**The First Fifteen Years of the Hunter’s Hill Trust**

**Alice Arnott Oppen OAM**

**The Hunter’s Hill Trust has been a strong force for valuing country, community and heritage. Fortunately, our peninsula was long off-grid for access until the Gladesville Bridge and Tarban Creek/Figtree razor cut, politely called an overpass.**

**Hunter’s Hill had remained a lovely waterfront community for long enough, until in the ‘60s and ‘70s we had the sense to stand up for its preservation. In the 1960s, developers were pushing this way, to make their fortunes and depart, leaving Hunter’s Hill with the problems of soulless dormitory suburb buildings. Church Street was their first obvious hit, still impacting as an incongruous architectural entry.**

**In our very resistance, Hunter’s Hill affirmed community determination in valuing and articulating terms like treescape, waterscape and curtilage gardens around homes. Some were mansions, more workers’ cottages, with stone walls, enormous fig trees… all this has had to be protected from being pulverised into flats, units, whatever you want to call rectangular brick dormitories for commuters.**

**In the 1960s when it was discovered that some Hunter’s Hill Councillors were developing zoning which allocated new areas for medium density development, coincidentally benefitting some Councillors and their associates, the Hunter’s Hill Trust was formed after a public meeting here fifty years ago. One such area was diagonally across the street from us. The new committee was remarkably good at organising, investigating and acting.**

**Notable people turned their energy, intelligence and professionalism into defending what is best about Hunter’s Hill as home. I am here to pay tribute to Dr Alan Bradfield, an obstetrician, Richard and Diana Temple, scientists, Tom Farrell, of the SMH, Judge Richard Barbour, photographer Douglass Baglin, and researchers and architects Ros Maguire will tell you about. These were people high in their professions willing to dedicate great effort to preserve Hunter’s Hill as an entity.**

**The Committee attracted and ran a slate of candidates in the next Local Government election. Along with gaining a measure of representation, the new Committee of the Hunter’s Hill Trust developed a submission to Council and the State Government, demanding heritage preservation. This book, with photographs and histories of about 250 historic buildings in Hunter’s Hill, was a brilliant stroke. It recorded, it publicised and proclaimed. Other submissions have followed, such as “The Myth of Bigness”, contradicting with evidence, the assumption that amalgamation of small areas could bring sufficient benefit to outweigh the social, environmental and heritage losses. Other Trust members researched and proclaimed that Hunter’s Hill is the oldest ‘garden suburb’ in Australia. What would we be, without these visionary toughies?**

**Fundraising was initiated, and I was recruited over our stone wall by neighbours Eleanor and King Watson (editor of The Telegraph). Conrad and I had been told that Hunter’s Hill was so conservative that you had to wait 20 years to be introduced. Not so, join and work. In those days, it was a ladies committee, the Hunter’s Hill Trust Auxiliary, that raised money by holding House Inspections of prime examples of historic buildings worthy of preservation. When the ladies wanted to be involved in decision-making in spending the money, I was propelled onto the main Committee and acted as liaison.**

**Since then, the record of historic buildings has been expanded, made attractive and saleable in two editions of ‘the green book’, raising consciousness and pride among home owners and raising funds for the Trust’s advocacy. I remember Tom Farrell, sometime Managing Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, teaching the editorial committee around our dining table how to lay out pages.**

**Issues have cascaded: the overpass, density, amalgamation, Pulpit Point, Woolwich Dock, Gladesville Hospital, foreshores. Roslyn will speak to these with her historic research knowledge.**

**I think we have helped to grow the concept of a foreshore building line, the significance of waterscape, the importance and measurement of environmental impact. It’s been a full fifty years.**

**Look at the strategy, linking a joint aim, both of town planning and preservation of individual houses – the strategy of claiming the need of area protection because of a conjunction of historic buildings was inspired, and ultimately successful in gaining area protection. This stood us in good stead in the recent amalgamation push. Similarly, using photography and documented history both in submissions to all levels of government and for fundraising was inspired. House inspections stimulated appreciation and raised funds.**

**Eloquence matters. Richard Temple, fondly known as “poison pen”, was our leader in effective submissions. Here is a gem of clarity, when:**

**In June 1974 the Hunter’s Hill Trust appeared before Commissioner Dale with objections to the Certified Town Plan, following long and detailed written submissions already lodged. The Trust’s comment was that the Certified Plan had enfeebled and obscured those measures in the Draft Plan which were designed to preserve the unique character of the area. In the Trust’s view, the Certified Plan does not commit the Council, the SPA or any other authority to preserve the area. As a result it would be possible for a future Council to abandon preservation entirely if it wished, without departing from the formal provisions of the Plan. The State Planning Authority, which is a non-elected body of public servants, has seen fit to throw out these proposals entirely. Thus the Certified Plan, which is almost entirely the creation of the SPA, makes no provisions at all for Historic Districts or an Advisory Committee.”**

**Although the current State Government is spectacular in the same disregard of local wishes, there were gains after this objection, area preservation and the Conservation Advisory Committee’s creation. I served on this for a number of years and saw the improvements gained.**

**I would like to pay tribute to all the wonderful Hunter’s Hill denizens who gave their best and nurtured those of us who helped.**

* **Tom Farrell advised on publications, with Trust historical researchers and photographers and taught us the principles. He was dedicated and generous, and forty years later I am still producing publications for organisations.**
* **Richard Temple, when I was very new as Trust President and trying to be placatory, came behind my chair and hissed “Stop cringing”. He was right, it was cringing, and women do try to please others into decisions. I’ve been trouble ever since, and been glad of it.**
* **A great privilege was being Douglass Baglin’s sidekick as he photographed the historic buildings, peering over walls and under trees for a picturesque view.**
* **Others are Anne McNally, a force of mother nature and creator of wonderful Trust events, Pat Healey, the Saunders, Chris Coulman, Alex Dircks, Joan Croll, Kim Santow, Richard Barbour, Vincent Serventy, Fred Hinde, Bev Sherry, Sam Sheffer, Michael Lehany, Ron Barrelle, Kath Lehany, Reg Martin, David Bryant, Kerry Bennett, Malcolm Lane-Brown, Peter Pinson….**

**In 1981 some three hundred and twenty Historic buildings were recommended for protection under the new Heritage Act.**

**In 1982 our second Green book, The Heritage of Hunter’s Hill was published, this time under our own banner, not the National Trust’s.**

**And the LEP, the Town Plan, was completed, in a way. Because the previous drafting was not completed before new State legislation governing town plans came into effect, our non-existent Town plan was again being revised. Fancy that. In an article in the Trust Journal, Lewis Carroll’s Alice, in a similar illogical Wonderland puzzled that jam never came today, it was always yesterday or tomorrow. So production of the Town Plan rivalled the Red Queen’s love of domination of logic. By the time the Plan was gazetted, the State Government was well underway with overriding legislation, progressively overriding the powers from local government we fought fought so hard to improve.**

**As the Walrus said,**

**“It seems a shame,” the Walrus said**

**“To play them such a trick**

**After we’ve brought them out so far,**

**And made them trot so quick!”**

**The Carpenter said nothing but**

**“The butter’s spread too thick.”**

**The butter is thick indeed, with the current State Government privatising some of its responsibility for development applications and the monitoring of compliance, of designating areas for huge developments beyond infrastructure capacity, air quality or, indeed, much quality at all. We may need to generate heat to try to melt the butter.**

**I would like to thank the Save Our Councils movement, which has done so much to perpetuate our struggle, with many people enspirited by Phil Jenkyn and Ross Williams.**

**The Hunter’s Hill Trust is needed more than ever, as a clear voice and presenter of evidence, weighing wisely the public benefit, the heritage of community, architecture, landscape, waterscape – so much not to be taken from people who call this home and heritage.**

**We need to give great effort, all our talents, stretch our time, in a communal and talented effort to proclaim and resist.**