. In Hunters Hill this could be as high as 6% of houses.
3. Many heritage houses are lived in by people who have owned them for many years. The value of their homes has increased because of developer pressure. Long term residents tend to be on fixed incomes, a lot are self-funded retirees.
4. When the tax was introduced in State Parliament it was presented as a tax on the rich. The reverse is the case. The tax will put pressure on long-term residents to move out and hand their houses over to the rich.
5. If the owners who have been forced into reduced financial circumstances elect to stay, the Government invites them to go into a debt situation which would benefit the State.
6. The pattern is that wealthy purchasers either make the heritage houses over as mega-mansions or pull them down to build home units. This activity places an intolerable pressure on councils and groups who are required to fund legal measures to protect heritage for future generations.
7. Commentators continually remind us that the great stabilising forces in Australian society are home ownership and our drive to save for the future. The home represents the only saving made during the working lives of most Australians. A government interested in stability would encourage home ownership, not impose a tax on it.
8. The land tax on owner-occupied homes was bundled in legislation with the hotel tax and the club tax. It is significant that the home owners,

the so-called rich, lacked the resources of the pubs and clubs to mount a media bash on the Government.

Mrs Kerry Chikarovski attended the meeting on July 24, giving a rousing attack on the land tax legislation. In our letter to the Opposition Leader, Mr Peter Collins, we asked for a commitment from the coalition to repeal the legislation once they are elected to government. We asked the Premier Mr Carr that the home owner land tax be reconsidered and withdrawn.

Lost horizon?

Members are aware of our appeal to the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning Mr Craig Knowles, to save us the bit of beach on the Housing Commission estate at 15 Dick Street before it went to auction. The Hunters Hill Council backed our request. Now the Minister has written to us via Mr John Watkins M.P. saying that the request was carefully considered before the property was sold but the department could not accede to the request because there has never been a right of access across Department of Housing land and there are a number of points in Henley at which direct public access to the water is already provided.

He reminds us that there is already a regional park at the Gladesville Hospital site immediately north and west of Henley. Mr Knowles concludes: "I am advised that the Trust's concerns about the heritage aspects of the site would be better addressed through approaching the new owner of the property..." Has it slipped Mr Knowles' memory that he is the Minister for Heritage and it was because of this that we got in touch with him in the first place? Without his help, the Hunters Hill Council will have to tackle this problem when the new owner submits a development plan.

Meanwhile with Australia's rowers qualifying in every division of the current international rowing competitions and our oarsmen being set for international recognition during the Olympics, Mr Knowles is prepared to let slip the most important harbourside site in rowing history.

Trust Christmas Party

*You are invited to the Hunter's Hill Trust Christmas Party
to be held on Thursday November 27 1997
at Oatlands, the home of Mrs Joyce Wood, at 10 Ferry Street, Hunters Hill
from 6.30 pm to 8 pm.*

Guest Speaker: **Roy Lumby**, author of *A Spirit of Progress*, the recently published history of Art Deco architecture in Australia.

Roy will talk about the 20th century architectural heritage of Hunters Hill.

Oatlands stands at the centre of land selected by Etienne Bordier in 1854-5 for the first multiple-housing development in Hunters Hill. The land, originally classified as whaling allotments and owned by John Tawell and John Terry Hughes, was also part of Ambrose Foss's large landholdings in the 1840s.

*Frederick Mader, a German immigrant with a stationery business in George St, was the first purchaser of a Bordier house, situated where **Riversleigh**, 12 Ferry St, now stands. He paid Bordier's mortgagee, Didier Joubert, £1000 in 1857 and named it **Swiss Villa**, perhaps an allusion to Bordier's nationality. When Mader became insolvent in 1866 after his mortgagee had sold the property for a greatly depreciated £580, he attributed his insolvency to a poor speculation in property at Hunters Hill.*

*There was not a subdivision of this 1½ acre property before 1875 when Francis Maguire, living in the Bordier house, let a 7-room stone house and land to Edward Bedford. In May 1876, Andrew Low bought the **Oatlands** section of the property for £1400 and in September 1879 it was purchased by Sidney Oatley whose family lived there until 1932.*

*Because of the 1870s subdivision, it is difficult to date **Oatlands** with certainty before that, although its simple architectural design, so popular in the 1850s, suggests that it is earlier. A similar style is found in Didier Joubert's*

*Coorabel and Gabriel de Milhau's **Paraza**, both built in the 1850s.*

***Oatlands** is a delightful example of Georgian domestic architecture. It is of modest proportions, especially the narrow hallway, yet gives an impression of light and space. It is completely symmetrical in the internal arrangement and scale of rooms, as well as in its original external lines.*

Elaborate bargeboards are its only decoration, highlighted by plain timber posts and a stone flagged verandah that encircles at front of the house. Double doors open from the main rooms providing easy movement between the house and parts of the garden in which 3 old camellia bushes and the original well-head still exist. The warm pink of the stone used in the upper northern wall contrasts with the heavily picked stone of the verandah walls. The original ironbark floors remain in most of the rooms.

*The charm of **Oatlands** derives from its simplicity and lack of decorative Victorian features. Alterations at the back of the house have been in sympathy with the original, following the same building lines and in sandstone. An attic room was made without alteration to the hallway by installing a light tuck-away stairway.*

♦ reprinted from a flyer produced by the Hunter's Hill Trust for a house visit in the 1980s.

*Tickets \$25 per person for members and guests.
Contact the Treasurer, P.O. Box 85, Hunters Hill 2110
or contact Gil Wahlquist - phone/fax 9816 2627.*