



WAVERLEY COUNCIL

A BONDI BUSH RETREAT

By Robin Yip

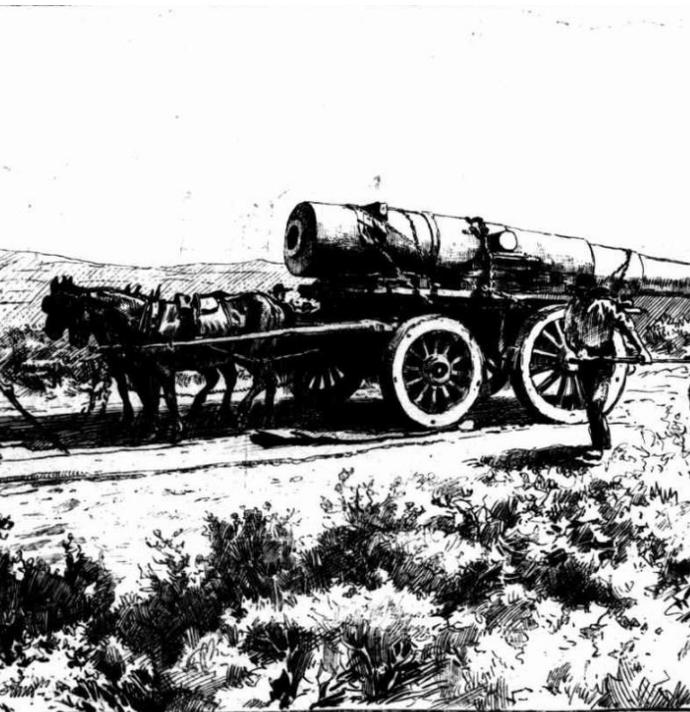
Waverley Council held a Seniors' Storytelling Workshop at Waverley Library in 2009 to collect and celebrate the memories of Waverley's seniors.

When we were very young my brother and I used to spend some of our holidays with an elderly family friend. Every day her daughter would walk us down to Coogee Beach where we played in the surf and when the tide was out we were able to play at being adventurers. There were little pockets of water in the rocks where we would discover a myriad of tiny sea creatures.

A few years later in 1950 we moved to Dover Heights. It was an old house and my dad used to enjoy telling people that he purchased it with a one pound (\$2) deposit. We were disappointed with the house at that time but were delighted with the vista in front of us. Across the road was a large tract of native bushland and beyond that to the horizon were the deep blue waters of the

ocean with the white sands of Bondi visible down the hill. We soon discovered that we could go exploring through this bushland down onto the golf course and then it was a hop, skip and a jump to the beach.

This little stretch of bushland was to become a wonderful playground, for hidden amongst the bushes was a big gun. The north Bondi coastal defence fortifications were built in 1892, as one of three, to house the newest 9.2 inch breech loading guns. They were the largest guns to be installed in the colony of New South Wales and were designed to protect the colony from attacks by enemy ships off the coast. The barrel of the gun weighed 22 tons and it took over three weeks for a team of 36 horses to carry the gun from Victoria Barracks to the coastal fort.



Images from top:

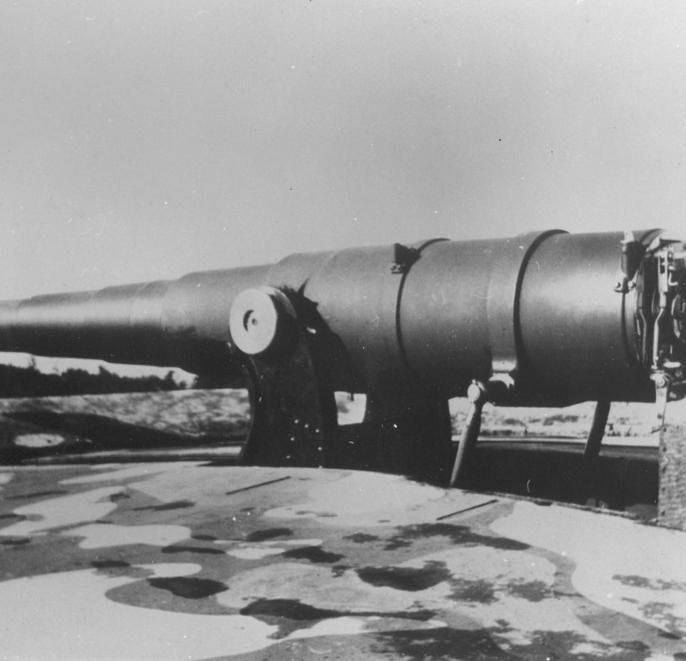
Rodney Reserve at Rodney St,
Dover Heights 1950.

Transporting gun from Victoria
Barracks to Ben Buckler.
Sydney Mail 22 April, 1893

WAVERLEY COUNCIL

A BONDI BUSH RETREAT

By Robin Yip



Images from top:

Big Gun, North Bondi.

Internal view of the Ben Buckler gun battery chambers during an unauthorised excavation by the Waterboard Authority, January 1984.

It was hidden below ground level, beneath a domed iron shield and housed in a large reinforced concrete emplacement ten metres in diameter. There were also store rooms and a tunnel going out to the lookouts on either side of the gun site. The gun was in regular service until the Second World War when it was held in reserve. The army vacated the old fortifications in the 1950s and the government was to sell off the gun, however, they were unable to find a scrap metal buyer to take it away. It is now classed as an architectural relic and is protected by the Heritage Council.

With the added excitement of the gun this native bushland, which was approximately 2.7 hectares, became the hub of many a childhood fantasy. War games, hide and seek, a mysterious landscape for intrepid explorers and the roof of the fort providing a wonderful platform for war dances and other deafening pursuits as it gave off the most decidedly satisfying noises. When not playing these games we would sit on the edge of the cliffs and

watch the ocean come crashing in onto the rocks below – awesome! The occasional ship would pass by as they travelled up or down the coast – a passenger liner, a cargo ship and sometimes a fishing boat or a sailing boat. Where are they going? What are they carrying? Are they heading off to exotic lands?

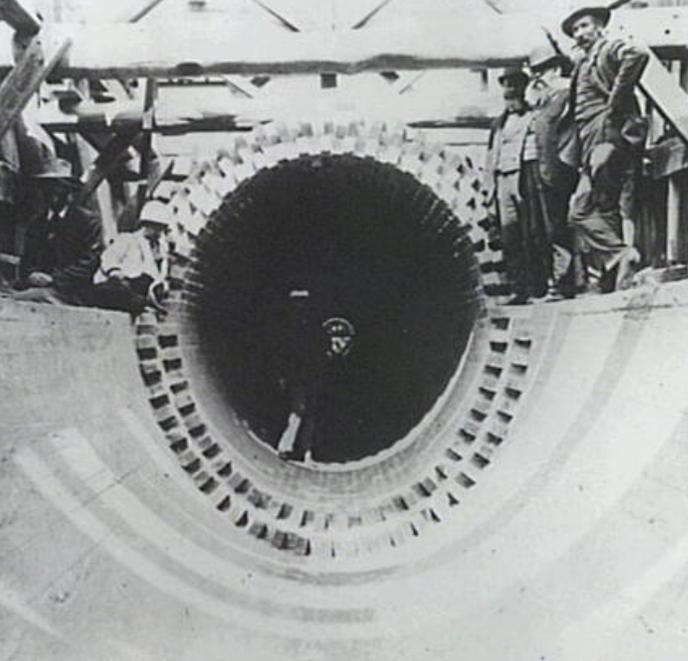
Unfortunately all this soon changed. This pristine parcel of bushland which had stood virtually untouched for hundreds of years (apart from the cannon and lookouts) was to be ravished in the name of progress. In about 1961 much of the bush was cleared and the area was turned into a formal playing field which became known as The Hugh Bamford Reserve. The gun was covered in sand and buried with the landfill which was trucked in to build up the levels for the reserve.

As the recently built Sydney Water buildings blocked any access to the golf course we were no longer able to trek to the beach but were forced to use the conventional route along the main road.

WAVERLEY COUNCIL

A BONDI BUSH RETREAT

By Robin Yip



Images from top:

Section of the oviform brick-lined Bondi sewer under construction, with workmen on the left and right. Image ca. 1880.

Bondi Beach panorama section with the Bondi sewer vent stack in the background, 1960s.

I lived overseas for seven years and when I returned at the end of 1974 our native bushland had become a football field but with the perimeters now littered with rubbish and the odd condom and needles. We were intermittently bombarded by droves of people who came to practice, play or watch football on the weekends.

In 1984 Sydney Water started an upgrade to the sewerage system and so the dynamics of this mostly peaceful park were to change again. Trucks, machinery, wire fencing and noisy workshops appeared in the middle of the field. Little did the workers realise how good the acoustics were in this small corner so that not only the loud music of their radios but their conversations and occasional 'blue' language would sometimes be very clearly heard in the street above. Every now and then we would be subjected to a shuddering blast as another explosion occurred 30 metres beneath us. All in the name of progress we are led to believe.

The North Bondi system, which

was started in 1880, is Sydney's oldest ocean outfall system and serves approximately 500,000 residents from Bondi to Rozelle as well as Sydney's central business district. It runs under the Bondi Golf Links and the chimney stack in the middle of the course, the original odour exhaust, was affectionately known by the locals as "Stella the Smella". The work was finally completed in 1991 with the construction of a pipeline stretching 2.2 kilometres into the ocean and peace was again restored. The little reserve was once again a playing field complete with a club house and footballers, young and old, came to practise and play and dog lovers came to exercise their pets.

In 2003 the reserve was again to be disturbed as Sydney Water needed to modernise the sewerage system. This time the working area was not such a blight on the landscape as most of the equipment and materials were housed in a large shed 27 metres long. Enclosing the work compound was a concrete wall painted with a landscape

WAVERLEY COUNCIL

A BONDI BUSH RETREAT

By Robin Yip



Images from top:

Hugh Bamford Reserve.

Robin and two bush regenerator friends.

mural and with native bushes planted along the base of the wall. Work on the upgrade proceeded without too many disruptions as most of the work was underground. A “grinder” was used to excavate the tunnels so we were spared the traumas experienced with the previous underground blasting. As work progressed the neighbours were invited to inspect the project. There is a network of 150 linear metres of tunnels, one kilometre of pipe work, 80 kilometres of electrical cable and four sedimentation vats. Finally, the work was completed in 2007 and the reserve was again back to being a football field. It is to be hoped that “Hugh Bamford” can now settle down without further disruption. One exception would be if the gun site were to be excavated and put on public display.

In lieu of fees for the lease of the Reserve, Sydney Water undertook to fund a programme to restore and improve the native bush around this area. There were pockets of native vegetation which were under pressure from weed infestation

so the programme included specialists to clear the weeds especially around the Military Road embankment. Much of the greenery in this area are the ‘exotics’ which were brought in with the Council landfill.

Adjacent to the reserve and behind the houses is a narrow strip of coastal heath which runs along the cliff tops and is a continuation of the original tract of bushland. It is one of only half a dozen patches of original bushland which still exist in Waverley today and these small patches are an irreplaceable part of our natural heritage.

For the past nine years I have been part of a group of volunteers working with the Waverley bush regeneration programme to preserve this heritage. Largely neglected for many years the site had been overtaken by weeds. This weed infestation alters the site by shading out the local species so our work involves the clearance of these weeds which then allows the native seedlings to emerge and natural regeneration to occur.

WAVERLEY COUNCIL

A BONDI BUSH RETREAT

By Robin Yip



Images from top:

Banksia Serrata, illustrated by Adam Forster. 1921. Image courtesy of the NLA.

View from the bush regeneration site.

Among the indigenous plants in this heath are paperbarks, three species of banksias including May Gibbs 'old man banksia', wattles, monotocas, commelina, lomandra, native lilies, the slender rice flowers and many species of native grasses. As we work in the area there is much excitement as another 'new' species is regenerated and numerous native seedlings continue to appear. As the 'bush' returns there is a noticeable increase in the numbers of native birds taking refuge here. Whilst not as large as the original tract it is still wonderful to have an area which is regenerating back towards its original state.

On the one hand in North Bondi we have a formal football field and park with little or no vegetation and abutting this on the Dover Heights side we now have an area in which the native bushland is being revived.

Ironically the open playing field is enclosed by high fencing along the cliff edge and the area fenced off for the bush regeneration is open to the oceans. As most of the cliff side in Waverley is fenced off for the coastal walk this enclosed regeneration area could possibly be the only retreat where one is able to sit on the cliff tops surrounded by the original native bush and absorb the spectacular coast views and marvel at the constancy of the ocean waters crashing in on the rocks below.

Where is that ship going? What is she carrying?