



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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**Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust Inc.
Annual General Meeting**

Monday 7 April 2008 at 8.00pm

Beecroft Presbyterian Church Hall, 6A Welham Street, Beecroft
Please note new venue

Guest Speaker: Professor Lesley Hughes

The Impact of Climate Change on Flora and Fauna

Nominations by members for Committee Positions must be submitted on a form which can be obtained from the Secretary and returned by March 24.

Membership Fee Reduction

The Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust is dedicated to preserving the heritage and bushland amenity of our suburbs. Our main and often only source of income is your membership subscription. We thank you for your support last year when we had many major issues to fund and it was necessary to raise our subscription. This year we can reduce our membership fees to \$20 for household membership and \$10 for pensioners and single resident households. We urge every household to join the Trust and support our suburbs.

BEECROFT CHELTENHAM CIVIC TRUST Inc

**Annual Subscription Rates 1/1/08 to 31/12/08: \$20 per household
or \$10 for pensioners and single person household**

Mailing Details: (please print)

Title _____ Initials _____ Surname _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

Enclosed is ___ \$20 for Household or ___ \$10 for Pensioner/Single Resident

Post with cheque to: The Membership Secretary, BCCT, PO Box 31, Beecroft, 2119 Or visit www.2119.org.au and pay your subscription by credit card

Civic Trust Survey

The Trust is seeking ideas and ways of improving Cheltenham & Beecroft, including our shopping, transport and environment. Please take a few minutes to complete the enclosed survey, (or visit www.2119.org.au to complete on-line) telling us your household's opinions. **The Survey closes on 24 March 2008.** You may care to post it in with your membership payment BCCT, PO Box 31 Beecroft 2119. Summary results will be provided to local Councillors and MPs, and be presented at our Annual General Meeting on Monday, 7 April from 8pm, at Beecroft Presbyterian Hall, 6A Welham Street.

Your responses will remain confidential and not be linked to your name. If you provide your name and contact details, these will only be used by the Trust to contact you on Beecroft & Cheltenham issues. More information can be obtained by 'phoning the Trust's Colin Johnston at 040 875 1915. Thank you for helping us make our special area a better place to live!

Fifty years in 'Leafy Beecroft' Brian and Pru Gill, 1951-2000

No. 10 in a series of articles on the history of Beecroft and Cheltenham

Brian's parents, Dudley (always known as Jim) and Sybil Gill, and their family came to Beecroft in 1951. Jim was about to retire from the CSIRO where he was Head of Animal Health. He wanted to move to a place where there was plenty of space, so he chose to come to Beecroft and bought a large open block of several acres of land on Albert Road. There were no close neighbours in those days but in the vicinity, the top people were the Dobbies and the Willises. There was a fair bit of open ground, the land having been cleared on first occupation.

This resulted in the spread of blackberries both here and in other areas further away beyond Devlins Creek. Local children would often go picking them, and risking scratched legs and fingers. Blackberries were rife in the Beecroft Reserve. The local fire brigade would set fire to them from time to time and then hasten to put

out the fire. The casual staff members of the Bush Fire Service were only paid when they were actually fighting fires. There were quite a lot of citrus trees around, but no orchards. These were further out in the Hills District.

The Gill family gave Gunbalanya Avenue its name. Sybil Gill searched out the meaning of the word and because this was the headquarters of Devlin Creek called it 'billabong and water lilies' - 'Gunbalanya'. You could hear the stream running after heavy rain. In the middle of Hull Road there was a large tree, around which cars went on either side. It was there until Hull Road was extended to run up to Pennant Hills Road.

Over a period of time in the 1960s, Jim Gill began to reduce his large property. In the first place he laid out Gunbalanya Avenue, subdivided blocks and began to sell them. Brian and his wife Pru moved to a new house built here in 1960. Building covenants were placed on the blocks as they were sold. Naturally the new houses were to be of brick and tile construction and to keep the open aspect of things there would be no paling fences. This led to a high degree of uniformity of materials, though there was some diversity of style. The result is a development of houses with a feeling of homogeneity and with very pleasant gardens.

Mr Gill sold blocks quite cheaply to help people get started, but nevertheless several spec builders were able to buy two blocks, build on both and keep one, selling the other. In one case, the developer made £600 (\$1,200, but in 2008 money, perhaps \$20,000) in three weeks.

Beecroft and Pennant Hills in the 1950s were both still small villages. Possibly the most important shop on Hannah Street in Beecroft was Mr Anderson's, the grocer. He was a small man, very quiet and obliging. His boy came around every week to take the order and next day would come back with the delivery neatly packed in boxes and with the bill made out. The common practice was to pay COD. Around the corner from Mr Anderson's was the butcher's shop where for many years the Beecroft Treasure House was located. Hannah Street had an area of quiet style. At the top of the street, facing the corner of Beecroft Road and Hannah Street was the Post Office. It remains as a heritage building,

though for some years it has been a restaurant. On the other side of Hannah St were two large Federation houses. One was the home and medical practice of Dr. Bruce Terry, and the other, closer to the station, was Ozzie Seale's home and dental practice. There were a newsagent, a chemist, a fruit shop and a delicatessen. There was also a hairdresser, but none of the beauty parlours and gift shops that came to characterise Beecroft in later years. In the 1960s modern methods of shopping came to Beecroft, first with the Arcade and then the Module with its supermarket. At the beginning of the 1950s, Beecroft were still basically a little country village, but in Pru Gill's view, it was then ruined by development.

As most people did not have cars, the shops had to provide home deliveries. The milkman came daily with his horse and cart, as did the baker, his basket of loaves covered with a white cloth to keep out the dust and flies. The grocer's boy came round once a week and you rang the butcher who then delivered your order. Every locality had a bakery close by. Beecroft's bakery faced the railway line in Railway Crescent. It operated until the Arcade was opened. Later the building was demolished for an extension to the Arcade and the car park. Another baker came down from Pennant Hills to northern parts of Beecroft. His bakery was where the telephone exchange now is. You still had to go shopping for fruit and vegetables, and Pru had a shopping trolley with wheels to bring things home. That was easier than carrying a heavy basket up the hill from Hannah Street.

Like many Beecroft families, the Gills were involved in many community organisations. An important one was the Red Cross which had been very strong during World War II and remained so in the 1950s. It had a big following of between 30 and 40 members who worked very hard. There was an annual fete and guest speakers at people's homes. There were of course the churches, the Masonic Lodge, the bowling club and the golf club. At the School of Arts were dances and community functions of various kinds. About 20 years later, in the 1970s, the School of Arts adopted its modern title of 'Community Centre'. Over the years there were occasional exhibitions and bush dances. Brian Gill added that it was quite hard to join some of the community organisations which were restrictive in whom they allowed to join.

The churches had cake stalls and there was a bit of healthy competition between the ladies of the dif-

ferent churches to achieve the highest standards. They all supported worthy causes such as foreign missions and the Home Mission Society, now Anglicare.

As few people had cars, Beecroft Road was quiet. People did a lot of walking. Both Beecroft Road and Pennant Hills Road were two lane roads and both were surfaced, but in the early 1950s most of the back streets were still dirt roads, including Albert Road where the Gills lived. At the bottom of Albert Road was the intersection with Hull Road which stopped at the bottom of the hill.

Electric trains had replaced steam trains many years earlier, and some old wooden carriages from the late 1920s were still in use. 'Very drafty', recalled Pru. In the 1950s, the ticket office was at the foot of the stairs and was very cold in winter. Naturally, there was a fire in the ticket office. Tickets were collected as passengers alighted, the station attendant rushing to the gate at the top of the stairs to collect them.

What we now regard as modern suburban services had mostly been installed well before the 1950s - electricity and water, of course, and sewerage was extended during the 1960s. Brian remembered an interview with the Water Board concerning the installation of sewerage in Gunbalanya Avenue. He went with his father to see somebody in the Water Board's office. It was clear to Brian that the man wanted a bribe, but he didn't get it. After the interview he told his father that he had seen the man's hand held out. Mr Gill senior was horrified. He was a man of absolute integrity and such a thing would never have crossed his mind.

There were few labour-saving devices and people provided their own entertainment. Although television started in Australia in 1956, it was not until 1964 that the Gills had their first television, rented from Radio Rentals. Throughout the country, television took a while to catch on. 'It was much better than it is today', reflected Pru. Before that people enjoyed the radio, reading or playing games like Scrabble in the evening. Jack Davey was a universal favourite. Pru commented, 'Radio made you imagine what was happening. You listened in.' Children were encouraged to read in a way that is once again being exhorted.

Beecroft changed a great deal in the 1960s, and the subdivisions on Jim Gill's original property were part of a general movement throughout the sub-

urb. Following the development of Gunbalanya Avenue, Bangalow Avenue was put through to Chapman Avenue a little later on. Over the next 40 years a massive increase in property values took place in line with the whole of Sydney and with Beecroft's growing popularity. The Gills reflected on why Beecroft appeared to some to be a cut above other places on the Northern Line. Why was this so? Perhaps it had something to do with the absence of a hotel, with the attractive old Federation houses; perhaps a better class of people had sought out 'Leafy Beecroft', with its fine gardens growing in the rich black loam here.

Like most long-term inhabitants, the Gill family found it very hard to leave Beecroft after so many years. Brian and Pru moved to the Hawkesbury district in 2000, where, sadly, Brian passed away a couple of years later.

If you would like to know more about another aspect of community life in the second half of the twentieth century, do please read *Beecroft Children's Library : giving the gift of reading, 1942-1998* compiled and edited by Emma Dortins, and published by the Beecroft Cheltenham History Group, an activity of the Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust. This is obtainable from Carolyn Watt, President of the Civic Trust (9876 3266), and from Joan Reid (9875 1318), who was one of the fine group of people who served on the Library Auxiliary. The cost is \$15.

ONLINE HERBARIUM FOR THE BUSHLAND SHIRE

Need to find information about plants found in the local area? Visit the new look Hornsby Online Herbarium. The Online Herbarium is an easily accessible, fully searchable database, containing photos and information on hundreds of plants collected locally.

The website has been created as a partnership between Hornsby Council and members of the North Shore Group of the Australian Plants Society. It is based on the pressed plant collection housed in the Local Studies section of Hornsby Library, which has been assembled over ten years by Jenny Lewis and a team of dedicated local volunteers, including Ross Doig, Pat Pike, Noel Rosten, Max Gregory, Graham Dowden, and Barry Lees.

Jenny and the team are adding high quality scans of live material and photos of plants in the field. The database will eventually include the more than 900 native species and over 200 introduced plants found so far in Hornsby Shire. Other plants will be added as they are found.

Details on each plant include classification, family, genus, species, common name, collection location and habitat.

The database will help bush regenerators to find and identify plants on bushcare sites. Educators, students, environmentalists and gardeners will also find much of interest in the Hornsby Online Herbarium.

To begin your search, go to www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/library, and click on Hornsby Online Herbarium.

For more information contact Hornsby Shire Library on 9847 6614.

Community Events

Sunday 6 April - 10am. Heritage Pioneer Walk. This is part of Hornsby Council's free guided bushwalk on the Pioneer Track. Meet at the Scout Hall in Plympton Rd. There will also be displays in the Scout Hall for those who can't do the walk. **Bookings essential** in case the event is cancelled. Send the name of the walk, your name and home phone number and the number of walkers by email to bushland@hornsby.nsw.gov.au or phone Denise Moss 9847 6832.

Sunday 13 April - 10am - 12. Guided Walk to see the Built and Natural Heritage of Beecroft and Cheltenham. Expert guides will be on hand. Meet at Beecroft Station in Wongala Cresc. Wear good walking shoes and hat and bring snacks and water. This walk will examine some bushcare areas so it involves some bush tracks. It will end at the starting point. This is a Council walk and **numbers are limited. Bookings essential** 9847 6726.

Note, due to the limited numbers, BCCT may repeat this walk on **Sunday 18 May** for those who miss out. Details later.