

31st October 2004

52nd Annual Report of the Parks and Playgrounds Movement Inc 2003– 2004

Colleagues and Friends,

I am pleased to report on the year's activities of the Parks and Playgrounds Movement. Your committee has continued the hard work of previous years in support of conservation of our natural and cultural heritage but is hampered by a total lack of resources.

Members are reminded that it was [Tom Farrell](#) who brought the Parks and Playgrounds Movement to Newcastle in 1952 but the Movement was actually established in the early 1930s by Charles E W Bean, the historian, lawyer and journalist. Our branch was called the Northern Parks and Playgrounds Movement before incorporation.

It is with regret that I must report the death of Arthur Munro who was the Movement's Treasurer from 1960 to 1981. He was hit by a car while riding his bike at Adamstown and survived the injury but suffered a memory loss that plagued him until his death last month. Our deepest sympathy is extended to Arthur's family. Arthur was a great contributor to bushwalking, to life the environment and education and his family and all who knew him sorely miss him.

Parks and Playgrounds Movement does enjoy wide support in the community but we actually have a slowly decreasing membership. We rely for our essential work on the voluntary efforts of a few and some generous donations. A drive for new members and some fundraising is long overdue. In July this year we organised a very successful film night fundraiser for the Lower Hunter Green Corridor that raised \$2,000 for that project. This is an example of what can be done with the help of members and friends. We screened the Film [Fahrenheit 9/11](#) at the Showcase City Cinemas. The film was topical and well received. On that night we congratulated Brian Purdue and Dennis Hurst for the ACF Peter Rawlenson Conservation 2004 award, which they received personally from ACF Vice President and Parks and Playgrounds Movement Patron Penelope Figgis. A well-earned achievement for Brian and Dennis and a good night was had by all present.

Newcastle 200

It was the City of Newcastle's 200th anniversary year this year and the Movement made many contributions to the Anniversary. On behalf of the Movement I visited every school in Newcastle and provided historic material from the Movement. Also on the 30th March we joined with the Newcastle University Coal River Working Party to help in guiding visitors and school students around the recently located first coalmine adits at Colliers /Point Fort Scratchley. The 30th March is a significant date for Newcastle because it is when Charles Menzies and his 34 convicts and band of soldiers landed at Coal Harbour to mine coal and cut cedar.

The district was henceforth to be called Newcastle in the County of Northumberland. In his first letter back to Governor King, Menzies stated that he had named the spot after his Excellency. A plan of the Colliers Point mines dated July 1804 was titled Kings Town New Castle District, County of Northumberland

The Movement had hoped that the 1804 convict coalmines might have been entered this year. Following our successful Coal River Workshop in 2003 and the publication of the workshop notes the Newcastle Council made \$10,000.00 available to the University Working Party for proving the coalmine workings. The drilling and the lowering of a camera into the mine have not been done yet. We are continuing the work started with the workshop through the Coal River Working Party and are making steady progress with the documentation of the heritage of early Newcastle. On the 19th December 2003 our proposed Coal River Precinct was registered on the NSW State Heritage Register. The listing provides the precinct with further recognition and protection. The City Council will be responsible with the Heritage Office of NSW in preparing a Conservation Management Plan for the whole Precinct. Look for Coal River at: [Nobbys Coal River Heritage Park Website](#)

We are pleased that *The Herald* produced a superb publication 200 years of a great Australian city for the 200th Anniversary and Council produced a small book NEWCASTLE a brief history.

The Movement has written to Councillors suggesting that Council resolve in this year to place a suitable monument in a significant location in the city. We have suggested two locations one in the Foreshore Park near the where the first coalmines were located or the other at the head of Hunter Street in Pacific Park near where the 1909 Historic Coal Monument now in Parnell Place, once stood. We favour the Pacific Park site because the Park was especially designed to accommodate a monument as a focal point at the head of Hunter Street. This together with the restoration of the Newcastle Herald Fountain would achieve an improvement in the general appearance of the park.

We would like to see a 200th Anniversary Monument unify the four principal stories relating to the founding of Newcastle with a story on each face of a sandstone cube similar to the 1909 Coal Monument:

1. **The Aboriginal Dreamtime story-Why-bay Gamba** (Nobbys) the abode of the immensely large kangaroo who occasionally shakes himself and causes rocks to fall.
2. **1797 Lt Shortland's discovery of a "Very fine coal river"** - he named it Hunter's River.
3. **1801 John Platt set out first coalmine at Coal Harbour** settlement later abandoned.
4. **1804 Founding of Newcastle** –Lieutenant C Menzies arrived 30thMarch. Governor King issued the Commission to establish Newcastle following the Vinegar Hill insurrection.

We envisage that the monument would be a symbolic acknowledgement of the beginnings of the City and a statement of confidence in the future.

Coal River Precinct State Heritage Register SHR 01674 -Newcastle

A Draft Brief for the Coal River Conservation Management Plan has been prepared and when the Coal River Committee is established it will report to NSW Heritage Office & Newcastle City Council. We would envisage the committee managing a Coal River visitor Centre and generally promote and administer the precinct. We proposed an Interim Visitors Centre in the Station Masters Cottage.

The Movement has had an interest in the Coal River concept since 1968 when we proposed the Historic Site to include Nobbys, Macquarie Pier & Fort Scratchley in 1968. Further work since then has included:

- The production of: Hunter 2000 and the Newcastle East Supplement & Historic Site, with the National Trust 1972
- The proposal in 1974 of the Foreshore Park including Historic Site (P&PM 1974)
- The Newcastle Old Town Development and Conservation publication 1991.
- The Historic Park and Open Air Museum proposal 1989 for the Citizens Foreshore Committee.
- Workshops on Community Perspectives on Planning 1998 with the Newcastle Civic Assoc
- Formulation of the Prospectus for Coal River 1999 for the Lord Mayor to take to Canberra.
- Workshop for the Nobbys Coal River Historic Precinct and publication of the notes with the help the Newcastle Permanent.

This year the Movement outlined the following actions urgently needed in the precinct:

1. Action to provide safe public access to Nobbys Headland without commercial alienation;
2. Identification of construction details of Macquarie Pier; and
3. Discovery of the extent of the Convict Coal Workings.

We are working through the Coal River Working Party and we want the establishment of an Interim Coal River Visitor Centre to encourage volunteer tour guides to show tourists and school parties over the precinct.

Adamstown Land Dealing

Newcastle City Council was a party to the 1999 agreement between the Commonwealth, Newcastle Council, the RTA NSW, and the National Parks Service to rezone 5ha of openspace for housing at Adamstown and transfer 25ha of bushland (lot 2 DP827809) into the Glenrock State Recreation Area at the nominal cost of \$49,000. The RTA NSW promised to facilitate the agreement as compensatory habitat for the Charlestown West bypass. Parks and Playgrounds Movement have discovered that the RTA has not honoured this undertaking. Newcastle Council initiated the rezoning, which was carried out in the year 2000 but the 25ha of Lot 2 in DP827809 was not transferred as promised.

Housing is currently under construction on the rezoned openspace and the bushland has been subdivided this year by the RTA for an extension of an expressway into Bruncker Road. Your help is needed to have the RTA subdivided lots conveyed to the Glenrock Park forthwith and the Commonwealth Ombudsman investigate why the Commonwealth wrongly transferred the remainder of lot2 to the RTA and not to Glenrock. Lot 2 was an important part of Newcastle's green spaces strategy and has been zoned for openspace purposes since first planning scheme was exhibited in 1952. Newcastle's exhibited plan 2000 also showed the land as openspace. It has never been zoned for roadway. Your help is needed now.

Corridors for Conservation

Parks and Playgrounds Movement has won the support of the Annual Conference of the NSW Nature Conservation Council representing over 140 conservation groups in NSW for the Movement's Corridors for Conservation Strategy.

- The biodiversity green corridor through the Hunter River estuary from the Stockton Bight to the Sugarloaf Range.
- The green buffer proposed in the Hunter Regional Environmental Plan between the city of Wyong and the city of Lake Macquarie.

- The protection of the Newcastle railway corridor to Newcastle's heritage railway station and the development of attractive urban nodes and transfer facilities that focus on CityRail stations in the network.

The conservation movement will campaign to have proposals integrated into the State Government's Metropolitan Strategy, which is currently being prepared. The strategy is designed to guide development in the Greater Sydney Region including the Lower Hunter for the next three decades.

Honeysuckle

It appears that the Honeysuckle Development Corporation, which is a Ministerial Corporation under the direction and control of the Minister, has become a super quasi-Council without any of the checks and balance of the Local Government Act. Honeysuckle is able to act in an arbitrary manner and reports to the Minister. Meetings are held in camera and the Board is not elected. The Honeysuckle Growth Centre area has been extended over most of the inner area of Newcastle without exhibition or report to the people of Newcastle. The Growth Centre concept was brought from England where it was used to establish New Towns. It is being wrongly used to usurp Local Government in Newcastle and hide government privatisation of public land. Sadly Rail services to historic Newcastle Station have been under threat simply because the Corporation is required under *The Growth Centres (Development Corporations) Act 1974* to implement an instrument called the "Approved Scheme" which includes closing the railway. The Scheme was approved by Robert Webster MLC in March 1993 and never brought up to date. I appeal to members to work to achieve the Corridors for Conservation Strategy and to change the Honeysuckle "Approved Scheme" so that it includes the Scenic Landscaped Rail Corridor to Newcastle Station as proposed in the Joy Cummings Newcastle Foreshore landscape 1981.

The whole Growth Centre Area and the "Approved Scheme" should be reviewed as a matter of urgency to provide for the next decade and achieve a more open and transparent planning regime. The Minister for DIPNR is proposing to use Development Corporations to implement the Metropolitan Strategy, which is a proposition that should be strongly resisted if the corporations are allowed to operate in the way that Honeysuckle has.

Newcastle Port

Parks and Playgrounds Movement believe that the Port Concept and ultimate local planning instruments must have as their objective the development of a modern, efficient, and ecologically sustainable port that respects and integrates with the natural and heritage values of the Hunter River estuary and its environs. We gave evidence this year to the Upper House Inquiry in to the Botany Bay port proposals and emphasised the point that Newcastle is not a natural deep-water port and that the Hunter estuary must have a healthy and ecologically sustainable future. We do not want to see cargo destined for central Sydney being transhipped by road from Newcastle. The concept of reviving coastal shipping could be considered in the future

Development should be confined to those areas already damaged beyond feasible remediation to a natural state. The Movement applauds the Member for Newcastle Mr Bryce Gaudry in his statement that the SEPP74 across Kooragang should be revoked. The Austeel site on the Tomago side of the river should be now transferred to the Parks and Wildlife Service to become part of the Kooragang Nature Reserve and rehabilitation project.

Civic & Cultural Precinct

The Movement made a submission to the Cultural Precinct Masterplan drawing attention to our long held views about the development of the civic axis of the city. The Master Plan was unfortunately underpinned by a misconception of the cultural theme and the evolution of the City. We could see no

practical or cultural reason for moving the Library from the War Memorial Cultural Centre where there is ample room for expansion on the site through to Queen Street along with an expanded Art Gallery. There was considerable public effort and support for the creation of the Cultural Centre, which was to be on the City Hall Axis across the Civic Park. The Development of Civic Park and the Margel Hinder Fountain were demonstrations of a very active cultural heart in the community. We approve of the concept of extending the Civic Theatre into the arcade to provide adequate backstage facilities for major shows and the refurbishment of the former Hunter Valley Theatre Coy theatre in the complex. However it would be wrong to conclude that all cultural activities should be located in the Civic area.

The historic Victoria Theatre that was recently sold was an essential part of Newcastle's cultural fabric. The theatre with its history, architecture and crystal clear acoustics is in an ideal location to be restored as a theatre and restaurant. Night-time parking could be made available in the adjacent David Jones carpark.

The relocation of the Newcastle Administrative Offices from the current Wheeler Place site seems to be arbitrary and without a sound economic basis. The city has spent large sums of money acquiring lands in the Civic area for redevelopment and the administrative offices should not be abandoned without good cultural or civic reason. There is ample opportunity for extending the administrative functions in the area between Wheeler Place and Burwood Street including the restoration of the New Frederick Ash building in Burwood Street. Other parts of site and future buildings could include carparking structures. The Movement is opposed to building over the railway line on aesthetic and practical grounds. The current Civic Station is adequate for the city into the foreseeable future. The existing building is a heritage item and presents an attractive, neat and tidy finish to Hunter Street.

Access across the railway line should be by way of two bridges one with ramps at the eastern end of the station building and the other parallel with the existing pedestrian bridge and with public lifts for the disabled or elderly. Hunter Street should also have a crush lane for cars travelling west and wishing to cross the rail line and a further pedestrian crossing should be made at the eastern side of Merewether Street crossing.

The intersection of Workshop Way needs extra width to provide turning lanes to North and South into Merewether Street. We believe the Regional Museum should be retained at Hunter Street West with an attractive visitor centre with carparking located in conjunction with extensions to the complex fronting Stewart Avenue. This would give the Visitor Centre and the Museum a prominent face on a major arterial road into the city. The existing mining poppet head on the Parry Street corner is an important and distinctive landmark.

We consider that Council could hold a Council Poll of electors in conjunction with the next Local Government Elections to seek information and guidance on the proposal to shift council administrative functions from the existing buildings and whether it should move the Museum and the Library from their present sites.

Croudace Bay Park Protection of Community Land

Valentine parkland foreshore owned by the Lake Macquarie City Council classified Community Land was under threat and we combined with the local community to prevent further alienation. We believe that Council must protect foreshore parkland with an appropriately strong Plan of Management for the Community Land.

This land is important foreshore community land accessed by a restricted residential street and should not just be given over to the interests of Bowling Club members.

The first test in the fitness of a development on Community Land is: does it comply with the intention of the Plan of Management? The second test should be: is this Council property and has Council directed that the DA be prepared? Lastly a development on Community Land should be assessed at arms length by obtaining advice from an independent authority

Heritage -Merewether Beach Pavilion and Morpeth Conservation

Parks and Playgrounds Movement is anxious that Council allow the Merewether Beach Pavilion to be restored and believe the building should be placed on the NSW State

Heritage Register. An Interim Heritage Order was placed over the Pavilion 12 months ago.

The local municipalities in the Greater Newcastle area were amalgamated in 1938 and the Beach Pavilion is the only state significant public building surviving from the Merewether Municipal Council era. The pavilion is prominently positioned above the beach on the side of a sloping bank adjacent to Dr. James Mitchell's Burwood Colliery / Glenrock Colliery Railway.

The Beach Pavilion is Classified by the National Trust of Australia (NSW); Listed in the Heritage Schedules of exhibited Newcastle Local Environment Plan (2002); and listed as a heritage item in the official Heritage Places Plan of Management for the beachfront-Merewether Baths Precinct. Furthermore it is identified in the current Draft Newcastle Coastal Management Study and Plan.

Our members are particularly concerned because the pavilion was planned in the year of the Golden Jubilee of Merewether Municipal Council in 1935. It was designed by the architects Pitt and Merewether; and was opened by Mr. E. S. Spooner Minister for Works and Local Government, in November 1937. The building cost 7,000 pounds to build and the State Government gave Merewether Municipal Council 3,500 pounds of that amount. The nearby Ocean Baths were also opened as part of the Merewether Jubilee Celebrations.

The Merewether Beach Pavilion (Surf House) is important to the heritage of the city and worthy of listing on the State Heritage Register and being properly restored and reused. The Movement would like to set up a Friends of Merewether Beach Pavilion and begin tidying up the surrounds of the building and preparing for its restoration.

David Griffin submitted 16 items to the State's State Heritage landmark Icons project on our behalf and the Movement made a submission to the Morpeth Draft Queens Wharf Landscape Master Plan. Our principle concern was the implementation of the public domain projects and heritage interpretation of the riverside park and the railway. We stressed the importance of the Plan to maintaining the character of Morpeth in future development.

Thanks to supporters

Again we owe thanks Helen Smith, David Griffin, Dave Horkan and Brian Purdue, for their continuous help in fostering the Movement: Brian and Helen have steered the Green Corridor Coalition to the position where they are ready to become an independent corporate group. Helen's work as Secretary has been especially appreciated and I thank all committee members for their help and support. I also thank Gionni di Gravio for help with the Coal River project. Greg Wright has continued with the Belmont Lagoon Land Care Group who have published in conjunction with the Council an integrated wetland management proposal. I have represented the Movement on the Green Point and Fernleigh Track Committee. Vice President Pat Hyde deserves a special mention for her constant and continuing help.

The Parks and Playgrounds Movement has continued to be a significant participant in the voluntary conservation movement for fifty-two years and it is my pleasure to move the adoption of the fifty-second Annual Report of the Parks and Playgrounds Movement Inc.

Doug Lithgow President
Parks and Playgrounds Movement Inc.