

Proclaimed 3rd December 1887

100 YEARS OF
FIELD OF MARS
RESERVE

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Written and Compiled by
Rod Wallace

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Written and compiled by Rod Wallace.

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General enquiries about the Field of Mars Reserve and the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society should be directed to [updated 2021: rhffps@gmail.com / RHHFFPS, PO Box 552 Gladesville 1675].

Applications for membership of the Society are invited and should be directed to the [Treasurer at the above address].



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FOREWORD

I am sure there must be many people in our Municipality who are quite unaware of the rich historical background of the area we now call the Field of Mars Reserve.

This booklet sets out to trace its history dating from soon after the arrival of the First Fleet, when the area was thought to have been the home of a band of Aborigines known as the Wallumedegal, to its use as a common by the early settlers and its deterioration into a place of undesirables.

In 1887 a portion of the common was set apart for public recreation which was to become the Field of Mars Reserve. Although Council accepted trusteeship of the reserve in 1889, for more than a generation it took no interest in the land and made no effort to develop it for recreation purposes.

However, a proposal in 1965 that Council establish a garbage tip within the reserve outraged the local residents and it was largely due to the efforts of the Anti-Tip Action Committee that the plan was averted, and Ryde-Hunters Hill Flora & Fauna Preservation Society was formed with the object of developing the reserve as a flora and fauna sanctuary.

From the outset Council co-operated with the Society and this booklet outlines the dedication of members, past and present, in creating an area of outstanding beauty and tranquility, and an important seat of learning in environmental education.

That the Field of Mars Reserve has survived to celebrate its centenary is a tribute to the Society, and with the continued co-operation of Ryde Council, the Society and the Department of Education, residents of our Municipality may look forward to a permanent area with increasing capacity for leisure and learning during the next 100 years.

M. LARDELLI,
MAYOR.



M E S S A G E

In December, 1987, we celebrate the Centenary of the Field of Mars Reserve.

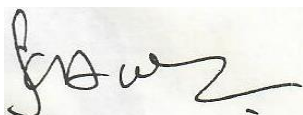
In many ways, its history parallels social developments in Sydney over the last 100 years. Valued in Edwardian days as a rifle range and picnic ground, it fell into disuse as Sydneysiders discovered recreation areas further afield, accessible by vehicle and train. Today the community once again recognises the immense value of undeveloped bushland in the heart of the suburbs.

The Reserve provides an excellent opportunity for people to spend time in a natural environment, with its native plants and animals.

My congratulations go to the Ryde-Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society. Its members have successfully developed and managed the Reserve, in consultation with Ryde Municipal Council, since 1966.

I wish the Society every success with this booklet.

JACK HALLAM,
Minister for Agriculture,
Lands and Forests.





RYDE - HUNTERS HILL FLORA AND FAUNA PRESERVATION SOCIETY

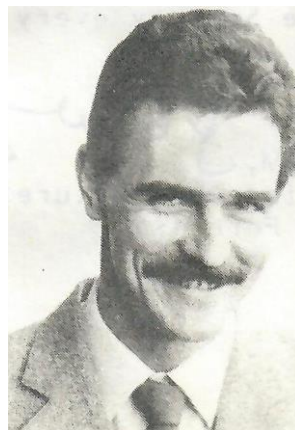
P R E F A C E

One hundred years ago certain manoeuvres took place between Ryde Council and the State Government which unwittingly led to the preservation of a large patch of bushland - the Field of Mars Reserve. Prior to 1887, the Reserve and its surroundings environs boasted a rather colourful and intriguing history dating back to the First Settlement years.

For more than a generation since its reservation, the Field of Mars Reserve was largely forgotten, except as a remote patch of bush into which the adjoining cemetery could be extended from time to time. In the 1950s the banks of lower Buffalo Creek were used as a garbage tip. Again in the 1960s the threat of further garbage fill was made, involving the filling of the creek valley with garbage to a depth of fifty feet. It was this threatening proposal which triggered a number of members of the local community to form the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society as a vehicle to ensure and work for the preservation of the Reserve.

Within weeks of its formation, the Society was criticised by the Mayor of the day as "a seven day wonder". Indeed, what poor judgement did that former Mayor have? Twenty one years hence, the Society can boast a history of great achievement and this history represents two very significant decades of the Reserve's centenary. This booklet attempts to depict that history, together with the events which led up to that period of time.

ROD WALLACE
President.



Centenary Incumbents

ALDERMEN - RYDE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

His Worship the Mayor, Ald. Mick Lardelli

Deputy Mayor, Ald. Jim Hull

Ald. Tony Archbold
Ald. Chris Geddes
Ald. Peter Graham
Ald. Andy Johnston
Ald. Denis Keller

Ald. John Lazzarini
Ald. Peter McCulloch
Ald. Terry Perram
Ald. John Shearer
Ald. Edna Wilde

MINISTER FOR LANDS

The Hon. Jack Hallam, M.L.C.

MINISTER FOR PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

The Hon. Bob Carr, M.P.

MEMBER FOR GLADESVILLE AND MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

The Hon. Rodney Cavalier, M.P.

OFFICE BEARERS AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE RYDE HUNTERS HILL FLORA AND FAUNA PRESERVATION SOCIETY

PRESIDENT

Rod Wallace

VICE PRESIDENTS

Leah Warton

Graeme Ward

HON. SECRETARY/TREASURER

Val Nelson

PUBLICITY OFFICER

Noela Jones

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Trude Kallir

COMMITTEE

Howard Barker

Lyn Crossing

Andy Johnston

Maureen Johnston

Bill Jones

Tina McDonald

Co-opted

Chris Koettig

Prior to 1887

THE FIRST INHABITANTS

The first group of people to occupy what is now known as the Field of Mars Reserve and surrounding areas was thought to be a band of Aborigines known as the Wallumedegal.

The Aborigines of the Sydney region were organised into a number of small groups, some of which were described in a letter dated 13 February 1790 from Governor Phillip to Lord Sydney:

"The natives live in tribes, which are distinguished by the name of their chief who probably takes his name from the district in which he resides ...

"From the entrance of the harbour. along the south shore, to the cove adjoining this settlement, the district is called Cadi, and the tribe Cadigal; the women, Cadigalleon.

"The south side of the harbour to the above-mentioned cove (i.e. Sydney Cove) to Rose Hill, which the natives call Parramatta, the district is called Wann, and the tribe Wanngal.

"The opposite shore is called Wallumetta, and the tribe, Wallumedegal."

According to later observers, the territory of the Cadigal extended westwards to Long Cove. The Cadigal, Wanngal and Wallumedegal were not tribes in the sense in which the term is used now, but were more likely extended family units.

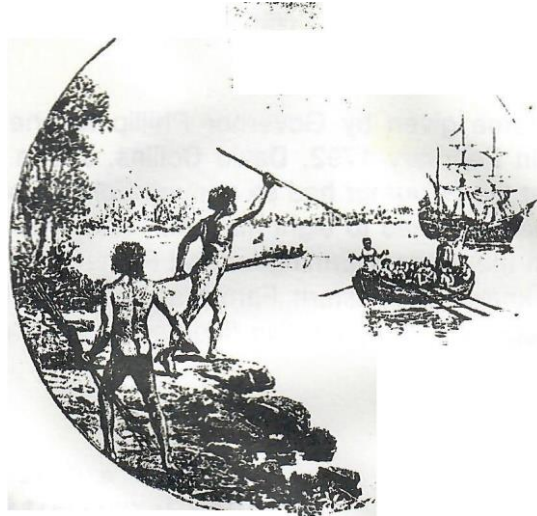
The Ryde district was occupied by the Wallumedegal. On the east, according to one source, they extended to Milsons Point. On the west, their neighbours were a band called the Burramedigal, whose territory included the present Parramatta. It seems that Parramatta is a corruption of Burramatta. The boundaries of the territory occupied by the Wallumedegal are not clearly established, but some information is provided by de Freycinet's *Voyage de l'Uranie*, livre V, quoted by the local historian, M.C.I. Levy:

"The Wallumedegal were distributed on the northern side of Parramatta River, starting from Lane Cove", and centred mainly "dans le district de Field-of-Mars". These observations applied to the period around 1819. Levy's conclusion is that in 1788 and thereafter the Ryde district was occupied by the Wallumedegal. The name *Wallumetta*, mentioned in Phillip's letter, had been adopted as the title of the newsletter of the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society and has also been used by other local organisations.

The British first encountered the Wallumedegal a few weeks after the settlement at Sydney Cove. Bradley records that on 15 February 1788, he accompanied the Governor up the Harbour with three armed boats from the *Sirius*:

"We stopped at a neck of land (later named *Looking Glass Point* in Gladesville) to Breakfast. We were soon met there by a Native armed. He laid down his spear as soon as he joined us, and had more curiosity than we had before met with. He examined everything very attentively and went into all our boats from one to the other. In the Long Boat he sat down and with the help of one of the People he contrived to manage an Oar, though very awkwardly. The Governor gave this Man a hatchet and a looking glass which, when he looked into, he immediately looked behind the glass to see if any person was there, and then pointed to the Glass and the shadows which he saw in the Water signifying

they were similar. Another man joined up soon after and a third was laying off in a canoe. Wanting to see him get out of the canoe, we enticed him on shore. He had a stone slung by way of an anchor which he let go just as the canoe took the ground. He stepped one leg out of the canoe keeping the weight of his body in its centre till he had foot hold of the shore to remove it to that leg. In this manner he landed without any risk of oversetting the Canoe."



Members of the Wallumedegal encounter members of the First Fleet.

In less than a hundred years, all that would remain of the Wallumedegal would be some scattered middens, artifacts, axe grooves and rock engravings and a few memories. Some of the most interesting discoveries in the Ryde district came from a midden in a cave on Sugarloaf Point, which is just east of the Field of Mars Reserve. This mound of shells, half a metre deep, contained artifacts made of quartz, chert, and igneous rock, none of them local materials. One of the things found was that many of the molluscs whose shells were found in middens lived in marine conditions outside estuaries. The interpretation of such facts is a matter for consideration, but when taken together with other known facts they could help to build up the picture of the Aborigines' way of life. A smaller midden has been recorded in the Field of Mars Reserve, not far from the confluence of Buffalo and Strangers Creeks.

Some middens have been lost as irretrievably as the wooden tools and hunting weapons. Debris at the mouths of caves, found to be rich in phosphates, was used for garden manure. Shells were also used for lime burning. A large midden on Sugarloaf Point was covered by sand dredging. But some are relatively undisturbed, like those at Glades Bay and in the cave on Sugarloaf. Stone tools have been found over a wide area. Among typical finds, on Macquarie University campus, in Lane Cove River Park, and near Browns Waterhole, were a number of scrapers, utilised flakes, and adze flakes made of chert and silcrete.

„

In the Ryde district it is still possible to find a number of rock engravings and the grooves where stone axes were ground and sharpened, often near a creek or a river. The best known are the engravings of wallabies in Glades Bay Park, examined and recorded in 1941 by F.D. McCarthy, Ethnologist of the Australian Museum. They are identified by a plaque as having been made by people of the Wallumede group, and are enclosed by a railing. In the vicinity there are axe grooves, emu tracks, and the figure of a man.

Three streets directly west of the Field of Mars Reserve, near Malvina High School, are named after members of the Wallumedegal - Nanbaree, Abaroo and Bidgee.

THE NAME FIELD OF MARS

The name *Field of Mars* goes back to the first settlement years. People sometimes wonder how it comes to be scattered so widely over the map. Residents in the north-west of Ryde Municipality, near Terrys Creek, find that the titles to their land describe it as being in the Field of Mars Parish, which extends westwards towards Parramatta. Properties in the centre and east of the municipality are in the Parish of Hunters Hill. But in the extreme east, near Lane Cove River, the name Field of Mars occurs again, being used for the Reserve and the cemetery.

Field of Mars was the name given by Governor Phillip to one of the oldest British settlements in Australia. In February 1792, David Collins, Judge Advocate of the First Fleet, noted in his diary that the Governor had so named a district on the north side of the Harbour, where land had been granted to eight marines. This was the western section of the stretch of land between the present Ermington and Putney. The eastern section was settled by civilians, being known as Eastern Farms and later as Kissing Point. These marines and civilians are represented by the two figures in Ryde Council's coat of arms.



Ryde Council's Coat of Arms. The heraldic juxtaposition of the marine and civilian is meant to represent the pioneers at the Field of Mars on the west and at Eastern Farms, or Kissing Point, on the east.

The settlements spread northwards from the river, but for more than a century there was a wild area beyond Buffalo Creek. It is thought that Buffalo Creek was named after the *Buffalo*, a ship in which two of the district's first land-holders had sailed.

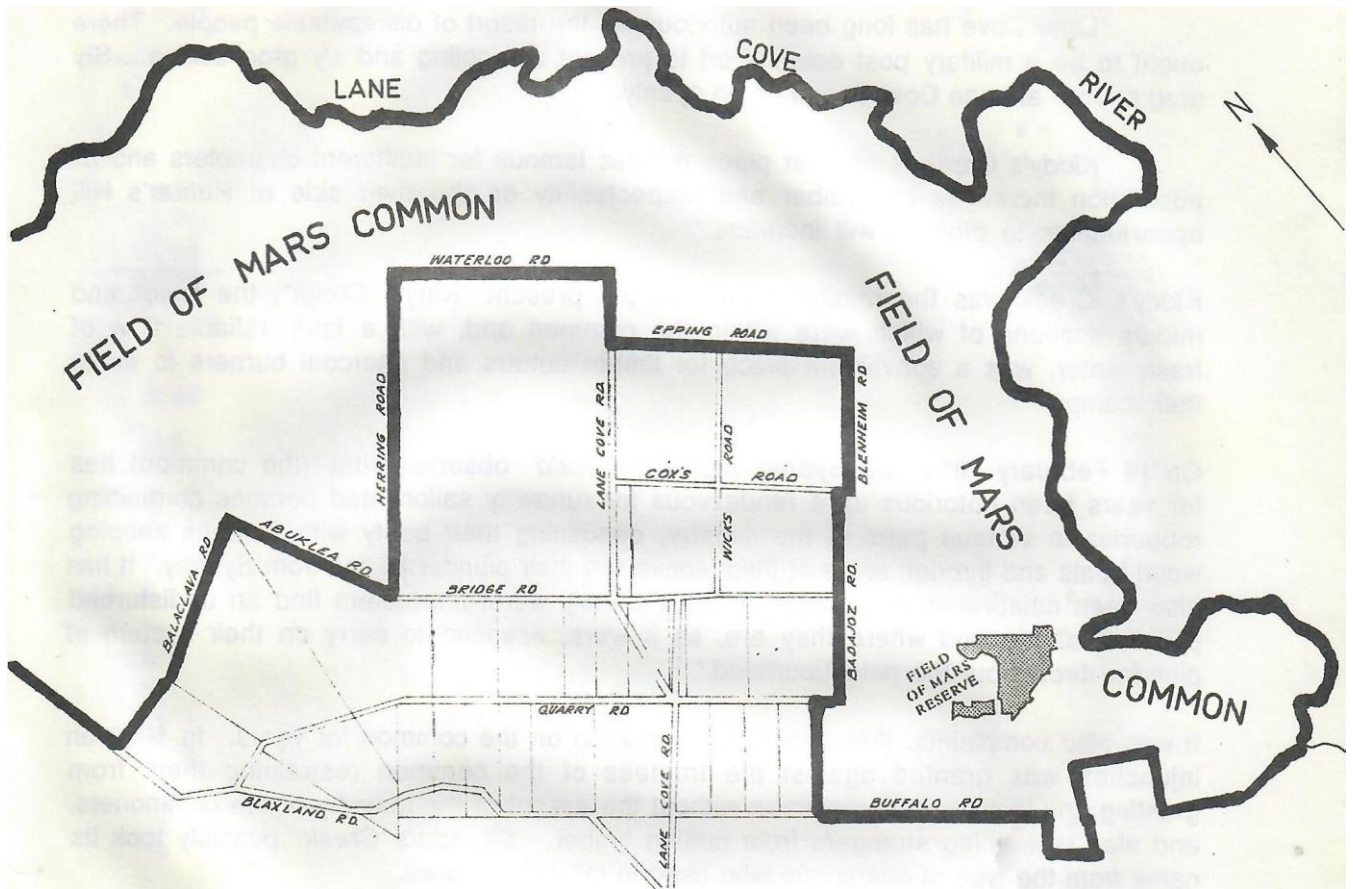
Governor Phillip named the district the Field of Mars in deference to the marines' service to the god of war - *Mars*. In its virgin state the timbered land north of the Parramatta River bore scant resemblance to Rome's Campus Martius, where gladiators exercised in the halcyon days of Roman glory. Perhaps Phillip was thinking of the Champ de Mars in Paris. But whatever the original inspiration, the name has persisted and has given us an enduring link with the marines who were Australia's first defenders.

FIELD OF MARS COMMON

In 1804, it was found that the first land grants had been too small, so Governor King set aside a large part of the undeveloped area as a common "for the preservation and increase of the breeding stock". This was known as the *Field of Mars Common*. As villages became established at places like Top Ryde and Eastwood, and acquired their own names and identities, the name *Field of Mars* fell out of popular use as a description of the settled area. It survived, however, as the name of the legal parish and the common.

The common covered 2523 hectares, extending from the present Boronia Park in Hunters Hill, along the west and south banks of Lane Cove River to Browns Waterhole, and then westwards along Boundary Road to West Pennant Hills, with a large extension

running southwards on both sides of Terry's Creek to Eastwood. This area is included in the present municipalities of Hunters Hill and Ryde and the Shire of Hornsby, and in the legal parishes of Hunters Hill, Field of Mars and South Colah.



Extent of the Field of Mars Common in Ryde and Hunters Hill.

Boundary of the Field of Mars Common.

The history of territorial units such as parish and county has its own interest, revealing how planners began by using patterns established in England or North America, but were then obliged to find local solutions to local problems. In the system introduced in 1826, counties, hundreds and parishes, based on English models, were intended to provide for community and local government. Hundreds never found a role. Counties and parishes survived for some limited purposes, but their major functions were taken over by other units.

The Field of Mars Common, too, became an anomaly. In the west and south, near the settlements, it was in fact used as a common. In the north and east, however, it was exploited mainly by timber cutters, who used Lane Cove River for transport to Sydney. A combination of rough country, thick forests and easy communication with Sydney, independent of official transport, made the common a refuge for desperate characters. In 1841 it was said that the district was infested by bushrangers and there was much smuggling on Parramatta River near Kissing Point.

A PLACE OF UNDESIRABLES

The *Sydney Gazette* of 25 February 1841 reported an attack on a citizen, and commented:

"Lane Cove has long been notorious for the resort of disreputable people. There ought to be a military post established to prevent smuggling and sly grog selling ... Sly grog selling at Lane Cove is carried on openly.

"Kiddy's Creek is another place no less famous for indifferent characters and as population increases in number and respectability on the river side of Hunter's Hill opportunities to plunder will increase."

Kiddy's Creek was the original name for the present "Kitty's Creek", the lower and middle sections of which were within the common and, with a fairly reliable flow of fresh water, was a convenient place for timber cutters and charcoal burners to make their camps.

On 14 February 1851, the *Sydney Morning Herald* observed that "(the common) has for years been notorious as a rendezvous for runaway sailors and persons committing robberies in various parts of the country, depositing their booty with persons keeping wood boats and through some of them conveying their plunder to and from Sydney. It has also been celebrated as a place where the very worst characters find an undisturbed place of abode and where they are, as it were, licensed to carry on their system of plunder throughout the neighbourhood."

It was also complained that people had squatted on the common for years. In 1852 an injunction was granted against the trustees of the common restraining them from granting any leases of the common without the assent of the majority of the commoners, and also restraining strangers from cutting timber. *Strangers Creek* possibly took its name from the type of characters who used to inhabit this area.

In 1862 a witness informed a parliamentary committee that the common had always been haunted by bad characters as long as he had known it. He said that at a place called Buffalo there was a great number of woodcutters, who brought women from Sydney, and great rioting and debauchery were carried on. This would probably have been Buffalo Creek, which also had some good camping sites. There was general agreement that something would have to be done about the common. In 1874 it was resumed, and became ordinary Crown land.



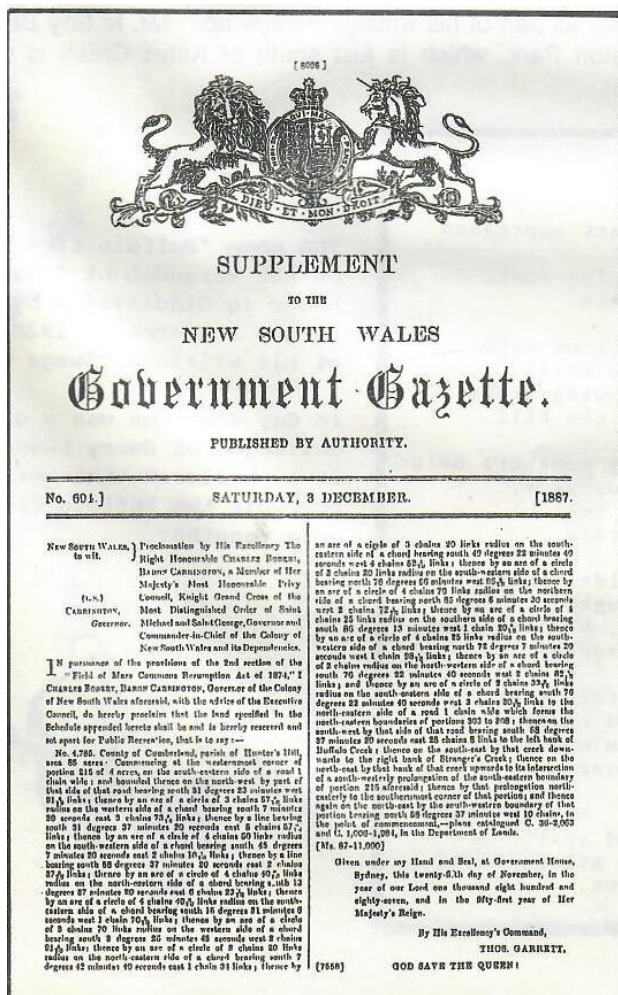
Buffalo Creek provided ideal camping sites for many disreputable people in the mid eighteenth hundreds.

Genesis of the Reserve

THE RESERVE NOBODY ORIGINALLY WANTED

The survival of the Field of Mars Reserve as a bushland enclave is due in part to a series of accidents. After the incorporation of Ryde Municipality in 1870, aldermen began to look for a recreation ground. In 1881 they asked the Government not to alienate Haddons Flat (the site of the present Civic Centre), which they thought would be a suitable place. The Government offered them instead 85 acres (about 35 hectares) of the old common, within a mile of the village, if "the Council would bear half of the cost". This was the land which finally became the Field of Mars Reserve. Council emphatically rejected the proposal, pointing out that "the intended reserve was too far from and of no service to Ryde", and "that other municipalities had had large parks purchased by the Government, without surrendering rights of commonage, nor subscribing any part of the cost". Nevertheless, the Government went ahead with its plans. Four hundred unemployed were hired to clear the greater part of the old common and lay it out in streets and allotments. 25 acres were held back for the cemetery in 1884, and the 85 acres which had been the subject of the dispute were held back for a park in 1887.

By proclamation which appeared in the Government Gazette of 3rd December, 1887, His Excellency The Right Honourable Charles Robert Baron Carrington, Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Colony of New South Wales and its Dependencies, reserved the subject area as Reserve No. 4,785 and set it apart for Public Recreation. The



The Government Gazette
Notice of 3rd December,
1887 which formally
proclaimed the Field
of Mars Reserve.

proclaimed area later assumed the name - Field of Mars Reserve. Ryde Council accepted trusteeship of the Reserve in 1889, but took little active interest in the land. In 1900 it again turned its attention to Haddons Flat, but plans fell through because of the cost, about 25 pounds (\$50), and because it was thought the land might be needed for a tramline. Eventually, Salters Paddock was acquired, and in 1908 was opened as Ryde Park.

With Ryde Park available for organised sport nearer home, the people of Ryde had little need for the Field of Mars Reserve. In Edwardian times a rifle range was established there, and it attracted many picnickers from Sydney. Then trains and cars began to take Sydney people further out of town for their recreation, and the Field of Mars Reserve was largely forgotten. The long-term effect of the manoeuvring between Council and the State Government was the preservation of a large patch of bushland in a built-up area.

Although the Reserve had, for the most part, been vested in Ryde Council since 1889, the Council had not developed the Reserve for recreation purposes at all until pressure was brought to bear in 1966. Apart from the transfer of portions of the Reserve into the cemetery and the clearing of timber by locals, the Reserve remained largely undisturbed until 1954.

THE FORGOTTEN YEARS

For more than a generation since its reservation, the Field of Mars Reserve was largely forgotten, except as a remote patch of bush into which the cemetery could be extended from time to time. The area did, however, inspire poet John le Gay Brereton, who wrote the poem *Buffalo Creek* in 1928 as part of his writings *Swags up*. Mr. le Gay Brereton lived in Gladesville and Brereton Park, which is just south of Kittys Creek is named after him.

BUFFALO CREEK

Atimid child with heart oppressed
By images of sin,
I slunk into the bush for rest,
And found my fairy kin.

The fire I carried kept me warm:
The friendly air was chill.
The laggards of the lowing storm
Trailed gloom along the hill.

I watched the crawling monsters melt
And saw their shadows wane,
As on my satin skin I felt
The fingers of the rain.

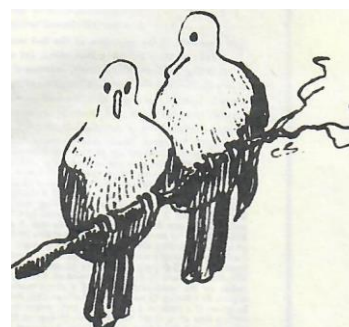
The sunlight was a golden beer,
I drank a magic draught,
The sky was clear and, void of fear,
I stood erect and laughed.

And sudden laughter, idly free,
About me trilled and rang,
And love was shed from every tree,
And little bushes sang.

The bay of conscience' bloody hound
That tears the world apart
Has never drowned the silent sound
Within my happy heart.

The poem "Buffalo Creek" penned on the verandah of "Osgathorpe" House in Gladesville by John le Gay Brereton in 1928 as part of his writings "Swags Up".

le Gay Brereton was a close colleague of Henry Lawson and it is believed that both used to visit the Buffalo Creek area together.



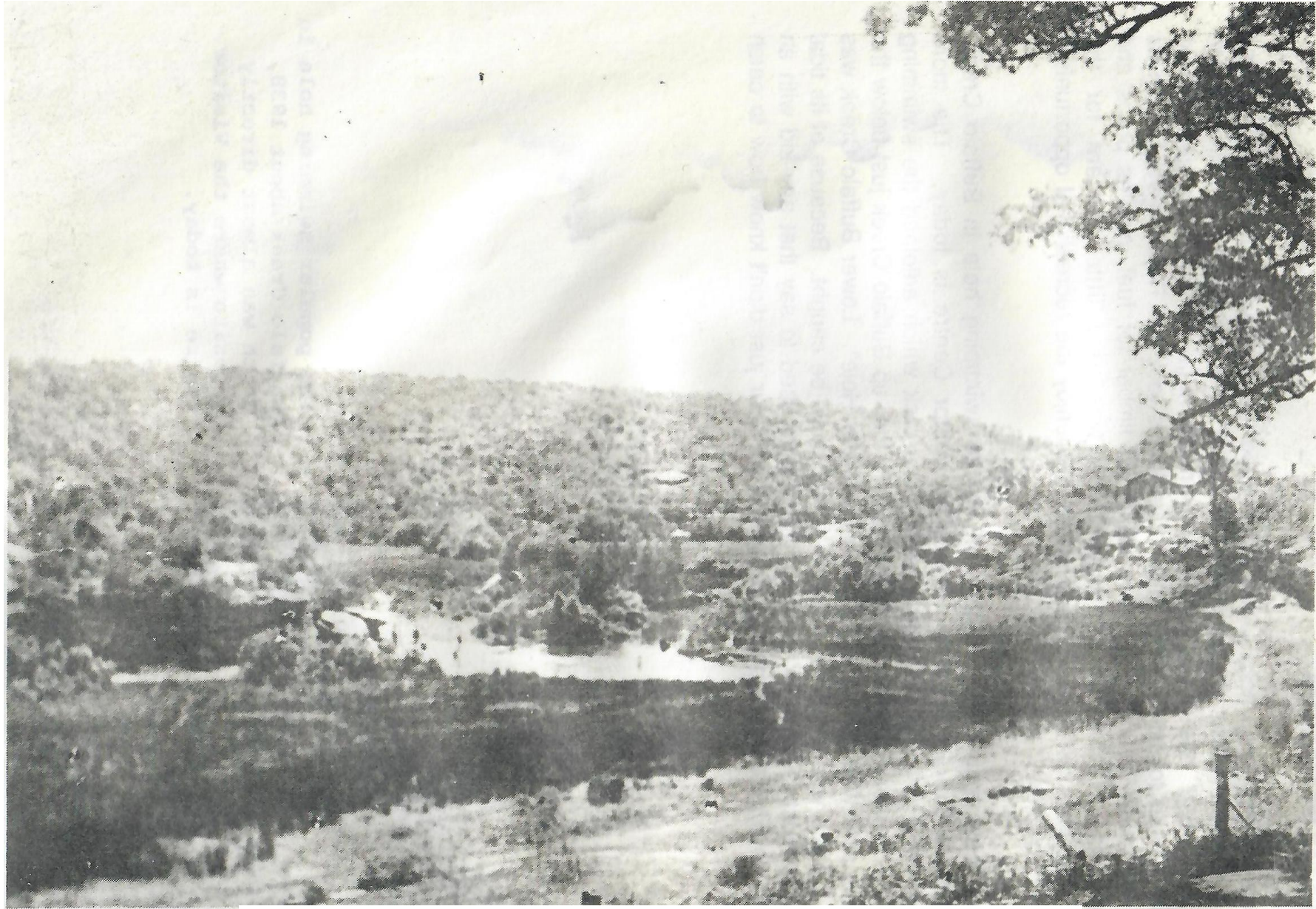
As was common place in the mid eighteen hundreds, timber cutters were again active in the region, and their wedges have been found near Strangers Creek. Local residents say that as recently as 1940 there were no blue gums along Buffalo Creek; the slopes where they are now growing had been cleared and cows were grazing there. In fact the late Wal Doyle recalled a time when virtually the whole of the Reserve was cleared of timber. Presumably the seeds remained in the ground from the original forest, or were re-introduced by winds and birds. At about the same time, the lower section of Strangers Creek was quarried for sandstone.

During the depression years, many of the locals used the Reserve as their backyard and playground. In fact there was a sprinkling of "squatter" type dwellings and shacks which had sprung up around the place, particularly on the ridge north of Strangers Creek, which the locals used to call "Candle Hill". The locals took the Reserve very much for granted and continued to exploit it as a source of timber for fuel, clothes props and building materials. During these years there was very little concern for the environment, however, the locals did appreciate and enjoy the recreational opportunities the Reserve had to offer.

Virtually every local resident learnt to swim in the swimming hole in Buffalo Creek, which was almost directly opposite where the Visitor Centre is today. The more adventurous used to dive from the large sandstone rock which adjoined the swimming hole. There was another popular swimming spot further up Buffalo Creek just below the cascades. This spot was known as the "Buffalo Water Hole". Lower Buffalo Creek was renowned as a place where a great tonnage of fish could be caught. Because of its tidal influence, it was most famous for prawns. Wal Doyle used to say that any kid with an onion bag who couldn't catch a bag of prawns in an hour just didn't know how to catch them.



The popular swimming hole in Buffalo Creek about 1938, which was almost directly opposite where the Visitor Centre is today.



Lower Buffalo Creek valley about 1937 showing the extent of the original saltmarsh flats. The foreground to the right is the area where the Visitor Centre and the Environmental Education Centre currently stand.

Pressures of the Fifties and Sixties

GARBAGE

After World War II new housing development had spread north from Buffalo Creek along John Miller and Bird Streets, and around to the Dress Circle Estate at East Ryde. The suburbs extended for many kilometres in all directions, and people began to realise that there was no longer an unlimited amount of open space.

Garbage disposal began to become a problem for the local Municipal Council at Ryde. In the fifties, non-putrescible garbage was dumped on the left bank of Buffalo Creek just upstream from Pittwater Road near the confluence of Strangers Creek and Buffalo Creek, and an additional 4.8 hectares on the right bank was gazetted in 1954 for use as a rubbish depot. Today, this 4.8 hectares of land is identified as the Reserve's Pittwater Road entrance and car park and the general area where the Visitor Centre and Environmental Education Centre are located.

The areas which were filled with garbage were the original saltmarsh flats which adjoined the mangrove lined Buffalo Creek. This estuarine environment was completely alienated by the sheer impact of the tip. Also, the popular swimming hole in Buffalo Creek, which was almost directly opposite where the Visitor Centre is today and where many locals had learnt to swim, was despoiled.

The tip was a continual source of smoke and smell and on a number of occasions the local fire brigade had to be called to put out fires which broke out in the tip. The tip closed in 1959 and was just left covered with a layer of ash and industrial slag. Although the tip had closed it still remained gazetted as a rubbish depot for a number of years.

AND MORE GARBAGE

In the mid sixties, Ryde Council was faced with a critical waste disposal problem following the impending closure of its tips at Meadowbank Park and at the end of Magdaia Road, North Ryde. These tips had almost reached their limitations and new tipping sites had to be found to satisfy the municipality's waste disposal requirements.

In July, 1965 Ryde Council's Municipal Engineer proposed that the Buffalo Creek area within the Field of Mars Reserve be developed as a major tip/reclamation site for putrescible garbage. This proposed development involved the laying of very major twin 120 inch pre-stressed concrete pipes to convey the floodwaters of Buffalo Creek under an estimated 1,000 cubic yards of compacted garbage deposited each week for a period of 16 years. The ultimate height of fill over these pipes was estimated to be in the order of 40 to 50 feet.

It was envisaged that tipping would commence in the Wellington Road area and that the total project would involve the expenditure of well in excess of \$1 million (1965 value) of ratepayers money. Whilst Ryde Council had given its approval in principle to the Buffalo Creek proposal, the implementation of the scheme could not immediately commence as it would take some considerable time by the time approvals, acquisitions and construction could be undertaken. In the meantime, Council explored several other alternative means of resolving its waste disposal problem.



RESIDENT ACTION

On a winter's afternoon in 1965 Mr. Arthur Soady of Rene Street, East Ryde, sat down and wrote to the local newspaper. He asked, "Is anyone interested in doing something to save the Field of Mars Reserve?". The response brought together a group of people interested in preserving the bushland character of the Ryde-Hunters Hill area, which ultimately led to the formation of the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society.

Once Ryde Council's decision to turn the Buffalo Creek/Strangers Creek valleys into a garbage disposal area became public knowledge, residents from every corner of the Field of Mars Reserve were aroused and became outraged by the proposal. Residents began to make appeals through petitions, deputations, attendance at Council meetings, letters and phone calls to aldermen, members of State Parliament and various government departments to make Ryde Council reconsider its proposal. The residents felt that if Council were to continue with its proposal the resulting tip would seriously affect the physical, mental and financial well being of the people who live in the area, as well as destroy one of the best remaining natural assets of the Ryde district.

In an attempt to mobilize resident action against the tip proposal, the (East Ward) Anti-Tip Action Committee (ATAC) was formed in May, 1966. The first chairman of the Committee was Mr. C. Gregory, the secretary Mrs. Leah Warton and the publicity officer Mr. Arthur Soady. Other prominent members of the Committee were Mr. & Mrs. L. Gilbert, the Ward family, the late Mrs. E.J. Healey, Mr. & Mrs. W. Newman and Mr. Leighton Boyd. The Committee's primary aim was to oppose tipping by Ryde Council and to investigate alternate means for garbage disposal. The Committee in fact submitted several alternative proposals to Council, including incineration, treatment in a composting unit and transportation to a disposal area outside the metropolitan area.

The late Mrs. Joyce Healey of Kim Street, Gladesville was particularly active in collecting signatures for petitions. The first petition of about 350 names was presented to Council in January, 1966. The second petition, containing some 3,162 names, was presented to the then local member of parliament, the late Mr. Frank Downing, M.L.A. in October, 1966. It is understood that about 120 local citizens assisted Mrs. Healey in collecting signatures for the second petition.

<h1>AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE GARBAGE TIP</h1> <p>Mrs. M. Malgo, of Kim Street, Gladesville,</p> <p><i>Letter to the Editor . . .</i></p> <p>FIELD OF MARS PARK AS PUTRESCIBLE TIP?</p> <p>Dear Sir, During Ryde Co</p>		<p>(EAST WARD) ANTI-TIP ACTION COMMITTEE</p> <h2>DEPUTATION TO MAYOR</h2> <p>His Worship the M C. M. Cutler, received (East Ward) Anti-Tip A by the Chairman an Chambers on May 23 proposal of Garbage</p> <p><i>Letters to the Editor . . .</i></p> <p>Letters on "THE TIP"</p> <p>Dear Sirs, We, the ratepayers of</p>
<p>Anti tip committee</p> <p>Sir,—On behalf of the residents and ratepayers of the Buffalo If of the resi-</p>		<p>... We, the ratepayers of</p>

EMERGENCE OF A NEW FORCE

Concurrent with the formation and early activities of the Anti-Tip Action Committee was the formation of the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society. Following the response from Mr. Soady's letter which appeared in the local press in September 1965, a gathering of local residents and persons interested in forming the new society met on 11th January, 1966. Many of these persons were in fact the same persons who had formed the Anti-Tip Action Committee.

On 16th February 1966, an inaugural public meeting was held at the St. Thomas Church Hall, Orient Street, Gladesville, which formed the Society, decided upon a constitution and elected office-bearers and a management committee. The first office-bearers and management committee for the Society were:-

President:	Mr. Arthur Soady
Senior Vice President:	Mr. C. Gregory
Junior Vice President:	Mr. J. Morrisby
Hon. Secretary:	Dr. James Ward
Assistant Secretary:	Mr. Kelvin Ward
Hon. Treasurer:	Mrs. Pam Larymore
Committee:	Mr. Trevor Shade Mr. Leighton Boyd Mr. J. Morgan Mr. Laurie Gilbert Mr. S. Larter Mr. Jack Heggen

The fundamental objective of the Society was to bring to the public's attention the need for wildlife conservation, with the specific task of preserving, managing and developing the Field of Mars Reserve as a flora and fauna sanctuary. The Society's policy was that the Reserve would not only be an area for recreation, relaxation and the viewing of native Australian plants, but an area for students, research workers and school children doing field studies, and last, but not least, a tourist attraction. The Society proposed that there would be no exotic plants, no formal gardens, and that the whole project would be planned as far as possible to be self-maintaining.

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Membership of the Society, consisting of people from all walks of life, grew considerably till the Society became one of the largest and most vigorous in the Sydney area. The Society began to organise a programme of activities, including several field days in the Field of Mars Reserve and other places of interest for people who appreciated, or were learning to appreciate our native flora and fauna. Meetings of the Society were held monthly, when lectures and films were sometimes presented.

The Society continued to maintain and expand its programme of activities, as well as maintain its high community profile, in the interests of reminding Ryde Council and other authorities that it was a force to be reckoned with insofar as the future of the Field of Mars Reserve was concerned. The Society also liaised with other conservation groups and with specialists who gave advice to the Society in its work. In addition to work in the local area the Society was taking a keen interest in conservation matters in the State generally. In this regard, the Society became a member body of the N.S.W. Nature Conservation Council.

The inclusion of the areas "Ryde" and "Hunters Hill" in the name of the Society was to reflect the Society's responsibility and concern for the local district as a whole, of which the Field of Mars was one integral part. Other natural areas in the local district which have been of great interest and concern to the Society since its inception include Sugarloaf Point, the lower Lane Cove River foreshores and mangroves, Twin Road Forest and the Parramatta River foreshores. The inclusion of the terms "flora" and "fauna" in the Society's name was to highlight the fundamental components which make up the natural heritage of the local district. The establishment of organisations like the Society was in fact promoted by statute under the Fauna Protection Act, 1948 and in this connection the former Fauna Protection Panel provided valuable advice and assistance in developing a nature conservation ethic for the Society. During the sixties and late fifties a number of kindred societies were formed in other parts of the Sydney metropolitan area, including neighbouring districts such as Hornsby, Parramatta, Lane Cove and Fullers Bridge.



RECOGNITION

In conjunction with the (East Ward) Anti-Tip Action Committee the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society took up the battle lines to fight against the proposal to develop the Field of Mars Reserve as a garbage depot. A number of tactical counter-proposals were explored and contemplated by the Society; one of which was a proposal in February 1966 to approach the then Lane Cove National Park Trust with a view to approaching the Minister for Lands in a united effort to have control of the Reserve and adjacent Crown Land vested in the National Park Trust.

This proposal was never seriously pursued. However, after an exchange of numerous items of correspondence between the Society, the Council, Ministers of the Crown and various Government departments and authorities, the N.S.W. Department of Health, in September 1966, gave Ryde Council approval to use the area known as Porters Creek at North Ryde (a former pig farm) as a putrescible garbage tip, being an alternative site to the Field of Mars. Council initially responded to this approval with caution, with some Council aldermen still advocating the use of the Field of Mars as a tip.

Council ultimately chose the Porters Creek site as its major reclamation area/tip and on 20th September, 1966 Council resolved "that the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society be advised that Council agrees to their development of the Field of Mars Reserve as a flora and fauna sanctuary subject to any development being carried out to the satisfaction of the Council's Municipal Engineer". This resolution of Council was the first formal recognition of the Society's serious attempt to preserve the Field of Mars for all time.

No firm decision:

DEPUTATION ON BUFFALO CREEK

The future of Buffalo Creek was made no clearer in a 10-hour debate at Ryde Council last week. The debate was a decision to approach the Minister for Lands to see whether he could

GROUPS FIGHT FOR CONTROL OF PARKLAND



Mayor orders interjector from public gallery—

Approach to have Field Of Mars Park declared a sanctuary

Ryde Council last week agreed in principle to the development of the Field of Mars Park as a Flora and Fauna Sanctuary, and

view the land, officially the Field of Mars Park, be retained for use by the Ryde-Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society.

Widely varying views were put forward as to how this might best be done.

With conflicting opinions still being voiced after an hour's debate, Ald. E. Stewart effectively stopped the "gag" by suggesting the Mayor, Ald. C. M. Cutler, lead a deputation to Mr. Lewis to discuss the situation.

Mr. Lewis

Council seek declaration of the area as a Nature Reserve and seek to be appointed, together with members of the society, as trustees of the nature

This decision of Council represented a dramatic development in the Society's activities and members of the Society took their task seriously and diligently applied themselves to the physical work of achieving their goal for the Reserve. They moved into a weed infested wilderness working continuously to remove weeds and rubbish and to generally clean the area up. A solid corps of keen workers, including complete families, would turn up regularly for Saturday afternoon work parties. The job of building the reserve was recognised as a long-term project, however, work parties were held in a relaxed atmosphere and interested numbers steadily grew.

Formal recognition of the Reserve as an area for nature conservation purposes was pursued by the Society. Initially, the Society approached the then Fauna Protection Panel with the view to having the Field of Mars dedicated as a Faunal Reserve (Nature Reserve) under the Fauna Protection Act, 1948. In response to the Society's request, the then Chief Guardian of Fauna, Mr. Allen Strom, replied by saying " ... the Fauna Protection Panel is of the opinion that the area does not possess at this time, a great deal of significance for the wildlife conservation programme. This does not mean that the area does not contain habitat of a limited nature for a limited number of animal species, however, the area has been considerably pauperised by lack of management and is now threatened by further developments around the periphery. It could still be a pleasant area with trees should the Council care to enter into a planned development arrangement and the eradication of exotics such as lantana, privet and honeysuckle. The Fauna Protection Panel is concerned with the retention of samples of natural habitat in a pristine condition and small areas of the nature of the Buffalo Creek region are not considered of great significance in the Panel's programme."

This response from the Fauna Panel did not discourage the Society. Instead in 1967 the Society approached Council and the then Minister for Lands, the Hon. T.L. Lewis, M.L.A. about the prospect of re-reserving the area as a Reserve for the preservation of native flora and fauna under the Crown Lands Consolidation Act, 1913. The Society also asked whether it would be possible to consider the appointment of trustees for the new reserve comprising representatives of the Council and the Society. Mr. Lewis in fact visited the Reserve on 22nd July, 1968 and addressed a special meeting of the Society that evening. Although the Minister appeared somewhat receptive to the Society's overall approach, the Council decided to maintain the status quo, i.e. to retain the area as a Public Recreation Reserve with Council as trustees and authorise the Society to manage the Reserve as a flora and fauna sanctuary. It was not until some years later that the status of the Reserve changed. At about the same time when the status of the Reserve was being initially considered, a proposal was put forward to have the name of the reserve changed to *Wallumetta Ground* - the local Aboriginal name. However, this proposal was not pursued.

Further recognition of the Society's work in the Reserve came about in March 1967 when Ryde Council appointed four of the Society's members as Honorary Rangers for the Reserve. The appointments were made under the Local Government Act and the rangers were responsible for the protection of the Reserve from vandalism, rubbish dumping and the removal of stone and soil. Those appointed were Mr. Laurie Gilbert, Mr. Leighton Boyd, the late Mr. Wal Doyle and Mr. Kelvin Ward. Other members of the Society have since been appointed as Honorary Rangers.

The threat of a rubbish depot in the Field of Mars Reserve was further removed in 1969 when the 4.8 hectares of land on the right bank of Buffalo Creek, which was gazetted in 1954 for use as a rubbish depot, was revoked and re-reserved for public recreation. This action brought the Reserve's total area up to 33.2 hectares, close to its original area.

Buffalo Creek to be major reserve

Within a few years Buffalo Creek will become one of the showpieces of Sydney and will attract thousands of visitors each year.

President of Ryde-Hunters Hill branch of the Flora and Fauna Society, Mr. A. Soady, made this promise to district residents last week.

Mr. Soady said the branch was extremely pleased at Ryde Council's decision to allow the branch to develop Buffalo Creek.

"Now we have the official go ahead to plan a really beautiful flora and fauna

Mr. Soady said the area was ideal for development as a sanctuary and passive recreation reserve for the residents of Ryde.

"It has several waterfalls and two distinct types of soil which will allow almost every type of wild flower to be grown. "With co-operation from the council we will be able to make the area a real asset for every Ryde resident," he said.

SOCIETY OBTAINS RESERVE

Ryde will have its own flora and fauna reserve thanks to the efforts of the Ryde-Hunters Hill Branch of the Flora and Fauna Society.

At its latest meeting areas surrounding Buffalo Creek were discussed and the Ryde Council approved a motion giving the branch permission to develop Buffalo Creek as a reserve.

Council also decided to approach the Department of Lands with a view to having the area reserved.

DEVELOPMENT OF BUFFALO CREEK AS A SANCTUARY

Council carried out Ald. Anderson's motion and an amendment from Ald. A. Soady for Council's consideration to the Works Department for the development of the area.

Council to reconsider park-tip plan

Council agreed unanimously to consider alternative methods of garbage disposal before rubbish on a local park.

Ryde's present tip beside the Lane Cove River stopped.

Dumping there would have to stop in 10 weeks' time.

Members voted unanimously for Ald. Cutler's motion to:

● Approach Kuringai and Parramatta Councils for

Victory for residents of Buffalo Creek area—

PORTER CREEK SELECTED AS TIP SITE

Ryde Council had a tiger by the tail when it decided to use Buffalo Creek as a tip. H. R. S. Anderson said at last week's meeting of Council.

discussing the recommendation of the Council to deal with the problem of garbage disposal in Ryde.

However, the site would be well suited to establishment of an incinerator — garbage could be gravity fed into the incinerator, and the residue gravity fed into the valley.

Congratulating Council on arriving at a satisfactory conclusion, Ald. L.

ping and compaction."

Ald. Anderson praised the people of the Buffalo Creek area, whom he said, had put forward to Council many constructive criticisms.

"Whatever the outcome of this, Buffalo Creek will not be the answer."

Commending the Porter Creek site to the aldermen, the Mayor, Ald. C. M. Cutler, said it was well for the municipality that Council

Honorary Rangers appointed at Field of Mars Reserve

The Flora and Fauna Society will be invited by N.S.W. to assist in the development of the area as a sanctuary and reserve.

last week carried a motion of R. S.

OTHER THREATS

The Army

In 1964 Ryde Council granted the Army permission to use specified areas within the Municipality for training purposes. On Saturday afternoon, 7th May, 1966, the Army moved into the Field of Mars Reserve unannounced to prepare a simulated minefield. Fifty women, mainly housewives from nearby streets in East Ryde immediately flocked to the Reserve because they felt that the army mines would be a danger and nuisance to their children who played there regularly. These women protesters defied the Army and help up the minefield exercise. They sufficiently blocked the Army for long enough to make them understand their presence was not welcome. Ryde Council was criticised for allowing such activities and for failing to notify local residents. Council subsequently withdrew permission to allow the Army to use the area, allegedly on the basis that the Army did not seek the concurrence of the Lands Department, which was apparently a condition of Council's approval in the case of the Field of Mars.



The Cemetery

The Field of Mars Cemetery has been a perennial thorn in the side of the Reserve for many years. In 1920, 1924, 1926 and 1967, parts of Reserve 4785, totalling about 6 hectares, were revoked and added to the cemetery. The excision of 1967 which involved over 4 acres occurred without any initial reference to Council. After this action was effected, the Under Secretary of the Lands Department in a letter to Ryde Council on this matter wrote: "It is regretted that Council was not informed at an earlier date." Not having been informed when it should have been, Council could not effectively oppose this revocation of public parkland. Following this excision, the subject land was cleared and after the boundary between the Reserve and cemetery was surveyed and fenced by Ryde Council in 1969, it was revealed that a further 2 acres of the reserve were cleared by the cemetery authorities. Since then, copious quantities of alien fill have been brought into the cemetery as part of the cemetery's improvement programme. For most of the Reserve's common boundary with the cemetery, this fill has been pushed right up against the boundary and has formed very unsatisfactory batters. This has caused an ongoing undesirable impact on the reserve, resulting in the subsidence of the fill, the invasion of weeds, the spread of rubbish, an affectation on the natural drainage patterns and the imposition of unwanted drainage - all of which have affected the quality of the natural vegetation in this part of the Reserve.

Golf Course

A municipal golf course was initially proposed for part of the Reserve in 1957. The proposal surfaced again in 1963 when Ryde Council was considering a site adjacent to Strangers Creek and Moncrief Drive. The proposal was still under consideration up until 1966, but after then it seemed to have been forgotten.

Housing Development

In May 1966, the Minister for Lands announced that action would be taken to develop Portions 258 and 259 (a section of unreserved Crown Land between Moncrief Drive and Strangers Creek) for residential subdivision. Such action occurred in 1969/1970 and although the subject Crown Land had never previously been reserved for public recreation, the Society considered at the time that it would have been preferable for the area to be added to the Field of Mars Reserve. The residue of the subject land which was not required for the subdivision, being the area between Strangers Creek and the new allotments in Finch Avenue, was subsequently added to the Reserve in April 1973.

Small Bore Rifle Range

Apart from the rifle range which was established in Edwardian times, there was no further threat of such activity until 1965 when Council recommended that a small bore rifle range be allowed in the Reserve. The proposal, however, was disallowed by the Minister for Lands.

SURVIVAL OF NATIVE FAUNA

The changed conditions in the Lane Cove River Valley are generally not favourable for most species of native mammals. The Field of Mars Reserve does, however, have populations of brushtail and ring-tail possums, some bats and echidnas. Introduced mammals include rabbits, feral cats and foxes. The foxes are quite well established, and their diet is known to include cormorants, rabbits and poultry from the backyards of houses in Higginbotham Road. Bandicoots and goannas are thought to have been exterminated by dogs, but the Reserve still has skinks, bearded dragons, blue-tongue lizards, long-necked tortoises and several species of snakes. In recent times meat ants, bulldog ants and several species of birds have died out, but a wide range of invertebrates and birds remain. Up to the 1950s, white-faced chats could be seen by the hundred, but their nesting grounds in the Field of Mars Reserve were taken over by an extension to the Cemetery, and their feeding grounds north of Strangers Creek by a housing development. The dusky wood-swallows have also left the Field of Mars Reserve, but are still found in other parts of the Lane Cove Valley. On the other hand, noisy miners, previously absent from the Reserve, have been observed to spread, year by year, from the north-west, through the Reserve, into the Boronia Park region. The Reserve has the size and the variety of conditions to support over 80 native species of birds and nine introduced species.



Domestic cats gone wild - one of the greatest destroyers of the Reserve's native fauna.



The Work of the Society

THE ACHIEVERS

The work, recognition and results achieved by the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society in its task of preserving the Field of Mars Reserve would not have been possible without the concerted effort of the many dedicated members who made up the Society. Special recognition is made of certain members who played a significant role in the Society's work.

Arthur Soady

Mr. Soady, formerly of Rene Street, East Ryde was the founder of the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society. He was the first President of the Society in 1966. However, due to health reasons he was forced to relinquish his active role in late 1966. Mr. Soady was also a foundation member of the (East Ward) Anti-Tip Action Committee.

Dr. James Ward

James Ward was a foundation member of the Society and was the Society's first Honorary Secretary. James, with his parents and three younger brothers, Kelvin, Graeme and Philip, grew up in the Higginbotham Road area. Prior to 1966, James and his family held a great concern for the way in which the local area was developing and had made a number of personal representations to the Council and government authorities. As the Society's first secretary, James was responsible for drafting all the important items of correspondence which were very critical in the early years. He was particularly instrumental in mapping out the Society's strategy and steering the Society in a responsible and sound direction.

Kelvin Ward

Following James' departure for overseas later in 1966, his brother Kelvin took over the role of secretary and continued the important work initiated by James. Kelvin acted in the position of Hon. Secretary until late 1967 when James returned to take over the role again. Kelvin was the first co-ordinator of the works programme for the Reserve and was largely responsible for implementing a professional approach to the development and management of the Reserve. Being a school teacher at the local Hunters Hill High School, Kelvin saw the great potential the Reserve had to offer schools as an outdoor teaching resource. Kelvin in fact initiated a number of programmes and activities to foster this special usage of the Reserve. Kelvin was also editor of the Society's newsletter - *Wallumetta* for a number of years.

The Late H.R.S. (Harry) Anderson, M.B.E.

Harry Anderson was an alderman on Ryde Council between 1959 and 1982. Although Aid. Anderson was never an active member of the Society as such, he played a significant role on Council in the mid sixties by persuading his fellow aldermen to understand and appreciate the Society's desire to preserve the Field of Mars Reserve. He actively represented the Society's viewpoint at a time when the future of the Reserve was at its most critical point.

The Late Joyce Healey

Mrs. Healey, formerly of Kim Street, Gladesville, was largely responsible for organising the petitions which were circulated in the mid sixties. Although Mrs. Healey did not hold any office in the Society, she did a great deal to boost the membership of the Society by spreading the good word. Being a school teacher at the local Boronia Park Primary School, she also helped promote the use of the Reserve for educational purposes.

The Late Wal Doyle

Wal Doyle was born and bred in the Buffalo Creek Valley and lived in the area for over 60 years. There was not one single square inch of the area which Wal did not know intimately. He knew it down to the little inconspicuous trapdoors where spiders would hide out along the rock ledges of Buffalo Creek to the lichen which grew on the sandstone rock faces. Wal imparted an incredible amount of information about the Field of Mars Reserve and possessed a very special technique in interpreting the bush and everything it was made up of. He led numerous school teachers and classes and other groups through the Reserve since 1966 and always held their interest.

Wal first became a member of the Society's management committee in late 1966 and remained an active member of the committee until his sudden death in October 1986. Between 1968 and 1969 Wal in fact served as the Society's president. During his time with the Society he placed an incredible amount of his energy into projects such as track construction, weed removal, tree planting and bush fire fighting. Wal abhorred vandalism and senseless destruction of the bush and spent numerous hours on many days of each year patrolling the Reserve for offenders in his capacity as one of the Reserve's first honorary rangers. He always dealt with problems effectively and tactfully. Wherever possible, Wal used a public relations approach in rectifying certain problems, with often very good results.

Above all, Wal had a very special concern for our native plants and animals. On many occasions when the Society would unwittingly lose sight of this concern Wal would be quick off the mark to bring the Society into line. His special concern for wildlife was particularly displayed before he died when he constructed a rock bird bath in front of the Visitor Centre to provide drinking water for many native birds who previously relied on a nearby spring which had since dried-up.

Leah Warton

Leah was a foundation member of both the Society and the Anti-Tip Action Committee. In the early years she was very active in the Society having served on the Society's management committee for a number of years. Between 1971 and 1977 Leah was an alderman on Ryde Council and was instrumental during that period of time in influencing Ryde Council to acquire more land for the Reserve, to improve the status and protection for the Reserve and to expend funds on providing various improvements for the Reserve. Leah served as secretary of the Society between 1977 and 1980 and in this centenary year, she is one of the Society's vice presidents.

Leighton Boyd

Leighton was a foundation member of both the Society and Anti-Tip Action Committee. He was a member of the Society's first management committee and was particularly active in the early years in cleaning up and improving the old rubbish tips adjacent to Buffalo Creek. Between 1968 and 1977 Leighton was an alderman on Ryde Council and like Leah Warton, he brought about a number of desirable developments for the Reserve. Leighton

was particularly responsible for influencing Council to construct the Visitor Centre, which was completed in September, 1972. Leighton served as president of the Society between 1977 and 1983.

Bill Shearer

Bill Shearer became actively involved in the Society in 1967, initially assisting with the development of a trail system for the Field of Mars Reserve. In the early seventies Bill turned his talents to developing a strategy for the educational use of the Reserve. On behalf of the Society, he meticulously drafted many letters and submissions, which presented the Society's case for the establishment of a Field Studies Centre in the Reserve. As part of this exercise, he also sought the advice and guidance of others, like Allen Strom, and attended many meetings and deputations. In conjunction with the Association for Environmental Education (N.S.W.), Bill was largely responsible for producing the *Resource Book for Field Studies in the Ryde District*, which was published in 1979. Apart from its environmental education value, this book contains the most comprehensive documentation on the Field of Mars Reserve and surrounding environs which has been produced to date. The book has been an invaluable reference source for teachers and students and has had a wide appeal to interested members of the community.

Also in the early seventies, Bill in his usual thorough style, was largely responsible for the submission from the Society which ultimately led to the consolidation and expansion of the Reserve's boundaries, as well as the attainment of an improved status for the Reserve.

Ray Mangan

Ray Mangan became actively involved in the Society in 1968, initially assisting with the preparation and erection of signs and notices for the Reserve. Ray took an active role in the Works Committee for the Reserve and in later years was convener of that committee. In 1969 Ray was appointed as an Honorary Ranger and in conjunction with the late Wal Doyle, he played a significant role in providing an effective law enforcement presence in the Reserve.

Bill and Noela Jones

Bill and Noela have become actively involved in the Reserve in more recent years and have been particularly responsible for introducing and implementing the Bradley Method of bush regeneration in dealing with weed problems in the Reserve. Their contribution in this field has brought about a more professional approach to the management of the Reserve. Bill is currently convener of the Works Committee and Noela is a professional bush regenerator with the National Trust.

CO-OPERATION WITH COUNCIL

Ever since the Field of Mars Reserve gained the recognition the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society tirelessly strove for, the Society and Ryde Council have co-operated harmoniously in the management of the Reserve. Council initially graded the old tip-flats, supplied topsoil, erected fences along critical boundaries, cleared fire-breaks, assisted with grass cutting and supplied materials for signs.

One of Council's greatest contributions was the construction of the Visitor Centre in 1972, which was funded with the assistance of a loan from the Lands Department. The Visitor Centre was officially opened on 16th September, 1972 by the then Mayor, Alderman H.R.S. Anderson.

Other matters in which the Council has assisted have been the provision of numerous potted trees and shrubs, the supply of fire-fighting equipment, the provision of some outdoor park furniture, the expenditure of considerable sums on the acquisition of areas along the boundaries for inclusion in the Reserve and the engagement of professional teams to carry out bush-regeneration work. In co-operation with the Education Department, Council built an access road and turning circle in from Pittwater Road to primarily service visiting school groups. Valuable assistance was also received from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, which provided routed timber signs for the Reserve

DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF THE RESERVE

Following the authorisation given in September 1966 by Council which allowed the Society to develop the Reserve as a flora and fauna sanctuary, members of the Society immediately undertook important projects such as the planting and labelling of trees, the eradication of weeds, the building of retaining walls and bridges and the clearing of trails. A development programme was adopted by the Society in October, 1966. This programme proposed the development of barbecue and picnic areas on the old Buffalo Creek tip and at the head of Strangers Creek, a car park on the southern bank of Buffalo Creek and adjacent to Pittwater Road and a foot-bridge over Buffalo Creek from the car park, and a bridal path along the southern bank of Buffalo Creek as far as Monash Road. The programme also envisaged a revegetation scheme involving study areas for bottlebrush shrubs on the old tip flat adjacent to Strangers Creek, melaleucas on the old tip adjacent to Buffalo Creek, grevilleas in the Strangers Creek valley at the rear of Finch Avenue and at the end of Kellaway Street, and desert plants on the hill behind the cemetery.



The old tip site inherited by the Society in 1966.

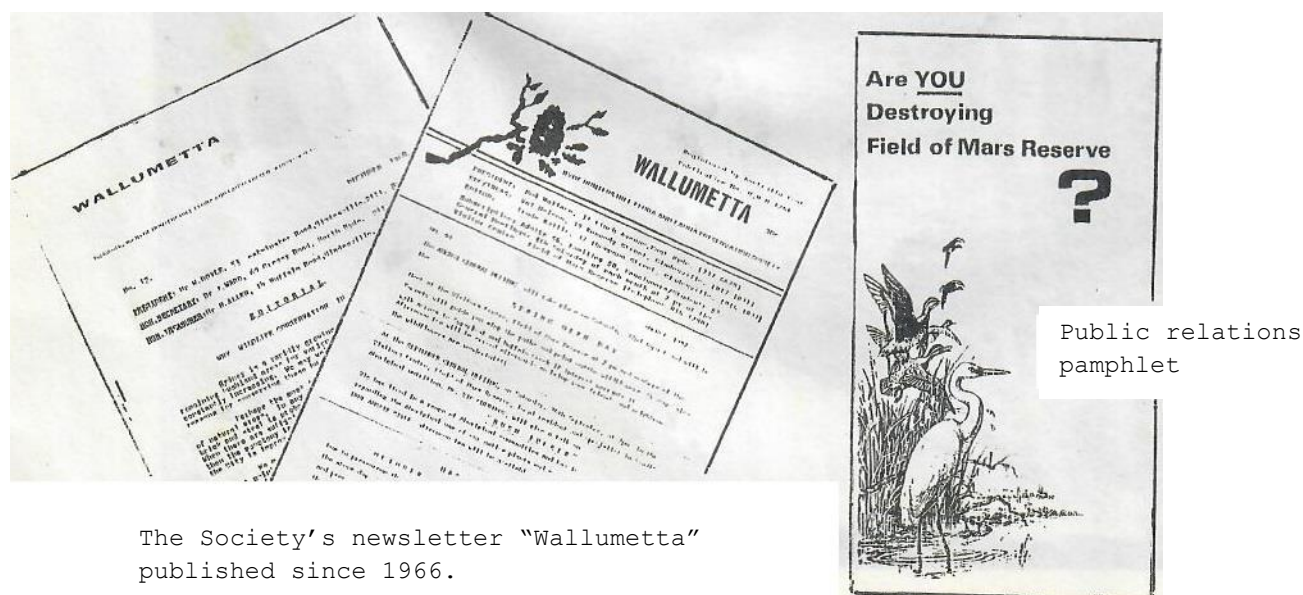
Many of the projects in the programme were of a long term nature and the revegetation schemes involved the planting of some species of native plants which were not indigenous to the district. For instance, in Strangers Creek, flooded gums, flame trees, red cedars and silky oaks were initially planted. This concept was aimed at providing a native wildflower garden arrangement which would display a variety of plant species from different parts of Australia. In later years, greater emphasis was placed on preserving the original character of the Reserve's flora, rather than introducing plants from other parts of Australia. The Society's policy was moving more towards the practice of removing weeds from selected areas and replanting such areas with species that would originally have grown there. Consolidation and recognition of this practice was made in the first formal Plan of Management, which was officially adopted by Ryde Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1977. The Plan of Management also reviewed and abandoned some of the earlier development proposals and contained a number of management prescriptions which were more in keeping with the objective of promoting the use of the Reserve for environmental education.

In more recent years, the management of the Reserve has become more refined by the adoption and application of the Bradley Method of bush regeneration. This method has brought about a far more effective means of removing weeds than was previously employed and has generally introduced a more professional approach to urban bushland management. A number of qualified bush regeneration teams have been working in the Reserve in the last few years.

The work of the Society in the Reserve was particularly recognised in 1972 when the Society received first prize in the *Operation Earth Day* competition which was sponsored by the Daily Telegraph and the Bank of N.S.W.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

The Society has always regarded the matter of keeping the community at large aware of its activities as being of paramount importance. Over the last 21 years the Society has developed a close liaison with the local press, which has resulted in countless numbers of press statements and articles on the work of the Society being published. In the earlier years, when public support for the work of the Society was very vital, the Society staged several major exhibitions at the Top Ryde Regional Shopping Centre. In an effort to maintain the interest of its members and others in the community, the Society has since 1966 regularly published a newsletter, which is entitled *Wallumetta*. The November/December 1987 issue will in fact be the 100th edition published to date.



The Society's newsletter "Wallumetta" published since 1966.

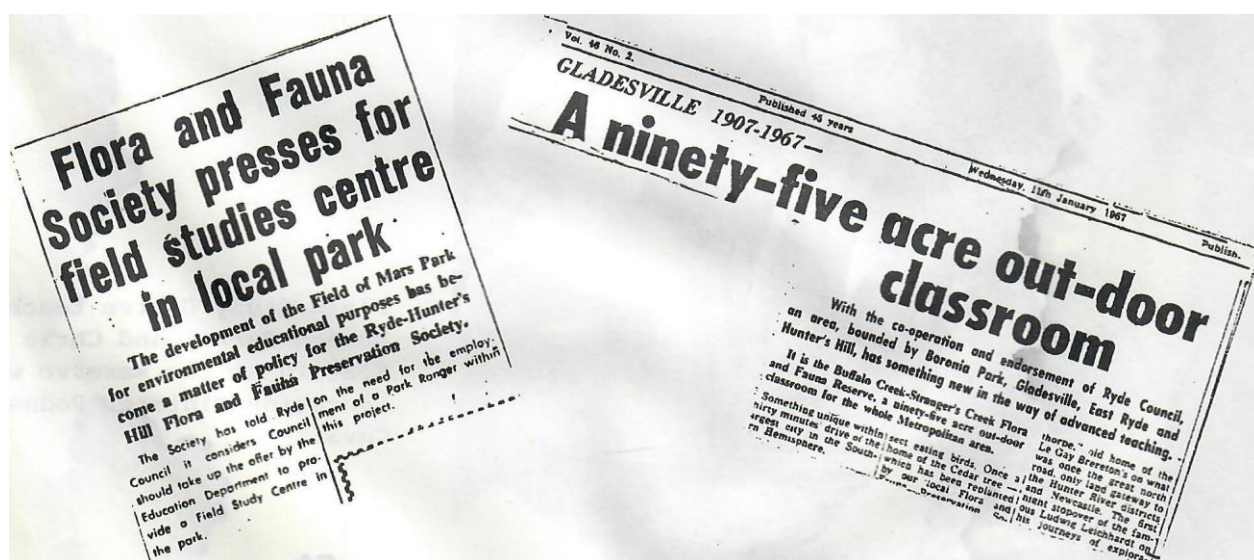
Since its inception, the Society has held regular general meetings, which have always been open to the public. Many of these meetings take the form of lecture presentations where a vast range of guest speakers have addressed the meetings over the years on a variety of interesting and informative topics. The Society has also organised a number of public open days in the Reserve which have engendered a great deal of interest and follow-up involvement in the Society.

The Society continues to keep the community aware through periodical letter box drops, by publishing interpretive and educational leaflets about the Reserve and by staffing the Visitor Centre in the Reserve at weekends as an information service.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Since its inception the Society has always believed that the Field of Mars Reserve and its surrounding environs had a great deal to offer teachers and students in the way of field studies and environmental education.

The first promotion of the Field Studies Centre concept occurred in 1967 when the late Wal Doyle presented an article in the local newspaper - *The Weekly Times*. His article was entitled *A ninety five acre outdoor classroom*, which described the outstanding diversity of flora and fauna of the Field of Mars Reserve and advocated the Reserve as "something new in the way of advanced teaching."



The development of an education programme was actively taken up by foundation members, Kelvin and James Ward, who inspired people like Nan Kelly from the Sydney Teachers' College to seriously use the Reserve as an educational resource for teacher trainees. Since those early years, the educational use of the Reserve has snowballed and its direction and further development have received invaluable assistance and guidance from people like Allen Strom and Thistle Stead.

Originally a group of 34 trainee teachers from the Sydney Teachers' College spent a day in the Reserve as part of their training course. They were led by two teachers, Miss Nan Kelly, B.Sc., Dip. Ed., B.Ed., and Miss S. Bonner. Miss Kelly had said that the college considered various areas for the excursion (including one west of the Nepean River), but none were as suitable as the Buffalo Creek/Strangers Creek area. She expressed the hope that the college would be able to use the Reserve for a wide variety of studies in coming years. The college did in fact continue to use the Reserve for many years.

The Society is indebted to its member, Bill Shearer, who since 1973, was largely responsible for presenting the case to the Education Department to establish an official Field Studies Centre. The announcement in September 1986 by the Minister for Education, the Hon. Rodney Cavalier, M.P., about the establishment of the Field of Mars Field Studies Centre indeed represented the culmination of many years of planning and consistent agitation by the Society. The strong commitment by the Minister and his Government to environmental education was highly commended by the Society.

The Field of Mars Field Studies Centre officially commenced operations on 27th April, 1987, with the appointment of Howard Barker (Teacher in Charge) and Chris Koettig. The other two staff members of the centre are Mrs. Barbara Surbey (Clerical Assistant) and Martin Fleming (General Assistant). As a temporary measure, a demountable classroom has been installed near the Visitor Centre until the permanent building is completed later in 1988.



Field Study Centre teachers Howard Barker and Chris Koettig at the Reserve with Education Minister Rodney Cavalier.

The Society is proud of the part it has played and will continue to play in fulfilling this vital education programme and firmly believes its role and the role of the Field Studies Centre will complement each other.

In June 1972, the Society proposed that the boundaries of the Reserve be extended to include the land south-west of Wellington Road and north-east of Strangers Creek, owned by the Crown, the Council and the Department of Environment and Planning.

After protracted negotiations these proposals were effected by 1975. Within that period of time Council also acquired several small portions of adjoining private land for addition to the Reserve. On 20th June, 1975, R.4785 was revoked and was re-reserved together with other Crown lands proposed by the Society as R.89474 for Public Recreation and Promotion of the Study and Preservation of Native Flora and Fauna, with care, control and management devolving upon Ryde Council pursuant to the provisions of section 344 of the Local Government Act. The lands belonging to the Department of Environment and Planning were also placed under the care, control and management of Council, and subsequently became part of the Reserve.

On 9th May, 1975, all these lands, totalling about 49 hectares were proclaimed by the Governor of New South Wales as the "Field of Mars Wildlife Refuge, No. 339" pursuant to section 68 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974. On Saturday, 24th May, 1975 over 200 local residents, many official guests, local members of Parliament, both State and Federal, and Council representatives from Hunters Hill and Ryde attended a ceremony at the Reserve at which the then Director of National Parks and Wildlife, Mr. D.A. Johnstone, officially declared the Reserve a "Wildlife Refuge".



The Next 100 Years

As the Reserve enters its second century and the Society its third decade, it will be important to ensure that the many achievements gained over the last 21 years are not lost or diminished. The Society has come a long way since its infancy years. The last decade has particularly seen a greater recognition of the fact that the management of urban bushland is complex and sometimes contentious and of the need for informed advice. Whilst the Society does not concede to have all the answers, its approach to the management of the Field of Mars Reserve is becoming more professional.

The Society's main problem is that it has too few physical resources to implement its objectives. Although its objectives and practices are now fairly well firmly in place and working reasonably well, it is important that its objectives and policies are not converted into unchanging dogma. Since urban bushland is a dynamic living system - changing all the time because of external influences - there is a need to be flexible, not too dogmatic and to sometimes experiment with new techniques.

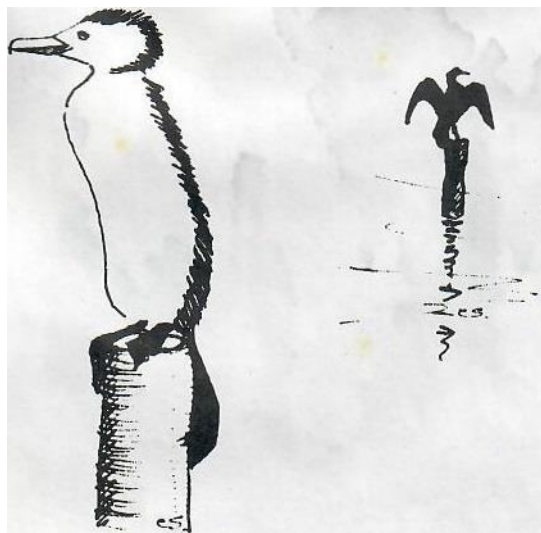
The Reserve, being an area largely "hemmed-in" by urban development will continue to suffer from the impact of earth fill, weeds, household pets, increased urban runoff, increased nutrients, chemicals and fertilizers from adjoining areas, particularly from the cemetery and new residential developments. These will represent the physical challenges of the future. Another challenge may be the emergence of a change in public attitude towards the Reserve. This must be met with a continual campaign to win the community's appreciation of living in the midst of a quiet natural bushland setting. Equally important will be the task of ensuring that Ryde Council continues to think along parallel lines to the Society.

For the past 21 years the Society has shared a very cordial and workable partnership with Ryde Council in the management of the Reserve. From this year onwards, that partnership will be extended to the Education Department. With this three way involvement in the Reserve, it can be anticipated that the Field of Mars and the cause for nature conservation will benefit greatly.



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Work party of Society members at the Reserve in 1966.



Current day aerial view of
the Field of Mars Reserve
and surrounding areas.

