

Some Perspectives About Mt Wilson in The 20th Century

Mary Reynolds

By the 1950s the Mount Wilson Village Hall was a reality after a remarkable community effort succeeded in having it constructedⁱ. The young people who had made up a supportive percentage of the population at that time were soon to move on in pursuit of careers and lives beyond Mt Wilson. In a sense a new era was to emerge in the next few decades. Some of the original houses had already changed owners such as Yengo, Withycombe and Dennaque. Wynstay remained with the original family the Wynnes, as did Sefton Hall (the Clarks), Bebeah (the Sloans) and Nooroo (the Valdars). Sadly Campanella had been lost to a house fireⁱⁱ. However that property was to be owned for many years and still is by the Mayne family. The Gregson family, whose presence in the earlier decades had been significant, was diminished to some degree with the death of Margaret Gregson in 1940s from cancer. Chimney Cottage ceased as a tearoom and then there was the loss of Edward Gregson in December 1955 in Applecot, his final home. Edward had played a vital role in the Mt Wilson Trust for the Sites Reserves and as Secretary of the Mt Wilson Progress Association in 1950s.

Tea rooms

Tea rooms were not unusual in Mt Wilson during the mid 20th century. When Sylvan Close was bought by Professor R. Thorp and his wife, Dorothy in the 1950s it became a tearoom using that charming name. Local people often helped in these tea rooms. Flossie Finato from Taiho and Betty and Rosemary Clarke from Mt Irvine were among these people. In Queens Avenue Emoh Ruo, owned by Tom Kirk and his first wife Joy, was another successful undertaking as a tearoom. Later in 1965 The Tulip Tearoom in the Avenue was established by Jack and Amy Gunn. It was able to survive for many years, and into the 21st century until 2004, unlike Sylvan Close and Emoh Ruo which had closed their doors by the mid 1960s.

In the decades to come the opening of gardens would become almost a set pattern in the spring and in the autumn for those involved, demanding constant hours of work and dedication. In those same years a small number of newcomers were to buy land and build or purchase property and exercise influence quietly or at times forcefully in community affairs.

The State of the Roads

Using archival material from the Mt Wilson Progress Association and similar sources one can sense some of the issues and concerns which challenged the community in the mid 20th century. There was always the issue of the state of the roads. Remember that the Avenue was not tar sealed until the end of 1959 and other roads much later. Even today the condition of the roads remains a challenge especially when a major undertaking such as scenes for the film 'the Great Gatsby' were made in Mt Wilson two years ago. By 2015 most of the laneways and smallest roads were finally sealed.

Tree planting, drainage and power

Other concerns that appeared in the minutes of the Progress Association in the middle decades of the 20th century were the questions of tree planting, the drainage outside the Village Hall, the grazing of cattle along the lanes and roads of the Village, the possible construction of a gas pipe line from Newnes across the Wollangambe, the introduction of the Parma wallaby at Yengo and the worry of the electricity supply after it was installed in Mt Wilson 1940 and later in Mt Irvine in 1962. Dr C.H. Currey describes the arrival of electricity in Mt Wilson with these words—'In 1940 the boon of accessibility by improved roadways was enriched for dwellers at Mount Wilson by the amenity of electricity.'ⁱⁱⁱ Judging by the minutes of the Progress Association at that time the roadways had a long way to go. However Dr Currey does pay tribute to Charles Wilkins Jefferson, the grandfather of the Gregson Girls, Helen, Meg and Troath, for his efforts in making the supply of electricity available. Those of us who had lived in Mt Wilson for many years are well aware that the supply of electricity has been, until recently, rather erratic reaching, in 2011, the ultimate experience when a severe windstorm struck in July bringing down hundreds of trees and leaving the community without electricity for five days in the middle of winter.

A reliable water supply

Another of these concerns was the vital need for a steady and reliable water supply. The following is the story of the attempt to bring a reticulated water supply to Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine.

In an official document produced by the NSW Department of Public Works in 1967, the following appeared:

'CONSTRUCTION OF COUNTRY TOWNS WATER SUPPLY AND SEWERAGE SCHEMES. The Relation of the Department to Councils and Forms of Assistance which can be rendered by the Department.'^{iv}

The document contains an outline of Blue Mountains water supply system of 1967-1968 which includes details of the system operating between Mt Victoria to Medlow Bath. It states:

The eventual three system design provides for a connection between Medlow Bath and Katoomba which will allow water to be transferred either westerly from Katoomba to Medlow Bath or easterly from Medlow Bath to Katoomba as demand occurs.

When the later work is completed there will be a bad supply point within the system in that Mt Victoria area is dependent upon a single fibro gravity main between Blackheath and Mt Victoria and will only receive a second supply at some time in the future when it becomes necessary to develop the *Wollangambe catchment* at Mt Wilson^v but this is not anticipated within the next 15 years.

Here is reference to the Wollangambe catchment by the NSW Department of Public Works. This was prior to any approaches by individual residents of Mt Irvine and Mt Wilson. Thus there was public acknowledgement of possible use of the Wollangambe Catchment in the future.

Towards the end of 1968 there was correspondence from Mr Jim Armitage of Mt Wilson to the Blue Mountains City Council Engineer, Mr J Yeaman, seeking information of a technical nature concerning the provision of a permanent water supply to Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine.^{vi} About the same time, the Minister for Public Works Mr Davis Hughes had received a letter from Mr H.E. Smart of Mt Irvine, for Mr W. P. Scrivener of Mt Irvine, seeking assistance in a proposal to obtain water from the Wollangambe.

Mr Jim Armitage and his wife Lurl occupied a property Koonawarra, in Church Lane which had originally been part of Portion 28 and Dennarque. They built a charming house and developed a fine garden from 1950s. In 1968 Jim Armitage was holding the position of Secretary of the Mt Wilson Progress Association following the passing of Edward J. Gregson in December 1955.^{vii} While Mr Armitage made his enquiries concerning a water supply as a private individual not as the Secretary of the Mt Wilson Progress Association, confusion over his public role as Secretary of the Progress Association was to cause considerable stress in the coming months.

Mr W. P. Scrivener was the son of one of the original settlers in Mt Irvine and grandson of Charles R. Scrivener, the first Commonwealth surveyor. He was an excellent farmer with merino sheep of fine wool and later had expertise in the production of chestnuts and walnuts. Mr Hugh E. Smart and his family had established a fine nursery Carisbrook in Danes Way Mt Irvine, specialising in cool climate plants, trees and shrubs. These three gentlemen acted as individuals indicating that a permanent water supply was desirable in Mt Irvine and possibly in Mt Wilson. It is wise to be aware that the annual rainfall for both these mountains was considered to be above average.^{viii} Mt Wilson also had rainfall averaging close to 50 inches per annum^{ix} Underground water through springs and/or bores were in use, sometimes reflected in the presence of wells on some properties. Indicative of the rainfall was the richness of the vegetation lush with temperate rainforest natural to both mountains arising from the depth of basalt soil covering each mountain.

I can record that in 1985-6 a hydrological survey was carried out on our behalf prior to extending and adding to our home in Church lane Mt Wilson. The results were rather negative and discouraged us from attempting any sinking of bores at Donna Buang. The variations on Mt Wilson when it comes to ground water were [and are] considerable.

Let us return to 1968 and early 1969. Mr Yeaman, the engineer for the Blue Mountains City Council provided some figures for a possible water reticulation scheme, calling them 'a calculated guess' for Mr Jim Armitage whom he addressed as the Secretary of the Mt Wilson Progress association. Then on 10 January 1969^x the Mayor of the BMCC had this to say:



I would point out ... that this is not a Council proposal as the matter has not been before Council as yet, as the Town Clerk and the City Engineer feel the reaction of the Association [Mt Wilson] which undertook to convene a public meeting would determine whether or not this or any other proposition would have the support of the majority of residents here.

This comment reflects the concern of the Council to gain support of the majority of the residents; something that had not as yet taken place.

Already the suggestion of a permanent water supply had aroused other residents to seek more information as demonstrated by Mr George Watson who wrote to the Council and to Mr Davis Hughes the NSW Minister for Public Works^{xi}. In October 1968 Mr Hugh Smart received a letter from Mr Davis Hughes (the Minister) indicating that Mr Smart and Mr Scrivener had requested a private system involving a pump in the Wollangambe River. This would require a licence from the Lands Department and the Park Trust and was refused. Mr Hughes stated that his Department was unable to help. However if the Blue Mountains City Council was to assume responsibility for a scheme to supply the township, the Department of Public works would investigate the scheme and offer a subsidy to the Council. The letter refers to the Council asking, in 1966, for a small scheme to supply Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine. At that time the Council was asked to supply more information but failed to follow it up. There is little doubt that residents were fearful about paying higher rates to the Council owing to the great height to which water would have to be raised from the Wollangambe River. Mr Hughes suggested that it may be possible to find a way round this.

A public meeting called for 18 January 1969

Mr Jim Armitage and Mr W.P Scrivener had taken matters a step further by calling for a public meeting to be held in the Village Hall Mt Wilson on 18 January 1969

It should be emphasised that the Progress Association was not involved in this move. See the Notice of Meeting below^{xii} This meeting was chaired by His Honour Mr Justice Hutley of Robin Hill Wyndham Ave Mt Wilson. One assumes that Justice Hutley was invited to chair this meeting by the two gentlemen who called the meeting.

PUBLIC MEETING

It is proposed to hold a public meeting at the Village Hall, Mt. Wilson, on the 18th January, 1969, at 10.00 a.m. to discuss a permanent water supply for Mt. Wilson and Mt. Irvine.

As a result of representations to the Minister for Public Works made by Mr. Scrivener, the Works Department has put forward a proposal. The proposal depended upon a certain degree of participation by the Council. An informal talk between Mr. Armitage, Mr. Scrivener and the Shire Engineer followed with the object of finding out the Council's attitude.

The Council has now submitted a proposal that could give an unlimited supply to both Mt. Wilson and Mt. Irvine provided the co-operation of property owners is assured.

The meeting is to determine this point.

J. R. Armitage

W. Scrivener

Unfortunately by this time there was a degree of uncertainty and disagreement over what was to be proposed. See below the proposal as printed by Mr W.P. Scrivener and Mr Jim Armitage and presented to the meeting on 18 January 1969.

AT THE PUBLIC MEETING ON 18TH JANUARY, 1969 --
MT. WILSON - MT. IRVINE - WATER SUPPLY.

The purpose of this meeting is to explain briefly events leading up to the proposal for a water supply for Mt. Wilson and Mt. Irvine. It is then thought to submit the following resolution:

"This meeting is in favour of asking the Council, in conjunction with the Department of Works, to engage consulting engineers to prepare a plan, estimate of cost, for a water supply for Mt. Wilson & Mt. Irvine."

The history of this affair began in 1966 when Mt. Irvine residents approached the Minister for Conservation in an attempt to get a private supply. This culminated in a setback in the form of a letter from the Minister for Lands of 15th October, 1968. To quote part of it:

"As it is necessary, as far as possible, to maintain parklands in an undisturbed condition it is not possible to accede to your request for permission to install the pump and pipeline referred to in your letter. The policy established in these matters would only sanction works of this nature within parklands in cases of absolute necessity."

He concluded by saying he understood the Council may provide a water supply "in a few years" and thus it would not be worth disturbing the place by installing a scheme that would be obsolete later on.

This lack of encouragement prompted Mr. H. Smart and myself (Mr. Scrivener) to take the matter to the Minister for Public Works. His letter of 28th October, 1968 acknowledged the difficulties with the Lands Department and Park Trust mentioned by the Minister for Lands. He added his sympathy and pointed out that a licence for a private supply of that sort was outside his department's scope.

The important part, however, is in the following paragraphs:

"If, on the other hand, the Council were to assume responsibility for a scheme to supply the township I would be prepared to have my engineers investigate the proposal if so requested by the Council, and if it were found to be eligible for Governmental financial assistance I would then be prepared to offer the Council a subsidy towards the cost of constructing the scheme. I do not anticipate that there would be any serious difficulty in securing the necessary approvals if this were a Council scheme

I put forward these suggestions for your consideration and discussion with the Council if you agree, in the hope that you may succeed in obtaining a satisfactory water supply system at charges which are acceptable to all concerned."

As a direct result of this Mr. H. Smart, Mr. Armitage and myself (Mr. Scrivener) had an informal talk with the engineer to see what the Council would suggest so that some scheme could be submitted to this meeting.

Broadly it is this:

1. A flood proof pumping station be set up on the Wollangambe Creek at a suitable place below Smith's Hill to pump from a natural pool. Mains would rise to Mt. Wilson and Mt. Irvine.
2. Pumping equipment once used for the Wentworth Falls supply could probably be used.
3. Two 500,000 gallon tanks would be installed - one at Mt. Wilson and one at Mt. Irvine. The two systems would be connected with 6" mains.

4. The Council would plan to reticulate the supply locally from the two tanks to all consumers. Water would be taken to the last house in any road. The consumer's liability would be to pay connecting costs only within his own property.

The engineer was reluctant to make anything but a very rough guess at costs. This was appreciated, but he was pressed to give some approximate guide for this meeting.

These figures are:

1. Total cost (very approximate) \$300,000. Of this 50% would be Government subsidy in line with the statement in the letter from the Minister for Public Works. The balance would be loan money.
2. Of this total, tanks would cost \$30,000 each. Seven miles of 6" mains would cost about \$100,000.
3. Repayment of loan and payment of interest, together with operation costs, would account for most of the water rates. An extremely rough estimate put these at \$75 p.a. with unoccupied properties probably being ratable by 50% of this amount.

All properties within 720 ft. of the Council's main would be charged rates.

The rates would include the provision of 225,000 gallons p.a. It is realised that the demand for water would vary enormously from property to property and it is obvious that this would have to be taken into account in finally fixing a figure for the rates.

The above quotes the letter from the Minister of Public Works written in October 1968. It states that the 'this affair began in 1966 when Mt Irvine residents approached the Minister for Conservation in an attempt to get a private supply'. Implied is the idea that all Mt Irvine residents were in support of this move. This was unlikely at the time.

The Proposal:

1. A flood proof pumping station be setup on the Wollangambe Creek at a suitable place below Smith's Hill^{xiii} to pump from a natural pool. Mains would rise to Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine.
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Reports on this meeting held on 18 January 1969 have not been officially recorded. However there is evidence from different sources that suggest that the meeting experienced misrepresentation, confusion and serious misunderstandings. My husband Ellis G. Reynolds attended this meeting and I recall he came from it deeply disturbed over the events that took place there. Another document does exist which was presented to the Mayor of the BMCC by Mr Tom Uren ,a property owner in Mt Wilson and a Labour Federal member of the Commonwealth Parliament and Mr SBW (Tom) Kirk world champion axeman and property owner plus owner of the mill in Mt Irvine Road in Mt Wilson. In their presentation to the Mayor, the following points (in summary) were made in reference to the meeting on 18 January 1969.^{xiv}

- 'The notice of the meeting created grave concern; the Council had submitted proposals; the Department of Public Works had submitted proposals; few people had very obviously been privileged to receive much detail. The balance of ratepayers none. At the meeting at least eight present stated they had no notice'.
- The conduct and chairing of the meeting; refusal to read details of letters; refusal to allow Mr George Watson to read full details.
- Attempt to propose the motion within six minutes of the start of the meeting.
- Large attendance at the meeting! Many ratepayers literally 'frightened' [writer's emphasis] to stand up because of the action of the Chairman.
- Wrong rulings given by the Chair. Refusal to accept and put the amendments.

Judging from the above comments and my memory of Ellis's reaction to the meeting in January 1969, the outcome of the meeting must have been unfortunate, and regrettably from this point onwards the community became seriously divided. 'The public meeting apparently dissolved with considerable dissension amongst persons in favour of, or opposed to a Water Supply Scheme'^{xv}

In spite of the apparent failure of this meeting to resolve anything it appears a resolution was moved by Mr George Watson of Fernhill, The Avenue, Mt Wilson and by Mr Gordon Cutmore, (manager of Denmarque):

This meeting be adjourned to a date 15 March and that all ratepayers in the area of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine be given at least 30 days notice of the meeting. The President of the Mt Wilson Progress Association in conjunction with the President of the Mt Irvine Progress Association be asked to request from The Blue Mountains City Council a list of ratepayers and to carry out notification of these people. Copies of all available and relevant information to be forwarded to all persons concerned with the notice, apprising them of the business and purpose of the adjourned meeting. Any person desiring to have information included with the notice may forward same to the Chairman of the Mt Wilson progress Association.

This is puzzling and confusing as the 18 January meeting was not sponsored by either Progress Associations. Surely the Progress Associations would need to sponsor a separate meeting independently of each other.

Thus the community found themselves involved in a quite serious conflict. Signs of that appeared quite oddly at times such as a notice near the then Post Office 'Beware the Secret Six'! In some documents written about this time there was reference to the 'Establishment' (meaning those who favoured a

reticulated water supply). It was unusual to see the agreement between Mr Tom Uren and Mr Tom Kirk opposing the proposal as each man had a very different political perspective.

In the weeks following 18 January Professor R. Thorpe, the President of the Mt Wilson Progress Association and Mr George Watson were very active in correspondence with the Blue Mountains City Council with the aim of organising the meeting to be held in March 1969. The President of the Mt Irvine Progress Association, Mr Bill Knight Brown also became involved. Some individuals took up the issue independently such as Mr G. Hoskins of Linden Mt Wilson when he wrote to the Mayor and Aldermen of the BMCC requesting a postal plebiscite of all property owners to determine whether there is a demand amongst them for the provision of a permanent reticulated water supply. He suggested the question take the following form:

Are you in favour of the Council and the Department of Public Works making a Survey of the Wollangambe Creek with a view to preparing a Plan for a permanent Water Supply for your District? Answer Yes or No

Mr Hoskins and 13 others signed this letter on 29 January 1969.^{xvi} He also suggested that information be supplied along with the plebiscite stressing items of cost and that no recommendation would be made by the Council until completion of the survey.

Meanwhile Mr Jim Armitage, reflecting his position as Secretary of the Progress Association, requested that Mr George Watson supply a seconder for his resolution for the meeting to be held in March. He wrote 'Since Professor Thorpe so obviously agrees with your outspoken opinion of his secretary he would consider the document [of the resolution] to be most unsafe in my hands', in a rather bitter tone under the circumstances. Later George Watson wrote a conciliatory letter to Mr Armitage. Whether it was accepted or not is not clear.

Meanwhile Mr Tom Uren and Mr Tom Kirk approached the Mayor of the Blue Mountains City Council as a delegation representing, one assumes, those who were opposed or very uncertain about the proposed water reticulation scheme. Some of the points raised by Mr Uren and Mr Tom Kirk were:

- If requested and /or invited by say 15 or 20 ratepayers would the Council send a senior representative to chair the meeting?
- Would the Council consider sending a 'Please Reply' question to each ratepayer so that each ratepayer may express his opinion directly to the Council without fear of the consequences of opposing 'The Establishment,' in some cases with possible loss of employment?

The use of the title 'The Establishment' referring to those who favoured the water reticulation proposal reveals an interesting insight into the perceived class structure of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine at this time.

Other questions raised with the Mayor involved queries such as: 'Where would the pumping stations be? The exact positions of the pressure tanks? Details of all costs? What extra costs would ratepayers expect to carry e.g. connection to property?' There was also scepticism expressed about the amount of the subsidy. 'The Department of Public Works insists that the Council must make the request to it and there is no proposal at this stage.'

Early in February the City Engineer gave a report headed 'Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Water Supply 11 February 1969'. Here he states that the Minister for Public Works has indicated to Council that he is prepared to undertake the survey if so requested by the Council:

It is recommended that the Minister be asked to investigate a proposal to provide a water supply scheme to Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine, based on an immediate demand of 25 million gallons per annum. Pumping equipment to be available to deliver say 75 million gallons per annum by an extension of hours. Service supply to be by 500,000gallon reservoir with reticulation to supply some 50 occupied premises.

Thus it was in the weeks between the 18 January 1969 and the meeting planned for 15 March there was a flurry of activity with letters to Council from individuals, such as G. Watson, Professor Thorp, Tom Uren and G Hoskins among others. Hoskins' letter also carried 13 signatures. In essence it asked for a postal

plebiscite of all property owners before any request was made by the Council to the Department of Public Works. Tom Uren wrote at least three letters in this period to the Council taking the Council to task over costs of two schemes; one using the Wollangambe; the other the Waterfall Creek. Yes, there had been a suggestion that the Waterfall Creek could be used. Today that almost seems absurd or a rather poor 'joke'!

Meanwhile Jim Armitage and Bill Scrivener wrote to the Mt Wilson Progress Association stating that they would not be attending the meeting on 15 March 1969. Their decision was hardly surprising under the circumstances. It is also important to note a letter from W.P. Scrivener and Hugh E. Smart on 1 February 1969 stressing that their approach to the BMCC was as individuals not as representatives of the community. As the Council had a scheme in mind Mr Armitage had offered to act as secretary for those present including Mr Hoskins.

Another document of interest at this time was a letter from George Watson to Tom Kirk on 5 February 1969 requesting a list of those against the proposal and those in favour of it. What was fascinating was that our name Reynolds appeared on the list as being in favour! One wonders how this confusion arose as we had not expressed our views. We were newcomers on the scene.



The Post Office as it was in 1968^{xvii}

With the approach of the meeting planned for 15 March two resolutions were drawn up prior to the meeting. These were phrased in the following terms:

Because of the Blue Mountains City Council's precipitated action in asking the Minister for Public Works to investigate the proposal for a reticulated water supply to Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine before ascertaining the wishes of the majority of the ratepayers of the districts, this meeting now resolves to send a petition to the Minister for Public Works. A copy of the suggested petition is attached.

A second resolution stated:

That this meeting resolves to request the Mt Wilson Progress Association to take all necessary action to make certain that the opinions and wishes of all the ratepayers of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine are properly represented to the various Municipal and Government authorities'.^{xviii}

The following issues concerned those who wrote to the BMCC prior to 15 March.

1. The failure to consult the whole community;
2. The cost for each individual ratepayer;
3. The wish for Mt Wilson to remain as it was;
4. The fear that water reticulation could lead to much subdivision.

15 March 1969 meeting

This meeting must be seen as a quite separate meeting promoted by the two progress associations to spread information and 'to gain understanding'! Following the meeting Professor Thorp wrote to the Mayor of the BMCC, including hand written minutes of the meeting. These handwritten minutes are corrected in many places. Here are selected extracts:

The heading: 'Minutes of an Adjourned Public Meeting at the Mt Wilson Village Hall 15th March 1969' Thus it is not a meeting of the Mt Wilson Progress Association.

Subject: 'To discuss a permanent water supply for Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine; adjourned from January 18 1969'.^{xix} Again every effort is made to divorce this meeting directly from the Progress Association. Indeed in the official minutes of the Progress Association there are very few references to the subject.

As Justice F. Hutley, the Chairman of the 18th January meeting, sent his apologies to this meeting and neither of the convenors of that meeting were present, Professor R. Thorp was elected Chairman and Jock Lumsden of Chimney Cottage was elected to record the minutes. According to the corrections to these minutes '66 persons were present who were ratepayers or direct relatives or representatives.' Apologies were received from Alderman I Dash, Davies, Mrs Huber, Guntz, Reynolds, Chesterman, Morley, Fleming, Leurinsky and Carney.

As there were no minutes available from 18 January 1969, the Chairman read the report on a Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Water supply from the City Engineer circulated to all the Aldermen. Mr I Dash of Blackheath, an Alderman representing the ward and unable to be present had supplied some facts and comment:

1. Drawing attention to a planned major water supply from the Wollangambe River by a dam to be erected in 10-20 years at a cost of some \$10,000,000 during the next 10-20 years
2. That the present survey was suggested to provide information to the Council. The figure of \$400 was very much a guess. The cost would be a charge on the General Rate.
3. If the cost of a proposed scheme proved to be too high, the Council would have to abandon it owing to the needs of the Lower Blue Mountains area.
4. Alderman Dash affirmed that he would insist on a plebiscite before any scheme was introduced.^{xx}

Some present were eager to have a vote taken immediately for or against the water proposal. Cooler heads prevailed insisting that the discussion should be allowed to continue.^{xxi} The chairman invited one of the six petitioners (supporters of water supply) to present their views. Mr R Hanna of Withycombe and Mr T Vidler of Lindfield Park were asked. Mr Vidler stated he was not a signatory and not one of the Six; yet he spoke at length explaining the reasons of 'certain people' to obtain water for the district.

Mr Tom Uren quoted a letter from Mr Davis Hughes (NSW Minister for Public Works) stating that no application for a survey had been received from the BMCC to date [13th March 1969]. This was a significant issue; the belief that there should be a survey of ratepayers before any approach was made to the NSW Government. There followed a lively debate involving well known residents, including Mrs Enid Bell, Mr Hugh Smart of Mt Irvine, Mr Tom Vidler, Mr George Watson of Fernhill, Mr Fred Huber of Windy Ridge, Mr Tom Uren, and Mr Tom Kirk of Emoh Ruo.

Finally the Chairman called for a show of hands after the wording of a petition to be sent to the Mayor and the Minister was read out, the majority voted in favour; none voted against it. Mr Tom Uren moved that the Council be informed of the concern felt at its behaviour in the intervening period between 18 January and 15 March 1969.

Finally the motion first raised by Mr Fred Huber that a vote be taken for or against the Water Development was put to the meeting and 44 voted against the water proposal; 1 in favour; and 7 undecided.

Mrs Meg Fromel [from Rimon Cottage] moved that the Mt Wilson Progress Association was the proper body to deal with the issue; seconded by Mr Tom Kirk. This was carried.^{xxii} Below is the wording of the petition. There were over 70 signatures attached to the petition .It was sent to the Mayor of the BMCC and the Minister for Public Works, Mr Davis Hughes, along with a letter from Professor Thorp.

17th March, 1969.

His Honour the Mayor of the City of the Blue Mountains,
Council Chambers,
KATOOMBA, 2780.

Dear Mr. Mayor,

On Saturday last the Public Meeting to discuss a water system for Mt. Wilson and Mt. Irvine, which had been adjourned from January 18th, completed its business.

Neither of the Convenors of the original meeting attended and the Chairman, Mr. F.C. Hutley, Q.C. had notified Mr. Lumsden, the Secretary of the Progress Association of his inability to attend.

I was elected unanimously as Chairman, which was appropriate as I am President of the Progress Association and Mr. Lumsden was asked to act as Secretary.

The history of this unhappy affair was outlined and also the ultimate plan for a water supply to be arranged by the State Planning Authority. The meeting was told of the two petitions made to your Council, one from 13 residents and the later one from six only on which your Engineer recommended that a Survey be requested from the Department of Public Works. Reference to your letter of January 10th to Mr. G.V. Watson stated that "the reaction of the Association which undertook to convene a public meeting would determine whether or not this or any other proposition would have the support of the majority of residents". This meeting has now reached a number of very clear decisions.

1. A petition will reach you in about a weeks time when all signatures have been appended.
2. All matters relative to discussion of a water supply for Mt. Wilson and Mt. Irvine have now been placed solely as the responsibility of the Progress Association.

(c) Those who were undecided of their views in this matter. 0 votes

I appreciate that the actions of your City Engineer have put you in a difficult and embarrassing position in this matter but my advice to you would be to go no further with the request for a water survey which according to our information has not yet reached the Minister for Public Works. Our meeting was so very definitely opposed to such action that such a request is clearly not desired by the majority of residents of this district.

Yours faithfully,

A P E T I T I O N
T O
HIS HONOUR THE MAYOR OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BLUE
MOUNTAINS, MR. E. N. LESSLIE

Dear Sir,

We, the undersigned ratepayers of the District of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine, being gravely concerned at the Blue Mountains City Council's action in proceeding with a survey for a reticulated water scheme without first ascertaining the wishes of the majority of the ratepayers or before granting the said ratepayers an opportunity to effectively convey their considered opinion to the Blue Mountains City Council, hereby request:-

- 1) That a detailed copy of the proposed survey when received from the Department of Public Works, together with the costs, method of levying rates, etc., should be despatched simultaneously to all ratepayers,
- 2) That no further action should be taken by the Blue Mountains City Council before a full opportunity is granted to all ratepayers to assess their individual requirements and their ability to meet the increased costs involved,
- 3) That, when sufficient time has elapsed after the distribution of the details, a Council controlled plebiscite should be undertaken on the basis of one vote one rate notice to correctly ascertain the opinion of all ratepayers.
- 4) That the practice of information being given to individual ratepayers by members of the Blue Mountain City Council's staff relative to the Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine reticulated water scheme should cease forthwith.

Name

Address

The petition approved at the meeting held on 15 March 1969 and signed by over 70 residents and/or ratepayers. There were 50 occupied residences; and 88 ratepayers according to the minutes. The petition made it clear that there was implied criticism of the Council and the manner in which it had dealt with the whole question of water supply. In a letter from Tom Uren to the Council in February and early March he took the Council to task for deciding to ask for a survey by the Department of Public Works.

In due course, following the letters of Professor R. Thorp to the Mayor and the Minister for Public Works, replies were received during May 1969. A statement from the Town Clerk was sent on 26 May 1969.^{xxiii} This report contained an abbreviated history of the water proposal along with more recent developments. It covered two foolscap pages. What did it finally say? The Mayor E Leslie acknowledged the petition and assured that it would be put before the Council and the issues raised would be replied:

The Progress Associations will be kept informed of developments concerning the water proposal but not individual ratepayers. An appreciation would need to be gained of both the need for a reticulated water supply as well as the capacity to meet repayments of loans raised for the purpose. The request for a plebiscite is not unreasonable. The practice of making information available to ratepayers is contained in the Local Government Act.

Finally the report states 'Organisations representing groups of ratepayers in your district will be kept fully informed of developments with respect to furtherance of proposals for a reticulated water supply'.

In the *Mountains Gazette* on 4 June 1969 an article appeared with the title 'Stormy Reaction to Water Plan'.

Strangely, it seemed that the Council had chosen to ignore the basic democratic vote at the meeting on 15 March 1969 which clearly demonstrated a majority vote against a water reticulated system along with the intent of the petition. The report in the *Gazette* came from a meeting of The Blue Mountains Progress Federation at Bullaburra where Mr Ken (George) Watson said he was at the meeting to seek support on behalf of the Mt Wilson Progress Association to stop the Council from spending money on the proposed water scheme. Mr Watson stated that 'of the 80 ratepayers in his district, 71 were opposed even to the Blue Mountains Council conducting a preliminary survey on the proposed scheme which would cost about \$400. The actual scheme was likely to cost between \$200,000 and \$400,000. This was too much for the... residents of the district to repay even if the Government subsidised a portion of the scheme.'^{xxiv} Alderman Leslie (Mayor) later stated at this same meeting that 'Council had undertaken a survey of the scheme so that aldermen could be aware of all relevant matters when considering the proposal. He added that 'Mt Wilson – Mt Irvine had no immediate worries about a reticulated water scheme because Council had no money for a water scheme anywhere.'

For the year 1969 that seemed to be the end of the issue!

Debates of the Mt Wilson Progress Association

Recalling that the water reticulation matter had been transferred to the Mt Wilson Progress Association to take responsibility for at the meeting on 15 March 1969, (see above) it was worthwhile checking the minutes and the correspondence of that organisation in 1969 and 1970. What is quite amazing is that on the same evening of 15 March 1969, commencing at 9.50p.m., the Mt Wilson Progress Association held its meeting clearly following the meeting about the Water Reticulation Scheme. Did those who attended the earlier meeting remain? Were they all members of the association? What do the minutes reveal?

There is no indication of who was present apart from the list of new members who were accepted into the Association. That was quite a list! Many of whom had been involved in the debates at the earlier meeting. A new constitution was being considered for the Progress Association hence the admission of new members. Yes it does become somewhat confusing as one looks back. A study of the proposed constitution is not part of this story and deserves separate attention.

Another item mentioned in the minutes of that meeting on 15 March was the decision to join the Blue Mountains Federation of Progress Associations. This was linked to the article in the *Gazette* of June 1969. The intention was to take the Water Reticulation debate to that forum.

Between 1969 and 1972 this debate almost vanished from the public records of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine if one is to be guided by the minutes of the Mt Wilson Progress Association. As is the practice in 21st century in Mt Wilson, general meetings were few and far between in 1960s and 1970s. In September 1969 Mr Tom Kirk referred to inaccuracies in a circular relating to the water reticulation scheme but we do not learn what these were. The BMCC was to be informed of these. After this (1969) meeting those held in February 1970, October 1970 and in 1971 covered every conceivable topic but not water reticulation. Professor R Thorp and D. Lumsden retained their positions as Chairman and Secretary. However in February 1972 Professor Thorp relinquished his position due to work commitments overseas and Mr W H Smart was elected Chairman. Mr Tom Kirk became Secretary.^{xxv}

At the end of 1971 a report by the Town Clerk of the BMCC went to the Works Committee, headed 'Proposed Water Supply to Mount Wilson and Mt Irvine'. This document reached Mr W. H. Smart as it was among the papers he gave to the Historical Society in 1990s.^{xxvi} The report was based on the findings of the Department of Public Works for a water supply to the Villages of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine. It covers four foolscap pages! It provides a brief history of this issue both in relation to the water supply as it was for the Blue Mountains broadly and the supply of water to the Mounts. There were eight separate proposals from The Department of Public Works. The City Engineer's comments state clearly that Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine could not be included in the Blue Mountains reticulation. There would have to be a separate water supply servicing either or both of these two villages.^{xxvii}

On page two of this report we are reminded that there had been divided opinion on such a proposal. Opposition was led by the Mt Wilson Progress Association and support by the Mount Wilson/Mount Irvine Water Development

Association. In 1969 the Mayor had agreed to a plebiscite of the rate payers of which there were 133 with 77 separate holdings in Mt Wilson and 48 in Mount Irvine. Of the eight proposals scheme the third was seen as the most suitable. It was defined as:

Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine Combined Scheme with the Wollangambe Creek as the source of Supply based on Separate Requirements For Domestic and Irrigation Water Usage.

The report contained detail and costs but indicated that even with a subsidy from the Government there would be a delay of at least seven to eight years.

A plebiscite having been promised it was proceeded with in April 1972, the year Mr W.H. Smart became Chairman of the Progress Association.^{xxviii} This letter from the Council (we assume) went out to all ratepayers from the Town Clerk. Thus the Water Reticulation Scheme suddenly emerged as an issue once more. Yet it barely receives a mention in the minutes of the Progress Association even in the year of 1972.

On 3 May 1972 a letter from the Mt Wilson Progress Association contained the following:

Although this Association has never made representation to the Blue Mountains City Council or any other body for a Water Supply scheme, it feels that insufficient information is supplied in Council's letter to ratepayers, dated 27 April 1972.^{xxix} Council Officers have agreed to attend a public meeting to explain in more detail the scheme and costs involved. We urge all ratepayers to attend and suggest that all votes be withheld until the scheme is fully discussed.^{xxx}

On 30th April the secretary Tom Kirk sent a letter to the Council requesting Council provide an officer or officers to answer questions. His letter contained 8 questions:

1. Would the estimated annual cost of \$17000 to \$20,000 include loan payments? There is little doubt that the cost of a separate water supply was a very significant factor in peoples' approach to this possible scheme.
2. Would the water be supplied under pressure to higher points on Mt Wilson?
3. Where would the supply tank be sited?
4. What would be the maximum pressure to lower areas, bearing in mind the old system of plumbing in some houses?
5. Would water rates be chargeable before the scheme was completed?
6. What percentage would constitute a majority in voting?
7. Who other than ratepayers, would be entitled to vote in the plebiscite?
8. Could the ratepayers appoint an independent scrutineer to attend the counting of votes?^{xxxi}

On 3 May 1972 the Council sent its reply with answers to some of these queries but not all as seen below:

1. Provided some detailed figures all estimates with the possible minimum rate at \$65. Raising \$4,485.00 and \$1.65 in \$1.00. This latter rate applied in the Blue Mountains in 1971.
4. The pressure of the water supply would be based on the top and bottom levels of a service reservoir to be erected on high ground at the end and to the north of Church Lane and have an approximate top water level of RL= 3450 ft. Providing a reticulated supply to both villages. Tank Sizes? As indicated above this is proposed for Church Lane which is only 33 feet wide and it may be necessary to acquire a piece of adjoining private land for this installation. 500,000 gallons would be largest size.
5. Water Rates? This would depend upon when the Public Works Department claimed Council for its share of funds. It is possible that a loan rate could be levied prior to the availability of water but there would only be a delay of 12 months due to smallness of the scheme.
6. The plebiscite being taken is not a poll. It is really a public opinion determination and is not binding on the Council in any way.
7. As indicated above, this is not a 'vote' in the way that it will of itself determine the position...residents means it will include non-residential ratepayers and/or rate-paying lessees.
8. As this is not a 'poll' the question of a scrutineer is not applicable, but the Association's request is a matter for determination by Council.

Other matters in relation to the public meeting and the attendance of Council personnel will be referred to His Worship, the Mayor.^{xxxii}

Interpretation of words can be curiously different when one reads the replies of the Council to the questions sent to it by the secretary Tom Kirk. In the minds of the local people a plebiscite was a clear vote. The question of it being binding on the Council raised a set of different propositions. Were the aldermen of Ward 1 bound by that vote? What

about the other representatives in Wards 2, 3, and 4? Probably at the time there was considerable anger with the Council in Mt Wilson. That is not an unusual state of mind for Mt Wilson.

On 4 May 1972 Mr Tom Uren wrote to Mr W.H. Smart, the President of the Progress Association. Mr Uren, a federal member of parliament, and a ratepayer stated:

I was personally surprised to receive the questionnaire from the Blue Mountains City Council when the Mount Wilson Progress Association clearly expressed a very firm attitude that a permanent water supply was not needed for the area.' Remembering that this is the year 1972 and that Mr Uren was to become a Minister in the Whitlam Government at the end of that year, Mr Uren added- 'conservation of this area would come within environmental aspects and my own personal view is that a permanent water supply to this area would be firstly a misuse of allocation of resources and would be a regressive step, not conserving the area but would work to the contrary. I intend, if the Council proceeds with the proposed water scheme, to seek an investigation on who was responsible for the Council proceeding with such a scheme even though the overwhelming majority of the residents of the area are opposed to a permanent water scheme.^{xxxiii}

It should be noted that Mr Uren did not write to the Council expressing these views.

A public meeting was advertised to be held in Mt Wilson by The Progress Association on Saturday 20 May 1972 to discuss the proposed water supply. 'Aldermen and officers of the Blue Mountains City Council will be in attendance' and all ratepayers were urged to be in attendance.

There are no formal minutes of this meeting recorded in the Minute Book of the Association. The closest we can come to a report is an article written by Mr W.H. Smart to the local newspapers including *The Mountain Gazette*, the *Blue Mountains Advertiser* and the *Blue Mts Lithgow District News*.

Mr Smart called his article 'WATER FOR PETER PAN LAND'. He chose this title as 'supporters of the scheme argued that the residents should move with the times and not try to live in 'Peter Pan Land' where nothing ever changed and nobody ever grew old.'^{xxxiv}! In the article he stated that at present 'traditional water supplies are drawn from springs, creeks, wells and bores. Generally these are adequate for stock, garden and domestic use. In dry spells additional water would be useful for gardening'.^{xxxv}

We learn from this report that 95 residents of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine attended the meeting on 20 May 1972. The Mayor, Alderman Ian Dash, Alderman Charles Callan and Mr John Yeaman, acting for the City engineer, addressed the meeting.

The proposed scheme using water from the Wollangambe River would provide 140,000 gallons a day from a reserve tank of 500,000 gallons and could be operating by 1980 if the residents gave their approval.' Council is holding a plebiscite among 26 ratepayers who live permanently in Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine and 67 weekend or absentee land owners'. The mayor stated also that a two thirds majority in favour of the water scheme would be required before the Council would proceed. The following were the 26 resident ratepayers:

Mount Wilson: J. Gunn, E Kirk, Miss Sloan, J Austin, J Armitage, P Hoskins, F.Huber, W.H.Smart, M. Davies, A. Kirk, H. Clark, J Fisher, P. Pigott, J Lumsden, T Kirk. G. Valder [Note the absence of wives'names]. Mount Irvine: Mrs N. Maclean, P. Finato, A. Gunn, Miss B. Clark, G.and D. Scrivener, W Scrivener, W. Knight-Brown, Miss N. Knight-Brown, H. Smart, E. Artlett, Miss D. Fountain, C. Kirk, T. Vidler. [Note that residents in Farrer Road are placed with Mt Irvine.]

Other facts or points made by those opposing the scheme were:

1. Too few ratepayers to share the cost
2. Town planning scheme precluded the possibility of any large scale subdivision to increase the number of participants.
3. Residents came by choice to seek the seclusion and tranquillity offered by the district.
4. They deplored the thought of additional costs forcing the sale of land and bushland and leading to 'suburbanisation'.

This account of the meeting on 20May 1972 fails to provide any substantial report on the arguments in favour of the scheme. Nor does it provide any information regarding if a vote was taken at the meeting. We are told that the replies to the plebiscite were to be returned by 2 June 1972 to the Council.

Is this the end of the story? In a sense it is but it is not a very satisfactory ending.

I am very conscious that to offer a fuller and more accurate account of this interlude in Mt Wilson's history and in Mt Irvine's history, there should be research into Council records and the memories or records of those who favoured the scheme. Unfortunately that has not been possible. Nevertheless, the scheme was never implemented and any reference to it almost vanished from any public record after 1972. In the Minutes of the Mt Wilson Progress Association this was the case.

Today Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine continue to rely on the sources of water they always used, be it tanks, springs, bores, dams or lakes and/or wells. Fortunately technology has advanced and these resources function more efficiently than in 1970. One only has to observe the remarkable skills of the Rural Fire Service in Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine in 2013-2014 to appreciate this.

Notes

ⁱ See MW&MIHS Historical Papers No 1

ⁱⁱ See Newsletter No. 22 September 2010 for Campanella.

ⁱⁱⁱ C.H. Currey *Mount Wilson New South Wales A&R* 1968 page 99

^{iv} Mt Wilson Historical Archives Y1 Environment E1

^v My emphasis

^{vi} Archives Mt Wilson Historical Society Environment Y1 E7

^{vii} Archives Mt Wilson progress Association MM2PA6-PA16

^{viii} Mount Irvine a History Climate Average RF 45 to 50 inches or 1,800 to 2000 millimetres Note in 1967 snow damaged telephone and electricity supplies. Records from G.Valder,

^{ix} C.H. Currey *Mount Wilson New South Wales A&R* 1968 page 39

^x Letter from the Mayor E.N. Leslie to Mr George Watson Fernhill, The Avenue Mt Wilson. Archives Mt Wilson Historical Society Y1 Environmental 7

^{xi} Letter in archives Mt Wilson Historical Society see footnote 9

^{xii} From Mt Wilson Historical Society archives Environmental Y1 E7

^{xiii} Smith's Hill is now subdivided and is reached by an extension via Farrer Road West

^{xiv} Delegation to His Honour the Mayor of the Blue Mountains Council Archives Y1 Mt Wilson Water E7 Mt Wilson Historical Society.

^{xv} Report by the City Engineer 11th February 1969 Mt Wilson /Mt Irvine Water Supply Y1 Mt Wilson Water E7 Archives Mt Wilson Historical Society.

^{xvi} Mt Wilson Historical Society Archives Y1 Water E7

^{xvii} C.H. Currey *Mt Wilson New South Wales A&R* 1968

^{xviii} Archives Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine Historical Society The Environment and the Water Y1 E7

^{xix} *Ibid*

^{xx} Minutes from Y1 E7 archives Environment Mt Wilson

^{xxi} Mr H. Smart as per the meeting minutes.

^{xxii} *Ibid*

^{xxiii} 26th May 1969 Document No.34A Y Box E7 Mt Wilson Archives.

^{xxiv} No 33 from the E7 documents in Y archive Box Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine Archives.

^{xxv} Progress Association Archives MM2 PA 11 Minutes from 1965-1983

^{xxvi} Classified in the archives under Environmental Matters Y1 E7.

^{xxvii} Mt Wilson Environmental archives Y1 E7 71A

^{xxviii} See letter in Archives Environmental Y1 E7 72A

^{xxix} *Ibid*

^{xxx} Letter in Archives Environmental Y1E7 72C

^{xxxi} 72B E7 Y1 Environmental Archives Mt Wilson

^{xxxii} 72D E7 Y1 Environmental Archives Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society

^{xxxiii} 72E E7 Y1 Environmental Archives Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society

^{xxxiv} 72K E7 Y1 Environmental Archives Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society

^{xxxv} 72K E7 Y1 Environmental Archives Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society