

*We acknowledge the traditional custodians of Hunters Hill
and show respect to Elders past and present.*



www.huntershillmuseum.org.au

“Bunk”

“History is more or less bunk”
HENRY FORD, Chicago Tribune, 1916

Garden competition evokes visions of the past

To reinvigorate the historic Hillman Orchard, nestled next door to Vienna Cottage, Hunters Hill Council and Hunters Hill Rotary Club are collaborating to run a garden competition to raise funds for its ongoing maintenance.

The Spring competition will include categories for both private and public spaces which will celebrate the essence of Hunters Hill: Australia's oldest surviving garden suburb, far earlier than the model garden suburbs of the turn of the century such as Sydney's Haberfield.

Entry will be free and open to residents living in the local government area and online registrations will open from July with judging and prize presentations later in Spring.

Of course the significance of farming and later gardening in our suburb began in 1798 when convict farmer James Everard was granted 30 acres of land by Governor Hunter which he called Everard Farm. Located in the area of Everard Street. Half still survives as open space in the sports field owned by St Joseph's College.

The farm was acquired, early in the nineteenth century, by James Squires (also an ex-convict) and said to be the district's most successful farmer and later successful brewer.

With the steep terrain, lack of fresh water and lack of fertile soil the peninsula was a challenge to farm but nevertheless Mary Reibey (convicted for horse stealing at age 13 in Lancashire and transported to NSW) established the first substantial farm in 1835 purchasing 60 acres and naming it Figtree Farm after a large Port Jackson fig tree which grew by the Lane Cove River.

With two cottages on the property and although not a farmer she built up the farm to cultivate “forty acres of barley and maize.....six acres of fruit and vegetables” as written in an auction notice in *The Australian* (10 August 1838) when she decided to sell. But when it failed to do so, the farm was leased by Joseph Fowles (Sydney's first art teacher and artist).

(Refer to story by Tony Saunders Page 3).
Fowles saw his future in supplying fruit and vegetables to the Sydney colony by river transport. Mary Reibey's orchard was already bearing pears, apples, plums apricots, peaches, quinces, oranges and lemons.

Fowles' *Journal* quoted in *Hunter's Hill Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb* by Beverley Sherry:

“I have a great quantity of wood on the land which we cut and send to Sydney and for which I get 5/- per ton. The boat I have takes 5 tons at a time – and we get paid every Saturday.”

(Continued on page 2)

HUNTERS HILL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Diary Dates
2023**

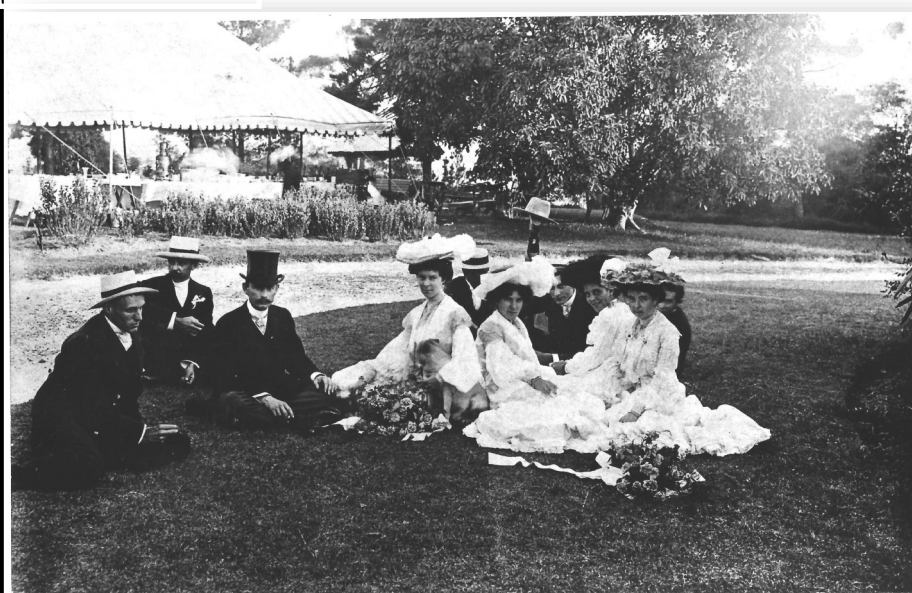
Mid-winter Lunch

**Wednesday 12 July
12.30pm
Woolwich Hotel**

Annual General Meeting

**Thursday August 24
10.00 for 10.30 start
Town Hall**

Below: Amy Stoltenhoff's wedding in 1903 in the elegant garden of Wybalena.





In 1861 the suburb was proclaimed a municipality and by 1870 a tree policy was introduced by Mayor Jeanneret when 30 trees, including 26 Illawarra figs, were planted on Ferry Street and 100 trees were bought by council and given to residents to plant and look after them near their street frontages.

The creation of a garden suburb was well underway and as Beverley Sherry wrote (p66): "the pioneering entrepreneurs and the aldermen were often the same people, as with the Jouberts and Jeanneret, and their dual capacity exerted a major influence in shaping the suburb".

In 1886 the three-volume *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia* describes Hunters Hill:

The hill is covered with villas not less picturesque, though less imposing than those found

(Continued from page 1)

In the 1830s all the land on the peninsula was bought by private investors (often absentee landhold-

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2022-2023**

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Editor: Kate Armati

ers) after Governor Bourke introduced new laws allowing purchase of land grants and hence began land speculation. Then in the 1840s and 1850s that a new breed of pioneers and investors arrived and started to create the suburb. Two French brothers Didier and Jules Joubert bought and subdivided land between 1847 and 1880. They built houses for sale or rent using Italian stonemasons and the sandstone quarried on site from the rocky peninsula.

One of these is The Haven, 1 McBride Ave, (pictured above) built in 1858 and was part of Jules subdivision of Ernest and Ady Streets from Alexandra Street to the Lane Cove River creating 26 allotments of varying sizes which became the nucleus of the suburb. Didier who had purchased Figtree Farm restructured Mary Reibey's cottages to form Figtree House but his principal house was St Malo (demolished in 1961). He subdivided Figtree Farm in 1875 developing residences and stone villas overlooking the Lane Cove River. With these grand houses came the establishment of gardens.

Maybanke Anderson (founding member of the Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW and a founder of the Kindergarten Union of NSW) wrote of the suburb in the 1920s in her history of Hunters Hill "The Story of Hunter's Hill," *JRAS*, 1926. She and her husband Professor Francis Anderson lived at The Haven (1918-27).

"On the grassy slopes of its narrow streets possums play in the moonlight; in its leafy garden birds find green sanctuary, no rumble of trams, no shriek of trains disturbs its abiding peace, and while time deals with its crumbling walls, behind them the tender grace of a day that is gone lingers around old-world houses and garden of Hunter's Hill."

about the foreshores nearer the city. The soil here is loamy and being set a little inland from the salt sea-breezes, rich and delicate vegetation makes a more luxuriant display. The houses are mostly built from the fine sandstone which lies a few feet below the surface, and gorgeous and glorious creepers are trained wherever balcony or trellis-work affords an opportunity. It is a richly floral district, and it is almost impossible to exaggerate the beauty and splendour of the rich masses of Bougainvillea which cover a whole house-side in the earliest days of spring, or of the climbing rose that makes a veritable "field of cloth of gold" over a hundred square feet of trellis every spring and autumn. Nowhere else along the river or by the sea can be seen finer contrasts of colour and foliage – bananas and plantains by the water's edge, cedars drooping on the slopes, hibiscus and flame-trees putting out their crimson and scarlet blooms, the tender green of the budding vine prophetic of the purple show of autumn, and the dark glossy leaves of the orange trees with their golden fruit.

So 137 years later we will acknowledge and celebrate the gardens of today often grown from the foresight and toil of yesteryear.

Kate Armati

The Haven (pictured above) in 1870 shows the Sim family. The garden is flourishing in the 12 years since the house was built by Jules Joubert.

Joseph Fowles: artist, teacher and farmer



Figtree Farm by Joseph Fowles from the Collections of the State Library of New South Wales (MSS B1310, p153) (from "Journal of a Voyage from London to Sydney in the barque Fortune, April 5– August 1838", Mitchell Library.

Joseph Fowles lived an extraordinary life and some of it in Hunters Hill in one of our well known heritage residences Figtree Farm owned by Mary Reibey (now Figtree House). According to an historical publication: "She rented it to artist Joseph Fowles".

So who was he? Joseph Fowles was born in Gloucestershire, England, in 1809. He emigrated to Australia as a free settler arriving in Sydney on 31 August 1838 and was accompanied by his wife Sarah (nee Goldstone) and a "partner" Miss Emily Collyer.

He rented Figtree Farm for three years and produced fruit and vegetables and cut down timber which he sold in Sydney. During his period of living in Figtree Farm, his wife Sarah returned to England. Joseph then had a relationship with Emily Collyer and they had seven children. Perhaps a scandal at the time! Emily died and he then started a relationship with Elizabeth Harris whom he married in 1874 after learning of the death of Sarah in Guernsey. Elizabeth and he had four children.

But it is his career as a major artist which gained him notoriety. Initially well known as a marine artist, he opened a studio in Harrington Street in the Rocks and exhibited in the first major public

art exhibition in Sydney in 1847. But it is his depiction of street scenes in Sydney that brought him most fame. In 1848 he commenced sketching the buildings in Sydney including residential, government, religious and commercial premises.

The Sydney Morning Herald at the time, wrote: "The principal object of this work is to remove the erroneous and discreditable notions current in England concerning this city, in common with everything else connected with the Colony."

He wished to depict the spacious streets, its thriving population, public buildings as equal to London! To this day, Fowles' sketches are an important record of how Sydney looked in the mid-1800s. He also painted the famous publican Stephen Butts on a white horse outside his house in Macquarie Street and also painted horses, probably due to his interest in racing. He established stables in Randwick named Newmarket Training.

Fowles also taught at a number of major Sydney schools and became drawing master for the Board of National Education. He died 25 June 1878 from a seizure. He was only 69.

Tony Saunders