



# FROM TRACK TO TARMAC

**A Walking Tour of Blues Point  
Road, McMahons Point**



## INTRODUCTION

Blues Point Road began life as a dirt track from Billy Blue's 'Northampton Farm' to the Township of St. Leonards. At that time, the north shore was a remote and largely unpopulated district, and the only means of communication with the main colony on the south shore was to hire the services of a waterman for the trip across the water.

In 1817 William Blue received 80 acres 'free from all taxes, quit rents and other acknowledgements for the space of five years from the date thereof' on the North Shore. He named his property 'Northampton Farm' and moved here with his wife and six children. At the same time he was appointed official ferryman to the north side and commenced a regular rowing service between his farm and Dawes Point.

Following 'the Old Commodore's' death in 1834, Billy's eldest son William continued to ply a ferry between Blues Point and Sydney, thus confirming Blues Point Road's status as the most important commuting route on the North Shore. Soon after Blues Point Road was officially gazetted in 1839, William junior died, bringing about the first subdivision of the Estate and the beginnings of the present suburb of McMahons Point.

Various shops and businesses, several hotels, a school and church were established along this thoroughfare to service the needs of the commuting public. By the 1870s the bulk of the North Shore population was located in the vicinity of Blues Point Road close to ferry wharves and transport to Sydney. Blues Point remained the principal landing place for most of the North Shore passengers until 1886 when the main ferry terminal and cable tram were established at Milsons Point. Blues Point Road remained a major artery for vehicular ferry traffic across the Harbour, especially during the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The dominance of the Milsons Point transport terminus and thoroughfare in the late nineteenth century kept development pressure away from Blues Point and eventually the Harbour Bridge construction led to the removal of much of the Milsons Point thoroughfare building stock, leaving Blues Point intact and developing gradually through the twentieth century. Meanwhile Blues Point continued to be used for a variety of industrial and commercial purposes until the late 1950s, including a ferry depot, North Sydney Council's metal hoppers, road making depot and public cargo wharf, a coal bunkering and reserve stock pile, and ship berthing accommodation.

Today Blues Point Road is a predominantly mid 19th century to mid 20th century residential area with a mix of Victorian, Federation and 1920s and 30s housing mixed with a small amount of Interwar residential flat buildings and a small group of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20th century commercial buildings.

## OUR WALK BEGINS AT THE ENTRANCE TO NORTH SYDNEY RAILWAY STATION, BLUE STREET, NORTH SYDNEY

**Distance:** 2 km  
**Approximate Time:** 3.00 hours  
**Grading:** low to medium

### NORTH SYDNEY RAILWAY STATION

As early as 1875 the residents of the North Shore foresaw the need for a railway to provide transport for agricultural products to the harbour and to open up the area for residential purposes. However the Government opted to construct a single track railway line from Hornsby to St. Leonards, services commencing on 1 January 1890. Throughout this time and during the construction phase, the Borough of St. Leonards continued to lobby the government to reconsider the proposal to extend the railway line to the harbour at Milsons Point. Eventually the Parliamentary Committee on Public Works agreed that construction of the line from St. Leonards to Milsons Point should be made. The 2 1/2 mile of double track was built to the newly excavated site at Milsons Point using two tunnels beneath McMahons Point and at Waverton and 10 brick arched viaducts at Lavender Bay.

During the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge the former Milsons Point Railway Station was demolished to make way for the construction of the northern pylon of the bridge and erection of the Dorman Long workshops. At this time a temporary railway station, ferry wharves and tram terminus were erected further round in Lavender Bay.

The present railway stations at North Sydney and Milsons Point were opened to coincide with the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in March 1932. The Sydney Harbour Bridge Conservation Management Plan states that

*the promise of a railway link between the North Shore and the City was a fundamental impetus for the creation of the bridge. The turning of the first sod and first acts of bridge construction, undertaken in July 1923 primarily to inspire confidence in prospective tenderers, took place at the site of North Sydney Railway Station.*

Interestingly the distance between North Sydney and Milsons Point Railway Stations is the shortest distance between two stations in NSW.

*Cross over Blue Street.* Opposite the entrance to North Sydney Railway station is the **GREENWOOD HOTEL** nestled in behind the magnificent Moreton Bay fig trees. The Greenwood Hotel was formerly the North Sydney Superior Public School and latterly the North Sydney Technical High School until the end of 1969.

The inception of schooling in North Sydney began in 1844 when the Presbyterians

erected a school house at the corner of Blues Point Road and Lavender Street. This building was subsequently replaced with the extant stone school house in Blues Point Road. In 1870 a group of gentlemen from the district, including William Tunks, Captain Hixson, Charles Woolcott and aldermen of the Borough of St. Leonard's, met and formed a committee, and at that meeting unanimously endorsed the motion of Edward Lord (Mayor of East St. Leonards) -

*that in the opinion of this meeting it is desirable than an effort should be made to establish a public school in a situation, and of a character suitable to the growing requirements of this neighbourhood.*

The Trustees of the Presbyterian School offered to surrender their school house without reference to the subscriptions that might be collected. *"Mr Anderson said that the Trustees of the Presbyterian School were indeed willing to assist the committee and were quite prepared to surrender their property, provided the inhabitants of the district guaranteed to contribute liberally towards the establishment of a good school.*

The present site of the former school was acquired in 1875, and the first stage of the school was built as the St. Leonards School in 1878. As the district grew, so too did the school, with additions built in 1882 to house the then 365 students. During the 1880s it was renamed the Superior Public School and it began offering post-primary classes. Additional buildings were erected in 1891 and again in 1898 and 1901 when student numbers reached 650. The original 1878 Gothic style east wing was designed by G. A. Mansfield., whilst the central and western wings, were constructed between 1882 and 1893 and designed by Schools architect W. E. Kemp.

New schools were erected elsewhere in North Sydney for intermediate students (North Sydney Boys High School in 1914 and North Sydney Girls High School in 191) owing to accommodation shortages at this site. The infants students were transferred in 1932 to a new school built on the site of Crows Nest House (the present day North Sydney Demonstration School) and the primary boys and girls moved there also in 1934. The former North Sydney Superior Public School was renamed the North Sydney Chatswood Junior High School until 1943 when it was renamed the North Sydney Technical High school. This school closed at the end of 1969.

After the school closed in 1969 it became a Teachers Training Centre and in 1987 the site was sold to developers by the State Government and the Greenwood Plaza and Optus Building were erected on the site, necessitating massive excavations beneath the original school building. This heritage building was subsequently restored and converted into the Greenwood Hotel. The Old Boys of the North Sydney Technical High School retain a room in the hotel to house school memorabilia and host meetings.

*Walk up Blue Street to Miller Street .* **MILLER STREET** is named for William Miller, Assistant Commissary-General of Government Provisions, who in 1833 purchased some of the land granted to Deputy Assistant commissary General Thomas Walker on the North Shore. In 1844 Miller was transferred to Hong Kong and passed his home to his son. In the early 1870s this property was purchased by Bernard Holtermann who erected a grand Italianate mansion on the site. In 188- the property became the Sydney Church of England Grammar School (Shore). Miller Street was one of the roads marked in the 1838 plan of the Township of St. Leonards by Surveyor-General Thomas Mitchell .

*Cross over traffic lights at the corner of Miller and Blue Streets.* At this intersection begins the northern end of **BLUES POINT ROAD**. This road began life as the track from William (Billy) Blue's "Northampton Farm" to the township of St. Leonards (now North Sydney). Known at various times as St. Leonards Road and Lane Cove Road, it connected with the main road to the northern districts and was proclaimed in the government gazette of 31 July 1839. After Billy Blues death in 1834 the family began to sell parts of the estate commencing in 1838. The remaining portion of the estate of the late William Blue was auctioned in 1842 comprising 63 lots, varying in six from one rood to one acre each. Billy's daughter Suzanne Chuter at her death left considerable property including shops, houses and lots (most in the so called Chuters Estate).



*Enter through the gates of* **ST. PETER'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AND MANSE**. According to the North Sydney Heritage Inventory, St. Peter's is the "oldest surviving Presbyterian Church in Sydney, with nineteenth century interior intact. Important local church that has associations with a number of prominent Australians, and oldest surviving church on the North Shore. Fine example of mid-nineteenth century ecclesiastical architecture." A Crown Grant of land was made to the Church of Scotland to establish a church here on the North Shore in 1844 (purportedly the extent of the grant made was actually a mistake on the part

of the Government). The Presbyterians proceeded to erect a simple timber school house near the site of the present stone schoolhouse across the road. It served as both church and school until it was replaced in 1863 when they built the present stone schoolhouse.

Meanwhile the first stage of the church was erected in 1866 and enlarged in 1881 and again in 1885 when the grand pipe organ was installed in the newly constructed organ chancel. St. Peter's pipe organ is an important feature of this National Trust listed church. It was built in London and installed in 1885 . It was restored by Brown & Arkley of London and rededicated in 1980. The colourful stained glass windows also date to this period. Those beside the southern door include the waratah along with the rose, thistle and shamrock. Some other windows contain white stars or flowers, which are thought to represent flannel flowers. Two windows depict the burning bush. Other flora depicted in the church are traditional vine leaves and grapes, acanthus and ivy. Note also the carved cedar pulpit and choir gallery.

Adjacent to the church is the manse erected in 1871. This building is an excellent example of the Victorian Rustic Gothic style. The first occupant of the manse was the Rev. James Stirling Muir.

*Exit the church grounds via the main gate and cross over at the traffic lights. Walk down Blues Point Road passing the St. Peter's Park.*

### **193-207 BLUES POINT ROAD**

Note these two groups of three-storey Victorian terrace houses built along the Blues Point Road street alignment. These terraces were built in the 1880s by St. Peter's Presbyterian Church. They continue to be owned by the Church, including the Op Shop and block of flats adjoining the old school house and hall.

*Across the road take note of **212 –216 BLUES POINT ROAD**, a group of typical interwar red brick flat buildings on the western side of Blues Point Road adjacent to the St. Peter's Presbyterian Church grounds. At least one of the blocks has had the face brick painted over. Note the flat area below the church which is the former site of a tennis court.*

*Take steps down to **ST. PETER'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SCHOOL**. This present stone building was erected in 1864 and replaced the former timber school originally built in 1844 in this approximate location. It became a state school in 1874 when the St. Leonards School was opened at the Blue Street site in 1878. This former school house continued to be used as the church hall until the present red brick hall was erected in 1891.*

*Return to street. Adjacent to the former stone schoolhouse is the present **ST. PETER'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HALL** built in 1891. It is a two storeyed red brick and slate building with Edwardian detailing, especially the semi-circular openings, plain brick walls and*

rusticated stone infill elements. Note the Gaelic inscription above the entrance.

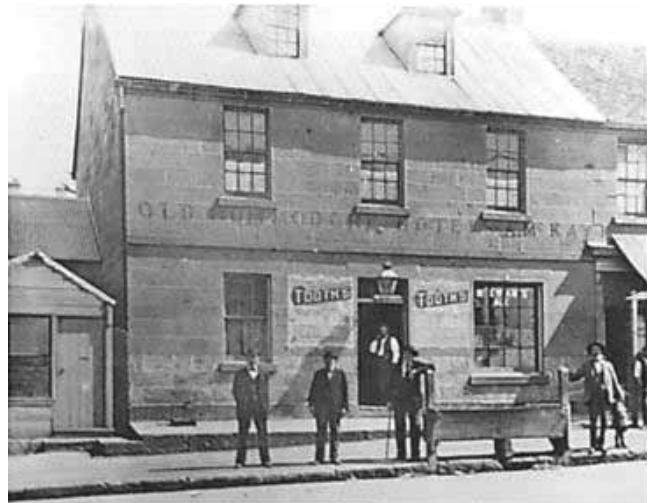
Between the present church hall and Lavender Street was previously a small group of single storey buildings, including the shop and dwelling occupied by North Sydney's first chemist, John Guise (1820-1894). He was a Captain and Major in the Indian Army before migrating to Australia. The photo at right shows him in his uniform outside his store.



*Opposite the Presbyterian Church Hall is a small pocket park at the corner of William Street* occupied by the **HENRY LAWSON SEAT**. Australia's most famous and most loved writer, Henry Lawson, was a resident of North Sydney for three periods of his short-life. He was born on 17 June 1867 and died, age 53, on 2 September 1922. He was a well known and much loved figure in the McMahons Point neighbourhood and occupied a variety of homes around the area during his lifetime. Amongst his large body of work are a number of poems and stories recounting North Sydney life and battlers.

*Cross over at traffic lights.* Note **206-208 BLUES POINT ROAD** a pair of two-storey shops with dwellings above. **208** is presently occupied by a hairdresser's but for most of its history was operated as a butcher's shop.

*Cross over Union Street traffic lights* to the **COMMODORE HOTEL**. The present building occupies the site of a continuously operating hotel since 1848. The present Commodore Hotel occupies the original site of the *Billy Blue Inn* built in 1848 by John Blue. This original hotel has been variously known as the *Commodore Inn*, *Commodore Tavern* or *Commodore Hotel*. The original hotel (depicted at right) was demolished in 1901 and a new hotel built here by Tooth and Co.



The second hotel building was demolished and replaced in 1938 by another hotel which survived until 1973 when it too was demolished and replaced by a new "*Old Commodore Tavern*". The third hotel building was extensively rebuilt and extended to the present design in 1997. It is a popular hangout for the local residents as well as office workers from the North Sydney CBD.

*Continue walking along Blues Point Road.* Across the road is the **MCMAHONS POINT COMMUNITY CENTRE**. In the 1950s the McMahons Point-Lavender Bay Progress Association

were aware that the area had an urgent need for a baby health centre and a community hall. They formed a sub-committee at its first meeting on 5 December 1958, with the aim of establishing these amenities. Eventually the present site in Blues Point Road was purchased by the North Sydney Council, and with street stalls and other fund raising events to help meet the costs, the two buildings were constructed. The Francee Drew Baby Health Centre was opened by the Minister for Health, Hon. A.H. Jago, whilst the community centre was opened by Alderman R.H. Jeffrey on 2 July 1966. The original building consisted of the upper hall only and the lower hall and footbridge were added later.



Adjacent to the McMahons Point Community Centre is **165 BLUES POINT ROAD**, a two-storey stone house built by the beginning of 1875 by John Carr on Sec 3 of the Blues Estate (shown in this 1876 view of Blues Point Road alongside 'Ellerslie'). John Carr was a substantial land owner and lived in the house 'Neepsend' above Lavender Bay (resumed and demolished for the railway line to Milsons Point in 1893). After Carr's death in 1881 his land was subdivided and offered for sale in 1882, and included several houses on this eastern side of Blues Point Road between Lavender Street and King George Street, namely 'Brenchley', 'Spring House' and 'Ellerslie' (the latter being on the present site of the McMahons Point Community Centre).

*Stop outside* **184 BLUES POINT ROAD** a nicely detailed three-storey block of flats erected in the 1930s on the former site of the *Alma Hotel* run by Mrs Tait. It was later known as the *Royal Hotel* with a succession of publicans, most notable being William Waterhouse from 1876-1886. The hotel ceased trading by the 1930s.

*Next door at* **182 BLUES POINT ROAD** is an office building located erected in 1961 as the Australian headquarters of Kalamazoo (Aust) Pty. Ltd. Kalamazoo acquired this land in 1954. At that time there existed a very old stone and weatherboard building that had been constructed in the early 1860s on the original Billy Blues Estate. Also occupying the site was a two-storey sandstone and brick shop and dwelling erected in the 1840s (see right).



The Kalamazoo headquarters were designed by local architects Rupert V. Minnett and Cullis-Hill, Peterson & Powell. The architectural journal *Cross Section* stated of the design that:

*such wilful and mannerist manipulation of structure & form has resulted in a building which expresses nothing but its own struggle for uniqueness. (1/9/1961)*

Kalamazoo (Aust) Pty. Ltd. was established in Australia in 1919 to market Kalamazoo loose-leaf binders. At that time most of the office products were imported from England

where the British parent company had begun business in 1904 in Birmingham. Kalamazoo (Aust) Pty. Ltd. also purchased land in Victoria Street near Chuter street in 1925 and built the present red texture brick factory there in 1940.

*Cross over Victoria Street. 178/180 BLUES POINT ROAD* is presently occupied by the *Thai Tanic* Restaurant but was for many years the *La Potiniere Restaurant*. The original stone building pre-dates the 1870s and consists of a single stored structure on Blues Point Road with a two-storey portion at the rear. According to North Sydney Council Rate Books the property has been described since 1883 as a shop and dwelling occupied by a succession of grocery and general stores.

*Cross over Mitchell Street to 162 BLUES POINT ROAD.* The present modern office building occupies the former site of 'Hamilton's Steam Laundry'. The laundry was built about 1905 and demolished in the 1970s. It was at one time a distinctive landmark on the North Sydney skyline as it featured a tall brick chimney which could be seen from miles away (as shown in the photograph on right).



*Continue walking along Blues Point Road. Before crossing at the pedestrian crossing take note of 149/151 BLUES POINT ROAD* across the road, a nicely detailed pair of two-storey red brick shops with four flats above, built in 1941.

**139 BLUES POINT ROAD**, the former *London store, Willington and Son, Wholesale and Family Grocers*. The Willington's operated the store on the ground floor and lived upstairs. They also held a liquor licence and sold wine by the bottle and glass, the *London Store* becoming a popular drinking spot for many of the locals. Walter Willington and his eldest son Thomas James bought the land and building from Michael McMahon for £600 in July 1890. When Walter George Willington died in 1910 he left the property to his eldest son Thomas and his wife Grace Louise.

After Thomas J Willington's death in 1928 the property was left to his widow Grace Louise. She leased the shop for the next ten years to James Doble who continued to run the business of selling groceries and provisions and maintained the license as a wine merchant. After Grace's death in the mid-1930s it was sold to an English man Thomas Nicholls and after his death the wife leased the premises to McWilliams Wines and they did away with the general grocery business and converted the place into a wine merchants and extended the bar into a larger wine bar selling exclusively McWilliams Wines. The latter bought the property and continued to operate it as a wine bar. McWilliams sold the premises to Francis and Agatha Sinclair and in the 1970s it became the 'Grape Escape Bar and Restaurant' until just recently when it changed hands and became 'Thai Riffic' restaurant. Note that the original verandas and awnings have been removed in the past as

has the corner shop doorway enclosed and a new entrance created on the Blues Point Road elevation.



*Walk a little way down Blues Point Road, take note of **123-137 BLUES POINT ROAD** comprising a small shopping and café precinct in Blues Point Road, formerly two groups of two-storey dwellings. These houses were converted into shops and cafes in the 1970s. **131-135 BLUES POINT ROAD** were built at the beginning of 1897, whilst the adjoining houses, **123-129 BLUES POINT ROAD**, are collectively known as the 'Hopwood Terrace' and were built in 1910 (note the name and date on the parapet above the first floor).*

Look across the road at the present group of two-storey shops **136-156 BLUES POINT ROAD**. These shops with the former dwellings above, were all built in the second half of the 19th century to service the needs of the small McMahons Point community. Since the 1900s this group of shops have been occupied by the usual assortment of local businesses such as grocers, greengrocers, general stores, bootmakers and shoe repairers, hairdressers and barbers, confectioners, chemists and newsagents.

*Cross over to Prince Street and continue along Blues Point Road. Turn right at Mil Mil Street. Note chimney standing beside fence of **126 BLUES POINT ROAD**. This marks the former site of a small cottage built in the mid-1800s on Billy Blue's land grant. All that remains of the house is this chimney near the corner. The former house on the site had been the home of Harry Reynolds, and had been built by his grandfather who was a*

waterman on Sydney harbour, plying between North Sydney and Circular Quay.

Harry finally relented in 1976 to have electricity connected to his home. The Sydney County Council believed that *"the house in Blues Point Road, is as far as can be ascertained, the oldest to have been without electricity in North Sydney. It is only a three-room structure, with a disused chimney in the backyard that was originally used for heating water."* The house was most likely built in the 1860s and demolished after his death in the late 1970s.



*Continue along Blues Point Road heading downhill and cross over French Street to the **BLUES POINT HOTEL*** which is an excellent example of the inter war functionalist/interwar art deco style. This two-storey brick building is curved around the corner of French Street and features a parapet with brick corbelling, double hung timber framed windows with horizontal glazing bars to first floor, a cantilevered awning, and majolica pattern glazed wall tiling to the ground floor. The present art deco building replaced the earlier hotel in 1938 and was designed by architects, J.E. & E.R. Justelius and N.D. Frederick. The original hotel on the site was named the *'North Shore Hotel'* and was most likely built by publican James Phile in about 1864 as it first appears in the Sands Directory in 1865. Phile had previously run the *St. Leonards Hotel* and *Billy Blue Inn*. Later publicans of the hotel include John Blue, Rachael Blue, William Green and William Kelly.

*Cross back over Blues Point Road to East Crescent Street.* Take note of **101 BLUES POINT ROAD**, currently a hairdressing salon, but originally one of a pair of stone houses built before 1869 by Henry Mohrman. The shopfront was added around the 1900s. It was used as a butchers shop for many years.

*Cross over East Crescent Street.* The block of flats on the corner, **36 EAST CRESCENT STREET**, was built in 1937 and designed by architect Charles Leslie-Rounding. The adjoining pair of stone houses, **89/91 BLUES POINT ROAD** is one of the earliest surviving buildings in the street. The first part of the building was built before 1869 and variously described in Council Rate Books as a house and shop or dwelling house and shop or shop, store and dwelling house. A large increase in the annual value between 1869 and 1870 may indicate substantial building work occurred at that time. The second part of the building was erected by the then owner Mrs Clewett about 1878.

North Sydney historian and early Neutral Bay resident G.V.F. Mann claims that Clewett operated a dairy farm in that vicinity, *"on the hill, where Captain R.F. Pockley owned many acres"* (between East Crescent and Parker Streets and down to the harbour at Lavender Bay).

*Continue walking down the hill.* **81 BLUES POINT ROAD** is the former home of noted

Australian photographer David Moore (1927-2003). He hired architects Philip Cox & Partners to design the house for him in 1977 to incorporate his photographic studio and living quarters. The home features a landscaped courtyard separating the studio and living area and is built on a small site in an area with a diversity of older residential buildings. The house won a merit award in category B of the NSW Awards in 1978.

### **75 BLUES POINT ROAD**

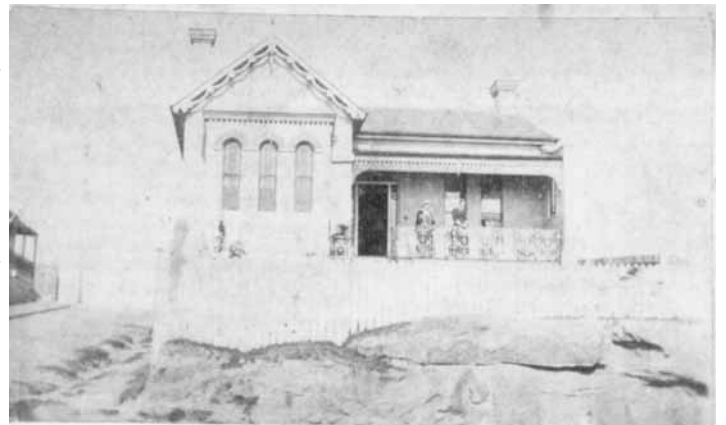
*Magnolia Cottage* is one of a group of surviving stone houses in this section of Blues Point Road. It was built about 1877 by George Adamson. The adjoining pair of two-storey houses at **77-79 BLUES POINT ROAD** were also built by Adamson. These replaced an earlier single storey, two roomed wood and shingle dwelling house.

Next door, **73 BLUES POINT ROAD** is another small stone house built in 1869 for Joseph Reeves. It was owned from 1874-1985 by the Trustees for the Estate of Van Der Polder and then sold to solicitor Llewellyn Russell Jones who bought the house as an investment property. Formerly known as *Avinon*.

Further along the road is **63/65 BLUES POINT ROAD**, formerly a dwelling house and shop built in 1872 by John Langford. The first tenant of the house, Mrs Agnes McNab, bought the house from him about 1876 and operated a shop here until her death about 1913.

*Continue along Blues Point Road and cross over Parker Street to 47 BLUES POINT ROAD*, variously called *Fairmount* or *Fairmont*. This house, situated high above the road at the Parker Street intersection was built in 1880 by John Thomas, a provision merchant of George Street, Sydney and his wife Ellen.

Three of their children were married from this home. After John's death of a stroke in 1887 his wife Ellen moved to their other home, 'Verona', located at the rear of 47 Blues Point Road at 1 Parker Street. Ellen sold the house about 1908 to Charles Smith, who almost immediately sold it again to John Michael Taylor.



*Cross over to West Crescent Street.*

Note the sandstone fence and railing now surrounding **58 BLUES POINT ROAD**. Formerly the site of *Allington House* built in 1871 by Mr Muston and subsequently sold to James and Jane Powell by 1879. After their respective deaths the house was sold to contractor Nicholas Trevaskis and then to Mrs Alice and John Trevaskis who leased it out to a succession of tenants. The property was subdivided by Mr Kersey in 1945 and the present house built on new lot B. The old two-storey sandstone *Allington House* was demolished to make way for the present 2 West Crescent Street apartments. The apartments were designed in 1968 by Stan Symonds for John and Ivy Moore and completed in 1973.

Sandstone from the former house was reused in landscaping and retaining walls.

Note across the road, **33-43 BLUES POINT ROAD**, a group of houses and flats, some with garages at street level, built on steeply sloping blocks above Blues Point Road. These are built on the Pockley Estate between 1910-1920. Robert Pockley was a master mariner and captain of various ships including the 'Tobago' in 1844/45 and 'Hellespont' in 1854 (Sydney-Melbourne Steam Packet Co.). Pockley was also the Harbour Master at Port Jackson when the 'Dunbar' went down off the heads in 1861. He was for a time the largest ship owner in tonnage in Australia. He and his wife raised 12 children at his home 'Pictonville', Lane Cove Road, North Sydney before moving to Killara.

*Continue walking down hill towards Blues Point.*

### **32-36 BLUES POINT ROAD**

The *Westbridge* flats were designed by architect A.M. Bolot and built by the Urban Co-Operative Multi-Home Units No. 2 Ltd. in 1947 as an early example of the tenant-ownership system. Two other co-operative societies were formed at the same time to build flats in Waruda Street, Kirribilli and the other in Potts Point. *Westbridge* was originally designed as a block of 36 flats, but this was later reduced to 27.

*Westbridge* occupies the site of the *Figtree Inn* and *Bayview Cottage*. The *Figtree Inn* was one of the earliest hotels established in the North Sydney area, probably built in 1843 by Thomas Redgrave. The hotel was subsequently operated by a succession of publicans including William Montgomery, Thomas Stephens and Archibald Stephens. Mrs May E. Simpson interviewed for an article in the *Northern Herald* on 21 July 1975, was one of the early residents of the area and moved into the suburb when the *Figtree Inn* was still standing. She recalled a story of the original owner Thomas Redgrave who was quite an eccentric, " *he was married to an aborigine and whenever he'd go off in his rowing boat to the city he'd lower her down the well*".

The *Fig Tree Inn* featured in one of Henry Lawsons' poems, *The Pub That Lost Its Licence*. Here are the first and last verses of that poem -

The pub that lost its licence  
Was very quaint and old;  
'Twas built before the railway,  
Before the days of gold.  
The pub that lost its licence  
Was built of solid stone  
And good Australian hardwood  
In fashion all its own.

The old pub lost its licence,  
Not for its sins at all;  
But because it was a free house

(They said it was too small).  
'Twas let to other people  
That grind and grub, and wowse -  
They turned it into "lodgings":  
And called it "Fig Tree House".  
(They opened it for Boarders  
And called it Figtree House!)



#### **No. 26-28 BLUES POINT ROAD**

Site of *Belmont* built by the estate of Moses Bell about 1890. Acquired by the developers of *Blues Point Tower* and demolished at the end of 1959.

*Cross over to HENRY LAWSON DRIVE* named in honour of much loved former popular Australian writer Henry Lawson (1867-1922). Henry lived in North Sydney on many occasions, notably in Eureka Street. Formerly known as Cliff Avenue, Henry Lawson Drive was only formed after 1909 when the cliff was excavated for a tramway loop servicing the McMahons Point Ferry Wharf.

*Turn left into Henry Lawson Drive.* Note the **1/1A HENRY LAWSON DRIVE**. This house and slipway was formerly associated with prominent boatbuilder, Reginald Holmes. His business operated from a number of different sites including the former Neptune Engineering Company site at the head of Lavender Bay and here on the shores of McMahons Point. He was implicated in the infamous 'shark arm case' of 1935.

*Continue to end of street.*

#### **MCMAHONS POINT WHARF**

In 1884 an all-night ferry service operated between Circular Quay and the north shore stopping at Milsons Point, McMahons Point and Lavender Bay. From 1906 Sydney Ferries ran services at 15 minute intervals and every 10 minutes at peak hour. Whilst Milsons Point was by far the busiest of North Sydney's ferry wharves, the McMahons Point and Lavender Bay service was a popular and busy transport route carrying over 6,000,000 passengers per annum before the opening of the Bridge. By the 1930s steam ferries were berthed at the Point and the wharf bustled with activity - coal loading, water tanks and other infrastructure to support the steam ferries.

Ferry services were essential to the residents on the north side, but were also the subject of much grumbling and controversy. Wharves were often inadequate, embarking and loading considered unsafe and fares always in contention. Passenger services continued to operate between Circular Quay and McMahons Point on a trial basis after the opening of the Bridge in March 1932 to see whether residents of McMahons Point and Lavender Bay preferred to travel across the Bridge or on the ferries. Until October 1932 Sydney Ferries

Limited operated a reduced service to these wharves but complained of considerable revenue losses and the fact that Council accepted a tender by Mr Hegarty to run a ferry service at the wharves made available by Sydney Ferries. In 1935 the Manager of the Company sought Council's views on their intention to resume services to McMahons Point and Lavender Bay, combined with a new Milsons Point run. Council responded favourably but warily and asked the Company to provide assurances that the service would be permanent and reliable.

*Return to Blues Point Road via Blues Point Reserve.* Near this intersection stood a cottage owned by William Blue (Jr). In the late 1860s this cottage was occupied by William Waterhouse (seen in foreground of photograph on right). The house was then occupied by a succession of tenants. Adjacent to the cottage was another stone building used by various lessees for wharfage purposes and which eventually became the North Sydney Council tar depot.



#### **BLUES POINT VEHICULAR FERRY DOCK**

*Our house belonged to Sydney Ferry Company – Number 1 Blues Point Road, right at the very end of Blues Point Road where the vehicular ferry used to come in with the horses and carts before the Bridge was built... Our house was the only house there ... the next lot of this was where the coke and the clinker and stuff was piled ready to go on the ferries.*

Joan Wakeham, Oral History Interview 1997

Along the foreshore are the remains of the Blues Point Vehicular Wharf which commenced operation in 1901 and continued until 1932 when it was rendered obsolete by the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It was originally used to augment the service to Milsons Point, and it was the main cross-harbour terminal on the north side during the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge from 1924-1932.



Ferries traversed the waters between Sydney and Blues Point before formalised ferry services were established. Watermen, such as Billy Blue (for whom the Point is named), offered ferrying facilities at a price. With a captive audience these ferrymen plied their trade offering varying degrees of service - some were noted for their bad temper and unpleasant manner, others for extracting unreasonable fares and their boats were thought to be unsafe and unkempt. Not a satisfactory situation for a growing township and the demands for a proper ferry service were increasing in the 1830s and 1840s. In 1842 a

regular service was established between Blues Point and Windmill Street, Dawes Point with the *Princess*, a steam punt designed to carry passengers and vehicles. This was replaced by the *Ferry Queen* in 1845.

A public wharf was officially gazetted on 10 October 1871 (NSW Government Gazette No 247) in response to deputations made by the Borough of Victoria. The original wharf was built on land part dedicated to the public by the crown and part dedicated to the public by the subdivision of blues estate.

Under the Borough of Victoria's conditions for leasing the public wharf, they required the successful lessee to - *run a steamboat for the accommodation of passengers and horse and carts or other vehicles to and from Sydney—the steam for passengers to run daily throughout the year at regular intervals and the last boat to leave Sydney at 12 o'clock midnight, Sundays excepted.*



Hunt and Greenwell wrote to the Council in August 1871 expressing a wish "to put a waiting room at the end of Blues Point Wharf...for the convenience of passengers by the steamer". A punt and floating stage was erected by William Stoddard in 1873. Although the wharfage facilities were extended in 1886 for "the purpose of establishing a ferry for passengers and vehicular traffic to and from Sydney", the Borough continued its push for better services to its shores and in 1888 approached the State Government - *to provide suitable accommodation for the whole of the North Shore traffic on the Sydney side of the harbour and more especially for the contemplated ferry at Blues Point.*

## **BLUES POINT**

Named in honour of William (Billy) Blue who was granted 80 acres of land here on the north side of the Port Jackson in 1817 by Governor Macquarie. He named his grant 'Northampton Farm'.

Billy Blue was probably a Jamaican or West Indian and was an ex-convict sentenced to seven years transportation in 1795 for stealing 20lb of raw sugar from a ship, when he was working as a wharf labourer. He married Elizabeth Williams in 1805 at St. Philip's Church, Sydney and they lived in the Rocks for a time. Billy became Sydney's first official ferryman in 1807.



William Blue died on 29 May 1834. Between 1838 and 1844 the land inherited by eldest son William was gradually subdivided. William Blue junior outlasted his father by only nine years. Daughter Susannah Blue (Mrs Chuter) and other son John retained the best part of their inheritances until their deaths.

*Cross over road and follow path beside **BLUES POINT TOWER**.*

At the tip of the point overlooking the harbour was situated the house formerly known as *Gibraltar*. According to G.V.F. Mann in his history of North Sydney published in 1938-

*The building was constructed of wood and stone and is said to have been erected by a Captain Meredith over one hundred years ago. Gibraltar was at one time the home of Captain Norrie, and later was occupied by the late Mr Richard Teece. The property was then purchased by Mr Isaac Ellis Ives—a former Alderman and Mayor of Sydney— who built on the western side of the Point a bond for the storage of kerosene.*

Isaac Ellis Ives, apart from being an Alderman and Mayor of Sydney (1888-1890?), was also the Member in the Legislative Assembly for St. Leonards between 1885-1889. Ives was born in Great Waltham, Essex, England in 1839 and arrived in Sydney in January 1857 under a 3-year engagement to Tooth & Co. where he worked at their Kent Brewery. He was appointed manager of the Argyle Bonded and Free Warehouses for Messrs Tooth, Mort and Croft (1860-1865), then for J.S. Mitchell until 1876 when he purchased the business himself. Ives was a promoter of the North Shore ferry Company, and a chairman of that company for a short time. After his death in 1906 at Mosman, *Gibraltar* was acquired by Sydney Ferries Limited and the house occupied by the Company's manager, Mr Todd, "under whose supervision wharves were erected on the western front of the Point for the fuelling of the Company's steamers". G.V.F. Mann in his 1938 history notes -

*after being untenanted for many years it fell into a state of decay, and was recently demolished.*

Adjoining *Gibraltar* was the Victorian villa **BELLVUE** (variously spelt 'Bellview' or "Bell'vue") and adjoining **BELLS TERRACE** and **BELMONT**. The early history of this site is somewhat confused but it is likely that the original cottage on the land was owned by a Woolcott (either William Prout Woolcott, a house and estate agent, or Charles Henry Woolcott, former Town Clerk of Sydney). The house was most likely built between 1870 and 1873 by Moses Bell and purportedly designed by architect Edmund Blackett. The earlier house was probably demolished to make way for it.

Moses Bell was a wealthy man and had been a member of the original syndicate of eight diggers who, including Bernard Holtermann, had made their fortune when the syndicate unearthed a huge reef gold nugget at Hill End worth £12000 in October 1872.

During the construction of 'Blues Point Tower', 'Bellvue' (seen here on the left) became the site office for Civil and Civic. Although the developers did offer the North Shore Historical Society the stone and fabric of the old house 'Bellvue' for relocation into the lower portion of Blues Point Reserve, the society was unable to raise sufficient funds, and the stone blocks and building materials disappeared.

**BLUES POINT TOWER** is a conspicuous and controversial building on the shores of Sydney Harbour. This 24 storey building comprises 168 apartments and was designed by Harry Seidler in 1958 and built by Civil and Civic. When completed in 1962 it was Australia's tallest flat block.



A flat building on this site was flagged as early as 1951 when the Public Trustee Office made application to the County of Cumberland to sell the Moses Bell Estate. Despite opposition from the community, who petitioned the North Sydney Council to acquire or resume the property for open space and playground, the County of Cumberland granted

approval in January 1958 to the erection of two blocks of flats, each of ten storeys, this application was subsequently amended to a twenty-two stored block of flats.

During this same turbulent period, the McMahons Point and Lavender Bay Progress Association sponsored architect Harry Seidler, in conjunction with a group of architects and planners, to develop a plan for the suburb *'in an effort to alter the present industrial zoning of the area and encourage its development as a high density residential area'*. This blueprint for the residential redevelopment of McMahons Point entitled *'Urban Redevelopment Concerns You'*, was released in 1959. The plan featured a number of buildings including a secondary school and sports oval, primary school, community hall and church, yacht club and music shell, restaurant and night club, shopping centre, tourist hotel, court houses, 6-storey walk-up maisonettes, tower blocks, and 12-storey maisonettes.

Eventually, the massive redevelopment of McMahons Point was abandoned and Blues Point Tower was the sole element of the plan erected. According the North Sydney Heritage Inventory this building is *"a design which was initially part of a larger concept plan for high-rise residential development for McMahon's Point, but which by the time it was completed was falling in popular acceptance, as was the general perception of high-rise, high-density residential development. In recent years, whilst generally respected, it is often cited as an example of a structure inappropriate to it's context"* (1993).

Our *Track to*  
tour ends here  
Return to  
Blues Point



*Tarmac* walking  
at Blues Point.  
North Sydney via  
Road.

Notes and walk prepared by Léonie Masson, Senior Librarian, Historical Services, Stanton Library, 234 Miller Street, North Sydney. Ph: 99368412, April 2005.



