



North Sydney

Heritage Leaflet

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IVYCLIFF

Ivycliff was a substantial two-storey gothic style sandstone residence that once occupied the present day flat area on the eastern flank of Waverton Park below present day Commodore Crescent. Ivycliff's original presentation was to Berrys Bay with the original steps that gave access to the dwelling still leading into the park from Commodore Crescent. Below the house on the waterfront was a rock swimming pool, stone built jetty and a boathouse.

The Building of Ivycliff

Charles Henry Woolcott purchased lots 1-5 sec E of the Blues Estate in 1858. However it would appear that the house was commissioned by him and built by 1865, as in 1866 he advertised the house for auction:

That delightfully situated WATERSIDE VILLA known as IVY CLIFF, at the head of BLUE'S BAY... The house is most substantially built of stone, and contains hall, six good rooms, kitchen, laundry, servant's room, store etc. There is a verandah 60 feet by 8 feet on the western, and a balcony with two porches on the southern end of the house...the internal work is of picked cedar, and no expense has been spared in completing it as a comfortable residence, replete with every family convenience.

It is possible that no suitable offer was received for the purchase of Ivycliff and hence Charles Woolcott remained owner and occupant of the home until his death in 1905.

Charles Woolcott and Ivycliff

Charles Henry Woolcott, Town Clerk of Sydney, lived in Redfern until 1864, when it is believed that he moved into Ivycliff. He joined the City of Sydney Council as a clerk to the city treasurer in 1843 and held various positions, including draughtsman to the city surveyor and secretary to the Mayor before becoming assistant town clerk. He became town clerk in 1857 and served a record 44 years on the council, he resigned in March 1887.

Whilst living at Ivycliff Charles Woolcott rowed daily across the harbour to attend his duties at City of Sydney Council. He continued to reside at Ivycliff until his death in August 1905 at 83 years of age. His wife Helen stayed on in the house after his death. After her own death in January 1910 their daughter Mary Bayly retained ownership of the house. At this time the property was advertised for auction in the Sydney Morning Herald as a "water frontage residence, built of Stone (in main) and Weatherboard, and containing 9 rooms, kitchen, laundry, bathroom, pantry and other offices".

She leased it out to a succession of tenants, the most notorious being William James Chidley, philosopher with unconventional theories on sex, diet and clothing, who reportedly sunbathed naked with his followers upon the lawns at the rear of the house (with followers) in full view of trains passing by.

The Fraser Family at Ivycliff

Alexander Fraser and his family moved into Ivycliff from Experiment Farm Cottage, Parramatta in 1914. Daughter Helen Hey-Cunningham recalls "Ivycliff was a lovely home facing the water in Berrys Bay with large gables and many rooms". She particularly remembers that at the entrance there was a coloured glass door facing a tiled verandah with iron posts and also the wooden staircase and doors in the house were all cedar.

A famous visitor to Ivycliff in this period was Australian artist James R Jackson. Helen recalls that the artist:

...came often with his model to take our rowing boat into the water and paint. The model had a red umbrella and the painting is in the Sydney Art Gallery. Mr Jackson entrusted me with the painting which was huge – I kept it in the laundry.

The work she recalls may be *Lady with parasol* painted in 1914 and held in the National Gallery of Australia.

Development of Waverton Park

In 1920 the North Sydney Council commenced negotiations with the State Government for the dedication of land at the head of Berrys Bay for public reservation.

In the meantime William and Alice Scholes purchased the property from estate agent John Yelverton Mills in 1925, at which time the Daily Telegraph described it as a:

2-storey stone residence, containing on ground floor, verandah, hall, drawing and dining room, large room (24x12), maid's room, kitchen, pantry, laundry, bathroom. 1st floor, 4 bedrooms. Land in area about 1 acre, 14p...with large frontage to Berry's Bay.

When William died in 1935, Alice retained ownership of the property, but she must shortly afterwards have become an inmate of a mental asylum, as 'The Master In Lunacy' Department thereafter supervised finances and property holdings on her behalf.

In 1943 the Government dedicated 5 acres of land for public reservation at the head of Berrys Bay below Woolcott Avenue. In the same year the further 1-acre immediately adjoining this area to the east (Ivycliff house and land) was resumed from the Estate of Miss Alice Scholes.

The house was demolished, sometime between 1939 and 1942 and the site of the house and its former gardens were absorbed into the newly created reserve, named Waverton Park.

Archaeological dig on site of Ivycliff

In 1988 the Bicentenary in North Sydney was celebrated and commemorated by a variety of events and activities in North Sydney. One project undertaken by the Bicentennial Committee was the archaeological excavation of Ivycliff. Earlier, in 1985, David Earle, wrote that *"the significance of this archaeological site is in the remains of an architecturally important house and garden of a historically important personage, of more than local relevance to the establishment of local government in Sydney and Australia"*.

Proposed redevelopment works in Waverton Park promised to disturb the archaeological integrity and significance of the rectangular mound site which contained visible sandstone. A team of professional archaeologists, led by Denis Gojak, established the layout of the building, including the footings, and the location of internal walls.

The excavation was assisted by a number of volunteers who worked long and hard both at the site and behind the scenes. In particular, the dig was fortunate to have as one of its volunteers, Clive H. Woolcott, the grandson of Charles H. Woolcott. Clive worked on the site for three days and brought with him a number of family heirlooms of which copies were made for Stanton Library's Local Studies Collection. The artefacts from the site are stored in Council's Archives. The North Sydney Heritage Centre also holds photographs and other material on both the residence and the Woolcott family.

North Sydney Heritage Centre

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