

Historical Outline of Blue Gum High Forest at St Ives

showing interrelationships of Browns Forest, Dalrymple-Hay Nature Reserve, undeveloped private property and Sydney Water land

The Blue Gum High Forest is a tall, moist open forest. It originally occurred along the high ridge lines between Crows Nest and Hornsby and west from Eastwood to Castle Hill on the Wianamatta Shale soils with a rainfall over 1100mm per year. Trees were reported over 40 metres high. Today only very small examples remain in reserves. The largest remnant surviving with its original understorey species is the St Ives complex, which consists of four adjoining properties with different ownership. They are Dalrymple-Hay Nature Reserve, Browns Forest, Sydney Water and undeveloped private property (18 hectares in all).

Because sandstone does not outcrop anywhere in this remnant there are no surviving relics of Aboriginal occupation of the site (such as engravings), but the understorey plants would have supplemented their diet of mammals, birds/eggs, reptiles and honey. The high rainfall would have led to quick rot of any organic artefacts.

17 April 1788 The first Europeans to pass through this country were Captain Arthur Phillip and party on his first inland exploration. Although his exact route cannot be identified, it is known that they spent the night of 16 April at Bungaroo “where the flowing of the tide ceased, and a fresh-water stream commenced” (Surgeon-General John White) – this site has easily been identified on Middle Harbour Creek. The following morning, after the climb up the rocky sandstone hillside, the party entered an “immense forest” and would have passed very close if not through this remnant of the Blue Gum High Forest. The highest point between Bungaroo and Wahroonga is the Sydney Water Reservoir, at 173 metres above sea level, on part of this remnant forest. Such markers were favoured by early explorers to take their bearings. Later in the day Phillip sighted hills to the west (now known as the Blue Mountains) and assumed that a river ran at its base. His next expedition confirmed this.

Watkin Tench’s publication (although second-hand reporting) provides the most relevant information of an Aboriginal presence in the area, and his information of the lack of running water indicates that Phillip followed the ridge, probably along the line of today’s Telegraph Road and Pacific Highway.

February 1805 **George Caley**, botanist and collector for Sir Joseph Banks, undertook a 4 day exploration from West Pennant Hills to Narrabeen Lagoon crossing Lover’s Jump Creek and Cowan Creek (both running water) and then present-day Mona Vale Road near Woodbury Road, St Ives, continuing through Belrose and Terrey Hills to the coast. He returned slightly more to the south, crossing East St Ives around Pentecost Avenue and on through Turramurra. He reported, “Some places were rather stony, but in general I have not seen so good forest land in the country”.

In 1823, D.D. Mathew was promised the Rosedale Grant of 800 acres of forested land, adjoining the Robert Pymble Grant, for erecting and working a saw-mill. He leased the land and returned to England to import specialist sawmilling equipment at a cost of 2000 pounds. He established his sawmill, which he named “Cowan” after the Aboriginal name for the creek (Cowan = big water) on the site of the present-day Pymble Golf Club. The mill, the first to be erected in New South Wales, proved to be a huge success. He specialised in cutting flooring

boards from stringy-bark which grew mainly on the transition soils between the shale and sandstone. The milled timber was transported by bullock dray to Fiddens Wharf on the Lane Cove River and floated to the Sydney timberyards. He became one of the most important timber merchants of the time. In 1832 he commenced selling his grant, an indication that the most profitable timber had been removed. After his death in 1856, his executor Richard Hill completed the sub-division and sales.

Reference Vol 33 No.1 Oct. 2004 "The Historian" journal of Ku-ring-gai Historical Society Inc. deals with D.D Mathew's life, correspondence and the sales of his Grant and family histories of subsequent owners.

In 1823, Joseph Fidden had established his wharf at Killara on the Lane Cove River to transport the timber being felled throughout the district to build Sydney town. The whole of this district was known as Lane Cove and is referred to as "old Lane Cove" in the recently published "Brown Family Chronicles".

At this period the settlers were mainly timber-workers. Saw-pits were worked originally by convicts and the timber moved by bullock-drawn jinkers to the Lane Cove River and shipped across the Harbour on the out-going tide to the wharves at Darling Harbour. They returned on the in-tide bringing stores.

As the best of the High Forest was cut out, by the middle of the 19th century most timber workers moved on to the forests of Gosford, the Illawarra and the NSW North Coast; very few stayed to establish the orchards and farms. It was a different group of settlers who bought and cleared the scrub from the original grants to grow produce to feed the expanding population of Sydney. The sale of firewood as the land was cleared became a profitable enterprise.

In 1854, Thomas Brown, who had grown up and been employed in the district, purchased 30 acres on the western side of Mona Vale Road (now Canisius College) and established an orange orchard.

This land had been purchased from D.D. Mathew for twenty-six pounds 10 shillings for an under-age John Oliver who, two years later, sold it to Brown for 145 pounds.

What made this land worth such an increase in price?

Speculation suggests it still grew marketable timber (a fragment remains as Blackbutt Reserve), or was it that the level land partially cleared, contained rich soil ideal for an orchard on the head-waters of Cowan Creek, an uncontaminated water supply?

The Thomas Brown Family retained possession of this land until 1938 when it was sold to Canisius College.

In 1856, D.D. Mathew sold 60 acres of timbered land on the east side of Mona Vale Road. to F.& E. Arthur. This forest had probably been selectively logged by Mathew as the market requirements of the time dictated, given that his timber mill was close-by.

In 1867, Thomas Brown purchased this forested land from the Arthurs and built the original stone cottage “Rosedale”(now known as “Greenwood” and National Trust listed). He kept this area of the Blue Gum High Forest intact refusing several offers of purchase. Over his life-time he probably used some timber to construct a cottage at North Sydney and for fencing, posts, rails and firewood. The Brown Chronicles (2002) suggest that in an era when mineral fertiliser was rarely used, he was using the leaf litter to mulch his orange orchards opposite. This is confirmed in a reply to a letter from his son T.E. Brown to the Forestry Commission.

In 1905, Thomas Brown, shortly before his death in 1907, deeded as two separate parcels of land, the forest side of Mona Vale Road to his two daughters, Jemima Brown, and Susan Kent, with her husband, whose land included the cottage. The orchard was left in trust for the children of his son Thomas Edwin. The daughters did not attempt to develop their respective lands. It was managed as before by their brother.

In 1925, the Forestry Commissioner, Richard Dalrymple-Hay, recommended to the Minister for Lands, the Hon. P.F. Loughlin, that “56 acres, 4.5 perches known as Browns Forest at Pymble be acquired by resumption for forestry ... and held for all time to serve as a **demonstration forest and arboretum** for the city of Sydney”. Other points in the recommendation were, “being within about nine miles of the city and approached by both rail and road communication, it is not only of historic interest, but will be of great value for educational and propaganda purposes”. And, “It will serve the purpose of a natural park ... and be of value in connection with the proposed Australian forest school in Canberra and the training of foresters for the NSW Service”. He also foresaw the development of the district as a residential area.

At the bottom of this document, in P.F. Loughlin’s handwriting: “Approved – after personal inspection PFL 6/9/25”.

The NSW Forestry Commission quickly resumed both parcels of land, the 56 acres on the eastern side of Mona Vale Road, to establish a Demonstration Forest. The portion now known as Dalrymple-Hay was purchased from Jemima Brown and the agreed payment made. With Susan’s land now inherited by her four sons, the Kent brothers, the sale was not finalized, as agreement could not be reached on the value of the land or compensation.

In 1926, although the sale was not completed, the Minister for Lands, P.F. Loughlin, opened the Dalrymple-Hay State Forest and named it after the first Commissioner of State Forests. A crucial stage now emerged in the history of this forest.

Within a short time it was decided that the area was too small for its intended purpose. Much of the forest was therefore spared from being replaced by foreign species as part of an arboretum. It would be over a decade before the Cumberland State Forest at Pennant Hills was acquired instead. This large arboretum was accommodated within the 97 acres of mostly cleared land and planted with species from many districts. The integrity of the Blue Gum High Forest at St Ives was saved from this threat.

The Kent brothers were not happy with the proposed purchase price, and the Government was not prepared to pay more for the Forest than the standing timber was worth. So by mutual consent the Government decided to relinquish the land back to the original owners. An Act of Revocation required the consent of both Houses of Parliament.

In 1931, an Act of Parliament re-vested 29 acres in the original owners, the Kent brothers, Thomas Brown's grandsons, leaving 26 acres fully acquired as State Forest. In the wider national picture this was during the Depression and all public funds were scarce. Even so there was a public outcry from all over Sydney about this action.

October 1934 The first public meeting was held at Killara "to protest at the action of the Government and appoint a committee to consider what steps could be taken to retain the whole area for the use and enjoyment of the public" (Mayoral minute 31/14565). The Mayor of Ku-ring-gai, Cresswell O'Reilly, presided at the meeting. C.R. Barton and F.T. Berman of the Australian Forest League, and Mrs Annie Wyatt of the Ku-ring-gai Tree Lovers Civic League (she later founded the National Trust) led the community involvement, which resulted in the formation of the Dalrymple-Hay Forest Preservation Committee.

Between 1931-34, Council dickered over the means of buying the land even though the Kents were prepared to sell on terms or a land swap, voting against it in the end (probably still the effect of the Depression).

The Kents then applied for a sub-division of all their land with a road frontage to Mona Vale Road and Rosedale Road into about 1 acre allotments, 13 lots in all. Council passed the sub-division and the allotments were sold over a period of time.

It was stated by the Ranger's League (1933) that "this beautiful area is probably the last piece of original forest of its size within 50 miles of Sydney. Not a single piece of timber has been cut from the forest for more than 50 years". The secretary of the Parks and Playgrounds Movement, Dr Bean, described the forest as "a great national monument, and the only complete relic of a forest in almost the same condition as when Captain Cook landed" and urged Ku-ring-gai Council to take over the acres.

The Forest Preservation Committee took an option on the 11 acres of the Kent's land without a street frontage and in 1934 Council was persuaded to take up the option for 1460 pounds, less 310 pounds from the owners if an undertaking was given to dedicate the land as Forest Reserve. Council completed the purchase for 1150 pounds, 350 from donations and 800 from Council, with Browns Forest protected by Covenant as "Forest reserve for all time".

Between 1934-71, the community group, the Forest Preservation Committee, some members of which served as honorary rangers, had much correspondence with Council and State Forests on the long-term future of the combined area as a recreational forest or a Flora Reserve, and on the current upkeep and day-to-day management of the Forest area. To make the forest a Flora Reserve would have required legislative changes. No action was taken by the Forestry Commission to solve the long-term dilemma, except to transfer Dalrymple-Hay Forest to their ecology branch presumably due to the pressures of World War 2 and then post-war development.

During the depression, a team of four men were employed under unemployment relief. They camped in the Forest, were supervised by Council and costs met by the Forestry Commission.

In 1938, Mr Room purchased Lots 12 and 13 of the Kent subdivision fronting Rosedale Road, erected a house on Lot 12 and occupied the property until the land was transferred to his widow in 1987. Some garden was developed near the house, but most of the holding was left in a natural state. Correspondence with Council in 1983 mentions that they had

experienced a number of bushfires, two of which had blackened the trunks of the trees.

In 1946, Lots 8-10 of the original Kent brothers' subdivision were resumed by the Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board for a water reservoir. The native vegetation, an important part of the Blue Gum High Forest ridge-top community, still occurs around the reservoir and parking area. Importantly, the construction was outside the catchment of the main forest and so had minimal impact. The reservoir was not built until 1974 and is still operational.

In 1967, the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) Act was passed.

In 1971, the State Forest was gazetted as Dalrymple-Hay Nature Reserve becoming the responsibility of NPWS. Since then Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve and Browns Forest have been managed in close co-operation between NPWS and Ku-ring-gai Council. No fence has ever marked the boundary between the two.

In 1984-85, Ku-ring-gai Bushland & Environmental Society (KuBES) obtained a Commonwealth Community Employment Program (CEP) Grant with the support of NPWS, for a bush regeneration project in Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve. It paid for a supervisor/trainer to teach three unemployed women the skills of bush regeneration and plant recognition, particularly of weeds. The initial 9-month grant was extended to 12 months and three more women were trained. As far as has been ascertained, the supervisor, Bruce Rodgie, made the first comprehensive botanical survey of the area, listing 172 native species and 40 weed species for the Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve and Browns Forest area. Another CEP Grant, sponsored by KuBES, was undertaken in 1987. Since then NPWS has employed contract bush regeneration teams at intervals as finances have permitted.

In 1990, Mrs Room's executors sold both Lots 12 & 13 to Mr Lam, who submitted a subdivision for 9 lots which was refused by Council on the advice of its Engineering and Parks Department. Ku-ring-gai Bushland & Environmental Society submitted an objection. An objection from NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service stated that **"to clear and develop was totally inappropriate and should be avoided through acquisition or other means"**. A similar objection was received from the National Trust of Australia (NSW). Between 1990 and 1998 the owner was issued with notices to remove weeds such as rhus, lantana and privet, demolish the derelict house and remove all accumulated rubbish.

In 1997, Blue Gum High Forest was gazetted as an "Endangered Ecological Community" in Schedule 1 of the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995.

In 2000, the 1 hectare site, 100-102 (Lots 12-13) Rosedale Road, St Ives, came up for sale and Ku-ring-gai Council considered purchase. However because it had a considerable debt and shortfall in its budget for capital works at the time, the purchase price of \$2.2M was considered beyond its means. The land was purchased by two related companies.

In 2002, a Development Application for Lot 12, refused by Council, was appealed to the Land & Environment Court. The appeal was dismissed "because of its inability to provide a sufficient asset protection zone (A.P.Z.)", criteria for which was set out in the *Planning for Bushfire Protection Guidelines*, January 2002, "and also its impact on the endangered Blue Gum High Forest ecological community".

In 2002-04, a medium density complex approved on appeal to the Land and Environment Court was built on Mona Vale Road, adjoining Browns Forest. The increased volume and frequency of stormwater flow into the reserve has accelerated the erosion of the fragile shale soils and contributed to further destruction of Blue Gum High Forest through waterlogging in the lower sections of the main ephemeral watercourse.

September 2004 A Development Application was submitted for a single dwelling on 100 Rosedale Road. About 60 objections were received by Ku-ring-gai Council. By July 2005 Council had rejected this development application.

May 2005 The properties 100 and 102 Rosedale Road, St Ives, were advertised by Colliers International for sale on the international market, however, by the closing date at the end of May had not been sold.

July 2005 Ku-ring-gai Council agreed to seek Commonwealth and State assistance to purchase 100-102 Rosedale Road, St Ives, to in principle allocate part funding to the purchase and to obtain a valuation.

August 2005 The Commonwealth Minister for Environment and Heritage, Ian Campbell, announced that the Blue Gum High Forest ecological community was listed as 'critically endangered', the highest category of threat under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

The Federal Member for Bradfield, Brendan Nelson, publicly supported conservation of the St Ives Blue Gum High Forest and promised to assist in an application for funds to facilitate the purchase of the last hectare of the forest into private ownership.

October 2005 100 Rosedale Road, St Ives (0.55 hectare), was purchased by the NSW Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation (TIDC), as an offset, to compensate for the destruction of a small remnant (0.33 ha) of Blue Gum High Forest Ecological Community as a result of the upgrade of the railway north of Hornsby.

November 2005 Ku-ring-gai Councillors unanimously resolved to accept the staff recommendations:

- A. That Council accept the offer of funds representing a development offset and should the development application proceed, place the funds in an internally restricted reserve for the purpose of acquiring 102 Rosedale Road, St Ives.
- B. That staff enter dialogue with the owners of 102 Rosedale Road, St Ives as to potential agreement regarding the long term conservation of this land.
- C. That staff prepare, in collaboration with the Blue Gum High Forest Group, an application for grant funding towards the purchase of 102 Rosedale Road and submit this application to the Department of Environment and Heritage.
- D. That Council seek further support from the Member for Bradfield, The Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson MP, in relation to funding opportunities and other opportunities.
- E. That additional funding sources as outlined in the Report be pursued and reported to Council.

January 2006 An application for a grant from the Commonwealth Government under the National Reserve System was submitted jointly by Ku-ring-gai Council and the Blue Gum High Forest Group. Funding from the Commonwealth was necessary to add to Ku-ring-gai Council's allocation and donations from the community to purchase 102 Rosedale Road, St Ives.

July 2006 The property **100 Rosedale Road** was transferred to the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change.

The NSW Scientific Committee made a preliminary determination to list the Blue Gum High Forest Ecological Community as **critically endangered**. This recognised the increased level of threat since it was listed as endangered in 1997 under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995.

December 2006 **Blue Gum High Forest at St Ives** was selected as a Threatened Species Demonstration Site. This endangered ecological community was the first of eleven sites within the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Area chosen to showcase best practice management to ensure the long-term viability of threatened species, populations and/or ecological communities.

April 2007 NSW Scientific Committee determined that the Blue Gum High Forest ecological community be listed as critically endangered.

May 2007 A **Development Application** (DA) was submitted for a large single dwelling on 102 Rosedale Road. The required bushfire asset protection zone would cover most of the site. If approved the development would seriously degrade the biodiversity of Blue Gum High Forest Ecological Community on the site and have significant long term adverse impacts on the conservation of the surrounding reserves.

Blue Gum High Forest Resource Kits for local schools were being produced by the Department of Environment and Conservation, with funding from the NSW Environmental Trust and assistance from community people. Both the cultural (early timber industry) and natural heritage values were covered.

Bush regeneration was occurring in both Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve and Browns Forest. Experienced contractors were stimulating regeneration of the Blue Gum High Forest Ecological Community by removing weeds and burning small area. Funding was provided by NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change and the Ku-ring-gai Environmental Levy.

The Volunteer Bushcare Group now has 12 members who spend 2 Sunday mornings per month tackling weeds and several residents provide assistance by providing water and transfer of weed refuse to the tip. From informal conversations with local residents there is an increased appreciation of the values of this special forest compared with similar interactions in 2004.

August 2007 The development application for 102 Rosedale Road was deemed a controlled action under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and was to be assessed under the bilateral agreement with NSW under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979

September 2007 Ku-ring-gai Council refused the development application submitted in May on the grounds of its impact on the Blue Gum High Forest ecological community.

October 2007 At a ceremony in Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve the federal Member for Bradfield, the Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson, announced that the Commonwealth Minister for Environment and Water Resources, the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull, had made a funding contribution of \$350,000 to Ku-ring-gai Council to assist in securing 102 Rosedale Road for conservation of the Blue Gum High Forest critically endangered ecological community.

The Blue Gum High Forest at St Ives will be recognized as part of the National Reserve System which includes protected areas across the whole of Australia including national parks, nature reserves, historic sites and private land under voluntary conservation agreements.

December 2007 The Mayor of Ku-ring-gai, Councillor Nick Ebbeck, announced the purchase of 102 Rosedale Road, the 'last piece of the jigsaw' of Ku-ring-gai's treasured Blue Gum High Forest. He said that the sale of the half hectare piece of land, finalised after a lengthy negotiation process, meant the entire 18-hectare forest site will be kept intact and protected for future generations.

This purchase has brought to fruition the vision of Annie Wyatt, founder of the National Trust of Australia, to keep the forest at St Ives as a 'forest for all time'.