



BEECROFT - CHELTENHAM

C I V I C T R U S T

I N C O R P O R A T E D

P.O. BOX 31, BEECROFT. N.S.W. 2119

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Spring Walk

Sunday 16 September 2007 2.00pm – 5.00pm

Please mark your calendar for an afternoon to explore and learn more of our special area. The date will be Sunday 16 September, at 2pm, from the bus stop in Wongala Crescent, Beecroft. The route will take in Observatory Park, Hull Road Reserve, Fernley Park and Chilworth Reserve. Representatives from our local History Group will provide commentary.

This is different from past spring walks, as there is a lot of good local history and it shouldn't be too difficult. (It is open to all ages.) Remember to bring a hat, water and wear good walking shoes. Afternoon tea will be provided at the Village Green, about 5pm.

Proposed “Preferred Option” for the North West Rail Link (NWRL)

In November 2006, John Watkins NSW Minister for Transport, announced as the preferred government option that an underground connection from Epping Station to the proposed Franklin Road Station for the NWRL was to be further investigated by the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation (TIDC). TIDC had originally outlined both an above ground tunnel connection from a divepoint near Murray Road from the main northern line and an underground connection. For cost, environmental and safety reasons the Murray Road divepoint alternative has been abandoned.

The replacement preferred option tunnel involves construction of a direct line in a tunnel deep under Cheltenham and Beecroft proceeding under bushland areas as much as possible to minimise community impacts. Some residents have concerns that their properties may be affected by this proposal. In seeking information from TIDC on this preferred underground proposal they have generally found that impacts may not be as severe as they had thought. It is important that concerned residents seek reliable information from TIDC rather than listen to unin-

formed comment and assumption.

The Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust (BCCT) will continue engagement with TIDC to ensure that resident concerns regarding possible noise and vibration issues and the important issue of possible compensation from Government are addressed with care and consideration. It is important that the highest standards and best available technology is used to minimise community impacts. The preferred tunnel option from Epping proceeds at an considerable depth to minimise impacts. BCCT will seek from TIDC ongoing consultation regarding location and structure of required egress and ventilation points and again seek best practice urban design.

The decision to construct will only be made following completion of geotechnical, engineering and environmental studies it must be realised that the NSW Government has not yet determined funding methodology for construction. There is an urgent need for the NWRL to service the transportation needs of the rapidly developing North West Sector. This will deliver substantial reduction in impacts on the Beecroft Cheltenham area as commuters from other areas will not need to access the main northern line from Beecroft and Cheltenham stations.

Before supermarkets

Two early shopkeepers – Thomas Stobo and Samuel Higgins

by Helen Barker and Catherine Bartho

No. 9 in a series of articles on the history of Beecroft and Cheltenham

With the opening of the Strathfield to Hornsby railway in 1886 and the growth of the farming community, it was inevitable that soon, some enterprising soul would open a store to supply the needs of the local families of Beecroft and Cheltenham. A general store was usually the first shop to open and as the name implies, was expected to stock a diverse range of items from pins to pick-axes, household fare to horse fodder. Sacks of flour, sugar and porridge oats lay on the floor alongside of demijohns of vinegar. Boxes of tea and candles sat on the counter, competing for space with other staples for the home and farm. The stock of the general store created an aroma all of its own.

The first person to open a store in Beecroft was Thomas Stobo, who in 1893 came with his family to Beecroft to start life again after suffering financial loss in the economic depression of the 1890s. A small timber building opposite the present Beecroft railway station became their home as well as their shop. Assisted by his wife Charlotte and on occasions his children, Thomas provided a much-needed service to the nearby families. Their daughter Elizabeth took the mail bags to the station. Their son assisted with the fortnightly trips to Sydney to buy provisions for the shop. Meat and dairy produce was delivered by horse drawn cart by other tradesmen. The Stobos endeavoured to provide whatever else was needed. Major household items and clothing could be ordered from store catalogues or purchased on a day trip to the city stores. The Stobos prospered and soon the family had not only purchased the land on which the store stood, but also built extensions.

The store became the hub of life for the community by day. By night it served as the meeting place for the Beecroft Progress Association. The local newspaper, the *Cumberland Argus* published accounts of lively meetings attended only by local landowners

who formed the association to lobby for improvements to roads and local facilities. One evening when a contentious issue of whether to admit women members was being discussed there was a noisy disturbance outside by those opposing the matter. The newspaper also hinted that Thomas Stobo had at the rear of his store, an illicit still. If this was true it was the first source of anything alcoholic in the otherwise straight-laced community. It would be eighty years before a legal liquor supply (apart from sporting clubs) would be available to residents and that was a bitterly fought issue. Interestingly, this first retail liquor store was commenced in what had once been Higgins Store near Beecroft Public School.

Samuel Higgins and his store

Glasgow-born Samuel Higgins came to Australia at the age of three with his family. In 1903, when Samuel was 27 years old, he married 23 year old Grace Brasnett of Pymble. After a year in Goulburn Samuel and Grace moved to Beecroft, where Samuel leased a small timber shop with attached residence on the corner of Beecroft Parade and The Crescent. (1905). Samuel re-stocked the store, turning it into a general store, the second one in the growing suburb after Thomas Stobo's 1893 store opposite the railway platform. A useful building on Higgins' large property was a shed in the backyard, a necessity for the storage of produce and general provisions and a stable for the delivery horse and cart.

In 1908, being successful with this first business, Higgins built a handsome, two-storied brick store and residence on Beecroft Road, a central position next to the school and opposite the Village Green. As was customary in the plan of a shop with a residence, the living areas and kitchen were immediately behind the store, with stairs leading up to four bedrooms and the front balcony. By 1916 the Higgins had four children, Alan (b.1905), Jean (1907), Marjorie (1910) and Ian (1916). A local girl lived in to help with the housework and the children. The children slept on the balcony all year round, conforming to the belief that the night air strengthened children's lungs. As pneumonia was a frequent killer of the young, this sleeping-out practice was a wise precaution in its time.

Higgins sold foodstuffs, patent medicine, drapery and produce for the numerous horses and poultry in the district. The bulky produce

was stored in a small timber building which had been Miss Ogden's small private school. Stables were built for Higgins' three horses and two delivery carts. The store also acted as an agency for the Commonwealth Bank and the local newspaper, the *Cumberland Argus*.

The store prospered and Samuel was able to give his children a good education, something he had been deprived of himself. His two sons became solicitors, Jean trained as a nurse and Marjorie became General Secretary of the St John's Ambulance Association. After some years of this work she was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), and was made a Dame of the Most Venerable Order of St John of Jerusalem, though this award does not carry a title.

In 1929 Higgins leased the store and the family moved to a house in Wandeen Avenue. They lived there for only three years, next moving to Manly. In those Depression years Samuel took whatever jobs he could find in the city. He was a kind and generous man, sharing what he had with those in more need than himself. He died in 1957, Grace in 1964.

The general store continued for many years with various owners. It had its share of the local lime-light on at least two occasions. When a change from general store to liquor store was mooted in 1969, there was some local feeling about its proximity to the Primary School and the possible bad influence liquor sales might have on the children. There were predictions of binge drinking in the Village Green, but these fears proved to be unfounded. Later, after the building was placed on Hornsby Shire Council's Heritage List, the painting of its side wall with flamboyant coloured spots caused some surprise and complaint. After the wall was repainted in more sombre colours, the business continued successfully.

The site Higgins had chosen on the main road many years earlier has proved over many years to be a suitable business location, especially as a natural widening of the road at that point provided valuable parking space.

Scout Hall Demolition

A Development Application has been lodged for the demolition of the Historic Scout Hall in York Street. It is pleasing that since their last applica-

tion, Scouts Australia (NSW Division) has conducted an extensive Heritage Report into the building and its grounds, recognising its historic significance and the need to preserve certain artefacts as well as the trees in the grounds. The Trust is concerned about three main aspects.

1. Trees. We have asked Council that a boundary and tree survey of the site be conducted so that the impact of any demolition on existing trees and adjoining bushland can be fully assessed.

2. Pathway to Mary Street. Residents were amazed to learn recently that use of this pathway, which has been well used for over 80 years, might be illegal. We have sought clarification of this and asked Council to ensure that the pathway remains available for public access.

3. Future Use of the Site. The Heritage Report recognizes the intent of the bequest of the land by the prominent local Byles family that as few trees as possible should be removed and that land use remains in keeping with the existing bushland. This would impose significant restrictions on any future use of the site so we have asked Council to consider maintaining it as a public reserve. A marker should be erected recognising the gift of the land by Ida Byles and the use of the site.

Bambara Bushcare Group

The Bambara Bushcare groups have been working to restore remnant bushland around the Beecroft Carlingford area and working to promote their conservation efforts to a wider community. The group has focused restoration of fauna habitat that has been greatly reduced through urban development and subsequent degradation of natural bushland. Volunteers have recently secured a fauna assessment of these remnants, hoping that information provided will help the volunteers and surrounding residents to restore and create habitats needed for local fauna.

The assessment recommended to increase food sources for local fauna through the regeneration and planting of suitable local food plants and to increase nesting and shelter sites in the form of nest boxes. The Bushcare group recently sought support from the local community to sponsor these most needed nesting boxes, ranging from boxes suitable for gliders, owls, parrots, kookaburras, pardalotes and possums that are known to occur in the area. Each nest box sponsored is given a

name.

The Beecroft Cheltenham Civic trust sponsored two boxes and named them 'Chorley' and 'Harris'. These names were given in reference to two prominent citizens of Cheltenham. William Chorley bought rail land in the area and named the suburb Cheltenham after his birthplace. He petitioned the building of Cheltenham railway station which opened in 1898. William Harris moved to Beecroft Road, Cheltenham in 1906. His house 'Edensor' with its magnificent stables is listed with the National Trust. He donated much to the community including the land to establish the Cheltenham Recreation Club.

The nest boxes are now in the process of being installed into the reserve located between Orchard and Midson Roads along the Pioneer Track. Hornsby Council has contributed towards the installation of these boxes. It is hoped that with the support of the community and with the dedication of the volunteer group that visitors to the reserve will be lucky enough to enjoy a greater diversity of fauna in the area for many years to come.

Pennant Hills Road No Solution Tunnel Proposal

The Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust has continued to deal with residents' concerns about this proposal and the health consequences of fine particulate matter. This was reviewed at a conference held in Canberra in May 2007 by the Federal Department of Health. An ongoing workshop arrangement was established to consider how government policy may deal with this critical issue which some see as a potential 'new asbestos' problem. Trust members have met with NSW Shadow Minister for Transport, Duncan Gay MP, and discussed strategic alternatives to the Pennant Hills Road Tunnel. The meeting focused on using a new bridge over the Hawkesbury River for both an outer western road and rail connection.

BCCT has linked with the Pennant Hills District Civic Trust who have arranged a letterbox drop to promote the *Groundstrike* DVD, based on the public meeting address given by Dr Ray Kearney on 10 September 2006. To order your copy of the DVD for \$20 please contact Malcolm Powell 98762980 or visit the Trust website www.2119.org.au to download an order form.

Bus Route 623

State Transit wants to cancel this route from Parramatta to Beecroft Stations via Orchard and Murray Farm Roads. This was announced in a survey delivered to residents recently. Cancellation will deprive residents in this area, many of them elderly, of the only bus route they have. The only alternative is for them to walk for some 45 minutes up to Ray Road to catch a bus to Epping. The Civic Trust was disappointed that no contact was made with Beecroft shopkeepers about the proposed change. We wrote to oppose the change and have approached Hornsby Council about alternate community transport should it go ahead.

Membership - reminder

Please support the Trust's work in getting and giving good information to our community. With your Visa/Mastercard ready, just log-on to our website www.2119.org.au and click on the button near the bottom-left of the home page "*Pay by Credit Card*" OR post a cheque with your name and address to PO Box 31 Beecroft 2119. **Thank you for helping us make Cheltenham and Beecroft a better place to live !**

Additions to www.2119.org.au:

New additions to our website include:

1. 2006 ABS Census recent results for our 2119 area, compared with Australia;
2. Details of the Tree Preservation Order, that protects much of our leafy area.

Ray Park Heritage Group

This newly formed group has held a number of very interesting and informative events on local history. On Saturday 13 October they are holding an Orchard and Farming Display between 9 and 5 at the Scout/Guide hall in Plympton Road Carlingford. They welcome visitors and new members. For information on this or the Bambara Bushcare, please phone 9876 5713.