



A matter of commitment

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Join the Trust

Membership of the Trust is \$25 a year for a family,

\$15 single and

\$5 for pensioners and students.

Greetings from your new president. This is the first time I have talked to you in the Journal, though I met many of you at the last Christmas party held at our old stone cottage in Mars St last November (in what is confusingly called North Ward). I took over from Tony Coote after the May AGM, as he had reached his allotted time in the job. I'm in the deep end a bit, happily reliant on the considerable experience and expertise of our hard-working committee members, and committed members of the Trust.

This has been an interesting year to be speaking and working for the interests of the Trust. It is barely 12 months since we were integrally involved in the fight to "Save Hunters Hill", where a vigorous and united campaign of the community and its Council saw us successfully stave off a threatened amalgamation with Ryde Council. At the Council elections, where the number of councillors was reduced to 7 (including a popularly elected mayor) the Trust asked all candidates to sign a charter of commitment to preserve and protect the character of the Municipality. All successful candidates, with the exception of Peter Astridge, signed the charter, and we'd cause for

optimism as far as heritage issues were concerned. Unfortunately, the history of the development process for the Hunters Hill Hotel site has demonstrated otherwise. Since the Hunters Hill Village Centre draft Masterplan was proposed in early 2002, it has become abundantly obvious that the owners of the Hunters Hill Hotel were uninterested in the concept of the overall development plan for the area. Instead, they presented a succession of ambit development applications, (until successful several weeks ago). Every one of these applications fell substantially outside Council's own guidelines.

Community engagement has turned to community dismay and anger: the feelings and wishes of very well-attended public meetings, as well as the strong expressions of opposition to the Hotel Development in many submissions and presentations have been to no avail, as Council has in the end approved a Development which is essentially a repudiation of its own height and density and floor space ratio controls.

Equally worrying have been the due processes subverted or ignored: Council's own CAP (on which two of our Trust members sit) bypassed on the most significant development in years before

Council, residents excluded from Council meetings, and NO Councillor prepared to address the fundamental issues at stake at either Council meeting where the decision was being made.

The Trust made every effort to uphold the principles of our Charter in numerous submissions and responses throughout this process. We funded printing of a brochure to alert every resident of the Municipality to the importance of the Hotel site decision, and sought and presented a legal opinion from Matthew Baird, barrister in environmental law (whom many of you would remember as a former resident and Councillor). Matthew's submission presented a strong argument that, should Council refuse the Development Application before it in October, the Land and Environment Court would endorse its refusal, in the event of an appeal from the developer. Council rejected this submission.

Where to from here? The goodwill between the Trust and the Council needs to be maintained, so we must work hard and positively to remind Council (and the community we live in) that the Trust is NOT opposed to development as such. At the same time we need to be resolutely opposed to development

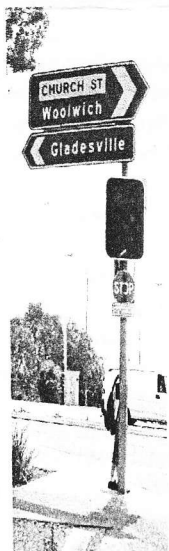
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Field of Mars Common is 200 years old

By Margaret Christie



The area now designated Boronia Park was once part of the lands of the Wallumattagal clan



2004 marked 200 years since the Field of Mars Common was proclaimed by Governor Philip Gidley King. The Municipality of Hunters Hill has almost 30 hectares of remnants of the original Common as significant open space - Boronia Park Reserve, Buffalo Creek Reserve, the Lane Cove River Foreshore Walk and the tiny St. John's Park in Ryde Road. With our increased awareness of the value of public open space, it is timely to recall some of the key points in the history of a place that is highly valued by so many residents of Hunters Hill and beyond. The history of the Common and its disposal reflects many of the issues and attitudes that the Hunters Hill Trust still deals with today. The following time-line highlights the major occurrences from European settlement until the end of the nineteenth century.

Pre- 1788 - part of the lands of the Wallamattagal clan

1788 - 2nd February - Captain Hunter and Lieutenant Bradley survey the Lane Cove River. The area now designated Boronia Park was once part of the lands of the Wallumattagal clan, a group of the Dharup tribe who occupied land as far to the north-west as Ryde. The Aboriginal population was severely reduced by small-pox in particular, but also cholera and influenza and their numbers around the inner reaches of the harbour dwindled rapidly even in the first year of white settlement. Archaeological evidence of Aboriginal occupation has been found along the foreshore in rock overhangings

that contain many middens which are now listed and protected by the National Parks and Wildlife Association. In 1988 Val Attenbrow researched Aboriginal occupation within Hunters Hill.

1790 - Phillip designates land as the Field of Mars for settlement by the military. Governor Phillip had declared all land to be Crown Land and in 1790 named the large area, from as far north as Carlingford to the Lane Cove River, the Field of Mars. As the new colony was desperate to become self sustaining, the area would be for the express use of the military for farming purposes.

1792 - Many farming lots were taken up - mostly in the southern section of the Field of Mars. By 1800 there were over 50 settlers occupying this area from Parramatta to the Lane Cove River.

1804 - Governor King proclaimed the Field of Mars Common. On 11th. August 1804 a large tract of undeveloped land within the Field of Mars was proclaimed by Governor Philip Gidley King as the Field of Mars Common, public open space to be used as communal grazing land for the settlers on their small surrounding plots in the same way as the old English Commons. The Common covered 2523 hectares, extending from the present Boronia Park along the Lane Cove River, Boundary Road to west Pennant Hills, with a large extension on both sides of Terry's Creek to Eastwood. The bushland on the north and eastern side, and the proximity of the area to the river for transport, saw it exploited by timber cutters and reputedly became a ref-

uge for bushrangers and smugglers.

1861 - 5 January. Hunters Hill declared a Municipality. Population 400

1862 - 1874 - Petitions to the Government both for and against the resumption of the Common. From the 1860s there had been agitation for bridges and roads as an alternative to river transport. As well, there was a struggle by the Hunters Hill Council to clean up the Common from squatters and ruffians by selling off parts for development and to use the proceeds from the sale of land to finance roads and bridges in the area.

1862 - Government Enquiry into the resumption of the Common. The best evidence for the conflict between the prominent citizens of Hunters Hill and the people who used the Common comes from Petitions to the Parliament and from the Minutes of the Enquiry by the Legislative Assembly set up in 1862 to examine the issue. The Enquiry heard evidence from some of the most prominent developers and aldermen in Hunters Hill including Jules Joubert, the first mayor, and James Squire Farnell. Farnell was to become the most renowned of all the original aldermen when the Hunters Hill Council was formed in 1861, although, apart from Farnell Street in Boronia Park, he is little recognised in this municipality today. He chaired the meeting at the formation of the Council although he himself was never mayor. He had bigger fish to fry! Farnell's maternal grandfather was James Squire, a former convict who in 1795

The Remnants of the Field of Mars Common within the Municipality of Hunter's Hill.

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The area that is now Ryde and Gladesville was known as the Eastern Farms as it was to the east of the major farming settlements established originally at Parramatta. By 1800 there were over 50 settlers occupying this area from Parramatta to the Lane Cove River.

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The public area to the north was never clearly defined in the eyes of the locals and although the areas near the farms on the south and west were used for their intended purpose, gradually settlers established themselves on the 'common' land and came to be known as 'commoners'.

The extent to which the Common was taken over by squatters can be seen in a Report to the Surveyor General by J.J.Galloway in 1847. It lists the commoners, their families, the size the area they were cultivating and the length of time they had been there.

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From the 1860s there had been agitation for bridges and roads as an alternative to river transport. As well, there was a struggle by the Hunters Hill Council to 'clean up' the Common from squatters and ruffians by selling off parts for development and to use the proceeds from the sale of land to finance roads and bridges in the area. Many of the more prominent early settlers in Hunters Hill, particularly aldermen on the Council, were speculators and land developers who felt the attractiveness of the area would increase their profits if better communications with the city existed.

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Farnell's maternal grandfather was James Squire, a former convict who in 1795 was granted 30 acres at Kissing Point and went onto wealth and respectability as the colony's first brewer. By 1822 he had 1000 acres at Kissing Point. His famous grandson inherited 400 acres of this estate. Farnell also had business interests in ferries and banking.

In the first rate notice of 1861 Farnell was listed as having property valued at 35 pounds but as land only. Presumably this was part of the Everard estate. By 1870 he is no longer listed as a ratepayer.

Farnell was pursuing his political career which culminated in his becoming the NSW's first Australian born Premier from 1877 to 1878.

He had won a State by-election in 1860, had subsequently lost his seat but had been elected for the seat of Parramatta in 1864. One of his strongest interests was in public infrastructure and in particular roads and bridges. In 1861 Hunters Hill had a mere three 3 miles of roads and the very first expenditure of the new Council in 1861 was for 10 pounds to be spent on 'the wharf road.' Subsequent meetings were devoted almost entirely to discussion of the provision of roads.

The original aldermen, entrepreneurs and developers in Hunters Hill saw an improvement in transport facilities as a means of attracting greater residential development in Hunters Hill. Hence the double objective: sell the Field of Mars Common for housing blocks and use the money to build bridges and roads. On 26 October 1861 - a mere few months after the formation of the Council - a motion was passed - moved Cr. Brookes seconded Cr. Farnell 'That a petition be presented from this Municipality to the Legislative Council in favour of the sale of the Field of Mars Common and the construction of roads and bridges.' The petitions to the government began and a passionate opposition organised.

A Parliamentary Enquiry into the resumption of the Common was set up in 1862.

Mr Farnell's evidence to the Enquiry sums up the attitude of the entrepreneurs when he said '.....I have looked at it in this way - whether it (ie. the Common) could not be put to better use, by being occupied by private individuals, than by lying a large waste as at present...' - a sentiment sometimes heard today!

The Parliamentary Enquiry recommended that the Common be subdivided in proportion to the rights of the Commoners in the district. It did not agree to the raising of money for the construction of bridges. It appears that the resumption of the Common did not proceed at this point.

From 1862 until 1874 there were numerous petitions to the NSW Parliament both for and against the resumption of the Common and the sale of the land for infrastructure. Those against refuted the claims that the Common was inhabited by unsavoury types, that the sale of land would raise enough money to build the bridges desired at both Gladesville and Iron Cove, and most of all that the Common was useless to the surrounding residents. They also claimed that they would lose an important amenity while in no way benefitting from the loss. Thousands of people signed these petitions.

An example of the use of the Common for its original purpose is known in Hunter's Hill through the story of the Hillman family who owned 'Vienna' cottage until it was bought by the National Trust for a house museum. John Jacob Hillman, a bootmaker, lived in Alexandra Street, from the 1860s and it is reputed that his wife Ann, who had a small dairy, took the family cows from Alexandra Street up to the Common each day and returned for them in the evening.

1874 - the Field of Mars Resumption Bill.

The political weight of those in favour of the resumption was obviously very impressive.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a controversial decision was made and, in 1874, the 'Field of Mars Common Resumption Bill' was passed in the Legislative Assembly of NSW that much of the Common be resumed, cleared and laid out in streets and allotments.

By that time Mr. Farnell's political career had advanced considerably. He was Secretary for Lands.

1879 - Australia's first national park - the Royal National Park.

1885 - the auction of parts of the Common in Hunter's Hill. Barons Crescent subdivided.

The western boundary for the Field of Mars Common in the Hunters Hill area had been the former Hunter's Hill Road, now Ryde Road and on 15th September 1885 a famous auction was held whereby fifty one

allotments and one hundred and twenty five portions on the Field of Mars Common were sold off. Several of the older houses in the area were built on land acquired at this auction, for example numbers 52 Ryde Road, 74 Ryde Road, 62 Park Road, 41 Blaxland Road.

The fine line between the Common and the rest of the Municipality can be seen by the fact that Marika at 46 Ryde Road was part of a 30 acre land grant of 1835 to Frederick Hayne, although St. John's Park was part of the Common as was the land on which all the present houses between Ryde Rd and Everard Street are situated. Ardenclotha at 52 Ryde Road was built for the Rev. George McIntosh of Parramatta after he bought two lots of land at the auction of the Common in 1885 for 125 pounds each.

The survival of any part of the Common as open space was largely accidental. In 1881 the Government had offered Ryde Council that area now known as the Field of Mars Reserve as a public recreation ground and although the Ryde Council rejected that site, preferring an area closer to the village centre, the Government gazetted the remaining parts of the Common as Public Recreation areas. Parts of the remaining area were gradually hived off for extensions to the Field of Mars Cemetery, the latest being in 1967.

1887 - Boronia Park Reserve proclaimed as a public recreation area.

In the 1880s, with the rapid population increase, the benefits of public open spaces for the people's health and recreation had become a national issue. Ironically, James Squire Farnell's son, Frank, a member of the Legislative Assembly was one of the strongest proponents of the Royal National Park. Farnell Avenue is named after him, not his Premier father!

In 1887, more public parks and reserves were gazetted in Sydney than in any other year in the century and it was that year that the Governor of NSW, the Right Honourable Charles Carrington declared, by the Public Parks Act of 1884, the area so designated in Hunters Hill known as Boronia Park, to be a Public Park, for 'the purpose of public recreation, convenience, health or enjoyment' (NSW Sydney Gazette, 16 December 1887.) The proclamation has a detailed site description of the designated area set out in the Imperial system of measurement.

Hunters Hill Council was made Trustee of the Boronia Park Reserve and although both Ryde and Hunters Hill Council took responsibility for the remaining sites that had been within the old Common, they showed little active interest in rehabilitating them as public recreation areas and certainly no interest in their value as natural or rare remnant bushland. In fact, both areas were still used for timber-getting until well into the twentieth century and both were used as rubbish tips and sewerage dumps.

The history of the reserves in the twentieth century is another story! Suffice to say that public recognition of the significance and value of many aspects of the sites - natural areas, sportsgrounds, parklands, areas for general community use and culturally significant items has meant that they now have some protection.

With the increasing population density in Sydney, those few areas that are public open space and, more significantly, remnant native bushland have a heightened significance as a rare, precious and fragile legacy from the past.

The full text with references of A Heritage Assessment of the Remnants of the Field of Mars Common within the Municipality of Hunters Hill by Margaret Christie BA M.Heritage Conserv.is held by Hunters Hill Council.

The Hunters Hill Trust Inc.

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See us on the web -
www.huntershilltrust.org.au

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such as that which has been approved for the Hunters Hill Hotel site, where important heritage issues are simply ignored.

A very important site, (the future of which has been under question for some time) is the historic Priory in Manning Rd, the oldest public building in the municipality. Its fate will be determined soon and we'll need to be active and vigilant on its behalf. Council's making all the right noises about their care for its future, but we'd value your involvement at any level.

Hope to see you all at the Trust Christmas Party at Len and Kate Condon's on Wednesday December 1st, to share the goodwill of the season.

David Gaunt

Officers for 2004-2005
President – David Gaunt
Vice-president—Tony Coote.
Secretary – Len Condon,
9816 2796.
Treasurer – Nicola Jackman
9817 5644.
Committee – Robyn Christie,
Sally Gaunt, Chris Hartley,
Louise Hunter, Wendy Dennis
Committee meetings are held at
7.30 p.m. on the second Thurs-
day of each month

This is Your Invitation
to the Trust's Christmas Party
It's at Len Condon and Kate Russell's place
at 58 Barons Crescent Hunters Hill
on Wednesday December 1st.

6.30 pm to 8 p.m.
It's \$30.00 per head
The Trust's own Beverly Sherry will
be our guest speaker.
RSVP Len Condon at 9816 2796

A letter from Beverley

Barry Smith
General Manager, Hunters
Hill Council
Town Hall, Alexandra St
Hunters Hill NSW 2110

16 September 2004

Dear Mr Smith,

What is going on with the
Hunters Hill Council?

The Council's Heritage Adviser approves the demolition of a stone building (20 Wybalena Road), fortunately overruled by the Land and Environment Court and not without a disparaging comment by the Commissioner about this same Heritage Adviser. It approves overdevelopment such as that in process on the corner of Lloyd Avenue and Alexandra Street. Now Council is considering a commercial/residential development on the Hunters Hill Hotel site which is clearly an overdevelopment in terms of Council's existing planning con-

trols – and this after massive community opposition and on a stretch of road which should be a clearway given the four streams of traffic constantly flowing there, from and onto the expressway north and south.

According to the National Trust, Hunters Hill Council has not responded to their State of the Heritage questionnaire, and I notice that Council's newly designed website has dropped its previous slogan, which was taken from the subtitle of my book *Hunter's Hill: Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb*. Does this mean there is no longer a high priority on preserving "Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb"?

I realise that there are some relatively new Councillors, so perhaps it is necessary to ask: does the Council understand fully what the unique heritage of Hunters Hill is? A first priority of all Coun-

cillors should be to educate themselves on this subject. There are ample sources available: the Council's own *Hunter's Hill Heritage Study* (1984), the Hunter's Hill Trust's *Heritage of Hunter's Hill* (4th edition 2002), and my bicentennial history, which was supported by the Council, *Hunter's Hill: Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb* (1989).

People choose to live in Hunters Hill because of its special character. Change and development are inevitable and welcome if they do not despoil that character, which it is Council's continuing responsibility to protect.

Yours sincerely,
Beverly Sherry

Copies by email attachment to Mayor Hoopmann and all Councillors.

Thirty hectares remain as Boronia Park

was granted 30 acres at Kissing Point and went onto wealth and respectability as the colony's first brewer. By 1822 he had 1000 acres at Kissing Point. His famous grandson inherited 400 acres of this estate. Farnell also had business interests in ferries and banking. In the first rate notice of 1861 Farnell was listed as having property valued at 35 pounds but as land only. Presumably this was part of the Everard estate. By 1870 he is no longer listed as a ratepayer. Farnell was pursuing his political career which culminated in his becoming NSW's first Australian-born Premier from 1877 to 1878.

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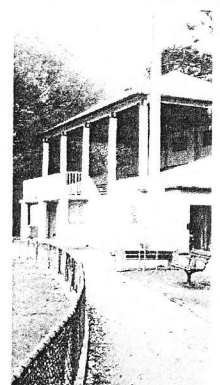
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Grandstand at Boronia Park main oval