

Living with nature

Residential development in the Wolli Creek Valley was slow. There was no public transport, roads were unsealed, and frequent flooding made access difficult. Local progress associations lobbied government to provide community facilities such as medical services and schools.

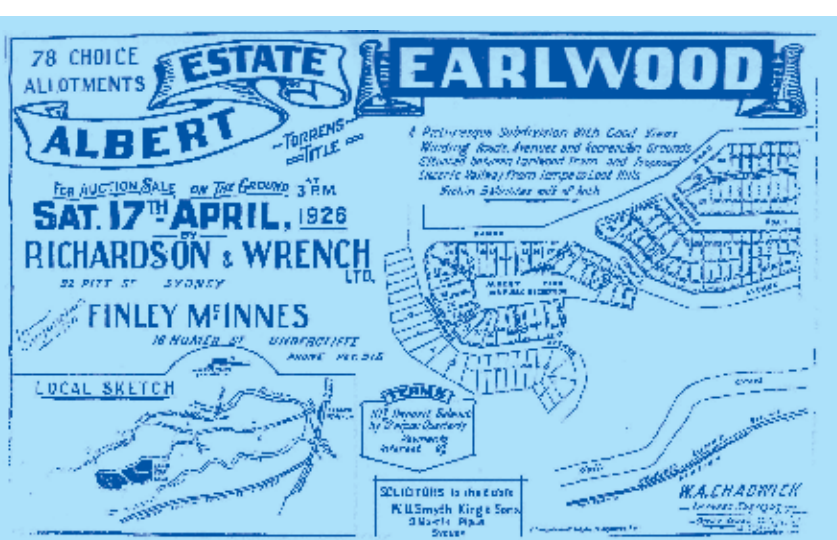
In 1886, an advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald for the sale of 'Wolli Park' originally the old Ballater estate, in the Turrella Reserve area, read:

'... it is within 10 minutes walk of Tempe or Arncliffe Station ... it has excellent views ...the lower portion consists of rich meadow land, fronting the creek, which here is of considerable width, with deep open pools, adding much to the charm of the place... The estate is cleared ready for subdivision.'

Joseph Caruthers, later to become Premier, purchased the land. It turned out to be a disaster. A rail line wasn't

built along the valley and noxious trades in Turrella deterred buyers. The depression of the 1890s delayed any development. Eventually, in 1912, the tramline was extended from Marrickville to the Cooks River at Undercliffe and Curruther's land was sold and subdivided.

When the tram service continued to Earlwood in 1924 and a rail service opened from Tempe to East Hills in 1931, residential development started to spread. Then in 1948, the road reservation prevented development of any sort. Ironically this helped save the bushland. The government built the motorway in a tunnel and declared that the Wolli Creek Valley would become a Regional Park.



Tram at Undercliffe, 1912
Photo courtesy City of Canterbury Library

Red-bellied Black Snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*) Illustration G. Gatenby, courtesy NSW NPWS

Jackson Place bushland
Photo J. Finlason

Wolli GHFF camp Photo D. Little

PETER RANKIN

Peter Rankin, the son of Danny and Neil Rankin, was brought up in the Wolli Creek Valley. As a child, he spent hours studying and recording the Copper-tailed Skinks on Nanny Goat Hill. His records are held by the Australian Museum. He became a herpetologist of great promise.

After his premature death in 1979, aged 23 whilst on a field trip, the Rankin Family established the **Peter Rankin Trust Fund for Herpetology** administered by the Australian Museum.



Bushland on our doorstep

Despite its proximity to built-up residential areas, the bushland has retained a wide variety of flora and fauna. It is a **'vital green corridor'** so necessary for the biodiversity of native flora and fauna. Being in an urban setting, the bushland is vulnerable to the effects of inappropriate practices and development.

There are also benefits usually denied to those living in large cities. People can experience nature on their doorstep and help care for a precious area of natural bushland. Children can learn about the natural world through play, observation and hands-on experiences.



Grey-headed Flying-Foxes

Grey-headed Flying-Foxes (GHFFs) have established a camp in a tree plantation between the rail line and Wolli Creek. GHFFs may appear plentiful but their survival is not secure and their numbers have dropped by one third in just ten years. This alarming decline is caused by human activities, particularly land clearing, for agriculture and urban growth, and shooting. WCPS members take part in a nationwide count of GHFFs once a month.

“ We had a snake once in our back yard... We had turtles wandering up from the creek. I used to catch tadpoles. It used to be a great thing in those days, ...putting them in a bottle, waiting, and watching them turn into a frog... I had a lot of freedom. There were no fences stopping me. I could go down to the creek, fish for eels.

Memories from 1950s, John Schattiger, Undercliffe.