

BRIEF

PUBLIC VIEWING POINTS IN VAUCLUSE

From 19th century paintings and photographs, we know that extensive views of Sydney Harbour could be obtained from many points along New South Head Road.

Around 1900, concern began to be felt that housing development along that road would block these views and that a number of public viewing points should be established.

Mr Horler, the Town Clerk of Vacluse, wrote in November, 1916: "The coigns of vantage along the South Head Road of this Borough, one of the prettiest tourist routes in the State of New South Wales, if not the World, are rapidly disappearing owing to the erecting of residences along this important tram route, thereby cutting off travellers' view of the harbour. The question of setting aside of the subject land for all time as a public lookout is one of national importance, for the historic associations connected with Vacluse, South Head and The Gap attract from all over the World, thousands of visitors yearly along this tourist route.....".

Mr Horler's letter was specifically related to the promise made in 1912 by Mr G.S. Beeby, the then Minister for Lands, that a parcel of land at the Shaftesbury Institution - later to become Samuel Park - would be placed under control of the Council.

SAMUEL PARK. This park of 3 acres (1.2 ha.) on the headwaters of one of the branches of the creek running into Vacluse Bay was originally part of the Shaftesbury Reformatory for Girls, which, when it closed in 1914, became the Shaftesbury Inebriate Institution for males. Throughout the 1910's and 1920's, the pressure to have the Institution's land to the west of New South Head Road made into a public reserve was resisted by the Department of the Attorney General and Justice who administered the Institution.

When the Institution closed in 1927, things changed. The land to the east of New South Head Road was given over to private housing and part was later to be occupied by Vacluse Boy's High School.

The three acre block was gazetted as a public reserve in August, 1930 and

named in honour of Ald. A.C. Samuel, Mayor of Vacluse from 1927 to 1934 and 1943 to 1944.

In the late 1930's, the Vacluse Bowling Club was formed and part of the land was leased to the Club for bowling greens which necessitated building up the southernmost part of the park to the level of New South Head Road.

JOHNSTONS LOOKOUT, the next viewing point south along New South Head Road is a narrow triangular block at the corner of that road and Hopetoun Avenue. The view from this point was featured in the 1960 Municipal Centenary publication 'The History of Woollahra' by James Jarvis between pages 78 & 79 as an 1824 woodcut and a late 1950's photograph.

It was purchased by the Minister for Lands from the Trustees of the Wentworth Estate and was dedicated for the purposes of public recreation on November 24, 1915, with care and control being given to the Vacluse Council.

From the start it appears to have been named Johnstons Lookout. Research to date has left it imprecise as to which Mr Johnston it gave honour but there seems little doubt that it commemorates Mr William Johnston (1862-1925) who lived and carried on businesses in the early part of this century in Watsons Bay.

He came from Stirling, Scotland, was a stone mason and worked on the initial building of the Sacred Heart Convent, no doubt in the employ of the major contractors Holdsworth MacPherson and Company.

An accident seemed to have terminated his activity there and he reverted to the role of a general merchant operating 'The Gap Stores' on the eastern side of Military Road, and from 1912 as a 'house agent' from a house nearby.

William Johnston was an Alderman of the Vacluse Council from 1898 to 1902, in 1907 and from 1913 to 1917 while he was Mayor of Vacluse from 1903 to 1906 and 1911 to 1912, so the subject area was designated 'Johnstons Lookout' during his term as an alderman.

Records indicate that he was prominent in 1901 in attempts to have Hopetoun Avenue extended through to Watsons Bay and that he took a positive interest in the establishment and maintenance of park lands within Vacluse

including action to try to establish Beebys Lookout.

His enterprise and service to the community would fully justify the honour bestowed by the placement, in such a prominent part of Vaocluse, of a marker carrying his name - a new marker board has recently been placed there by the Woollahra Council.

BEEBYS LOOKOUT would have become the next south of the view points. The acquisition of three blocks of the Vaocluse Estate was approved by the Minister for Lands in 1912 and given the title Beebys Lookout, naming it in his own honour - he was Minister for Lands from 1911 to 1912.

The blocks were lots 15, 16 & 17 of sub division No 9 of the Vaocluse Estate and were auctioned off in 1910. The blocks fronted some 440 feet (133 m.) on the western side of New South Head Road roughly opposite Ray Avenue to opposite Clairvaux Road today.

Whilst the acquisition of these blocks was approved, it never occurred and in 1915, the then Minister advised the Vaocluse Council that the proposal would not go ahead due to "economic stringency brought on by the war in Europe (WWI)". The northern block, lot 15, borders on a drainage reserve and had it alone been acquired it would have made an excellent viewing point.

FORSYTH RESERVE. The southernmost of the public viewing areas is located at the corner of New South Head and Bayview Hill Roads right at the southern border of the then Vaocluse Municipality. This is land reclaimed from the course of a creek which would have run down from Hillside Avenue emptying into Rose Bay at the bottom of Bayview Hill Road.

It was named in honour of Ald. A. Forsyth, Mayor of Vaocluse in 1913.

What Mr Horler feared in 1916 would happen has largely occurred, in that views of the harbour from public roads have all but disappeared due the erection of not only houses but also high walls, garages and other structures.

The community today is indebted to the Vaocluse Council and other citizens whose actions resulted in three fine harbour

viewing points being established on New South Head Road which are now enjoyed by thousands of visitors from all over the world who still travel along this fine tourist route.

The fact that Beebys Lookout was lost because of 'economic reasons' is a reminder to present generations that these present viewing points and other public open spaces must be defended with vigour from those who want to alienate them.

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FEBRUARY, 1992

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