BLAXLANDS LOST HISTORY

The “Pilgrim Inn” was for many years the focus of Blaxland’s history since it was the first building after Barnett Levey received large land grants in 1825. By that time, the first two roads to ”Wascoe”, (as the town was originally known) had converged, making it the ideal site for a travellers rest.

There were several Hosts for the Inn until William Deane purchased it for a country residence in 1872, while living in Burwood. He was the first to purchase and subdivide large tracts of land in the precinct in 1867. “Pilgrim Inn “remained in the Deane family for several generations until sadly it was burnt down in the devastating bush fires which raced through the lower Blue Mountains in 1968. McDonalds Restaurant now occupies the site and fortunately some history is recorded on a metal plate on the protected stone walls of the Inn’s remains. There are also some historic photos inside the café.

What is not known now is that those same terrible fires also destroyed the Historic Church and Rectory and several of the homes in Hope and View Streets which were built in that first subdivision by Rev. Joshua Hargrave, in the early 1900’s. He and his family members and friends remained for years as the small village developed. Now only five of the homes remain in Hope and View Streets.

Along the Highway, another five early homes were destroyed in that bush fire. Two of them, with very large, lovely gardens were established across the highway from the Inn. One known as “Pilgrim Cottage” and the other one, were originally owned by families related to William Deane. The gardens were opened to the public on occasions, sometimes for fund raising.

A new home, “Pilgrim Cottage” was built on the original site which is now much smaller. “Euroka Pre School Child Centre” and the extension of Hope and Station Streets are now on the other one.

Three Tea Rooms and an Antique shop, once popular with locals and passing travellers stopping in the mountains, closed when no longer viable.

Mature deciduous oak trees were a unique attraction lining the highway alongside the railway line. They too were demolished for the highway which also cut off vehicle access to Blaxland Park, once a popular recreation area for the community with shelter sheds and play equipment.

Major works to widen the Great Western Highway and provide footpaths to the station and shops occurred between 1960 and1970. As a result other old homes, one with a popular tennis court, were demolished or had severely reduced frontages.

As a result of the need to enlarge the shopping precinct, the original Scout Clubroom was demolished to provide for a small park and increased parking. BMCC provided a new Clubroom in Baden Place in exchange.

Another renowned property, burnt by another bushfire in 1944 was established by Bernard Cummins in Bunbinla Avenue about 1930. Bernie had built a ladder on a very tall tree for a lookout on a substantial platform. He charged sixpence to climb and view the vast green plains, farms and orchards below, through a telescope. The Sydney Harbour Bridge could be viewed during construction and subsequent completion. There was a notice on the Lookout which read “Don’t mind the sway, it’s just the way”. Bernie, who was an artist and writer, also developed a small Museum and Tea room in his home with his wife Mary.

The original Public School built in 1918 on the highway, remains but has a side entrance and it is obscured, surrounded by new buildings, trees and fences.

Presently, scattered elsewhere throughout Blaxland, there are only about twenty old homes built before the early 1930’s.Most have been renovated and hidden by gardens.

It is to be hoped that the proposed new developments for the shopping area, around “Pilgrim Place,” will enhance the township and retain some memorials of the first settlement years.