

# WHERE HAVE ALL THE TREES GONE?

By Melina Amerasinghe

This is an extract from a project in Ecopsychology and cultural change, a subject in a Social Ecology course at University of Western Sydney.

## **My suburb Oatley is becoming denuded of trees**

I moved to this suburb with my husband and three children because I liked being surrounded by trees and it was close to Oatley Park, 50 hectares of remnant bush. I felt that I would be able to bring up my children in fresh air.

Over the last few years I have been concerned with the loss of trees in the suburb. It has become a "desirable, expensive area" but this has had the consequence of the older homes being demolished to make way for large McMansions that take up the whole block with very few plants, let alone trees, in the back yard. In addition, the Council seem to be cutting down trees at the hint of a branch falling, to avoid the possibility of being sued.

The Picture shows a tree on my street that was "pruned". Every time I see it, it seems to be saying what can you do about this?

Inaction ensures that business proceeds as usual (Du Nann Winter,1996:301). As a part of taking some action, I have made a folio on some lost trees in my suburb that have been reported in the local press.

I would like to add to this portfolio other instances of tree loss in the suburb. This could be an opportunity for the community to channel their concerns about tree loss. Through showing of this portfolio to the community I hope to increase awareness about tree loss in our suburb which will result in fewer trees being cut down and suitable tree replacements being planted and nurtured.

I am also considering creating a document of photos celebrating significant trees in Oatley and their stories. A study similar to the Lugarno Tree Study undertaken by Graham Quint in March, 1990 for the National Trust of Australia (NSW) could also be considered by the Oatley Flora and Fauna Society. <http://www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au/lts.html>



If I can inspire residents to pay attention to the plight of the lost trees and celebrate those still standing I hope it might help in a small way to repair the damage we are doing to our environment.

Please send photos or information of lost or endangered trees to [off@oatleypark.com](mailto:off@oatleypark.com)

# A Community Active in protecting its trees

## Smaller paperbarks not so destructive

By HEATHER SMITH

AN Oatley resident last week stepped Hurstville Council from chopping down paperbark trees in Gungah Bay Road by parking her car in front of council trucks.

Louise Radcliffe of nearby Myall Street was protesting against the mature natives being removed, saying the trees provided much-needed shade.

"They provide shade for Stevens Reserve and the 400 children who walk along that road to Oatley West Public School every day," she said.

Two of the eight paperbarks were cut down before Mrs Radcliffe intervened.

She said that neither neighbouring streets nor the school had been notified of the plan.

However, a council spokeswoman said 22 residents directly affected by the decision had been notified a year ago.

"All were in favour



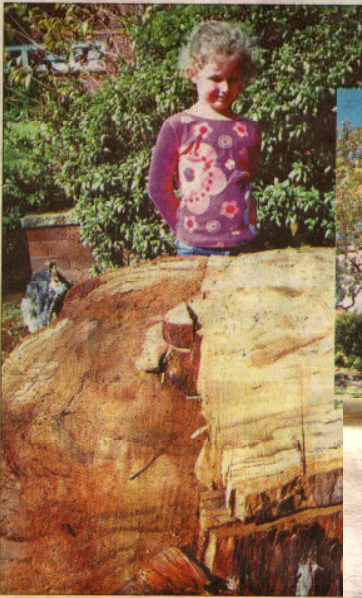
REPRIEVE... the six remaining paperbark trees were coming down yesterday. Photo: WESLEY LONNGAN

because of the problems with the kerb and guttering," the spokeswoman said. The tree roots had caused the kerb to break and buckled the guttering. The spokeswoman said the trees would be replaced with smaller paperbarks, which the Oatley Flora and Fauna Society had endorsed. "They're still substantial trees," she said. Oatley Flora and Fauna Society secretary Robin Dickson said the trees had outgrown their usefulness and it was time for them to come down. "Naturally, we're very distressed about them having to go but we recognised there was a major problem there," Mrs Dickson said. "The society felt the smaller paperbark would be an appropriate replacement."

## Stevens Reserve Oatley Reported in Leader December 2002

A few residents parked cars in front of trees so they could not have access to the trees. We handed out pamphlets encouraging residents to write. This issue resulted in my entry into Oatley Flora and Fauna as a committee member,

## 'Chainsaw massacre' by council sparks outrage



By PAT STRINGA

Sharyn Cullis reckons she has witnessed the horror of a chainsaw massacre.

The Oatley resident and Georges River Environmental Alliance spokeswoman is sickened by the killing of a magnificent Sydney red gum, believed to be more than 100 years old.

"The tree didn't look dead, dying or dangerous to me," Ms Cullis said.

"Because it was on the council nature strip, Hurstville Council must have ordered its execution.

"This is the same council that has for years urged residents to respect the Tree Preservation Order, nurture trees on private property, have sick and damaged trees treated by arborists

and only ever removed as a last resort."

Ms Cullis believes the tree removal is being driven by "an exaggerated and irrational overstatement of risk and fear of insurance".

But Hurstville Council spokeswoman Lisa Smith said the Baker Street tree was removed because of "a public safety issue".

Ms Smith said a tree inspection officer had been monitoring the tree for several years and it was "very unstable" with a large fungus through the main trunk.

A number of street trees had been removed in the area because they were considered dangerous to the public, she said.

Oatley ecologist Alan Fairley said council had made a mistake

in cutting down the tree and was following a statewide trend to remove old trees because of liability fears. "It is clear from the cut trunk and wood that the core of the tree was perfectly healthy and it only needed a trim of some dead overhanging branches," Mr Fairley said.

"Fungal activity is a natural part of the growth process of large Australian trees and is what causes hollows in older trees.

"Appalling decisions like this one are being made constantly by council tree preservation officers and the tree cover of our suburbs is being steadily reduced.

"Decision-making on tree removal must be made on a more informed basis and must have more community consultation."

## Red Gum on Baker Street; Reported in Leader 24 June 2004

## **Blackbutt Tree on Coles site, Mulga Road: Cut down on 15 Dec 2005**



The tree was a sentinel- at the top of the hill, on the main road into Oatley West. It provided a home for about 20 Lorikeets. In the days before the tree was cut it was hard to walk past without wondering about the destruction of their home, with yet another possible habitat being destroyed by making more homes for humans.

### Submission to the Land and Environment Court by Alan Fairley Member of Oatley Flora & Fauna Society:

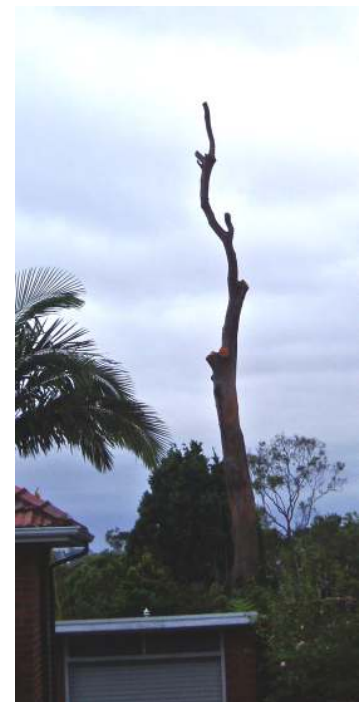
I oppose the removal of The large Balckbutt (*Eucalyptus pilularis*) which is on the development site. The tree is well over 150 years old and is a local landmark as it grows on a prominent sandstone ridgeline and can be seen from many parts of West Oatley. It is a remnant of a more extensive eucalypt forest which once covered the area and which is now confined to road side margins along lower Mulga Road and Myles Dunphy Reserve near the railway line. It is thus not just any tree but one of great local significance. In my opinion this tree is in very good condition, not "stressed" as in an arborist report gained by the developer, and can be expected to live and grow well beyond our life time. Any interference with the roots (such as excavating below it for a car park) would seriously compromise the tree's health and structure.

At a public meeting held to discuss the above development, there was strong support by the majority of those attending for retaining the tree and rejecting any development which would require its removal. The community's wishes in this regard is as important as the visual, historic and landscape reasons for the retention of this tree.

## **Tree "trimmed" on residence in Oatley Park Avenue - 22 February 2006**

I arrived home to see this sight from my study window. At the time I was not brave enough to approach the owners of the block to find out why they felt the need to trim the tree so severely and why leave the stump?

Subsequent enquiries have revealed that the tree was apparently termite infested and the owner was refused permission to cut it down- hence the extreme trimming. Despite its rough treatment the tree has started to sprout sometime in June 2007!



## Memorial Gardens – Flooded Gum – Cut 6 May 2006



### Sequence of Events

- ❖ Early March 2006 Council cordons off tree with tape and sign goes up "Do not approach this tree -Tree damaged by cockatoos, and is considered a risk to nearby pedestrians. It will be removed in/about May 2006.
  - ❖ OFF rings Kogarah Council to obtain details.
  - ❖ OFF contacted by leader ; 14 March Leader article
  - ❖ 23 March letters in Leader OFF and resident (OFF member)
  - ❖ 3 April OFF writes letter to Council
  - ❖ 6 April, weakened limbs seem to with stand 70 kph winds.
- ❖ 12 April on site meeting with Kogarah Council & OFF

### Council's Position

- An independent arborist report showed there was a significant risk of branches falling.
- Council is concerned about possible compensation claims
- City Rail powerlines are close by and legislation requires a five metre clearance from trees.
- Past pruning because of the power lines has weakened the structure of the tree.
- A number of trees on the reserve have to be removed (according to city Rail spokesman)
- The large eucalypt will be replaced by 2 *Angophora costata* and 5 smaller WA flowering gum (*euc. Ficifolia*)



### Oatley Flora and Fauna Society Position (OFF)

- The large eucalypt (30M) is one of 6 large trees in the reserve marked for removal. This would cause significant loss of environmental values. Council must explore alternatives to removal.
- Memorial Park with its many trees, provides a green heart to Oatley which will be significantly diminished.
- Council is excessively concerned about compensation claims. Council could easily create a no-pedestrian zone under the tree with appropriate signs.
- Pruning around power lines has proved successful over the years. Council should not cave in to CityRail pressure.

- There is considerable doubt about the "independent arborist's opinion. Gale-force winds (up to 70kph) in early April did not result in any branches falling.



**Result:** Tree was cut down on 6 May. Close inspection of the tree by several members of the public did not reveal structural damage that would make the branches would fall.



## Marine Drive Development

Five large Indigenous trees will be lost when the house is built at Marine Drive. The block faces Oatley Park, so it will be a loss of visual amenity to those walking in the park. The building is being sited as close to the foreshore as possible to obtain uninterrupted water and bush views. In addition the location of the pool will be breaching the foreshore protection legislation. It is symptomatic of many water front properties. Oatley seems to have escaped this so far because this part of the Georges River was not perceived to be "desirable" area.



## Lesley's Tree - Mulga Road –Learning from mistakes

Lesley and Peter are members of the Oatley Flora and Fauna Society and very active in working towards looking after the environment. The tree was planted by them in the 1970s. As was commonly the case, their enthusiasm to embrace native trees, an inappropriate tree (E. Scparia a native of Tenterfield) was purchased from a local nursery.

By 1999 the tree was causing damage to the sewer and phone line and creating vertical cracks to the house. Permission was given to cut the tree. They have learnt from their past mistakes choosing more appropriate natives and many indigenous natives. As it is close to our neighbourhood shops it provides a wonderful example of native garden for others to follow.



1980s



1999



2006

## **What can Ecopsychology offer to change the loss of tree cover in my suburb?**

Ecopsychology has many roots: Spiritual Traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Indigenous spiritual beliefs and ways of knowing. Psychologists such as Jung and deep ecologists such as John Seed have also been instrumental in the development of Ecopsychology. Social historian Theodore Roszak first publicly defined the term "Ecopsychology" and enunciated a vision of the field of Ecopsychology in his book *Voice of the Earth* (1992). Roszak sought to formulate some general principles to guide both environmentalists and therapists in their common project of defining a sane relationship to the world around us.

### World Views

The loss of trees is symptomatic of a larger issue - our world view. Materialistic motivations and the primacy of the individual are the driving force of the Western society. The purpose of life has changed from harmony & sustainability seen in traditional non Western societies to progress, growth and material wealth as the Western Way of life. Winter believes like most contemporary social scientists, that cultural factors are more important than biological factors in explaining behaviour (Winter 1996: 55, 119, 126). Ruth Richards warns us not to be on auto pilot, falling into a habit of "programmed living at the risk that we miss our life entirely, and the richness it could have" (2001:65). Sewall in her book *Mindful Eyes* provides us with a study of how we can change our way of seeing, to change our world view (1999).

### Community Groups

Historically the community seems to have people interested in the environment. Myles Dunphy, a father of the conservation movement, was a resident of Oatley. Alan Fairley's book *Being Green* documents the Oatley Flora and Fauna Society and other local community groups' actions over the last 50 years to keep our suburbs green.

There is still a community spirit in the suburb. On Clean Up Australia Day there is always a good turn out of volunteers. Oatley Flora and Fauna with a membership of about 250 is still active in local conservation issues. <http://www.oatleypark.com/>

In 2004 I was involved with a campaign to save the Hurstville Council Bushcare Volunteer group from being axed by the council. This group plays a vital role in helping to maintain the small but vital role in preserving urban bush land. In addition it provides a useful point of focus for more than 60 (mainly elderly) residents of the suburb in which to get outdoors, fit in contact with others of like mind while doing something good to the environment.

It feels good to be part of a community doing something good for the environment. It also feels good to have physically been active. I ponder as to why a community that has a good turn out for cleanup day continues to remove trees from the suburb. A glossy advertising campaign draws people; the results are instantly visible. Winter observations help support this when she notes that humans we are visually dependent: out of sight, is out of mind (1996: 196).

### Relationship between man, trees and psyche

Trees are integral to our lives. It is vital that we look after trees as a part maintaining a sustainable environment for all living and non living things. We use their products, delight in their beauty, take shelter under them, watch over them and grieve their loss. The tree is a symbol in world religions and mythology. Christopher Witcombe's web page on trees and the sacred, details many occurrences of trees in the sacred. There would seem to be a few cultures in which the sacred tree does not figure: as an image of the cosmos, as a dwelling place of Gods or spirits, as a medium of prophecy and knowledge (Anderson 1990: 23-25).

### Sense of Community & Responsibility

Malidoma puts forward the view that only being part of a community will address the loneliness that haunts the psyche of the modern person: that people's resistance to community may come from an undeveloped sense of personhood. People expect the community to look after them but give nothing back (1998:29).

Shapiro's work with community groups in habitat restoration is encouraging. He has been able to use the restoration process to heal, cultural, personal and environmental issues (1995:233).

My involvement in such community groups has given me immense personal satisfaction while doing something for the environment. I will continue my work in these groups because working in such community groups gives support to healing the rift between the nature and psyche and it gives me support in working towards retaining trees cover in my suburb and hopefully increasing it.



Growing concerns: Bush regeneration volunteers at Lene Kin Bay Reserve.

Picture: John Wang

### Weeding out bush care workers

By Jim Galbraith

HURSTVILLE'S more than 60 bush care volunteers are angry over a proposal in the new council budget to cut its bush care staff.

Under the plan, three of the council's bush regeneration staff will be redeployed to parks and maintenance and their work will be undertaken by contractors. The council's two volunteer co-ordinator positions will be merged into one with the area staff member also going to parks and maintenance.

The move is expected to save the council \$300,000 a year. However, volunteers dispute the figure.

"Volunteers put 2300 hours of their own time into bush care activities in 2004," volunteer John Way said.

"All we ask is that council recognise and value our support."

The 62 bush care volunteers help the council staff to remove weeds, reduce bush fire hazards and maintain the wetlands.

Hurstville Mayor Joanne Morris said the impact of the changes on volun-

teers would be minimal.

"To just reduce the bush regeneration will be undertaken by contractors instead of council staff," she said.

But Mr Way estimated that council staff provided around 14,000 man-hours supporting the volunteers.

"We estimate that with the proposed changes the council will provide 1200 hours. There is no way the volunteers can make up the shortfall," he said.

A meeting will be held at 100 Roberts Avenue, Monstere, today at noon. All volunteers are asked to attend.

## **Psyche & Culture and Psyche & Nature**

### The cost of "Progress"

I can see that people in my suburb, my self included, are being driven by the cultural economic rationalism - that bigger is better. The underlying cause is a deeply seated narcissism whereby we see the natural world only as resources, which should be extracted and used by human beings for the comfort and convenience of human beings alone.

I have observed that the psyche in the suburb is changing towards a greater separation from nature. Alan Fairley's book "Being Green" documents 50 years of environmental activism in the surrounding suburbs. Some of the children of these active members still live in this suburb but they are not active in protecting the environment.

### Defensive Behaviours

Freud's theory of Defences can be useful in explaining this behaviour. Freud postulated that we defend ourselves from anxiety by "splitting" our awareness, so we can remain unconscious of our instincts without entirely ignoring them. This fragmented state allows us to continue our destructive behaviours while paying some, though not full heed to the mounting threats to our ecosystem (Winter, 1996: 119-134).

I can see signs of Defence actions taking place my community:

- **Rationalisation** – It's only one tree, it won't make a difference overall.
- **Intellectualization** –It's in the park, it is not my Council - the suburb is split between two councils. Most members of the Flora and Fauna Society live in Oatley West, Hurstville City Council. In the case of the Memorial Park tree it was in Kogarah Council.
- **Displacement** - There are individuals who would consider it enough to be a member of OFF but not active.
- **Suppression** – hundreds must have walked, driven past the cordoned off tree which is near the main shopping centre, but their attention must have been called elsewhere as only two letters were sent to the papers and Council in complaint.

### Small Meaningful Initiatives

Winter notes that at times the defensive behaviour described above may make one feel overwhelmed; he advises focusing on specific behaviours (small steps) to overcome this feeling. Because if we slip into despair or helplessness it undermines our own growth and maturity which ensures a planetary outcome that justifies our despair (1996:302).

## My Garden

It has become clear to me that only trying to stop tree removal is not enough. I need to draw attention to the beauty, diversity positive aspects of growing native (hopefully indigenous) plants. Winter notes that we are heavily dependent on vision to provide us with information (1996:196).

When I first moved into my newly renovated house in 2001 there was one plant in the back yard. I have planted over 60 plants, most of which have survived.



2001 Mohan & Manuwai Planting an Angophora



By 2006 Manuwai & the tree have both have grown

Being on a corner block, I have the advantage of using extra space alongside the house. I even planted the nature strip. My neighbour (Alan Fairley) inspired me by his efforts to reclaim the nature strip with native plants. People have commented on the how good it looks despite the drought. I do not water my garden. I let the ferns die back and regrow when rain falls. My garden reflects the seasons and the harshness of the Australian environment.



The local Councils have been encouraging new home builders to use natives to landscape. Some residents have been inspired to plant natives after seeing my garden, and have asked for advice on plants.

My next project is to plant up my front garden lawn with native grass. In this I have been inspired by Tim Berryman, a speaker at the Oatley Flora and Fauna Society in 2006. He spoke to us about his work, propagating native grasses used to revegetate the Penrith lakes. Cumberland Plain Seeds <http://www.cpseeds.com.au/>

My front garden is visible to the many residents who walk past on their way to the park and school; it would serve as an example to those who see it on the beauty and value of natives. Angeles Arrien notes that planting trees, gardening are ways that we re-green our own natures by connecting to the plant kingdom (1993: 31-33).

### Tree Studies and Photos

I am also considering creating a document of photos celebrating significant trees in Oatley and their stories. A study similar to the Lugarno Tree Study undertaken by Graham Quint in March, 1990 for the National Trust of Australia (NSW) could also be considered by the Oatley Flora and Fauna Society. <http://www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au/lts.html>.

Perhaps we can find some inspiration from Bob Beal, an environment journalist who will speak to the Oatley Flora and Fauna society on "If trees could talk- great Australian Tree stories" on Monday 27 August 2007 at the Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Meeting at 7.45 in the Uniting Church Hall, Frederick Street, Oatley.

If I can inspire residents to pay attention to the plight of the lost trees and celebrate those still standing I hope it might help in a small way to repair the damage we are doing to our environment.

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