



BEECROFT - CHELTENHAM  
**CIVIC TRUST**  
INCORPORATED  
P.O. BOX 31, BEECROFT, N.S.W. 2119

**BULLETIN 1**

**February 2009**

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### **BCC Trust Inc. Annual General Meeting**

**Monday 23 March 2009 at 7.30pm**

Beecroft Presbyterian Church Hall, 6A Welham Street, Beecroft

Guest Speaker: John Neish, CEO of The National Trust of Australia (NSW)

#### **Challenge and Change in the National Trust**

Notice is given to members that the annual general meeting and election of the committee of the Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust will take place at the conclusion of this address. Only financial members of the Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust for 2009 may stand for or nominate someone for election to the committee. Nominations for the committee must be submitted on a form that may be obtained from the Secretary. Nominations close with the Secretary on Monday 9 March 2009.

### **Let's Clean Up Beecroft and Cheltenham Clean Up Australia Day - Sunday 1 March**

This year the Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust has registered several sites in Beecroft and Cheltenham for Clean Up Australia Day. We encourage residents and families to participate and clean up a small area. Please note that:

- **participants must register** for insurance purposes.
- **children 12 years or younger must be accompanied and supervised by a parent or guardian.**
- **suitable clothing must be worn** - closed in shoes, sturdy gloves, hat, sunscreen and a water bottle is recommended.

**Registration is from 9am to 12 noon on Sunday 1 March at the Beecroft Village Green**, near the playground. As there is limited parking in Beecroft Rd, you may wish to park in The Crescent. Collection bags and instructions will be given out and you can be directed to an area that needs attention.

For more information, please phone Carolyn on 9876 3266

### **Need Help Making a Submission to Council on a Development Application?**

Council notifies nearby residents of development applications in their area and many are listed in the local press. The Trust is concerned that residents may find it difficult to respond or may make submissions that do not deal with the issues that Council is required to consider.

guidelines to explain which matters Council may consider. These guidelines suggest a suitable format for your letter to Council and may be viewed on the Trust's website [www.2119.org.au](http://www.2119.org.au).

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### **Dates for your Diary**

Civic Trust Autumn Walk Sunday 19 April, meet 2pm Cheltenham Oval near Netball Courts for a 2 hour circular walk. Afternoon tea will be served at the oval on completion of the walk

## Beecroft's Firefighters

by Lesley Goldberg

*No. 14 in a series of articles on the history of Beecroft and Cheltenham*

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the growth of population in the northern areas of Sydney led to the building of several fire stations during a time of considerable expansion of the Fire Service. In what is now D district, Hornsby (no.50), Eastwood (no.59) and Gordon (no.37) were opened in 1914. Representations from Hornsby Council to the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW for a fire station at Beecroft led to the building of station no.58 on a parcel of crown land which it still occupies on Beecroft Road. It opened in 1915. All these stations had a mixture of permanent and volunteer staff.

In the period from the 1840s to 1884 fire fighting had been the province of insurance company brigades and volunteer brigades, which frequently failed to co-operate. Sydney's Metropolitan Fire Brigades were established in 1884, after a spate of major fires in the growing city. Most memorable was the fire in 1882 that destroyed the Garden Palace Exhibition building in the Botanic Gardens facing Macquarie Street. It consumed a building proudly constructed for the Sydney Exhibition of 1879 and was Sydney's costliest fire till then. In 1909 the Fire Service became state wide.

### Early years

The history of the Beecroft brigade is a tale of growing expertise in firefighting and considerable changes in the service. When it opened in 1915 a shortage of motorised fire engines meant that the running appliance was a hand drawn hose reel with 1470 feet of hose. A Sandford 25 horsepower motor hose carriage was supplied in 1916 to carry personnel to a fire, but it was not fitted with a pump. In its first year the Beecroft brigade attended only two calls, both slight. In 1926 a Garford Hale motor engine with a pumping capacity of 150 gallons per minute was installed. By 1957 Beecroft had a modern Dennis motor engine with a pumping capacity of 400 gallons per minute. The station did not need a water tanker as fire hydrants were available throughout the district.

In 1975 changes in equipment and the expanding

number of personnel meant that the oldest fire station building was carefully taken down and reconstructed at Leppington in Green's Motorcade Museum Park, (its present location is uncertain) and the existing brick building on the site was modified, its exit now facing Wongala Crescent. Photographs of the earlier timber building show the siren on its roof. This could be activated to notify the district, including the volunteer firemen, of a fire in progress. Previously fires were signalled by ringing a bell attached to a pole. A telephone box on the front of the old building allowed citizens to call headquarters in an emergency when the station was temporarily unattended.

When the original fire station opened it had one permanent officer, one fireman and a volunteer, R.B.Biden who lived in York Street. Today it is manned by four platoons each consisting of an officer and four firefighters. Volunteers were phased out in the 1990s. In earlier days firemen were not well paid and service was often a family tradition. The Simpsons of Welham Street, Beecroft were such a family. Vic (Albert Victor) joined as a volunteer in 1939, and his son John in 1960. A neighbour in Welham Street, Wally Hall, (a kindergarten now occupies the site of his home) served from the 1930s until the 1960s. The combined service of these three men approached a century.

### Beecroft's volunteer firemen

Both Wally Hall and Vic Simpson were volunteer (or 'partially paid') firemen, required by the service to live within a quarter mile of the fire station. Another volunteer was Ronnie Dalgairns, proprietor of the hardware store in Wongala Crescent, who was ready to close the store when needed for firefighting duties. Volunteers were paid a retainer and for attending one drill per month. They earned a fixed rate for the first hour of work, and the same rate for each subsequent half hour. At a time when permanent firemen were poorly remunerated and their union was seeking the appointment of more permanent staff, the volunteers earned good money in a busy fire season.

It is easy to understand the attractions of the service for Wally Hall during the 1930s depression when work was scarce. He worked (part time) as the groundsman at Beecroft Lawn Tennis Club and supplemented his income by working as a

fireman. Frank Powell, another neighbour in Welham Street, remembers that when he was a pupil at Beecroft Public School, Wally was working on the tennis courts on a day when the fire engine drove past, its siren sounding. (The siren was activated by a foot pedal). The children saw Wally rush back to get his bicycle and watched him peddling after the fire engine, while they yelled encouragement. Vic Simpson joined as a volunteer in 1949 and served for more than 15 years. The service installed an extra telephone line to the home of volunteers. The phone at the Simpsons, according to John Simpson, was above his parents' bed to ensure that Vic would be quickly alerted by its bells when needed.

Peter Seale, who lived in Malton Road, served as a 'vollo' for nine years, commencing in 1963. His job as an electrician at Goodyear at Camellia involved shiftwork and so he was often available when called to a fire. Sometimes there were false alarms in the early hours of the morning. Peter recalls being called out when a light plane, attempting to make an emergency landing on Pennant Hills Golf Course, finished up crashing into the front wall and garden of a house on the corner of Pennant Hills Road and Copeland Road. On another occasion the brigade put out a fire at Epping Railway Station. A major bushfire the Beecroft brigade attended with two other brigades was in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. It jumped both the highway and the train line at Mt Ku-ring-gai and the brigades were lucky to escape.

The most distressing fires Peter attended involved loss of life. He cannot forget two occasions when this occurred, and John Simpson recalls the distress of finding the body of a young man he knew in the Scouting movement. It is not surprising that we feel there is an heroic dimension to the role of firefighter.

### **Auxiliary firefighters**

Due to manpower shortages during WW11 auxiliary firefighters were employed. Unlike volunteer firemen, they were not paid a retainer but were paid for fighting fires, at higher rates for structural fires than for grass fires. Photographs of a Beecroft crew of auxiliaries in 1945, posing with their officer and their Dennis fire engine in Malton Road, show them wearing inappropriate bakelite helmets and rubber boots. Such fire engines were unavailable during the war years and the NSW fire service imported 25 lefthand-drive American Mack fire engines.

### **A changing service 1960 -2002**

Influenced by his father and Wally Hall, John Simpson joined at Beecroft as a volunteer fireman when he was 18 and became permanent in the service when he was 21 in 1964. For the last 15 years of his career he was an officer at Beecroft, his 'home village'.

During a long career, John Simpson saw the service become increasingly professional. Recruits in 1960 were given simple mathematics and written English tests, had their height, weight and chest measurements checked by a doctor and had a vision test to ensure they were not colour blind. Brawn rather than brains was seen as desirable. The stringent medical, educational and psychological testing now employed reflects a service with complex responsibilities. One third of the recruits are university graduates.

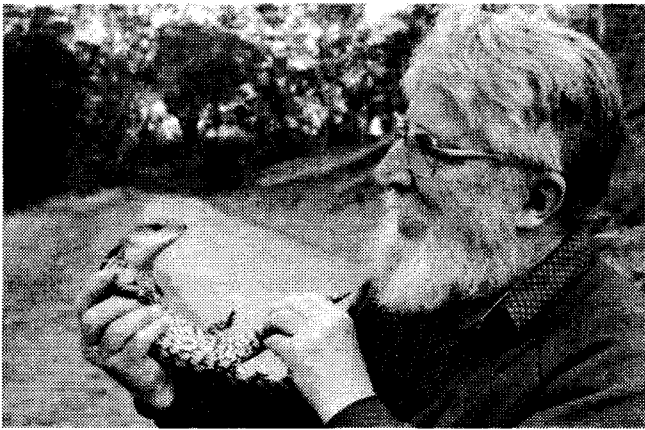
Equipment carried on the fire engines changed slowly. Now each fire engine carries a trauma kit but few firefighters had first aid training when John Simpson joined the service and these few paid for their own training. He recalls a time when the fire vehicles carried 70mm hose and 38 mm hose (more useful for bush fires), beaters, shovels, rakes, brooms, buckets, only one gas mask, lengths of rope, canvas sheets and canvas bags for drinking water - all of it inadequate when fighting a large blaze. Now all firefighters are knowledgeable about chemical hazards, wear fully protective clothing and are educators as well as firefighters. For major buildings fire plans have to be prepared and recorded.

John Simpson recalls that in the 1960s there was radio communication only from the firefighter manning the vehicle back to the headquarters communication centre and communication on the fire ground was done with whistle signals and hand or lamp signals. On rare occasions when firefighters wore breathing apparatus communication was by tugs on a signalling line. All this changed in the 1970s when the officer in charge of the fire ground and the firefighter staying with the vehicle were equipped with hand-held radios. Since 2002 all firefighters are equipped with radios.

*Over almost 100 years this district has had respect and affection for its firefighters.*

The Beecroft Cheltenham History Group meets regularly - for further details please telephone 9487 7825.

## Ivan Powell Lewis, 16-5-1921 - 4-1 2009



Ivan Powell Lewis, who was an early member of the Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust, died on 4<sup>th</sup> January after a long illness. He was 87. Ivan was born and raised in Woodend in Victoria, before joining the RAAF in 1940. He trained as an electrician servicing such aircraft as Spitfires and Wirraways, then remustered as a draftsman at Coomalie Creek air base in the Northern Territory where he served for over a year, experiencing several air raids. After he was demobbed in Sydney he studied Art at the National Art School in Darlinghurst, followed by a Diploma in Education at Sydney Teachers' College where he met his first wife, Rosemary Bunker. His 15 year high school teaching career included 5 years at Hunter Girls' High School followed by another 5 years at Lithgow High School.

After returning to Sydney in 1964 he settled in Beecroft and taught a few years at Asquith Boys' and Girls' High Schools before transferring to Sydney

Teachers' College where he taught student teachers for 15 years. After retirement and divorce, he met and married Jenny Anet in 1983.

In his early years in Beecroft he helped John Noble in clearing lantana and privet from Beecroft Reserve. He was active in the Hornsby Art Society through which he held art classes in Beecroft Community Centre for many years. During the protests against the Castlereagh Expressway battle he photographed many rallies in the bush and in Macquarie Street, also provided many photos of the bushland for display purposes. In retirement he taught photography at Tara Anglican School for Girls as an after school activity for several years.

He was a man of diverse skills and talents. His property in Beecroft demonstrates his landscaping skills with superb retaining walls, and intricate paving designs which he laid himself. He loved working with wood and made furniture and tools. He loved the bush and in younger days bushwalking. He was passionate about conservation and the environment. Music was another love, with his fine Welsh tenor voice he sang with the Sydney Philharmonia Choir for many years, including at the opening of the Opera House before the Queen and Prince Phillip. Opera, especially Wagnerian opera was another interest; during his last few years in the nursing home he watched DVDs of the Ring Cycle several times.

*The Trust extends its sympathy to our esteemed member Jenny Lewis and her family.*

### 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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