

## HISTORIC BUILDINGS - CONSERVATION & CLASSIFICATION

*The Editor,*

*Illawarra Historical Society Bulletin*

Dear Bill,

"Cormiston" is now falling to the wreckers' sledge-hammers, and I hope the authorities who pronounced its death sentence are proud of their insensitivity. That leaves only one old building still standing within the area of Wollongong proper. This, of course, is "Little Milton", and its defenders must begin to gird their loins to see that this, too, does not go the way of "Bustle Cottage" and "Cormiston"; for if "Little Milton" goes, we will have nothing left in the way of private buildings of comparable age, a way of colonial life, part of our heritage, will have been destroyed; and is irreplaceable. So the time has come for a sober review.

"Bustle Cottage" was the first victim, because it has been let go so for now that it is beyond recall. As you know, I always did hold the view that this

house was not so old or intrinsically interesting as others, and that alterations had long since changed its character to the extent that it is no longer a true relic of our past. Yet its defenders were right, as it so happened, because the skirmish to preserve this old house was the first line of defence for others. I for one did not range myself alongside those defenders, though I now feel remiss for not having done so.

"Cormiston" was another matter. Its historical and aesthetic associations were far stronger than those of "Bustle Cottage", and its quality far greater. But those considerations could not save it; other considerations in the form of dollars in private pockets, aided by obtusely irresponsible attitudes on the part of decision-making authorities, have resulted in the present thud of sledge-hammers into old and irreplaceable masonry.

That leaves only "Little Milton", the best of them all, and the last. The original part of the building is of the typical bungalow style, relaxed comfortable, and superbly adapted to the Australian environment. Its verandahs give protection from excessive sun in summer, and the rough elements in winter. The fact that this style of architecture does not lend itself to modern conditions is due to cost and space. But that only means that this surviving example of an ideal style should all the more urgently be preserved.

So I come to my main point, which is really of your own making. You will remember that recently when we discussed the relative quality of our three old private buildings - those which then remained - I remarked that by State-wide standards ours were not very significant; and that is true enough. But then you made a point which has impressed me more and more since then. This was that one must have regard to all or any available remaining sources. I think you instanced Windsor, saying that a house might be insignificant in the wealth of old buildings in such a place, whilst the same house in an area less generously endowed, like ours, has a far greater significance.

The more I think of it, the more I think you are right, and I agree with you that in making classifications the National Trust should have regard to the wealth or paucity of comparable buildings in a given area. Despite our rich local history, we are a poor area in relation to historic buildings, and poorer still since "Cormiston" was abandoned to sledge-hammers.

No doubt you will be wielding your own editorial hammer on this subject in our "Bulletin", but I do hope you will not fail to stress this most significant argument of yours. And in doing may I add another argument of my own.

I think it is true to say that private owners of historic buildings have no absolute property rights. To a high degree they are trustees of their

---

properties for the community, and this is a fact they must accept in buying or holding those properties. The modern concept is that we have planning authorities whose duty it is to respect and protect that trust, if owners do not have proper regard to it. It is our duty as citizens of the present to see that trust is respected in favour of future generations. We cannot blame the jack-hammers and crowbars; if there is any further breach of trust, we can only blame ourselves, if we do not stress our point. When we have done this, and failed, blame must fall solely on our representatives for having disregarded our importunities and their solemn trust.

Let there be no misunderstanding: "Little Milton" is our last hope. If that goes, we are destitute. So please go your hardest!

Yours sincerely,  
Edgar Beale.