

Huskisson Heritage Association Inc.

An open letter to Kanishka Raffel, Anglican Archbishop of Sydney

Your Grace

Our community was heartened to receive your letter concerning events occurring on the property of the former Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Huskisson. You told us:

I am writing to assure you that I regard this matter as one of the utmost seriousness and I am engaging with the issue as a matter of high priority. I am particularly conscious of the deep feeling of the Indigenous community. I am seeking advice on what options, if any, are available to me. [Archbishop Kanishka Raffel to Huskisson Heritage Association, 24 June 2021]

At this time, the presence of a great many possible grave sites over the land have been indicated by a thorough Ground Penetrating Radar survey. There is distress in the community at the prospect of future development over the site, including underground parking and the construction of a large hotel. Currently none of this has been approved, but right now there is a proposal to take machinery onto the site to 'scrape' the ground, possibly in the hope of 'disproving' the GPR findings. This requires permission of NSW Heritage and, please God, it will not be allowed. This prospect is particularly distressing to Aboriginal people, as well as to many non-Indigenous people who believe that the graveyard should be left in peace.

Huskisson is a small place with a population of less than 800 residents at the last census, but it is held in deep affection in the wider community. Well over three thousand signatures calling for recognition of the importance of this land to our heritage have been collected in a petition which your predecessor ignored. Your local parish members refused to communicate directly with the rest of our community, including the Aboriginal community, and appeared to be content with bad mouthing anyone who objected to this development. The parish seems pleased that the proceeds of the sale will go towards building a new Faith Centre at the 'crossroads' site in Vincentia. Suggestions that this outcome could ever cancel out the damage and harm done to Huskisson – not now and not ever - seems to be beyond the grasp of the Anglican church, both at the local and at the diocesan level.

Now that the land has been sold, we are told that no-one in the Anglican church has any material interest in the matter. The Bishop of Wollongong assured us that the Church has done nothing illegal. That may well be true. But everyone knows that the land was granted without cost, for religious public purposes. Previously some of us believed that for the Church, morality trumped legality. Now we have all had it forcefully brought home to us that this is not true. Now we know, without a shadow of a doubt, that the Church is a business and a property developer. The pity of it is that the land, with its lovely little Cyril Blacket church, its old growth trees and its

unmarked burial ground could have formed the basis of a fine gentle re-development. This may not have netted the Church quite so many pieces of silver, but it could have embedded your mission in the community and been a net contributor to Huskisson. Now the Church is clearly seen as greedy, venal and, dare we suggest it, unchristian.

The Blacket church has been allowed to deteriorate on your watch and the whole site has become shabby. Even simple community offers to mow the grass or clean the gutters were rebuffed. Again, you will no doubt say that the church had nothing to do with this, but until very recently, you owned it.

Over the past three years trees have been needlessly cut down on the site. Some of these are believed by some citizens to be marker trees of Aboriginal burials, including the burial of James Golding, aka King Bud Billy who was a local identity and elder in the community until his death in 1905. Police have been called to the site and peaceful citizens have been needlessly harassed and assaulted.

These interventions on the site, long before any development consent has been given, will remain a stain on the Anglican Church into the future. Currently your congregation is dwindling, and the more people understand about the significance of this site, the more they are puzzled as to the why the Anglican Church has been so determined to offend and distress. The record of the fortunes of this land are already sullied and if the proposed developments on the site go ahead the Anglican church will stand condemned for its scandalous legacy of enabling the possible development of a hotel, gambling, along with the obvious desecration of a graveyard and destruction of Huskisson's central heritage property.

If the Church has any power to mediate these proposed developments, please do it.

Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit. Proverbs 10:2

Written on behalf of the Huskisson Heritage Association
Joanne Warren, Public Officer, +61402 754 576
PO Box 51 Huskisson NSW 2540

email: huskissonheritage@gmail.com