

# Hunters Hill Trust Journal

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## UNFIT FOR THE FUTURE?



All the talk in the Municipality recently is about the State Government's push to amalgamate Local Government Areas in NSW with a view to reducing the number of metropolitan councils from 41 to 18. As members will be aware, the so-called Independent Pricing and Regulatory Panel (IPART) judged Hunters Hill, as well as a number of other councils, to be *unfit for the future*.

At its meeting on Monday 9 November, Council decided (pending legal advice) not to participate in the process whereby it is required to respond to the State Government's ultimatum to submit reasons why they should not be forcibly amalgamated by the deadline of 18 November.

As we wrote in our email to members, The Trust is fundamentally opposed to forced council amalgamations. And, while we have been critical of Hunters Hill Council's performance in a number of areas, most recently in its handling of the Gladesville Shopping Village development (no doubt members will have their own lists of Council's shortcomings), there is no evidence that we will be better off with a bigger council and there is no doubt that our current level of representation and access to council will be severely reduced as a result of any forced amalgamation.

**We encourage Trust members to keep the pressure on the government by contacting our local State member, Anthony**

**Roberts.** We need to reinforce the fact that the Liberal Party's determined push for amalgamation is not supported by the majority of the people he represents.

### Macquarie Street rules

Unfortunately, in NSW, the size of local councils, the extent of local representation on them and the number of councillors per head of population, have little to do with influence a community might have on planning decisions. All the major planning decisions are made at State level, usually by the Minister and usually as a result of lobbying from wealthy individuals and their associations like the Minerals Council of NSW or Urban Taskforce.

### Greater Sydney Commission

To reinforce this centralisation of planning power, the government has now introduced a bill, which has passed both houses of parliament with bi-partisan support, to set up the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC).

The Bill gives the GSC authority for Regional and District growth plans, the power to review Local Environment Plans and to consider development and rezoning applications. It is designed to support the Government's plan to grow Sydney's population by 1.6 million over the next 15 years.

## WHAT FUTURE ARE WE FIT FOR?



The embodiment of *the future* in Hunters Hill and across Sydney is the proposal for the redevelopment of Gladesville Shopping Village (*sic* – this mega development has absolutely nothing to do with villages).

Despite a process stretching over more than 10 years, whereby Ryde and Hunters Hill Councils agreed on

a set of planning controls for the development of the Gladesville commercial area and long strips of Victoria Road, the developer of the Coles site at Gladesville has now prepared what is known as a Planning Proposal (PP) for the site, which, if passed, will overturn the existing controls and massively increase the density of development and the height of buildings on the site, all to the detriment of the local residential area by way of increased traffic, parking, overshadowing and general loss of residential amenity.

At present the PP is before Council and they have engaged independent planning consultants to establish if further information is required. Eventually Council will have the opportunity to either support or reject the PP. However, this stage of the process has little influence on the final outcome. If Council supports the changes, the PP is prepared and submitted to the Department of Planning. If, on the other hand, Council does not support the changes, the PP then goes to the Department anyway via the Gateway review process.

### 10 Cowell St.



Essential to the developer's plans for the GSV site is the demolition of the Council owned heritage item at 10 Cowell St. As we noted in the June journal of this year, it would seem that Council has prevaricated on the heritage listing of No 10 Cowell Street and has only just sent the paperwork off for final checking prior to it coming back to Council for ratification.

**Continued on page 2**



Preserving Australia's  
Oldest Garden Suburb

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**Publications**

*Heritage of Hunters Hill* \$15  
*The Vision and the Struggle* \$15  
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**MEMBERSHIP**

The Trust welcomes everyone interested in preserving the unique character of Hunters Hill to become a member.

**Single membership** \$30  
**Family membership** \$50

Contact the secretary to join or download a form from the website.

*Continued from page 1*

**UNFIT FOR THE FUTURE?**

It is now over 10 years since the Paul Davies Report recommended its heritage listing. At the time Council received the PP from the developers, the cottage was still not formally listed!

Why is this taking so long? We don't know. Council's responses to our enquiries have been along the lines of "Oh, the dog ate the paperwork", or "so-and-so was away sick and couldn't complete the report". Some more cynically inclined people might question whether the delays, which extend over many months, were accidental?

**Tardiness is its own reward**

Could it be that Council had an interest in keeping 10 Cowell Street unlisted because it did not want its heritage status to be an impediment to the sale of the site and because the property would be more valuable without a heritage listing? The Valuer General valued the property in 2012 at \$1,600,000, which was a 410% increase from the year before.

**Hunters Hill is special**

What distinguishes the Hunters Hill Municipality from other local government areas is, amongst other things, its leafy streets, bushland and riverfront settings, its low housing density and the number of buildings that are of heritage significance. The argument for keeping Hunters Hill a stand-alone Council centres on the contention that it is much more capable of managing its special character and heritage than a larger, amalgamated entity.

**A fit Council must reject the GSV Planning Proposal**

When the Council gets to consider the Gladesville Shopping Village PP, it will be tested on its commitment to these core values. When we make our submission on the PP, The Trust will urge Council to follow the example of all those who have fixed ribbons to their fences to show its own true colours and to reject the proposal out of hand.

If Council does not reject the PP, it will demonstrate that it is more interested in money than heritage, that it is uncaring about the amenity of those living in the streets in the immediate vicinity and that it does not have the fortitude to buck the wishes of the State Government and that all the clamour around the amalgamation issue is just noise and ribbons.

If it does not reject the PP, it will be deemed unfit, not just by IPART, but also by all those who value the character of the area and all those who believe that Council has a responsibility to set the bar for excellence in heritage preservation. Those who manned the anti-amalgamation barricades will feel betrayed.

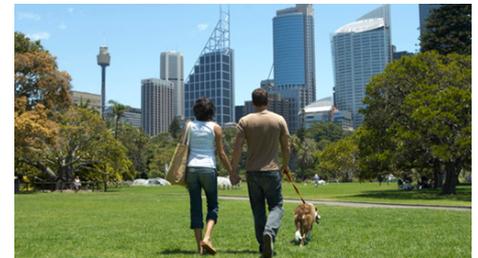
**Reality check**

While Council's rejection of the PP will probably not stop the developer achieving greater density and heights, it will force him to jump through a few extra hoops, and make it just that little bit harder for him to succeed in getting those umpteen extra units onto the site. With the volatility of local and overseas

economies, a delay may be all we can hope for.

**WHAT THE COMMUNITY WANTS?**

Spin doctoring, push polling and astroturfing are all techniques used by public relations firms employed by developers and their lobby groups to win support for their clients' endeavours and to show that "they have listened to the people".



When the PP for the Gladesville Shopping Village development comes on exhibition, look out for claims that the scheme has been redesigned in response to the community's wishes for more public green space facilities. Look out for claims that the developer has listened intently to the community as expressed in a series of public consultations run by their own PR firm.



Another technique to be on guard against is astroturfing. Wikipedia's definition of astroturfing is "the practice of masking sponsors of a message or organisation (e.g. political, advertising, religious or public relations) to make it appear as though it originates from and is supported by grass roots participants. It's not real grass, its artificial grass."

This technique was used recently (as exposed by Fairfax media) in the successful campaign to shoot down a plan to make large Australian companies disclose how much tax they pay. *The Family Office Institute Australia* (think thousands of self-employed tradies' wives filling out tax forms around the kitchen table after the kids have been put to bed) made a submission that informed large parts of a Senate report

that recommended the government shield privately-owned companies from increased scrutiny.

Fairfax discovered that the Institute actually has no members. It was established by two lawyers and a Canberra lobbyist who represent Australia's ultra-rich in disputes with the Australian Tax Office.

**A RENEWED PUSH AGAINST ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS**

Conservationists and local community organisations are currently under threat from all sides. Government funding for organisations like the Environmental Defenders Office has been withdrawn and opponents of development are facing the threat of crippling costs being awarded against them if they are unsuccessful in the courts. There have also been a number of anti-heritage articles and letters in the press.



The house in East Kew demolished

Recently the winners of the TV "reality" game-show, *The Block*, hit the news with their demolition, without consent, of a heritage-listed house in East Kew Victoria. The local council is demanding they rebuild the house's facade and has instructed its lawyers to take them to court for their failure to follow local planning controls.

Michael Pascoe in The Sydney Morning Herald's business pages of November 4<sup>th</sup> under the heading, "Heritage Laws should be abolished", went into bat for the law-breaking demolishers writing; "It looks like another example of local government stealing property rights without compensation; "heritage" bureaucrats preserving dated, second-rate housing in aspic; or in some instances, NIMBY councils circumventing rational medium density housing zoning by using a "heritage" excuse". He goes on to finish up with: "Keep your detached house if you like, but don't stop others achieving better use of scarce land close to transport and social infrastructure. But NIMBYs (and NODAMS – no other development after

mine) will fight it. Given most people's lack of engagement with local government, they're prone to hijacking by the small pressure groups with the loudest voices. The "heritage" listing increasingly is their prime weapon for the preservation of privilege."

Does anyone else hear the voice of the development lobby in this rant?

Trust president, Tony Coote, wrote to the Herald in response: "Self appointed heritage expert, Michael Pascoe, is clearly a devotee of that old-time religion of the 1950s - *Progress*. *Progress* is the religion of property developers, miners, laissez-faire capitalists, billionaires and, until recently, our government, under Tony Abbott and his Team of anachronistic fundamentalists.



*Progress*, in a jihad against society, urges its adherents to pay no heed to environmental law (e.g. Heritage legislation) and to bulldoze their way through the world to make a quid. They are encouraged to destroy the character of existing suburbs and are praised for digging up prime agricultural land and depleting ground water reserves. They keep their eyes tight shut to the negative impacts of their endeavours. Blind also to hypocrisy, the high priests of *Progress* live in mega mansions with harbour views, swimming pools, multi-car garages and air-conditioning in every room.



The favourite TV show of *Progressives* is *The Block*. In this

"reality" game-show, teams compete to spend money on renovating houses and units for resale. The winner is the team that makes the most profit on the sale. This nicely reinforces a basic tenet of *Progress*, that a person's home is nothing more than a commodity to be sold for profit when the market is right.



As well, by imposing a kitsch, fashion-magazine orthodoxy on what is considered "taste", *The Block* works to destroy the heretical idea that a dwelling might be inhabited by people with a world view that bears no relation to fashion or the market value of the things they choose to surround themselves with. These people are the enemies of *Progress's* caliphate. They are heretics or, as branded by Michael Pascoe, NIMBYs."

**HUNTERS HILL TRUST WALKS**

Our Sunday Walks series has been a great success with walks well attended by Trust members who have enjoyed exploring our beautiful area and meeting other "Trusties".



Our walks have taken us from bushlands and little-known nooks and crannies to the more familiar sights of our wonderful sandstone heritage. Feedback has been very positive, with members telling us how much they've relished re-discovering old favourites or visiting places they've never been before, whilst enjoying a good chat along the way and a well-deserved coffee afterwards.

We couldn't have achieved such a result without the commitment of our dedicated volunteers Leonard and Brigid Dowsett

and Alister Sharp, who have helped me prepare and lead the walks and find new and interesting routes. They have generously given their time and expertise and we have all benefited from their knowledge and enthusiasm.

We've also been lucky with the weather each month, culminating in a wonderful sunny morning for our Jacaranda walk, perfectly timed before the storm rolled in! If you'd like to suggest a route or contribute by offering to lead one, we'd love to hear from you, so please contact me on 9879 5051 or drop us a line at [members@huntershilltrust.org.au](mailto:members@huntershilltrust.org.au).

Next year's programme will start again in April and we'll be giving you plenty of warning on the website and by email. Walks are free for financial members but are on a first come, first served basis, so make sure you get in quick. Look forward to seeing you next time!

Maureen Flowers, Walks Coordinator

**DEVELOPMENT CREEP**



*The corner of Martin and Joubert Streets*

Above is a recent photo of a house in Conservation Area No 1 on the corner of Martin and Joubert Streets, close to the old Figtree Bridge foundations and next door to the heritage listed Cliff House.

There is an unresolved dispute about the fence, which was erected without Council approval and does not comply with Council's fence guidelines.

Back in May 2007 Council approved, by delegated authority, an application to erect a new integrated housing development with a party wall on an allotment that is just over 700 m2, which is the minimum lot size for integrated development. This proposal appeared to comply with Council's controls, which stipulate that the secondary dwelling should have a floor area less than 80m2, is single storey and does not exceed 3.6m in height.



*The 2007 approval*

In 2010 an application came to Council to add a second storey to the house. It came to Council's Conservation Advisory Panel, which advised that the proposed *building would be excessively bulky and of an anomalous scale which would give rise to adverse impacts on the conservation area and heritage items in the vicinity.*

Despite this advice and despite the fact that the house would contain more than one storey, exceed 3.6m in height and contain habitable rooms on more than one floor, the application was approved.

To add insult to injury a very large street tree, which helped disguise the house from view, has now been removed.



*Tree now gone*

We are now left with an ugly building on a prominent corner site in the conservation area and the only winner is the building owner who made one house into two then two into two and a half.

**DIANA DRAKE 1921-2015**

The recent death of Diana prompts a warm acknowledgment of the extraordinary amount of research work she undertook in the 1980s and '90s. We met while accumulating 'new' material for the 1982 edition (enlarged) of the Green Book, the Heritage of Hunters Hill, with Alice Oppen as Editor. Diana had retired from her position as head of the General

Reference (State) Library, a role made evident in the precision of her methods.

She and I would continue exploring records for early 20<sup>th</sup> century local buildings, a sign of the positive attitudes to conservation at that time, within Council as well among the wider community. 'Heritage – conservation' now seems rather quaint. Our copious notes and blue cards await a revival of those heritage concerns. She was born in England, and possessed the reserve and wit one might expect, but a keen capacity too for firm friendship. Those Trust members who knew her will remember her fondly.

Roslyn Maguire



**DIDIER JOUBERT (1816–1881)**

Roslyn Maguire

Didier Numa Joubert became one of the most prosperous French businessmen to settle in Australia during the middle years of the nineteenth century. An important asset was his 200 acre Hunters Hill landholding, part of which he kept for family occupation. His Sydney life had begun when whaling was profitable, and he would escape with apparent comfort through the depression years of the 1840s, probably due to an emphasis on shipping and trading interests as well as the recovery of a large debt challenged in a Paris court.

Didier had arrived in Sydney in 1837, then soon afterwards in New Zealand married Louise (Lise) Bonnefin, whose father had been an officer in Napoleon's navy. The ceremony was conducted in the Bay of Islands by Marist Bishop Pompallier marking the commencement of an advisory role that led to shipment of supplies to their South Sea Island

missions. As early as 1841 the partnership Joubert & Murphy began as wine and spirit merchants and with sugar from Mauritius a frequent cargo.

The wine industry as a whole was a major interest of Didier whose father, Auguste Joubert, also a naval officer, managed vineyards at St Julien de Médoc and it was from there Didier brought cuttings and later exhibited a white wine made at Camden Park. He would act as treasurer of the New South Wales Vineyard Association, the committee around the late 1840s including Thomas Mitchell, the colonial surveyor, Charles Cowper, who later became Premier, Thomas Mort, one of Sydney's most prominent businessmen, and William Macarthur, whose property The Vineyard (later Subiaco) was on Parramatta River. The Blaxlands too, from Brush Farm near Ryde, became firm friends; they are recorded as the first to exhibit colonial wines in London.



St Malo

In 1847, on behalf of the Marists, Didier had assisted negotiations for the purchase of a productive farm on Tarban Creek, and promptly acquired Mary Reiby's large holding at Figtree Farm by the Lane Cove River, where he and his family would live in a comfortable set of villas and cottages; their main residence St Malo will be remembered for the public objection aroused at the time of its demolition, a pivotal point in the conservation movement of Sydney.

Passy, which he built around 1857 to become 'home' to the French Consul Louis Sentis, remains a landmark on Parramatta River, a major thoroughfare of early Sydney. An 1859 description of Passy is interesting - 'Mansion and Grounds [...] 7 acres, tastefully laid out in shrubbery, lawn, flower and vegetable garden; orchard (260 fruit trees in full bearing), vineyard (1500 vines)'. Set on a ridge near the area's first ferry wharf, Passy could attract public attention to new nearby subdivisions and villas, so appealing in the excitement of mid-1850s economic optimism.



Passy

For New Year's Day regattas Sentis hosted a lunch, as the tricolour flew from a flagpole on the roof and ferries transported the general public to watch the races.

Other local investors too would have welcomed the publicity. As well as new villas, distinctive sandstone cottages sprang up in the narrow streets built, in most cases, with the labour and skill of local stonemasons, some of whom were Italian, although a favourite was the French Louis Lasbies, who was employed on construction of The Priory (Villa Maria), and to whom Didier sold a riverside portion of Passy land. It was the talented William Weaver, a trained engineer who retired as Colonial Architect in 1856 and was regarded as an expert on bridges, who would have encouraged local property owners to urge the government to have a bridge built across Parramatta River.

Around this time the term 'French Village' was coined. Didier Joubert's extensive land holdings would have allowed him to exercise more influence over local matters of course, however, with the Marist community of missionaries, the French Consul and Sydney's most aristocratic French resident, Count Gabriel de Milhau, living close together, the group as a whole would have been watchful of French interests across the broader spectrum. The shipping agents and traders of Sydney too would have been effective observers as well as carriers of intelligence across the various ports. Jules Joubert would become the first chairman of the local council (1861-2), Gabriel de Milhau the second (1863), and Didier was to be the first mayor of Hunters Hill (1867-9). A determined effort to boost population numbers to qualify for municipal status had succeeded at the third attempt, by way of an 1861 petition drawn up in Didier's handwriting. His brother Jules (b. 1824), who migrated in 1839, once described him as 'rarely if ever sanguine' in matters of business a remark that followed a sudden, rather chaotic shift away from Didier's Hunters

Hill property interests to acquisition of land for plantations in New Caledonia for sons Numa, aged eighteen, and Ferdinand, seventeen. Sugar prices were high and a new factory was being built on the northern shore of Sydney Harbour. What made matters more volatile were daily press reports covering what became known as the 'Sutton Affair' – the controversial shipment of Melanesian labourers to work plantations in Reunion Island, a French possession to the south-west of Mauritius.

Visits of Islanders to the Marist mission in Sydney had been frequent, whether for religious instruction, to assist on the Priory farm or to cut stone for construction of churches in the Pacific. Ironically, while the controversy featured in the press, an Anglican bishop, visiting Hunters Hill to lay a foundation stone, was pleased to note hard working natives in 'Mr Joubert's garden'.



The Priory

At the height of anxiety for both Didier Joubert, as owner of the *Sutton*, and Louis Sentis for his consular 'approval', Didier wrote to the new Governor of New Caledonia requesting land grants for the cultivation of sugar followed by rapid attempts to raise funds by selling or mortgaging properties. A Birchgrove Estate subdivision at Balmain was first, then a transaction 'by inheritance' of land around Madeleine Street known as the Joubert Subdivision, to his brother Jules who would have been expected to oversee some of Didier's local interests in absentia. Major decisions, however, were entrusted to Charles Smith whose wharf at Millers Point Didier shared, as well as a likely variety of contractual arrangements.

The plantation in New Caledonia was described a few years later as a 'model farm' with the family bungalow built in a style similar to that of St Malo. With improvements that followed, such as the erection of a sugar mill and of experimental cattle farming, the raising of further funds meant more attempts to mortgage or sell local properties.

Close links with the Marist Fathers extended to their New Caledonian activities, for they too developed sugar plantations, built a sugar mill of their own and ran a mission school – and, were said to make a superior rum. Sugar exhibits would appear in Sydney's Agricultural Show, organised and promoted by Jules Joubert as secretary of the Agricultural Society of New South Wales. However, it would be Jules's second bankruptcy in 1866 that brought Didier back to disentangle his affairs, and to accept the role of Mayor of Hunters Hill.

In 1878, Paris hosted an International Exhibition (*Exposition universelle internationale*), with Jules Joubert in charge of the New South Wales display. The intention was to shed the most favourable light possible on the development of the Colony and some content with a French association was inevitable. The sale of a large area of land by Didier Joubert at Hunters Hill for a Marist School for Boys (St Joseph's College) would have been an admirable example, a point of interest too, of a French connection when Sydney's International Exhibition opened in September 1879. Education and social enlightenment were essential principles behind the popular Exhibition movement and in 1879 Didier chaired the first planning meeting towards the establishment of a French Benevolent Society in Sydney.

In the late 1870s, after a lapse of many years, he built two more houses within close proximity to his own, The Bungalow in Avenue Road, and Warrawillah in Figtree Road, both now recognised with brass plaques, a project undertaken by Hunters Hill Historical Society.

On the 'Design and Art Australia' online website and in the *Dictionary of Australian Artists* (ed. Joan Kerr), Didier Joubert is reported to have produced 'the first recorded photograph taken on Australian soil' put on display in May 1841 at the store of Joubert & Murphy, who advertised the camera and its apparatus for sale.

Portraits of Didier Joubert, now coming to light, were taken by some of Sydney's best known professional photographers, and early portraits of him with his wife and one of their three young children have an unusual charm and clarity for that early period. Photography remained a fascination for the family. Didier's son Ferdinand exhibited examples of experiments using new techniques, and a

family collection of glass plate negatives of the 1890s including views of Lane Cove and Cliff Cottage at the northern end of Joubert Street, has been donated to the State Library of New South Wales. It is interesting to note that William Wright (a retired shipper with New Zealand interests and close friend of Didier Joubert) who built his mansion Drummoyn House opposite Passy, had Professor John Smith take photographs of his family, house and grounds around 1858, and the first medical doctor to live in Hunters Hill (Jenner Plomley whose marine villa above Tarban Creek was known as Riverview) took examples of his own photography to exhibit in London in the late 1850s.

Ferdinand died in New Caledonia, the elder daughter Louise had married and was living in Paris with her daughter, named Sydney. Rose, Didier's and Lise's younger daughter, married Arthur du Boisé, a former planter from Reunion Island and New Caledonia, and lived next to St Malo.



*Annabel Lea*

The Joubert name remains in local memory in the street names in Hunters Hill and Birchgrove. Of the two brothers, Jules was the more restless and flamboyant, while Didier seems to have earned a quiet respect. His estate papers of 1881 show land and houses valued at sixteen thousand pounds, with a large amount owing for land sold, apparently at favourable rates, to many local purchasers. 'Captain' Charles Smith acted as his executor; their trading and shipping partnership arrangements and close friendship endured to the end. Numa Auguste, the surviving son, took responsibility for the Lane Cove ferries and introduced a popular Pleasure Grounds a short walk away, disrupting the private spaces of Figtree Farm preserved by his father. Plantation ownership sat on both sides of the family with members of the Bonnefin

family owning sugar plantations in Mauritius. Numa after his first term as Mayor of Hunters Hill in 1888, would succumb to the tradition of colonial plantations on the north coast of New South Wales, before returning again to spend his last years at Figtree Farm.

The surviving Joubert-built mansions, marine villas and a farmhouse – named Annabel Lea – as well as the sandstone cottages of the 1860s Joubert subdivision, remain some of the most distinctive buildings of their time and type.

*A chapter on Didier Joubert by Roslyn Maguire appears in the recently published French Lives in Australia, eds Eric Berti and Ivan Barko, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne.*

**MY PLACE**

*House stories from Hunters Hill*

In the October 2014 Journal we published Trust member Karen Presland's story of her house at 10 Gladesville Road. Do you have a story about your place? We would love to hear it and will work with you to publish it in the journal.

**NAIL HOUSE FOR SALE**

A nail house is a Chinese word for a home belonging to someone who refuses to make way for real estate development.



*62 Gladesville Road*

Trust member Pam Tompkins, whose son Jay is the third generation of auto mechanics who have plied their trade in Hunters Hill, has put her heritage-listed house, Hillrest, up for sale. She has endured years of excavation and building, dust, noise and fumes as the hotel development went on one side and a three storey block of shops and units went up on the other. Her house dates back to 1879 and was probably built by Carlo Cerutti, an Italian stonemason who bought the land from Didier Joubert in 1878. It was called Hillrest because the horses rested here after the pull up the hill.