

North Sydney History Walks

Milsons Point and Lavender Bay





North Sydney History Walks

North Sydney has a remarkable number of beautiful and interesting historical sites to visit, despite the many changes that affected the area in the 20th century and the ongoing pressure of development in more recent times.

These maps were created with the aim of introducing locals and visitors to the history of North Sydney, and in the belief that walking a landscape is the best way to get to know it. The focus is on architecture, even more than people and events, for buildings provide the most accessible means of interacting directly with the past. They survive where most other examples of 'material culture' from the past – steam trains, corsets and gaslights for example – do not. Looking at the design and detail of a building and understanding it in its environment can provide insights into how people lived, what they thought and how things have changed. Of course, knowing who lived there can also be fascinating.

These are 'circle walks' which will bring the walker back to, or near to, the point of departure. The closest public transport access points, bus, train or ferry, are indicated. Public toilets are also marked. Walkers are of course urged to cross roads at dedicated crossing points or otherwise take due care. Take water, sturdy shoes and sun-protection. An indication of accessibility, degree of difficulty and length is given for each walk. North Sydney's hilly topography means that not all walks are entirely wheel chair or pram accessible. The presence of steps is also indicated.

These walks were researched and plotted by North Sydney Council Historian Dr Ian Hoskins with the assistance of Historical Services Staff. Susan Wade of the North Shore Historical Society provided valuable suggestions. We also would like to acknowledge the work of Bill Orme and Graham Spindler in promoting walking in North Sydney, and thank Sydways for permission to use their maps.

For more information on North Sydney's history visit the Heritage Centre, Level 1, Stanton Library, 234 Miller Street North Sydney, visit the website www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au or email localhistory@northsydney.nsw.gov.au



Milsons Point and Lavender Bay

Length: 1.8 kms

Difficulty: Easy but there are steps

Introduction:

Few areas have undergone such upheaval as Milsons Point. A main transport hub from the 1860s to the 1930s with Alfred Street a vibrant commercial and residential thoroughfare, it was dramatically affected by the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge from 1924-1932. The transformation changed Alfred Street but created three of Sydney's most enduring icons: the Bridge, the North Sydney Olympic Pool and Luna Park. Alfred Street became a street of modern office blocks, then a place of apartment towers when Harbourside residential property prices soared from the 1980s. Neighbouring Lavender Bay, called *Gooweebahree (Quiberee)* by the Cammeraygal people who drank the fresh water there, had its own transformation, from a bustling cove of boatbuilders, swimmers and waterfront villas in the late 1800s and early 1900s to scruffy backwater, then a gentrified haunt of artists.

This walk will help you explore the transition of Milsons Point and Lavender Bay and the thread of art and design that connects the two areas.

1) **Milsons Point station**

This is the third train station built at Milsons Point. The two previous stations were located on the foreshore of Lavender Bay from 1893 until the completion of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932.

2) ***Dind's Hotel site***

William Dind ran a hotel on this corner from as early as 1858. It was the second hotel on Alfred Street. By the end of the century there were four. *Dind's Hotel* was originally a single storey bungalow. A second two-storey building was completed in the early 1900s. It was immortalised in a poem of the same name by Henry Lawson shortly before he died in 1922: '...At *Dind's Hotel* / for those were days of sin / Six horsemen drank the Old Year out and drank the New Year in...' The hotel was demolished in 1938 and the site became a bowling green.

3) ***Camden Villa / Camden House*** (Inside Milson Village)

Built in 1864, *Camden Villa* is one of the oldest surviving houses in North Sydney. It was once a prominent structure on the rise above Lavender Bay with views up and down the Harbour. The house was designed in the Georgian style which characterised much of Sydney's early colonial architecture. Residents included the wool broker Paul Talbot. It was converted to flats in 1908. The house was included in North Sydney Council's first Heritage Inventory in 1981. Construction of the surrounding buildings was permitted on the condition that the building be restored. Its retention in 1986 was an extraordinary engineering feat. The result, however, is a building completely overshadowed with its context erased.

4) **Luna Park arch**

The original Luna Park arch was erected in October 1935 to welcome amusement park visitors as they headed down from the train station. North Sydney Council approved its installation in gratitude for the employment provided by the Park during the Great Depression. The arch was designed in the Inter-War Art Deco style which emphasized the contemporary American character of the amusement park. Having fallen into disrepair, the sign was dismantled in 2006 but rebuilt in 2016.

5) **22-26a and 26-28 Alfred Street**

These terrace houses are all that remain of Alfred Street's pre-Bridge residential street front. Nos 22 to 26a were built in 1901. The brick and timber detailing is typical of Federation-era architecture and differs from the filigree ironwork and rendered exteriors of Sydney's famous 19th century terrace houses. Nos 26 and 28, much altered, were built in 1895 in a grander Italianate-style.

6) **Site of *Lily of St Leonards* hotel**

The *Lily of St Leonards* hotel stood here from as early as 1844. Its name referred to the township of St Leonards (present-day North Sydney) established in 1838. The *Lily* was the first pub encountered by those heading up from the ferry at the end of Alfred Street. Renamed the *Imperial* in the early 1900s, it was frequented by Sydney Harbour Bridge workers. Business dropped with the Bridge opening in 1932 and the *Imperial* was demolished in 1949, along with

several decrepit houses behind, to build public housing. It became a small park. The site was incorporated into the North Sydney Olympic Pool in 2022.

7) Sydney Harbour Bridge, North Sydney Olympic Pool and Luna Park

The construction of the Bridge transformed this part of North Sydney. The area taken by the Bridge was once filled with densely developed streets. Demolitions cut the population and destroyed a once vibrant commercial precinct. When the Bridge was completed, the sites of the waterfront workshops were filled by Luna Park in 1935 and the Olympic Pool in 1936. The Pool was used for the 1938 Empire Games – forerunner to the Commonwealth Games – and was the site of 86 world swimming records from the 1950s to the 1970s. The original Pool entrance is stylistically similar to the Bridge pylons though its severity is relieved by the playful friezes featuring frogs. Luna Park and the Pool turned Milsons Point into a recreational waterfront. The Pool was extensively redeveloped in 2022.

8) Luna Park entrance

The Luna Park face has been a Harbour landmark since 1935. In 1953 resident artist Arthur Barton created a welcoming smile which remained on subsequent renovations. The pylons are an original feature and were modelled on the Chrysler Tower and is an obvious reference to the Park's American inspiration; Luna Park on Coney Island in New York.

9) Michael Leunig memorial to Luna Park fire

This sculpture was designed by artist Michael Leunig and features his well-known character, Mr Curly. It is a memorial to the seven people killed when the Ghost Train caught fire in 1979. The bronze figure was cast by fellow artist Peter Kingston.

10) Peter Kingston Walkway

Peter Kingston moved to Lavender Bay in the 1970s when he worked as an artist at Luna Park with Martin Sharp. In 2002 he cast and installed a series of small statues commemorating characters from Australian popular culture such as Blinky Bill the koala and aspects of local history such as a Hegarty's ferry. The Walkway was so-named in 2018.

11) Ferry wharf and site of baths

The Lavender Bay ferry wharf was opened in 1871. By 1906 services were running every 10 minutes at peak hour. The Bridge dramatically affected the viability of the ferry companies but Hegarty's continued to operate ferries between Circular Quay and Lavender Bay until 2003. To the east of the wharf were the Lavender Bay Baths. Public bathing had occurred here as early as the 1860s when popular action secured right of access to the tidal beach against the wishes of the landowner James Milson. A bathing enclosure was established in the early 1880s by Frederick Cavill. When the train line destroyed the beach, an enclosed wooden structure was built. Dick Cavill helped to develop the 'Australian crawl' freestyle stroke here. With the completion of the Olympic Pool use of the Baths declined. The remaining structure was demolished in the 1970s.

12) Rail viaduct

This brick viaduct was constructed in 1892-93 as part of the expensive last section of the north shore train line which delivered commuters from St Leonards to the Milsons Point ferry. It is an excellent example of a late Victorian-era public works structure. Brick, as opposed to iron, was probably chosen because of the proximity to the Harbour. Much of the expense was incurred by more than 500 metres of tunnelling and nine other viaducts. After the Bridge opened, this section became a shunting line.

13) Neptune Slipway

The Neptune Engineering and Slipway Co. was the last major boatbuilding yard in Lavender Bay. Operations ended in 1989 after nearly a century. Bob Gordon continued to build wooden boats in the nearby viaduct arch, converted to a workshop, until his death in 2006.

14) *Berowra*

This handsome villa was built in the Victorian Italianate style in 1888 for the local mayor Matthew Charlton next to its 'twin' called *Bugdewoi* which was demolished in the 1980s. It was occupied by the Milsons Point Station Master from 1920 until the nearby station closed with the completion of the Bridge in 1932.

15) **Whiteley House and Garden**

Wendy and Brett Whiteley moved to Lavender Bay in 1970. They rented and then bought the 1908 villa next to the steps which, by then, had been divided into flats. A tower with staircase was built to reconnect the various floors without the need to reinstate internal stairs. Brett completed several iconic paintings of Lavender Bay here in the 1970s. Other artists moved into the neighbouring houses and this became something of an artists' precinct. After Brett's death in 1992, Wendy created a garden out of the weed-ridden area behind the rail viaduct with the help of paid gardeners and volunteers. 'Wendy's Secret Garden' was State-Heritage listed with the house in 2018.

16) **Clark Park**

This park was established after completion of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Much of the area was formerly part of the rear garden of *Brisbane House* which was demolished during the Bridge construction. It was named in honour of long-serving Council alderman EM Clark.

17) **30a Lavender Street**

This extraordinary block of flats was designed by the firm Morrow and De Putron in 1919. The striking Free Classical style makes good use of stone, polychromatic (multi-coloured) brick and concrete. The three huge Tuscan columns are purely decorative.

18) **68 Lavender Street**

Established in 1942 the New South Wales Housing Commission constructed thousands of dwellings in response to the housing shortage following World War Two. *Quiberee*, also the Aboriginal name for Lavender Bay, was built in 1948 and designed by architectural firm Fowell, Mansfield and Maclurcan. It was the first Housing Commission block of flats in North Sydney.

19) **Jessie Broomfield fountain and Clary Akon statue**

When animal lover Jessie Stuart Broomfield died in 1935 she bequeathed funds for the benefit of Sydney's dogs, including the construction of drinking fountains for them. This example, installed in 1953, was one of several erected in Sydney. Clary Akon's 2007 sculpture, *Foxie*, was inspired by Broomfield's bequest.

20) Bradfield Park demolition sites

This part of Alfred Street was once an intensely settled residential and commercial precinct. Dozens of buildings were demolished on the east side of Alfred Street to make way for the Bridge and its curtilage. Signage installed along Bradfield Park north tells more of the story of these properties.

21) 94-98 and 104-108 Alfred Street

Buildings along the west side of Alfred Street have undergone two, sometimes three, incarnations since the building of the Bridge. The commercial and residential tower at Nos 104-108 was designed in 1981 by Feiko Bouman who had a significant impact upon the face of North Sydney through his private commissions and work with Council, including the redesign of North Sydney Oval. Bouman's tower has been altered. Nonetheless it, and No 94-98, can be seen as examples of the postmodern architecture which flourished in Australia, the US and the UK in the late 20th century. This typically used simplified elements of past styles, in this case classicism, to add ornamentation which post-war Modernism had avoided. Note the triangular pediments at the top of the buildings.

22) Congregational Church building

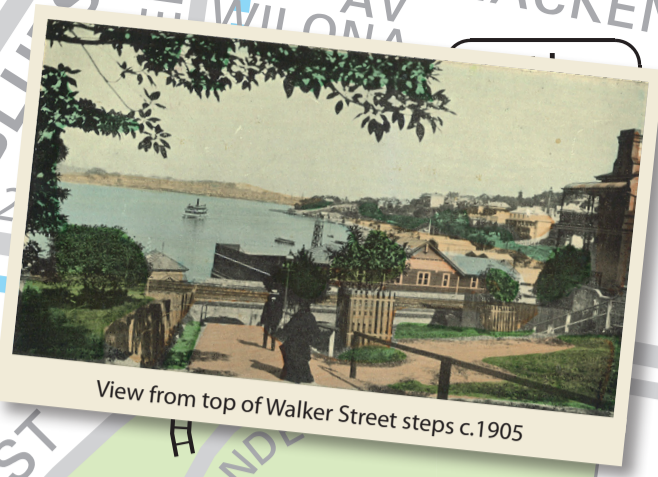
This church was built between 1883 and 1888. Designed by HS Thompson in a Free Gothic style, it contains Gothic elements but does not conform to a strict set of design principles. It is an early example of using brick with stone detail. Before the Bridge was built it was possible to see the Church's spire from Careening Cove to the east. By the late 1960s there were few Congregationalists living locally and the building was bought by Chinese Christians.

23) 84-88 Alfred Street

This was the site of the *Rest Hotel* from the 1890s to the end of the 20th century.

24) 80 Alfred Street

Before North Sydney Council was formed in 1890, the area was divided into three Boroughs. Kirribilli and Milsons Point were part of the East St Leonards Borough. This was the site of the distinctive East St Leonards Town Hall, designed to fit on the triangular block. The building continued as the North Sydney Town Hall until the 1920s. The *Turret Theatre* operated here from 1928 to 1930. The building was demolished in 1968.



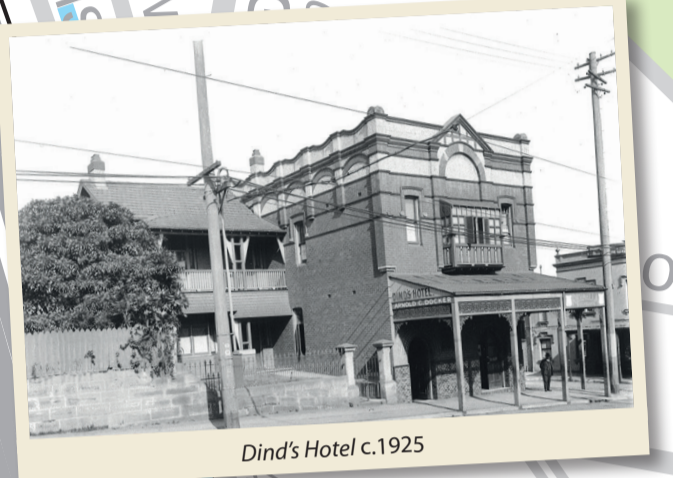
View from top of Walker Street steps c.1905



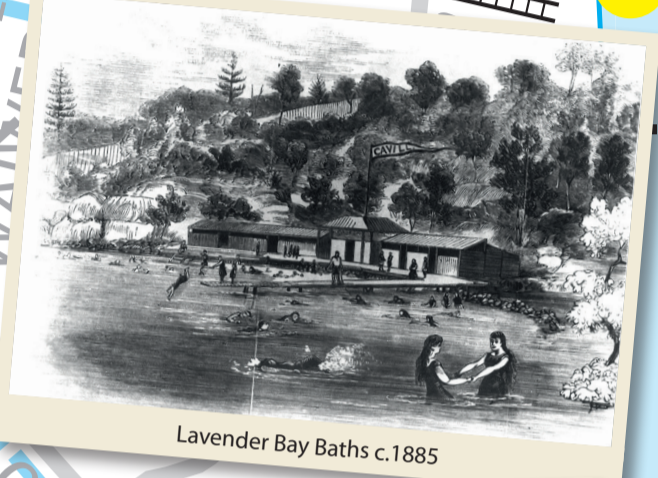
Brisbane House c.1904



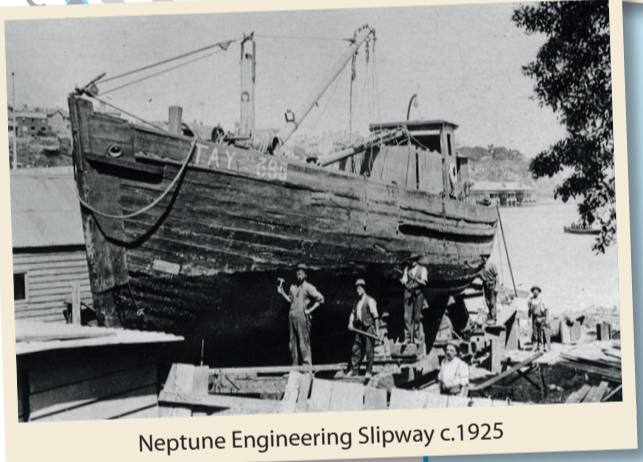
Bradfield Park looking north from Fitzroy Street, 1937



Dind's Hotel c.1925



Lavender Bay Baths c.1885



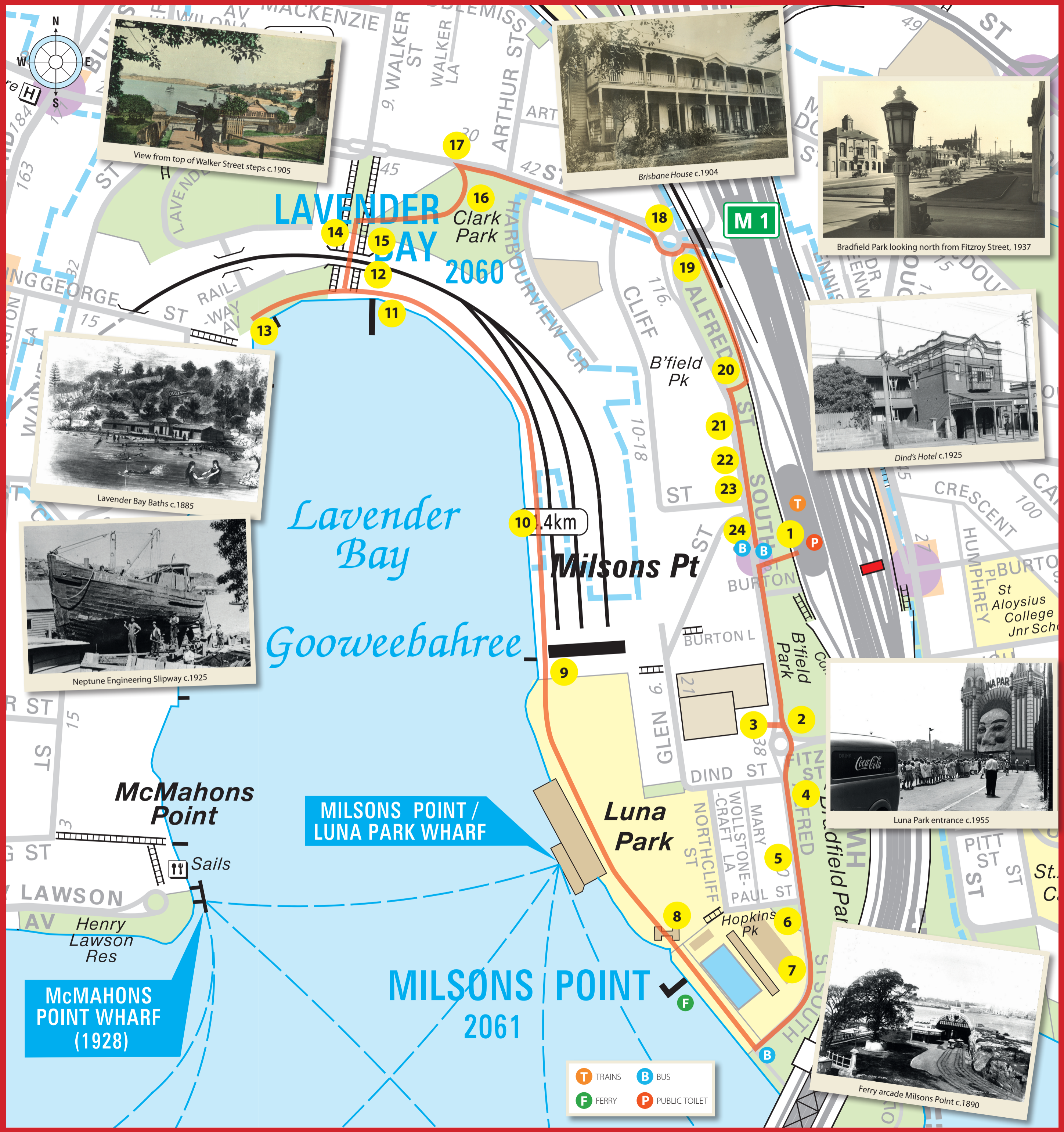
Neptune Engineering Slipway c.1925



Luna Park entrance c.1955



Ferry arcade Milsons Point c.1890



LAVENDER BAY
 2060

Lavender Bay
 Gooweebahree

Milsons Pt

Luna Park

MILSONS POINT
 2061

McMahons Point

MILSONS POINT / LUNA PARK WHARF

McMAHONS POINT WHARF (1928)

- T TRAINS
- B BUS
- F FERRY
- P PUBLIC TOILET