



## **Beecroft Village Green – Heritage Information**

### **Heritage Statement**

The Beecroft Village Green is of local heritage significance for its historical, aesthetic, social and scientific/research values. The Village Green historically formed part of the Field of Mars subdivision in 1886 and was officially opened in 1903. The park has continued to function as a recreational space since that time. The park is aesthetically significant for its conservation of Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest within a park like setting. The item makes a positive contribution to the bushland character of the Shire. The conservation of Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest has research potential for the conservation of its critically endangered ecological community. The Village Green holds social values to the local community and has a special association with the local Beecroft community for its use for public gatherings, community events and commemorative occasions.

### **Historical Notes**

The following historical notes are taken largely from Beecroft-Cheltenham History Group;

<https://www.bchg.org.au/index.php/environment/parks/village-green>

Maps from 1886 show two parcels of land marked 'reserve', one of which became the Village Green for public recreation. The Village Green was 'opened' on 5 September 1903 by the Governor Sir Harry Rawson who travelled to Beecroft by train. Over 2000 people were present and this was 'the largest gathering seen in Beecroft to this date.' The Governor inspected a guard of school cadets and a troop of police and lancers from the Parramatta Barracks. This distinguished event belied the earlier history of the reserve. It was dedicated for public purposes in 1898. Over the next decade it was described as so thickly timbered that it was not possible to determine where the reserve ended and the bush commenced. It was described by the local paper as remarkable only for locusts, lizards and snakes.

The southern part of the Green was leased in 1898 for the construction of the present day tennis club. A small parcel of land between the reserve and the School of Arts, was purchased in 1905 to supplement the Green.

Local residents contributed 60 pounds to the upkeep of the Green and eventually, in 1910 a sawn fence was constructed along Beecroft Road, ornamental shade trees were planted and between 1910 and 1913 a timber bandstand on brick foundations was built. There is a reference, in 1912, to a stone bandstand erected in the Village Green as though it was already built.

Closer to the middle of the present day reserve, a drinking fountain and memorial was constructed to the memory of David John Willis, a young Beecroft resident who was killed in the Boer War. It was unveiled by the local Member of Parliament, Frank Farnell, on 24 November 1901. The 6<sup>th</sup> Australian Rifles were present. A vote of thanks was moved by Mr Holcombe who said that "one of the objects in the erection of the monument was to impress on the heart of the young people of the district the importance of duty and discipline." The drinking fountain fell into disrepair and was relocated to the south side of Copeland Road, sometime between 1930 and 1943. At that time running water was not re-connected and the inscription re-inscribed with an incorrect date of death – 10 rather than 1 October. In 2018, the Boer War memorial to David John Willis was relocated to the south of Beecroft Railway garden.

A time capsule was placed in the reserve in 1988 by the Beecroft community through Rotary that will be opened in 2038 on the 250th anniversary of the nation. A sundial was placed in the reserve in 1989 to commemorate the work of former Shire President Don Evans who did much for the local community. The Community Centre is a former Mechanics Institute.

### **Beecroft Village Green**

The following description of the Beecroft Village Green was prepared by Local Historian, Patricia Dewey in 2003.

A Department of Lands map of Beecroft dated October 1886 shows two parcels of land marked 'reserve'. The first of these was set aside by the Department of Lands for government use and became the site of the fire station. The second piece of land became known as the Village Green as the Local Progress Association was looking for land closer to the village than other land off Castle Howard Road that had been set aside for Public Recreation and now known as Beecroft Park. The site was at one time considered as the possible site of the public school.

In 1898 two to three acres of land between the railway line and Beecroft Parade was dedicated by the Government for public purposes and soon became known as the Village Green. Despite the Progress Association's success after a lengthy battle, the *Cumberland Argus* reported unkindly that the land was so thickly studded with trees, undergrowth and dead timber that it was difficult to determine where it began and where it ended.

By 1899 the Progress Association and the trustees had made improvements to the Village Green. They planned rustic seats and a fireplace with a chimney for the use of picnickers. In 1900 a sawn fence 'quite ornamental in appearance' was added.

Following the death during the Boer War of David John Willis, a young Beecroft resident, it was decided to place a memorial to him in the Village green. The memorial was to be a drinking fountain and was unveiled on 24 November 1901 by local member Frank Farnell in the presence of some several hundred people. The fountain was originally at the entrance to the Village Green along Beecroft Parade. Later with the passage of time, the memorial was reconstructed and moved to its present position facing Copeland Road.

As part of the fund raising to establish a School of Arts on the northern end of the Village Green, a garden fete was planned for September 1903. Sir Harry Rawson, the Governor accepted an invitation to open the fete. On the afternoon of September 5, 1903, the Governor's railway coach at the rear of the through train to Newcastle, drew into Beecroft Station. More than 2000 people and according to the local paper, *'the largest gathering seen in Beecroft to this date,'* assembled to watch the Governor and his wife drive to the Village Green in a carriage and pair, through a guard of honour of school cadets, with an escort and rearguard of mounted police and Lancers from Parramatta.

In March 1908, the *Cumberland Argus* reports on a concert held on the Village Green to raise funds for its maintenance:

*The residents of Beecroft were afforded a real musical treat on Saturday evening by the famous Newtown Brass Band which, for nearly an hour and a half, charmed hundreds of residents and visitors from neighbouring townships who gathered round the band. There were vehicles of one sort or another, including motor cars, lining the road close to the green and loaded with listeners. The verandahs of houses for some distance away were occupied by those who could not well leave their homes.*

From an interesting comment made at what appears to have been a Progress Association meeting in January 1915 the Village Green may not have been as sacred as the residents would have liked. Mr Holcombe remarked that:

*The Trustees had carried out a great deal of improvements to the reserve. Had it not been for himself and others, that ground would have been covered by a lot of little buildings for the Government had arranged to sub-divide it into small lots. They had made it a beauty spot and a reserve.*

He went on to say that the erection of the bandstand [in 1910] which he considered an eye-sore, was not an altogether unanimous decision on the part of the trustees.

The Beecroft Village Green today is still popular as it ever was with local residents. The walkway through the park is used by hundreds of people every day as they make their way to the village, the station or to school. A sundial was placed in the reserve in 1989 to commemorate the work of former Shire President, Don Evans who did much for his local community. The Green is used by Beecroft Rotary Club for its annual fete as well as by Arden for the fete organised by the school each second year. For many years the Rotary Club, together with the children from Beecroft Primary School, has conducted an annual Carols by Candlelight in the last week of the school year.