

**Submission
No 35**

**INQUIRY INTO AGISTMENT OF HORSES AT YARALLA
ESTATE**

Name: Mr John Webster

Date received: 31/07/2013

Sydney Local Health District and the Yaralla Estate, 2013 Inquiry

[Many “Health” names have been used over the years in relation to the management of the Yaralla Estate. In this document I have used the acronym **SLHD** to represent all such.]

“The Walkers of Yaralla” by Patricia Skehan ISBN 0-646-38966-1 (particularly pp221-227) provides details of events between 1970 and 1999, and tells a sorry story of Government manipulation and SLHD incompetence – disinterest, really – in looking after this magnificent estate, leading to dismal reports of the structures “rotting away”, apart from the main building, which is renovated at great cost at intervals to be put to a new purpose, then left to rot until some other distant use is found years later.

On a number of occasions it has been intervention by locals by manual effort and their finance that has saved / preserved features, including the main house.

Given the historic and heritage classification of the site, I am concerned whether the recently commenced “upgrades” meet heritage guidelines for changes to such properties. To whom has SLHD submitted the proposed changes for validation, and where are the related documents published ?

The 4 June 2013 SLHD media release **Yaralla upgrade plans released** says the plans have been in the pipeline since 2010, which makes nonsense of SLHD claims that the December 2012 Agistment Facility Report triggered the unwanton disruption to local agisters and users of Yaralla Estate.

Most certainly I oppose the rearrangements mooted for a vehicular entrance opposite Moala St (or even Colane St) as dangerous. There is constant vehicular traffic in Nullawarra Avenue such that creating a crossroad would increase the danger to cars and pedestrians alike, and if a roundabout, even more so!

A (northern) entry at that place, with parking, would not be very attractive to foreshore visitors – anyone saying that must have rosy spectacles indeed, and have never visited the s(t)inking-mud shore line there - it's mainly from “The Drive” alignment (and south therefrom) that “the foreshore” is most attractive. Furthermore, that northern parking space would be only a short walk from the “rear” (south side) of Concord Hospital for visitors thereto, and probably produce cars juggling for spots throughout the day via a risky intersection! Is SLHD touting for extra customers?

I started visiting the Yaralla Estate in the early 1970s when I first lived in the area. To my surprise my grandmother started asking whether this-and-that feature was still there – she claimed to have paid many visits to the place in the 1910s and 1920s, participating in events there. Gradually I discovered from local Concordians that those I could not confirm for her had been wilfully demolished or dismantled – people said the wharves were blown up! ... though I could understand why the pool had been filled in for the safety of local kids. Nevertheless this is just another example of the uncaring attitude of SLHD to any parts of properties for which it has authority but disdains responsibility for maintenance and preservation even though of historic or heritage status.

There is a parallel to this Yaralla quandary: Callan Park. This same SLHD has similar rights to that landmark area, yet, on transferring its mental / medical patients and staff to Concord Mental Centre, it abandoned the dozens of previously occupied buildings (very much in sound condition though still needing ongoing maintenance and general upkeep) to the tender mercies of vandals such that most have been trashed – fittings damaged inside and out, every window smashed, doors stove in, some tiles dislodged, and close-by trees permitted to grow such that their branches dislodge and break through tiling thus permitting rain to flow inside and damage flooring. SHFA should have been charged with protecting them from the outset (such as seems to be the case today)!!

So at both Yaralla and Callan Park, SLHD has failed to take care of these spectacular historic properties with heritage considerations, in some cases carrying out the very carnage you'd expect them to protect against. Clearly it is time to enact legislation to remove these properties to benevolent control of a Heritage protecting organisation. In the Yaralla case, the Walker desire for the place to be used for medical services could thereafter be satisfied by assigning the use of the main house (as now) to SLHD as free tenant for the duration of their need, whilst responsible for the upkeep (and conforming to heritage principles in their use of the building) for the duration of their use. Perhaps each property could be made subject to a local TRUST of four or five members, all volunteer to keep costs down (unless the chair could be paid for one day or so a week to give someone responsibility and clout).

The U.K. has a Heritage Lottery Fund, from which it dispenses financial support for worthy historic and heritage site projects including maintenance and preservation. In fact, it was announced today that six such projects would receive £47million ... and that last year the U.K. benefited from visitors to such sites to the tune of £26,400million. Now, where do NSW Lotteries profits go? Oh, yes, Tatts!

Yaralla Estate is rightly spoken of as a Victorian and Edwardian masterpiece, one that every Australian ought be proud to visit. Why the State and Federal Governments have never taken the opportunity to preserve and cherish this place is typical of such organisations (and, I must say, of most commercial organisations today): “if it does not serve my interests, enhance my/our status, we’re not interested”.

The misconduct of the SLHD in the management of the Yaralla Estate deserves condemnation, and the arrogance displayed by its leaders in the recent stoush over horse agistment deserves no less. Their role in the dumping of asbestos contaminated material some months ago should also be investigated.

Yes, the horses are now gone, but much of the quintessential feeling of yesteryear that is so appropriate for Yaralla came from their presence. A commercial agistment facility would be quite out-of-place, as would the Mounted Police who surely would not be pleased at locals wandering around in past manner.

And by the way, the fences complained about in the dubious report of December 2012 match exactly those in the photographs taken of the Yaralla paddocks decades ago when cattle were present ... though of course I can agree they are somewhat more dilapidated by now. However, in theory, any replacements ought match the originals to preserve historical and heritage appearance.

The DEWE Agistment Facility Report

P5 mentions the agistment “paddocks” and “adjacent trotting track”

P5 “the gates located on Nullawarra [Road] ... not adequate for securing livestock ... “, and
“Improving gateway security” “minimising” “accidental stock access to the public road”

Comment: it’s interesting that in twenty or thirty years there’s only been one example I’ve ever heard of “livestock” on the loose, and that’s last year when two horses were reported in the helipad area of CRGH plus one other in somebody’s backyard. The culprits belonged to a man who unrelated to all the other local agisters invaded the triangular section of land north of the regular agistment paddocks, creating a trotting track for his own purposes there. Clearly he did not constrain his horses securely as they were found on the helipad and backyard. You could not blame the other agisters for his actions, yet this report makes “a federal case” out of it.

P6 Requirements of the Licensee: when and what requests has the Licensor made of the Licensee during the period he held the Licence ?

What communications did the Licensee make with the Licensor ? What were the responses ?

Comment: local scuttle butt is the answers are ‘none’ , ‘A number’ and ‘none’. Please tell us.

P6 the claim that “anyone with paddock gate keys” might be or know unauthorised dumpers is rather unfair when, if you ask who dumped the asbestos contaminated fill along The Drive on both sides to the fences, you get a flood of responses that ‘Health’ approved it.]

Comment: Why did the report requestors not tell the writer that?

P6 “The general condition ...” paragraph squarely indicates SLHD has been negligent.

Comment: When (ever) did SLHD examine the paddocks and request appropriate action?

John Webster

30 July 2013