

HISTORIC NORTH SYDNEY

a walking tour from Don Bank to St. Thomas' Rest Park

Commence this walking tour from Don Bank Museum, located in Napier Street, North Sydney; follow the Pacific Highway north from the North Sydney Post Office, turn left into Charles Street and walk to the top of the street - a sign at the front gates leads you into Don Bank's garden.

1. DON BANK MUSEUM

6 Napier Street, North Sydney

Don Bank is an early 19th Century timber cottage. It is not known when the oldest parts of the house were first built, possibly as early as the 1820s, but there is some evidence which suggests that a house may have existed on the site before 1854. It is one of North Sydney's oldest houses. By this date, the site was occupied by a four-roomed cottage called St. Leonards Cottage. In fact, most of North Sydney as we know it today was once called St. Leonards. North Sydney was formed in 1890 when the Boroughs of St. Leonards, East St. Leonards and Victoria amalgamated.

St. Leonards Cottage was located on the Wollstonecraft Estate, a large area of land (524 acres) granted to Edward Wollstonecraft in 1825. The suburb of Wollstonecraft is named after him.

Don Bank (the name changed sometime after 1900 for unknown reasons) was purchased by North Sydney Council in the late 1970s and was restored with assistance from the Heritage Council and the North Shore Historical Society. Today it is run as a Community Museum by the Historical Services Department of Stanton Library for North Sydney Council.

Don Bank is open to the public on Wednesday, 12noon-4:00pm and Sunday, 1:00-4:00pm.

Walk down Charles Street, to Pacific Highway, make a left turn and walk along the Pacific Highway, crossing Berry Street.

2. WOODSTOCK (1870)

No. 172 Pacific Highway (formerly known as Lane Cove Road) was John Brown's house when he had a timber mill in this area. It was restored in 1982 as commercial premises, retaining its name. Brown's Lane passes behind the property.

3. CROWS NEST HOUSE GATES
North Sydney Demonstration School

These gates were once part of the house and gardens on this site built by Alexander Berry, a business partner of Edward Wollstonecraft. This grand home was called Crows Nest House. An earlier cottage, built by Edward Wollstonecraft and Alexander Berry, was located north of here in Shirley Road, Crows Nest (approximately where the Uniting Church stands today), this was called Crows Nest Cottage. The name 'Crows Nest' comes from the crows nest of a ship, as the cottage's position enabled them to see long distances.

Crows Nest House was completed in 1850 and was lived in by Alexander Berry until his death in 1873. Alexander Berry was a former ship's surgeon and master and later became a Member of the Legislative Council. His estate passed to Sir John Hay. After the deaths of Sir John and Lady Hay, the property was subdivided and the house, unfortunately demolished. A school was built on the grounds of Crows Nest House (now North Sydney Demonstration School). You will note a number of streets in the area are named after these early residents, such as Berry Street, Edward Street and Hayberry Street.

Continue walking along the Pacific Highway

4. PACIFIC HIGHWAY
(formerly Lane Cove Road) between McLaren and Myrtle Streets

The former Mater Misericordiae Hospital, once a prominent North Sydney landmark, was demolished in 1992 and a new hospital was built in Rocklands Road.

North Sydney Girls' High School opened in 1914 and was the first suburban high school for girls. The land was purchased from the Berry Estate. This school had grown out of the North Sydney Superior Public School (now part of the Metroplaza/Greenwood development and commonly known as the Greenwood School after its long serving Headmaster, Nimrod Greenwood). The school moved across the road to the former Crows Nest Boys' High School in late 1993.

Masonic Temple (1922-75) (no. 317 Pacific Highway)

This was built by the Lodge St. Leonards-Samaritan (founded in 1876). The building next to this (known as Johnny's Stagedoor) used to be the local ice works. Ice was delivered to homes and stored in ice chests before we had refrigerators.

Cross over Pacific Highway and walk south to McLaren Street, turn left into McLaren and left again into Church Street.

5. ST. THOMAS' CHURCH and HALL

The stone school hall was built in 1848. The Memorial Hall was built in 1922 as a memorial to World War I.

Walk north up Church Street

6. ST. THOMAS' CHURCH

This is the second church on this site. The earlier Church was designed by Conrad Martens and opened in 1846. The Baptismal Font inside the Church was sculpted by Conrad Martens.

The present Church, designed by Edmund Blacket (well-known colonial architect) opened in 1884. It is considered to be one of his last great works. The first Rector, Rev. William Branwhite Clarke, was a former Headmaster of King's School, Parramatta. He was a geologist and one of those involved in the discovery of gold in the early 1840s. He is known as the "Father of Australian Geology". He is buried at St. Thomas' Cemetery where this walking tour finishes in West Street, Crows Nest.

Alexander Berry, Conrad Martens and many others buried at St. Thomas' were patrons of this church.

We leave St. Thomas' and walk to the corner of West and Ridge Streets.

7. PLAYFAIR HOUSE and TERRACE

This site's history can be dated back to 1853 when land was granted to James Harris French who paid £85 to the Colonial Secretary for it. The property passed to Arthur Muston in 1881 and was resold to Thomas Playfair, a butcher. This row of terraces has had many owners since and has been restored as commercial premises.

Walk along Ridge Street to St. Mary's Church

8. ST. MARY'S CHURCH

The first church was set up in a tent in 1855 by Father Powell. A small church building was erected in 1856. The first stone church was built by local builder, John Jago, in 1868. This was later enlarged by William Wardell (architect of St. Mary's Cathedral) and opened in 1896. Stone from this earlier building was used for the current church which opened in 1938.

The Presbytery in Miller Street was erected in 1885 and has since been extended

*Walk along Miller Street, on the western side, passing on the right:
North Sydney Oval and St. Leonards Park.*

9. ST. LEONARDS PARK

The name survives from the original name for North Sydney. William Tunks, first Mayor of the Borough of St. Leonards, was instrumental in saving this land as a public reserve.

The Park contains playing fields, picnic sheds, playgrounds, a music shell, a memorial gun from WWI and a War Memorial on the Ridge Street frontage.

Continue walking up Miller Street passing North Sydney Boys' High School.

10. NORTH SYDNEY BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL

The original building dates to 1913, and from 1915 received students transferred from the North Sydney Public School (Greenwood School, see no. 4 above).

The name Falcon Street leads to the use of a falcon in the school crest. Ex-pupils are called 'Old Falconians'.

Cross Falcon Street and continue north up Miller Street, cross over Ernest Street, turn left into Rosalind and then right into West Street, cross over and enter St. Thomas' Rest Park and Museum entrance gates.

11. ST. THOMAS' REST PARK/SEXTON'S COTTAGE MUSEUM

250 West Street, Crows Nest

St. Thomas' Cemetery was the first burial ground established on the North Shore. The land for the cemetery was donated to the Anglican Parish of St. Leonards in 1845 by a prominent landowner and merchant, Alexander Berry (see no. 3 above). Berry wanted a burial place for his wife, Elizabeth (sister of Edward Wollstonecraft) who died in 1845. The striking pyramid monument in the centre of the Rest Park was erected in her honour. Edward Wollstonecraft and Alexander Berry are also buried here.

The cemetery contains the graves of many notable local residents and mirrors the development of the district over a one-hundred year period. The first burial was recorded in 1847 and the last in 1950.

In 1969 the cemetery was handed over to North Sydney Council and opened as a Rest Park in 1974.

The Sexton's Cottage, a stone cottage built about 1850, consisted originally of only one room. It was used for the 'laying out' of bodies prior to burial. Extensions were carried out in the 1880s. The building became a residence for the Church's sexton. In 1985 the cottage was restored by North Sydney Council and a museum was opened in 1987. The Museum contains a copy of the burial register, as well as storyboards which tell the history of the Church and the Cemetery.

The Museum is open on Thursday 1:00-4:00pm and the first Sunday of the month, 2:00-4:00pm.

Compiled from the Local Studies Files - Stanton Library, and the North Shore Historical Society's walk brochures 5/93, updated 9/7/97