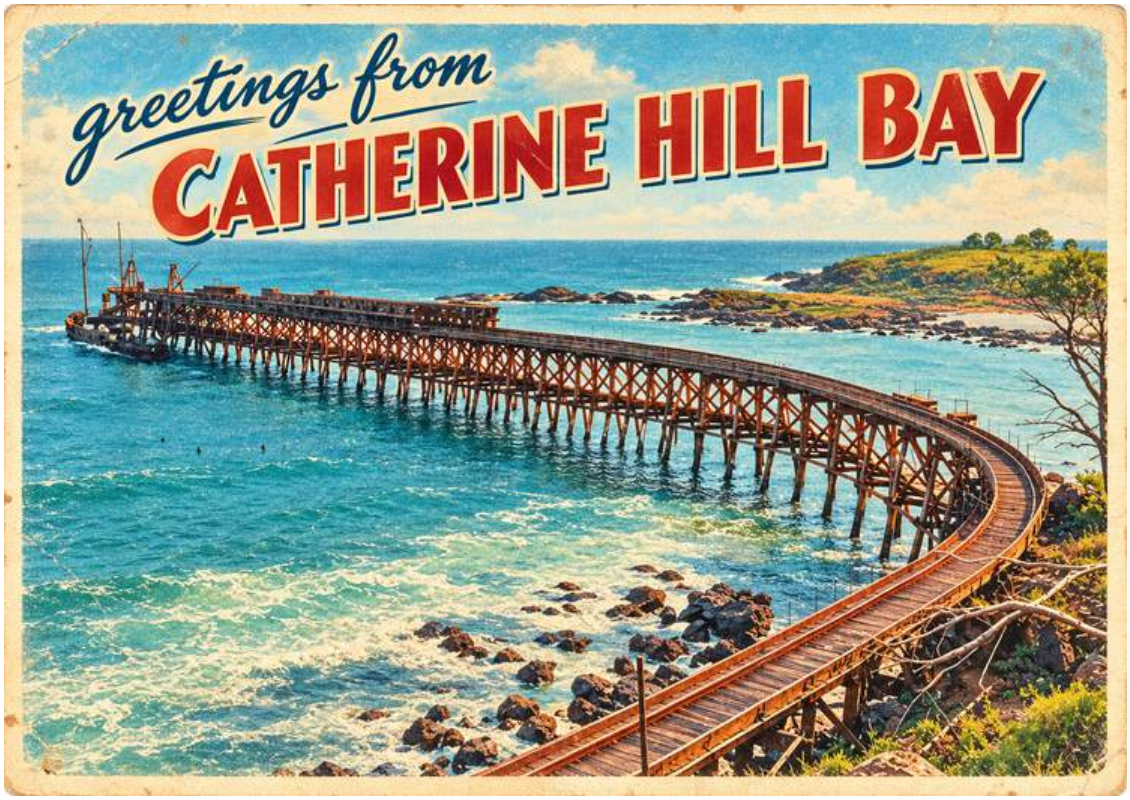
CATHO CHRONICLE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CATHERINE HILL BAY PROGRESS ASSOCIATION
ESTABLISHED 1901



GIVE OUR JETTY A FUTURE, NOT A MEMORIAL

The NSW Government wants to demolish Catherine Hill Bay's mine jetty, but have they made a compelling case for destroying our most recognisable landmark?

Their published engineering report provides a detailed assessment of the current state of the jetty, but the consideration of future options appears biased to the outcome of complete demolition and removal.

Of particular concern is the limited scope of the assessment. Maintenance and demolition have price tags, but where is the corresponding evaluation of the jetty's cultural, heritage and tourism value? Its silhouette tells the story of the mining community that built this town. It provides a subject for photographers, a drawcard for visitors and a tangible connection between generations. These benefits deserve proper assessment, even where they cannot so easily be expressed in dollars.

Nobody disputes that the structure is currently unsafe, but it doesn't immedately follow that it should be completely demolished. With dangerous elements removed and public access restricted, the option of retaining the jetty as a 'managed ruin' should be explored more fully.

IN THE SPRING 2026 ISSUE...

CATHO PUB SALE

LANDCARE NEWS

DA SUBMITTED FOR RETAIL PRECINCT

SES CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

NEXT PA MEETING at Catho SLSC on date TBA

Cover shot: Catho's second jetty, which operated from 1888 to 1974.

Give our jetty a future (continued)

Our sister jetty at Balls Head in Sydney is a great example of a heritage structure which has been assessed as having State Heritage significance as a rare, surviving piece of international maritime infrastructure. Rather than letting it collapse entirely into the harbour, the NSW government facilitated the retrieval of fallen debris and allocated funds to halt deterioration.

Another example is Brighton's West Pier in the UK, which offers a precedent for managing an inaccessible marine ruin through warnings, exclusion markers and debris removal. Catho of course would require its own rigorous assessment, including the need to remove oil from within the jetty piles, and methods to manage the risks to boating and swimmers nearby.

This type of 'managed ruin' approach could continue to anchor the bay's identity without expensive structural repairs to restore it as a workable jetty or public walkway. In fact it could potentially be much cheaper than the $11.3m budgeted for demolition and removal. A real win-win.

It is the PA's view that before any irreversible decisions are made, the community deserves a broader and independent review involving heritage and tourism specialists with a fair and reasonable comparison of future options. This should include a thorough assessment of the option of retaining this remarkable landmark as a managed ruin.

The hundreds of people who have signed the petition to ***Save Catho Jetty*** have a message for the State Government; the invitation to discuss a memorial is premature while the above questions remain unresolved, because the most striking reminder of Catherine Hill Bay's mining history is surely the jetty itself.

Sale of Catho Pub

In July we reported on an initiative by the local community to take on ownership of the Catho Pub. As part of the Expressions of Interest process, an offer was subsequently made to purchase the pub without the poker machines, The bid was not successful.

The Community Bid Steering Committee has advised that they are currently working with a third party with the aim of making a combined bid for both the pub and the poker machines. It is understood that a bid for both assets is likely to be more favourably received by the pub owner.

Further updates on this matter will be provided as they become available.



Rose Group Retail Precinct

Rose Group has submitted a development application (DA) to Lake Macquarie City Council for the retail precinct that's been proposed for well over a decade on the corner of Hale St and Montefiore Parkway.

The proposal is for a combined neighbourhood shop and café, and Rose Group has stated that the building design was developed in consultation with their preferred commercial tenant and a heritage architect (see image below). It is single story structure with pitched roof of maximum seven metres height and internal floor area of 680msq. The substantial wrap-around exterior deck totals 300msq in area.

While the PA welcomes the development of a retail precinct in Catherine Hill Bay, we are disappointed that the submitted design does not comply with Council's Development Control Plan (DCP) for the area. In particular, the design exceeds the DCP height limit by two metres, and the bulk and scale of the building is inconsistent with the local heritage guidelines.



With suitable modifications to the design - for example reducing the height and making the retail precinct a series of smaller interconnected buildings - the PA would be happy to endorse a revised proposal for the much-needed local shops in Catherine Hill Bay.

At the time of going to press the application was still under consideration by LMCC.

SES Call for Volunteers

Interested in new challenges and opportunities while making a positive contribution to your community? Swansea SES are recruiting new volunteers. The local area team is based in Catherine Hill Bay and they're looking for new people join the unit.

If you're interested, please click the link below, fill out the online application and the SES membership team will reach out to you.

https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/volunteer



Catho Community Trivia Event

Save the date - the CHB Trivia Afternoon is back by popular demand! See full details including how to reserve your spot in the flyer below.



Landcare News

Content by Carmel Brown - CHB Dunecare Team Leader

It's been a busy few months for the Landcare team. In the July session at the **Graveyard Beach** (North End) site, In the 13 July session, Carmel weeded Bitou bush seedlings near our big sign, spotted some banded rail bird pairs on the walkway going north, and then removed *Morning Glory* vines in the area between the carpark and the cemetery. A whole crowd arrived for the October 12th session, with Peter & Louise McGowan and Wendy Heys all coming back on board and keen as ever. We swept down through the main section of the site while focusing on removing *Bitou*, *Lantana* and some small *Morning Glory* vines. Peter and Carmel weeded this area again on 9th November, and also further down in the gully. See photo below right of a healthy *Guinea Flower (Hibbertia Scandens)* we previously planted. This location has now been restored to our best 'educational area' – just how our beautiful bush should be. We've decided to leave the campers and families to enjoy the whipper-snipped grass area at the top of the rise.





On the 23rd July, Carmel weeded the *Morning Glory* and *Bitou* at the **Pat Slaven Reserve** (South End) site, near the *Banksia Trees*, then the *Turkey Rhubarb* around the *Lomandra* and bushes further down towards the creek. There were many long white-stemmed seedlings and small plants with nodes. We did the same again on 27th August. Being in sand and with recent rain, quite a few whole plants with bulbs came out which was very satisfying! All were taken off site.
Then the powerful yellow pruners from Simon at Lake Mac Landcare chopped off the branches at their thick bases of the *Bitou Bush* smothering the *Tea Tree* there. On 14th September, Wendy Gleen (Green Team Leader) and Carmel attacked the *Turkey Rhubarb* and cleared the area.

On 19th September we attended the Sustainability Festival in Speers Point (see photos below). It was such a great experience to present to the public about our work. Note the banner of gloves! In the bottom right photo, Simon is on the left and Wendy is in orange vest.





Landcare News (continued)

Unless wind or rain foil our plans, we'll be at Pat Slaven Reserve (South End) on November 26th (3-5pm). There will be another Green Team session TBA. After that there's no Landcare sessions throughout the summer months due to the heat, ticks and sandflies, so we'll resume again in March.

In the meantime, ***we have a call-out for new Landcarers.*** Current members have all well and truly done their shift (legends!). If anyone can help, please get in touch and nominate your preferred days and times. We could do weekends rather than week days, and mornings instead of afternoons. Call or SMS us on 0438 499636 or just pop along to a session.

Bring a drink, gloves and your favourite planting, weeding and pruning tools, or use our Landcare ones. Wear long sleeves and long pants, use our DEET spray if you wish, and always be sunsafe.

Heritage Houses Walking Tour

On the 7th of November the Progress Association hosted a heritage houses walking tour, visiting a number of houses and the local cemetery in the Heritage Precinct. Each house visit was hosted by the current owner and different aspects of the history of the buildings, the adaptive use, and commentary on life in the Bay were covered.





The tour included the old RSL Hall, the Maternity Hospital and Police Lockup, all of which are now privately owned homes. The local cemetery was a fascinating feature in the tour, not privately owned but privately occupied. A home-cooked afternoon tea overlooking the beach completed the event.

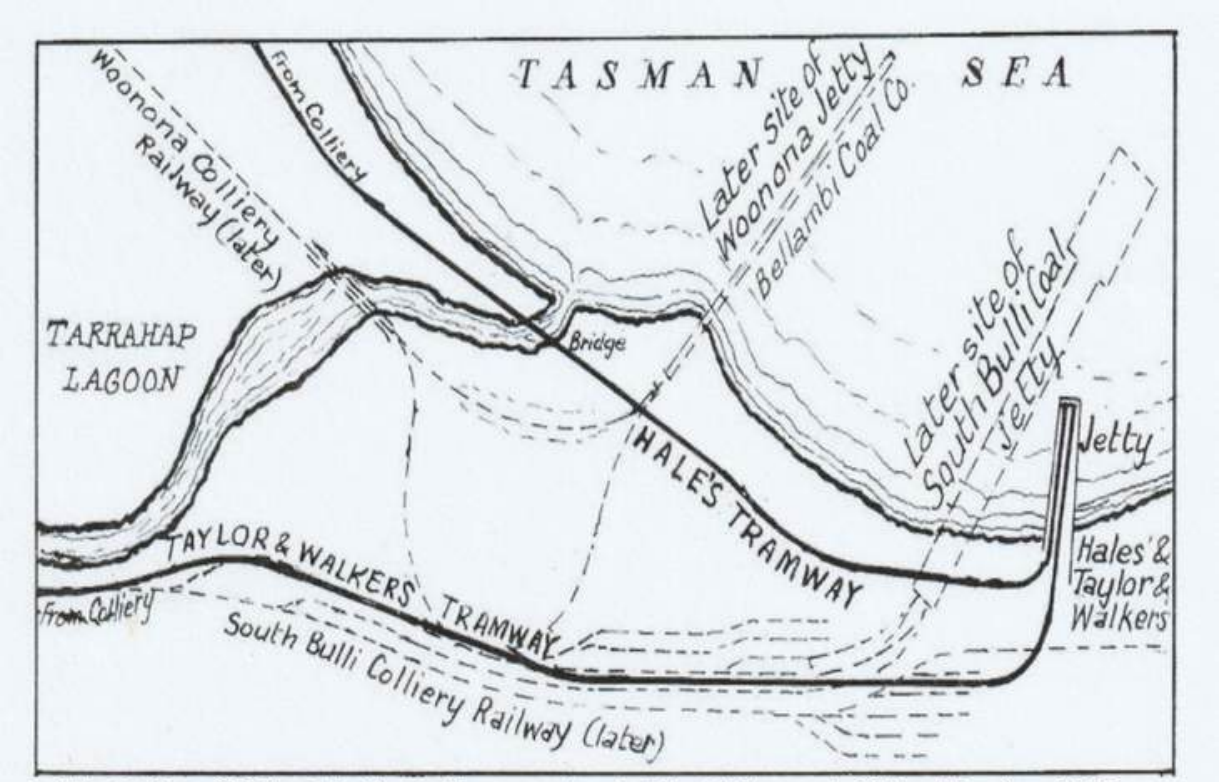
The attendees comprised Catho residents and people from other local areas. The event, which has been running for several years as part of the LMCC 'History Illuminated' Festival, was well received and there are plans to repeat it again next year.

Did you know ...

... that Thomas Hale (1814-1883), who was instrumental in establishing the first coal mine in Catherine Hill Bay, also pioneered coal mining in other parts of NSW?

In fact, Thomas Hale was noted for his pioneering role in coal mining on the NSW Illawarra Coast before developing the mine at Catherine Hill Bay. In 1857 he established a coal mine at Woonona, the second mine to start operations in the Illawarra. Mr Hale was a man of initiative, developing not only the mine but also the first deep-water jetty on the Illawarra Coast for loading of coal onto ships. He even purchased the ships to carry coal to his customers and was the first to discover the superiority of turpentine wood over all other timber species to withstand the "cobra in sea water".

Bellambi Point was selected as the jetty site because of the existence of a reef which provided some degree of shelter to a mooring. Prior to the building of the jetty, coal was inefficiently transported by rowing boat to ships lying offshore. Mine operations were greatly improved by the construction of a jetty, which was completed in June 1858. It was 150m long (later extended to 173m) and 3m wide, providing 3.6m low tide depth of water. By September 1858, a three-mile tramway of wooden rails with iron facings had also been constructed leading from the mine to the Bellambi Jetty.



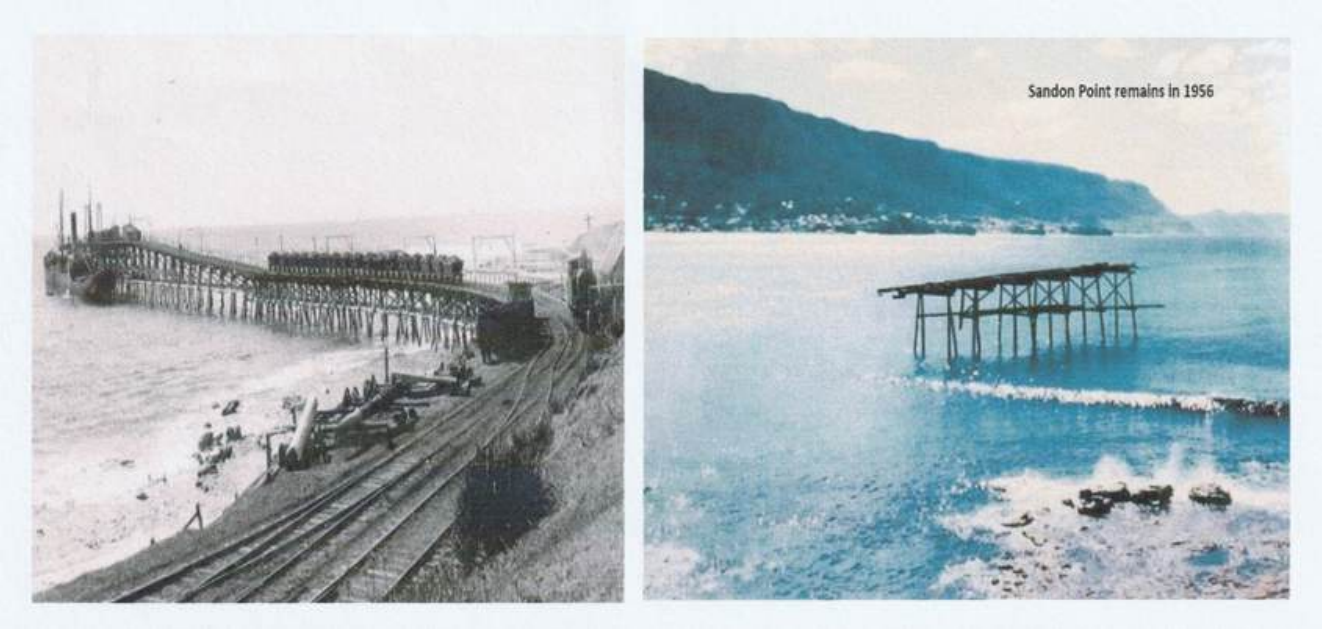
The jetties of Bellambi. *(from: Transporting the Black Diamond. Giffard Eardley. 1965).*

Following commencement of operations at the jetty, Hale bought more ships for the coal trade to domestic and export markets in China and the US.

In 1860, Hale initiated the start of the Illawarra Steamers Line for shipping. But in June of 1863 the vessel "Duke of Wellington" capsized during a storm while standing offshore north of Bellambi Harbour. Five lives were lost. That tragedy, along with a slump in coal trading conditions generally, caused Hale to close his Woonona Colliery at significant financial loss.

Mining pioneer Thomas Hale (continued)

After Hale closed his mine, *The Bulli Coal Company* later undertook the construction of another jetty at nearby Sandon Point. It was a twin-deck setup with larger vessels using the "upper" deck and smaller boats using the lower one. Over the years this structure was damaged by multiple storms, however it remained in operation for over 70 years, making it the most enduring of all the Illawarra deep-water jetties. The last shipment of coal was made from it in 1936.



Sandon Point Jetty: (Left) after storm damage renovations in 1922, and (right) the remains of the jetty in 1956, twenty years after it ceased operating.

A new venture

Thomas Hale, along with Jacob Levi Montefiore and others, became landowners at another promising location called Catherine Hill Bay. They took out a coal lease and began promoting the potential for coal mining in the area.

In 1873 they started up the *New Wallsend Coal Company* with Montefiore as chairman of the Board of Directors and Hale as Managing Director. A jetty was soon constructed, reaching out from the tunnel dug into the coal seam at the bottom of the cliff face (the mouth of this first mine tunnel can still be seen to this day, just south of the current jetty and sealed with concrete).

The first consignment of coal from the new jetty was made on 17th December 1873 by the steamer "Tasmania". The coal company also laid out an ambitious subdivision for the "Township of Cowper", and in 1874 Thomas Hale wrote correspondence seeking a Post Office for the fledgling Catherine Hill Bay community.

But just three years later the mine closed due to the mine company becoming bankrupt. The mine manager, Mr De Flon, abandoned Catherine Hill Bay and took the remaining staff with him, resettling in Little Bulli in the Illawarra area.

Mining pioneer Thomas Hale (continued)



Catho's first jetty (1873-c1885)

Mr Hale's next foray into coal mining was the successful operation of the *Coal Cliff Coal Mining Company* at Clifton on the Illawarra Coast, where he was mine manager from 1878 to 1880. Another jetty was built there by Hale and his team, with the steam collier Eagle delivering the first load to Sydney on 11th Jan 1878.

Thomas Hale died a few years later in 1883, bringing to an end his years of mining enterprise along the NSW coast. His name endures however in a street named after him in Catherine Hill Bay.

In the following years the Clifton mine was eventually passed over to Sir John Robertson and Charles Cowper, and in 1890 they formed the *Coal Cliff Coal and Land Company Ltd*. The Coalcliff Jetty suffered from storm damage in July 1878, and again in 1881 and 1904. It ceased operations for shipping in 1912. In 1889 the newly formed *Bellambi Coal Company* built yet another new jetty at Bellambi. It was the last jetty on the Illawarra Coast to be dedicated to a specific colliery, overseen by Mr George Williams and the veteran jetty builder Mr De Flon.

Meanwhile further north, coal mining was re-attempted in Catherine Hill Bay in 1888. This second enterprise was the *Wallarah Coal Company*, a well-funded operation from England. As the first Catho Jetty had collapsed by this time (due to a combination of fire and the ravages of the sea), a second more robust one had to be built at the southern end of the bay. This was a major turning point for the venture, and what followed was the emergence of a thriving company town and over a century of continuous mining in Catherine Hill Bay, lasting until 2002.

With all the historic deep-water jetties now gone along the Illawarra Coast, we are incredibly fortunate to still have Catho's mine jetty as a vivid reminder of the industrial heritage that shaped the formation of the town. But with the NSW Government now planning for its demolition with little to no consideration of the cultural significance of this remarkable Hunter landmark, the big question is - how much longer will it remain?

(Content kindly provided by Burt Errington of the East Lakes Historical Society)

Catherine Hill Bay Business Register

The CHB Community Alliance invites local businesses, trades, and service providers to be included in the Catherine Hill Bay Business Register. Its purpose is to highlight the skills and services available within our community, making it easier for residents to support local businesses and access services close to home.

If you operate a business based in CHB or live in and service the CHB community and would like to be listed, we would love to hear from you. Being included is a simple way to advertise your services to your neighbours and strengthen local connections. To join the register, please email us at CHBCommunity@outlook.com with your business name, a brief description of your services, and your preferred contact details. You can view the current Business Register here: *https://www.chbcommunityalliance.org/businesses*

Vale Stacey Brett Wiltshire



Stacey Brett Wiltshire, known variously to his mates as 'Hick', 'Spence' or 'Hayseed', was born in Catherine Hill Bay on 8 January 1960. He began his working life as an apprentice fitter at the Wallarah Colliery and went on to work at the washery and on the jetty. In the surf, Stacey was a long-term member of Catho Boardriders, winning the local Boardriders' open senior championship in 1980 and 1982. He was also a tireless supporter of Catho's Nippers, a regular beach patroller, and he captained the Catho Surf Life Saving Club's rescue boat team to an Australian Title win in 1991.

Stacey passed away on 29 July 2026. The Catho community remembers him with gratitude and affection and he is greatly missed.

How to become a PA member

Would you like to become a member or friend of the CHB Progress Association? The annual membership fee is $20, or $10 for pensioners. The membership form can be found at www.catherinehillbay.org.au. Please email completed forms to accounts@catherinehillbay.org.au. Thank you to all our members and friends who have already renewed their membership.
To join the Catho Chronicle mailing list, please email us at **newsletter@catherinehillbay.org.au**

For more local news check the following links:
www.catherinehillbay.org.au
www.facebook.com/CathHillBay
www.facebook.com/CathHillBayLandcare
www.chbcommunityalliance.org

and the various other Facebook pages related to Catho:
www.facebook.com/cathoslsc
www.facebook.com/cathoboardriders
www.facebook.com/swanseaSES
www.facebook.com/Wallarah-Rural-Fire-Brigade-1014414335240696