

CATHO CHRONICLE

CATHERINE HILL BAY PROGRESS ASSOCIATION

DEDICATED TO PRESERVING THE HERITAGE VALUES OF CATHO HILL BAY



REMEMBERING THE 2013 FIRE

This spring is the ten-year anniversary of the devastating bushfire that raced over the hill and struck Catherine Hill Bay on the 17th October 2013.

The fire, which originated from a deliberately-lit scrubfire in Wye, was fanned by strong southwest winds and quickly swept across the landscape, striking Catho in the early evening. Dozens of houses were threatened, the landscape was blackened, and the flames burned all the way to the beach in Moonee and the southern end of Catho.

Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the local RFS, no lives were lost and only four dwellings were destroyed; the Mine Manager's House (see picture over), the Jetty Master's House, the Pines House and the Police Lock-Up. In addition, the historic timber section of the Catho Jetty was lost.

Heather Jones, Nords Wharf RFS Deputy-Captain at the time, said, "In sixteen years of firefighting I've never seen anything like the speed and intensity of the fire on that day. It was a firestorm."

"It started with the ember attack from up over Montefiore," said Matt "Spud" Jones, the local RFS Captain. "Then the smoke, then walls of flames. We realised we couldn't stop it, so we just did our best to divert it around properties. The heat was so intense I had to pull the team out a few times."

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NEXT MEETING at Catho SLSC on Sat 2nd December

Cover shot: Public outpouring of gratitude in 2013 for the heroic actions of the Rural Fire Service

The picture on the right shows the fire from Catho Lookout. It was finally contained before reaching Middle Camp.



The picture on the front page of the Newcastle Herald (below right) highlights the importance of the Asset Protection Zones (APZs) around Catho; an oasis of green surrounded by a scorched landscape.

Matt Jones reflected on the critical importance of planning ahead to mitigate bushfire risk, "It became clear that the hazard reductions we did earlier in the year saved many of the houses."

The forecast is for hot and dry El Nino conditions to return this summer. The PA is keen to work proactively with the RFS, NPWS, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure Catho is as prepared as it can be for future bushfire threats.



As part of this initiative, the PA is planning a Bushfire Information Session to be held in the Surf Club on Saturday the 21st October 2023. It will include a talk by Matt Jones of the RFS, and full details will be provided in a separate email soon. We encourage all Catho residents to attend.

Whether you rent or own your home, you can take the following actions right now to prepare for bushfire season:

- trim overhanging trees and shrubs,
- mow grass and remove the cuttings from around your home,
- dispose of material that can burn, like wood piles and old furniture,
- clear debris from your gutters to stop embers causing a fire,
- install sturdy hoses that can reach around your home and ensure you have a reliable water source.

More information on preparing a household bushfire action plan is available at the following link:

www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/resources/bush-fire-survival-plan

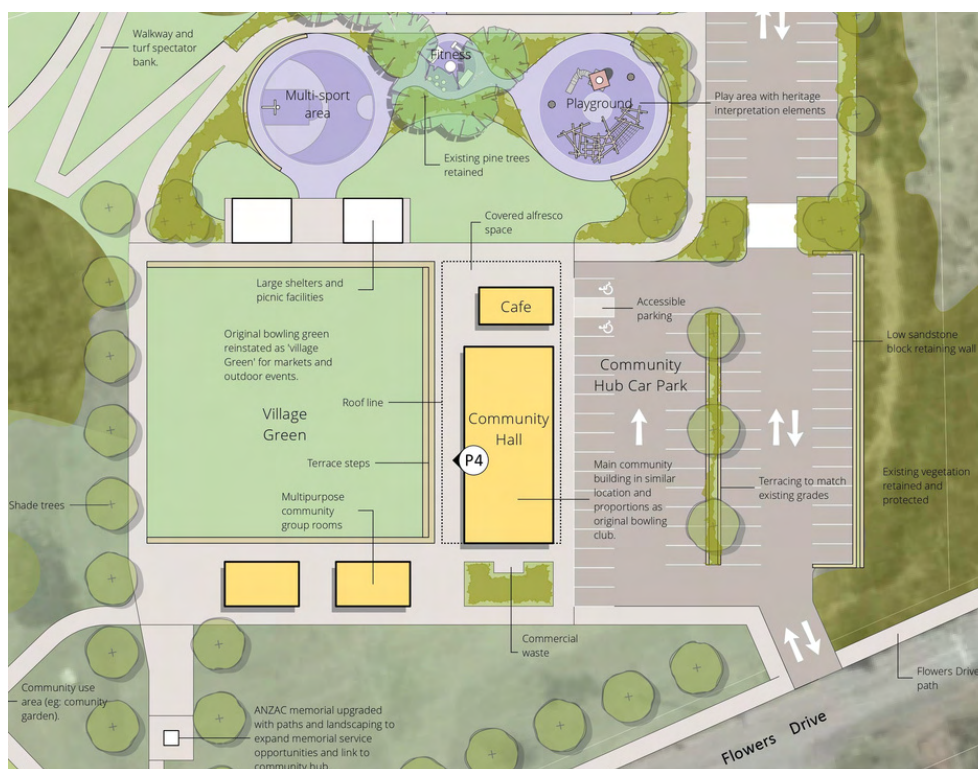
Catho Master Plan Update

Stephen McAllister from Lake Macquarie City Council spoke at our August PA meeting, providing an update on the implementation of community facilities proposed in the CHB Precincts Master Plan. This Master Plan outlines how community facilities will be provided at two key precincts, namely; i) the Middle Camp Sports and Recreation Precinct and ii) the Surf Club Precinct.

The first stage of implementation will be the Community Hub at Middle Camp, encompassing the community buildings, an upgraded play space, and associated parking and pathways. Geotechnical and contamination studies have recently been undertaken to inform design, which is in its early stages. In the recent PA meeting, Stephen sought community feedback on the anticipated uses for the Community Hall and associated buildings. Preferences expressed by members included:

- Suitable for art classes,
- A permanent museum,
- Wedding events,
- Wakes,
- A Men's Shed,
- Yoga/pilates classes,
- Dancing (ie wooden floorboards),
- Outdoor BBQs near picnic shelters,
- Bike racks,
- Solar panels on roof,
- Building designs must meet Heritage requirements.

It is expected that this Community Hub will be implemented in a 3-5 year timeframe. The timing for the other stages of the Master Plan, including the redevelopment of the surf club, will be subject to progressing land acquisition requirements before proceeding to detailed design and approvals.



Hunter Offshore Wind Energy Zone

The Federal Government has approved the Hunter Offshore Wind Development Zone, a nearly 2,000 kilometres square area in the Pacific Ocean between Swansea and Port Stephens. The declared zone will be 20km from the coast in the north, and over 35km from the coast in the south (ie the section closest to Catho). This area is capable of hosting up to 5 gigawatts (GW) of wind turbines. For comparison, the Eraring Power Station, the nation's largest coal-fired generator, has a capacity of 2.9GW.



Federal energy minister Chris Bowen says feasibility licence applications for the declared area opened in early August 2023. Proponents will apply for licences to study project areas of up to 700 square kilometres within that broader zone. It is anticipated that two or three proposals could progress from feasibility to construction in the Hunter zone, although some industry experts are questioning the financial viability of the offshore project given there are still significant opportunities for onshore wind energy in Australia, which is much cheaper.

How big would the turbines be?

One of the proponents, Oceanex, is proposing about 130 floating turbines, each 250 metres high and tethered to the ocean floor with cables. For comparison, Sydney's Centrepoint Tower is 300 metres high. The towers supporting the blades of the turbines are 130 metres above sea level, and the blades stretch another 120 metres above that.

Will you be able to see the turbines from shore?

Yes, but just how prominent they will be remains unclear. An Oceanex spokesman says someone standing on shore would "only see the very tip of a blade on the very clearest of days". The available details are vague, and more information is needed for the community to understand the visual impacts of these proposals. The fact that the blades are moving is likely to make them more noticeable when compared to a stationary structure. Also, there is no information available on how visible they will be from an elevated location, such as a headland, compared to standing at sea level.



When will they be up and running?

Oceanex says it could start building its project as early as 2028 and start producing power in 2030.

How does the electricity get back to shore?

Each turbine feeds power to an offshore substation, which is connected to land by sub-sea cables, which in turn connect to the Hunter's established electricity grid. A preferred grid connection point under consideration is in the vicinity of the decommissioned Munmorah Power Station.

The government plans to start community consultation on a Hunter offshore wind farm in the coming months.

Landcare Update

The sessions at the Graveyard Beach site in recent months have focused on the dunal area below the car park, which is now fairly weed free with good cover. The Bitou bush flowers and black berries are removed from the site - it's working! Great work by Carmel, Clarita Norman, Jayne Gordon, Lindsey and David Goff, Jann and Dave.

Earlier in the year we had support from the Lake Mac Landcare Green Team led by Wendy, and coincidentally the LM Natural Areas Program team was there too, organised by Simon Lubinski over at the Landcare centre. Clearing the area between the carpark and the cemetery by hand, and cut & painting with glyphosate. The NAP team returned to do more work along the cemetery side later in July.

At the south site (in front of Pat Slaven Reserve) the Council's erosion control area have now been fenced off and will be excluded from our work. Their Acacia sophorae wattles have died, but the small pigface plants are coping well. Bitou bush has returned to our work area, between the access road and the steps, so we're weeding there and further up along the fence, liberating tea tree bushes. We also planted Lomandra and pigface beside the access road, and Acacia sophorae higher up. Thanks to Carmel, Fae and Neil Patten, Jann Kinsela, Paul Myors, Clarita Norman, and Lea Brown.

We have approached Simon Lubinski at LMCC regarding the potential planting of fire-retardant trees around CHB. He is checking, and suggested we approach RFS too.

Everyone is welcome to join at either of the Landcare sites. Call us for a chat first on 0438 499636 if you're new!



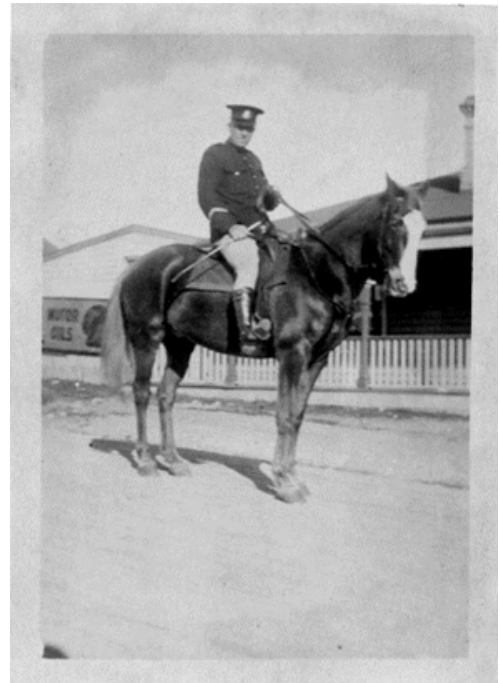
Did you know ...

... when you crest the hill between Middle Camp village and the Bay village and look south, you will see a small white building sitting on its own in the middle of the old town. It's not big enough for a house, but still significant. This is the rebuilt Police Cell, which was lost in the October 2013 fire as firefighters fought furiously to save the larger Police Station and Police Residence.

The History of the "Lock-Up"

There are sketchy records of a policeman at Catherine Hill Bay way back in 1876, but it's unlikely he had a police station. The first known police station building was on the lefthand side of the bottom of Clarke Street (when looking downhill) established in 1890, when a one-foot Constable was posted there.

The police cell was originally behind the courthouse, (between nos. 5 and 7 Clarke Street, refer photo below), It was moved to its present site when the police station was established opposite the Wallarah Hotel in 1920. It continued to function as a one-man station there until 1980.



Newspaper Article (26 March 1975)

Residents of the small, but long-established mining township are up in arms because of a report that the local police station is to close. The resident officer, Constable Brian Conlon had told the people that the station would close soon, Mr David Wotherspoon, the town's publican said.

Residents interviewed said they regarded the local policeman, not only as a preserver of the peace, but as a friend. They said it might be argued that the crime rate was neither serious in character, nor high in the fragmented township, but his presence gave the people a feeling of security.

One resident said "We do not have many problems here, except when people from outside come in and muck around the surf. There are the usual domestic squabbles, but generally the police officer acts as a peacemaker."

Mr Joseph Baker, 85, born at Greta has lived at the Bay, "man and boy for 78 years ". He still remembers the first policeman in the area, when Catherine Hill Bay was a lively town, and the pit - Wallarah Colliery - employed several hundred men. "He was named Gibson, and he was a good bloke " he recalled. "Come to think of it, I don't think that we've had a bad policeman."

Until about 20 years ago, the police station, now located opposite the hotel at the top and of the main street, was on the left-hand side of the bottom of Clarke Street. For many years it was alongside the since-departed Courthouse, this was at the time when Catherine Hill Bay was a place of several names, of which three remain; the Bay, Middle Camp and Mine Camp. One small section had the name of "Angels Rest", so called because it was a very quiet place. A hamlet of seven homes, behind the vigaro ground was called "Federal City",

Mr Baker said that although the township had a good record for the behaviour of its citizens, it must continue to have its Policeman and the station. For so long it has been a self-contained community. Almost everyone worked at the mine, and everybody knew each other. The lock-up, in the back yard of the station residence has seen little service over a long period, probably it had been used once every few years, Mr Baker said.

The last person to occupy the Police Cell was Brian D'Arcy. He had not paid a number of fines so as punishment he went into the lockup for 16 days where he was served hot meals everyday day by the policeman's wife (in return for some gardening). He used to be let out each day so that he could return home to bathe. This was in 1975 when Tom Jefferson was the policeman stationed at Catherine Hill Bay. Brian (Foopsy) recorded that, while serving his time, the door to the lockup was opened day and night and that he did odd jobs around the yard.

Until he died in 2007, Brian D'Arcy kept a copy of the food that he was served during his 16 day stay. Below is an excerpt of his diary for the first week:

Monday: Coffee for breakfast, soup for dinner, and toasted sandwiches for tea.

Tuesday: Biscuits for breakfast, biscuits for dinner, and seasoned beef and baked vegies for tea.

Wednesday: Cake for breakfast and bacon, beef steak and baked vegies for tea

Thursday: Cake for breakfast, chicken for dinner and t-bone steak, peas, beans and baked vegies for tea

Friday: Cake for breakfast, soup and bread for dinner fried sausages, peas and baked vegies for tea

Saturday: cake for breakfast, soup and bread for dinner roast pork with apple sauce, peas, beans and vegies for tea.

Sunday: Cake for breakfast and curried chicken and rice with carrots, peas, pumpkin, cauliflower potato and gravy for tea

He made the following diary entry upon his release:

"Releas (sic) Tuesday worse luck \$400 fine paid in full. I am the only person by record to spend 16 days straight at the Bay Lock Up. I am the only person can walk from by bed 4 foot, sit on the shit house and watch TV the same time, there no many or any can do that."

The Lock-Up one of only two of its kind left in the State, and an important reminder of the early history of policing in rural areas of NSW. Such lock-ups were once very common, but are now quite rare anywhere in NSW. It has also been a part of the social infrastructure of Catherine Hill Bay for a very long time.

Of the four important heritage buildings lost in the fire of October 2013, the Lock-up is the only one to be completely rebuilt in something resembling its original form.

How to become a PA member

Would you like to become a member or friend of the CHB Progress Association?

The annual membership fee is \$20, or \$10 for pensioners.

The membership form is attached to this newsletter email. Please email membership forms to accounts@catherinehillbay.org.au. Thank you to all our members and friends that have already renewed their payments.

To join the Catho Chronicle mailing list, please email us at newsletter@catherinehillbay.org.au

For more local news check the following websites:

www.catherinehillbay.org.au or

www.chbcommunityalliance.org

and the various Facebook pages for the latest news and great photos:

www.facebook.com/CathHillBay

www.facebook.com/catherinehillbay

www.facebook.com/CathHillBayLandcare

www.facebook.com/cathoslsc

www.facebook.com/cathoboardriders

www.facebook.com/swanseaSES

www.facebook.com/Wallarah-Rural-Fire-Brigade-1014414335240696