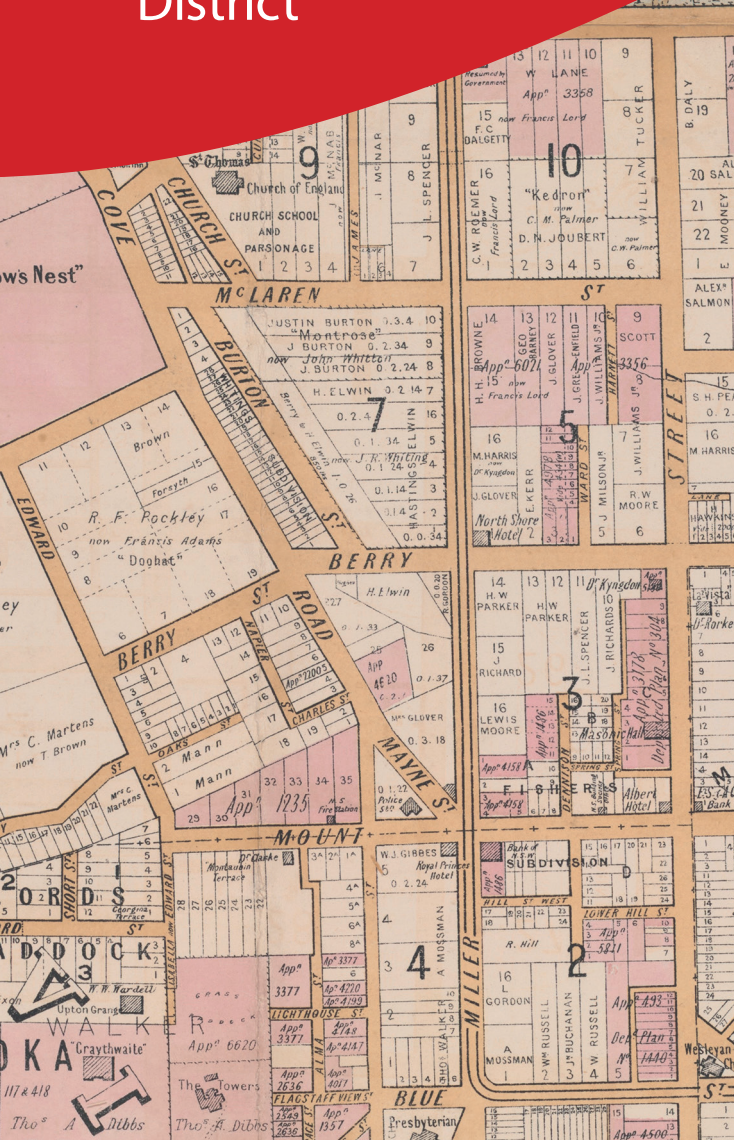


North Sydney History Walks

Central Business District





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



Central Business District

Length: 1.2 kms

Difficulty: Easy with some gradients

Introduction:

The township of St Leonards was gazetted in 1838. Large land grants had already been made to individuals on the west, east and south side of the present-day CBD, but the land roughly from Blue Street north was sold gradually by the 'Crown', or colonial authorities. Crown land was subdivided with a grid street pattern whereas the streets created on private estates in Wollstonecraft, Neutral Bay and Kirribilli, for instance, tended to reflect the existing topography. The central grid once extended north to Cammeray along Miller, Walker and Alfred Streets, before the latter was obliterated by the Warringah Expressway in the 1960s. The grid became the commercial heart of St Leonards, known as North Sydney from 1890. Until the 1960s these streets were lined with a series of two-storey shop dwellings intermingled with the occasional residence, hotels and civic buildings. From 1957 through to the 1980s the entire streetscape of North Sydney was transformed into a CBD of office towers, a twin of the city on the south side. The last 19th century Miller Street shop was demolished for the Sydney Metro in 2018.

This walk will help you explore some of the history of the CBD and its immediate surrounds, identifying the few surviving pre-1950s structures and the sites of some of those long gone.

1) 67-69 Mount Street

Two of the oldest structures in the CBD, these sandstone buildings were once part of a streetscape that included a grocer, bootmaker, baker, tailor and hairdresser. The building dated 1870 was occupied by the butcher John Thompson. The 1855 building was built for the Grand United Order of Oddfellows, a mutual help society. Mount Street was so-named because of its steepness. It is one of the original streets of North Sydney, part of the grid of Crown land blocks. It was home to the area's first Post Office and its first photographer, Dr Robert Ward, in the 1850-60s. The day after the World War One armistice was declared on 11 November 1918, a large parade marched up this street to the beat and tune of a brass band to celebrate the end of fighting.

2) **51 Mount Street**

Architects John Reid and Sons designed this Classical Revival building for the Bank of New South Wales (now Westpac) in 1931. The style was particularly popular with banks for it suggested respectability and security. The Commonwealth Bank built a similar triangular building on the other side of the new concrete road which had just been pushed through an entire block to complete the approach to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Both were designed for their new triangular corner locations.

3) **MLC Building**

The *MLC Building* was the largest office block in Australia when it was completed in 1958. Designed by the Australian architectural firm Bates, Smart and McCutcheon, it is one of the finest examples of the International Modern style in Sydney. Its construction signified the beginning of North Sydney's transition from a low-rise shopping district to a twin CBD. Several street front buildings were demolished to create the set back. The *MLC Building* was given State-heritage protection in 2021.

4) **92-94 Pacific Highway (cnr Mount Street)**

The grand 1889 North Sydney Post Office, and 1886 Police Court behind, were designed by Colonial Architect James Barnet in his signature style with its emphasis on classical elements such as the triangular pediment and arches, or loggia. Barnet was responsible for many of New South Wales' grand civic buildings, post offices and court houses particularly. Barnet's career as the Colonial Architect lasted from 1862 to 1890. North Sydney Post Office was therefore among his last projects. The clock tower was finished in 1895 and the clock installed in 1900 when Walter Liberty Vernon held the job of the colony's top architect. He had formerly been an alderman on St Leonards Council, a forerunner to North Sydney Council.

5) **Victoria Cross (cnr Pacific Highway, Miller and Mount Streets)**

This important five-way junction was called Victoria Cross in 1939 after a public naming competition was held. The name probably came from the municipal ward Victoria. The junction was defined on the corner of Miller and Mount Streets by the landmark *Federal Hotel*, a huge four-storey Victorian-era building. That was replaced in the 1930s by an Art Deco pub called the *Victoria Hotel*. Next door

was North Sydney School of Arts, rebuilt in 1886 after its previous site was taken by the Post Office. The School of Arts was a hub of community life containing a library, billiards and meeting rooms. Conscript meetings were held here during World War One. Both the School of Arts and the *Victoria Hotel* were demolished in the early 1980s. What for a century had been the Lane Cove Road, along the line of an earlier track, became the Pacific Highway after the completion of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932.

6) 7 Mount Street

The *Mary MacKillop Memorial Chapel* is part of the complex of buildings built for the Sisters of St Joseph in the early 20th century. It was designed by Albert Reid and completed in 1914 to house the remains of Sister Mary MacKillop, now Saint Mary MacKillop. She was canonised as Australia's first saint in 2010. Before the 1950s most of Sydney's religious buildings were designed in a Gothic Revival style. Where earlier churches were built entirely of stone, this Chapel combines structural brick, the material of choice at the time, with sculptural sandstone.

7) 9-13 Edward Street

This set of dwellings was built in 1905-06 in the Arts and Crafts style popular around the time of Federation – particularly in North Sydney. The style's delight in different shapes and materials made it ideal for adapting designs to unusually-configured blocks like this one.

8) 40 Edward Street

This was the site of *Rockleigh Grange*, home of Conrad Martens who accompanied Charles Darwin as expedition artist in 1834 on HMS *Beagle*, the famous voyage which provided the observations that informed the theory of evolution. Martens settled in Sydney in 1836 and had built the Gothic stone villa *Rockleigh Grange* in 1844. He used his north shore base to paint and sketch scenes around the harbour. Martens died in 1878. *Rockleigh Grange* was essentially demolished to build a large Arts and Crafts-style home for merchant Francis Larke in 1890-91, although the name 'Rockleigh' remained. The new house was designed by the architect and local resident Edward Jeaffreson Jackson, whose work influenced the development of the 'Federation house' that characterised many of Sydney's early

20th century suburbs. *Rockleigh Grange* was extensively remodelled by the Catholic Church after they bought the property in 1912. It is now a campus of the Australian Catholic University.

9) 2-12 Oak Street

This row of detached and semi-detached houses was built around 1880 for and/or by William Massey who was a storekeeper on Lane Cove Road. All are obviously timber but note the different finishes and detailing which give a sense of individuality to each home. The location of the chimneys gives an indication to the internal layout. The area of North Sydney from here to Berrys Bay has a large number of timber houses, possibly because of the proximity to Eaton's timber yard and the boat yards of the Bay. It is similar in that respect to Balmain, another long established harbour-side suburb.

10) End of Oak Street (6 Napier Street)

Don Bank Cottage/Museum is one of the oldest surviving timber houses anywhere in NSW. It is the oldest in North Sydney. Originally called *St Leonards Cottage* it existed as a four-room dwelling by the late 1840s with a garden that extended to Berry Street. The present-day building was completed by the 1890s. It was home to the White family through much of the 20th century. Thomas was a saddler on the Lane Cove Road. The Whites sold the house to North Sydney Council in 1979 to save it from redevelopment. It was one of the first heritage conservation projects in the area. Don Bank has operated as a museum since 1981.

11) 1-7 Napier Street

This row of cottages was standing by 1892, built of bricks that may have been made at the new Oaks Brick Works in Neutral Bay. Originally only four rooms they therefore compare interestingly with the similarly sized timber cottages in Oak Street. Brick became the main building material from the 1880s.

12) 120 Pacific Highway

This was the site of the White family saddlery. As the main thoroughfare to the north, Lane Cove Road was a perfect location for James and Thomas White's saddlery business. They manufactured collars and reins for the many working

horses which pulled carts before the uptake of motor vehicles in the 1920s. James opened the business here in 1869. His son Thomas sold up and retired in 1945. By then there were very few working horses left and the Lane Cove Road had become the Pacific Highway.

13) Site of Dr Ward's House, Berry Street

Robert Ward was one of the area's first doctors and one of Sydney's most important amateur photographers. His photographs of North Sydney in the 1860s provide a unique record. Ward lived in a large Georgian-style house on the south side of Berry Street between Miller Street and Lane Cove Road from the 1860s to the end of the century.

14) 199 Miller Street

The *Rag and Famish* is the only surviving traditional hotel left in the CBD. The first building on this site, in 1860, was the *Sailor's Return Hotel*. This was taken over by experienced publican Charles Bullivant around 1866. He changed the name to *Rag and Famish*, a reference to the mid-19th century English satirical military characters Ensign Rag and Captain Famish and chosen probably because of Bullivant's experience in the 46th Regiment in Sydney. He took the name with him when he left these premises in 1872-73 and ran a second *Rag and Famish* on the corner of Walker and Mount Street. Bullivant then named his Neutral Bay house, *Rag and Famish*, after retiring around 1875. This pub became the *North Shore Hotel* in 1872-3. It was the *North Star* in the early 1920s, following another change of ownership. In 1982 the hotel again became the *Rag and Famish*. The existing façade survives from 1892 when a new building replaced the 1860 pub which was burned down. It is a classically-derived style. The bricks would have originally been unpainted to contrast with the decorative masonry.

15) North West corner of Walker and Berry Street

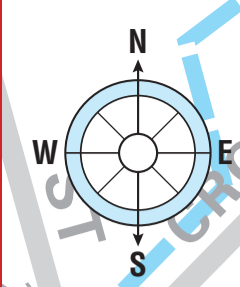
This corner was the site of one of the earliest and largest houses in the area. *Walworth Cottage*, or 'Moore's House' as it was also known, was standing by the mid-1860s as a two-storey stone and slate villa with sweeping views of the harbour. It was replaced by a block of flats in 1914. These were demolished by the end of the century.

16) 86 Walker Street

This was the site of the North Sydney Fire Station which opened in 1895 with the creation of the new professional North Sydney Fire Brigade. Prior to that a volunteer fire brigade operated from a premises in Mount Street and another in Alfred Street. The building was designed in the classical Italianate style which was common to public buildings in the 19th century. It stopped operating as a fire station in 1945. A rare survivor of the high-rise office boom of the 1960s and 1970s, it was converted to a restaurant and bar. The 50-storey tower built above the Fire Station was designed in 2018-19 as North Sydney's tallest building by Fitzpatrick and Partners.

17) 100 Mount Street

Charles Bullivant was operating his second hotel, called the *Rag and Famish*, here in 1873 having left the pub of that name on the corner of Berry and Miller Streets. By 1880 this was called the *Albert Hotel*. It was a handsome two storey building with Italianate features. Like many local hotels the *Albert* was a venue for community meetings as well as a place to buy a drink and find accommodation. Inquests were held here, as were political meetings. Election campaigns for local members, and colonial premiers, George Dibbs and Henry Parkes were discussed here in the 1880s. The 19th century building was replaced by an Art Deco style hotel around 1932. That was demolished in 1982 and replaced shortly after by *Alberts Tavern*. The present 35 storey building, designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill [SOM], was completed in 2019. Established in the 1930s, SOM were pioneers of Modernist office building design in the USA.



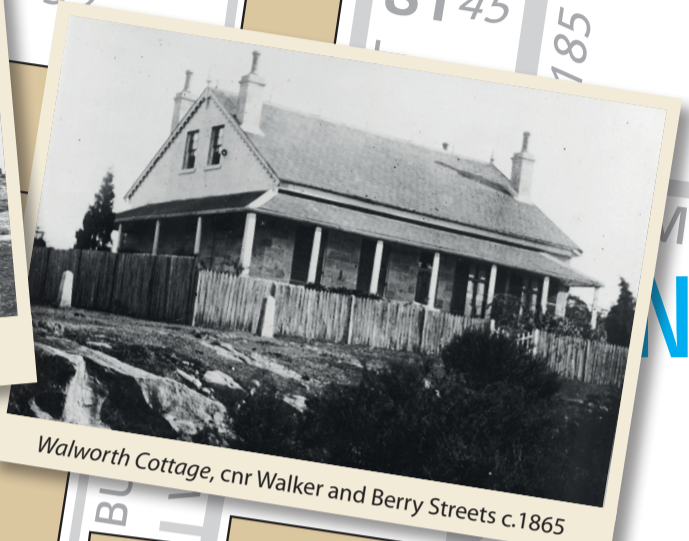
WAVERTON 2060



Dr Ward's House, Berry Street c.1865



The first Rag and Famish Hotel, c.1865. Looking east along Berry Street

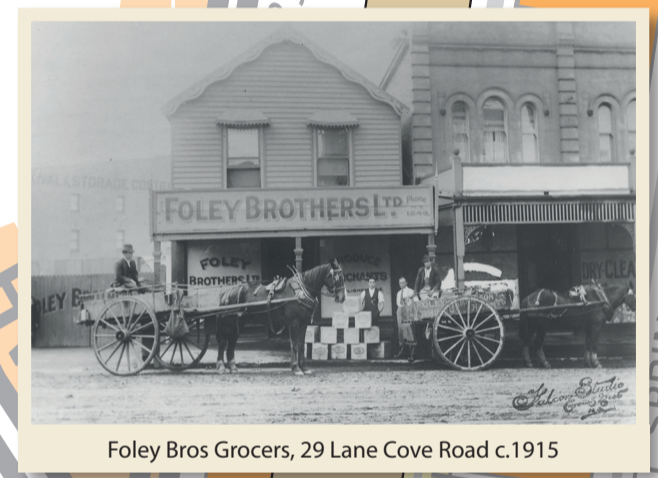


Walworth Cottage, cnr Walker and Berry Streets c.1865



Rockleigh Grange c.1900

Australian Catholic University MacKillop Campus



Foley Bros Grocers, 29 Lane Cove Road c.1915



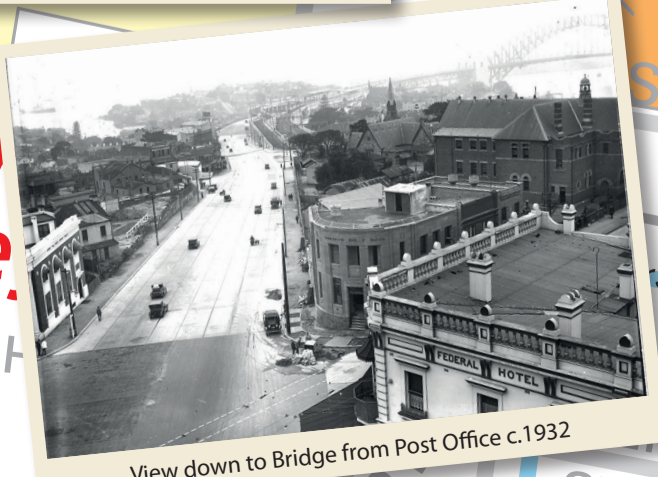
James and Thomas White and saddlery shop c.1915



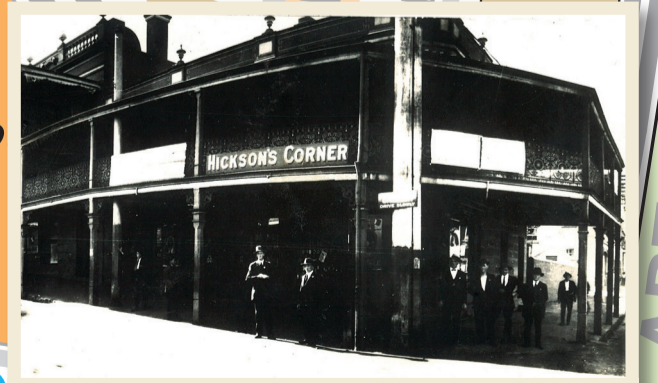
View up Lane Cove Road c.1932



Armistice Day Celebrations, Post Office steps Nov. 1918



View down to Bridge from Post Office c.1932



The Albert Hotel, cnr Mount and Walker Streets c.1920

North Sydney

North Sydney

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

