



Walk 6

Neutral Bay, North Sydney Railway Station to Kurraba Point & Military Road

NOTES PREPARED BY THE NORTH SHORE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1994

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We suggest using a street directory to supplement this map.

Walk No. 6

Cross Blue Street to a triangular grassy plot and read the plaque.

1. SITE OF THE FIRST METHODIST CHURCH, 1864-1931

The land was a gift from pioneer James Milson. The church served the parishes of Willoughby, Manly, Narrabeen and Lane Cove. A fine stone building, with spire and rose window, it was sold for £24 and demolished to make way for the Harbour Bridge approaches.

Cross the Pacific Highway (the original road north) and turn into Walker Street. Continue north up Walker Street, then turn left into Mount Street to see the old Sydney GPO Column, one of six Doric columns from Sydney's General Post Office which was demolished in 1863. Cross the Warringah Expressway. Walk briefly into Alfred Street north and turn left into Whaling Road.

2. TERRACES

In the area note the numerous elegant terraces and charming cottages of the nineteenth century. This was a popular district, within walking distance of the ferries that took people to work or shop in the city of Sydney. At the eastern end of Whaling Road stood the magnificent stone home Holmsdale, replaced by high units. Walk down Doris Street and take a path to Clark Road. Many old homes in Doris and Neutral Streets date from the 1880s. Cross to Anderson Park.

3. ANDERSON PARK

It was from this park in 1934, on 17th July, that Air Commodore Charles Kingsford-Smith and Captain P Gordon Taylor took off in a Lockheed Altair single-engined plane, in which they intended to fly in the Melbourne Centenary Air Race. Bad luck prevented this. Instead they made the first trans-Pacific flight from Australia to America. Smithy and Taylor had shipped the plane from America on the Mariposa. The City Council refused permission to take off from Macquarie Street, so the plane was slung over the ship on to a barge and wheeled on to the park. Their intention was to name the plane ANZAC but there were objections to this and the fliers covered the name with brown paper.

An old member of this Historical Society, the late Tom McCarthy, was there taking snapshots and remembered seeing the paper blow off before the plane reached the end of the park - just in time to rise! It flew to Mascot.

Near this park, modern home units are named after another of their planes, the famous Southern Cross. On 23rd April, 1976 a Memorial there was dedicated by Lady Kingsford-Smith (Mrs Tully), and Lady Taylor and others.

View 4, 5 and 6 from the sea wall in Anderson Park. Note Historical Society plaque near seats.

4. NEUTRAL BAY

This name was given by Governor Phillip who directed that all foreign ships anchor here - a safeguard against convicts absconding on the ships and a precaution in the event of war.

Thrupp's Grant: Lt. Alfred Thrupp arrived from London in 1814. On the ship he had met Captain Piper's daughter returning from finishing school. Later, he married her and prosperous Captain Piper arranged a grant of 700 acres around here for his new son-in-law. It is doubtful if Thrupp ever actually lived on and farmed it. When Captain Piper became bankrupt in 1826 this land was involved and had to be sold, purchased by Cooper and Levey. Thrupp Street keeps on his name. There were few settlers here till late in the last century, only about eight cottages in 1863.

5. INDUSTRIES

Ships were careened (cleaned on the outside) in the inlet of Careening Cove. In 1829, land was set aside for establishing a whaling industry on the northside, around Neutral Harbour and Careening Cove - to keep the smells well away from the inhabitants of Sydney Town. However the industry did not eventuate just here.

Timber was plentiful and supplies were needed for fuel, furniture, houses, fences, shingles, boat building and wharves. Sea shells were burnt for building lime.

Benjamin Boyd set up his wool washing business here in the 1840s. He had a dam in the rock from fresh water and a row of bake ovens for supplying his ships. Later, ferries were busy.

When Patrick Hayes established brick works in Neutral Bay (near the present Oaks Hotel), more houses could be built. The Smith Brothers built the Surprise, one of the first steam vessels built in the colony. Launched 1831. Patrick Hayes manufactured oils and soaps in 1874 and Hans Quist had smelting works nearby.

6. SITE OF THE OLD GAS WORKS, 1876

Here coal gas was first produced commercially on the North Shore in 1877. After about 1913, manufacture gradually moved to Oyster Bay, Waverton and in time the Neutral Bay Works closed. The plant was used as a torpedo factory in World War II and became part of HMAS Platypus, the submarine base.

Cross Anderson Park and go up steps to Kurraba Road. Note Royal Australian Historical Society plaques at Ben Boyd and Kurraba Road corner. Turn right to Hayes Street Wharf.

7. OLD TRAM TERMINUS

From 1900 a shuttle tram service ran from Neutral Bay Junction. There was a special tram jetty here but it was closed in 1949 when it had become unsafe. A steep grade caused brake problems too. The line closed in 1956.

Site of Craignathan c1830s: Benjamin Boyd leased the house from James McLaren. Scottish Boyd came to Australia on his yacht, Wanderer in July 1842. Five years later he was said to own or lease over two million acres, pioneering up into the Monaro and over to the Riverina. He had a whaling depot at Twofold Bay, where he built two towns, Boyd Town and East Boyd. Ben Boyd set up the Royal Bank and became the Member for Port Phillip in the Legislative Council.

However, Boyd's finances crashed in the great depression of the 1840s. He sailed to the Californian gold fields but failed there. In 1851, he was on his way back to Australia but disappeared while on a hunting expedition in the Solomon Islands, presumed taken by cannibals. He was aged 51. His Wanderer continued back but was wrecked off Port Macquarie. Its bell is in the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron clubhouse at Kirribilli.

Turn back and walk right, eastward along Lower Wycombe Road and Wallaringa Avenue.

8. WALLARINGA AND NUTCOTE

A stone cottage was purchased from William Dymock in 1863, by Staunton Spain, who enlarged it as his ten children arrived. The Spain family lived here till the early 1900s. Altered beyond recognition, it became Wallaringa Mansions Guesthouse.

No. 5 Wallaringa Avenue is Nutcote, the 1925 home of the late May Gibbs. The original architect was B J Waterhouse. The house was purchased in 1991 by North Sydney Council, as an active museum, opened 1994.

Follow Kurraba Road diverting down steps to Kurraba Wharf and No. 115A.

Once Upon A Time: 115A Kurraba Road. From the end of the wharf observe this Italianate home with statues by its pool. It was W A Crowle's home, across the harbour, near Garden Island. When that property was required by the Navy, the parts of the house were ferried across and rebuilt here. By its entrance is a stone lion from the blitzed London parliament building and verses from Goethe.

Continue along Kurraba Road, taking the path to the right between Nos. 137 and 141. The park below was saved for the harbourside when it was no longer needed as the depot for Manly ferries. It was bought from developers through a petition to Council, organised by well known residents Lady Galleghan and Dr. McGeorge.

9. KURRABA POINT

Enjoy the views as you walk along the reserve to Old Ballast Point. Kurraba Point was earlier called Thrupp's Point or Ballast Point. From here some 8,000 tons of sandstone were quarried and taken by lighter to complete Fort Denison in the harbour.

Spains Lookout is named after Captain Stanley Spain, well known in Neutral Bay where he lived most of his life until he died in 1966 aged 94.

Hodgson Lookout was named after T W Hodgson, an alderman in the first united North Sydney Municipal Council of 1890, Mayor 1901-1903.

10. HOME STYLES

Continue along Kurraba Road to Shellcove Road. Note No. 4 Spanish flats, Casa Loma; No. 11, an imitation castle style; No. 31, Brent Knowle, architect B J Waterhouse; Notice hoist to loft and steel spiral stair to above former stables; No. 39 Gundimaine, 1901, handsomely restored in 1982 as flats. Pause by No. 55 Honda.

11. HONDA 1858, 55 SHELLCOVE ROAD

Built as a home for architect Francis Grundy. The stone house was then isolated in bushland at the head of the bay, Shell Cove. It was shingled. Its gabled roof with ornate barge boards and its verandah columns remain, as well as a heavy wooden main door. From 1864, Honda was the home of William C. Bennett, from Ireland, Commissioner for Roads and Bridges, who died in 1889. His name remains on nearby Bennett Street. Here was born his daughter Agnes, who became one of our early women medical doctors and served in the Army. Still privately owned, it is used as flats. See the North Shore Historical Society plaque on the wall.

Walk a short way east along Honda Road to look across Bogota Avenue at Arden, 17 Bogota Avenue, which is understood to have been a girls' college, now a private home. Continue north along Shellcove Road to its junction with Wycombe Road (old tram route). Turn left into Wycombe Road to see St. Helens (now rather rundown).

12. ST. HELENS, 72 WYCOMBE ROAD C1886

In 1885, Walter Liberty Vernon, Government Architect 1890-1910, built a home Penshurst and Penshurst Avenue, Neutral Bay marks its site. At this time, he was a partner with Wm. Wardell (architect of St. Marys Cathedral). Vernon designed and built present No. 72 as Merstham but by the time he occupied it, about 1890, its name had been changed to St. Helens.

Vernon was an alderman of East St. Leonards Council and worked for improvement of roads and wharves. He had Thrupps Point Road renamed Kurraba. He was a lessee of part of Thrupp's grant, which had become Cooper's.

Cooper Street extended from Thrupps Point Road to Harriette Street. Vernon had Cooper Street extended as Wycombe Road, taking its name from his family's home town, High Wycombe, England. Lower down, No. 23 St. Julians is another of his designs, enlarged. Vernon's greatest work was Central Railway Station (built 1901-1905).

By 1905, St. Helens was a college for girls. For many years from about 1911 it was a boarding house. About 1977, it was internally altered to four strata title units.

Retrace steps along Wycombe Road to St. Augustines Church.

13. ST. AUGUSTINES CHURCH

This claims to be the only church founded on a ferry. A committee of local residents was formed, meeting where they regularly saw each other, on the ferry Gannet, to and from work in the city. They wanted a nearby church to avoid the long bush walk to St. Thomas, North Sydney, carrying lanterns on Sunday nights! Bushfires, bushrangers, snakes and other dangers were a hazard.

A wooden church was put up here in 1887. It was replaced in brick in 1923, with very handsome woodwork and stained glass war memorials for World War I. The grounds have a path with a lychgate to Burraway Street. An early 1900s home was purchased in 1939 for a Rectory, its coachhouse still attached. The rectory has been sold.

Enjoy Wycombe Road slowly, for here remain a number of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century houses of elegance or quaintness, with graceful iron lace, woodwork and balconies, fascinating windows and chimneys, etc.

Walk north to Military Road for transport.

14. MILITARY ROAD

Was laid out in 1870-71 to haul cannon and supplies to the fortifications by the harbour, at Bradleys Head and Georges Head. Unbelievable as it seems now, this was a precaution in the Franco-Prussian War.