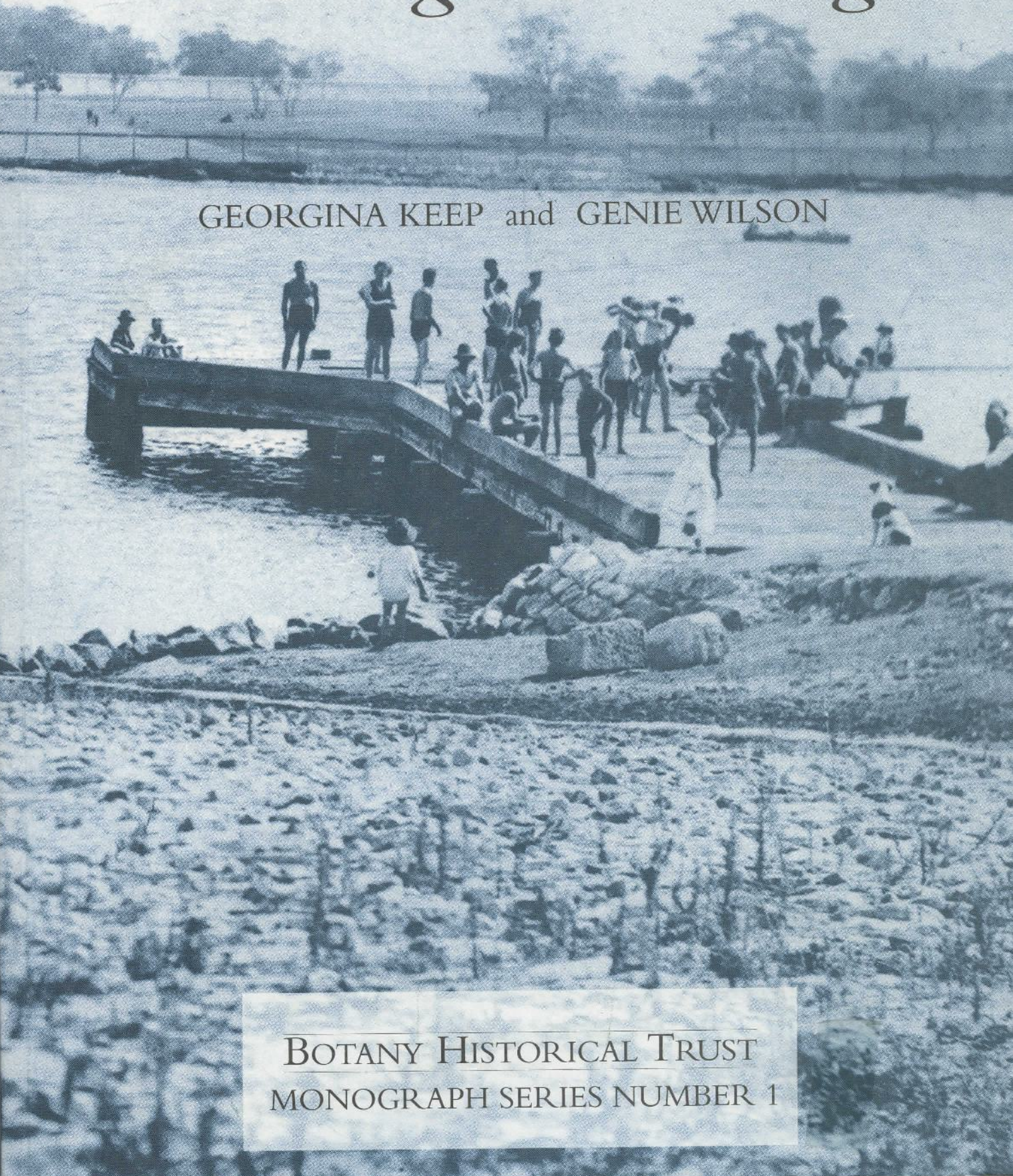


LAURISTON PARK

The Forgotten Village

GEORGINA KEEP and GENIE WILSON



BOTANY HISTORICAL TRUST
MONOGRAPH SERIES NUMBER 1

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GEORGINA KEEP
and
GENIE WILSON

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Foreword

When I first read *Lauriston Park: The Forgotten Village* I was reminded of comments I made in 1989, when our Bicentennial history, *The Heritage of Botany* was published. In the foreword to that book, I wrote that Council's intention was 'to stimulate ... greater enthusiasm for local history in the community at large', and described the task of the study and writing of the story of Botany as 'a serious challenge to professional researchers, archivists and entrepreneurial publishers.' This publication, the first in a series of planned works on the history of the local area, shows how successful we have been in achieving what we set out to do.

Why Lauriston Park? The clue to the answer is in the title – 'the forgotten village.' Not that the people who once lived there have forgotten the excitement of growing up in an era of unprecedented change brought about by the development of a major airport on their doorstep. Far from it. Their recollections give this book an immediacy and vitality it would not otherwise have had. But other people, especially the young and new arrivals in Botany, do not have such long memories. Their knowledge of Lauriston Park depends on other people's accounts – both written and oral.

It is the same with other areas of Botany's history. If we do not document our past, it will be lost – and with it will go part of ourselves. That is why Council set up the Botany Historical Trust – to ensure that local people not only own the material which reflects our history, but also have the opportunity to share their memories, ideas and expertise, so that the story of Botany is recorded and passed on to others. Storage and preservation of historical records is an important part of the Trust's functions. But since the real value of these documents lies in what they can tell us about our past, Trust members wanted to put their knowledge and skills to work to interpret this information and produce lively, informative, and above all, readable local histories.

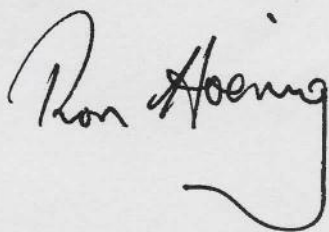
All history is about people, so it was to them that Council's researchers turned to supplement written sources when they first began to delve into the history of Lauriston Park. The resulting book is a collaborative effort between local people and Botany Bay City Council. As research continued over many months, the sustained enthusiastic public response to requests for information on Lauriston Park surpassed even our most optimistic predictions. Library staff who coordinated the project received dozens of phone calls and visits from people willing to be interviewed and eager to lend or donate material. Some came from the other side of Sydney to help us piece together the story. Others spent hours talking to the authors, building up a vivid picture of life in Lauriston Park. Then, when a draft was produced, members of the Botany Historical Trust volunteered to undertake the task of fine tuning the manuscript before declaring it ready for publication. To all the people who helped, I say thank you. This is your history. We could not have done it without you.

I congratulate Georgina Keep and Genie Wilson for producing such an entertaining book. With their easy flowing writing style and understanding of the subject, they make the task of unearthing the story of Lauriston Park look easy. But as many writers will tell you, it can sometimes take hours of concentrated effort to produce a few pages of skilfully worded text. *Lauriston Park: The Forgotten Village* is the product of original research, which draws on newspapers, Council and government archives, minutes of meetings of local clubs, letters and oral accounts, to tell the story of a village which occupied only a few streets in a working class suburb. Such meticulous research is hard work, but the results make it worthwhile. I have a particular reason for feeling pleased about the publication of this book. A few years ago, I saved Council's precious archives from oblivion, and set in train the process which culminated in the establishment of the Botany Historical Trust. Naturally, I am delighted to see this material being put to such good use.

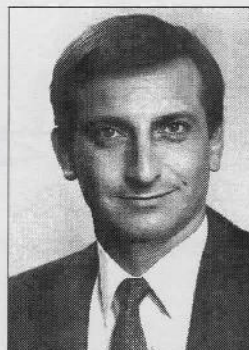
Two things make this history unique. Firstly, it breaks new ground, since the story of Lauriston Park has not been told with such completeness before. Secondly, because of an accident of geography that placed their village close to what was to become Australia's largest international airport, the people of Lauriston Park witnessed events of not only local, but national and international importance. This alone makes their story intensely interesting and relevant, not only to the people of present day Botany, but to all Australians.

Spanning a period of nearly ninety years, this book is full of the energy and enthusiasm of the everyday lives of people caught up in events which changed the history of Australia. With its emphasis on social and environmental history, it deals with issues and conflicts not discussed in any depth in previous histories of Botany. I commend Council for the foresight it has shown in supporting the publication of this book. With the continued help of all the people of Botany, who are part of our history and give life to it, we are committed to ensuring that more books like this one are produced. We have made a good start. It is up to us all to keep the momentum going.

Ron Hoenig

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ron Hoenig". The signature is stylized, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the last name.

Mayor of the City of Botany Bay



Message from the President of Botany Historical Trust

Over two hundred years ago, European settlement in Australia began at Botany Bay. This means that not only have we inherited a long and rich local history, but that much of it is also of national, and often international importance. Such good fortune adds excitement to the task of the historian, and also brings with it added responsibilities for those charged with storing and giving access to our historical heritage.

With this in mind, in 1994, Botany Bay City Council set up the Botany Historical Trust. By preserving historical documents and objects, and recording the memories of local people, members ensure that Botany's past is available to all to share. If we achieve our aim, readers of *Lauriston Park: The Forgotten Village* will come away with much more than just an account of events in a little known corner of Mascot. As well as reminding people of the changes which have taken place near Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport, we hope that this book will inspire everyone to become involved in researching and recording local history. It is the starting point for further work which can be done only with the help of the local community.

On behalf of the Botany Historical Trust, I thank Georgina Keep and Genie Wilson, who carried out their research so thoroughly and gave us such a well written account of the history of Lauriston Park. Thank you most of all to everyone who contributed their photos and memories to help the authors with this work. You are central to the success of the Botany Historical Trust, and it is to you that the credit belongs for the publication of this book.

Jos Wiggins

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jos Wiggins', with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

President, Botany Historical Trust

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all those who helped us piece together the story of Lauriston Park. Many people shared their memories and provided photos, including Rita Adams, Linda and Duncan Buchanan, the Coupland family, Vera Cragg, Mavis Franklin, John Goold, Ray Goold, Chris Gwilliam and the late Sid Gwilliam, Mabel Harris, Fred Hudson, Maisie Lesser, John McCarthy, Ron Nolan, Bonnie O'Brien, Harold Rootsey, Lennie Taylor, Kath Trim, Nell Walters, Mavis West, and Wyn Whymys.

Jos Wiggins, Dr Peter Orlovich, Chris Gwilliam, Nancy Hillier and Ernest Hillier read and commented upon our work. Bill Stinson's editorial comments and suggestions on possible sources of information were also much appreciated. Our thanks also to Isabel Fraser who word processed the document.

Thank you to John Prescott who reproduced many of the photographs in this book and to all the organisations, libraries and government departments which provided valuable information. These include the New South Wales Branch of the Australian Labor Party, the District Council of the City of Edinburgh, the Fairfax Photo Library, the Federal Airports Corporation, the Department of Land and Water Conservation, the Land Information Centre, the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, the New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority, the New South Wales Land Titles Office, Qantas, Sydney Water and Wimbles Inks Pty Ltd.

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Introduction

The story of Lauriston Park begins with mudflats, mangroves and primal coastal heathland. It ends in a landscape of industrial construction and concrete. In only ninety years, the village grew from a tiny settlement to a community, which flourished briefly, before gradually declining and eventually disappearing altogether.

Lauriston Park was a small village located at the mouth of the Cooks River on the northern shores of Botany Bay in Sydney. Europeans lived there from the earliest days of settlement, but it was not until 1902 that the area was considered to be ripe for potential development and was surveyed as an estate. The community derived its name from this planned estate.

At first progress was slow, and events drifted along until the outbreak of war in 1914. The people of Lauriston Park, like many others, fought in the long and debilitating conflict. When the 'Great War' came to an end in November 1918, they just wanted to resume their former peaceful way of life. And they felt there was much which needed to be done.

The future promised a great deal to a world weary of war. People wanted stability, work, and a better lifestyle. Not all of the Lauriston Park residents were aware of it yet, but they would soon have the opportunity to witness, and at times participate in, the economic activity and technological developments of a new era. Most obvious and exciting among the changes taking place in everyday life was the emergence of the aircraft industry. In the decades to come, planes would play an increasingly important role in commerce, transport and defence. Because of an accident of geographical location, the residents of Lauriston Park would soon find themselves very close to the centre of activity in the development of this new industry.

In 1921, the Commonwealth Government resumed a number of swampy, grassy paddocks close to the few houses which formed part of the Lauriston Park Estate. This area was to become the site of Sydney's principal airport. Despite Botany Bay's close links to the earliest days of the penal colony at Sydney, the locality around the airport site was still only sparsely settled. The area was relatively close to the main urban areas of the city, but progress had not affected the residents greatly. Cows, goats and horses grazed in the paddocks surrounding the houses. Some people owned a milking cow, others had a vegetable garden or a few layer hens fenced off in the 'chook yard'. Others bought their milk and vegetables from the nearby dairy and market gardens.

Social activities centred around the local community, where people grew up in a family atmosphere. Lack of good roads and the swampy nature of the land made access difficult, especially in wet weather. Nor was the land particularly attractive for residential development, with tanneries and the remnants of Simeon Lord's wool washes on one side, and the Botany Sewage Farm on the other.

The government's decision on the location of the new airport was to have unforeseen long term effects on the lives of the residents of the small village of Lauriston Park. At the time, they probably welcomed the plan as a sign of progress, hoping the changes would bring jobs, money, more public amenities and a higher standard of living. No-one realised that the decision would eventually mean the end of the community. As the airport expanded, the people of Lauriston Park ceded more and more land, until the village eventually disappeared entirely.

Today, the Cooks River and the Bay area near the airport have been physically changed. Two runways crisscross one another, and a third has recently been completed. The overseas terminal has been extended. New check-out counters are equipped with the latest high-tech equipment to cope with increasing demand. A plane takes off or lands every few minutes.¹ Passengers with a window seat in an approaching aircraft see a heavily industrialised landscape surrounded by a residential fringe and dotted by parkland and golf courses. All around the airport lies an immense infrastructure of courier companies, factories, container terminals and arterial roads, heavily laden with traffic. Lauriston Park no longer exists, and few remember it.

Progress has overtaken many communities like Lauriston Park. Sydneysiders born since World War 2 view their city as a highly urbanised and closely linked metropolis. They are often unaware of the previous existence of small semi-rural settlements like Lauriston Park, located relatively near the city centre. Most of these communities, with their lively village atmosphere, have disappeared. Yet Lauriston Park retains an important place in the history of the local area. In a relatively short time, successive generations of residents of this little known and unpretentious village saw more change in their surroundings than was witnessed by many who lived in the larger and more imposing towns and cities of Australia.

Chapter 1

The Early Years

At dusk on 10 January 1800, the convict ship *Minerva* weighed anchor just outside the Sydney Heads. On board were 188 convicts, 73 of them political prisoners, transported for taking part in the Irish Rebellion of 1798.² In addition to its human cargo, the *Minerva* carried supplies and a variety of goods for sale at highly inflated prices. There was keen competition among enterprising traders, including emancipated convict Simeon Lord and the officers of the New South Wales Corps, to snap up the most sought after items for resale at a healthy profit.

The next day at dawn, with the free passengers lining the deck, the ship sailed through the Heads and into Port Jackson. Slowly making its way towards Sydney Cove, the vessel passed the rocky outcrop of Pinchgut Island, where all eyes fixed upon a bleached skeleton hanging from a gibbet and rattling in the wind.³ The remains were all that was left of Francis Morgan, a convict who had been hanged for murder three years earlier.⁴ As the *Minerva* drew nearer to the shore, curious onlookers watched, following the progress of a young convict who was rowing resolutely towards the vessel. Perhaps he had hopes of getting his hands on some of the spirits in the ship's hold. Or maybe he just wanted to have a closer look at the new arrivals. In any case, he was so caught up in the excitement of the moment that he either did not hear, or deliberately ignored, repeated warnings to stop. He was abruptly shot and killed by a marine,⁵ an incident which witness Joseph Holt later described as 'the first tyrannical act I saw since I left County Wicklow.'⁶ This display of arbitrary justice was a warning to everyone of the fate which could befall those who defied authority in New South Wales.

Amongst the convicts aboard the *Minerva* were two Irish rebels,⁷ labourers Andrew Byrne and Edward Redmond, who had been transported for life.⁸ Any thoughts they might have had then about their future prospects were no doubt bleak and full of uncertainty. But they were destined for a better life than they would have enjoyed had they remained in Ireland. Like many Irish political prisoners, they were soon granted pardons and prospered reasonably quickly after their arrival in the colony. Both men were given land near the future village of Lauriston Park, and went on to become influential Catholic laymen.⁹

At first, only convicts and their gaolers came to New South Wales, but soon a trickle of free settlers began to arrive, seeking to escape the poverty of life in

English cities. Gradually, the colony lost its penal character as the population of Australian born increased and more and more free immigrants arrived. The settlement developed, expanded and prospered as part of the British Empire. But European settlement brought hardship and suffering to the indigenous people of Botany Bay. The single-minded determination which helped to create villages like Lauriston Park also meant the dispossession of the local Aboriginal people and the destruction of their lifestyle.

For thousands of years before the name 'Lauriston Park' first appeared on maps of the Municipality of North Botany, the local Aboriginal people had been managing the land on the banks of the Cooks River where it flowed into Botany Bay. The Kameygal people used every natural resource available. They knew exactly where to look to find a plentiful supply of food, and how to make the most of the plants and trees growing nearby.

Unlike the Europeans who settled the land after 1788, the Aboriginal people were not farmers or industrialists. Small bands set up camp sites along the Cooks River, fishing, hunting and gathering food, and living in close harmony with the environment. Survival skills were passed on to everyone in the group, so that each succeeding generation benefited from the knowledge of those who had gone before.

Local plants provided the raw material for food, weapons, medicines and everyday utensils. Shell middens lined the banks of the Cooks River, testifying to the importance of fishing in the everyday lives of the Kameygal. Both men and women were involved in this vital activity. Men launched canoes on the river, taking with them spears fashioned from the native *Xanthorrhoea* or grass tree. A shark's tooth, or other suitable sharp object, was fixed to the end of the shaft with glue made from heated resin, extracted from the base of this tree.¹⁰ Fragile craft were easily damaged, so small holes often had to be plugged with the same versatile resin. Larger leaks were patched with paperbark, taken from nearby trees.¹¹ The women cast out lines to which were attached hooks made from shell. They chewed up bits of shellfish and spat them into the water to attract fish.¹²

Nothing went to waste. The Kameygal quenched their thirst with a sweet drink, similar to mead, made from liquid extracted after soaking the spikes of the *Xanthorrhoea* tree in water. The soft basal part of the leaves was also eaten,¹³ and the seed pods of the Grey Mangrove were pounded and soaked, until they too were edible.¹⁴

Sheets of paperbark were also used to dress wounds,¹⁵ as 'groundsheets' during childbirth,¹⁶ and as protective covers on shields, so the bearer would not scrape his knuckles.¹⁷ With a plentiful supply of water close at hand, and an abundance of food to be gathered nearby, life on the banks of the Cooks River was far less rigorous for the Kameygal than it was for Aboriginal people in the more remote regions of Australia. But life was far from easy for the Europeans, who arrived in the colony without the skills or knowledge needed to survive in the bush – even in the relatively mild climate of Sydney.

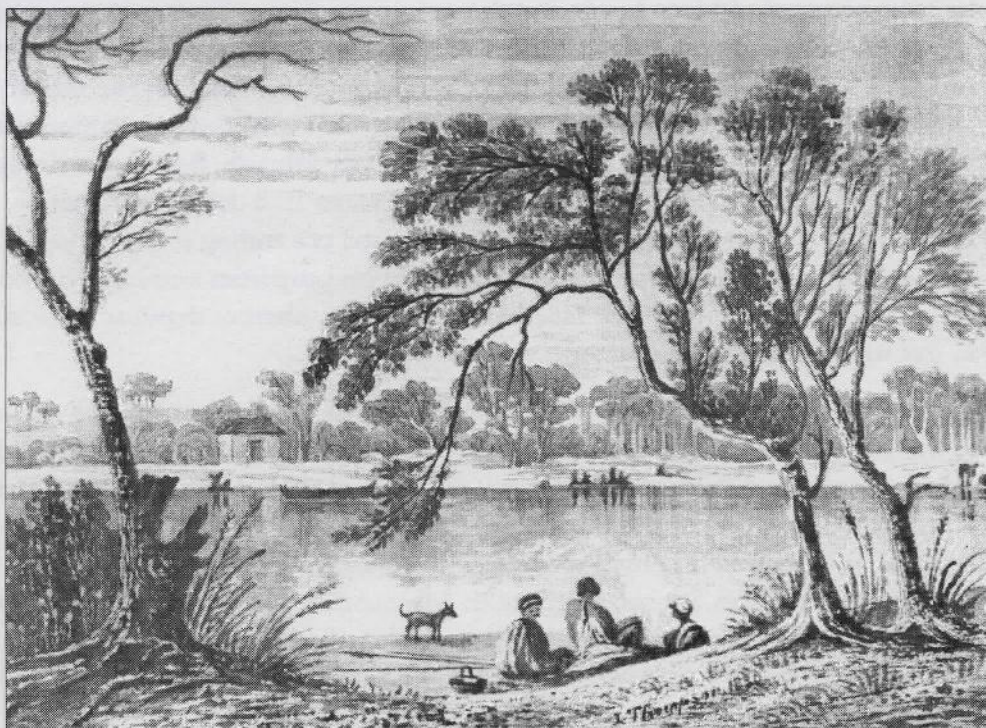
White settlers soon began to encroach upon traditional Aboriginal lands. Ignoring the needs and rights of the local tribes, enthusiastic administrators soon began to carve up the land and apportion it to those they considered to be most hard working and deserving of ownership. To the Europeans, progress meant

commercial and industrial development, and those who were given land were expected to be a part of it.

As part of this process, in 1809, three tracts of land known as 'Seaview', 'Newcastle' and 'Cool Harbour' were granted to Andrew Byrne, Mary Lewin and Edward Redmond. The farms lay in a flat swampy area covered by low scrub and trees, fronting onto the banks of the Cooks River at a point aptly named 'Mudbank.' Years later Edward Lord, son of the ex-convict industrialist Simeon Lord, recalled how difficult it was to cross this region on horseback.¹⁸ When Thomas Woore visited the area in 1833 and 1834 to collect aquatic plants, he commented that 'it was very difficult to travel, and in many places impossible to do so ... We at all times carried a piece of rope to drag each other out, should we get immersed.'¹⁹ This area was later chosen as the site for the Lauriston Park Estate.

Isolated in a harsh and inhospitable environment, the settlers near the Cooks River were struck by the vivid colours of the native plants. The Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub gave a yellowy green tinge to the sandy terrain. Varying shades of pink brightened an otherwise barren landscape, bringing a softness to the surrounding bushland. The moister areas were covered by the Pink Waxflower, which was intermixed with Boronias, Pink Swamp Heath and River Roses. Splashes of white were provided by the Wedding Bush, while closer to the estuarine swamps of the Cooks River were 'extensive mangroves, mainly Grey Mangrove ... and saltmarsh and dry salt plain'.²⁰

Keen to make the most of every opportunity, Andrew Byrne took to farming. He cleared the land, sold the wood to the Sydney watch-house to fuel their fires,²¹ and raised horses, which fed on the low-growing saltmarsh covering the area. Byrne also gathered the oyster shells left by the Aboriginal people on the banks of the Cooks River, and burnt them to extract lime for sale to the government.²² Natural lime deposits had not yet been discovered locally, so Byrne



*Thompson, John,
'Mud Bank Botany,
at the mouth of the
Cooks River, 1830.'*
Dixon Galleries, SLNSW



Lycett, Joseph,
*'View of the Heads and part
 of Botany Bay from the end
 of the Cooks River' [n.d.].*

Dixon Library, SLNSW

was fortunate to have easy access to a product which was in heavy demand. Limestone was the main ingredient in the mortar which was used to cement bricks together to build much needed houses in the colony. Wattle and daub houses were whitewashed with lime to protect them from the weather. Business boomed and Byrne grew richer.

In 1812 he married Mary Lewin but the union was short. Over forty years of age at the time of her marriage, Mary bore three children in quick succession and died in 1815, either during childbirth or soon afterwards. Byrne quickly remarried, and in 1819 advertised both the 'Newcastle' and 'Seaview' properties for sale, describing them in glowing terms as 'two valuable farms containing thirty acres each ... with a full prospect of the Ocean ... a delightful fishery ... [and] a good Country House which can be repaired at a trifling Expence [sic].'²³ Byrne's imaginative and colourful description of his properties emphasised their selling points, but conveniently failed to mention the obvious drawbacks of life in this still inaccessible region.

Not until 1813 was a 'carriage road' built leading to the shores of Botany Bay. It was paid for by subscription, with contributors including Andrew Byrne and Edward Redmond.²⁴ Realising how much they had to gain from having easier access to their properties, these settlers agreed to pay for the road to be extended as far as Mudbank where they lived. The contractor for the construction of the road was William Simms, a private in Macquarie's 73rd Regiment.²⁵ Later descriptions of the approach to the Bay were less than flattering. In his book *Travels in New South Wales*, Alexander Majoribanks gives a vivid account of a visit to Botany Bay:

The road is wretched in the extreme, deserving the name of a cart track. Immediately on leaving Sydney, you enter upon a complete desert of barren sand with low scrub or brushwood, which continues nearly all the way, and at one spot in particular when looking around in every direction there is not a vestige of a human habitation to be seen, so that one might actually suppose he was travelling through the desert of Arabia ... In fact I saw more serpents than flowers, so that I should have felt inclined to have called it Serpentine Bay.²⁶

Other nineteenth century descriptions of the land near Botany Bay were equally damning. In 1846, Lieutenant-Colonel Godfrey Mundy lamented:

So well founded were the objections of Phillip to Botany Bay ... that even at the present day, although only seven miles from Sydney, there are scarcely a dozen houses on its margin ... The shores of the inlet are still as unpopulated as if it were a thousand miles from the city.²⁷

In spite of the many unpleasant remarks made about the difficulty of travelling in the Botany Bay region, it would be wrong to suppose that the whole of the landscape was as impassable as the swampy area which was later to become the Lauriston Park Estate. On the eastern side of Mudbank, in the present-day suburb of Botany, was a much more attractive sandy stretch of coastline known as Long Beach. On this more hospitable shore, Thomas Kellett built the Sir Joseph Banks Hotel, hoping to attract the custom of both family day trippers, as well as the more genteel members of Sydney society. This venture was a great success. By the 1850s, the hotel and the surrounding gardens were already becoming known as a pleasure resort, with enthusiastic Sydneysiders regularly gathering there to take part in picnics, dances and sporting activities.²⁸

*Allport, Henry Curzon,
'Entrance of Cooks River
at Botany Bay, 1840.'
Mitchell Library, SLNSW*



For the locals, the hotel was also a great drawcard. On special occasions, residents made the trip around the coast to enjoy the attractions offered there. When they occasionally did so, they must have been impressed by the relative luxury of the accommodation at the hotel, with its landscaped gardens fronting onto a sandy shore. Living conditions for the settlers on the banks of the Cooks River were far more basic.

The wet and boggy conditions which so annoyed the early travellers to Botany Bay were an advantage to entrepreneur Simeon Lord. He was the first European to recognise the potential of the natural water supply of the Botany Swamps. In 1815, Lord established a woollen mill on the banks of a stream near where Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport is now located. To power this mill, Lord dammed the stream, so creating the Mill Pond. Here he established a wool scouring and wool manufacturing industry. His nearby residence, Banks House, is said to have been the first house constructed in the Botany district. 'It was erected on ti-tree piles because of the swampy nature of the ground.'²⁹ Encouraged by the success of his activities, 'Lord also constructed a second dam, just above the high water mark of Botany Bay, along the margin of the swamp. The impounded water of this dam turned [an] undershot wheel, which worked a flour mill.'³⁰ These were the first of many industries set up close to where the village of Lauriston Park was later to be established.

Simeon Lord was not the only one to recognise the value of the water supply in the area. Market gardeners also quickly realised that there were considerable financial benefits to be gained from exploiting the natural geographical features of the Botany Bay district. By the 1830s they had already arrived in the area, and were to remain there for over a hundred years, their gardens eventually encircling Lauriston Park. Then, in 1855, 'approximately 75 acres were resumed from Simeon Lord, [including] ... his home, the woollen mill and the remains of the flour mill.'³¹ This marked a new stage in the history of Botany. The area was about to provide water for the whole of the growing city of Sydney – a role which was to have a profound and lasting effect on the development of the entire region.

Chapter 2

An Abundance of Water

The decision to draw water from the Botany Swamps came as a result of a survey of several suggested sites conducted in 1852. In a detailed report, a government appointed board of experts saw the obvious advantages of selecting the Botany region as the source of Sydney's water supply. As well as being 'in the immediate neighbourhood', the Botany area seemed geologically ideal. The Board noted:

We find that the Botany country extends to a distance of four or five miles ... It may be described as a series of quartzose sandstone hills of moderate elevation, the vallies [sic] being filled in some places to a considerable depth with sand, thereby presenting an undulating surface which is partially covered with stunted vegetation.

*Botany Pumping Station
[n.d.]. Sydney Water*



Such a country is evidently capable of collecting and retaining large quantities of water ... We find that the drainage of several thousand acres of this country forms the source of never failing streams of a pure and limpid quality that take their course into Botany Bay at various places on the coast.³²

In 1859, pumps began carrying water from the swamps to the homes and businesses of Sydney. Botany became the city's third source of water supply, taking over where the Tank Stream and Busbys Bore had left off.³³ This constant use of the land for agricultural and industrial purposes brought gradual changes to the area which were later to have a great effect on the lives of the twentieth century residents of the locality. By the time the residents of Lauriston Park inherited this land, a great deal of damage had already been done to the original natural landscape by a long line of enterprising but often short-sighted farmers and industrialists. Complaints about pollution and the overuse of the land in the area were common years before the village of Lauriston Park was established.

For nearly thirty years, the Botany Swamps supplied Sydney's water. This placed a great strain on the resources of the land. When the area was first set aside as a water reserve, the natural ability of the soil to retain water was much prized:

Its power of absorbing rain as it falls is great, and it may be safely assumed that no water will escape over its surface until the whole sand below is charged; the swamp, therefore, acts as a reservoir, to store up the excess of rain at one season for use at another, and in this view its superiority is apparent.³⁴

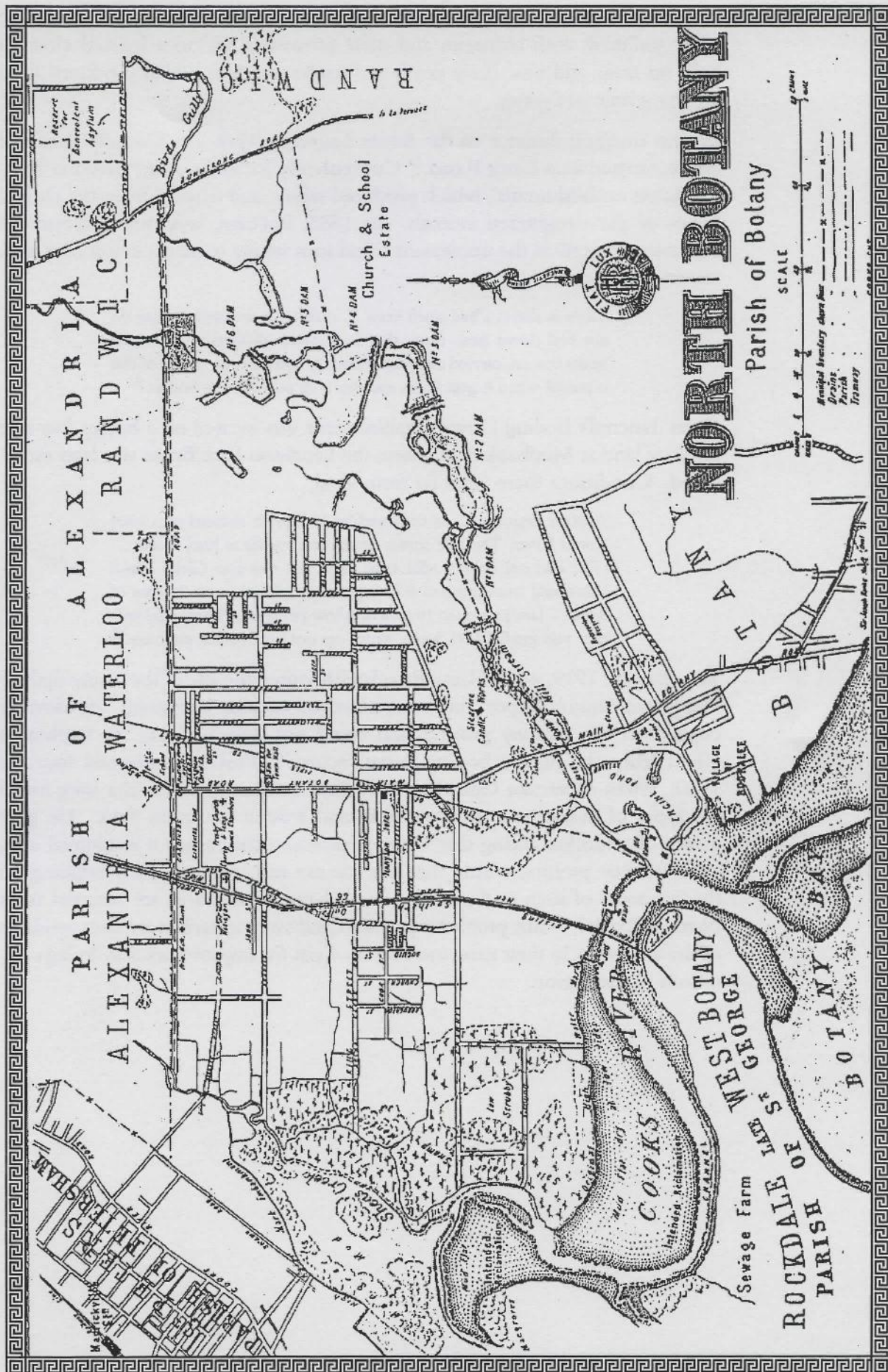
By 1869, only ten years after the pumps had been turned on, the situation had changed completely. The constant draining of the swamps, the increase in population, and continued industrial activity in the region inevitably took its toll on the environment. Market gardeners and factory owners cut trenches in the ground to obtain more water and to let slops run away. Horses and dairy cattle trampled the earth until it was packed down hard. Eventually, the once spongy soil began to dry up, and the Bay and surrounding land became more and more polluted. Because of this, the area was no longer considered to be a reliable future source of water for the city.³⁵ Edward Lord noted the changes which had taken place in forty years:

A number of years ago there was a supply [of water] yielded gradually, and ... if it rained for three or four weeks continuously, the effect of it would remain for four or five months; but now, immediately after a heavy rain there is a flood, and away the water goes.³⁶

In rainy weather, the section of the Water Reserve occupied by industry was transformed from a natural swamp to a boggy quagmire. No wonder the residents of Lauriston Park later frequently complained about the mud and puddles they tramped through after a heavy downpour.

The extent of the damage being inflicted on the local landscape was again emphasised in 1883, when a Parliamentary inquiry was conducted into 'noxious and offensive trades' in Sydney and its suburbs. For a short time, it seemed likely that the government would banish all such industries to the foreshores of Long Bay, where a plentiful supply of water was close at hand.³⁷ Fortunately for the residents of Botany and North Botany, the authorities decided against the establishment of a huge industrial zone nearby. Even so, in the course of the

*Opposite page:
Map of North Botany,
Parish of Botany,
County of Cumberland
c.1888.
Mitchell Library, SLNSW*



inquiry, it became clear that much of the land in North Botany was already badly polluted, with tanneries and meat processing factories located close to built up areas, and near dairy farms and market gardens which produced food for the whole of Sydney.

Within smelling distance of the future Lauriston Park was Carroll's slaughter house, situated near Lords Road.³⁸ Conveniently located nearby, were the 'boiling down establishments', which produced tallow and manure from the fat and bones of the slaughtered animals. In 1883, Richard Seymour, Inspector of Nuisances, described the unpleasant conditions which residents living near such factories endured:

There is always a bad smell from ... boiling down because they do not boil down fresh meat; they boil down all sorts of meat and bones that are carried away from the city and suburbs. Some of this is putrid when it gets there, and this is all put into the boilers.³⁹

Peter Tancred's Boiling Down Establishment was located on a boggy five acre block of land at Mudbank near where the Lauriston Park Estate was later established. Conditions there were far from ideal:

Surface drainage ... is conveyed by [an] open channel into [the] Cooks River. The tide comes up the drain as far as [the] works ... [The owners] collect offal both from the city and Glebe Island [Abattoirs] amounting to 6 tons per day ... They crush 20 tons of bone ... [and] produce 10 tons of tallow per week. [They] feed seventy pigs [and] 1,000 ducks, which are not kept on the premises.⁴⁰

Years later, in 1919, when Harry Broadsmith visited the site of the future Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport, he complained of vehicles becoming 'irretrievably bogged' in the swampy ground, and could not help noticing 'an unpleasant odour from the nearby boiling-down factory'.⁴¹ Protests continued into the 1920s, when Alderman Chambers presented to Mascot Council a long list of the types of industries and factories in and around Lauriston Park. He gave notice of a motion asking that Council proclaim the region a residential area, and that they 'prohibit within that area the use and erection of any building for the purposes of such trades industries and manufactures as are referred to as Noxious Trades'.⁴² But problems persisted and were inherited by later residents of the area, who, in their turn, took up the fight for improvements in living conditions in the region.

Chapter 3

An Estate is Born

The land for the future Lauriston Park Estate was surveyed by E. H. Cowdry in September 1902. Soon afterwards, advertisements began appearing in the local newspapers offering cheap land for sale through Brothie Real Estate Agents in Coward Street, North Botany. The price was £15 per lot.⁴³ In an era in which home ownership was more often a dream than a reality, the private housing estate of Lauriston Park was an affordable place to live. The residents were working class people, many of whom were of English and Celtic origin. Cottages with names like 'Brixton' and 'Inverness' lined the streets of the tiny settlement. The origin of the name 'Lauriston Park' is uncertain. It could be a reference to Lauriston Castle near Edinburgh in Scotland. Street names such as 'Melrose' and 'Roslin', also often spelt 'Roslyn', reflect a Scottish influence.

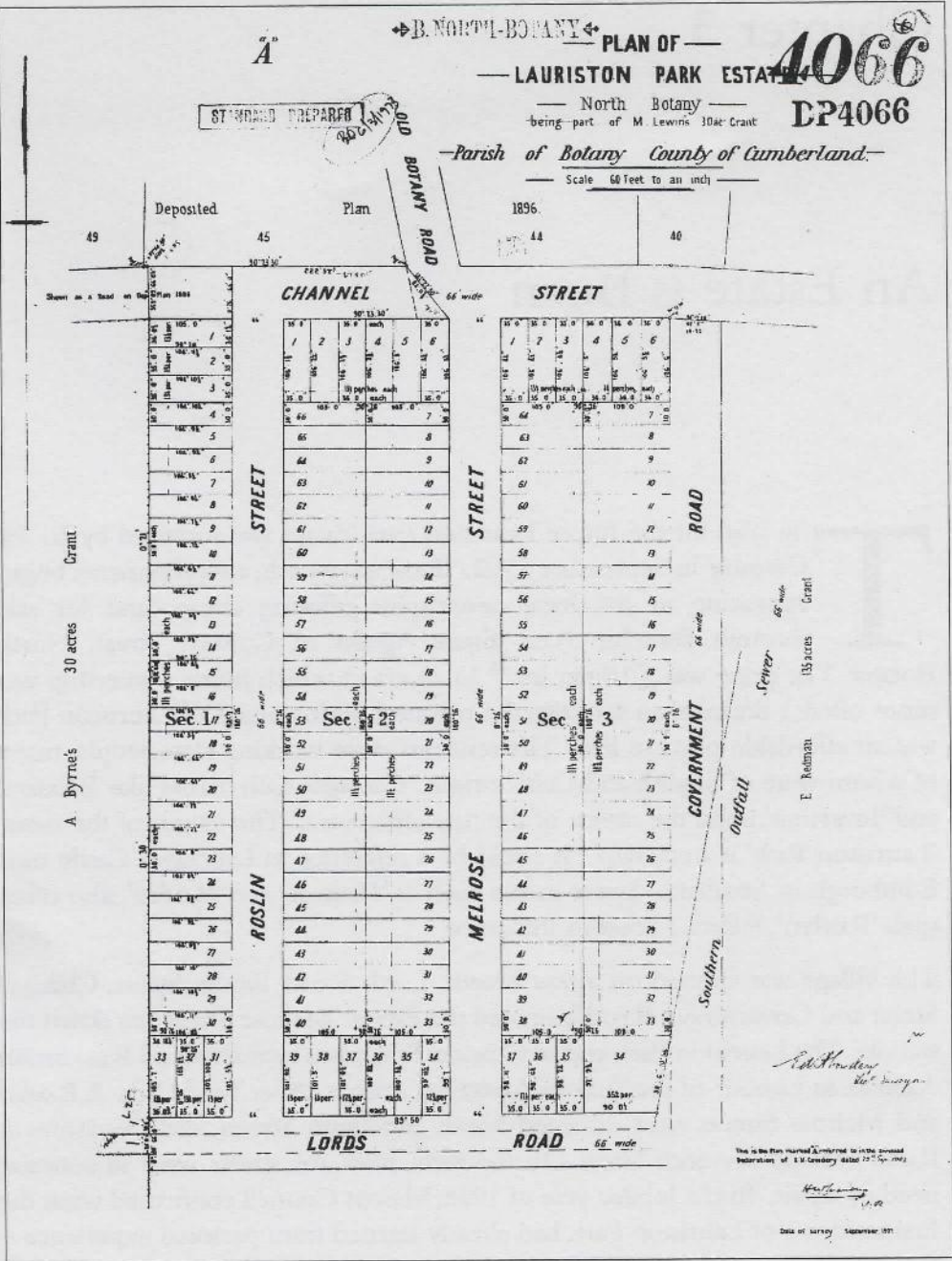
The village was centred on a few streets. Lords Road, Roslin Street, Channel Street and Government Road bounded the Estate. Melrose Street ran down the middle. The Lauriston Park end of Channel Street was later renamed Ross Smith Avenue, in honour of the famous Australian aviator. After World War 2, Roslin and Melrose Streets were renamed Ninth and Tenth Streets, and Government Road became Eleventh Street. In the early years, the streets were in constant need of repair. In the Jubilee year of 1938, Mascot Council confirmed what the first residents of Lauriston Park had already learned from personal experience – that the roads in the Municipality were in very poor condition.

There existed practically not a hundred yards of properly made road. The roads were almost impassable, and low lying lands were flooded after a heavy shower of rain, owing to insufficient drainage.⁴⁴

In rainy weather, Lauriston Park youngsters, like all children, loved to take off their shoes and splash about in the mud puddles on their way to and from school. Naturally, they ignored their parents' pleas to walk around or jump over them. Annoyed adults continually complained to the Council about the poor state of the roads on the Estate.

Money was short, so progress was slow. By 1915, when electricity was still an expensive luxury, streets were not well lit.⁴⁵ Forty years later, it was still common practice in the Municipality to mount a 100 watt lamp on every second or third power pole,⁴⁶ so it is not surprising that, in these early years, the people

Subdivision plan of the
Lauriston Park Estate 1902.
Land Titles Office of
New South Wales



of Lauriston Park had modest expectations. Nor were the houses numbered or the streets signposted.⁴⁷ But only visitors were inconvenienced by this oversight. Many houses had individual names instead of numbers, and in any case, no-one in Lauriston Park needed any reminder of where their neighbours lived.

Houses were typical of those in other parts of the Municipality, and in similar working class suburbs all over Sydney. Most were simply constructed weather-board cottages. In later decades, fibro was used as a convenient and affordable exterior covering. A few houses were more substantial and consisted of two levels. Each house had its own yard and there was plenty of open space where children could play. In summer, on weekends, and after work, people relaxed and chatted with their friends over a cup of tea on the cool verandahs. Two or three bedrooms were common, with a small kitchen, and an outdoor laundry and toilet.

*The Babbington family home
c.1914. Mabel Harris*

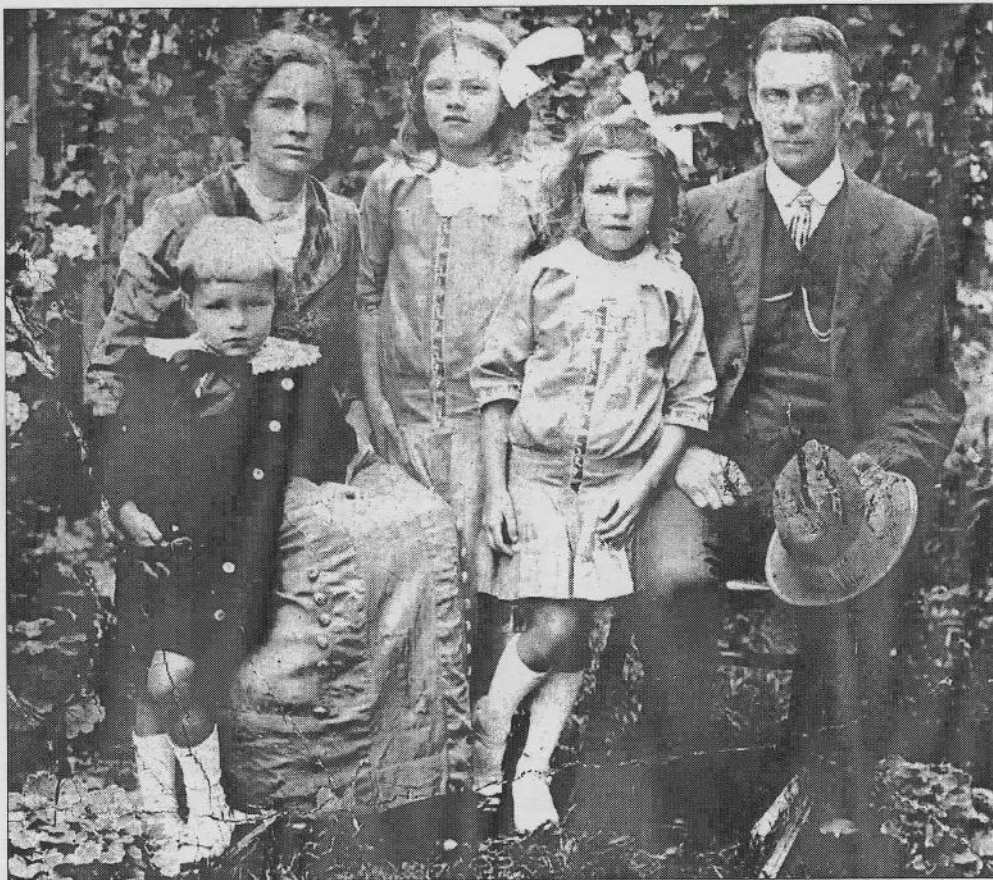


Household appliances were few in the early days, so it took time and effort to stay well fed and groomed. Clothes, and even the family Christmas pudding, were boiled in a wood fuel copper. Cooking was done on a fuel stove, which also served to heat the flat iron, a familiar appliance before electricity became a commonplace source of power. Those who could afford it had an icebox to



*The Babbington family
c.1914. Mabel Harris*

The Goold family c.1914.
John Goold



keep food cold. Others used meat safes. Personal luxuries were few in the days before the First World War.

With few affordable labour saving devices available to the people of Lauriston Park, housework was a full time job. Women stayed at home and looked after the children, while the men spent long hours at work. After World War 1, a kindergarten was set up in a corner of the local hall, giving the women some relief from child rearing. Large families were common, so the kindergarten was very popular. Whenever the authorities suggested that the service was too costly and should be closed down, there were loud protests from the locals. The kindergarten survived for many years.

For working class people, expensive cars were out of the question, so most people in Lauriston Park stayed at home after work and on the weekends. Houses were built close together, so everyone knew everyone else, what they were doing and why. Nobody minded the lack of privacy. A community spirit grew up. Neighbours helped each other, the women caring for sick friends and the men sharing tools and helping out when special building projects were under way. Family chores were often shared and children stayed with a neighbour if their parents were away from home for any length of time.

Everyone was used to walking. Most were young and healthy, and thought nothing of walking a mile or so to school or work. But there were times when motorised transport and up to date equipment could have been very useful. In 1917, a house in Lauriston Park went up in flames after fire fighters discovered that the local alarm did not work.⁴⁸ But even if the warning had been given immediately, the whole operation would have been slow. The village relied on

horse drawn fire fighting equipment and help from volunteer teams based at Mascot. Even with the most thorough preparation, they were not always on site and ready to answer a call at a moment's notice.

Facilities at Lauriston Park were basic. Like most of Sydney at the time, the village was unsewered. There were no schools, churches, or regular transport services. Not until 1924 was Mascot Public School built in King Street. The local Council was always hard pressed for funds and was hardly in a position to spend large sums of money on the relatively few families who had settled in Lauriston Park. It was not without reason that land there was cheap.

Food was bought 'up the road' at Mascot, and clothes at the more distant Redfern shopping centre. Later, a few corner shops sprang up to cater for local needs. Davey Webster's was in Melrose Street, and Jack Hendrick owned a shop in Ross Smith Avenue. Mrs Hawke's grocery store took up the front section of her house in nearby Roslin Street. The local market gardens supplied fruit and vegetables, while those who did not own a cow could buy milk from Taylor's Dairy in Lords Road.

Many of the local residents worked on the land or in the factories surrounding the settlement. Some were market gardeners, others dairy farmers. After 1914, the Wimbles Inks Factory was a possible option for those looking for work. Later, in the 1920s, the stone mason's yard in Ross Smith Avenue, owned by Anselm Odling, employed more locals. The yard produced ornamental work, fashioned from marble and granite and was later known as Mascot Granite Works. Tanneries and wool scouring factories kept many others in work, while those who were willing to walk, or who had access to transport, could work in the service industries at Mascot.

*An aerial view of the
Wimbles Inks factory and
New South Wales Gun Club
[n.d.]. Linda Buchanan*



Local employment came at a cost. Problems created by the need to dispose of industrial waste, and the related question of what to do about sewage and pollution, were of particular importance to a community increasingly worried about their health. There was nothing new in their concern. Noxious trades industries had already impacted on the area by the time Lauriston Park was officially established. And situated just across the river from the village, connected to the Southern Outfall Sewer, was the Botany Sewage Farm. It had been a feature of the landscape since 1886. Even then, there was great debate about how to get rid of the sewage without polluting the area. The government's Deputy Medical Adviser, Dr J. Ashburton Thompson, was well aware of the unhealthy conditions near where Lauriston Park was later established. Referring to the haphazard way in which sewage was dumped on vacant land he stated:

The nightsoil carts have been in the habit of turning off Lords Road into the bushes which cover the flat, and have there cast their contents on the surface. A very large quantity has been thus thrown down, and the surface covered with the soil is very considerable ... There is a considerable number of people near enough to be affected by it and they complain seriously of it. ⁴⁹

Lauriston Park was later nicknamed 'Fly Flat', and even less flatteringly, 'Shitter's Ditch'.

The battle to have the sewer connected to Lauriston Park was a long one. As early as 1906, and again in 1909, Botany and North Botany Councils argued that a sewerage scheme for the two Municipalities be considered. They wanted to be connected to the Southern Outfall Sewer, which passed under Lords Road at the intersection with Government Road, on its way to the Botany Sewage Farm. No-one wanted to wait for the construction of the main Southern and Western Ocean Outfall Sewer which would carry the waste to an outlet at Long Bay.⁵⁰

To anyone unfamiliar with the local area, such a task might have seemed simple. But the Council knew otherwise. Lauriston Park, like much of the rest of



*Workers at
Anselm Odling & Sons
(marble merchants) in
Ross Smith Avenue
[n.d.]. Mavis West*



*Sewage Farm at Cooks River
c.1916. Sydney Water*

the Municipality, was in a low lying area, whereas the main sewer line was generally at or above ground level. Crests in the former Lords Road, and in present day Baxter Road, Robey Street, High Street and O'Riordan Street show how the roads were built up to accommodate the pipeline. Sewage from Lauriston Park and areas like it would have to be pumped up to the main line – an expensive proposition at the time for a small and relatively poor Municipality like North Botany.⁵¹

Despite the costs involved, locals kept up the pressure. Most residents remembered the outbreak of plague in 1900 and the more recent typhoid epidemics which spread fear across the whole of Sydney. Doctors and residents again voiced their concern when the issue resurfaced in 1910. Giving evidence at a Parliamentary inquiry, Dr Weekes Young described the current practice of sewage collection in North Botany:

The pan system at North Botany is a most obsolete affair. They go round with one cart, tins are emptied in and the pan is put back, and then they take the stuff out to Coward Street, over the sand hills and deposit it in close proximity to two dairies. There is no interchangeable pan system there like they have in Botany.⁵²

Still nothing was decided and Lauriston Park remained unsewered.

Life at Lauriston Park had its lighter side. The New South Wales Gun Club in Lords Road had been organising shooting competitions since at least the 1880s. Membership fees and the cost of equipment and ammunition were considerable, so most locals were spectators rather than participants in this sport. But

they did visit the nearby Ascot Racecourse, where pony races were held regularly. Lords Road led to Ascot Avenue, which ran down to the Cooks River. The River dominated the landscape and became the focus of many local leisure activities, such as fishing, swimming and boating.

Apart from the continuing debate over issues of health and the provision of public amenities, life continued with the rhythmic regularity common to all small communities until, in 1914, the outbreak of World War 1 abruptly broke the cycle of everyday life in Lauriston Park. Ten young men from the village were killed in the war. Each death was an intensely personal loss for everyone in the village, many of whom had grown up together like an extended family. The names of the dead were etched on a simple marble tablet, reminding the locals of how cruelly their lives had been changed by events beyond their control.

When 'the war to end all wars' was finally over, the Lauriston Park residents, like people all over the country, wanted to put the sadness behind them so they could begin to rebuild their lives. The shared hardships of the war drew the community closer together. Now they looked forward to peace and prosperity.

Chapter 4

Reward for Effort

The desire for a better life motivated many Lauriston Park residents during the interwar period. Their efforts were set against the backdrop of rapid change. Anticipating the rewards future progress would bring, they pushed for improvements in basic services, and the provision of better public amenities. Some problems, like the poor condition of the roads and the lack of public transport in the area, were almost exclusively the subject of local interest. Other concerns, such as the delay in the connection of sewerage to the Estate and the pollution of Cooks River and Botany Bay, also affected the wider community and attracted support from neighbouring communities.

In the 1920s, Lauriston Park residents joined with those in other nearby municipalities to improve the condition of the Cooks River. The river was a source of entertainment for the whole community. Adults and children spent their leisure time in, on, or near the river, swimming, boating, and picnicking on its banks. But the waters also separated the communities on either side. Everyone wanted a bridge to connect the neighbouring Municipalities of Mascot, Rockdale, Kogarah, Marrickville and Canterbury. In 1922 David Alexander, a Lauriston Park resident and an alderman on Mascot Council, urged 'that some action be taken in reference to the road over Cooks River to Kogarah.' The state government replied that 'the question of the bridge was being considered'.⁵³

It was 'considered' for many years, but to the frustration of



Alderman David Alexander became the champion of the Lauriston Park residents.
Botany Bay City Council Archive

local residents and councils, nothing was done. At first, a punt was suggested as a cheap alternative to the construction of a permanent bridge, but the local Mayors had other ideas. In early 1923 they arranged a symbolic trip to the banks of the river to publicise their cause:

Members of the respective councils ... drove along the road in the course of construction from Rockdale to Cook's River opposite Puckeridge's Wharf for the purpose of arousing enthusiasm in favour of [the] construction of a bridge instead of a punt as proposed.⁵⁴

Government officials remained silent on the issue, evidently unimpressed by this show of local government solidarity.

While everyone waited for a decision on the bridge, the river became more polluted. Together with residents of neighbouring municipalities which also fronted onto the banks of the Cooks River, concerned Lauriston Park residents continually protested about the accumulating debris and sewage blocking the course of the once free flowing river. Through the Cook's River Improvement League, formed in 1924, locals drew attention to the problem. The honorary organiser of the League, Finlay McInnes, voiced the fears of all those living near the river when he wrote to the Minister for Health in 1924 complaining of sewage overflowing into the water:

By the direction of the last monthly meeting of the Cook's River Improvement League, I went as a special messenger to Mr T.R. Ball, Minister for Public Works ... to point out the filthy condition of the water where children swim in hundreds. The Minister for Works was sympathetic, but nothing has been done. This appeal is made to you, sir, as a last attempt to get your Government to stop the Water and Sewerage Board from this disgusting practice which is such a grave danger to public health ... It is your Government's duty to relieve the danger at once, failing which some other action must be taken to bring immediate relief from this dangerous, filthy, and disgusting state of affairs.⁵⁵

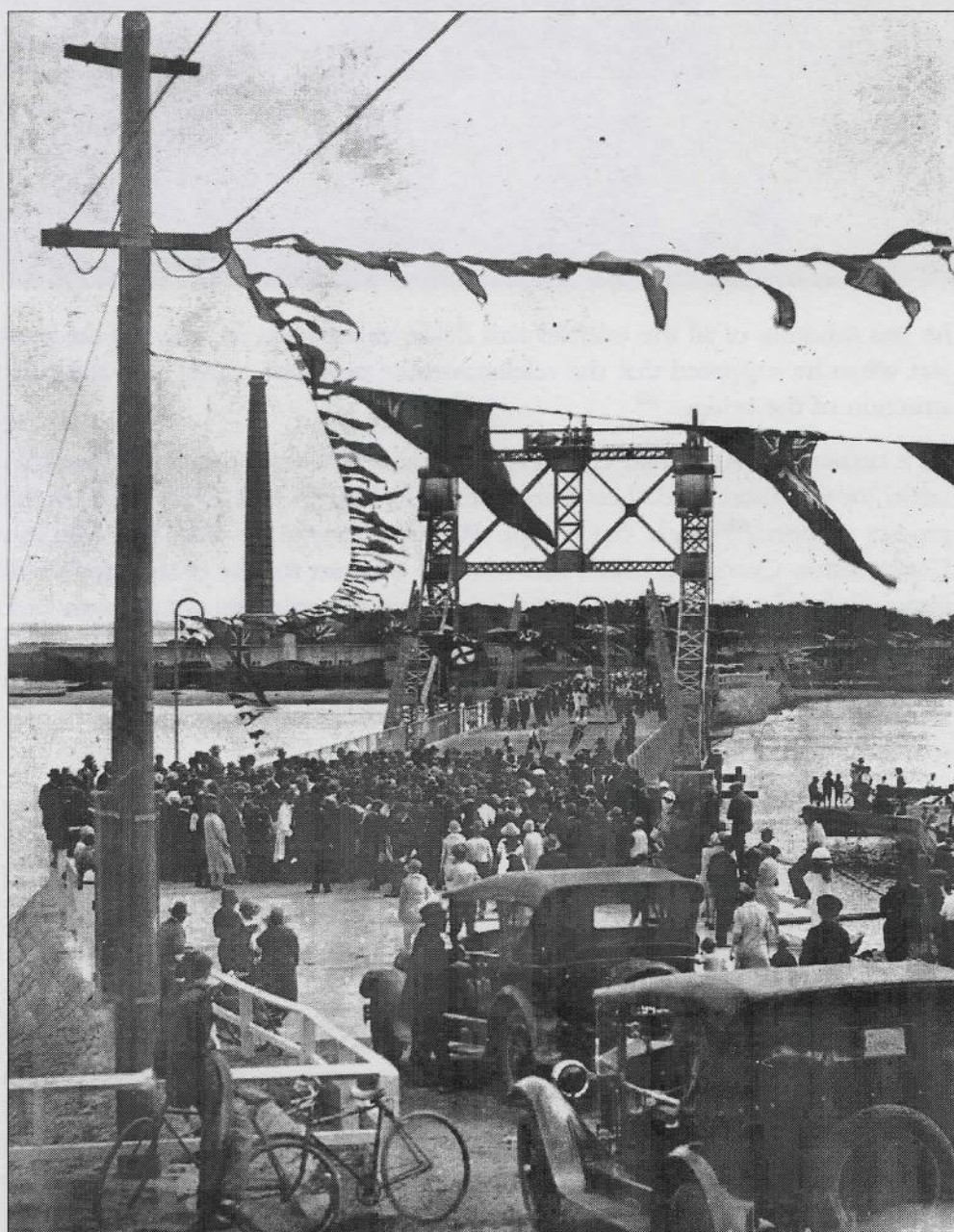
Their complaints went unnoticed and nothing was done.

So, by 1924, local government authorities, backed by residents, were fighting a battle for the Cooks River on two fronts. Once again taking up the question of the construction of a bridge, the Municipalities of Canterbury and Marrickville decided to wait no longer. After more than a year of government procrastination, they decided to band together to fund the building of a bridge further up the river from Mascot, at Wardell Road, Dulwich Hill. With the help of a small grant of £1,000 from the government, work began in September 1924,⁵⁶ and was completed the following year.⁵⁷ At the ceremony held to mark the driving of the first pile for the new bridge, the Minister for Local Government praised the efforts of the local community, pointing out that the government was eager 'to encourage self-help on the part of municipalities'.⁵⁸ The statement was not a good omen for the citizens of Lauriston Park, who had virtually no chance of raising the considerable sum of money needed to build a bridge near Puck's Wharf.

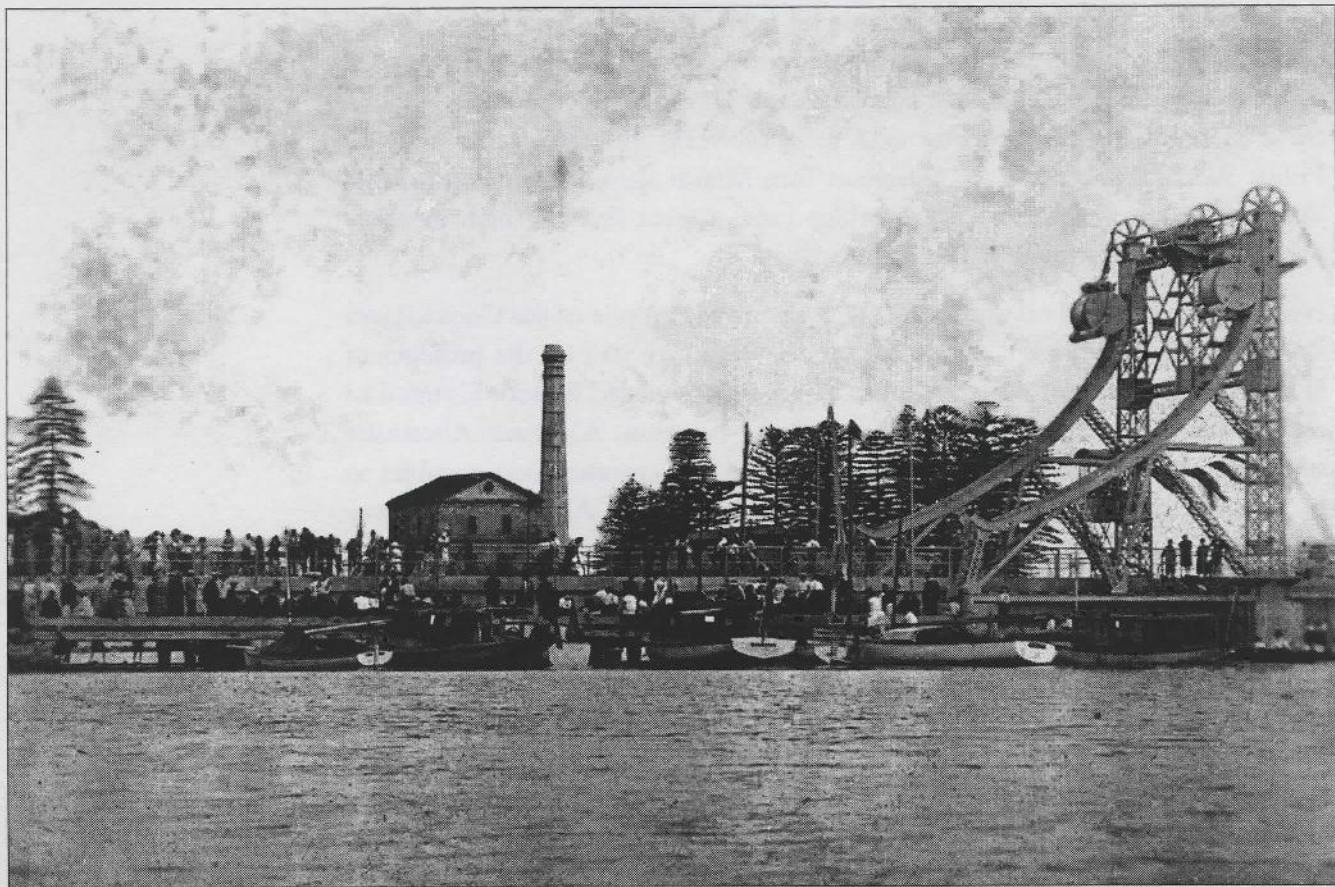
Delays continued at the Mascot end of Cooks River, with inevitable clashes between the government and Mascot Council. The Public Works Department

estimated that the cost of the erection of a bridge at Lauriston Park would exceed £20,000, and referred the matter to the Public Works Committee.⁵⁹ Outraged, Mascot Council's Alderman Frank Chipman accused the government of 'preparing big estimates so as to delay works in referring them to the Public Works Committee'.⁶⁰ Alderman Tom Mutch agreed, commenting that 'the departmental estimate for the bridge [was] a great deal too high in comparison with the estimate ... he had obtained.'⁶¹

Negotiations dragged on until early 1926 when the first pile of the Cooks River Bridge was finally driven. David Alexander was so excited by the prospect of at last having a bridge over the Cooks River that he urged Mascot Council to arrange a party at Coronation Hall to mark the occasion. Alderman Alexander suggested that £20 be set aside for the purchase of a commemorative tablet to be fixed to the pile. £30 was allocated for entertainment. Alderman Galloway was not so sure about the wisdom of celebrating the event so soon. No doubt



*Crowds assemble
for the opening of the
Cooks River Bridge in 1927
Nell Walters*



*Opening of the
Cooks River Bridge
in 1927.
Nell Walters*

he was thinking of all the troubles and delays that had so far plagued the project when he suggested that the celebrations be postponed until after the construction of the bridge.⁶²

As it turned out, Alderman Galloway's scepticism was well founded. Council's initial joy was short lived. Less than six months later, in June 1926, work on the project stopped.⁶³ Both the Public Works Department and the McLean Construction Company, which had won the contract for the bridge, denied all responsibility for the delay. Mascot Council and the residents of Lauriston Park were caught in the middle. They were given no explanation as to why work was not continuing.⁶⁴ It was all put down to 'unforeseen delays' and the Council was merely told that the Minister for Works 'promised to use every effort to hasten on completion of the bridge.'⁶⁵

To the relief of all concerned the bridge was finally opened on 17 December 1927.⁶⁶ There were great celebrations to mark the linking of the communities living on both sides of the river. It was Saturday, so people took advantage of the holiday, coming from miles around in cars, on bicycles and on foot. They crowded onto the bridge beneath the fluttering streamers and flags to get a closer look at the opening ceremony. Lauriston Park residents felt they had particular cause to celebrate. Their tiny village was now becoming less isolated.

The success of this venture left the locals free to press on with their efforts to clean up the Cooks River. Various alternatives were explored, but once again nothing was decided. The sensitive question of who was to pay for the cost of any work carried out proved to be a stumbling block. In 1929 the Cook's River Improvement League was again involved in negotiations with the government

over a proposal that the river be transformed into a navigable channel eventually extending from Botany Bay to Homebush Bay. The Honorary Secretary of the League, H. W. Sawkins, was adamant that the government should finance the scheme:

The league held to its opinion that the Government should finance not only the Crown Lands reclamation, but the whole of the section from the Tempe Dam to the Burwood Road ... [The scheme] will permit of the removal of obstructions to the river thereby giving cleaner water ... It will remove the disagreeable unhealthy conditions that exist along the river, and generally improve the appearance of the district affected.⁶⁷

Although Mascot Municipality was not directly involved in the discussions, residents were adversely affected by the delay in coming to a decision about how to handle the water pollution problem. While debate continued, local children happily swam in the Cooks River. Yet Henry Ferrett, Canterbury's Health Inspector, declared that he 'would not allow [his] dog ... to swim in it because of its pollution.'⁶⁸ The project was never pursued past the initial proposal stages, leaving those living on the banks of the Cooks River frustrated and annoyed by the apparent lack of official concern over pollution, but still determined to get the job done.

Linked with the question of the pollution of both the Cooks River and Botany Bay was the recurring problem of the collection and disposal of sewage in the area. The issue which had aroused such passion in the first few years of Lauriston Park's history was raised again in 1930. With the effects of the Depression making themselves felt in Lauriston Park, Alderman David Alexander saw a way of tackling two matters of great concern to the community at the same time. He asked that work begin on the sewerage of the area, urging 'that men from the surrounding district be given the work ... and not men from other districts, as had been the case on numerous other occasions.'⁶⁹

The suggestion was timely. Soon after, in 1931, when the Water Board needed to carry out lengthy repairs to the main Western Outfall Sewer at Long Bay, they proposed that the sewage be diverted into Cooks River or Botany Bay while the work was in progress. Not surprisingly, the locals were steadfastly opposed to the idea. A meeting was held at the Botany Town Hall, where the protest was led by both the Mayor of Botany, Alderman F. J. Kerr and the Mayor of Mascot, Alderman David Alexander. Alderman Kerr outlined the probable effects of dumping more sewage into the Cooks River:

It would mean the destruction of oyster farms worth £270,000 and the negation of 30 years of work upon them. High tides would carry sewage high on the foreshores of the bay and of Cook's River, and as the tide receded this material would be left rotting in the sun, a dangerous breeding ground for the germs of disease.⁷⁰

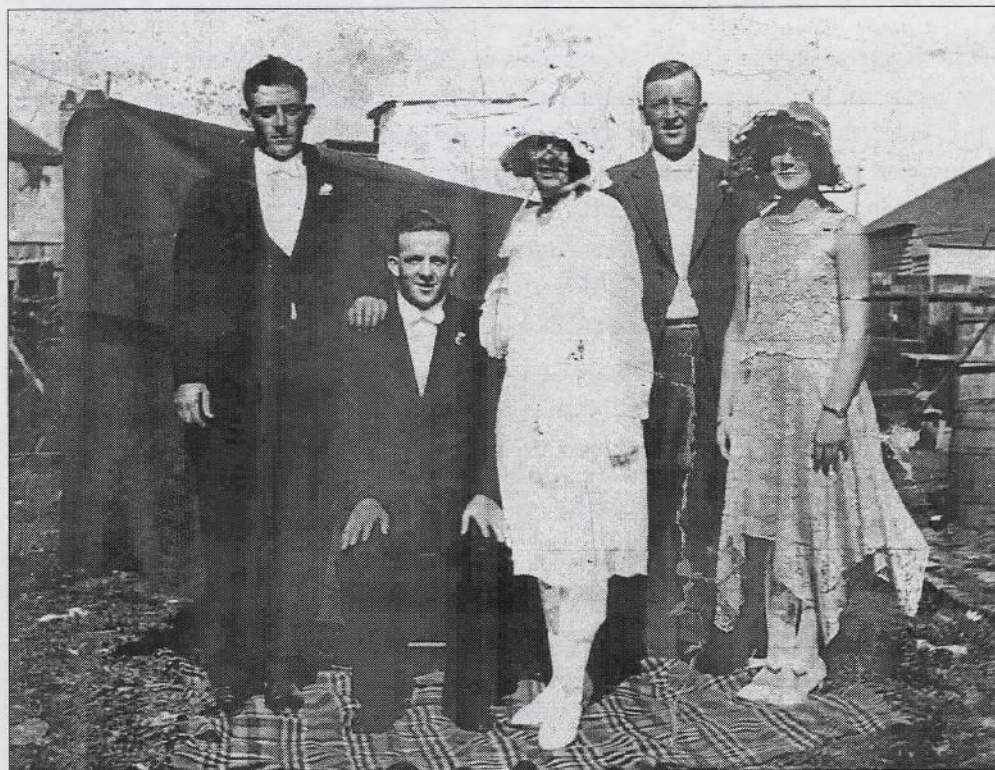
The problem persisted. A month later, the vexing question of sewage and how to deal with it again became the subject of heated debate. The nearby airport was developing rapidly, and a modern sewerage system was needed. Here was Mascot Council's chance to have Lauriston Park connected at the same time. But excitement turned to anger when, in May 1931, word leaked out that the

Defence Department had begun connecting the airport to the main sewer line without informing either the Water Board or the local residents. Mascot Council aldermen were furious, realising that they could not now afford to go ahead with the scheme independently of the government. Since the land around Lauriston Park was so cheap, the Council felt that, with so many ratepayers unemployed or struggling on low wages, they could not expect other residents of the Municipality to subsidise the sewerage of the Estate. Alderman Evans summed up the position of the Council when he commented in exasperation that 'it was throwing money into the air to do a small scheme like this'.⁷¹ So Lauriston Park missed its chance to be sewerage. The people had to wait another five years before the sewer was finally connected in 1936.

The Depression of the 1930s brought with it considerable hardship for some Lauriston Park residents. But it did not dampen their spirit or induce them to envy others. Rather than complain about their lot, the locals 'put up with it and got on with life'.⁷² A woman who lived behind the school in King Street, Mascot, served bowls of soup to local children. Linda Buchanan was born in Lauriston Park, and spent her childhood there during the Depression. She remembers children taking advantage of this offer:

We used to walk to school ... and go through a hole in the fence into her place. She used to give us cups of soup and bread. I don't know who paid for it, but ... anybody could go down. It didn't matter whether your father was on the dole or not.⁷³

Ladies from the Lauriston Park Relief Committee found equally practical ways of lending a helping hand to those in need. They visited a group of 'gipsies' camped on the banks of the Cooks River, offering them accommodation in the Lauriston Park Hall, and leaving money and blankets when they refused to move from their makeshift homes.⁷⁴



*Wedding photos in the
backyard at Lauriston Park.*

Rita Adams/Vera Cragg

During this period the concerns of the people were often voiced by members of the Lauriston Park Branch of the Australian Labor Party. They lived locally and understood the problems of everyday life in Lauriston Park. They were typically working class people, such as labourers, timber workers, carters, fellmongers, carpenters and stonemasons. Some women also joined up, giving their occupation as 'domestic duties'.⁷⁵ Local loyalty to the Labor cause impressed the party faithful. A survey of the Botany electorate in 1930 had already revealed Lauriston Park to be 'a Labor stronghold ... [which] should convince all who were doubtful'.⁷⁶ At the time, the local member, Bob Heffron, was particularly pleased, pointing out that 'the result of the canvass was the best that had been received from any part of the Botany Electorate'.⁷⁷

David Alexander, Lauriston Park's most powerful political ally, was at the forefront of the push for change in the village. Eventually serving as Mayor from 1931 till 1933, he continued to exert influence where it was most useful. Constant demands for improved services and facilities in the village, and repeated requests that something be done about the potholes in the roads, were brought forward at Council meetings. Hardly a month went by when Alexander did not draw the attention of his colleagues to problems on the Lauriston Park Estate. For the Council, there could be no easy solution. Lauriston Park was a thinly populated part of a small and poorly funded Municipality. The question of how to allocate limited resources was a sensitive political issue, especially during the Depression when everyone was short of funds.

The distance between Lauriston Park and the nearest commercial centre, Mascot, was not an insurmountable problem for healthy people willing to walk or cycle a mile or two. But older, less fit residents often felt isolated. Even the most energetic wanted to have the option of a faster and more comfortable ride, especially in wet weather. Most thought the time had come for an upgrade in the transport services. Trams to Ascot Racecourse ran only on race days and were never intended to service the people of Lauriston Park. Everyone wanted a regular local bus service. There were many attempts to set up private bus services but they invariably failed because there were simply not enough passengers to recoup expenses.

By 1933, in the midst of the Depression, resentment came to a head over the lack of public transport services to Lauriston Park. After several private operators protested that they could not afford to continue to run bus services to Lauriston Park, Mascot Council applied to the Transport Board to run a bus service from Ross Smith Avenue to Dacey Avenue and from there to Central Station. David Alexander strongly supported the move, telling the Council:

When the late Government scrapped the buses, members of the present Government expressed concern for those unfortunates who lost their jobs, and for those ratepayers who were seriously inconvenienced ... but those men are still unemployed, and our residents are still walking through miles of mud and slush.

I can quote cases of people who have never left their homes since the buses were taken off the road, and who have never seen the City of Sydney since the end of 1931.⁷⁸

From the reply of the Transport Board, it seemed clear that bus services to Lauriston Park were considered to be uneconomic, and were to be made

available only for limited periods and on special occasions. The Board was unwilling to support a proposal which it felt would compete with the government run Crown Street tram service. A representative outlined the situation at a later meeting of Mascot Council:

[The Board is] entirely opposed to the granting of a license [sic] to operate a bus service between Mascot and the Railway as it [is] not good business to establish a business to compete with one already in existence.

In any case ... the needs of our local travelling public [are] adequately catered for at present. [The Board] would, however, consider the advisability of running a fleet of buses to the showgrounds on Saturday afternoons and during the R.A.S. show.⁷⁹

It is unlikely that the residents of Lauriston Park would have sympathised with this view. The main government bus and tram routes were still a long way from Lauriston Park.

Fifteen years later, in 1948, the situation was not much better. Complaints about the lack of transport to the nearby airport were always greeted with the same reply – ‘the matter will receive consideration’⁸⁰ A *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter commented:

Kingsford Smith Airport remains a forgotten transport area ... The nearest public transport service is the tramline, a mile and a quarter from the airport. Night workers, many of them women, have to trudge this road after signing off duty.

People who wish to see friends off or welcome them when they arrive in Sydney by plane, cannot do so unless they have their own cars or hire them at considerable expense.⁸¹

By this time, the streets around Lauriston Park were becoming busier. Lorries laboured past, transporting their loads to local industrial sites. As the airport expanded, planes took off and landed more often, and cars ferried travellers to and from the terminals. On race days, trams rattled along Lords Road, depositing eager punters at the gates of the Ascot Racecourse. Residents began to notice the difference, as the pace quickened and noise, dust and traffic increased. The slow moving, relaxed, country lifestyle of the pre-war years was gone forever.

The fight for better public transport services was never entirely successful. By the time adequate services were introduced to cater for the growing airport, the residents of Lauriston Park were under pressure to move elsewhere. Many of those who pushed for changes in the 1930s were no longer there to benefit from improvements made in later years.

The problem of the pollution of the Cooks River was ‘solved’ in a way which was never envisaged by the campaigners of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1948 work began on the diversion of the river to make way for the extension of Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport.⁸² The problem of pollution was taken away, along with the river itself. The mouth of the Cooks River was relocated further to the west of the Lauriston Park area.

In spite of the enthusiasm of the Lauriston Park residents, it was inevitable that many facilities in the village would remain basic. From the residents’ point of

view, their village was situated just far enough away from the business centre of Mascot for them to regard it as a separate entity – a feeling of uniqueness which was reinforced by the fact that the area was known locally by its own distinct name of Lauriston Park. But the Council always thought of the area as an integral part of Mascot, and never looked upon the tiny settlement as a separate suburb. Understandably, they did not consider it practical or economically feasible to extend or duplicate expensive services for the benefit of this comparatively small community. After all, most outsiders who visited the nearby airport, barely noticed the few streets on its outskirts, and few if any of them had ever heard of the name Lauriston Park.

Many locals were no doubt disappointed about the failure of some of their campaigns for change. But given the size of the village, and the lack of Council funds during two wars and an intervening depression, their efforts were remarkably successful.



*Swimming was a popular pastime for younger Lauriston Park residents.
Rita Adams/Vera Cragg*

Chapter 5

The Pursuit of Pleasure

The people of Lauriston Park could not afford lavish entertainments, so the pleasures they enjoyed had to be inexpensive. Many of them had grown up during the Depression of the 1890s, and were frugal by nature. Even if they had had the money to spend, they would not have 'wasted' meagre earnings on leisure pursuits in the sense the term is now understood. Extra income was spent on food, clothes, and the necessities of life. Parents passed on this sense of thrift to their children, so that forms of entertainment changed little, either for adults or children till the end of World War 2.

The family home was the centre of entertainment. Dominoes, draughts and cards were popular. In the twenties, those who could afford it had a crystal set. Families who owned a pianola or piano invited their friends over for a sing-along. When radio became popular, they sat together listening to serials, quiz shows and radio plays. Eating out was not a common activity. Restaurants were not widespread as they are today. When working class people dined out, they

*The Lauriston Park domino
champions.*

Rita Adams/Vera Cragg





*Swimming at Puck's Wharf
in the 1920s.*

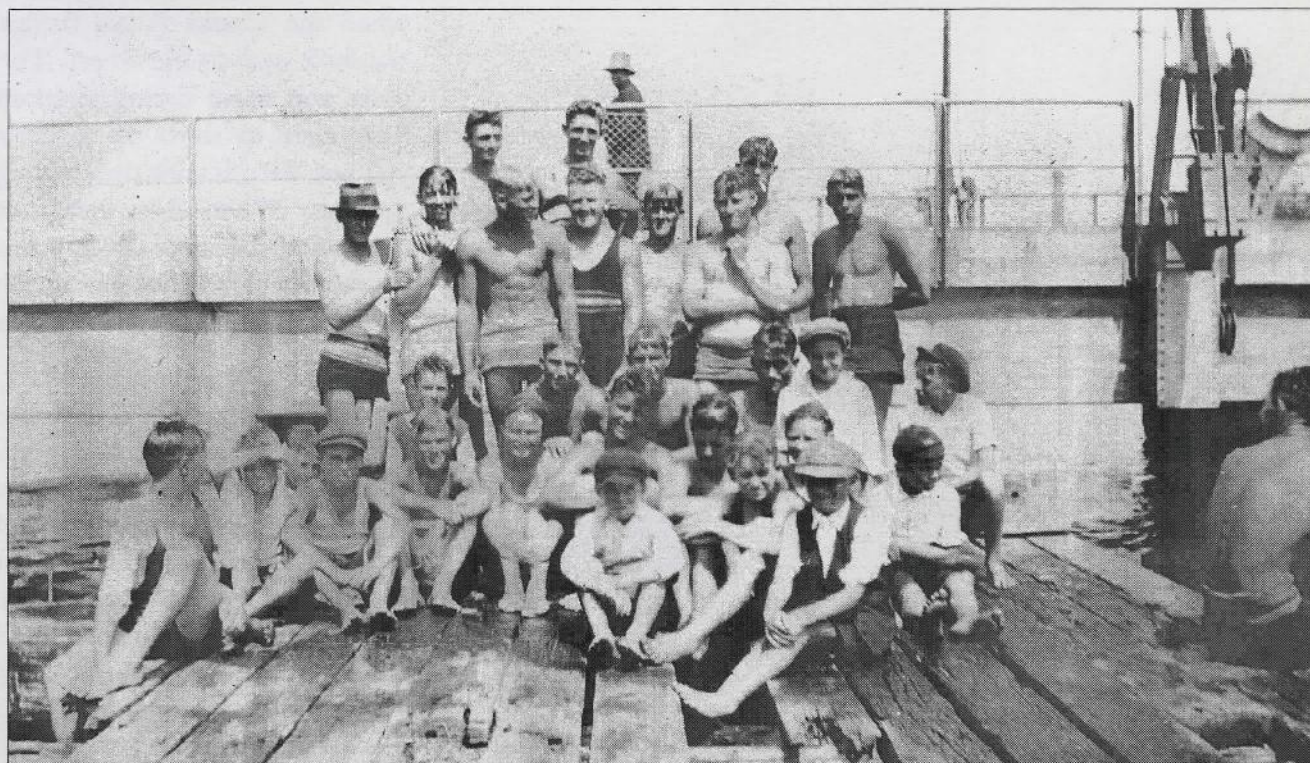
Nell Walters

usually went to a cafe and ordered a meal of fish and chips and salad, or a pie, or steak with vegetables. More often, they held parties in a local resident's back-yard. Many a wedding photo was taken against the backdrop of a leafy shrub planted in front of the garden shed.

Most activities were enjoyed in the company of friends, most of whom lived close by. In this respect adults and children differed little. Adults attended dances, played football (both Rugby League and Australian Rules), boated and fished on the river, organised picnics and went to the pictures at the Ascot Theatre in Mascot. The arrival of a famed aviator at the airport always created much interest and excitement. Children played games together, held tea parties, swam in the Cooks River (in spite of the pollution), made kites, spears and bows and arrows, and raced billy-carts.

*Time out for a photo
on Puck's Wharf*

Linda Buchanan



*Fancy dress party in the
backyard at Lauriston Park.*

Kath Trim



Since the village was so close to the banks of the Cooks River and Botany Bay, it was only natural that the children spent a great deal of time either in or on the water. Most former residents remember 'Puck's Wharf' as a favourite spot for swimmers, despite the sharks. Situated at the end of Ascot Avenue, the wharf was named after the Puckeridge family, well-known lime burners and fishermen who moored their boats there.

But the local children found more enjoyable uses for the wharf, dive-bombing their friends from it, and splashing and ducking each other in the water below.

Facilities were further improved when the Cooks River Bridge was built next to the wharf. The older and more daring children were keen to show off to their younger friends with their diving displays. When they were not swimming, the more adventurous children launched boats onto the river and explored its many twists and turns.

Children improvised. The more supple branches from trees were used to fashion bows and arrows. Kites made from newspaper and brown paper were a familiar sight in the skies over Lauriston Park. Boys made sling shots and aimed them at jam tins, street lights, and the local bird life. Taking the lead from their brothers, girls joined



*Mr & Mrs Williams.
Mr Williams was the caretaker
of the Wimbles Inks premises
in Lauriston Park.*

Linda Buchanan

in the fun. For variety, the children organised tea parties and picnics in the backyard. Fairy bread and iced arrowroot biscuits were washed down with weak cordial.

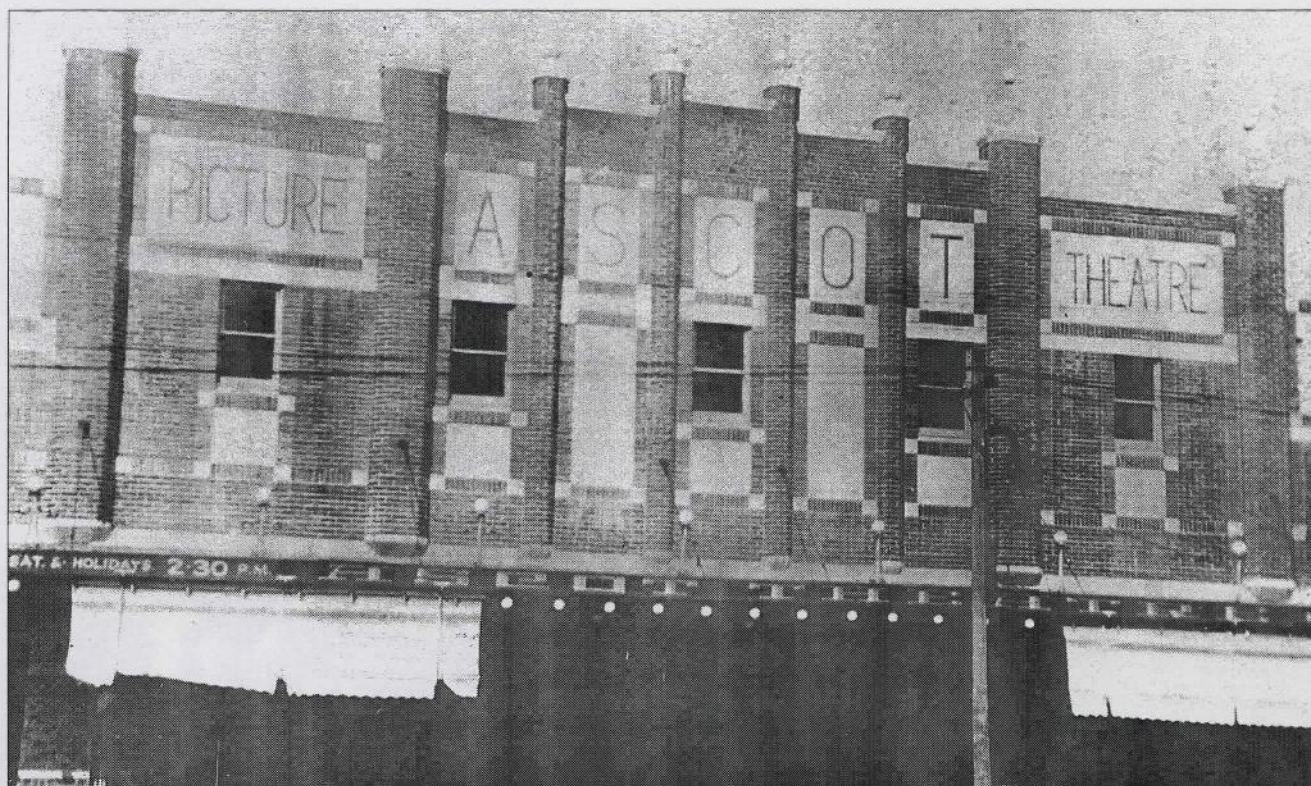
Then there were the everyday pranks, common to children everywhere. The youngsters of Lauriston Park were thrown together a great deal, and could be tempted to try something daring when boredom set in. One long-time Lauriston Park resident, Linda Buchanan, remembers 'pinching' fruit from Leicester's cart to make a fruit salad. The children's plans for a feast were interrupted when their father stepped in, alerted to the goings-on by a nervous sister. The perpetrators of the deed had plenty of time to think about their 'crime' and to practise an apology, before being 'marched out the next Friday to apologise.' The children's embarrassed father paid for all the stolen fruit.⁸³

While many housing blocks were small, Linda Buchanan's backyard was more like a paddock. Sometimes they shared their playing space with the neighbour's goats which wandered freely around the Estate. Like many Botany residents of the time, the family enjoyed a game of golf:

My brother-in-law used to play golf ... and he used to teach us.
We had three holes in the paddock ... If the balls went near
them, the goats ate them ... All the paint would be running down
their mouths.⁸⁴

Everyone looked forward to Saturday afternoon, when friends gathered together for a session at the pictures. Every week, serials were screened at the Ascot Picture Theatre, in Botany Road Mascot. Viewers were kept in suspense while they waited from week to week to see what would happen to the unfortunate heroine. The theatre, which stood on the site of the present day Waratah Arcade, was later destroyed in a fire. Sometimes the films were interrupted. If a charity parade passed along Botany Road, people would empty out of the theatre to

*Ascot Picture Theatre, now
Waratah Arcade Mascot.
Botany Bay City Council Archive*



*Fancy dress costumes
'The Duchess and Duke
of La Perouse'.
Rita Adams/Vera Cragg*



*The Lauriston Park
Football Team c.1924.
John Goold*





*The Lauriston Park
Football Team 1927,
winners of the Argus Cup.
John Gould*

watch, and then resume their seats for the rest of the show.

While there was plenty of opportunity for neighbours to get together to enjoy themselves, by 1914 there was still no central building where the people could meet to discuss matters of local concern or hold activities. They needed a community hall. Rather than wait for outside help, residents decided to do the job themselves. The project was organised by the Lauriston Park Progress Association. Land in Roslin Street was donated by the Alexander family, and the rest of the community supplied materials and helped with the building. Various events, including a sports day and baby show, were held to raise money. After a great deal of hard work, the hall was finally opened on 8 June 1918.⁸⁵

It was to be the meeting place for many of the social events organised by the residents of Lauriston Park in the years that followed. The local football club held dances in the hall. Wedding receptions and Christmas parties were celebrated there. On a more serious note, the hall was the venue for community meetings of the Progress Association and the local branch of the Australian Labor Party. A corner was also set aside for a kindergarten.

Fancy dress parades were also judged in the hall. Costumes crafted at home by patient and imaginative mothers were proudly worn by the children, who marched through the streets, banging loudly on drums to draw the attention of the adults. Then the participants lined up in the hall to be awarded prizes for the best costumes. Confronted with such personalities as 'The Duke and Duchess of La Perouse', swaggies and ballerinas, and inspired creations such as dolls in boxes, the judges often faced a difficult choice.

The Lauriston Park United Football Club played an important part in the lives of the whole community. Players and spectators alike turned up to the weekly matches wearing the maroon and sky blue team colours. In a working class



*The Lauriston Park
Football Club c.1939.
Ray Goold*

community like Lauriston Park, it seemed natural that Rugby League would be popular. It was energetic and full of excitement, providing a chance for people to meet and enjoy themselves without spending too much money.

Only the men and boys played. The women remained on the sidelines, cheering enthusiastically – sometimes too enthusiastically. In 1928, club officials felt obliged to reprimand ‘a woman barracker who has been a nuisance to the league by interfering with the players.’⁸⁶ Rugby League was a predominantly male affair. The strong code of mateship implicit in the game appealed to the men of Lauriston Park, who were already close friends off the football field. So the women would not have been surprised when, at its third meeting, the members of the club resolved that ‘the club have no ladies committee.’⁸⁷ A short time later, the men reconsidered their position, and decided that the ladies did, after all, have a role to play. They were asked to do the cooking for the social functions.⁸⁸ It was a community role they were happy to perform, and in the years that followed they helped make many informal get-togethers a success.

Most vocal and colourful of the club’s supporters was Jack Hendrick, a local shop-keeper who was always respectfully referred to as ‘Mr Hendrick.’ He was a well known identity in the Lauriston Park community. Children regularly visited his shop in Ross Smith Avenue to buy lollies and biscuits. A kindly but authoritarian figure, he kept his store spotlessly clean and had a reputation for refusing to serve any youngster who came in with dirty hands. Instead, after a few well chosen words of admonition, he sent the offenders home to have a wash.⁸⁹

Hendrick was a born organiser, and was actively involved in all local social and political committees, including the Lauriston Park Football Club. There were times when his determination to see tasks completed on his own terms brought



*Lauriston Park residents
enjoying a picnic in 1928.
Mavis Franklin*

him into conflict with other members of the club. He was not one to compromise, and eventually resigned from the club over a dispute about payment of a weekly levy of sixpence towards the injured players' fund. It was not the fund itself that annoyed Hendrick, but rather the notion that honorary members should be obliged to contribute to it. For Hendrick, it was a matter of principle, and he would not budge from his position. In the end the club 'accepted his resignation with regret'.⁹⁰ As in all organisations, politics played an important part, and Jack Hendrick liked to be in the thick of it.

The club did more than just improve the sporting skills of its members. Much of the social life in Lauriston Park revolved around it. From all accounts there was a good 'roll-up' at the club dances, held on Saturday nights. Everyone dressed up for the occasion. Women who could afford it wore long evening dresses. Others made do with less elegant clothes. Supper was traditional, with the women providing the food and the men supplying the drinks.

Old time dancing was always popular, but every so often a new dance would take hold. In the twenties it was the Charleston which captured everyone's imagination. Enthusiastic dancers spent hours learning the steps, before teaching them to everyone else. This was a cheap way of keeping up with the latest trends, as few locals could afford to take private dancing lessons. The Glover family gave impromptu demonstrations of the latest steps on most Saturday nights, with other dancers throwing in some money to show their appreciation. The large family was finding it hard to make ends meet and everyone wanted to help.⁹¹



*Lauriston Park A Grade
Australian Rules Team 1930.
Wyn Whymys*

The annual club picnic was a grand occasion, with the most popular venue being Fairyland at nearby Sandringham.⁹² While the adults chatted in the hall, the children swam, played 'chasings', and took turns on the swings. Then came the highlight of the day. Everyone's attention turned to the races. The children scrambled over the line in the traditional egg and spoon race. For the men, there was the serious matter of the Club Championship, contested over 110 yards and attracting the prestigious prize of club medal. All the old standards were run, including the thread the needle race and the married women's race. Small prizes were given to all the winners. In 1927 a prize of 10/6 was offered to the winners of the men's races. The ladies were not so lucky. Their prize was a tin of biscuits, supplied by Hendrick's shop.⁹³ The contents often did not survive the day. Hungry children consumed the biscuits, leaving the prize winner with only the honour of her victory. Those with enough energy left in the afternoon had the chance to test their strength in the tug o' war.

Although the football club held the limelight, Lauriston Park was represented in other sporting activities. Australian Rules and cricket teams also competed under the village banner. From 1925, the cricketers used the wickets in Ross Smith Park, on Ross Smith Avenue, commonly known to the locals as 'Lauriston Park'. Eager cricketers also kept an eye out for new playing fields. Some of their more ingenious suggestions were not appreciated by the authorities. In 1926, the Defence Department notified the Council 'that they could not grant permission for cricket pitches on the Aerodrome as it was required for Aviation purposes.'⁹⁴

The cricket matches played in Ross Smith Park did not always amuse Jack Hendrick, the honorary caretaker of the park. He liked order and discipline in his life, and sometimes disapproved of the 'rowdy' behaviour of the young



*John Goold's shop in
Ross Smith Avenue c.1949.
The shop was previously
owned by Jack Hendrick.
John Goold*

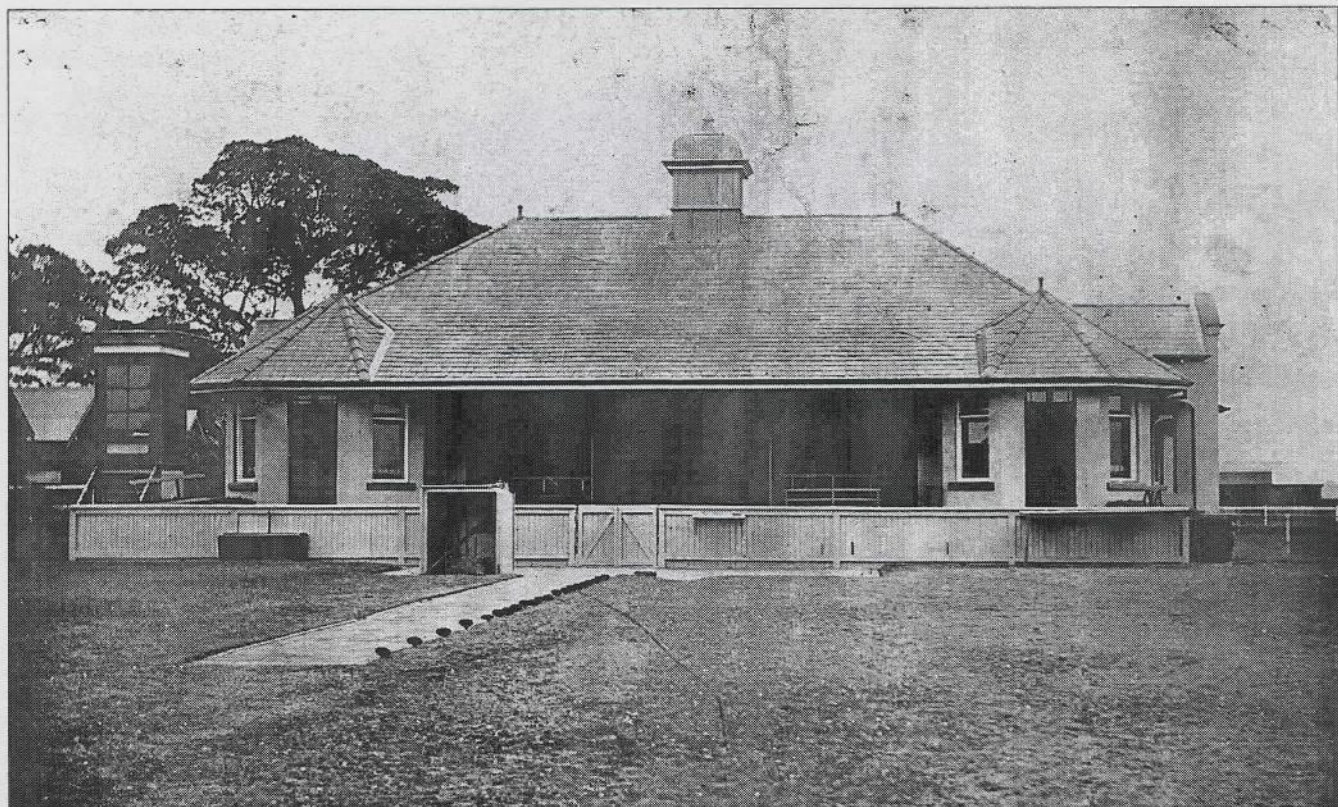
people in the park. In 1930, a well hit 'sixer' shot across Ross Smith Avenue and smashed his shop window, prompting him to complain to Mascot Council about the irresponsible behaviour of The Paper Mills Cricket Club. He was silenced only after the club had agreed to pay for the installation of a new window.⁹⁵

The New South Wales Gun Club in Lords Road was the meeting place of relatively wealthy shooters. Few locals belonged, and sometimes there was friction between nearby residents and club members. Living near the club had its problems. Bets were taken on the various contests held on shooting days, encouraging louts to gather outside the gates taking wagers. As early as 1903, North Botany Council wrote to the club complaining on behalf of local residents. The local paper summed up the Council's objections:

The falling shot not only caused damage to property but was a source of continued danger to residents ... There was also the very objectionable presence of loafers and larrikins, who gathered outside the grounds, and who insulted residents by using filthy and



*Many locals owned guns
and rifles even though they
did not belong to the
New South Wales Gun Club
Bob Franklin*



*The New South Wales
Gun Club building,
Lords Road Mascot.*

Fred Hudson

abominable language. It was high time that such a state of affairs should cease, and it was for the club to provide the remedy. ⁹⁶

A similar criticism was made years later, when in 1909 Annie Vicq of Roslin Street, wrote to the Secretary of the club, expressing her fears for the safety of her family:

I beg to notify the N.S.W Gun Club Authorities that if the shot from the said club grounds shall continue to fall on my cottage or premises after seven days ... I shall be compelled to take legal proceedings against the Club ... Apart from all damages, I am living in constant dread of one of our family losing their eyesight, as my child was wounded some time ago ... I am sure the roof will sooner or later show signs of damage ... I have been trying to sell my place and will take £95-00 cash in order to get away from the risk of shot damage.⁹⁷

Seven days had not elapsed before the Vicqs sold their house. Obviously relieved, Annie Vicq wrote again to the club observing that 'all's well that ends well ... We are pleased our trouble and fear will soon be at an end'.⁹⁸

Local children paid little attention to such disputes. While some were absorbed in the challenging task of retrieving stray pigeons, others were employed by the club to place the pigeons in the traps and release them during shooting matches. Some young workers overstepped the mark and were caught giving 'insider information' to their favourite shooters. When club officials heard about what was going on they issued a reprimand to those involved:

The secretary reported to the committee that he had heard the trapping boys were able to tell some shooters which trap would be pulled when [the] shooter went to the mark, and he proposed to

call in the boys ... and ask them some questions ... W Faithfull called the boys in and read them a lecture, telling them [that in the] event of their doing so again and being found out, they would be instantly dismissed.⁹⁹

Despite this warning, it was not long before one of the boys involved, Albert Puckeridge, was in trouble again. He was caught trapping on the grounds after instructions had been given for his dismissal for 'absenting himself without reason.' The caretaker's efforts to protect him were in vain and they were both reprimanded for their behaviour. The boy's short association with the club ended abruptly after this incident.¹⁰⁰

Catching pigeons could be a dangerous pastime, and one which sometimes incited the anger of residents whose property was damaged in the chase. Soon after the Lauriston Park Estate was established, eighteen year old Willy Bennett was killed when he fell from a tree while trying to capture a pigeon.¹⁰¹ Years later, in a letter to Mascot Council in 1923, Mr C. W. Campbell complained of 'boys damaging his property while going after pigeons which had been missed at the Pigeon Matches at the Gun Club.'¹⁰² The local boys saw only the chance to make some extra money by selling the birds back to the club. They were not overly concerned about the possible dangers involved, or worried about annoying the neighbours.

Whatever its perceived faults, the club exercised a great deal of influence over the rules and regulations for shooters across New South Wales. It received enquiries about membership from all over the state, and was the final arbiter when disputes broke out. Wealthy graziers visited when they came to the city, and influential businessmen valued their membership and the prestige and privileges it bestowed.

*A marksman takes aim at the
New South Wales Gun Club
Fred Hudson*



The club grew quickly in size and reputation, and soon found it necessary to expand. As early as 1914, they sold their land to the Wimbles Inks Company, moved to the other side of Lords Road, and built impressive brick premises. Maisie Lesser, whose uncle, Arthur Crouch, was caretaker at the Gun Club for many years, remembers this imposing building in the years before World War 2:

The Mascot Club, ... featured doors of solid cedar. It was topped by a large flagpole, and sometimes incoming planes would just clear that pole, and our windows would rattle ... The entrance to the Club grounds was opposite F T Wimbles property ... through two huge imposing wrought iron gates. A very long driveway, edged with massive interspersed Norfolk Pines eventually arrived at an attractive circular garden of colourful annuals and other smaller garden beds¹⁰³

By this time, the job of gathering up the pigeons was done by older men, including Maisie Lesser's uncles, Arthur and Fred and their assistant, Jim Wilson.

On shooting days, Uncle and Jim used to catch the pigeons, which were housed in five large pigeon lofts, then put them into baskets and transport them to the shooting area. Jim and ... Fred Crouch ... had the job of constantly running back and forth to place one bird at a time in one of the five traps ... Another man sat in a small hut near the shooters' handicap marks. He had to control the wires leading to the traps by manipulating a hand lever. After taking aim, the shooter called 'Pull!' not aware which trap would open, or in which direction the bird would fly ... If the bird was shot, one of the three dogs would retrieve it. [The pigeons] were bought by leading hotels, such as [the] Australia, [the] Metropole ... and City Tattersalls Club to provide delicacies ... for their patrons.¹⁰⁴

Lauriston Park's uneasy relationship with the New South Wales Gun Club ended in 1947, when they moved to new premises at Kyeemagh, to make way for the fast growing Kingsford Smith Airport.

The nearby Ascot Racecourse ran mid-week pony races. It was a cheap alternative to the more up market Randwick Racecourse, where wealthier patrons watched thoroughbreds go through their paces. Many locals could not resist the urge to lay a bet. All the action was broadcast on loud speakers, so even those who could not afford the entrance fee could get the latest results. The local boys also made the most of race days. After the last event, they ducked through the entrance gates and hungrily devoured any leftover food they were offered. There was also the chance to earn a little extra pocket money by exercising the horses. Tom and Jack Steel regularly tied ponies to their rowing boats and took them swimming in the Cooks River.¹⁰⁵

But it was the airport which created most excitement in the village. From its earliest days as Mascot Aerodrome, the children haunted the place. They were fascinated by the planes, and spent hours chatting to the people who worked on them. The cheekier boys dared nervous potential joy riders to 'give it a go'. Nobody seemed to mind, as long as they kept out of mischief.¹⁰⁶

Whenever an aviator took off or touched down, the whole community was caught up in the excitement. Even sporting commitments took second place when pilots such as Amy Johnson and Charles Kingsford Smith were welcomed at Mascot after making record breaking flights in the twenties and



*Amy Johnson arrives
at Mascot Aerodrome
4th June 1930.*

Botany Bay City Council Archive

thirties. Crowds waited patiently to catch the first glimpse of the approaching aeroplane. Then, with no thought of danger, everyone rushed onto the runway to greet their heroes. From time to time, the behaviour of over enthusiastic spectators caused angry protests. In 1931, after an accident involving the *Southern Cross Junior*, a Canberra man, amazed at seeing girls touching the plane's instrument panel, described the crowd control methods at Mascot as 'primitive'.¹⁰⁷ But the practice continued, with Lauriston Park residents often arriving first on the scene.

Air pageants, organised at Mascot by the New South Wales Aero Club, gave poorly paid pilots the chance to show off their skills in mock dog fights, tight aerial manoeuvres and steep dives. 'Barnstorming' was a spectacularly dangerous pastime, which fascinated and thrilled onlookers. Admirers held their breath and watched with nervous anticipation as daring aviators climbed onto the wings of their aircraft and performed hair raising balancing acts. A roar of approval erupted on completion of each stunt.

The 1935 Empire Air Day displays excited great interest:

At Mascot, planes zoomed, flew upside down, rolled and did other fantastic things. Many kinds of planes were in the air – fast fighters, big airliners, smart pleasure planes, and a tiny backyard-built

craft with a motor cycle engine. The flight of 24 aeroplanes over the city was very impressive.

The most spectacular event of the afternoon was the arrival of three new Hawker Demon fighting planes of the RAAF – the fastest planes in Australia. They crossed the aerodrome at terrific speed. The Demons ... sped to the aerodrome in line abreast formation in terrific dives, and rocketed vertically skywards till almost lost in low-lying cloud.¹⁰⁸

The people of Lauriston Park would join others on the hill near the Wimbles Inks Factory, watching pilots such as Goya Henry performing corkscrews and loop the loops.¹⁰⁹ Henry was one of the more colourful characters who frequented Mascot Aerodrome. He had an almost suicidal attitude to flying, and was always in trouble for ignoring safety regulations. Despite his many clashes with the authorities, and the loss of part of his leg in a 1930 plane crash at Manly in which his passenger was killed, Henry continued his flying career and, amazingly, lived to old age.¹¹⁰

The local residents were in a unique position. They could fish, play football, go to the pictures and attend dances like most working people. But more often than others, they were able to see the country's aviation pioneers in action. Occasionally, they even met some of them by chance, as they prepared for flights at Mascot.

Ironically, the same close links between the village and the nearby airport which enabled residents to share such privileges, eventually caused problems for the locals, which no-one could have appreciated in the early days. To understand how and why these changes took place in Lauriston Park, one needs to go back to the early days of aviation to examine the vision and motives of those who originally planned and built Australia's first international airport. Unlike many local residents, these early pioneers saw that Mascot Aerodrome was much more than a source of excitement, adventure and entertainment – it was a serious commercial venture, with a long and hopefully profitable future.

Chapter 6

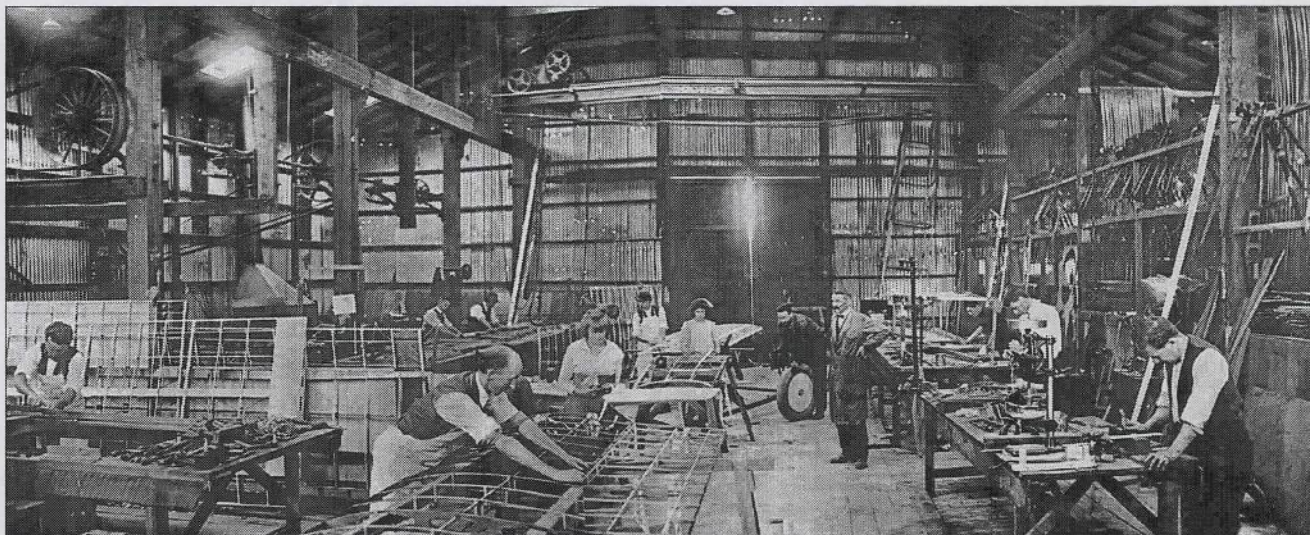
The Shadow of the Airport

When peace returned in 1918, businessmen with foresight realised the potential of the aeroplane. Anticipating the future role aircraft would play in transportation, they looked around for an appropriate site to locate a factory in Sydney. To the surprise and initial delight of local residents, Mascot was soon to play an important role in the development of the aviation industry.

In 1919, three enterprising men began making plans for the manufacture of aeroplanes. Nigel Love, Harry Broadsmith and Jack Warneford were the founding partners in the Australian Aircraft and Engineering Company. They had the money and the expertise to do the job. Love and Warneford had served in the Australian Flying Corps during World War 1. Broadsmith, an engineer, procured the rights from aircraft manufacturers A. V. Roe to establish an agency for the company in Australia. Everything was in readiness for the beginning of a new enterprise. Only one thing was missing. Since potential customers would want to see the planes fly, the manufacturers were in desperate need of an aerodrome.

After an extensive tour of suitable sites for an aerodrome, they settled on a flat, grassy bullock paddock on the banks of the Cooks River, near the industrial suburb of Mascot, on the northern shores of Botany Bay. It was relatively close to the centre of Sydney and, according to Nigel Love, had all the qualities required for an aerodrome:

Interior of the Australian Aircraft and Engineering Company Factory Mascot c.1920. Qantas



The surface was perfectly flat ... It was covered by a pasture of buffalo grass which had been grazed so evenly by the sheep and cattle running on it, that it simply left nothing to be desired.¹¹¹

Take-off and landing conditions at the Mascot site were almost perfect:

Its approaches on four sides had virtually no obstruction. On the southern side were the ... banks of the Cooks River, beyond which lay the Bonnie Doon Golf Links. On the eastern border was the Ascot Racecourse, and the northern area was bounded by Chinamen's Gardens.¹¹²

Love probably did not even notice the small number of houses on the Lauriston Park Estate.

When the aerodrome was officially opened on 9 January 1920, the newly formed company set about recouping the money they had spent getting the business started. The grazing cattle were herded from the 'runway' and eager passengers paid four guineas each for a five minute joy flight.¹¹³

The Australian Aircraft and Engineering Company is best remembered for the Avro 504K aeroplane. This model was manufactured at the company's factory at Mascot and became the first plane to be purchased for the Qantas fleet. In its day, it was praised for its technological features, including a self starting engine which used a 'cranking handle in the cockpit in front of the pilot's seat'.¹¹⁴

Despite early hopes of success, the venture did not thrive. Enthusiasm and ability were not enough to ensure success. Business acumen and government support were also essential – ingredients which were both in short supply after 1921, when the company sold the 163 acre Mascot site to the federal government for £15,500.¹¹⁵ The purchase was well timed. In the same year the Royal Australian Air Force was formed, as the Department of Defence was becoming increasingly aware of the strategic value of air power in the event of another war.

*Mascot Aerodrome c.1924.
Lauriston Park is the block of
houses in the top right hand
corner of the photograph.
Qantas*





The government's plan 'to foster and control the development of private and commercial aviation' was under way.¹¹⁶

The Avro 504K was the first aircraft used by Qantas.
Qantas

The Australian Aircraft and Engineering Company was the loser in the transaction. Over the next few years, its fortunes began to decline, until eventually, plans to manufacture and repair aircraft on Australian soil had to be abandoned. The final blow was struck when, unable to secure a vital contract with the federal government to recondition planes for the RAAF, the company was forced into voluntary liquidation. The government's action seemed to confirm public criticism of the treatment meted out to private manufacturers. Looking back on events, in 1923 *The Daily Mail* reported:

The Air Force and the Munitions were strongly opposed to the establishment of private manufacture because their pet theory is to create a combination of circumstances which will eventually force the Government to have a factory of its own – and thus open up a rich field for official exploitation.¹¹⁷

The long term economic implications of the events taking place around them were probably not obvious to the people of Lauriston Park at the time. When the land was taken over by the government, the move was greeted with excitement by most of the local residents, who were pleased and proud that Mascot Municipality had been chosen as the centre of the new aviation industry. The local area was now the subject of front page newspaper articles and became the focus of national attention. No one could have known, at this early stage, what the eventual impact of these changes would be.

The aviation industry developed rapidly over the next ten years. Although planes began arriving in ever increasing numbers, local residents still saw the airport site as an extension of their recreational space. In 1927, the government-employed weekend control officer, Captain Chateau, was obliged to remind the



Mascot Aerodrome c. 1930.

Qantas

local racehorse trainers that 'they must now refrain from using the aerodrome as a training track'. He also expressed some misgivings about 'bands of youths using the Aerodrome as a shooting ground'.¹¹⁸

Regulations were not strict in the early days. There were any number of eager pilots willing to take to the air so that aspiring aeronautical engineers like William and Allan Clancy could test fly newly built machines. Early in 1931, former World War 1 pilot Captain Shaw volunteered to put the brothers' tiny plane through its paces. The event was reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

An aeroplane small enough to be housed in a garage ... has undergone a successful trial at Mascot aerodrome.

Though neither has yet been aloft in an aeroplane, William and Allan Clancy, of Rothschild Avenue, Rosebery, have for years taken a keen interest in aviation and decided to make a plane of their own. Allan Clancy is a draughtsman in the employ of the Railway Department, and he drew and prepared the plans of his own design. William Clancy is a motor engineer, and to him was entrusted the mechanical side of the venture ... The brothers bought a four-cylinder motor cycle engine, and after converting it to their requirements, set about building the plane in the backyard of their parents' home ... By Sunday last it was ready to take to the air.

After a short run, the machine rose gracefully and encircled the aerodrome ... The Clancy brothers are delighted with their success, and now intend taking up a course of training with a view to flying the machine themselves.¹¹⁹

With such a casual approach to flying, it was inevitable that accidents occurred. The newspapers of the 1920s and 1930s frequently reported the details of crashes and the resulting deaths at Mascot. Lauriston Park children found the drama intensely exciting and were usually first on the scene to check out the damage. For their part, the adults were philosophical, and took it all in their stride. But at times even they must have become a little nervous about the prospect of being injured, as more and more aircraft skimmed low over their roofs before crashing into the Cooks River, or the nearby paddocks or market gardens.

In 1928, curious neighbours gathered outside the West family home in Roslin Street and stared in disbelief at the remains of the verandah. The house had been hit by a lead weight attached to a parachute, dropped from a plane flown by well known aviator, pioneer aircraft designer and Avro test pilot Captain Edgar Percival. Evidently engrossed in the task in hand, he did not even think to look over the side of his aeroplane to check that the landing site was clear. His lack of concentration earned him a reprimand for breaching the International Air Regulations which prohibited 'the dropping of any article or ballast from an aeroplane, except for sand and water.'¹²⁰ He paid £20 to cover the considerable damage to the house. Although the 'incident' was soon forgotten, it was a sign of the danger the local residents faced as aviation became more popular.

While the people of Lauriston Park were keeping a watchful eye on low flying aeroplanes, the government was seriously assessing the future of the aviation industry. By 1930, official investigations were under way to determine the suitability of the Mascot site as a permanent location for Sydney's main international airport. Flying was more than just an amateur pastime. It had serious implications for defence, transport and commerce. Already pilots such as Ross and Keith Smith and Amy Johnson had shown that distance was no longer an insurmountable barrier for previously isolated countries like Australia.

By the end of the twenties, the authorities were beginning to wonder whether Mascot Aerodrome would be able to cope with the increased air traffic which would be sure to follow advances in aviation technology. Reporting on the current conditions at Mascot Aerodrome, a Parliamentary Committee noted that 'although [the site had] certain disadvantages, an extensive search had failed to discover any equally suitable area within a reasonable distance of Sydney'.¹²¹ The Committee's conclusions had important implications for the people of Lauriston Park who were living on the land near the airport:

The Committee is of the opinion that [although] the existing area at Mascot is sufficient for present needs, all the evidence obtained indicated that, with the rapid development of commercial aviation, it would be essential to obtain a larger area within the next five or six years ... It is necessary that steps be taken at once to obtain the comparatively useless land now available near the aerodrome. ¹²²

Although there were no immediate plans to resume the village itself, the plans attached to the report show that much of the land around Lauriston Park was marked for future development even at this very early stage.¹²³ This previously isolated community now witnessed a flurry of building activity nearby, including the construction of several hangars, a refreshment kiosk, an administrative building and control tower, and all the usual public amenities needed for the

workers and visitors who were expected to use the airport once it began to grow. The future of the locals' favourite playing field, Ross Smith Park, was not bright. The Committee warned Mascot Council that its twenty year lease on the park was 'subject to cancellation should the whole or part of the land be required for public purposes ... It may be possible to utilise it for building purposes'.¹²⁴ Evidently the sporting activities of the local community were not a high priority in the federal government's agenda. According to the Assistant Minister for Industry, Mr Beasley, 'part of the aerodrome ... used by members of the Aero Club as a golf course might have to be resumed'.¹²⁵

The Council's attitude towards these new developments was one of cautious optimism. Giving evidence to the Committee, the Mayor of Mascot, Michael L'Estrange, assured the government that 'the municipal council is pleased to have the aerodrome at Mascot, and will be pleased to do everything it can to assist in its development'.¹²⁶ A bigger airport would mean jobs for the people of the area, and the access roads to the aerodrome would be upgraded. This led the Mayor to comment that 'the presence of the aerodrome is increasing the progressiveness of the Mascot district'.¹²⁷

However, even at this early stage, L'Estrange could see problems. He added:

The existence of the aeroplane is no great advantage to the municipality, because Crown land is not rateable. The adjacent property will increase in value ... [but] the aerodrome is only in the baby stage so far ... I do not think the area of Mascot is large enough for future developments in aviation ... We did not anticipate the developments that would take place'.¹²⁸

L'Estrange was obviously nervous about what the future would hold for the people of Mascot, particularly those living closest to the airport in small settlements like Lauriston Park. Such considerations did not always concern those selling land near the airport. The Airly Estate was even closer to the aerodrome than Lauriston Park. But at least one advertisement endorsed the properties with an enthusiastic sales pitch:

Airly Estate [is] an investment with unlimited possibilities, [with] building sites nearest to the Aerodrome ... Aviation – the fastest, most modern transport – has the greatest future. A building site nearest to such developments is an investment that staggers the imagination.¹²⁹

The establishment of Adastra Airways at Mascot Aerodrome in 1930 was further evidence of the changing role of the aeroplane. Their hangar was located in Ross Smith Avenue. From World War 2 onwards, their offices were in Vickers Avenue. Adastra was the first aerial survey company in Australia. The venture began as a flying school and charter operation and eventually expanded to include the operation of a passenger service to Bega. In his book *Mapmakers of Australia*, John McCarthy, who worked with Adastra from the 1950s, describes the somewhat primitive and often dangerous conditions pilots faced in the 1930s:

That it was early days for aviation ... is indicated by a Sydney newspaper article of the day which stated that Captain Follett, of Adastra, had landed on a cow in a paddock adjacent to Mascot Airport after an engine failure in his Moth aircraft. The plane suffered a damaged wing. The cow suffered some indignity, and, presumably, a bruised back.¹³⁰

From such seemingly inauspicious beginnings, Adastra grew to become the leading aerial survey company in the country. The company was technologically ahead of its time, flying the British built Klemm aircraft – the first plane in Australia to be equipped with a retractable undercarriage. In 1935, Adastra bought camera equipment from Britain valued at £4,000. The investment proved worthwhile. The company landed a contract with the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission of NSW to take aerial photographs of the country around Moree. Similar work was carried out for Brisbane City Council, and the Clarence River County Council. Mosaics were made up from the photographs, giving surveyors a clearer view of topography of the country than they had yet been able to piece together.¹³¹ Adastra pioneered photogrammetric mapping in Australia.

Such work had enormous implications for the future of aviation, which now had a scientific as well as a military and commercial role to play. Adastra went on to help in the search for oil, and to conduct aerial surveys of the Snowy Mountains Scheme,¹³² the Great Barrier Reef and the border between the Dutch and Australian sections of New Guinea.¹³³ Locals living near the airport in the days before the Second World War could never have imagined the extent of the changes which would take place in the next thirty years and the effect they would have on their relatively peaceful existence.

So the allure of flying continued to fill the minds of aviators and spectators alike throughout the 1930s, with passenger flights increasing as flying became more popular as a means of transport. By 1936 the aerodrome had become an airport, and was officially renamed Kingsford Smith Airport in honour of everyone's hero, aviator Charles Kingsford Smith. By 1938 the government had built new terminal facilities at the airport, so that it began to take on the status and character of an international facility. Aeroplanes were now seen as a serious commercial industry. They were no longer merely a pleasant diversion for amateur pilots and interested spectators such as those living in nearby Lauriston Park.

In the late 1930s, when war seemed imminent, the airport was increasingly the focus of attention. The importance of air power as a means of attack and defence had already been demonstrated in the First World War. Kingsford Smith Airport would soon take on a new role as a central location for building combat aircraft and training the pilots needed for battle. After the outbreak of war, the hangar space at Kingsford Smith Airport was expanded to accommodate the De Havilland factory, which manufactured parts for Tiger Moth Seaplanes. Lauriston Park residents became used to seeing these planes taxiing along the Cooks River before taking off and manoeuvring in testing and training exercises overhead.

The presence of allied servicemen at Kingsford Smith Airport brightened the social lives of the Lauriston Park families. Temporary accommodation was erected in the Wimbles Inks Factory paddock for the servicemen based there. Sometimes the men visited the families at Lauriston Park and did odd jobs around the house. Glad of the change in routine, and appreciative of a little home cooking, they often stayed on for a chat and a singalong around the pianola.¹³⁴

The more serious aspects of the war were never far from the minds of those living at Lauriston Park. It was the war which drove home to them the vulnerability

of their small community. They were located very close to a major airport which they feared would be a target for enemy attack. The residents became particularly nervous and 'went icy' whenever the air raid siren sounded.¹³⁵ There was also the constant fear of receiving a telegram announcing the death of a family member. In July 1945 the people of Lauriston Park were again reminded of the reality of the war when a plane from the British Pacific Fleet crashed on the southern side of Kingsford Smith Airport near the Kyeemagh Polo Ground.¹³⁶ In all, eleven servicemen were killed, prompting the President of the Air Force Association, Nigel Love, to comment on the 'urgent need for longer runways at Mascot aerodrome'.

It's a pity we have to wait for such a horrible fatality to occur ... Our airports must be of adequate dimensions if we are to cope with the overseas air traffic which must inevitably come after the war. If Cooks River was diverted, an immediate extension of the N.E. - S.W. strip at Mascot could be effected.¹³⁷

After the war, engineers were to take up this idea, incorporating it in their plans for the airport's expansion. The new planes were bigger and heavier than the pre-war models, and needed longer runways. Much of the post war development at Kingsford Smith Airport was centred around improving the runway capacity. In the process, the airport began to creep closer to the outskirts of the village of Lauriston Park.

By the end of the war, Lauriston Park was no longer as isolated as it had once been. There were increasing calls for the modernisation of the airport facilities at Mascot to keep pace with other international airports:

Commercial pilots consider that Mascot can be built up into a modern airport comparable with any in the world. They agree that improvements are essential ... Longer runways are the greatest need at Mascot.¹³⁸

It was clear that Kingsford Smith Airport was no longer a place for amateur pilots and recreational flights. Commercial pilots declared them to be 'a menace' and even private pilots realistically admitted that using the airport had become dangerous.

A private pilot said last night that private flying at Mascot was "on its last legs". There were so many other machines arriving and departing, and mail-carriers had the right of way ... the private pilots said, that making a landing was a "headache", because a pilot had to watch not only the ground but the control tower for a possible red light.¹³⁹

By 1948, private pilots who did not hold a commercial licence, were banned from the airport. The Department of Civil Aviation 'considered it was not safe for pilots of lower than commercial grading to use the aerodrome because of the increasing air traffic at peak hours'.¹⁴⁰ In 1949 the final blow was delivered to the amateur pilots when the Royal Aero Club of New South Wales was ordered to transfer from Mascot to Bankstown Airport. Its clubhouse was taken over by the Aerodrome Control and Communication Centre.¹⁴¹ A profitable, commercial industry was being developed at Kingsford Smith Airport. Recreational flying could continue elsewhere. No longer would Lauriston Park residents see the familiar small planes manoeuvring overhead. This seemingly



Harold Rootsey worked at the airport in the post war era.

Harold Rootsey

unimportant change in procedures at the airport held deeper meaning for those locals who realised the full significance of the dominance of larger planes.

Such commercial considerations set the tone for the government's post war scheme to expand and modernise the airport. The official view was that there was little choice but to follow the path of progress. But for the people of Lauriston Park, this decision would cause some distress and inevitably result in a conflict of interests. The Mayor of Mascot, Alderman A. P. Lever, succinctly expressed the growing anxiety of the residents and the Council about the government's peace time plans for the airport. His concerns were reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* :

Alderman Lever said the council could not go ahead with its post war plans. The Municipality was flooded with rumours about what was going to happen, and everybody was unsettled. The Council was not happy about the Government selecting Mascot as the new airport. If the Government resumed a lot of land, the Council would lose considerable revenue.¹⁴²

He was echoing the words of Alderman L'Estrange fifteen years earlier. There was always an element of doubt in the minds of the local residents about the consequences of living so close to a major airport.

When the government's plans for the airport were eventually made public in August 1945, the news was both good and bad for the people of Lauriston Park and the districts surrounding the airport. A massive £5,000,000 expansion plan was envisaged. The scheme was devised by Dr K. N. E. (Bill) Bradfield, son of J. J. C. Bradfield, who had supervised the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. He envisaged the construction of four runways. Work on the first stage of his 'Master Plan' began in 1947 and was completed by 1956. However in the process, Bradfield's original plan was amended because of rising costs. Only two of the planned four runways were ever constructed. Life would have been extremely unpleasant for the people of Lauriston Park and the wider community surrounding the airport, if Bradfield's plan for four runways had been fully realised. It is very likely that the village of Lauriston Park would have been resumed much sooner than it was.

But even the building of two runways cost the local residents dearly. As the people of Lauriston Park watched, the recreational areas around them disappeared and the airport grew. In 1947 resumptions included the property owned by the New South Wales Gun Club, situated in Lords Road and the Kyeemagh Polo Grounds. This was only the beginning. Familiar landmarks, which for years had been part of the landscape of Lauriston Park, began to be targeted for acquisition by the government. Soon, the Wimbles Inks Factory building in Lords Road and the nearby Mascot Granite Works were also taken over. Ross Smith Park, where so many Lauriston Park children had played their first competitive game of cricket, was also resumed by the airport authorities. The Cooks River no longer flowed nearby. In 1948 work commenced to divert the course of the river. The whole landscape of Lauriston Park had changed forever.

It was not the airport alone which was under consideration for development. There were also rumours that the seaplane base at Rose Bay was to be relocated as a 'seadrome' in Botany Bay. The concept involved constructing 'a single control building directing the movements of giant airliners and flying boats alike ... [at a] composite airport at Mascot-Botany Bay'.¹⁴³ Controversy raged for many years over the most suitable location for a sea boat base. Residents of Woollahra Municipality urged that the Rose Bay Seaplane base be moved to Botany Bay. The complaints of the Mayor of Woollahra, Alderman Davies, were constantly reported in the newspapers:

Alderman Davies said the nuisance of the noise was only one consideration of the Council. Its main worry was that the safety of residents might be endangered by flying-boats taking off.¹⁴⁴

The leader of the Federal Opposition Dr H. V. Evatt, realised that the same concerns would be felt by the residents living near Botany Bay. He commented:

I can see no justification for establishing a base at Botany Bay. Apart from other considerations, the residents of the Botany Bay areas are already inconvenienced enough by the land-based planes at Kingsford Smith airport.¹⁴⁵

It was fortunate for the people of Botany Bay that the matter was eventually settled without a fight. Flying boats became obsolete before any resolution had been reached, saving the people of Lauriston Park and surrounding suburbs from even further disruption to their lives.

For local residents the airport expansion brought the prospect of an extra 10,000 jobs.¹⁴⁶ Set against this was the likelihood of increased noise levels as the jet age approached. A Kensington resident described the noise of a plane skimming over the roof shortly after midnight as being reminiscent of the London blitz.¹⁴⁷ Since Lauriston Park was much closer to the source of the noise than Kensington, the residents there would have appreciated the point. However, not everyone sympathised with those living close to the airport. Referring to the noise emitted by the Lancaster bomber, *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter, Hugh Elliot, admitted that 'a din pours down ... on the defenceless pillowed heads below', but added philosophically:

Complainants may see ... that nothing can be done about this low-flying business. Had those who originally planned Sydney's airport at Mascot thought about the matter and visualised the size of aircraft used in this year of grace, they might have gone farther way from the city. But that would have deprived air travellers of an advantage which Sydney has over most other city airfields in the world – a short distance to travel between the airfield and ... the city itself.¹⁴⁸

This stoic observation was small comfort to the people who were annoyed during the day and awoken at night by planes roaring overhead.

Added to the upheaval the expansion of the airport was causing, was the prospect of noisy Comet Jet Liners which first landed at Mascot in early 1953. Even though they had been aware of the imminent arrival of the jet age, the reality came as quite a shock to some locals:

We were down at the airport and we watched the [jet plane] come over. And the smoke came out of all the engines – and the noise!¹⁴⁹

In the mid 1950s more noise was inflicted upon the people living near the airport, when training for Qantas pilots was carried out temporarily at Mascot. The local people protested, with the Mayor of Rockdale, Alderman Gosling, commenting in exasperation:

If they must use Mascot for the present, these big airliners should at least try to keep to the runway leading out over Botany Bay, which keeps them well away from the densely populated areas ... Now we have this nuisance and danger back in our midst again.¹⁵⁰

From this point on, the aviation industry continued to grow, bringing both benefits and problems to the people of Lauriston Park. Some of them found work at the airport or in related industries. Others were concerned about the increasing possibility of an accident close to their homes. In 1957 a near tragedy occurred when a Tamworth bound airliner crashed into a lake at the Eastlakes



Section of an aerial photograph of Botany Municipality, 1951. Still visible are Ascot Racecourse, the Cooks River Bridge and Puck's Wharf. The Estate of Lauriston Park is the block of housing in the centre left of the photograph.

Crown Copyright Aerial Photography supplied by The Sydney Map Shop, Department of Land and Water Conservation, Land Information Centre, 23-33 Bridge St, Sydney, 2000

Golf Course. Eager sightseers complicated the job of the rescuers:

Two soldiers ... helped police to hold back the crowd that swarmed on to [sic] the golf course. Children in nightwear and other people, some from miles away, crowded the area.¹⁵¹

Many ignored police requests to keep back and at times threatened to force rescuers and rescued back into the lake. They blocked exit routes for ambulances and restricted salvage operations.¹⁵²

Although the residents of Lauriston Park were quite a distance from the crash site, they were near enough to be reminded that living close to a major airport was potentially dangerous.

Most of the younger generation moved out of the village after the war. They found jobs and marriage partners elsewhere. But many of their parents were determined to stay. By the 1970s a few houses remained nestled amongst hangars and maintenance workshops, close to busy access roads. Then came the federal government study *Major Airport Needs of Sydney* (MANS). Once again local residents were quick to voice their fears about the further development of Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport. They were strongly supported by Botany Council and local MP Lionel Bowen. In May 1979, hundreds of cars blocked the roads to the international terminal. They had just come from a meeting organised by representatives of fourteen southern Sydney councils who urged union bans on construction work at the airport. Protesters carried placards with messages for the government including 'BAN FRASER'S 707s' and 'WRAN'S A WRAT'.¹⁵³

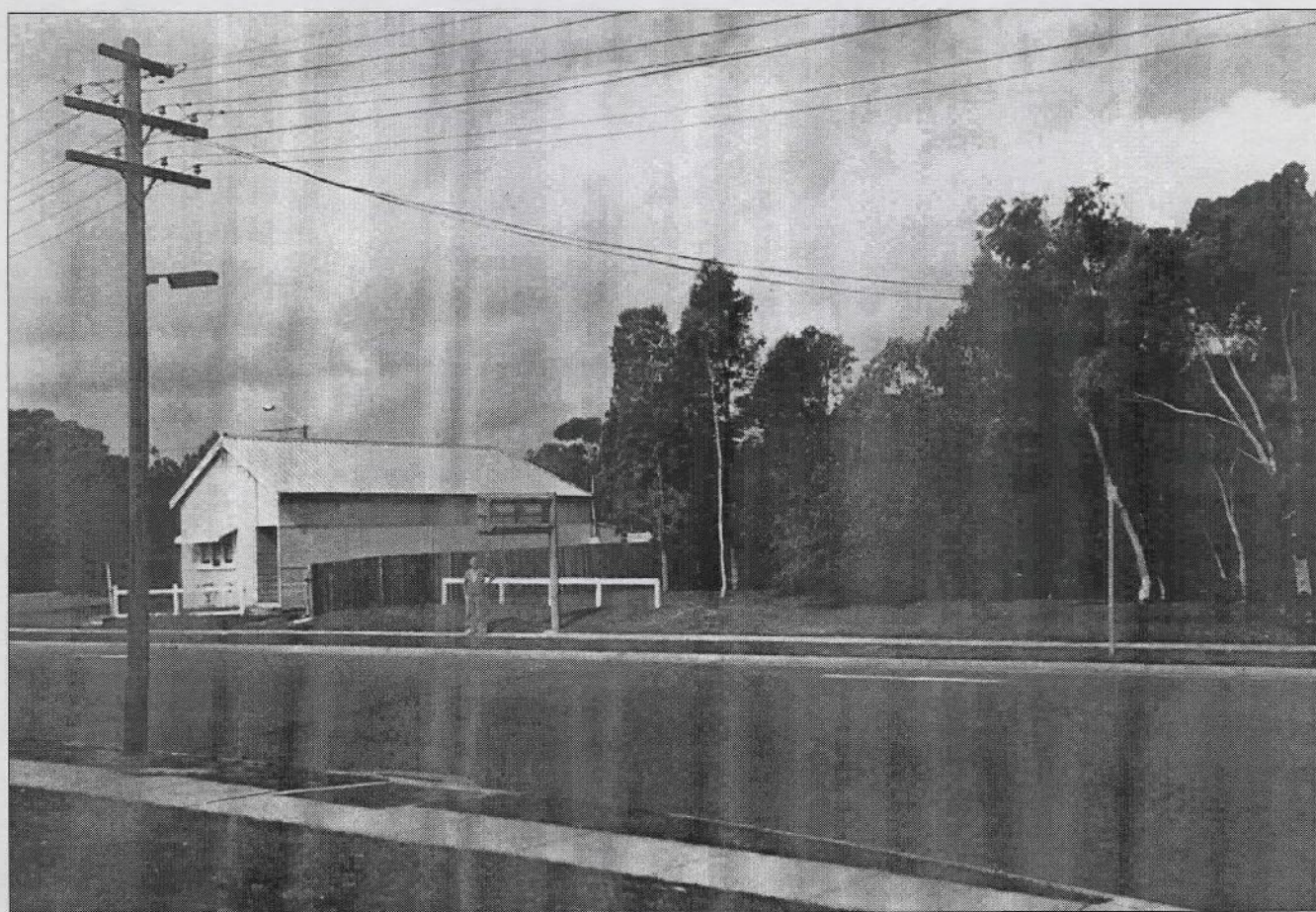
By the 1960s the airport had expanded dramatically. Lauriston Park is in the bottom left hand corner of the photograph.
Qantas





Above: Demonstrators at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport, 1979. Fairfax Photo Library

Below: Harold Rootsey's house, Lauriston Park, 1990. Harold Rootsey





Not everyone sympathised with this point of view. The editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald* accused Lionel Bowen of overreacting to the situation:

Mr Bowen came alarmingly close to abandoning reason in favour of emotion, and championing self interest rather than the wider community interest ... He is not entitled to try to impose his opinion on everybody else by inciting industrial action ... especially in the depressed state of the construction industry. The future of Sydney as Australia's most important international airport ... must also be taken into consideration.¹⁵⁴

*John Goold's house (centre),
Lauriston Park, 1990.*

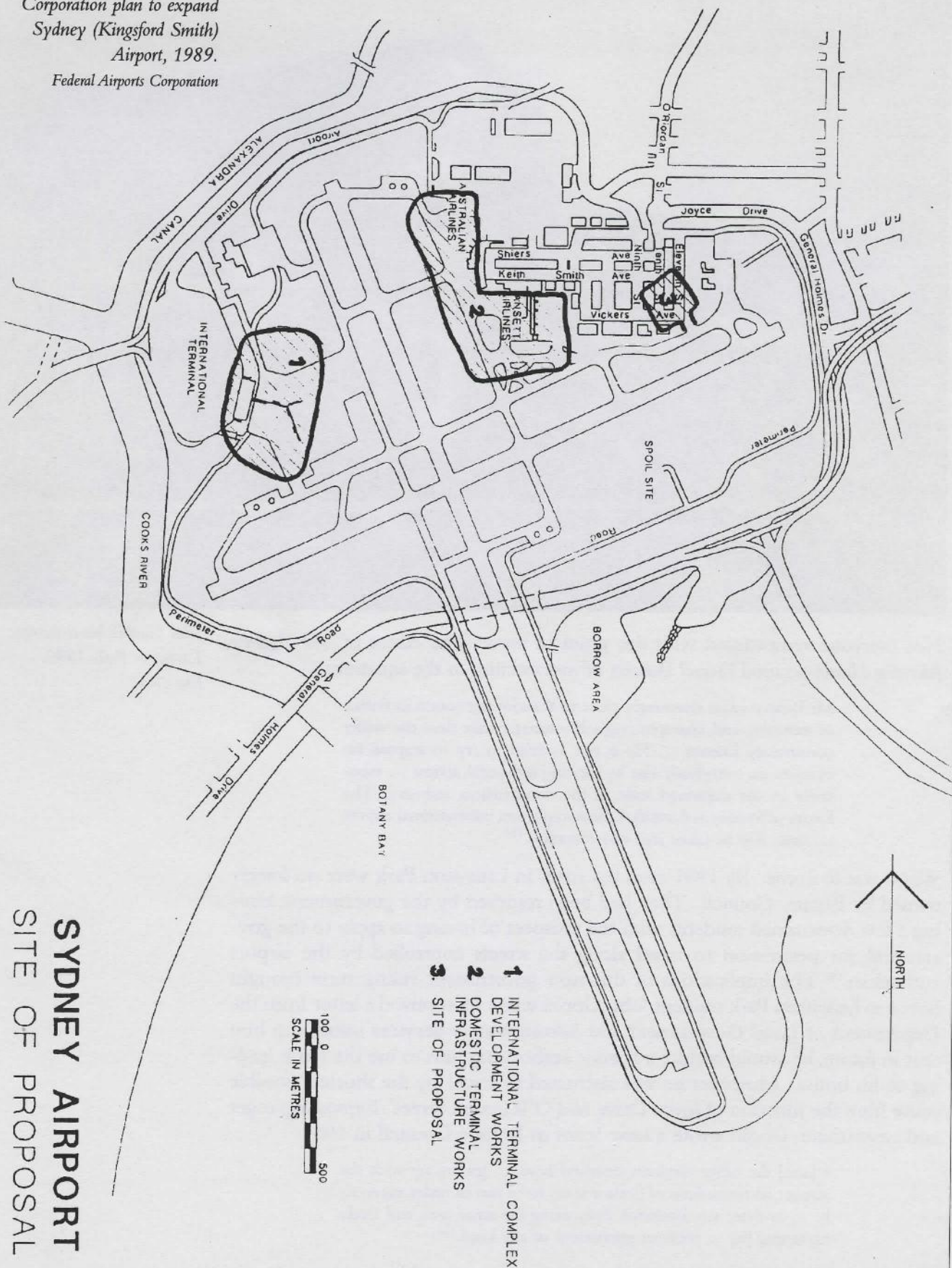
John Goold

Worse was to come. By 1981 even the roads in Lauriston Park were no longer owned by Botany Council. They had been resumed by the government, leaving a few determined residents with the prospect of having to apply to the government for permission to travel along the streets controlled by the airport authorities.¹⁵⁵ The implications of this new government ruling were brought home to Lauriston Park resident John Goold when he received a letter from the Department of Local Government and Administrative Services informing him that in future, he would require a licence authorising him to use the roads leading to his house. Moreover he was instructed to travel 'by the shortest possible route from the junction of Joyce Drive and O'Riordan Street'. Expressing anger and amazement, Goold wrote a terse letter to Botany Council in 1987:

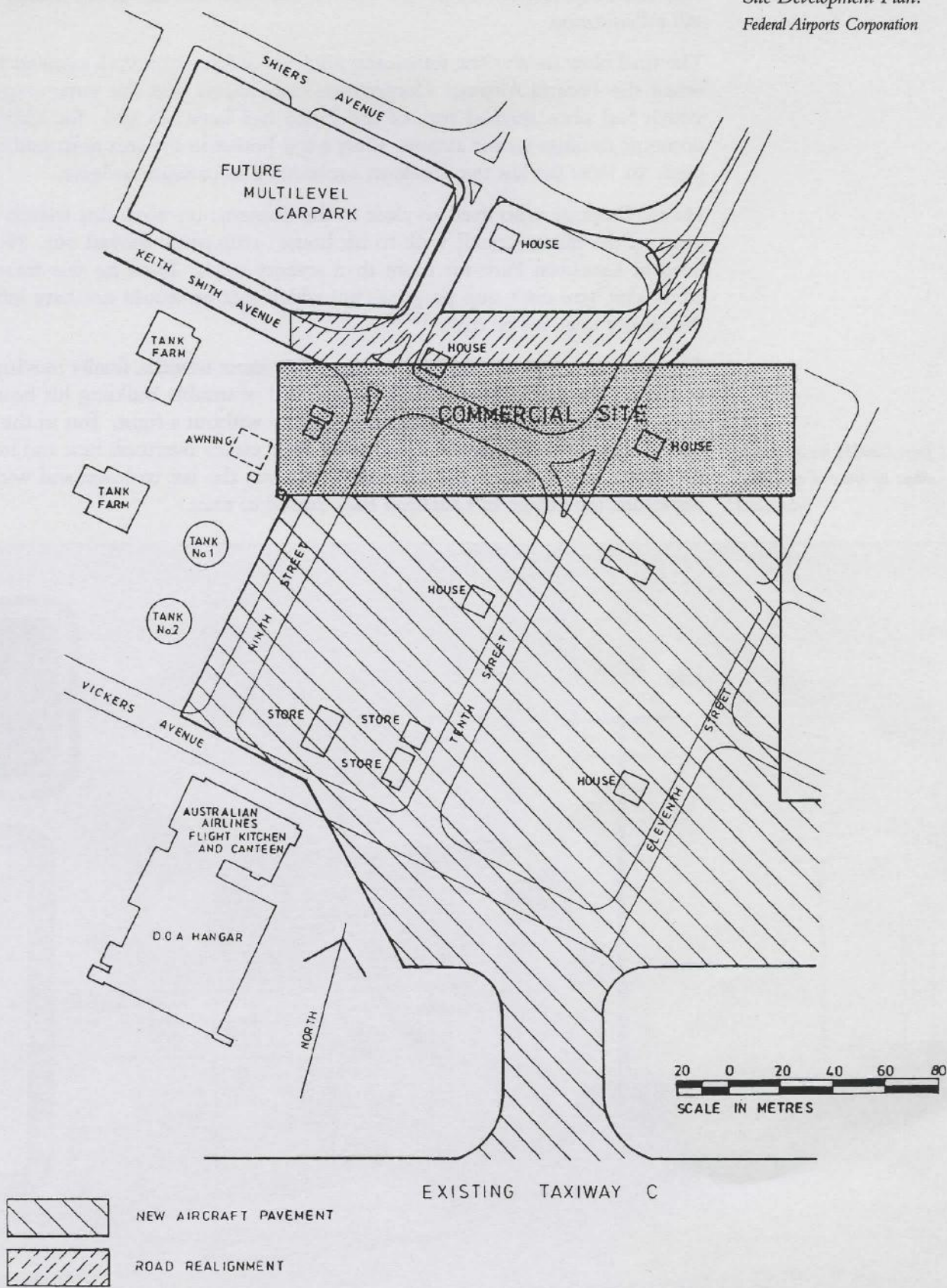
I [and] the other residents involved have ... grown up with the airport, so restrictions of licence seem to be out of order, especially ... as there are thousands daily using the same area, and freely traversing [it] ... without restrictions of any kind.¹⁵⁶

Those still living in Lauriston Park were in an unenviable position. It was becoming increasingly difficult to justify staying there, despite the strong

The Federal Airports
 Corporation plan to expand
 Sydney (Kingsford Smith)
 Airport, 1989.
 Federal Airports Corporation



SYDNEY AIRPORT
 SITE OF PROPOSAL



SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 3

emotional attachment the people still felt for what was left of the village they still called home.

The final blow for the few remaining residents of Lauriston Park came in 1989, when the Federal Airports Corporation announced that the remaining land which had once formed part of the Estate had been set aside for additional domestic facilities for the airport. Only a few houses in the area remained occupied. In 1990 the last two residents succumbed to pressure to leave.

Harold Rootsey, who lived 'so close to the domestic terminal that friends stepping off the plane [could] walk to his house', reluctantly moved out. He had lived in Lauriston Park for more than seventy years. Even he was forced to admit that 'you can't stop progress', but added that he would not have left had the choice been his to make.¹⁵⁷

The tenacious John Goold held out for a few more months, finally moving out in December 1990. He had had a great deal of trouble building his house in the late 1940s and was unwilling to give it up without a fight. But in the end, like so many other residents of Lauriston Park, events overtook him and he had no choice but to accept the inevitable. He was the last to leave, and with his departure, the village of Lauriston Park ceased to exist.

*John Goold's house stands
alone by the end of 1990.*

John Goold



Epilogue

Today, very little remains to show that there was once a thriving community on the site of Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport. An observant visitor to the domestic terminals might notice the remnants of the original Melrose and Roslin Streets which are now barely visible near the wire fence marking the perimeter. Two street signs and a marble tablet commemorating the losses of World War 1 are now valued items held by Botany Historical Trust. The original New South Wales Gun Club building and the remains of the pigeon lofts are now occupied by the Federal Airports Corporation. Nearby, the remnants of Simeon Lord's ponds provide sanctuary for ducks and other waterfowl. These physical reminders of the past, and the memories of the people who once lived there, are all that is left of the village of Lauriston Park.

When the first residents built their houses on the Estate in 1902, none of them could possibly have appreciated the extent of the changes which would influence the nation and cause the demise of their community. The concept of world war was unimaginable and powered flight had not yet begun. The locals' immediate thoughts were focused on building homes for their families and ensuring a better life for themselves and their children.

The selection of land near their housing estate for the development of a major airport backed by the government was to change their lives irrevocably. Lauriston Park Estate fell victim to the geography of its location which was exploited by various commercial and political decisions over the decades. Once the initial decision to build the airport at Mascot was made, the momentum of



Remnants of Tenth (Melrose) Street, Lauriston Park, are visible behind the Federal Airports Corporation sign as you approach the domestic terminals in 1992.
Botany Historical Trust

progress and the demands of the wider community meant that it was difficult to reverse without political and economic repercussions. The time at which a decision is made sometimes precludes certain courses of action later.

If Lauriston Park had been located somewhere else in Sydney, it probably would have expanded as part of a larger suburb. But because the Estate was situated near the airport at a time when the aviation industry was developing at a fast pace, its few streets often became the centre of state and even national interest.

Ironically, the growth of the airport, which gave the village its unique identity and provided excitement in the lives of the locals, was also the main reason for the eventual decline and disappearance of the small community. Lauriston Park's distinctive history derives from the link between these later developments and the events of the nineteenth century. A rich procession of activity took place within the bounds of a few streets.

Appendix

A list of the residents of Lauriston Park in 1930, taken from *Sands Sydney (NSW) Directory 1858-1932/3*.

Melrose Street (East Side Off Lords Road)

Sharpe, J. *Melrose*
Mitchell, Alfred
Light, William *Mullawkee*
Beard, Mrs Mabel *Kia Ora*
Price, R. *Ormuz*
Ellson, D. A. *Kenade*
Croft, Clarence *Deene*
Dickens, William
Schmarr, Arthur
Eastman, William *Essex*
Headford, Cliff *Oxford*
Anderson, Alfred
Anderson, W. *Durham*
Webster, David confectioner
Jones, Clyde R.
Cragg, Alfred E.
Anderson, Thomas
Gossage, Henry
Martin, F. *Taradale*
Sykes, George *Carthona*
Coupland, George
Glover, David
Bell, Thomas *Buka*
Glover, Joseph *Emoh Ruo*

Melrose Street (West Side)

Jordan, John *Eniruan*
Babbington, P. *Peckham Rye*
Lardner, J. E. *Osborne*
Levy, Albert
Goold, John
Stephens, R. *Jutland*
Warren, Charles S.
Douglas, George
Jackson, Henry
Shuttleworth, Walter
McLaren, Robert
Walker, H. *Killarney*

Smith, George S.
Farrow, Mrs. L.
Dillimot, Stanley
Dawson, T. *Fairview*
Campbell, Fred K. *Hilda*
Hanley, George *Hieda*
Holland, John Thomas
Carroll, Mrs Rebecca
Driscoll, William M.

Roslyn Street (East Side Off Lords Road)

Steel, Robert H. *Betty*
Steel, Anthony J.
Burns, George *Minanto*
Steel, H. J. *Bonnie Doon*
Steel, Edward T.
Rootsey, C. R. *Araluen*
Mahood, James W.
Hawke, Mrs A. grocer
Shuttleworth, George
McCusker, T. J. *Maxton*
Jackson, W. H. *Gladwyn*
Shaw, George
Draper, Thomas A.
Cox, Mrs Mary *Arthurville*
Cummings, Mrs Sarah
Upton, Alfred *Dartnell*
Campbell, W. C. *Hilbeth*
Smith, John J. *Geelong*
Smith, William

Roslyn Street (West Side from Lords Road)

McGrath, D. *Heroic*
Steel, Anthony
Sullivan, William
Gwilliam, Thomas E.
West, William A.
Shuttleworth, L. W.
Steel, Robert A. *Alma*

Smith, Mrs S. *Charleston*
 Mantle, G. E. bottle merchant
 Buchanan, William *Toreance*
 Holley, Philip
 Knight, Henry
 Jones, Leslie
 Knight, Fred *Iris*
 Alexander, James
 Alexander, Mrs Jane
 Assembly Rooms Hall
 Electric Light Sub Station
 Dibley, Thomas A.

**Government Road
 (Off Lords Road West Side)**

Sharpe, J. *Warwick*
 Woolley, Arthur *Trundle*
 Matthews, Edward
 Eastman
 Simpson, P. *Mayville*
 Johnson, J. *Kenyu*
 Barlow, Leslie *Avondale*
 Crossingham, E. W. *Norwood*
 Pelham, Arthur *Viola*
 Toohey, John *Lynton*
 Murray, Thomas
 Bonner, James *Tresham*
 Douglas, Walter
 Craig, H. *Craigleigh*
 Floyd, J. F. *Stanley*

**Lords Road
 (North Side Botany Road to
 Cooks River)**

Jordan, Frank *Enirvan*
 Yard, Fred *Aref*
 Coffee, Joseph *Secret*
 Douglas, A. W. *Glen Rich*
 Allen, Thomas *Kelso*
 Purvis, R. C. *Jessmine*
 Gibson, Cecil R.

Wimble, F. T. & Co. Varnish depot
 Williams, John

Lords Road (South Side)

Ascot Racecourse
 NSW Gun Club, Ltd
 Crouch, Arthur
 Taylor, H. Dairy

**Ross Smith Avenue (formerly
 Channel Street)
 South Side Government Road
 to Canal**

Harper, John *Homeleigh*
 Shennan, Robert *Myalla*
 Coupeland, Ernest
 Bayliss,
 Sheperd, Mrs Arabella
 Reid,
 Davis, Harry
 Hendrick, John A, grocer
 Green, Samuel
 Odling, Anselm and Sons, marble
 merchants
 Alexander, D.A, J.P
 Fawcett, Mrs Elizabeth, tea rooms
 The Aerodrome
 Australian Aero Club, NSW Section
 Golden Aircraft Company, aircraft
 proprietor
 Mascot Aircraft Company, Hector
 Ross proprietor
 Air Travel Ltd
 NSW Airways Ltd
 Eastern Australian Aviation
 Company Ltd
 Sydney Air Service
 Aerial Flights Company
 Nall's Air Service
 Hammond Aerial Transport
 Company Ltd

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