North Sydney History Walks

Old North Sydney

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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

Old North Sydney

Length: 1.5 kms

Difficulty: Easy – includes a set of stairs

Introduction:

North Sydney has been home to some of the wealthiest people in the city and some of its poorest. The buildings in and around Lord, Euroka, Ancrum, Bank and Union streets are evidence of this social divide. On top of the ridge are grand stone-built *Graythwaite* and *Upton Grange* while below are the narrow streets and houses of the old Euroka Estate. Writer and poet Henry Lawson, who fondly described 'Old North Sydney' and its community, knew this area well. He lived alongside the families of stonemasons, carpenters and mariners. But life could be hard. In 1956 the *Sydney Morning Herald* referred to Ancrum Street as one of several Sydney addresses in which it was 'hard to live' and 'easy to die'. However, by the 1970s gentrification had begun to transform the demographic of the area. The newcomers restored rather than demolished the old dwellings. Much of it is now protected as a Conservation Area that sits partly in the suburbs of North Sydney, Waverton and McMahons Point.

This walk will help you explore some of North Sydney's oldest timber and stone dwellings and some of its most evocative streets.

1) 22 Edward Street

This large sandstone house was called *Upton Grange* when built for Francis and Sarah Hixson in 1871 on land owned by Sarah's father Francis Lord, wealthy merchant, politician and himself son of Simeon Lord, one of the colony's most successful ex-convict businessman. It was originally freestanding on a large lot. Shore School, established across the road in 1885, acquired this land and built the adjoining building in the 1930s. Hixson was a ship's captain and the President of the Marine Board. Renowned architect William Wardell lived here from 1880 to 1899. He was designer of St Mary's Cathedral in the city - the first stage of which was built between 1866 and 1900.

2) 20 Edward Street

Graythwaite is the best surviving example in North Sydney of a grand 19th century home in its garden context. The existing Italianate-style two-storey stone house with its balcony was built by banker Thomas Dibbs in the 1880s. The remains of a pre-existing house called *Euroka* and out-

houses can be seen at the rear. Some of this structure may date to the 1830s when the first owner Thomas Walker, after whom Walker Street is named, built his home here. Edwin Mawney Sayers bought the house and estate in the 1850s and subdivided some of the adjoining land known as the Euroka Estate. Thomas Dibbs acquired the property in the 1870s and leased it to his brother George, the some-time colonial Premier. He subdivided more of the surrounding Euroka Estate. In 1915, after 30 years of residency, Dibbs gave the property to the State Government to be run as a convalescent home for soldiers returned from World War One. The Red Cross ran the facility as a home until 1980 when it became a geriatric hospital. By the early 2000s it was clear that the buildings were no longer adequate. A community campaign to keep *Graythwaite* in public ownership failed when Shore School bought the property in 2009 for $32.5 million. The house is now an administrative building and a museum.

3) **48-52 Lord Street**

This set of three terrace houses was built in 1904. It represents the last expression of terraced housing before the revival of the form, sometimes called townhouses, in the late 20th century. In terms of design, these dwellings are transitional. They feature the iron lace so characteristic of 19th century terrace houses but are finished in un-rendered brick in the manner of most dwellings of the early 1900s. The difference between these and the adjoining terraces is obvious.

4) **40-46 Lord Street**

Called *Georgina Terrace*, this set of four dwellings was built in 1883 for a single owner. They were bought and rented out by North Sydney medical doctor and pioneering photographer, Robert Ward, in 1887. By 1905 all *Georgina Terrace* and Nos 48-52 were owned by Peter McManus and rented out. Owner occupation was rare in the 19th and early 20th century.

5) **32-38 Lord Street**

This set of single storey terrace houses was built in 1882. Simply styled with symmetrical frontages but without much ornamentation, they are late examples of the Georgian style that was once widespread in Sydney. All probably had front fences with flower gardens. They are made from rendered brick rather than stone. All had iron roofs.

6) Lord Street steps

The view from the top of the steps gives a good idea of the topography of the area and the elevation of *Graythwaite* and *Upton Grange*. Note also the density and variety of the settlement. The steps and the pathway below were originally surveyed as part of Lord Street.

7) 74-76 Bank Street

Now a single house, this was originally a pair of semi-detached dwellings. They were built in 1896 for, and probably by, builder Thomas Cranshaw on vacant land.

8) 61 Bank Street

This shop dwelling house was built on an empty lot on the Lords Paddock Estate in 1883. For at least 30 years it operated as a butcher shop. The timber façade is possibly not original. Most were stone or brick by this period.

9) 70 Bank Street

Avon Cottage was built on an undeveloped Euroka Estate lot in 1893 by carpenter David Bennett. It was acquired by the War Service Homes Commission in the 1920s to provide accommodation for the family of a returned World War One soldier.

10) 66-68 Bank Street

These semi-detached dwellings were built around 1890. The highly respected ferry skipper Captain Almar Bridge lived with his family in No.68 until 1907. When Almar died in 1923, after 47 years on the Harbour, flags on Sydney's ferries were flown at half mast.

11) 64 Bank Street

This timber and iron house was built for, and possibly by, stonemason William Gaff in 1879. He was one of several masons in Bank Street but perhaps chose timber over stone because of the expense. No. 64 is one of the oldest surviving timber houses in the area.

12) 50 Bank Street

This Victorian Georgian style cottage was built for, and probably by, stonemason James North in 1876. The iron lace and palisade fence are probably original. The roof is consistent with the original design.

13) 42 Bank Street

Two-storey timber houses are unusual in Sydney, although there are several in this area. This dwelling was built around 1891.

14) 29 Bank Street

Montrose was built for David Gardyne in 1883 and probably named after the town of Montrose in Scotland. Mobility was a feature of life in North Sydney in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and people rarely owned or stayed in the same house for longer than five years. Gardyne, by contrast, lived in *Montrose* until 1913.

15) Railway line

The construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge from 1924-1932 entailed the rerouting of the north shore train line. A tunnel was dug beneath the gardens of *Graythwaite* on the east side of Bank Street. Several dozen homes were demolished to create the train line from the west side. The construction caused years of noise and dust and upheaval.

16) 27-29 Ancrum Street

Alfred Schoer, 'The Rissole King', was already an established pie and sausage maker in North Sydney when he opened a smallgoods factory here in the 1920s. Much of it was destroyed by a fire in 1926. Maxco Industries made electric lamps here in the 1930s. The company name is still visible above the door.

17) 31 Ancrum Street

This Victorian Georgian cottage was standing by 1885. It was built for, and possibly by, the stonemason Jonathon Hepburn.

18) Tye Park

This 'pocket park' was created on two vacant lots in the early 2000s. No. 35 once accommodated a two storey dwelling. No. 33 was always vacant. Given the intense development in these streets there were few other opportunities to create playgrounds.

19) 37 Ancrum Street

This was a knitting factory as early as 1916 and a clothing factory run by Colorado Apparel in the 1950s. It was still listed as a factory in the mid-1970s but was converted to a residence shortly after as gentrification of the area began.

20) Euroka Street

This street obviously takes its name from the Euroka Estate and EM Sayers' large house on the hill. Henry Lawson lived in Nos 21, 26, 28, 30 and 31 over various years in the early 1900s. His 1915 poem 'Kiddies Land' described the lives of children of this and neighbouring streets. Because of its steepness, Euroka Street was a favourite run for billycarts. Two storey timber houses such as those at Nos 40-44 are unusual for Sydney and may be explained by the access to timber at Eaton's Timber yard in nearby Berrys Bay. They date to around 1890. The sandstone terraces at Nos 7-9 were built around 1893. Lawson was photographed outside No. 5 Euroka Street, which still stands, probably around 1915.

21) 20-28 Union Street

The set of large terrace houses, called *Euroka Terrace*, was built in 1880 for mariner Captain James Monro. Their size contrasts markedly from the nearby dwellings in Bank, Ancrum and Euroka Streets.

22) 34-40 Union Street

Sayers Terrace was built around 1864 and represents one of the first subdivisions of the Euroka Estate, named obviously after EM Sayers. It may have been built by the local master mason John Jago who was an early resident. From 1864 to 1869 No. 36 was home to PF Adams the Deputy Surveyor-General of the colony. The buildings were extensively restored around 2010.

23) 77-79 Union Street

This remarkable multi-storey semi-detached dwelling was built in 1905-06. The architect or builder is unknown but the design exemplifies the celebration of variation which was a characteristic of the period. Note the many shapes and building materials used.

24) 44 Union Street

Kailoa was built in 1885 for the Dibbs family who also owned *Graythwaite* at the top of the hill. Shore School bought the property in 1966 and a decade later proposed to demolish it to build a tennis court. In 1980 a community and Council campaign to save the house led to a Green Ban being placed by the Builders Labourers Federation, which had earlier prevented the redevelopment of the Rocks. Permanent heritage protection was subsequently won.

25) 111 Union Street

Built around 1884 as a single storey dwelling, *Constitution Cottage* was home to John Blue until his death in 1891. John was the youngest son of Billy Blue. He ran the *Commodore Hotel* nearby. The second floor on No.111 was added much later in the 20th century giving the building the feel of an early 19th century Regency-style villa.

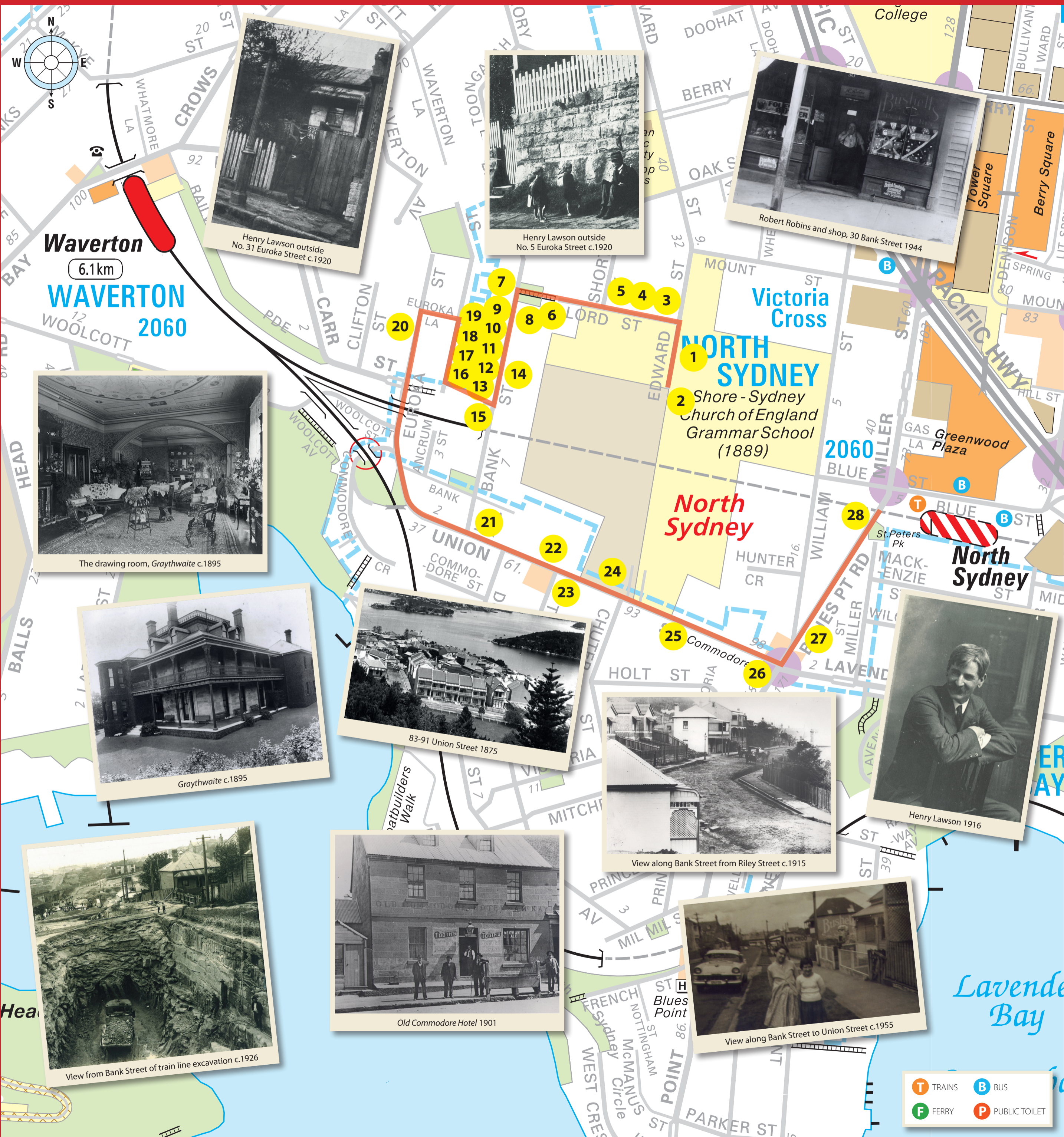### 26) Cnr of Union Street and Blues Point Road

The present *Commodore Hotel* is the fourth pub to occupy this site. The first called both the *Billy Blue Inn* and the *Commodore Hotel* was built in 1848. Billy Blue had been granted the entire peninsula to Blues Point in 1817. His nickname was the Old Commodore. That first hotel was demolished in 1901 to be replaced by another which lasted until 1938. That building survived until 1973 when it too was demolished and replaced by the *Old Commodore Tavern* which subsequently underwent refurbishments.
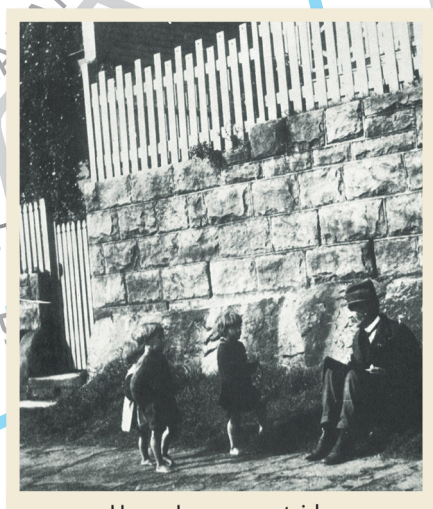
27) 177 Blues Point

St. Peter's Presbyterian School Hall was opened in 1893. Note the decorative use of different coloured or polychromatic brickwork for effect. The Gaelic motto reads: 'And yet it was not consumed', a reference to Moses' encounter with God and a burning bush in Exodus 3:2. The North Shore Historical Society was founded at a meeting in this hall in 1958, prompted by the proposed demolition of the house *Bell'vue* to make way for *Blues Point Tower* at the southern end of this road. The sandstone school behind dates to 1864.
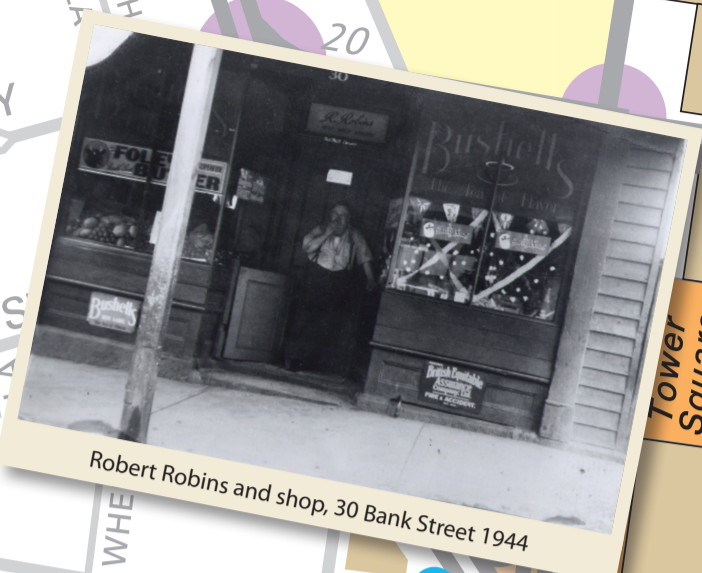
28) 218-220 Blues Point Road

St Peter's Presbyterian Church is the oldest surviving church in North Sydney. The first stage of the church was erected in 1866. The building was enlarged in 1881, and again in 1885 to accommodate the new Maley, Young and Oldknow organ imported from London. The Manse next door was built in 1871. Henry Lawson, who lived for a period in nearby William Street, wrote his poem 'Black Bonnet' in 1916 after watching an elderly female parishioner walking to and from St Peter's.

N W E S

Waverton
6.1km
WAVERTON
2060

CROWS ST
WHATMORE LA
RAIL
WHARKS
WOOLCOTT
HEAD
BAY
BALLS HEAD
PDE
CARR ST
CLIFTON ST
WOOLCOTT AV
COMMODORE
WOOLCOTT
ANCRUM ST
EUROKA ST
EUROKA LA
WAVERTON AV
WAVERTON LA
TONGA LA
TONGA
SHORE
OAK ST
BERRY ST
WHE ST
DOOHAT AV
DOOHAT ST
PACIFIC ST
College
BULLIVANT ST
WARD
Tower Square
Berry Square
DENISON ST
SPRING ST
MOUNT ST
MOUNT ST
EDWARD ST
LORD ST
BANK ST
UNION ST
COMMODORE ST
CR
MITCHELL ST

Victoria Cross
NORTH SYDNEY
Shore - Sydney Church of England Grammar School (1889)
North Sydney
2060
BLUE ST
HUNTER CR
WILLIAM ST
MILLER ST
MACKENZIE ST
MILES PT RD
St.Peters Pk
North Sydney
PACIFIC HWY
GAS LA
Greenwood Plaza
HILL ST

Commodore
HOLT ST
VICTORIA ST
CHUTER ST
PRINCE ST
WEST CRES
MITCHELL ST
FRENCH ST
Blues Point
Boatbuilders Walk
H
PRINCE AV
MIL MIL
SYDNEY ST
NOTTINGHAM ST
McMANUS ST
Circle
POINT ST
PARKER ST
Lavender Bay
ER BAY

7 5 4 3
19 9 8 6
20 18 10 1
17 11 2
16 12 14
13
15
21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28

Henry Lawson outside No. 31 Euroka Street c.1920

Henry Lawson outside No. 5 Euroka Street c.1920

Robert Robins and shop, 30 Bank Street 1944
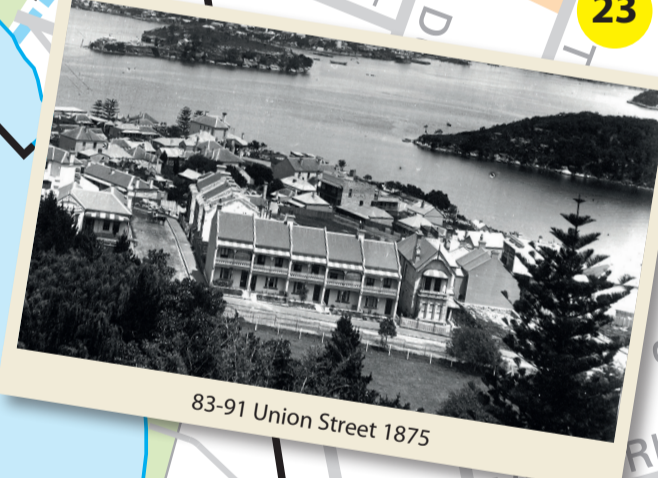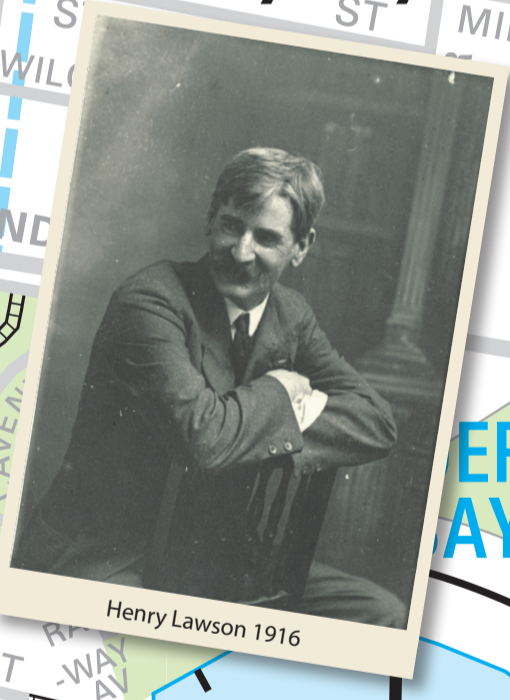

The drawing room, Graythwaite c.1895
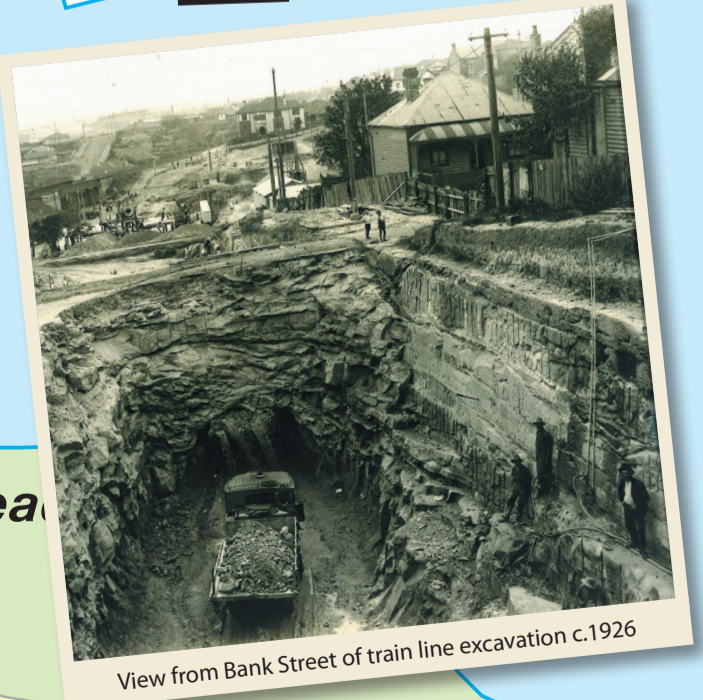

Graythwaite c.1895

83-91 Union Street 1875

Henry Lawson 1916
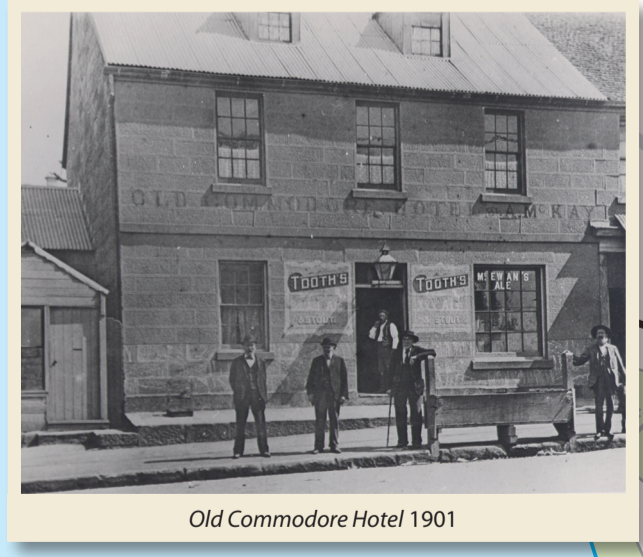

View along Bank Street from Riley Street c.1915

View from Bank Street of train line excavation c.1926

Old Commodore Hotel 1901

View along Bank Street to Union Street c.1955

T TRAINS   B BUS
F FERRY   P PUBLIC TOILET