

# 9

## MARKING THE PHASES OF LIFE



Significant stages of human life & the activities of significant people



## THEME 9.1: BIRTH AND DEATH

The relevant National-level theme is *marking phases of life*. The relevant state theme is *birth and death*.

Local themes within this theme are activities associated with the initial stages of human life and the bearing of children, and with the final stages of human life and disposal of the dead. The following activities and places in the former Botany Bay LGA are relevant to this theme:

See Health (Baby health) clinics and Defence (War Memorials).

Note that the Bunnerong Cemetery is not within the study area.



## THEME 9.2: PERSONS

The relevant National-level theme is *marking phases of life*. The relevant state theme is *persons*. Local themes within this theme are activities of, and associations with, identifiable individuals, families and communal groups. The following activities and places in the former Botany Bay LGA are relevant to this theme:

- Nancy Hillier
  - Port Botany Campaign
  - Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport Campaign
  - The Orica (ICIANZ) Campaign

Other related themes:

- 3.2 Environment - cultural landscape
- 3.11.3 Transport (Port Botany)
- 7.0 Government and administration

### 9.2.1 NANCY HILLIER OAM

Nancy (Annie Newall) Hillier (1924-2013) was a Botany local and a passionate community activist. Nancy fought for many decades to alert the Botany Bay community and Australian and State Governments of the dire impacts that the large scale industrial development in the area was having on the community's health, progress and the natural environment.

For over thirty years Nancy Hillier was the driving force behind numerous community-led campaigns and grass-roots agitation protesting against a wide range of issues affecting the people and environment of Botany Bay, and what she saw as the decision-makers' "total disregard for the people" (Obituary Nancy Hillier 1924-2013. 2 December 2013, The Sydney Morning Herald; accessed online at <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/obituaries/nancy-hillier-relentless-rebel-with-many-causes-20131201-2yjbq.html>.)

Her most powerful protests included the pollution and environmental harm generated by the large-scale heavy industries in the area, in particular the ICIANZ (Orica) plant; the environmental impacts of the (then) proposed expansion of Kingsford-Smith Airport including the construction of the third runway; and finally the major expansion of Port Botany.

Although throughout her years she experienced several death threats and was burgled on several occasions, she had no fear in speaking out against what she saw as the destruction of local community and development. In her own words...



*“We have a right to complain about improper planning. A country’s wealth must be assessed by the living conditions of its people and not be judged by how many millionaires it can boast.”*

Her vociferous support for the ordinary resident earned her both great respect amongst the community and great animosity from those who supported these industries, to the point where she became an infamous character in Botany Bay and was referred to as ‘the Ratbag of Botany’. In 1985 Nancy was named Botany Council’s Citizen of the Year. In 2006 she was awarded an OAM for her services to conservation and the environment in the Botany Bay area and community.

*Fig. 9.2.1 and 9.2.2 (facing) Nancy Hillier was a pivotal figure in the campaign to prevent the major expansion of Port Botany. These photos show her addressing a Port Botany protest rally in c.1976.*

*Daily Telegraph photographs held by BCHA*

Her determination could not win everything she fought for, however, it can be argued without shadow of a doubt that the industrial and environmental landscapes of Botany Bay have been directly shaped by her actions.



## PORT BOTANY CAMPAIGN

During the 1970s State Government proposals were made to expand Port Botany and to construct a coal loader. This reportedly was not widely communicated to local residents at the time. It was only when Hillier and others noticed vigorous activity along the foreshore that the expansion plans came to light. Hillier was outraged that this had

occurred without community consultation and went on to form a small group of approximately 100 locals in the Botany Independent Action Group. Their campaign was fierce and contained letter writing, rallies and public mock “trials” of public bureaucrats.

Against all odds, the grass roots campaign saw significant success. While it could not stop the wider plan of expansion to the port, a huge win was the decision to not build the coal loader at Port Botany. Oil supertankers were also prohibited entry into Botany Bay, and as a concession for constructing Foreshore Road (which blocked access down to the Botany Bay), the nearby Sir Joseph Banks Park was extended for community use. Furthermore, newly elected State Premier, Neville Wran, commissioned a scientific study to be done on the ecology of the Bay, entitled the *Botany Bay Enquiry*. It was this study that largely influenced new legislation to be passed, called the Environmental Protection and Assessment Act NSW (EPA 1979), which formed the basis of the contemporary planning system, which was intended to integrate public submissions and concerns into all planning decision-making.

## SYDNEY KINGSFORD SMITH AIRPORT CAMPAIGN

By the 1980s, Sydney’s Kingsford Smith Airport was in need of further expansion. The plans for this expansion included adding a third





runway in an attempt to ease the heavy air traffic burden already being experienced at the airport. Hillier was adamant that the addition of the third runway should not go ahead as it would mean more noise, air pollution, road traffic, safety risks and further destruction of the already-delicate ecology of Botany Bay.

The campaign led by Hillier involved staging mass traffic blockades that held up air flights and other vocal tactics for the community to voice their concerns. The campaign was not successful however and the third runway, and expansion of the airport, went ahead. Once again the Government gave concessions to the community. An example of these was the installation of noise insulation in houses and buildings (including churches and schools) within affected areas of the flight paths, at the Government's expense. Although the campaign was lost, it has been argued that if it wasn't for Hillier's relentless protesting, that these concessions may not have been made (or at least not paid for by the Government).

### THE ORICA (ICIANZ) CAMPAIGN

This was among Nancy Hillier's greatest achievements in her activism career. In the 1970s Nancy became aware of the expansion of the ICI (now Orica) chemical plant near her home in Botany. Her son suffered from bad asthma, and the chlorine and other leaks were beginning to drastically affect her son's health. Leaving the windows open could, and once did, cause a drastic asthma attack for her son. As a concerned parent and community member, Nancy began keeping records of incidents and wrote many letters of complaint to authorities both low and high.

*Fig9.2.3 A rally at Sydney Airport to protest about the impacts of proposed airport expansion on the local community and environment. 1979. (BCHA).*



Nancy was most concerned about ICI's destruction of toxic chemicals using the Geomelt process which was untested for safety at the time. She also campaigned to improve the pollution of the groundwater that leaches into the Botany Aquifer and Botany Bay from the ICI site, for monitoring and reduction of toxic emissions from the chlorine plant and also formally opposed the method of destroying 10,500 tonnes of hexachlorobenzene(HCB) on-site at Botany.

In 2004 it was announced that Orica had withdrawn its application for a \$70 million plant to destroy HCB waste because the Geomelt procedure could not be proven to be safe. Not only was this a defining 'win' for Hillier's environmental activism, but the aftereffects of the campaign also saw ongoing improvements in her other area of focus; community activism. Hillier was aware that the residential areas surrounding the industrial precinct of Botany Bay had a high proportion of residents from a non-English speaking background (almost 50%). Previously, residents did not feel confident in speaking out their opinions or in writing letters of complaint, however after Nancy campaigned on their behalf, the Commission of Inquiry now accepts written submissions in nominated languages other than English and pays for them to be translated into English.

This provision, alongside the streamlining of administration required for submissions and the running of "outside of working hours" local meetings, led to significant changes in community relations and increased the empowerment locals felt in the voicing of their opinions; a success of the campaign that greatly befits the area in which Hillier was so passionate.

### 9.2.2 GEORGE HANNA

The Hanna family have been active residents in Botany Bay for over 100 years. George Hanna was born on 29 October 1912 at 1424 Botany Road – a house named 'Helena', named after his mother (Elizabeth Helena Schlebusch). George Hanna's father, Robert Hanna, had built Helena in c.1904-1906 and worked as a plant manager at Thomas Elliot & Co.'s Springvale/Floodvale woolscour in Botany. He was a "self made man" and passed on a keen love of sailing to his son George. At the time of George's childhood the foreshore of the Bay lapped at the backyards of the houses on the southern side of Botany Road in lower Botany. George, like most of the children in the area, grew up



sailing, swimming and fishing in the “*children’s playground*” of the Bay.

He remained in Botany all of his life, being elected as Alderman on Botany Municipal Council in 1959, a role he held until 1968. George Hanna was also elected as Mayor of Botany in 1966. Hanna died on 6 August 1996 and the then Mayor, Ron Hoenig, delivered a eulogy at his funeral on 9 August. In his eulogy, Hoenig announced his intention to have Council rename the existing Mascot Library the George Hanna Memorial Museum and Mascot Library (GHHM and ML). The dedication ceremony took place shortly after. The Museum and Library were substantially refurbished in 2012/2013 with a grant from the then Federal Labor Government.

*Fig 9.2.4 George Hanna, Alderman at Botany Council from 1959 to 1968, and Mayor in 1966.*

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