

## Trust action:

### Australia's third government farm still under threat

Governor King established the third Government Farm at Castle Hill in 1801, employing over 300 convicts. By March 1804, 700 acres had been cleared and a number of buildings, including a stone barracks were erected. Grain crops and citrus were grown from 1802.

In March 1804, convicts at the Castle Hill farm revolted and the Battle of Vinegar Hill took place near the road to Windsor.

Governor Macquarie closed the farm in 1811 and the barracks were converted to the first asylum in the colony. In 1828 the asylum was converted to serve as St Simon's Church of England and Ireland. It remained a church until its demolition in 1866.

The cleared site remained an open rural landscape well into the 20th century but with agriculture on the site becoming uneconomical residential subdivisions on adjoining lands began to encroach.

Through the efforts of the local community working with Baulkham Hills Shire Council and the National Trust, the Castle Hill Heritage Park was established. The "Castle Hill Historic Site Landscape Conservation Area" was listed on the National Trust Register in 1994 and the site was listed on the State Heritage Register in 2000.

An important view of the site was lost when an adjoining housing development was constructed in the 1990s. Now, another vital vista from Old Northern Road across the site to the Blue Mountains is threatened by development. The Trust

will be urging Baulkham Hills Shire Council and the NSW Heritage Branch to ensure that this historic vista is protected.

It's difficult to understand why a site of such historical and landscape significance is still under threat. This highlights the need to establish effective planning controls to protect irreplaceable settings and views associated with historic properties of national and state significance.

Graham Quint



Castle Hill Heritage Park, Photo: Graham Quint

## Wahroonga's rich heritage under threat

The constant battle between over development and our heritage both built and natural, is at the core of the National Trust's existence.



Coolabah, 39 Burns Road, Wahroonga

Our visit to three beautiful heritage properties in Wahroonga (see Wahroonga Day, page 5) will provide a fascinating glimpse of this urban battleground while offering the delight of inspecting homes which illustrate the Wahroonga story. The properties are "The Briars" in Woonona Avenue, "Hazeldean" and "Coolabah" both in Burns Road, Wahroonga and all are in Urban Conservation Areas identified by the National Trust in 1995-1996, anticipating the urban consolidation of Sydney.

Wahroonga is one of Sydney's older suburbs. With the coming of the north shore railway in 1890 it became popular with wealthy businessmen of Sydney town. Wahroonga was desirable then for its clean air, its open space and the promise of a new garden suburb. Initially the railway came south from Hornsby to St Leonards. Large lot sizes were normal and many imposing dwellings designed by prominent architects were built in the early years. In 2009 these same large lots define the character of Wahroonga but at the same time provide unfortunate opportunities to developers.

Conservation Areas declared by the National Trust have no statutory weight and must be "gazetted" by the Planning Minister to achieve legal status. As suburbs such as Haberfield attest, gazetted conservation areas are extremely effective in preserving and improving the special character of quality urban precincts.



The Briars, 14 Woonona Avenue South, Wahroonga

In 1999 the then Planning Minister Craig Knowles instructed that the urban consolidation plans for Ku-ring-gai should be not to a standard recipe but be "tailor made for Ku-ring-gai". Accordingly, the Ku-ring-gai Council commissioned additional heritage studies to inform its planning for higher urban density. Craig Knowles was successively replaced as Planning Minister by Ministers Refshauge, Beamer, Sartor and now Keneally.

Early in 2002 the proposed Ku-ring-gai Conservation Areas were about to be submitted to Minister Beamer for approval and gazettal when the Department of Planning issued Council with the remarkable instruction that to proceed with the Conservation Areas "would be inappropriate" as the required high density plans had not yet been approved by the Minister. The plans later announced by Minister Beamer in May 2004 provided for five storey apartments next to heritage items, with the softening transition provisions required by Council having been removed.

The embargo on Conservation Areas dictated by the Planning Department continues to this day and the high rise apartments emerging throughout Ku-ring-gai are being approved with inadequate consideration of heritage impacts. "The Briars" provides a perfect illustration of this planning vandalism while "Hazeldean" and "Coolabah" have their own interesting stories to tell.

Don Brew