

Proposal for a Peace and Reconciliation Park at Richardson's Lookout

~ Background Notes ~

Several local organisations and individuals have recently come together to form the Gallipoli Centenary Peace Campaign (GCPC). The campaign aims to widen the public discourse, at both the local and national level, about Australia's identity and the place of war in our past and future. The local organisations initially involved in this campaign include Marrickville Peace Group, Marrickville Residents for Reconciliation, Pax Christi, and Marrickville Greens.

As well as using the Gallipoli Centenary 2015 as an opportunity to commemorate all Australians, including Marrickville residents, who lost their lives or were wounded in the Dardenelles, it is also an opportunity to reflect on other aspects of Australia's involvement in WW1, such as:

- The impact of war on the families of servicemen and women and their communities;
- The plight of returned servicemen and women who were damaged psychologically and/or physically by war;
- The defeat of the conscription referenda and the deep political and social divisions at home caused by the war;
- Those who were accused of 'disloyalty' for opposing the war such as peace activists who advocated non-violent methods of resolving conflict together with conscientious objectors.

With respect to wars more generally, it is also an opportunity to reflect on Australia's frontier wars, the dispossession of the Aboriginal people and the lasting effects of that process.

Rationale for a Peace and Reconciliation Park

GCPC believes that the establishment of a Peace and Reconciliation Park will serve to honour the memory of all those who lost their lives in past wars in the best way possible, that is by focusing on the causes of war and how the risk of future wars involving Australians may be diminished. As Peter Underwood, Governor of Tasmania has said, "all our remembrances and honours are meaningless unless we also vow to become resolute about peace because that is what those whom we remember and honour on (Anzac Day) thought they were dying for." It is GCPC's belief that the establishment of a Peace and Reconciliation Park will help us become more resolute about peace in the future.

Possible Locations for a Peace and Reconciliation Park

There are at least two sites in Marrickville which have an association with Australia's wars and which could provide locations for peace memorials.

The first site is the Addison Road Community Centre that served as an army barracks from WW1 to the Vietnam War.

The second site is Richardson's Lookout. This site is well known for its Aboriginal, military and local heritage. The site was part of the land inhabited by the Cadigal people for many thousands of years and is said to have been a significant vantage point for the local Aboriginal people providing views to Botany Bay and of the Cooks River catchment.

Following European settlement, Richardson's Outlook was part of a parcel of land first granted in 1799 to Thomas Moore who used local timber to build boats for the colony. Later, in 1830, the estate was purchased by Dr Robert Wardell, a barrister, who expanded his landholding to 2000 acres

to include most of today's Petersham, Dulwich Hill and Marrickville, from Parramatta Road to the Cooks River.

In 1859, after the sub-division of Wardell's estate, a wealthy businessman, Thomas Holt, purchased a parcel of land comprising 130 acres which he subsequently called 'The Warren'. Holt's home, a 'Victorian Gothic' mansion, was built around 1866.

Holt returned to England in 1883 and died in 1888. Following his death, the estate was gradually sub-divided but the mansion remained part of a 12 acre block and was acquired by the Catholic Church. Between 1886 and 1903, The Warren accommodated a French order of Carmelite nuns.

The site's military history is linked to The Warren. During WW1, The Warren was used by the army as an artillery encampment. In 1919 The Warren's mansion was demolished and the land sub-divided for a housing estate for returned soldiers. It is this precinct's military history that makes it a fitting location for a memorial to Marrickville's connection with WW1.

In recent times, Richardson's Lookout has also been the setting for Sorry Day events, organised by Marrickville Residents for Reconciliation, and it is a site for the Aboriginal Interpretative signage and Story Poles project developed jointly by Marrickville Aboriginal Consultative Committee and Marrickville Council in 2013. It is called 'Looking Out' and features the 'Sea of Hands' imagery initiated by ANTAR (Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation) as a symbol of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians joining hands and working together towards reconciliation.

Designating Richardson's Outlook as a Peace and Reconciliation Park

GPCPC is intending to call upon Marrickville Council to designate Richardson's Lookout as a Peace and Reconciliation Park. Such a designation would not replace the current name of the site but would build upon the pre and post-European settlement history of Richardson's Lookout.

Currently there is no signage to indicate the name of this area or the origin and significance of the surviving entrance columns from The Warren. Appropriate signage could highlight the various stages in the history of the site and could call to mind the conflicts of the past and acknowledge the ongoing efforts by many to put forward alternatives to violence as a means of resolving conflict.

In addition, the revegetated natural land between the lookout and the river calls to mind the original state of this land before colonisation and is testimony to the ongoing efforts of local Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, supported by Marrickville Council, to live in harmony with the Land and with each other - a foretaste of the peaceful future for which we are striving.

May 2014

