

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SAD CASE OF THE HERITAGE-LISTED COTTAGE AT No 11 MARK ST**

The Hunters Hill Trust's Heritage of Hunters Hill 1982 edition lists the building with a photo of the front verandah by Douglas Baglin, which shows the front verandah in good condition.

The text notes that, *"Between 1882 and 1982 Henry Nattey was living in Mark Street. Nattey owned the land until 1880 and the house is typical of the small timber workmen's cottages near St Joseph's College, which were being built in the 1880s. Henry Glading, painter, purchased the house in 1895 and lived there. The house has been bought by St. Joseph's College."* The College still owns the building. The Trust's listing and publication of buildings in Hunters Hill formed the basis of the heritage listings in Hunters Hill's Local Environment Plan. As a result the cottage at No 11 Mark Street is currently a Schedule 5 listed item.



*Douglas Baglin's photo from Heritage of Hunters Hill 1982*

### **The building falls into disrepair**

Since 1982 The College has allowed the building to fall into complete disrepair. This came to the attention of Hunters Hill Council's Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP) when it visited the site in 2009 in a preliminary discussion with the owners, who were canvassing the idea of complete demolition of the house for a car park.

The Hunters Hill Trust drew wider attention to the appalling state of the place in its Journal of April 2014 noting that The College's website proclaims that it *"is extremely proud of the facilities and resources it provides for its students. These include a Visual Arts Centre, a Drama Centre, a Music Centre with Mac computers for digital producing and specially designed practice rooms, a purpose-built Science Wing" etc.* The Trust article concluded with the comment that *"The school's pride clearly does not extend to its responsibility to preserve and maintain the heritage of Hunters Hill."*



The state of the cottage in 2014 – the front verandah



The side view in 2014: note the rear part of the building with its joined hipped roof.

### **The Trust's correspondence with The College**

*Note that the letters from The Trust were authored and signed by me as president.*

On 16 June 2014 The Trust wrote to Ross Tarlington, headmaster of The College regarding the state of the building and the fact that nothing had happened to the place

since CAP's visit of 2009, indeed the dilapidation was getting worse. The letter ended with the hope that The Trust *"can look forward to hearing of the College's plans to restore No 11 Mark Street in the hope that this humble, but no less important building, will receive the care and attention it deserves and that The College will properly fulfil its responsibility to the heritage of Hunters Hill."*

Mr Tarlington replied with a timeline of various actions The College had taken regarding the cottage concluding with a 2011 NBRIS and Partners heritage report assessment that:

*"Due to the low intactness of the place, NBRIS+Partners recommends that Council approve:*

- *Demolition of the structures on the site following archival recording;*
- *Redevelopment of the site in accordance with Aspect Studio's concept design for a landscaped parking area; and,*
- *Interpretation of the retained chimneys and lost significance of the site in the redeveloped landscape."*

On 21 August 2014, The Trust replied that, amongst other things, it is dismayed that The College *"has deliberately abandoned this small heritage-listed cottage to the ravages of wind and weather just for the sake of a couple of car parking spaces. Your apparent unilateral declassification of this heritage item shows an arrogant disregard for Hunters Hill's Local Environment Plan and an abrogation of your responsibility as a custodian of our local heritage."*

The letter went on to say that The Trust does not accept that the building is beyond repair and restoration and that, *"The Trust urges the College to abandon any idea of demolishing the cottage. The architects' suggestion regarding the "interpretation of the retained chimneys and lost significance on the site in the redeveloped landscape" (whatever that actually means) is ridiculous and belittling of the heritage significance of the cottage."*

Copies of these letters were sent to Councillors and The Trust received an email reply from then Mayor Richard Quinn acknowledging that, as an employee of The College he had a conflict of interest in the matter and would be absenting himself from any development applications received from The College.

On 11 September 2014, Mr Tarlington responded to The Trust's 21 August letter complaining, amongst other things, about The Trust's use of excessive language in the letter and its strident criticism of Mr Robert Staas the heritage consultant. He concluded that, *"Given the opinions expressed in your letter, I can only assume that you have predetermined the nature of your response to any development application that St. Joseph's College may submit to Council in regard to this site. I will therefore be expressing my serious concern to Council's General Manager about your ability to reasonably and fairly consider any future development applications submitted by the College that may be referred to the Conservation Advisory Panel for advice."* He sent a copy of this letter to HHC General Manager, Barry Smith.

On 12 September 2014, The Trust responded to Mr Tarlington's letter by email. After addressing the points raised by the headmaster, the email concluded: *The Hunters Hill Trust would like to see St Josephs College rethink its plans for the cottage at 11 Mark Street. We are advocating its restoration and inclusion in any plan you may have to extend the car park. We believe that the cottage is an important part of the heritage of Hunters Hill and makes a significant contribution to the character of Mark Street. In the scheme of things it seems to me that this is not a big ask and that it would go a*

*long way to restoring the community's confidence in St Josephs College as a worthy custodian of our heritage.* The letter was copied to the General Manager HHC.

On 19 September 2014 Mr Tarlington, among other things, replied that The Trust can be “assured that any development work that the College may contemplate will be directed to Hunters Hill Council through the appropriate channels.” He concluded with: *“Given the unfortunate nature of some aspects of your correspondence, I shall not at this point be entertaining further dialogue with you.”*

#### **The Hunters Hill Trust Journal of October 2014**

The Trust published an update on progress on the Mark St site, which included a resume of its correspondence with The College. The article noted that *“cottages like this one, which predates the main college buildings, are an important part of Hunters Hill’s rich and diverse character and it is disappointing to see them abandoned with the prospect of demolition and replacement by car parking when it is possible to resurrect them.”*

The article referred to the recent restoration of Exeter Farm carried out by the Historic Houses Trust of NSW, which was in *“arguably a far worse state of repair”*

On 4 December 2014 The Trust forwarded extracts from the April and October 2014 Journals to Council with the question *“Is there nothing the Council can do by way of intervention to save this important piece of our heritage?”*

#### **Council writes to The College regarding the state of the cottage**

On 8 December 2014 Hunters Hill Council’s Group Manager Development and Regulatory Control, Steve Kourepis, in response to The Trust’s letter, included a copy of a letter sent to The College on 11 September 2014, which noted that, *“following a site inspection of the subject property it is evident that the site is currently overgrown with vegetation and has a high threat of vermin. Your attention is required to this important issue of clearing the subject site from overgrown vegetation.”*

Mr Kourepis said that the site had now been cleared to Council’s satisfaction. He also noted that *“persons that own properties have rights, even though you personally do not agree with the current state of the dwelling house at this property, the property owners rights must be respected.”*

His response to the question about what Council can do to save this important piece of heritage was *“Maybe you could advise Council of what action could be undertaken under the current legislation controls of the EPandA Act, the Local Government Act or any other Act?”* Presumably this was a roundabout way of saying that Council has no power to protect heritage from the wanton neglect of its owners.

#### **The Trust’s response**

The Trust expressed its gratitude for Council’s instruction to the owners to clear up the site. As well, we noted that *“It is ironic that when property owners want to build things, we go to great lengths to ensure they comply with all the relevant planning and building regulations, but when they actively un-build things we can let them do what they want without oversight or assessment.”* The letter concluded: *“In writing to Council about this matter, I had hoped, through the office of the Mayor or the General Manager, that Council would have had something to say to St Josephs College to put moral pressure on them to do something about restoring the cottage. Perhaps the local paper will take this matter up with more success.”*

## **NOVEMBER 2015: A NEW PLAN FOR THE SITE PRESENTED TO CAP**

On 18 November 2015 a preliminary proposal for a new plan for the development of the site was presented to CAP. The idea of complete demolition of the cottage and the construction of a carpark had been scrapped.

### **CAP MINUTES FOR THE MEETING:**

*"It is proposed to demolish the existing cottage and reconstruct the front portion of it, including the verandah, retaining the existing sandstone chimney stack, with the possible re-incorporation of salvaged elements.*

*It is also proposed to make alterations and additions to the cottage by way of a part-single, part two-storey addition, and to re-use the sandstone from the demolished rear portion of the house as a "feature" fireplace in the proposed addition.*

*In considering the proposal, the Panel advised:*

**Existing House:** *both the front and rear hipped portions and fireplaces of the house should be retained in-situ and "reconstructed" in accordance with the definition at Article 1 of the Burra Charter of Australia ICOMOS (2013)*

1.8 *Reconstruction means returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material.*

*This definition does not anticipate complete introduction of new material, and the extent to which this is proposed is to be clarified through further fabric analysis and assessment.*

**Proposed Additions:** *the extent and scale of the proposed addition is considered excessive, and presumes the complete removal of approximately half the existing house (and seemingly the large tree to the rear of the site).*

**Trees:** *concern was expressed at the impact of the proposed addition on existing trees, and the removal of trees along the western boundary. Further assessment of the trees and the rationale for their removal is required*

**Committee Resolution:** *That the Manager, Development & Regulatory Control, be advised of the CAP's comments for consideration in the process of a possible future development application..*

## **CAP MINUTES FOR MEETING 271 20 APRIL 2016**

At this meeting a **Development Application** for the site was presented by Terry O'Hanlon of Quinn O'Hanlon, Architects.

*The subject property is listed as a heritage item, is within Hunters Hill Heritage Conservation Area C1 ("The Peninsula") and within the vicinity of heritage items at 13 Mary Street, St Josephs College, and stone wall to St Josephs College.*

*It is proposed to partially demolish the existing timber cottage, and make substantial alterations and additions to it.*

*In examining the proposal, the Panel raised the following matters:*

**Form:** *the double-hipped form of the cottage-and the fact that its south-eastern flank is available in street views-is a distinguishing feature of the cottage. The removal of the rear hipped portion and the associated chimney is considered fundamentally detrimental to the item.*

**Scale:** *the scale of the proposed addition is excessive, and will overwhelm the street presence of the cottage. An approach that entails a lesser magnitude of accommodation and reduces the height through a “rooms in the roof” configuration should be considered to reduce this effect.*

**Garage:** *the need for an enclosed double garage was also questioned in relation to its contribution to bulk.*

**Committee Resolution:** *That the Manager, Development & Regulatory Control, be advised of the CAP’s comments for consideration in the process of the Development Application.*

### DA APPROVAL 22 AUGUST 2016

At this meeting Council approved development application plans for No 11 Mark Street.

In approving these plans, Council ignored CAP’s advice regarding the removal of the rear hipped portion of the house as well as its advice regarding the scale of the rear extension. See addendum for the approved plans elevations.



### DA APPROVED ELEVATIONS

The rear elevation is on top with the Mark Street elevation below (drawings are those that were presented to the August CAP meeting)

## PROBLEMS FOLLOWING THE BEGINNING OF CONSTRUCTION



Those expecting to see the careful restoration of the existing cottage were shocked to see everything gone except for the two fireplaces and chimneys and even these ended up being demolished.



The restoration of the existing cottage paid little attention to existing details such as the profiles of the weatherboards or the colours. Unfortunately CAP's prediction that the scale of the new rear section would overwhelm the existing cottage was totally vindicated. **But wait – there's more!**



The construction of the new rear section of the house did not comply with the approved plans. Complaints to the Certifier resulted in the new roof being removed and rebuilt with higher walls, as can be seen in the unusually awkward distance between the top of the first floor windows and the eaves.



Here is another photo of the front of the house before the roof was rebuilt and the walls extended.



This photo shows the building after the walls of the rear section have been extended and the roof completely rebuilt.

### **The current state of play**

There was an approximately six months long hiatus during which work was halted while what to do about the unauthorised work was considered and then adjustments made to the building. Currently the house is unoccupied while, presumably, work continues to prepare it for occupation.

### **CONCLUSION**

The one aspect of the whole process that is positive is that the rebuilding of the front two rooms of the house represents a somewhat bastardised acknowledgement of what was once on the site and could be argued to being a better solution than complete demolition and car parking.

However, the whole project seems to be a lesson in what not to do in protecting and maintaining and adapting a Schedule 5 listed heritage item.

CAP's advice that the hipped rear section of the building should not have been demolished and its view that the two storey rear addition would dominate the single storey part of the house at the front has been entirely vindicated.

The rebuilding of the rear section has made this even more pronounced and has created an ill-proportioned structure.

The detail of the rebuilding of the front part of the house pays little heed to the details of the fabric of the former cottage and the colour scheme is execrable and, more to the point, nothing like the existing colours, which also ignores CAP's comments regarding The Burra Charter.

When Council itself ignores the advice of its own Conservation Advisory Panel and the results are so negative, one wonders just what is the point of having the Panel at all.

**Council's powers**

Finally, from the correspondence with Steve Kourepis regarding Council's powers to have any impact on how the custodians of local heritage look after their buildings, it would seem that not much can be done to ensure that heritage items properly maintained.

This sends an awful message to someone who sees heritage conservation as an impediment to their plans – all they need to do is to let it rot and self demolish.

This seems to be exactly what is happening with the two timber cottages at the corner of Gladesville Road and Ryde Road.

Tony Coote  
17 August 2018