



THE HUNTER'S HILL TRUST JOURNAL

PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST GARDEN SUBURB

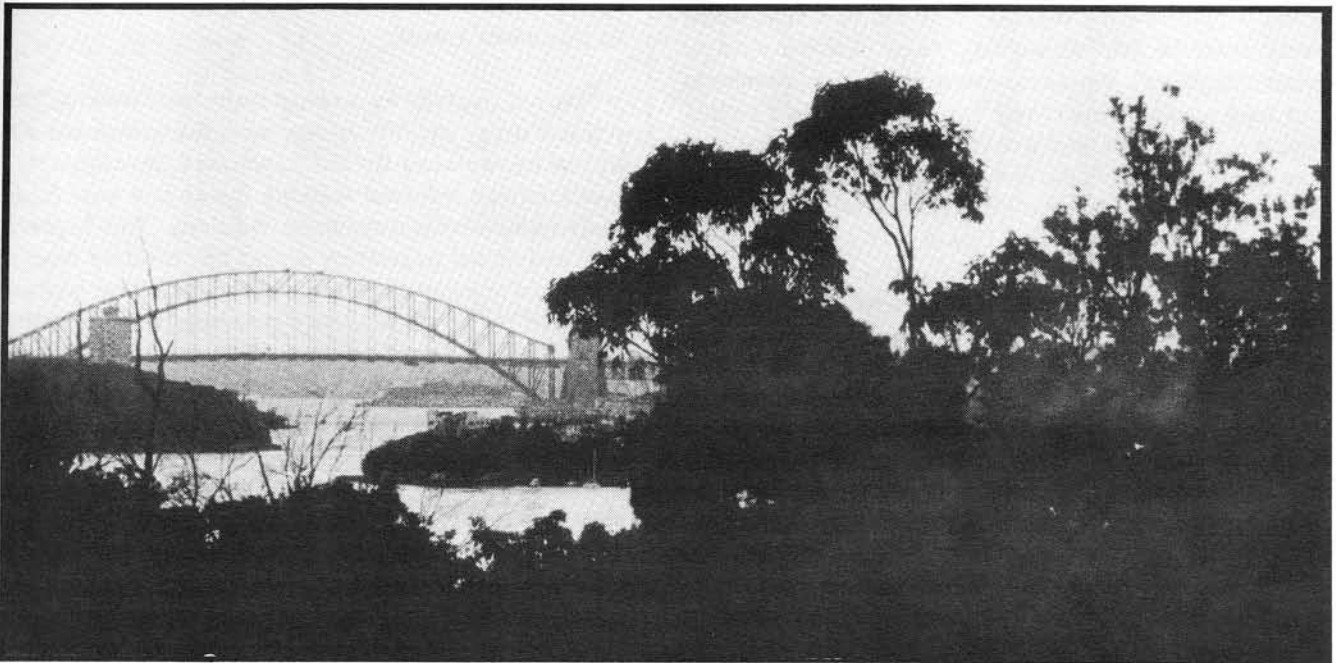
Volume XXII No.3

OCTOBER 1993

ISSN 0310-0111

GROWING UP NEAR KELLY'S BUSH

MICHAEL LEHANY



Most people can say that there is a site that has a special place in their childhood experience. For me, that site is Kelly's Bush - it was my own 'back yard'. My fellow siblings and our friends (of two generations) mostly went to Woolwich Public School now sadly closed. It had the best attributes of the small isolated country school (i.e.) a loyal and supportive community, broad social mix, a strong sense of individuality and independence which gave the suburb a strong sense of identity. Somehow these attributes were reflected in the manner in which Kelly's Bush was developed and maintained by its owners, the Sydney Smelting Works,- T.H. Kelly, Proprietor- then located on the south east waterfront of the site. The 'insular peninsula' (unknown to a child of the 1950s and '60s) was both a far less accessible and a far more 'provincial' community than in the 1970s and 1990s. Even then, up to the early 1970s, it was a time of corner stores,

local bakeries (mostly demolished, burnt or now the inevitable real estate agency!) and 'delivery people', of Percy the cheeky baker, Mr. Cattley the egg man, the greengrocer man with his produce displayed on racks along the open sides of his truck with suspended weighing scales, of the fishmonger, the brush man and the knife sharpening man. The milkman from Reeves' dairy at Gladesville delivered full cream milk out of milk pails from a horse drawn cart into the waiting billy cans with customers' handwritten notes - 'one pint', 'two pints' etc. There was hot competition for the steamy end-product of Mr. Reeves horses - the neighbour stood poised with shovel in hand to secure his bounty for the vegie patch.

This then was the flavour of the environment we grew up in, of coming home to lunch from school, listening to the country hour (and the Stock Exchange reports from

Stop Press- The Minister for Planning, the Hon. Robert Webster, MLC, handed over Kelly's Bush to the Hunters Hill Council on Thursday, 30th September 1993.

next door), and immediately beyond, the backdrop of Kelly's Bush to the east.

The bush was the background to the afternoon adventures - going across the oval past the old timber weather shed and past the Scout Hall (sadly torched this week), passing the 'Akela' rock overlooking Woolwich Road, on our way to Mooney's mud-hole (Council tidal pool on Lane Cove River) to buy sherbets, sucked out of the cellophane packets with licorice straws (whatever happened to them?).

Mr. Mooney lived behind the ticket booth and shop at the pool in a large canvas tent with a wooden floor (a great luxury compared to the dirt and sand we had camping), he looked after the pool and taught us to swim (unsuccessfully in my case) amongst the jelly blubbers and occasional 'blue swimmer' crabs.

The 'Akela' rock stood in front of the weatherboard Woolwich Scout Hall, and on special moonlit evenings we cubs would go beyond the protective painted park rail fence and in a ring perched on the cliff above Woolwich Road would do our 'did, dib, dubs and dob, dob, dobs' orchestrated by our cubmistress, 'Akela' and her younger sister "Bagherra". We would sweat like hell in summer in our long woollen socks, long woollen shorts and prickly woollen jerseys and little woollen "boys-own" peaked caps - or freeze to death in the same outfit in winter. Curiously all jumpers, coats, scarves except cub scarves, had to be removed once at the Hall - I think this made us tough, almost dangerously like 'going native'. These were cherished moments, soundly imbued with 'Kiplingesque' ritual and redolent with tales of exotic India (long before Indian takeaways). The image of the enormous moth-eaten stuffed brown bear with the glassy red beady eyes hung on the dark and gloomy unpainted and unlined weatherboard wall will always be with me. Years later the decayed remnant of the head was still kicking around outside the hall; shame it didn't have a more honourable incineration in the recent demise of the building.

The 'Akela' rock looked across to the older parts of the Marist Convent where seemingly mysterious and private lives were lived out encased in wonderful habits, worn by amazingly ancient nuns.

Another route formed the principal entry to the bush at the top (north) end of Nelson Parade - like the other formed pathway running east-west off Nelson Parade, these were carefully constructed, the natural rock cut to allow for a regular grade. The Long Walk crossed over the old seasonal creek line via a small bridge made of hardwood railway sleepers. About this area, lower down there were frog ponds, usually in stone quarrying areas, and in between, a large grove of bright red bottlebrush (*Callistemon* species).

Along the waterfront were groves of Christmas trees and in parts, tiny rock orchids clung to the rock outcrops. Near the smelting works could be found small clay crucibles among the slag, both products of the smelting process.

Some of these things survive, there are still bottlebrush bushes (*Callistemon* species) and Christmas Bush. The

small hollow rock that grew *Lachenelias* (Soldier Boys), seems to have gone as has the old sleeper bridge.

It's a cruel paradox that with the closure of the Sydney Smelting Works (the source of considerable pollution - noxious gas emissions and low level irradiated slag waste), the custodial (if parochial) care and maintenance of Kelly's Bush also declined. While the commendable Council purchase of the Kelly's cricket field northern portion of the site (under the old County of Cumberland open space scheme) brought a considerable portion of Kelly's Bush into publicly owned open space (Weil Park), the subsequent and inevitable enlarging and upgrading of the modest cricket field (formed on a natural slope), into a proper levelled playing field, destroyed the highly important natural drainage system and buried 'camel rock' forever. The new fill slopes of the oval introduced weeds into the bushland, and where the rainwater runoff was previously directed into a natural seasonal watercourse, it now fell evenly about the whole edge of the oval and has starved the old 'creek' of its source of water. The latter is now silted up and unrecognisable, the bushland plant species now overcome by weed *Pittosporums*, encouraged by the 'urban' runoff.

The old carefully formed and maintained walking tracks fell into decay and disuse, becoming overgrown and silted up, to be replaced by the haphazard development of undisciplined informal walking tracks that now formed undesirable seasonal drainage channels. This haphazard and undirected pedestrian access has resulted from the decay and removal of the original and traditional hardwood park-rail (or aris-rail) fence that originally formed the boundary for the entire site. This original fence had chained vehicular entries and 'anti-stock' chicanes at the principal pedestrian entry points; they were designed to discourage horseriding and bike riding through the bush.

No doubt the decay of the amenity of Kelly's Bush was due to the long ownership links of the development site period prior to the acquisition of the whole site by the Wran Government.

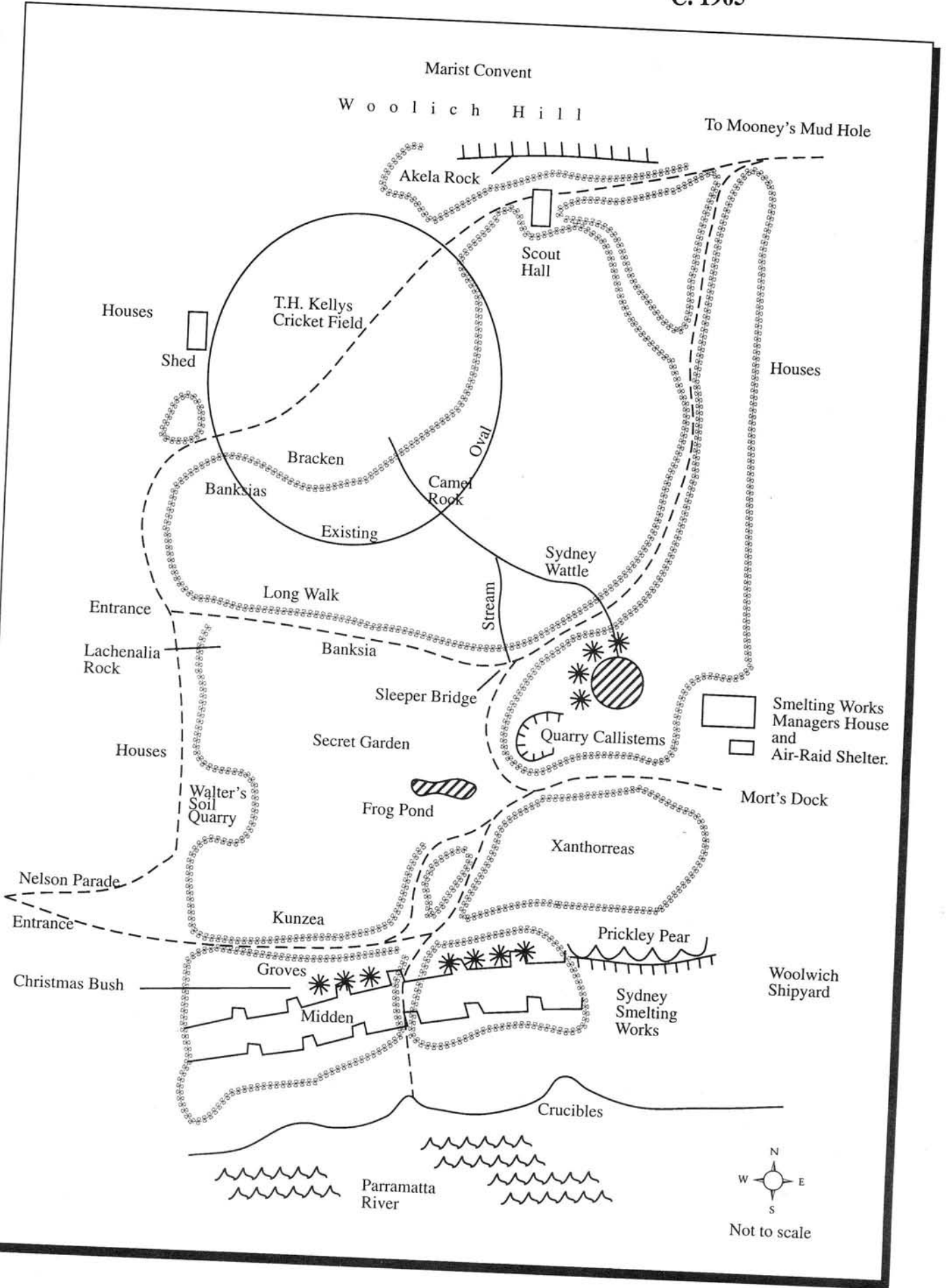
Hopefully, under Hunters Hill Council ownership and with sympathetic community participation, much of the original track system will be restored, the proper and effective hardwood park rail fence reinstated to its traditional role and most importantly a re-direction of the urban runoff from Weil Park oval into the original seasonal watercourse and the instigation of a careful and sympathetic weed management program. All this is achievable within a normal open space maintenance program. With the introduction of the new Local Government Act, councils are now directly (annually) accountable to the community for their custodianship of bushland areas, and in the Hunters Hill Municipality there is much valued bushland to be saved from the dreaded kikuyu grass and wasteful and expensive mowing.

About the Author: Micheal Lehany grew up in Woolwich at a house away from Kelly's Bush, he is a landscape architect who has a specialist interest in the conservation and management of cultural landscapes.

A Personal 'Mud Map' of Kelly's Bush

Former Mayor

C. 1965



HUNTER'S HILL COUNCIL'S NEW

Hunter's Hill Council adopted guidelines for Stone Walls on Monday the 23rd August, 1993. The Policy was prepared to help owners decide when action is needed on their walls, and to establish for the protection, maintenance and repair of stone walls. The Policy also aims to promote community awareness about the old stone walls of Hunter's Hill, including where they are located and their different methods of construction. The earliest walls were not mortared and were constructed of roughly squared blocks shaped with a pick, and filled with rubble in the centre. Mortared walls are characterised by

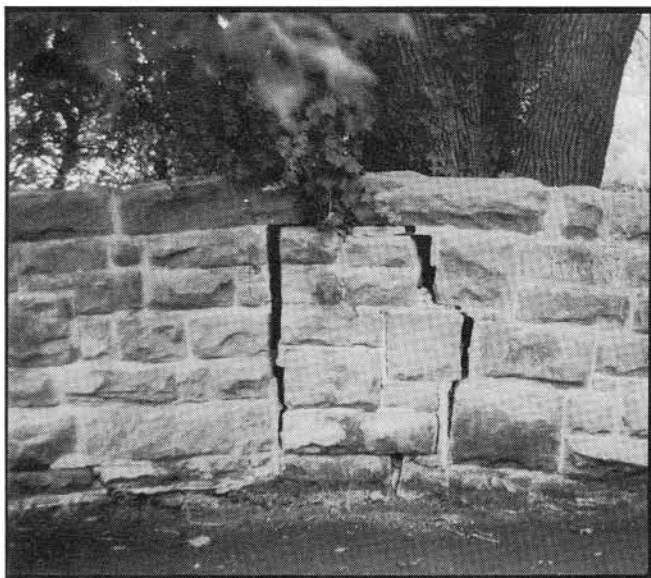
faces and beds of each stone cut and roughly shaped with a pick - many faces sparrow pecked. An important consideration in repairing a mortared stone wall is to use a weak mortar, the guidelines recommend that in re-pointing the mortar, the correct constituents should be used otherwise a stronger Portland cement mixture may result in the sandstone crumbling. The recommended constituents are 1 part hydrated lime to 3 parts sand by volume. Very exposed areas can have 5% to 10 % Portland cement (by volume) added to the mix. The policy notes that lime mortar takes many days to harden, and months to reach full strength.



Behind the Scout hall, Durham Street.



Early dry stone wall, at the back of Herberton Avenue, built of roughly shaped stones with rectangular capping stones. Slightly wider at base for stability



Mortared stone wall Stability of wall is damaged by roots of nearby tree: contact Council for advice.

