

HHT PRESIDENT'S REPORT MAY 30 2017

Introduction

Tonight I step down as President and hand over to Alister Sharp. I joined The Trust committee in 1997. To be more accurate, I was actually dragooned by Gil Wahlquist.

I've been president for 10 of the 20 years since then. It's time for fresh blood and renewal, so it's with great pleasure that I welcome Alister Sharp as our new president. I wish him all the best in these very interesting times.

On New Years day 1968, 95 citizens, concerned about the rampant destruction of Hunters Hill, came to a public meeting at the Hunters Hill RSL Hall - this very place. There was standing room only.

3 days later, on January 4th 1968, 11 residents met at Peter Elkin's house at No 2 North Parade. This was the first meeting of The Hunters Hill Trust.

January 4th 2018 will be the 50th or golden anniversary of The Trust. We will be looking at ways to commemorate this milestone.

Despite a number of significant achievements over the last 50 years, we are still grappling with many of the same issues. As well, we now have to address many more much wider issues that are impacting not just on our tiny municipality, but on the planet as a whole.

The State Government and Local affairs

In Reg Martin and Richard Temple's history of the first 20 years of The Trust, *The Vision and the Struggle*, there is a vivid description of the disquiet in the community in the late 1960s, disquiet caused by the demolition of a number of fine stone buildings that were replaced with ugly 3-storey high home unit blocks.

The construction of the Lane Cove expressway at the time resulted in the demolition of St Malo and Mary Reiby's cottage, two highly significant heritage buildings. The expressway cut the municipality in half and caused the relocation of St Marks Church.

Back then, the State Government was not at all interested in the concerns of residents who watched on as their unique local heritage, character and amenity was bulldozed to the ground.

Today, the NSW State Government continues its push to take over the last bits of planning and regulation that are still in the hands of Local Government. Examples of this include:

- The introduction of the "standard instrument" for Local Environment Plans. This allows the government, through the Department of Planning, to be in control of zoning and heritage.
- The introduction of complying and exempt development for single dwellings
- The proposal to extend complying development for medium density housing
- The Rural Fire Service's 10/50 Clearing Code, which allows tree and vegetation to be removed without Council approval.
- A proposed Education and Childcare Plan, which will make it easier for private schools to build new facilities without Council approval.

- The Greater Sydney Commission, which effectively represents yet another level of government that is further removed from local councils.
- The construction of major infrastructure programs, like the West Connex, and their massive impacts on local communities and heritage. Shades of the 1960s and the Lane Cove Expressway.
- And finally, today's breaking news. The Herald this morning has news of a proposal to remove planning powers from Councils for developments that are over a certain size. These will be assessed by Independent Hearing and Assessment Panels (IHAPs). This is actually already happening in some councils, such as the Inner West Council.

All this is to say nothing of the State Government's Bio-Diversity Act, which will allow an increase in wholesale rural land clearing. As well it says nothing of the Federal Government's failure to do anything about really pressing matters such as the urgent need to restrict carbon emissions in order to reduce Global Warming and its various consequences, including sea level rise and everything that will flow from just that.

This last will have a particular impact on Hunters Hill. A map published in the Sydney Morning Herald last Tuesday (available from coastalrisk.com.au) shows the predicted high water mark in 2100, that is when a child born this year will be 83 years old. In Hunters Hill, the Tarban Creek playing fields will be under water as will the oval and tennis courts at Hunters Hill High.

On top of all this is a single word - Trump. Trump this week failed to sign up to the Paris climate agreement. Trump has said that proposes to exit the agreement. He has said that the concept of global warming "was created by and for the Chinese in order to make US manufacturing non-competitive."

Amalgamation

The forced amalgamation of local councils is yet another area where the State Government is moving to take even more control. This move needs to be considered in the context of the larger picture and the things that impact on the state, the country and the planet, as well as the diminishing relevance of local government. It is now one year since the forced amalgamation process began. A short history of what's happened since would include the following:

- The Coalition has abandoned council amalgamations in rural areas.
- Some councils have proceeded with the amalgamations.
- Others, including Hunters Hill, are proceeding with legal challenges that are yet to be determined.
- The Court of Appeal found in favor of Ku-ring-gai Council's appeal against its forced merger with Hornsby Shire.
- The State government failed to lodge an appeal against the Ku-ring-gai Council decision.
- Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Mosman, Strathfield and North Sydney are waiting on the decision of the Court of Appeal.

- The High Court has granted an application from Woollahra Council to its appeal against the Court of Appeal, which had rejected its appeal to a merger with Botany and Randwick.
- Randwick Council has now joined the anti-merger fight.
- The State Government has made a huge mess of the process and left itself open to these multiple legal challenges.
- The lawyers are having a field day.

It is somewhat ironic that those leading the anti-amalgamation fight against a Liberal government are all from the wealthiest suburbs in rock-solid Liberal electorates.

Despite or possibly because of this, the premier has stated that her government is committed to pursuing the mergers in Sydney. Whether the government can maintain its resolve remains to be seen.

The Trust's response to the forced amalgamation issue was summed up in last year's President's Report to the AGM, which was also published in the July 2016 Journal, it can be summarised as follows

The Trust recognizes that Trust members and residents have differing views about the Council and the amalgamation issue. There is no consensus. We respect the fact that our members will have come to their own conclusions about the issue.

Moving on to other aspects of The Trust's work over the last year

Membership

This year we welcomed 9 new members. 12 single members and 6 family members did not renew their memberships. Some have moved from their current addresses and we have lost contact. There are 92 members who are not financial. That is 10 more than last year. Anyone here tonight who might perchance fall into this category – you know what you need to do.

Including the 92 un-financials, we have 390 members, which is made up of 165 individual members and 225 family members. Family members are calculated by assuming that each family membership represents 3 people.

Last year we had 428 members. So membership is on the wane. I'm not sure what this really means but it does seem to represent a trend. Certainly our membership is ageing and this is definitely a factor.

Website

Kate Russell has continued her excellent job as our Webmaster.

In the last 12 months 5,022 users visited the website.
 This is 17% more users than the previous 12 months.
 There were 14,773 page views (3% more than previous 12 months).
 Page views were completed in 7,762 sessions (6% more than previous 12 months).

Email List

If your email address is not on file, please let us know. This is an important way for us to make contact and to keep members in touch with goings-on.

Publications

The Journal

I have been putting out the journal for the last six years and will continue the job this year. We are committed to publishing two journals a year.

Digitised publications

A subcommittee has been working on the digitising various Trust publications and already some are available as free downloads from the web.

An update of the Green Book

To commemorate the 50th anniversary, we are proposing a review and update of the "Green Book". This is being led by new committee member and local historian Karen Presland. We are looking to include additional information and to include houses built up until the 1920s. Karen is seeking volunteers to assist, so if you're keen to work on this important piece of Hunters Hill history or if you have information to contribute, then please get in touch.

Celebrating the golden anniversary

As well as the Green Book update, we will be looking at a range of activities to mark and celebrate the 50th.

Working with Council

The Trust continues to be represented on a number of Council committees including:

- Tony Coote is on The Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP)
- Alister Sharp's on The Public Transport and Traffic Advisory Committee
- And Brigid Dowsett represents us on The Bushland Management Committee

Brigid reports that Hunters Hill Council is fortunate to have a very large number of keen bushcare volunteers working regularly in its many bushland reserves such as Kellys Bush, Ferdinand Street, Boronia Park and Riverglade Reserve. Many of these volunteers are Trust members. There are also several Trust members on the Bushland Management Working Group which meets quarterly at Council.

This group assists the Bushland Management Co-ordinator by reporting on relevant local issues and offering advice on Plans of Management and Community Education Programs. Of particular importance recently have been legislative and policy changes affecting biodiversity, weed management strategy and retention of our local trees. Proposed regulations via the Biodiversity Act will lead to the removal of Council's Tree Preservation Orders and weakened native vegetation protection through a new State Environmental Planning Policy.

Alister Sharp, who is our Traffic Committee rep, has only just got back from a bike trip in England and is still getting his breath back. His report will have to wait for another day.

Conservation Advisory Panel

I can report, as I did last year, that we have had mixed success. The controls on heritage in Hunters Hill are not strong, even when a place is a heritage item. A house that is not listed, even in a Conservation Area, is not guaranteed protection.

An example of this is the P and O style house at 48 Mary Street. Though it was featured as "heritage under threat" in the November 2016 Journal and was the subject of a Trust Submission, it as now been demolished.

A Trust member took issue with me as their representative on CAP because of the panel's recommendation in support of proposed work to the house next door to him.

I pointed out that the Panel is only an advisory body and that its advice is limited to matters that affect the heritage value of listed items and the character of the Conservation Areas.

The panel does not comment on planning matters such as solar access, boundary setbacks, floor space ratio etc. Trust members can be reassured that there is considerable heritage experience on the panel and that its recommendations are well considered.

Reports And Submissions

During the year The Trust has made a number of submissions to Council and State authorities. We have attended meetings of the Greater Sydney Commission as well as citizens' organisations such as the Better Planning Network and The Total Environment Centre.

Greater Sydney Commission

In our submission to the GSC we applauded its ambition to create great places for people to live. However we could not find anything in their publicity material about heritage and conservation and the essential place these must take when planning the built and natural environs of Sydney.

We followed this up with a letter to the Minister for Planning and a further submission regarding the need to include Ecologically Sustainable Design in the GSV charter and questioned why population growth was not considered a planning issue.

Gladesville Shopping Village Planning Proposal or GSV

The Planning Proposal for the GSV is yet another example of the State Government taking planning powers away from local government. The GSV has submitted a Planning Proposal, for a substantial increase in building height, and floor space ratio with the proviso that the building must '*exhibit design excellence*'. It doesn't define this term or who will determine "design excellence".

It is now up to the Developers to submit a new proposal, which will go on public exhibition.

Joubert St Childcare Centre for 98 children

The Trust opposed this proposal, arguing that it was too big. Following a deemed refusal by Council, the matter went to the Land and Environment Court. The Trust addressed the court when it convened on site. Subsequently the Court approved a revised scheme, which reduced the number of staff from 17 to 14 and the number of kids by 10 to 88. This was not considered a victory by residents in the immediate vicinity.

HH Council and tree pruning

On behalf of an owner of a heritage-listed house, we wrote to Council questioning the need for a Development Application to prune a tree. We argued that it is counter-productive to require this level of oversight of what is basic maintenance. This is not required for non-listed places. We should be encouraging the owners of heritage rather than making life more difficult for them.

Various other submissions

In brief we have made submissions on a number of other issues including

- The demolition of the P and O house at 48 Mary St – this was unsuccessful.
- The Revised Medium Density Housing Code, which will allow medium density housing to be considered "complying development" and to be overseen by private certifiers with no requirement to notify any neighbours.
- I wrote to a new neighbour freshly arrived in Hunters Hill from overseas advising them of all the various controls that apply to their place. We sent this on to Council with the idea it might form a template to send to all newcomers to the area.

- We have also made a start on producing a how-to guide for residents wanting to challenge inappropriate development in their vicinity.
- We wrote objecting to the extension of the Hunters Hill Hotel's trading hours. This matter is still before the court. The applicant has revised their proposal as follows: Weekdays: 8am to 2am, Sunday 8am to midnight. Older members may yearn for the days of the 6 o'clock swill as drinkers loaded up as fast as they could before the doors were shut.

Walks

Maureen Flowers reports: A stimulating walks schedule over 2016 saw us exploring more fascinating areas of Hunters Hill, including the heritage cottages of Batemans Road, the industrial village of Woolwich and the buildings and surrounds of the Marist Brothers Estate, new to many of our walkers. The rich heritage of our area is still proving to be a constant source of surprise and delight to us all.

Our 2017 program got off to a flying start with a lively bushwalk in Boronia Park, followed by a heritage walk along The Point Road and Werambie Street, where we were extremely fortunate to see some of the impressive homes up close and personal!

In April we enjoyed a leisurely boat trip on the heritage wooden boat, The Regal, sailing along the Lane Cove and Parramatta Rivers and viewing many of our most famous houses from the water. Some wonderful commentary by a few of our longer-term members gave us fascinating insights into past and present struggles to protect our heritage and environment.

In addition to our remaining program of walks, we're considering other events for the remainder of the year including a guided walk around Cockatoo Island and more interesting talks like the one we will be having this evening.

Christmas Party

Thank you so much to Trust members Barbara and Nick Dorsch for hosting the 2016 Christmas party at their house in Gale Street Woolwich. It was a great evening and such a pleasure and privilege to be in beautiful downtown Woolwich in a fine heritage-listed house.