

A Walking Tour of Waverton's Industrial Heritage



Early History of the Suburb of Waverton

The suburb of Waverton takes its name from "Waverton House" built by Joseph Purser in 1845 on land purchased from Alexander Berry. William Carr and later his widow, Charlotte, owned the house from 1850-1865. The Old family owned it from 1865-1974. Sadly, the house was then demolished.

The whole of Waverton was part of the large Wollstonecraft land grant (524 acres). Edward Wollstonecraft and Alexander Berry were business partners who settled on this side of the harbour and built Crows Nest Cottage - from which the suburb of Crows Nest takes its name. The Berry/Wollstonecraft partnership also received land on the South Coast at the Shoalhaven River. Alexander Berry was married to Elizabeth Wollstonecraft (Edward's sister) and after Edward's early death in 1832, the partnership was shared by Alexander and Elizabeth. Elizabeth died in 1845 and their impressive pyramid shaped tomb stands as a memorial to her in St Thomas' Rest Park. Upon Alexander Berry's death in 1872 the land at Coolangatta (on the Shoalhaven) and in North Sydney passed to David Berry - the town of Berry bears his name.

Waverton Station*(Walk begins here)*

The first railway line on this side of the harbour, the Hornsby to St Leonards line, opened in 1890 bringing modern transport to the people who lived on the north shore. Discussions took place in Parliament and at North Sydney Council on the extension of the line further down the shore to provide train travel to people who lived between St Leonards and the harbour foreshores. John Whitton (chief engineer of the Railways Department and known as the 'father of NSW railways') lived in North Sydney and is buried at St Thomas Cemetery (Rest Park). He provided estimates to the Government in 1880s for the southern extension as two options:

- the St Leonards to Milson's Point option to cost £350,000 (excluding the necessary land resumptions;
- and the other more fanciful option of the line to Balls Head at £710,000 (including the wharves required).

The Ball's Head extension was being considered at that time in light of the burgeoning industries at Pyrmont and Darling Harbour. Commercial interests hoped Balls Head Bay would become another Darling Harbour. As the railway debate raged so too did the continuing discussions about a harbour crossing

which would provide a land connection over the harbour and open up the north side. The Government Architect, Francis Greenway, created the earliest design for a harbour crossing in 1815. It took much more public discussion, political will and the passage of 116 years before the Sydney Harbour Bridge finally opened in March 1932.

The St Leonards to Milson's Point railway extension opened in 1893 to much fanfare but not without great cost, public debate and disruption to the area. The debate centred around:

- the benefits of such a line and who would benefit - the already wealthy landowners
- where it would go - St. Leonards to Milsons Point? Balls Head? Cremorne? Blues Point?
- the difficult topography of the lower north shore and the costs involved.

As the railway line and harbour crossing debates ran concurrently, the ideas put forward often included large and grandiose schemes including bridges and tunnels.

The line chosen terminated at Milson's Point Ferry Arcade and provided a transport interchange for rail, ferry, bus and tram commuters from the north



Waverton Station under construction - 1892

shore. The line was also a windfall to the Berry Estate, helping to strengthen the market demand for land development.

Three new stations featured along the extension route - Edwards Road (now Wollstonecraft Station) at Shirley Road, Bay Road (now Waverton Station) and Milson's Point. The Waverton and Wollstonecraft Stations were built by the Eaton Brothers, well known local timber merchants. (Sawmillers Reserve at Berrys Bay is located on the site of the former Eatons timber yard.)

Waverton Station was restored by State Rail and reopened in 1993 with a local event celebrating its Centenary. It is listed on Council's heritage database and

classified by the National Trust. The name of the station changed from Bay Road to Waverton in 1929.

Important heritage features of the Station include its:

- Victorian appearance and its relationship to the village environment that developed around the station;
- intactness, and its position as the station for visitors to Balls Head Reserve, a popular picnic spot (then and now)

A sign that has graced the station for many of its years stating "Alight here for beautiful Balls Head Reserve" has been restored and repainted several times and is a popular feature.

Walk along Bay Road towards Balls Head

Uniting Church Hall (75 Bay Road)

From Council's rating records it appears that the cottage located behind the Church Hall dates to an earlier period than the Hall itself. The property, originally owned by Frank Naylor, was purchased by the Methodist Church in c1919. A notation for a Hall appears in the 1925-27 valuation records and the address for the Trustees, who include Reverend Joseph Walker, is The Parsonage, Bay Road, Waverton.

Cross over Woolcott St and walk down Balls Head Rd to Balls Head Drive

HMAS Waterhen

HMAS Waterhen was established at this site in the early 1960s, however, the site was used previously by the Royal Australian Navy in conjunction with the US Navy during WWII as a Boom Defence Depot.

Continue along Balls Head Drive and Stop at Aboriginal Engraving Site

Aboriginal Engravings

North Sydney is rich in Aboriginal culture and history. The original occupants of this

region, the Cammeraygals of the Kuringai Tribe, lived along the foreshores and in the surrounding bushland prior to the arrival of the Europeans. The landscape of Balls Head, Berry Island, Kirribilli, Cammeray and Cremorne is dotted with the cultural remains of the Cammeraygals and tells their story even though the people who once lived here were displaced many years ago.

It is the foreshore areas of Balls Head and Berry Island that have some of the finest examples of Aboriginal cultural sites on the lower north shore. Large caves and rock shelters along waterways and trade routes were another popular location for local tribes and bands, and remnants of their occupation can still be found scattered throughout North Sydney today.

Rock engravings such as the large one near the entrance to Balls Head are special places which had strong significance to the Cammeraygals and would have related to the Sydney Dreaming. There are other smaller engravings located around this site but they are covered by the roadway. They were surveyed as early as 1899 and are discussed as part of the Waverton Peninsula Conservation Management Plan as important Aboriginal components of the site.

Chair of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, Jenny Munro, has said that there are:

"approximately 4,000 sites contained in the Sydney region and [they] represent the largest unified body of art so far established. They are the only indigenous art sites of such magnificence and magnitude that are to be found in a large cosmopolitan city anywhere in the world."

For further information on local Aboriginal sites and their significance visit the Gadyan Track at Berry Island Reserve (a brochure is available from North Sydney Council).

Balls Head Coal Loader

Constructed on the western edge of the Balls Head peninsula in 1917 to act as a steamship bunkering station, the Balls Head Coal Loader site was a significant Sydney Harbour industrial landmark. During its working life, the coal loader's gantry cranes and cable hopper cars unloaded and loaded coal onto the many ships, both passenger and commercial, that passed in and out of the Harbour. Wilf Brogden was the engineer, then manager of the Balls Head Coal Loader at Waverton from the 1950s until his retirement in 1982. Wilf was born in

England and immigrated to Australia with his wife and children in 1950. Before taking the engineer's position at the Coal Loader, Wilf worked for the Sydney Harbour & Lighterage Co. His position as a manager of the Coal Loader and a full description of the variety of ships and activities which occurred at the site during his 30 years there are included in an oral history interview held in Stanton Library's Merle Coppel Oral History Collection.

In November 1940 a freak wind storm damaged one of the gantry cranes beyond repair leaving only one crane in operation until the late 1950s. In October 1992, the Balls Head Coal Loader ceased operations resulting in the dismantling of the site. Only the wharf, coal loading platform, tunnels and a few brick administrative buildings remain as evidence of its former operation.

The Coal Loader is one of the subjects of the Waverton Peninsula Conservation Management Plan and part of the larger Masterplan for the revitalisation and reuse when all the Waverton sites are officially handed over from State Properties Group and BP to North Sydney Council. Interpretation for the site will include its former uses and historical significance: social, cultural and industrial.

BP Site

This site is significant for European history and its connections to the land grantees and business partners, Alexander Berry and Edward Wollstonecraft, dating back to the 1800s. Firstly, they constructed a stone wharf, then a stone warehouse, and workers' cottages and huts. Berry's overseer, W G Mathews, lived in the cottage on the site which consisted of only one room and a loft. This provided Mathews with an office and housing for 20 years. Due to a number of circumstances, Mathews relocated to a new cottage in 1854 located on a parcel of land leading to Ball's Head. This cottage was the Mathews family home for the next 44 years. Nearby stood the workers' cottages and remnants of the foundations can be seen today.

In the mid 1800s Berry leased the site for a short time as a coaling depot to shipping companies, P & O and General Steam Screw Ship Company. Other uses for the site included: ship repairs, storage of ballast and even a distillery which operated out of the stone storehouse

between 1872 and the 1880s and had connections to the Rag and Famish Hotel in the heart of North Sydney.

In the late 1870s the area was leased to the NSW Torpedo Corps as a depot. This Corps was instrumental in the defence of Sydney Harbour in the period of the Russian threat. The Corps eventually relocated to Middle Head in the late 1880s. This part of Berry's Bay was known as Torpedo Bay well into the 1920s.

Boatyards for repair and maintenance, and boatbuilding, have been regular landmarks on the North Sydney foreshores. Woodleys adjacent to the BP site and the Quarantine boat depot are examples of this type of use. Woodleys still operates as a slipway and marina, and the Quarantine depot is the home of the National Maritime Museum's working depot.

The Anglo Persian Oil Company's occupation of the site could date to as early as 1908 but it wasn't until 1923 that their first tank was installed. The tanks



View of Woodleys Boatyard and BP Refinery from the Harbour

grew in number to 31 by the late 1960s and were a prominent feature of this part of the Harbour up until they were dismantled in the mid 1990s. The site is now undergoing a remediation process. The Commonwealth Oil Refineries took over the Anglo Persian Oil Company (now BP) and many still recall the large letters of COR in lights on top of the cliff face. The cliff face in the past was known as 'Gibraltar' and this is evidenced in historical maps of the area and could relate to the character of the cliff face or the loss of a similar cliff over at Blue's Point.

The substantial stone store erected by Berry and Wollstonecraft was demolished to open the way for additional fuel storage tanks in the mid 1930s. The bund wall left standing contains the stones of the storehouse and is listed in the Waverton Peninsula Conservation Management Plan as having 'high' heritage significance. In the early 1950s additional tanks for storage were added in Unnecessary Road (planned extension of Rose Street which is today Larkin Street)



and adjacent properties purchased to provide accommodation for the staff.

The last tanks were dismantled in the mid 1990s and today you can see the outline of the tanks and get an impression of their size and bulk and see the many layers of history they have covered or replaced from Aboriginal to Berry and Wollstonecraft days, to the fuel depot period.

The site is included in the Waverton Peninsula Conservation Management Plan for interpretation, in particular, for its early European commercial uses and subsequent use as a fuel storage depot.

Walk back up Balls head Road to Wood St and turn Right into Larkin St.

Will Ashton Lookout

Named in honour of the well-known artist and Waverton resident, Sir John William Ashton. Prior to being knighted in 1960, he received an OBE in 1941. Will Ashton began his art career when he studied art in his father's studio in Adelaide until 1899, at which time he travelled to Europe to paint and continue his studies. On his return to Sydney he established himself as a painter of European subjects based on his European travels. In 1906 he won the Wynne Prize for an Australian landscape (he also won this prize in 1930 and 1939). He was the Director of the Art Gallery of NSW from 1937 to 1944.

View BP site from Larkin St, then turn back and Walk along Larkin St to Woolcott St

Larkin Street (formerly Rose Street) is believed to be named after Sergeant Edward Rennix Larkin, killed in WWI. Larkin had been a North Sydney policeman, the first Labor member of the Legislative Assembly and founder of the North Sydney Rugby League Club.

Woolcott Street is named in honour of the former City of Sydney Town Clerk, Charles Henry Woolcott. He was Town Clerk there from 1857 - 1887 and he lived in "Ivycliffe" (now demolished) on the shores of Berrys Bay. This street was known as Horace Street at one time (the continuation of Woolcott Street across Bay Road is still called Horace Street).

Waverton Park

The entrance gates to the Park, The Geraghty Gates, located at the corner of Larkin and Woolcott Streets, commemorate the late James Geraghty MLA who helped to save this parcel of land for open space, in conjunction with the Waverton Progress Association. The land set aside as public recreation to include a bowling green and childrens' playground, was dedicated in 1944 and opened by the Premier, Hon. W J McKell. The foreshore area of this park, where the playing fields are located today, is mostly reclaimed mud flat. The area which is now a beautiful North Sydney parkland was used for many years as a tip by North

Sydney Council - as were many of our parks prior to modern concerns of contamination and environmental protection. To create the Park and form the greens, fill from the Oyster Cove Gas Works was used. However, this filling soon required replacement when the gases from the fill ignited and smoke was seen coming out of the ground.

In March 1923, the Mayor, Alderman Clark, sought:

"to secure the dedication to the Council of Berry's Bay to low water mark for the purpose of a Park and Recreation ground ... it is well known to the Aldermen that Victoria Ward is without a park or reserve of any kind and it appears to me that this is a most convenient spot, and would prove useful for recreative purposes, besides beautifying the locality which at low tide is anything but an attractive part of the harbour."

To Finish the Walk

Return to Waverton Station via Woolcott Street and Bay Road or walk east along Woolcott Street under the railway bridge and into Union Street to continue your walk around the streets and parks of North Sydney. From Union you will be able to walk further east to Milsons Point Station (crossing Blues Point Road and walking along Lavender Street turning right into Alfred Street) or you can choose to walk north up Blues Point Road to Blue Street and North Sydney Station.

RESOURCES HELD AT STANTON LIBRARY

Down the Bay: the changing foreshores of
North Sydney.

North Sydney Council, 1997

North Sydney 1788-1988,

M. Jones, North Sydney Council, 1988

C. Sparks, "The BP Site at Berry's Bay",
North Shore Historical Society Journal,
Vol 38, No 1, April 1998, pp5-10 and
"William George Mathews", North Shore
Historical Society Journal, Vol 39, No 1,
April 1999, pp4-10

Draft Waverton Peninsula Conservation
Management Plan,

Godden Mackay Logan, 2000

Face of North Sydney - Image Database

Hands Across Time: A Guide to North
Sydney's Aboriginal History and Culture,

North Sydney Council, 1998

Merle Coppell Oral History Collection

Naming North Sydney

1996

Walk No 4

North Shore Historical Society

Heritage Database

North Sydney Council

To check the availability of research material on this subject Stanton Library book catalogue is now on the Internet at <http://203.111.117.216/webcat.html>

These notes were compiled for Heritage Week 2000. For further details or information contact North Sydney Council Historian on 9936- 8411