



THE GLEBE SOCIETY

BOX 100 GLEBE 2037

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 1988

I had not expected to be delivering this report when I joined the management committee at last year's AGM. However, I was plunged in at the deep end at the first meeting of the new committee and along with my colleagues, several of whom were as new to the management committee as myself, we have sought to maintain the momentum and vitality of the Glebe Society.

That this has been possible demonstrates the sound organisational structure of the Society and the trust we as members have in one another. The Glebe Society is not run by a clique apart from the rest of the membership but it is all of us. Our subcommittee structure provides both continuity and depth of experience in particular areas enabling us to respond to the many and varied issues we face in an informed and timely manner.

As noted in the minutes of last year's AGM, we started the year with hostile reactions to our views on a number of issues coming from Leichhardt Council offices. To briefly recount, we need to go back to a well attended public meeting organised by the Society to address traffic matters in April 1987. That meeting resulted in a strong support for a traffic study, retention of sandstone kerbing in Wigram Road and a diversion to the St John's Road and Ross Street corner to a rally opposing demolition of the group of buildings known as "Fines Corner".

Following that meeting, submissions were made to Leichhardt Council whose town clerk, Mr Ron Eggins took it upon himself to prepare a 40 page business paper denigrating both the Society and its members. This was not helped by an unsympathetic Council whose term, fortunately for us was due to expire the following September.

Thus the new committee started the year with The Society's status and credibility under question in a way that was being used to divert attention from the subjects of our campaigns and to justify ignoring the needs and interests of the people of Glebe. However, this did kill the issues of a traffic plan, sandstone kerbing and Fines Corner which we persevered with gaining some, qualified, success.

This was helped in part by the new Leichhardt Council, which under Mayor Nick Origlass's influence has been made open and accessible to members of the public and to groups like ours. While this has resulted in some very lengthy Council meetings - our traffic petition was received at 2:30 am one morning - such inconvenience is a small price compared to the permanent damage that would have been inflicted on Glebe if the power base of the previous council had been allowed to continue to dominate the scene.

We have a continuing need for volunteers to attend Council meetings to ensure that the open council system works to our advantage.

At the September Council election there were 65 candidates standing in 12 groups for the municipality as a whole instead of separate wards for Glebe, Balmain, etc as in previous council elections. We organised a public meeting to "MEET THE CANDIDATES" and this, no doubt, contributed to better informed voting.

Jeff Ibbotson and I met with Mr Eggins after responding to the old council's endorsement of his criticisms and that at least led to a partial truce (described in the local press as the end of a war!) in which he agreed to pass on to council submissions made by the Society in an unbiased manner. Despite some improvements, we are not disappointed that for other reasons, Leichhardt Council decided to relieve their town clerk of his duties.

Almost 18 months after our public meeting a traffic study and plan for Glebe is at last about to be started and Jeanette Knox will bring us up to date on this and other traffic matters. The reasons we sought a traffic plan were the adverse impacts of increasing through traffic on the residents of Glebe and the ad hoc approach by Council which comprised responses to the easier issues without addressing the problems of the area as a whole. Unless something is done to reduce the absolute amount of traffic using the streets of Glebe, improvements in one area can only be made at the expense of increased problems in another area. Yet we cannot expect to make real progress unless we set the example within our own territory - ie by walking rather than driving and by using public transport.

The public transport system has its shortcomings but it can only get worse if people don't use it - services get reduced, patronage drops and so on. The use of existing goods lines for light passenger rail would be the best solution and some support is emerging for this concept which was first promoted by the Glebe Society almost ten years ago. John Hoddinott is the contact within the Society on light rail and we welcome ideas on how progress towards achieving this objective can be accelerated.

We still have sandstone kerbing in Wigram Road despite an EIS that ignored any heritage value of such an integral part of Glebe's architectural character. Fortunately the new council saw through this appalling EIS which we had responded to in detail.

Preserving the architectural character of Glebe, promoting authentic restoration and ensuring major new developments are sympathetic are fundamental objectives of the Society. We are indebted to the work done by our planning subcommittee for their work in this area. Our convenor, John Tinkler was particularly active concerning developments at the Harold Park Hotel. He recently moved to the United States and other commitments limited his availability in the last few months so I am particularly grateful for the time and effort Neil Macindoe has put in as acting planning convenor.

Glebe is an old area and despite a checkered history, Glebe does not have to be a derelict area. However, demolition by neglect remains a continuing threat. There are some who seek to condemn buildings when the main problems lie in the interior woodwork rather than in the masonry structure. Timber floors, staircases and window frames can all be replaced. Even when the scars of age are deeper, appropriate restoration is both possible and desirable as demonstrated by the commendable rehabilitation work being done by the NSW Department of Housing.

The Conservation Area provisions of LEP20 should give adequate protection but experience shows otherwise. In the case of the Fines Corner development it required a specific heritage order to protect one building and the facade of another out of the four threatened with demolition. More recently the old publican's residence was demolished to make way for a beer garden at the Excelsior Hotel. In neither case were the demolished buildings acknowledged as a part of our environmental heritage. I believe they are as much a part of the conservation area as the individual elements of separate buildings that are specifically classified as items of the environmental heritage and deserve equal protection.

Many buildings remain at risk including some such as Reussdale that are officially classified. The help and support of members to avoid future losses is most welcome.

The Glebe Society does not wish to preserve everything in our suburb - indeed there are buildings that Glebe would be better off without. The Steetley building within the developing Bicentennial park is the most obvious example. We can have little sympathy with the spurious cultural claims and political tactics of the temporary occupants of that building as they have sought to delay progress on what will become a unique and beautiful harbourside park for the people of Sydney's inner west.

John Buckingham has kept up pressure for the Park on behalf of the Society and he will review progress later. Initial clearing already shows the potential - hidden for many years by a wall of derelict buildings and structures.

Blackwattle Bay Park is starting to look better as trees grow to maturity and routine upkeep is maintained. The missing commemorative plaque has been replaced although there are still no toilet facilities.

Much remains to be done regarding other parks and the Glebe Estate is one area where we need to focus our efforts. There is some scope for pocket parks (possibly requiring partial road closures) but unless we act soon the few remaining opportunities will be lost.

Wentworth Park represents a major challenge and we need to persevere with that area until the needs of the local community are properly satisfied. We should not be intimidated by the alienation of public open space that the dog track, stand and poorly maintained surrounds represent.

Glebe Point Road is the gateway to Glebe but it presents a very mixed appearance. We have sought funding from the National Estate Grant Program to prepare a concept plan to enable a co-ordinated approach to colour schemes etc in the main commercial stretch of Glebe Point Road. The Glebe Street Fair association is cooperating with us on this exercise. They have agreed to match the \$1000 commitment we have made if the grant of \$7000 is received. Our share would be paid out of expected earnings from the house and building inspection planned for October this year.

Incorporation is a condition of these grants and for that reason we have a motion tonight for incorporation of the Society. There are other benefits and Jeff Ibbotson will discuss these later.

A coalition of urban action groups has been established in NSW through the encouragement of the ACF. More than 100 groups are represented and the coalition provides an opportunity to share experiences and will help to strengthen our bargaining power on issues we share in common with other groups. I am on the Council of that coalition.

In the past year we have gained around 90 new members all of whom are most welcome to join in our activities and social functions. Total numbers remain static at around 400 so we need to be more responsive to the needs and interests of our members to reduce this effective loss. Comments from members on current priorities and issues that need to be addressed would be most welcome.

Andrew Wood keeps our membership list up to date on computer file and he uses this to prepare Bulletin wrappers. Sue Littleton writes to each new member. Thanks, Andrew and Sue.

The Bulletin continues to keep members informed about current issues and this year there has been plenty of material to keep our Editor and Immediate Past President Edwina Doe busy as a two finger typist. She has done an excellent job putting together each issue including six out of the past nine with additional pages to the usual four.

Social functions are the other means of interchange of views between members and I would like to thank Betty Wright and our current social secretaries - Colin and Jean Mackenzie for their time and efforts. Thanks also to Sally Nelson who keeps the Monday Group going. Happy hours and "dining out" continue to attract a small regular group and other members are welcome to these.

We only managed one "Meet the members" evening this year - thanks to Alan Robertson for an interesting and informative talk. I hope we can make these functions more regular in the coming year.

Peter O'Gorman has got our accounting records in order making it easy for the new treasurer to take over. Peter is leaving shortly to move to Western Australia.

To my fellow committee members, subcommittee convenors and all of you who have helped the Glebe Society pursue its goals - thankyou.



Peter Strickland

August 1988