

Just three letters: a gift to the Trust.

The Trust has recently been given some papers by the family of John Noble that relate to the early activities of the Trust and which shine a light on almost 60 years of consistent activism, advocacy and collaboration by the Trust. As an example of how local action can happen, be sustained and be successful it is worth looking afresh at these three letters – copies of which are attached.

The Bush has been central to life in Beecroft and Cheltenham since long before the district started to take shape [1]. In 1805 the botanist George Caley set out to travel east from John Macarthur's Cornish Farms (starting near what is now Pennant Hills Road) and travelled along Devlin and Byles Creek (then unnamed). He travelled with an Aboriginal boy, Dan (later Moowattin), who worked with Caley to identify trees and other vegetation and provide them with both Dharug and botanical names.

The first industry in the locality was the Pennant Hills Timber-getting Establishment starting in 1816 and based near where the Beecroft Reservoir is now to be found on Pennant Hills Road. It worked with the timber in the area and, as an ancillary activity also developed basketweaving around Devlins Creek – giving what we now know as Cheltenham its first English name of *Basketweavers Plateau*.

Once the railway and subdivision came, the integration of the Bush and large homes and an outdoor life style led to a distinct style in how the residential areas took shape. The Chorley family were renowned for their family picnics and naming local beauty spots, an early Hornsby Shire Councillor, Frank Chapman, campaigned on the retention of remnants of the Bush and especially large eucalypts along the streets.

Notable families who played a significant role in care of the Bush across New South Wales were residents in Beecroft, in particular, from the earliest days of the district. These families or individuals were core philanthropists in either donating or maintain land as reserves (Byles, Wachsmann, McConville, Blackwood, Falding) or in systemically establishing significant holdings elsewhere (Baldur Byles and Garfield Barwick with Kosciuszko, Marie Byles with Bouddi, de Beuzeville with Cumberland State Forest and Baur with State flora reserves).

Come the 1960s more intrusive infrastructure had commenced in Beecroft. In 1961 and 1962 the Water Sewerage and Drainage Board installed a major sewer line to service Epping, Beecroft and Cheltenham along Devlins Creek. This construction led to the Bush being destroyed and the soil disturbed along the line of this new essential work. It also led to the Creek no longer being polluted by residential septic tanks permitting children, in particular, having as much fun along the creek as those in the Martin or Ray families, for example, had previously enjoyed. Then in 1963 and 1964 the electricity authority proposed clearing street trees in Beecroft to permit the installation of electricity power lines and wires.

The sewer work led to some individuals responding by starting to form groups of friends who would clear weeds from those parts of the disturbed Bush. John Noble was a leading initiator of this individual response. John Noble again, but this time with Marie Byles, also took on an educative role by leading guided bushwalks that informed and inspired local residents as to the beauty of where they were living.

The work of the electricity authority necessitated more than just a response by individuals and so people like E J Richards and F R Barnett called a public meeting to establish the Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust. They were motivated by what these infrastructure developments would mean for the community in which they lived. They could see that the development of

new housing estates on old nurseries, poultries and dairy farms also needed to be addressed. Other, like Robyn and Owen Rowlands, were activated by a concern about the care of, and especially the dumping of rubbish in, the Bush. These motivations all came together to form a group concerned about the “preservation of the existing village character and the natural beauty of Beecroft and Cheltenham.” From the beginning it can therefore be seen that a balance was being struck between a village life (however that may be defined) and caring for the Bush. Activism and advocacy took on a more corporal approach.

From the Shire Council’s perspective it was also clear that with a majority of the Shire comprising Bush, with local Aborigines (having been decimated in this area some 150 years earlier) and so no longer providing Bush care together with successor industries like timber-getting and quarrying no longer providing any, even minimal, Bush care that it had inherited a significant unfunded responsibility.

These letters show how, in the very year that the Civic Trust was formed, Council sought to build upon a pre-existing Council initiative of ‘Rangers’ to supervise the Bush. It did this by seeking to harness the enthusiasm being shown by this new group. It is also of no surprise that the existing Rangers include names like Byles, Fallding, Tierney, Nobel and others who have featured in our story so far. Council ‘decided to invite’ the Civic Trust to look after and expand the role of these Rangers. The intent was not just (or even at all) to fund raise for playground equipment but to maintain and supervise the prevention of damage to natural rock formations, wild flowers and birds and animals.

The local residents who had commenced to activate and advocate were now also collaborating. The initial framework of rangers, with connotations of enforcement and oversight morphed over the next decade into bush regeneration so that by 1976 when the Bradley sisters, Eileen and Joan, were engaged by the National Trust to deliver training in their method of bush regeneration at Blackwood Reserve this movement was already well underway in Beecroft through the endeavours of Jenifer Lewis and (again) John Noble. Bush regeneration has continued until the present and Hornsby has one of the largest cohorts of volunteers anywhere in across the State.

These three letters encapsulate important aspects of community activism, advocacy and collaboration that build on generations of concern to preserve and sustain.

[1] For more information on the history of Beecroft and Cheltenham see the web site of the Beecroft Cheltenham History Group: www.bchg.org.au.

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[Click Here: for two letters dated July and August 1964](#)

[Click here: for Third Letter dated 11th November 1964](#)