

## **Hill Corner**

**Prepared by Hill Corner Residents Group – 15 March 2006**

Hill Corner is a small street that curves around a small tear-drop park. This park is at the end of Burley-Griffin's axis starting from the hill near the junction of Adelaide Avenue and Kent Street, and running along Fraser place, Bidwill Place and the two public laneways to Hill Corner.

Hill Corner was established as a publicly owned park in 1952, occupying the whole of Section 62. The park was planted with trees over the entire area, around the central elm which predates urban settlement and is now about 100 years old. The grandfather of one of the residents of Hill Corner used to rest his horses and dray under the tree for shade in the 1930s. As recently as 2001 the Department of Urban Services planted several new trees in the park on Block 3.

Hill Corner is named after the botanist Walter Hill, 1820-1904 who was the first Director of the Brisbane Botanic Gardens from 1851 to 1881. Many of the surrounding streets are also named after botanists including Abbott, Banks, Bentham, Bidwill, Fraser, Hutchins, Maxwell, Solander, Schomburgk, Weston and Woolls.

### **Hill Corner Preschool**

In 1952, after the establishment of the park and in response to a request from local residents, the government constructed a modest preschool in the park. The government funded the building and provided a teacher, while residents funded the setting up and equipment of the preschool. During the life of the government preschool the entire area of Section 62, including the fenced area around the preschool, continued to be publicly available for use by residents, particularly children, as a safe play area. The government preschool continued to operate until 1991 when it was transferred to the site of the Yarralumla Primary School.

### **Hill Corner Park**

In 1956 the National Capital Development Commission's statutory plan designated the whole of Section 62, including the area occupied by the preschool, as 'parks and sports grounds.' Until 1994 the Hill Corner park (Section 62) was variously classified as parks and sportsgrounds, unrestricted open space or urban open space.

Section 62 has been actively managed as a publicly owned park for over 50 years. The Government planted the area with exotic trees in the 1950s, mainly water loving shade trees such as elms and poplars that grew strongly in the damp conditions of the natural drainage line. The Government installed underground irrigation to water the lawns and trees, and installed a park bench in the middle of Block 3, mounted on a concrete pad. In 2001 the Government planted several new trees in the park on Block 3. Government employees water the trees and mow the grass regularly every summer. Residents assist with watering the trees during drought, and mow the grass before social events in the park.

## **Use then Sale and Development of the Pre-school**

In 1993-94 the St Nicholas School Ltd moved into the pre-school on a rent free basis and this continued until 1998.

Early in 1994, in the context of a proposal to offer a 99 year ACT Government lease over that part of Block 1 of Section 62 used as a pre-school to Estate Management, Department of Urban Services, Block 1 was split into Block 2 (the pre-school area) and Block 3 (the public park). Also in that context it was considered necessary to change the land use policy for the pre-school block from open space to community facility under the new Territory Plan. The lease granted to Estate Management was a lease over Block 2 only.

At that time it was specifically recognised that the Block 1 incorporated a section used for public park and it has not been explained how or why Block 3 (the park) also came to be changed from open space to community facility. Residents were unaware of this change at the time, and were shocked when they learned several years later that it had happened.

At some stage after the granting of the lease over Block 2 to Estate Management, the block appears to have been sublet to the St Nicholas School.

In 1997 the ACT Government received enquiries about whether it would be willing to sell Block 2 for the purposes of St Nicholas School. In accordance with normal practice, a valuation was obtained from the Australian Valuation Office on the basis of a maximum of 18 children and for a 25 year lease. In 1998 the St Nicholas School was granted a 99 year lease over Block 2 at a discount on the valuation for a 25 year lease provided by the Australian Valuation Office.

In 2002 the residents learned that the previous government had also given in-principle approval to proceed with the sale of part of the rest of the park on Block 3, again apparently at a discount on the Australian Valuation Office's valuation. The residents only learned about this when the St Nicholas School Limited proposed to redevelop the preschool over Blocks 2 and 3, and to increase the size of the operation from 18 students to 30 students. This proposal was strongly opposed by residents in many of the surrounding streets, and did not proceed. Residents met with the Minister to explore ways to protect the park from future development, but this has not yet been achieved.

In March 2007 the residents learned that the St Nicholas School Limited wishes to redevelop Block 2 to accommodate the 40 student places that it considers necessary for financial viability. Residents will campaign to ensure that any development of Block 2 meets the highest planning standards for building, setbacks and off-street parking, to preserve the character of Hill Corner in keeping with the Yarralumla Neighbourhood Plan.

Residents are continuing to campaign to have the land use classification of Block 3 changed to protect the Hill Corner park as a green open space with mature trees for the enjoyment of the public. This is particularly important as the redevelopment of suburb its character.