



BEECROFT - CHELTENHAM

CIVIC TRUST

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

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

BULLETIN 2

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CIVIC TRUST AUTUMN WALK **Sunday 19 April, 2pm Cheltenham Oval**

The Trust will be conducting its annual autumn walk earlier than previous years, on Sunday 19 April. So mark the date in your calendars. Past attendees will be aware that over the past few years the walk has combined a history tour with the traditional bush walk. It will start at Cheltenham Oval near the netball courts at 2pm, proceed through the bushland and streets to the York St area of Beecroft and then make its way back to the oval by a different route for afternoon tea at about 4pm. The Trust will be providing experienced speakers on matters as diverse as bush regeneration, vegetation identification, cultural history and recent development proposals.

Every walk is different and provides you with the opportunity to increase your knowledge of our unique suburbs. Simply turn up, no need to book, all are welcome, as long as you are capable of walking for 2 hours along well formed bush tracks. Make sure you have sensible shoes, a hat and a water bottle if you wish. The walk leader will be Ross Walker 9875 4446.

BCCT Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust was held on March 23 at Beecroft Presbyterian Church Hall. Guest speaker John Neish, CEO of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) spoke of the difficulties faced by a not-for-profit independent charity in the current economic times. He saw this as an opportunity for change as the organization seeks new ways of raising sufficient money to maintain its properties. The possibility of partnerships with Government and other independent organizations to conserve their heritage was raised.

The National Trust has three core programs:

- Advocacy on behalf of the built, natural and cultural environment.
- Conservation of heritage property.
- Education to engage children.

He noted that people are seeking a sense of place and belonging in their community and that the old idea of a house museum where one looked no longer appealed. New ways of engaging the public and children in their heritage are needed so that history can be experienced.

Of particular importance to Beecroft and Cheltenham is the threat to heritage and conservation posed by the new State planning laws.

The following were elected to the BCCT committee:

Rod Best, David Clark, Colin Johnston, Ilona Kernick, Stuart Pittendrigh, Malcolm Powell, Michael Stove, Richard Talbot, Ross Walker and Carolyn Watt. Election of office bearers from this group will occur at the first committee meeting.

Did you or anyone you know attend Beecroft Grammar School?

The Trust has been contacted by two former students of Beecroft Grammar School who would like to get in

A fountain is forever

Bessie Mitchell, MBE, foundation headmistress of Cheltenham Girls' High School, 1958-1972

What would Rome be without its fountains? They splash eternally in the summer heat, and several of them date from Roman times. Others were provided by Popes, just as keen to be memorialised as to bring to the city the great benefit of an assured water supply. What would Sydney be without its Archibald fountain or Canberra its Captain Cook water jet?

A fountain that adorns Cheltenham Girls' High School likewise commemorates a towering giant in the school's history. Miss Bessie Mitchell, MBE, was one for whom the cliché 'legend in her own lifetime' was entirely apt. She was already a well-known, influential and widely respected figure in educational circles at the time of her appointment as the founding principal (she preferred to be called 'headmistress') of only the second girls' high school in Sydney's northern suburbs (Hornsby GHS was the first, some thirty years earlier).

Bessie Mitchell was born in Enfield in 1906. Her father, George, was a butter merchant and storekeeper who had emigrated to Sydney on a sailing ship. Her mother, Helen Wilding, came to Sydney on the first steamship from Britain (with her sister who died of diphtheria and is buried at the Quarantine Station at North Head).

From the start young Bess was a brilliant student. She walked through the paddocks from her home at Enfield to Burwood Superior Public School, where she did well enough to win a bursary to Sydney Girls' High School in 1919. Girls were selected by merit for Sydney GHS, then and now the premier girls' high school in New South Wales. In her final year she won the Fairfax Prize, for the student who topped New South Wales in the Leaving Certificate. She gained the maximum of four first-class honours and two As – she could not have done better. It was the equivalent of a Tertiary Entrance Rank of 100 in today's system. She studied languages at Sydney University, gaining a rare triple honours degree in French, German and – her favourite – Latin. She slept with Horace under her pillow, she told an interviewer in 1994. She did so well because 'getting things wrong wasn't in your nature'.

After teacher training ('We were naughty. Treated it as a joke'), she was posted to Bathurst High School in 1928. Why did she not proceed to an academic or business career? In more recent times, a lucrative career in business or law would have been hers for the asking, but in the late 1920s, opportunities were much more restricted, even for a brilliant young woman like Bessie. Besides, she felt that teaching was 'written in my book of life'. From Bathurst she went to Tamworth – 'a very badly run school ... in those days I was sarcastic. You mustn't do that as a teacher'. Appointments to Maitland and Crown Street followed, and Bessie became known as one of the

reform of syllabuses which were in a rigid, highly academic straitjacket restricting students' understanding. 'We all got quite good jobs as a result.' Another view was that Bessie Mitchell was 'like the touch of garlic that made the whole dish work'. What an appropriate way to describe a French teacher!

Her firm, direct control of a class and her pragmatic concentration on outcomes in teaching also made her a fine committee Chair. She was the first woman president of the Secondary Teachers' Association. She was also president for several years of the Girls' Secondary Schools Sports Association. 'It wasn't because of my interest in sport, but because they needed some-one to run the meeting, otherwise the meeting would get out of hand. They made me a Life Member, and when I left, the man in charge tried to say what I had done, and I really hadn't done anything, except that I kept the thing going and sane.'

Bessie brought the same self-effacing, no nonsense approach to school administration. She was Deputy Principal of Marrickville GHS and then Sydney GHS before her appointment to Cheltenham as Principal. 'I was never interested in school administration [but] I had to administer. Administration is something to make the work easier. You have to make administration painless. It doesn't need to be the be all and end all.' In 1958, the year she commenced Cheltenham GHS, Bessie was one of a very select group of 50 eminent educators invited from around Australia to the Founders' Convention of the Australian College of Education, destined to become the nation's leading professional organisation of educators. Her selection as one of the College's Founders is a mark of the esteem in which she was held. She later became Vice-Chair of the College, and was given the high distinction of appointment to its Fellowship – FACE. She also received the honour of MBE – Member of the Order of the British Empire.

In her fifteen years as headmistress ('I never thought I would eventually become a head'), that esteem grew to legendary status. The very high expectations that Bessie had of herself as student and teacher were imprinted on the life of the school. Another cliché applies: she ran a tight ship. She was good at detail, and would stand at the school gate inspecting the girls as they passed through. Woe betide any girl whose uniform did not meet the headmistress's expectations. Pat Wallace recalled last November, 'I held a teaching position at Cheltenham, teaching French, German and Indonesian. Despite many changes ... I really always felt the presence of Bessie around the school, still manifested most obviously of course by the colour of the school uniform, referred to by the girls as "musk stick pink" and on which Miss Mitchell, as foundation Principal, had been adamant.'

It was Bessie who began another abiding tradition, the singing of the Alleluia Chorus at the school's annual Presentation Day, arguably Sydney's greatest

expectation – demand – that each girl would do her best, because of her belief in her own potential and her determination to achieve it. That legacy has given Cheltenham Girls' High School a sustained academic excellence not surpassed by any other non-selective school. In practical terms, for fifty years it has given the girls a powerful start in adult life that has helped many to become high achievers.

Bessie Mitchell died, aged 92, in 1998, but her fountain continues to flow – an unflinching spring of fresh water.

References: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September 1998; interview by Tony Ryan, 7 December 1994, for the Australian College of Education, in the Oral History Collection of the National Library of Australia, TRC 3291/0006/0002.

No. 15 in a series of articles on the history of Beecroft and Cheltenham By Stuart Braga

Request for Footpath along Hull Road, Beecroft

Following the approach of a number of residents over recent months, the Trust has requested that Hornsby Shire Council give urgent consideration to footpath construction along Hull Road, Beecroft.

Residents say it is particularly needed between Hannah Street and Albert Road. This is due to notable levels of traffic along that road section, as it is undulating and has poor sight lines, together with increasing numbers of parents pushing children in prams and strollers as well as older folk who walk to the Beecroft shops and railway station, via good footpaths in Chapman Avenue and Hannah Street.

Hull Road is a dangerous area for pedestrians – especially with no footpath. Regrettably, our Councillors have taken three months to advise that section is not a priority compared to a path from Chapman to Hannah Street, and that Hannah Street is to have a footpath on both sides.

The Trust believes this is unacceptable waste of ratepayer money and will seek an independent review of this seemingly dithered decision-making!

M2 Work – local Impacts

1. Roadway Resurfacing Noise

Transurban had made a commitment some time ago to resurface the deteriorating road surface this summer as part of a plan to reduce noise. They advise that re-sheeting works are currently planned to commence in April 2009 and that the communities af-

2. M2 Widening Project.

In the Government Gazette of 27 February, the Planning Minister announced the planning assessment for a proposed upgrade of the M2 between Delhi Road and Windsor Road. It includes:

- Widening of sections of eastbound and westbound carriageways.
- Provision of west facing on and off ramps at Windsor Road.
- Provision of east facing on and off ramps at Herring Road.
- Widening of the Norfolk Road tunnel and provision of a permanent cycle facility.
- Provision of a park and ride facility and bus interchange facility at Herring Road.

Transurban advise that the project will proceed if an agreement can be reached between Transurban and the NSW Government about the project scope and funding. A comprehensive assessment of potential project impacts will then be undertaken and this will include opportunities for community input and consultation. The Trust will keep residents informed.

New Housing Code for NSW

A new housing code aimed at getting faster home approvals commenced on 27 February. The Code outlines how new detached single and two-storey homes and home alterations can be approved within ten days. It also allows many minor improvements to proceed without planning or construction approval. The Code contains measures to preserve existing neighbourhood character, neighbours' rights and heritage items and areas. Residents are reminded that a large part of Beecroft and Cheltenham is covered by the Beecroft Cheltenham Heritage Conservation Area and that Council approval will still be required in this area. We would expect that this will help preserve the unique character and heritage values of our suburbs and the Trust will be working with Council to achieve the best outcome for residents under this legislation.

Hornsby Shire Housing Code

Hornsby Council has recently released a proposal for a new housing strategy which plans for higher density living in certain precincts. In particular, Beecroft residents should be aware of the proposals for the Thompson's Corner precinct of West Pennant Hills, where five storey medium density housing is mooted for the northern side of Pennant Hills Road. The draft strategy is open for comment until the 1st June.

More information can be found on the Council website at <http://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/onexhibition/index.cfm?NavigationID=1442&ArticleID=9081>

The draft strategy is on exhibition at the Council li-

Hornsby Council Track Opening Day, Beecroft Reserve

Sunday 31 May 11:00am -1pm

Join us for a BBQ and the official opening by the Mayor at 12 noon of stages 1 and 2 of the **Beecroft-Cheltenham Track**. This is part of a 3-stage track upgrade and construction.

Guided 1 hour bushwalks at 11am and again 1pm

Join in for the opening of this new bushwalk track through Beecroft and Chilworth Reserves. Walk amongst the tall majestic Blackbutt Gully Forest through which this track passes. Learn about how the reserve has been bush regenerated, see some bush birds such as scrubwrens or fairy wrens and learn what other bush creatures call this designated Wildlife Protection Area their home. Meeting place: Meet at the Scout Hall in Beecroft Reserve, off Kirkham Street.

Numbers are limited and you can prebook the bushwalks via 9484 6832 or bushland@hornsby.nsw.gov.au from the 30th April

Please note that these walks will cover some of the same tracks as the Civic Trust walk on 19 April.

Clean Up Australia Day a Success

Under the leadership of prominent local environmental campaigner Dr Raimund Pohl, Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust joined with other local groups for Clean up Australia Day on Sunday March 1. Overall some 630000 volunteers cleaned some 8000 tonnes of rubbish from some 7000 sites across Australia. We were pleased to help in our area with our main clean-up work being under the M2 and near Cheltenham Oval and Day Road Picnic Area. We intend doing it again in 2010, so keep Sunday March 7 free next year.

To encourage families to participate, the Civic Trust offered a prize of \$100 to the school which had the most children register. This was shared between Beecroft Primary School and St Gerards Primary School.

Dr Pohl is now encouraging us to help to raise the needed funds for the Clean Up Our Climate project. A small contribution can help 'Clean Up Australia' educate young Australians on recycling, waste management and water saving projects - all of which will **provide a cleaner future for our children**. Making a difference is easy - use the link below to visit our web-page, and click on 'sponsor us now' to make a small donation. Don't forget to leave a message as well!

If you need any help or have any questions please contact GoFundraise (Clean Up Australia's online fundraising partner) on 1300 889 272 email info@gofundraise.com.au or you can visit <http://www.gofundraise.com.au> RaimundRPohl



Green Home Mini Expo, Saturday 18 April, Hornsby Westfield, near food court on level 3, 9 - 5.

National Trust Open Day at Ahimsa, the home of Marie Byles, Day Rd, Cheltenham, Sunday 28 June - details nearer the date.

BEECROFT CHELTENHAM CIVIC TRUST Inc

Annual Subscription Rates 1/1/09 to 31/12/09: \$20 per household or \$10 for pensioners and single person household

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