

THE CRAG

NEWSLETTER OF THE CASTLECRAG PROGRESS ASSOCIATION INC

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Seventy four years of community development

September / October 1998

traditional Castlecrag's [^] Community

'Community' is a term that has been privatised by the corporate and public sectors to capitalise on demographics, and consequently downsized in the original meaning: "the people who live in one local area...the locality in which they live".

In a city of suburbs increasingly estranged from a sense of real 'community', Castlecrag is one suburb which still thinks of itself as a community. More dense, more diverse than it was, but still a community, which much of its population recognise as having some value. We care about what happens to the place beyond our own plot. Bottom line is that if you fall over in the street, someone will rush to help you and someone else might know where you live. Once that is gone, then the only community you have is a fractional figure in a sea of demographics.

Once, Castlecrag was a small place where everyone knew each other. They were very aware that to cement their strong community bond, they needed amenities where they could get together in fun, in culture, sport and in worship.

So they built them.

What? How many cakes and pots of jam do you have to sell to build a community centre or a church? There are still people here who could tell you. Now *that* is something for the demographics which could not possibly compute in today's terms. Not to mention the time and labour spent on community working bees, the funding drives, the concerts, etc. etc.

Who could possibly do that today? We're all too busy and besides, the costings have gone out the window and through the roof.

Those older residents of Castlecrag gave us amenities which still form the backbone of our community gatherings today. Discreetly positioned around the Griffin estate, they don't boast of their existence and some newcomers don't know they are there. They may not be flash, but they certainly are useful and they have a beauty all their own.

So, in this issue of *The Crag* — another institution faithfully handed on through the generations — we celebrate Castlecrag's community institutions and with some humility, thank those people who worked so hard to create them 50, 60 years ago. What gifts they were.

The Community Centre

Doubling as a kindergarten, the Community Centre still fulfills the same functions for which it was designated in 1943 and built on land Walter Burley Griffin had wisely marked for community use. With a population of 700-800 residents, mostly young families, it was apparent that the parent-run kindergarten had outgrown its temporary base in Phyl Stoker's home (next to the Stoker park in Edinburgh Road).

The community formed the Castlecrag and East Willoughby Community Advancement Co-operative Society, selling shares of ten shillings to secure control of the community land and to transfer it from the Greater Sydney Development Association to Willoughby Council. This was to avoid paying rates, but with the proviso that the Co-operative would control the land and building. Council agreed to a pound-for-pound subsidy and the Co-op began to raise funds and scrounge for materials during World War II, with rationing and everything in short supply.

The community knitted, sewed and baked, made toys and held fairs galore where the shopping centre now stands. An afternoon tea stall was set up at The Pinnacle for bushwalking visitors on Sundays. Card nights, raffles and baby-sitting helped to raise the 1,000 pounds which was their goal. Working bees cleared the land, dug drains and foundations, erected playground equipment and built a shelter shed. Griffin's partner, Eric Nicholls designed and supervised the building of the

centre and it was a day of great jubilation when the Castlecrag Community Centre was officially opened in November 1947.

Eventually, maintenance of the Community Centre became too arduous and Willoughby Council agreed to take over upon the winding up of the Co-operative.

Today, the kindergarten is still successfully run (by Kindergarten Union Services), although local children are no longer advantaged, with the long waiting lists that exist for all kindergartens. But the early Castlecragians' vision was right: it is situated in safe, clean, leafy surroundings with plenty of playing space. By night it reverts to being a Community Centre, as it has always done. In the past there were many dances and community get-togethers held there. Now, apart from the odd barbeque, it is mainly meetings, and indeed it has seen many a fiery debate over the last few years. But it is available to all the local groups and associations to use and is still managed by a committee of local people. Joyce Batterham was the original Secretary of the Co-operative Society and she gave 55 years of service to the Community Centre before her recent retirement.

As a Community Centre, it has held 250 or more people for public meetings, though it can accommodate only 150 comfortably. We would like an additional space for meetings where you don't have to dodge around kindergarten equipment or sit on the 'little chair' if you're late. However, it is a solid and useful place that we can treasure, still serving the community it was built for with so much love and effort 50 years ago.

THIS FEATURE CONTINUED ON PAGES 3 & 4

COMMUNITY BYTES

Willoughby Spring Festival at The Haven

The Haven Amphitheatre awoke from its Winter hibernation with the **Concert for Co-existence** held on a lovely Sunday afternoon, September 6. The indigenous performers represented tribal groups from Sydney and country regions and were supplemented by a non-indigenous choir, storyteller and speakers. The groups presented some fine dance, music, stories and participation numbers, including a lesson in tribal dancing for some game men from the audience. "Now you know how we feel when we have to go to an interview in a suit and tie" quipped Aaron Pederson (from ABC's *Wildside*) who hosted the concert with easy style.

Making a surprise appearance was Aden Ridgeway, Democrats candidate for the Senate, who gave a short address of clarity not often found in aspiring politicians. It was a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon, with a mix of cultures blending in the bush amphitheatre, land of the vanished Gamaraigals.

The Willoughby Big Band performed their **Jazz Haven** concert throughout dubious weather on Sunday 20 September to the great delight of those 100 intrepid souls who chanced it because they knew it would be good — and it was. This concert had been scheduled for the Spring Festival last year, but was solidly rained out. This was particularly unfortunate for the band — a group of professionals lead by Peter Walmsley, of the S.S.O. — because they spent their free time rehearsing for the event and had no wet weather date.

Vocalist Ruth Wilson apologised for singing *Stormy Weather*, but her silky styling of *Funny Valentine* and *Fever* spread a glowing warmth. The Big Band, with their 4 trumpets, 4 saxes and 3 slide trombones, drums, electric bass and piano, recreated the ultra-smooth, sliding sound of the 40s with great panache. *In the Mood?* Yes, definitely. Let's hope next time the weather is great and you can all come.

Haven Hacquisitions

The asset-rich but cash-poor Haven Amphitheatre would like to be able to offer patrons and guest artists a cool drink, but unless someone makes a last-minute dash to get bags of ice, cannot do it. Does anyone have a pre-loved (but still capable) fridge to donate or offer for a consideration? If you are about to update your fridge, why not call Haven President, Howard Rubie, on 9958 1729? Your name will definitely be blessed in the Haven annals.

URGENT! Former Warringah Freeway bushland sites: DUAP and RTA land in Edinburgh Rd

The CPA has written to the Minister for Dept. of Urban Affairs & Planning and The Minister for Transport over the possible sale of bushland blocks from Nos. 315 to 325 Edinburgh Road, asking that the management of these sites be passed to WCC. Action taken by the Castlecrag community in the 1970s resulted in the Kirby Report, and the freeway being disbanded. The report stated that the bushland over which the freeway corridor was planned should remain pristine. These sites are important because of their undisturbed vegetation, outstanding rock formations and habitat for flora and fauna. They represent much of the bushland corridor at the Sugarloaf-facing section of Castlecrag peninsula.

It is paramount that these particular bushland blocks are not sold to support funding needs of the Olympics, but given over to Council in perpetuity. It would be disastrous if they were sold for development, given their attributes and situation.

Also affected are blocks 298-302 Edinburgh Rd, facing The Tor Walk. We ask that if they are sold, the expansive visual access of Middle Harbour be retained and that some formal public access to the waterway be created to maintain the current usage.

This issue is on the agenda in respective government departments now. It is vital that their importance to Castlecrag is made known to the DUAP, RTA and Council. We ask that you write letters urging the retention in particular of 315 - 325 Edinburgh Rd as public land in perpetuity, as a matter of urgency.

Cash and Carry

Castlecrag Kitchen was the victim of an unusual, but effective style of robbery recently. Shortly before closing after a busy Friday, a young man entered the shop, reached across the counter, grabbed the cash register, yanked it away from its powerpoint and ran off with it. Staff busy cleaning found themselves on the wrong side of the counter to have the advantage over the thief who with a good head start, turned into Raeburn Avenue and met up with a mate. They kept running and shortly disappeared down some steps. This is the second Castlecrag shop to have been hit in a brief space of time. It is a pretty puny kind of bravado that robs small shopkeepers who work so hard to keep the service flowing.

Joy for walkers

The track leading through the Oriel Reserve from the Citadel to the Bartizan near The Bulwark has undergone a happy upgrade, courtesy of Council. Whereas for at least 40 years the stone steps have been somewhat haphazard, with some high and uncertain risers, new sandstone steps are replacing the bodgy ones. No concrete, just beautiful big slabs in the right places for easy walking. All in keeping with Griffin's original concept. Excellent!

Richardson & Wrench Castlecrag 9958 1200

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Castlecrag Library

The Community Centre, The Postern

Opening hours:

Tuesday 3.30 - 4.30pm
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 Saturday 10.00-12 noon
 Tel. 9958 8395

It is not meant to be a community secret, but because it is so discreetly tucked away at the end of the Community Centre and can only open limited hours, some people don't know it is there.

Pick the right opening time and you can walk into a pleasant book-lined room with a view to surrounding bushland, be greeted by a friendly local librarian, have a nice browse, a chat, and come away with something good to tuck into at home. There may be one or two other borrowers there, but you will find the library a window of peace in your day, removed from the busyness of the shopping centre and your commitments.

The library, which began in 1949 with a childrens' collection acquired by an early Castlecrag Kindergarten teacher, is having a little renaissance. For some time the titles of the books often kept company with its aging patrons, but in recent years, generous funding from Willoughby Library has meant that Librarian-in-charge, Billie Hume, has been able to do some more selective book buying.

These days, our library has a good stock of new titles to hand, including many best-selling works by Australian authors, quality international novels, biographies, travel and reference books. There are photographic documentaries of Australian and overseas regions, a large print section, whodunnit section and yes, there are still plenty of romances, airport novels and family stories, but *no* Mills & Boon.

There is a childrens' section, more for pre-schoolers than primary ages because as librarian Dorothy Fraser points out, school students can be better catered for in their school libraries.

The library is not online, but you can request a title to be borrowed from Willoughby library or it may even be purchased for you to read. You can also check the current Council papers. Castlecrag library is 'wommaned' by a dedicated but small (hence the short opening hours) team of volunteer librarians whose efforts over the years have prevented the library from disappearing and generated its current healthy state.

If you are at the shops on a Saturday morning, it is an easy thing to point the car down The Postern to pick up some books. There is even plenty of parking. You may be surprised at what you will find.

The Haven Amphitheatre

Cnr. The Scarp and The Barricade

The most enduring tradition in our community is to go to Christmas Carols at The Haven on Christmas Eve. Its fame has spread. Why? Because it is not a commercial event and because it is so *beautiful*. There's no orchestra, lavish choir, celebrities, Humphrey Bear or Julie Anthony, thankyou. There's a local choir, a childrens' nativity play, Santa giving out sweets and lots of singing. But most of all, a packed bush amphitheatre filled with happy people and lit with candles. And nothing is better than that.

The Haven Amphitheatre was designed by the Griffins on land they owned and built between 1928 and 1932 by sculptor, Bim Hilder, who carved out the stone tiered amphitheatre for community plays. The desire for a theatre grew from their playreaders' gatherings, but the leaning was for a Greek style amphitheatre in the bush setting they lived in. They had no permanent stage but built settings for Greek dramas on the hillside across from the seating tiers, parked their cars so the headlights could be directed towards the action.

In 1943 Marion Griffin, by then widowed and about to return to the United States, made a deed of gift of the Haven Amphitheatre to the people of Castlecrag. With the war on and local energy focused on the Community Centre, the Haven was allowed to slumber. Like *Sleeping Beauty*, it became overgrown with lantana and clogged with accumulated rubbish. By the 1960s, only old locals knew for sure where it was.

The amphitheatre was awakened not so much by the kiss of a prince, but by Salome demanding the head of John the Baptist. In 1976, local theatre people and an architect had decided to reclaim and renovate the Haven Amphitheatre. They got rid of the lantana and weeds, allowing the native vegetation to regenerate. They built a timber stage, a bridge across the creek, but most of all, they uncovered the original cascade of seating tiers and renewed those that had fallen. Willoughby Council undertook maintenance assistance and a management committee was formed. *Salome* was produced by Howard Rubie with a cast and crew of locals and people from The Stables, Kings Cross. Castlecrag had its theatre back.

Since then the Haven Amphitheatre has regularly produced or hosted plays, musicals, music concerts, multimedia performances and readings. It has been the backdrop for church services, community gatherings, seminars, street picnics and a couple of weddings. Over the last four years, the committee and local supporters have rebuilt the stage to a new permanent structure and fitted out its undercroft with basic facilities. Capital works grants from Willoughby City Council supplied the materials and residents supplied the labour.

There may be between 3 and 6 events annually held in the warmer months, but there are always the Christmas Carols. Occasionally, performances get rained out or blown offstage, but that's life in a bushland theatre. The Haven Amphitheatre has a rare magic not found anywhere else in Sydney.



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For our feature on *Castlecrag's Traditional Community*, *The Crag* gratefully acknowledges assistance or material sourced from: Joyce Batterham, Dorothy Fraser, Judy Grieve, Billie Hume, Elizabeth Lander, Edie Le Mesurier, June and Barry Raymond, Howard Rubie and Meryl Smallhorn.

St. James' Church

Edinburgh Road

In 1947, Castlecragians Dorothy and Jack O'Connor began to hold Anglican services in their home for sixteen people, which continued there for seven years. A Sunday school began in the same year in another home, which quickly grew from one teacher and seven kids, to five teachers and ninety kids nine months later, with some classes held outdoors and one in the laundry. If you were good, you got to sit on the plank over the washtubs.

By 1949 a Parents and Friends Association was formed to support the Sunday School. At Edie Le Mesurier's home they met to plan functions and started to make an endless supply of cakes to sell, contributing in a major way to the eventual new building.

Lot 112 Edinburgh Road was acquired in 1950, with the church wardens' object being at the time to build a church hall. J. Brindley volunteered as honorary architect but many locals really wanted a church as well — something contemporary, with lots of daylight and in sympathy with bushland surroundings. Working bees began the arduous task of site preparation in 1953 and by July 1954, the Lower Hall was finished, thus providing a place for Sunday School, Church, Fellowship and Girls' Friendly Society.

Before long the space was again strained, with 100 kids at Sunday School and classes once more held outside, sitting on rocks. A massive canvassing began in 1956 in an effort to create finance for purchase of the adjoining land and the building of St. James Church, which was opened by Bishop Hulme-Moir in 1957. Then there was the debt to pay off and to do it, some fairly heavyweight art shows, Gilbert & Sullivan performances, and fashion parades were created for the community to enjoy, which have gone down in local history — but that is another story, which we hope to publish in the future.

The church now looks like one of the better examples of its time because it managed to avoid the architectural pitfalls that befell many of its contemporaries. The original interior concept of using simple, clean lines, burnished hardwoods and big windows has paid off and its beauty sits well in simplicity. The copper and mosaic vestibule mural by Bim Hilder is now a local treasure, along with his Griffin memorial fountain.

Last year saw the special 50th anniversary of St. James Church which was attended by just about everyone alive who had ever been there. Its founders may have aged, but their energy is still in evidence — and yes, they still produce many cakes and pots of jam which disappear rapidly at the annual garden fairs held to keep up maintenance money. The St. James group are still active in the community they love, helping in so many ways. The Sunday School classes may be much smaller, but there is still a fair roll-up to services when the bell clangs.

MEMO

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Castlecrag Sporting Club Inc.

Known as Castlecrag Tennis Club, Cortile Reserve

Born of Griffin's Greater Sydney Development Association's vision for recreation in Castlecrag, the Castlecrag Sports Club (popularly known as Castlecrag Tennis Club) began 70 years ago in 1928, in the Cortile Reserve, when one court was enough for the needs of the time.

A second court was added in the mid 1950s and a clubroom with basic amenities was built. In 1984 the courts were surfaced with synthetic grass.

Over the 70 years of its existence, the Tennis Club has provided pleasure and enjoyment for a large proportion of the community at various stages of their lives — whether playing with the junior development group on Saturday mornings, or full club members on Saturdays afternoons and Sunday mornings, or one of the groups who hire the courts during the week. They might be associate members, or a friend or visitor playing informally. It has been estimated that 300 individuals play at the courts either on a regular basis or at least once a year.

The Tuesday ladies' group which began in 1950, remember that the late Blossom Hopkinson was seen arriving at the courts with a racquet in one hand and a walking stick in the other! Hail, rain or shine, those Tuesday ladies can be found either on the courts or in the clubhouse every week without fail. The late Mr. Lee Davis was a long-time member of the club who would often be seen at the local shops on a Saturday morning encouraging more juniors to join the Saturday group. The Wednesday, Thursday and Friday groups are now no longer only for women, as some retired men have joined their ranks. The mid-week groups are always looking for extra players, so the offer is open for residents to wander in to the courts to meet them.

Unfortunately, the courts are in need of repair, but once badly needed refurbishment has been carried out, it is envisaged that one court will be available six afternoons a week for casual hire to anyone who is not already a member or associate. We will advise when the work has been completed.

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Landslide in Castlecrag

The tail-end of the 'big wet' in August caused a large landslide in the bushland below the northern escarpment of Sugarloaf Bay, Castlecrag, running approximately 130 metres down the steep slope to Sugarloaf Creek below. The landslide occurred on open space property — fortunately, well below the adjacent houses situated on the ridge escarpment of Sunnyside Crescent, Castlecrag, so there was no possibility of damage to residents' properties, as has happened in the Wollongong area.

The landslide which begins 45 metres below the ridge, has made a crater of twenty one metres width and around two metres deep, which looks as if an earthmover has hollowed out a building site. The force of the water which hollowed out the crater carried off all vegetation, dumping it against a small rock outcrop downhill. From there the landslide forked into left and right channels which continue down the rest of the slope to subside in an unstable bog at Sugarloaf Creek, polluting the creek just below its main waterfall.

There was no evidence that the landslide was caused by stormwater courses; above it there was no vegetation flattened by rushing water. No trees had fallen above the landslide to begin a domino effect of damage. Just above the embankment of the landslide, a mature angophora stands, possibly helping to hold that embankment together. Looking at the embankment from below, there are small funnels below the topsoil of between 15 and 30 centimetres in diameter, where water rushed through at what must have been some force. The vegetation and topsoil above it is totally undisturbed.

The landslide looks as if it has been caused by groundwater alone. Both slopes of Sugarloaf Bay are very steep and the northern slope is so heavily vegetated, it is difficult to climb.

Despite the thick vegetation and rock formations, this slope has proved to be unstable. If there had been houses built in the area, they could have slipped.

A matter for thought is the fact that the bushland slope directly opposite the landslide is that which is subject to much debate *re* the lowered Foreshore Building Lines.

Residents alerted Willoughby City Council to the landslide and the site was inspected by the General Manager, Mr John Owen (formerly Director of Technical Services).



pic; a section of the top of the landslide; the vegetation above the embankment has not been disturbed, below it, vegetation has been swept away with the soil.

Tribute to Hilda Chapple

from an address by Andrew Frazer at the CPA General Meeting of 25 August 1998

It was with a great deal of sadness at St James Church yesterday that we farewelled an outstanding member of our community. Hilda Chapple, believed to be the longest serving resident of Castlecrag, has died at the age of 92.

Hilda's son John, one of her two children and two grandchildren, spoke bravely and proudly of a remarkable woman who came to Castlecrag in the early 1930s and built on land in Raeburn Avenue, subdivided from a dairy farm.

John spoke of his mother's career, stretching from shorthand typist with the legal firm Allen, Allen & Hemsley, through retailing, door to door sales in outback Australia and ultimately to real estate, which she practised until her retirement.

Hilda had two hip replacements, one of which required further attention after an injury sustained in a hot air balloon accident in the 1970s —which co-incided with her seventies.

Hilda was acquainted with Marion and Walter Burley Griffin and was often a dinner guest.

St. James' Church and Hilda benefited mutually from her regular attendance, both at Sunday services and mid-week Bible classes. Her fellow parishioners are deeply saddened by her passing.

However, it was Hilda's counsel, enthusiasm, dedication and support during the school saga which endeared her to our community. This was a local issue which could have been of little interest to a lady in failing health in her eighties. On the contrary, Hilda injected herself into the fray with enormous energy, climaxing in her volunteering to be the plaintiff in a claim against the State Government.

Concerned that Hilda may have misunderstood the downside of her role, I asked her if she understood fully her decision. She looked me straight in the eye and said "yes, I understand completely" in a way which left me humbled and in no doubt.

It was a proud moment for me to speak for the motion when honorary life membership of our Progress Association was bestowed on her.

Hilda was a remarkable woman.

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Griffin Reserves Plan of Management

The community advisory group on the Griffin Reserves and Walkways Plan of Management has met with Council staff on a regular basis. The group has also undertaken a series of walks through the Griffin open space system to familiarise themselves with the issues associated with each reserve, walkway and island.

Initially, the Embrasure Reserve — between The Battlement, The Bulwark and The Bastion — has been selected as a priority focus for rehabilitation. Access to this reserve is currently difficult and it is badly weed infested, but it has a central location in an integrated system of walkways. Council contractors have undertaken initial clearing work in the reserve. Apart from some maintenance activities, intensive work in the reserve will await the preparation of a detailed Action Plan by a professional consultant. Preparation of this plan will involve extensive consultation with residents adjoining the reserve.

A number of residents have asked about the yellow signs stencilled on roads in Castlecrag to indicate public access ways. Council did not undertake this activity, nor was it done with the knowledge of the Griffin Reserves advisory group or the CPA. Under the Plan of Management, reserves and walkways will eventually be given formal markings, but the nature and style of these markers will be subject to extensive consultation with residents.

Bob McKillop, President

**next CPA General Meeting
Tuesday 27 October, 7.30pm
at the Community Centre**

the Agenda will include:

- RTA and DUAP land on lower Edinburgh Rd. and The Tor Walk,
- Castlecrag Kindergarten waiting list,
- Residents' Pack,
- Progress report from Griffin Reserves Advisory Committee.

**followed by a Public Meeting
on local Traffic at 8.30pm**

- The LATM plan for Sunnyside Crescent and Edinburgh Road.
- The meeting will be addressed by WCC traffic consultants, Transport & Traffic Planning Associates. Input from Castlecrag residents will be welcome.

Traffic Management Edinburgh Rd & Sunnyside Crescent

Willoughby Council have now appointed consultants to undertake the traffic study in Castlecrag and to prepare a Local Area Traffic Management Plan for Edinburgh Road and Sunnyside Crescent (see *The Crag* 121, page 3). Transport & Traffic Planning Associates will be working with residents of Castlecrag over the coming weeks to identify the extent of traffic problems in the suburb and formulate priority action plans.

TTPA recently undertook the Eastern Valley Way planning study for the RTA, so they are familiar with the traffic issues of the area. The consultants are to hold at least three public meetings on traffic issues in Castlecrag and possible solutions. The Progress Association has arranged for the TTPA consultants to attend its next general meeting on 27 October and the agenda will primarily be given over to their presentation and your comments on traffic matters. All residents are welcome to come and have their say at this meeting [see box below left for details].

Bob McKillop, President

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APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP / RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP

Membership fee is \$5 per person (\$3 for students and those on a fixed income). Membership is for the calendar year and is renewable from 1 January 1998. Members must be at least 18 years of age.

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Our Constitution stipulates that a member of the Association must be a natural person who is a resident or ratepayer of the area (designated in Rule 1.3) being over the age of 18 years and has been approved for membership of the Association by the Committee. Two months membership is obligatory for a member to be eligible to vote. The names of the people applying for membership should be supplied with the membership fee. A person who was a member in 1997 will automatically be eligible to vote in 1998 as soon as the 1998 membership is paid (as long as the qualifying period has elapsed). A 'family' cannot be a member because a 'family' is not a real person. If a company owns a property in Castlecrag, then the directors of the company do not qualify for membership of the Association if they live outside Castlecrag.