

HUNTERS HILL DAY 2019

**Celebrating Hunters Hill Municipality – our community, history and heritage
Woolwich Pier Hotel – Wednesday 31 July 2019**

Speech of Dr Beverley Sherry – “Hunters Hill: Australia’s Oldest Garden Suburb”

Hunters Hill has the distinction of being the oldest surviving garden suburb in Australia. There were earlier ones, notably Kings Cross (Woolloomooloo Hill as it was called in the 1820s), but it didn’t survive in garden-suburb form, likewise with Hobart’s suburb of New Town, Brisbane’s Kangaroo Point, Melbourne’s South Yarra, North Adelaide. Hunters Hill, pioneered as a suburb from 1847, remains the oldest surviving example. It is also much older than the model garden suburbs of the turn of the twentieth century such as Haberfield and Daceyville.

We’re fortunate to live here but, importantly, we’re custodians of one of Australia’s historic places.

It doesn’t proclaim its historic character like Paddington or Glebe or Melbourne’s Carlton, terrace-house suburbs that have the nineteenth century written all over them. By comparison, Hunters Hill has a deceptively modern appearance simply because the garden-suburb form became the prototype for the modern suburb.

But if you walk around, the signs of its history are everywhere. Visitors immediately notice. They notice the trees – they are mature, they are large – thank Mayor Charles Jeanneret for that, who introduced the tree policy in 1870. And the stone walls, the stone buildings. And the generous green spaces (parks and native bushland). I met a group of visitors from Sutherland this morning who were walking down to Mornington Reserve on the Lane Cove river. One mentioned particularly the houses in established gardens.

So, how is it possible that Hunters Hill has survived for 170 years? Well, geography is a saving factor – we are a cul-de-sac in the Harbour with no through road. Still, in the 1960s strata title was introduced into NSW, and Hunters Hill was poised to have high-rise apartments throughout the Municipality. In the course of researching my book, I came across A.V. Jennings’ 1969 plans for tower blocks at Clarke’s Point. At that time too, historic buildings were in danger of demolition and were being demolished, Didier Joubert’s St Malo in 1961.

How did Hunters Hill survive in the face of this? People power! It was only through a grass-roots movement that began in the 1960s that the threat of high-rise apartments and the demolition of historic buildings was averted. The Garibaldi, for example, doesn't stand on the corner of Alexandra and Ferry Streets by chance: in 1971 there were proposals to demolish it and put up a service station (by Amoco, also by BP). The people of Hunters Hill rose up in arms and eventually The Garibaldi had a permanent conservation order placed on it. The same story with Kellys Bush, in 1971 the world's first Green Ban.

So Hunters Hill is, as it is today, not by chance. Those pathfinders of the 1960s and 1970s were intrepid, they had true grit. And they didn't communicate on-line. Some of them are here tonight, I think Alice Oppen is, she looks gentle but she is pure grit. As custodians of Hunters Hill we should draw inspiration from their example.

Dr Beverley Sherry

Beverley and her husband Sean have lived in Hunters Hill for 42 years, and over that time she has been an active member of the Hunters Hill Historical Society and the Hunters Hill Trust.

She is the author of *Hunters Hill: Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb* and *Australia's Historic Stained Glass*. Fellow resident and distinguished photographer Douglass Baglin supplied illustrations for both books.

Since completing her PhD in America in 1965, Beverley has had an academic career at the University of Queensland and the University of Sydney, where she is now an Honorary Associate in the Department of English.