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Bishop Peter Hayward
74 Church Street
Wollongong, NSW 2500

Dear Bishop Hayward

I am writing to you about the Holy Trinity Church in Huskisson. Currently a DA has been approved by the Shoalhaven Council to demolish the original church, long used as a hall, and to move the Blacket wooden church to the back of the site. The only reason anyone thinks that this is being done is to devalue the heritage values of the site.

I became involved in the campaign to try to get this place heritage listed last year. I am an historian with an understanding of heritage issues, and it seemed to me that the whole property – the little Cyril Blacket church, the beautiful trees, some of them old growth, and the haunting reality of the unmarked graveyard was of undoubted heritage value.

When the NSW Heritage Council recommended giving the whole block a 12 months Interim Heritage Order in November 2018 it seemed that the hard work of getting to this point was justified, and when this recommendation was reversed in February 2019 it seemed to everyone involved in our campaign that what had transpired was a political game. All the same, we may have left it at that, but for the ongoing and growing support from the local community. Apart from the measurable criteria used by heritage experts to assess heritage values there is also formal recognition of the criterion of ‘community esteem’ and this place undoubtedly holds that value.

As time has passed and so many people have volunteered to turn their attention to researching and exchanging information, we now know a lot more about the church and the hall, which was the original church building although much altered over time. We believe this is probably the oldest building in the village, and some Aboriginal people think it was used as a place for the distribution of government rations of blankets, food etc. This later has not been established through formal records yet, but we do know that Huskisson was a ‘government town’ for this purpose, and we do know that Aboriginal people lived along the foreshore next to the church lands.

We also know more about the trees, some of which are apparently rare, and above all we are coming to know more about the graveyard, with its Indigenous and its European burials. We understand that old burial sites all over the country have been built over and destroyed, but this is 2019 and the local Aboriginal community’s call for the Anglican Church and the Shoalhaven Council to ‘show some respect’ only grows. There do not seem to be much in the way of parish records, but using secular records we have uncovered a good story to tell about relations that existed between the parish and the local

Aboriginal community in earlier decades. Several of the early rectors embraced this community in a kindly and Christian way, in stark contrast to the current attitudes of disrespect that are giving pain to Indigenous people.

In the Shoalhaven there are many direct descendants for James Golding, who was known as King Budd Billy, the King of Jervis Bay, buried with an Anglican service in 1905. There are other Aboriginal family members who link to Dann Carpenter also buried there and when someone recently turned up a death certificate for Rebecca Golding, buried there in 1935 we were all surprised because this burial is much later than others we have information about.

I am labouring the point about these Indigenous burials because we are saddened when members of the local parish deny that there are any. We are frustrated when the hopeful developer bends the truth to suit his purposes including his claim that he will 'protect the graves' when he does not and cannot ever know where many of them are located.

We are saddened when we hear from people who tell us they have left the parish because of the money-grubbing approach that will allow the destruction of this wonderful piece of Huskisson. And we are surprised when parishioners tell us that they are praying for our campaign to succeed. On our facebook page @savehuskychurch there has been some brutal assessments of the Anglican Church, and we have discussed whether these are appropriate. In the end, unless comments exceed the bounds of decency, we have left them because this is a real reflection of the anger and frustration so many people are feeling. About the potential loss of this place. About the venal plans, not for something socially positive, but for a conference center/large hotel. About the church's insistence on getting an outcome which will diminish our village.

Anyone who stands amongst the trees behind the church for more than a few minutes is struck by the spirituality of the place. The local names for it include 'Cathedral of Trees' and 'Huskisson's Oasis'. A heritage listing would not preclude development. It may reduce the overall financial rewards available to the Anglican Church Property Trust, but it could be used for any number of sensitive developments that would turn both a secular and a spiritual profit. I know that the Anglican Church has worked assiduously for several decades to ensure the property is never heritage listed. It may be time to rethink this. It is a wonderful property and it could be used for good, and not developed as is at present proposed, in a manner that just brings disrepute on the Anglican Church.

We are continuing with our struggle to preserve this place, and we are continuing to uncover more of its wonderful story. If the church goes ahead with its current plan it will long remembered as a place that the Anglican Church destroyed. It doesn't have to be like this.

Thank you for taking the time to read this,

Yours sincerely

Shirley Fitzgerald, BA PhD Dip T Hon FRAHS.

8.7.2019