

A place to work and play

A walking tour from Milsons Point to Careening Cove

Distance: 3.5 km
Approximate time: 2-3 hours
Grading: low to medium



Introduction

Milsons Point is named after James Milson. Milson was a native of Lincolnshire and one of the earliest free settlers in NSW. Milson arrived in Sydney in 1808, aged 23, after service in the army. He settled at the Field of Mars initially as a farmer. In 1810 he married Elizabeth Fitzpatrick and they had six children.

In 1800 a grant of 120 acres was given to Robert Ryan for services in the Marines and the NSW Corp. Ryan knew nothing about farming and so the land was purchased by Robert Campbell a wealthy merchant and the largest private owner of cattle in the colony. In 1822 Campbell leased his land to James Milson.

In the mid 1830s there was a dispute between Milson and Campbell with Milson claiming that he was the rightful owner of Campbell's land. He argued that it had been granted to him by Sir Thomas Brisbane but that he could not prove it as the deeds had been lost in a bush fire in 1826. The colonial government didn't agree with him. Campbell was eventually recognised as the owner without registered title and Milson the permissive occupant.

Milson built a cottage (near the site of the northern pylons of the Harbour Bridge) on the headland which became known as Milsons Point. He established a dairy there but the soil was poor. Milson supplied ships in Sydney Harbour with fresh provisions and water, as well as ballast from a quarry near Careening Cove.

Milson and his family built and lived in many properties in and around Milsons Point and Kirribilli including Brisbane House, Carabella Cottage, Grantham, Wia Wia, Elamang, Coreena, Fern Lodge and Grantham.

On this walk we will see the Milson legacy in the residential properties which still stand and in the



sites of those houses demolished. Along the walk we will also view the industrial sites and businesses which developed on the shores of Careening Bay and Neutral Bay.

Turn left into Broughton St

Broughton St is thought to have been named after the Bishop of Australia, Rt Rev William Grant Broughton who consecrated St Thomas Church on 5th August 1846.

This northern end of the Street was called **Brisbane St** and was named after Brisbane House built by James Milson in 1831. The house took its name from St Thomas Brisbane, Governor of New South Wales (1821-1825). It was a two storey stone house and situated approximately to the block now enclosed by Arthur, Middlemiss and Lavender Sts, North Sydney. The house was demolished in 1925 as part of the Harbour Bridge construction.



Brisbane House shortly before it was demolished. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 5)

Turn right at Willoughby St and continue along and turn left into Winslow St

No. 6 Winslow St

Fern Lodge, a two-storey sandstone building, is one of only two of the several Milson family homes built during the nineteenth century to have survived (the other, *Elamang*, is in the grounds of Loreto Convent). It was believed to have been built about the 1840s. The building was fully restored in the early 1970s and renamed **Stoneleigh**. It was originally built by James Milson for the senior shipwright at the careening yard. It later passed to John Milson, who lived there with his wife Kate (nee Winslow).

Cross back over Willoughby St to Carabella St. Continue along Carabella St

Note the Victorian Terraces and Federation cottages on both sides of the street.

No.89 Carabella St

Formerly the *Tremayne Private Hotel* was built and named after one of the Milson family homes *Tremayne*. The house served as the Young Women's Christian Association [YWCA] hostel from the 1920s. The current building was erected in front of the original hostel building at Kirribilli in 1938. Escalating maintenance costs in 1978 led to the sale of the former hostel. It was renovated, restored and converted into a private hotel.

Continue along Carabella St

Loreto Junior School

Here stood **Coreena** the home of Alfred Milson, James Milson's son, which adjoined his father's property *Elamang*. Built in the early 1880s it was sold in 1923 and became Loreto's Junior School. The house was demolished in 1959.

Loreto Convent

A georgian style stone house **Elamang** was built in 1851. It is now part of Loreto -- a large

private girls' high school. One of the most significant buildings in the area, *Elamang* is only one of two of the many Milson family homes built during the nineteenth century to have survived (the other is *Fern Lodge* in Winslow Street). The house was originally the home of James Milson junior, the eldest son of James Milson. James junior built it in 1851-52 upon his marriage to Mrs Mary Ann Elizabeth Grimes. It was a Georgian Sandstone house with marble fireplaces, cedar joinery and geometric staircase.



Elamang after it was purchased for Loreto Convent, c.1905-10. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PC 581)

James lived here until his death in 1903, when the property was subdivided and George Powell purchased the house. It was converted into a guest house and run by Mrs Burton. The house was purchased in 1907 by the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, better known as 'Loreto'. The Sisters had been in Australia since 1875 (they originally came from Ireland) and had started a school in the Victorian villa *Kanimbla* in Fitzroy St in 1901 and later *Fern Hill* in Pitt St between 1902-1908.

In 1907 Mrs Sarah Heaton purchased *Elamang* for the Sisters. In 1908 the school opened with boarders and day-girls, the five to six year olds worked on slates, while the seniors' syllabus included English, French, Maths, Latin,

Geography Botany and some Art. There were extra lessons in needlework, music and tennis.

The Sisters embarked on a building programme on the property. The stables were demolished, and a two level colonnaded veranda erected around the house. An Italianate bell tower and chapel were erected on the south side of the house (dates from 1929). School expansion has resulted in more development. In 1979 the house became the administrative centre of the school. In 1992 the new buildings on the Elamang Ave frontage were opened.

No. 48 Carabella St

Nicholas McBurney, former Mayor of East St. Leonards 1887, purchased this corner block from John and Robert William Campbell in 1875 and proceeded to build the house the same year. During the time he lived here in the house named *Burnleigh*. Nicholas was actively involved in local politics. He was declared bankrupt in 1896 and the house was passed to his wife, Hope.

She continued to reside here after Nicholas' death in 1927. The house was passed on to the oldest son, Douglas, when Hope died in 1932. The McBurney family connection ended with his death in 1971 and there has been a succession of owners since.

No. 71 Carabella St

Araluen is a Federation Arts and Crafts style home built in 1910 and designed by James Peddle. The house is now owned by Loreto Convent next door.

No. 69 Carabella St

Fairhaven was built in early 20th century (1905) by architect James Peddle. The owner from 1905-1913 was banker Hugh Massie. Extensive renovations were undertaken in 1992.

No. 67 Carabella St

The *Quarterdeck* apartments mark the former site of **Miandetta** the North Sydney residence of Sir Edmund Barton, sworn in as Australia's first Prime Minister at the Federation ceremony in 1901. He lived here between 1896 and 1906, a significant time in the establishment of the Australian Commonwealth. This profound historic association was not enough to curb the enthusiasm for development and modernisation that changed much of Kirribilli in the 1950s and 60s. *Miandetta* was demolished in 1959. The *Quarterdeck* units were completed by Civil and Civic in 1961 and are believed to be only the second building in Australia to use aluminium windows. A notable occupant of the flats was Sir John Kerr Australia's Governor General at the time of the Whitlam government dismissal in 1975. The history of the site was commemorated during the 2001 Centenary of Federation with the placement of a plaque. (Note: the neighbouring Victorian villa now also called *Miandetta* has no association with the original Barton house).

No. 32 Carabella St

On the high side of the street the sandstone and iron fence and gate, are all that remain of *Milton* a two-storey mansion built by insurance agent William Goddard about 1882. This house became *Kigwigil* (smiling water), a "superior boarding establishment featuring large grounds, lawn tennis, electric light throughout, excellent cuisine, hot and cold baths, 10 minutes city ' in the 1920s". The house was demolished in the 1960s and the current high rise apartment building, *Villa Gardens*, erected in its place.

No. 28 Carabella St

Osterley was built between 1911 and 1913 by journalist Thomas Courtney to the design of well-known architect, John Kirkpatrick who was

the official Government architect for all new Commonwealth Bank buildings throughout Australia in 1912 and architect for returned servicemen's homes from 1918.

The original brick house was converted into two flats in 1951 by the then owner Mrs Stossi. The work was undertaken by architects Minnett and Cullis-Hill (the same firm undertook much work for North Sydney Council, including the extensions to the Council Chambers in 1937).

Significant structural alterations to the house include the pebbledash stucco of walls, demolition of the original shingled verandas on the Peel St elevation and the three chimney pots converted into one single chimney

Turn left into Peel Street and continue to end

Careening Cove has from the earliest days been the home of yachtsmen. The **Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron/Carabella, no. 33 Peel St** incorporates the house *Carabella*. Extensions and additions have been made at various times up to the present, enveloping the original house.

Originally *Carabella* was a single storey house with a slate roof. The early history of the house is unclear, but the first recorded occupant is John Edye Manning, followed by Thomas L. Peate; subsequently owned by William Tucker a wine and spirit merchant. It may have been built by William Tucker. The house was leased from 1901-2 by the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron and then purchased in 1903 and extensive additions made.

The Squadron was founded in 1862. The Milson family was instrumental in the founding of the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron. James Milson, Snr, was a keen yachtsman and learned to sail

on the Witham River in his native Lincolnshire. In 1826 he sailed in his first harbour regatta in his yacht *Sophia*. The yacht won the regattas of 1831, 1832, 1834 and the first anniversary later (Australia) day regatta of 1837. James Milson Junior was the first Vice Commodore of the club in 1862. The following year the club received the patronage of the Prince of Wales and became the Royal Yacht Squadron. The first club meeting was held in Bridge Street Sydney but later moved to Post Office Chambers Pitt Street. The rules stated the dress uniform to be a blue coat, skirt lined with white silk with a white or blue waistcoat each with club buttons and trousers white or blue according to the season. Alfred and Arthur Milson were both prominent yachtsmen. Alfred occupied the position of Commodore of the Royal Yacht Squadron, (1889-1893.)

Cross over and proceed along Elamang Ave. Stop at Willoughby Rd

No. 47 Willoughby St

Wrixton is a delightful Victorian timber cottage was built about 1888 by the Wrixton Family who also ran a small boat building yard at the foot of Willoughby St. The boatshed was built partly on reclaimed land and partly on land beyond the high water mark

At the foot of Willoughby St, adjacent to the house is a set of flats built on the site of the former **E. D. Pike timber yard**.

Cross over to Wrixton Park

Careening Cove was once forested with trees such as ironbark, blackbutt, stringybark, fig and mahogany. There was plenty of fish and oysters. The Cammeraygals called Careening Cove, Weye Weye

The name Careening Cove was adopted because it was where ships were careened (hove on their sides so that planks could be scraped free of marine growth, chaulked and if necessary replaced). The timber in the vicinity was felled for shipbuilding whilst James Milson also quarried stone for ships ballast. Rainbow Creek at the head of the Cove supplied good water.

It was sometimes known as *Slaughterhouse Bay*, as the Milsons family had a slaughterhouse at the foot of the Street. The slaughterhouse was established to provide the town across the harbour with fresh lamb and mutton. Here, Milson established his first vegetable garden on the sheltered slopes behind the Cove.

One of the stories associated with the Cove is that trespassing whalers sometimes anchored in Careening Cove and one of them, a Mr Donnison, illegally loaded a cargo of pigs which broke loose and gobbled up James Milson's vegetable gardens overlooking the Cove.

The company *Wunderlich* had a wharf at Careening Cove in or before 1908 taking deliveries of roof tiles to Sydney. The retaining wall along the waterfront towards the end of the High St peninsula is the location of their wharf.

Many well-known boatbuilders have conducted their businesses at Careening Cove including Sandemans, Hayes Bros, Pritchard Bros, Pattons and Halvorsens.

Halvorsens transferred their business from Drummoyne in the 1920s when the boatshed there became too small for their operation and set up business in Careening Cove where Lars Halvorsen had more room to build a much larger shed. The family initially lived in North Sydney and then moved to Elamang Ave close to

boatshed. They stayed in Careening Cove for about 2 years and then bought a block of land with a water frontage in adjoining Neutral Bay, (where Australian Customs Services have their premises today).

At Neutral Bay they built The Miramar (a big motor cruiser, 75 foot) for Stuart F Doyle who had built the State Theatre. In the 1920s they built fishing boats, boats for the Pacific Islands and a variety of commercial boats. The private work started in 1933-34 with motor cruisers. The Halvorsens even sold a boat to Errol Flynn.

Engineering firm *Stewart Sandeman Ltd* were at Careening Cove in 1921 as boat builders and according to tradition turned out three of the best known 21ft class boats "Corella", "EOJ" and "Boomerang".

In 1919 *Hayes & Sons* moved from Balmain to Careening Cove and took up their quarters next door to Pritchard Bros. It was reported that they built the first boat that sailed around the world from Australia – The Sirius. In the 1940s they were advertising their premises in Bradly Ave. In the Second World War, Hayes built trawlers on behalf of the Ministry of Munitions. After the war they were advertising that they made launches, yachts, sailing boats, skiffs and surf boats.

According to an early history, *Pritchard Bros* started business in Balmain in 1868 carrying out work for the Navy. They were contractors for the Royal Navy for over 30 years and supplied the Admiralty with every class of boat from whalers to steam launches. The firm was also involved in a large amount of yacht and launch building. In the early part of the 20th century they started up at Careening Cove.

In circa 1900 Mr H E Pritchard and his father were the first to successfully develop a vessel "Zephyr" whose beam was equal to its length. In the 20s they concentrated in engineering and devoted themselves to launch building and the manufacture of the Pritchard propeller used very successfully by yachts and then by most of the speed boats in Sydney. The propeller was seen as efficient and causing very little drag when sailing. The names of the launches built by Pritchards in the 1920s were 'Henrietta' and 'Nell', the latter a sturdy half cabin family launch with Studebaker engine and the Henrietta "a very comfortable cruiser 30 x 8 with every sort of convenience on board – ladies' cabin, folding galley, lavatory and so on"

Cross over road

No. 62 Willoughby St

According to the North Sydney Heritage Inventory, **Patton's Slipways** is the "oldest and largest remaining maritime industry in Careening Cove, once an important boat and ship building and repair location on the North Shore".



H. Younger's boatshed at the foot of Willoughby St. Also shows Wunderlich's wharves across Careening Cove, c. 1907. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 949)

Henry Younger operated a boatyard here until the early 1900s but the buildings on the site date from the 1920s. Patton's purchased the slipway site in the 1960s from the Burns Philp ship

merchant company, and the building fronting McDougall Street was originally the administration building for the Burns Philp company.

Walk a short distance along McDougall St

The boatshed of corrugated iron at Careening Cove into which the **Ensemble Theatre** moved in 1960 was described as a “rakish structure jutting over the water” but was considered to have a ‘quaint charm’. It was redesigned in the 1980s by architect Alan Williams. The Ensemble became Sydney’s first harbour side theatre. It was founded in 1958 initially in a children’s library at Cammeray, then moved to a loft on the corner of Berry and Miller Sts. When this was condemned as a fire trap the company converted the old boat shed at Careening Cove, making it a playhouse ‘in the round’. It opened on 7 January 1960 with a production of Mel Dinelli’s *The Man*. In 1952 the Ensemble’s founder Hayes Gordon arrived in Sydney from Broadway to star in *Kiss Me Kate* and stayed to perform in musicals and early Australian television.

Continue next door

Adjacent to Patton’s slipways was the site of the first **North Shore Rowing Club** wharf, established in 1879 at the foot of Willoughby Street (on reclaimed land). The North Shore Rowing Club (see below) was forced to relocate in 1890, temporarily to the opposite side of Careening Cove and in 1903 they obtained a block of land at the head of Careening Cove and erected a new clubhouse there (now the Sydney Flying Squadron). Growth of ferry traffic and choppy waters led the club to relocate to the Lane Cove River in 1933 to take advantage of perfect rowing conditions. The sold the

Careening Cove clubhouse in 1937 to the *Sydney Flying Squadron*.



North Shore Rowing Club eight in Careening Cove, 1890. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 98)

Cross into Milson Park

Dedicated as public parkland in 1898 and originally gazetted as *Kirribilli Park*, land reclaimed from Careening Cove. It changed its name to *Milson Park* in 1912. The head of Careening Cove had been used as a rubbish dump and was reclaimed in the 1890s. A central monument was used to dedicate the park to A G Milson, Mayor (1909-1913).



Milson Park looking towards Careening Cove, c.1912. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 99)

Continue across park to Bradly Ave

The site of **No 1 Stannards Place (Bradly Ave)** is historically important as part of the

former **Rockley (Rocklea)** on the Rockville Estate owned by Edward Lord (who was City Treasurer). From the mid 19th century the Cove was surrounded by residential estates.

In the early 1890s the upper cove was reclaimed and a sea wall was constructed at the edge of Milson Park (passing under the boardwalk of the current marine structure).

Various establishments of boat building activities in this section of Careening Cove commenced at the turn of the 20th century. Various small boatyards continued to operate in the Cove including in 1905 Pritchard Brothers.



Boatsheds at Careening Cove, c. 1920s. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 776)

By the second half of the 20th century the old boat sheds were leased to various boat builders including B J Halvorsen and in 1966 the sites were amalgamated into the ownership of Landseair who built in the present Marina in the mid 1980s.

The *Stannard* family was for a while in Careening Cove. They bought land in what became known as Stannards Place, building a house on the waterfront and a wharf out the front. This is where they moored the launches and according to Allan Stannard, “[My father] was available 24 hours a day so that if

something were wanted at two in the morning, my father was able to get up and walk out only a few metres, straight into a launch and way he’d go to do the job. Careening Cove... the whole area was devoted to boats and slipping and engineering where I grew up. It was a wonderful place for a youngster of course. We used to sail, virtually every day – sail and row.”

In 1986 the shipwrights work area was occupied by *Ben Lexcen* who designed 18 metre ocean going yachts including *Australia II* which won the Americas Cup. Marine based activities on the site have continued to the present time.

Turn left into Bradly Ave. Turn right into Hipwood Street and then right into Kiara Close. Walk around Iora

In 1875 an Act of the NSW Parliament authorised the manufacture and supply of gas to residents of the North Shore. James Walter Fell and Charles Watt, both former employees of AGL went into partnership and purchased land from Wood and Younger fronting Neutral Bay in 1876.



(North Shore Gas Company works, 1902. (Courtesy AGL)

Here they established the first gas works on the north side of the harbour, the **North Shore Gas Company**. The first coal gas on the North

Shore was produced at the works from 1877 to light homes and streets.

Coal was delivered by boat to a small wharf in the northwest corner of the site. Ships were unloaded at night, with the coal shovelled into large wicker baskets, resulting in clouds of coal dust. The gas plant consisted of the first Retort House, built on reclaimed land at the northwest corner of the property and a small gas holder located west of this. Excavation of the site created a flat area at the waterfront and another on the ridge, creating the distinct level changes still evident today.

After James Fell died in 1882 the partnership was liquidated and the North Shore Gas Company Ltd was established. The land reclamation was extended eastwards and the company embarked on a period of major expansion which saw the construction of a new retort house, a gas holder, exhaustor house, boiler house and coke plant.

An increase in population growth on the North Shore in the 1890s increased demand for gas and the original landholding was doubled. The original 1877 Retort House and Gas Holder near the foreshore were demolished and replaced.

As the population increased the company acquired more customers, but the gas works reached the limit of their expansion at the site. By 1913 much of the gas manufacture was carried out at Oyster Bay, Waverton and the Neutral Bay works closed in 1931/32.

One holder was removed in 1943, and another was dismantled in the 1970s. During this period the introduction of natural gas led to the closure of many coal powered gas works, included Oyster Cove which ceased gas manufacture in

1976. The North Shore Gas Company and AGL merged in 1980 and the third gas holder remaining on the Neutral Bay site was modified to store natural gas for emergencies. AGL retained the site until 1983 when it was sold and redeveloped for the residential development *Iora*.



Aerial view of HMAS Platypus and AGL gas holders, c. 1960. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 648)

In March 1942, the Commonwealth resumed part of the site for a **torpedo factory**. Initially it was planned to reuse the existing factory buildings, however in order to meet the production program most were demolished. The only buildings retained were the 1887 retort house, the gatehouse on High Street, the Exhaustor House and part of the coal store.

The building at the entrance of the site on High St was converted from residential flats to serve as a gatehouse and office. After the war ended the torpedo workshops continued to service the British Navy submarine fleet based at HMAS Penguin and the Australian Navy's destroyer fleet. The sheds on the waterfront were converted to submarine workshops and the torpedo maintenance function was transferred to the RANTME factory.

In 1964 a decision was made to establish the Royal Australian Navy's Submarine Service. After the purchase of six 'Oberon' class submarines from the UK, **HMAS Platypus** was officially commissioned in 1967 as a shore support depot. HMAS Platypus was the base for the six 'Oberon' class submarines and other visiting submarines and provided the operational headquarters and communications base for the Australian Submarine Squadron.

The Department of Defence embarked on plans to dispose of the site. In 1997 a development application for 95 dwellings on the remainder of the Defence site was lodged with North Sydney Council. The DA was approved by the Land and Environment Court, however, the DA consent lapsed and plans did not go ahead.

On the 14 May 1999 the white ensign was lowered for the final time and the HMAS Platypus decommissioned

In 2005 the Commonwealth Government announced the handover of the site to the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust. A draft report was published in 2007 on plans for the future of the site.

Look across bay to Australian Customs Services Centre (foot of Ben Boyd Rd)

In 1928 the site was taken over by **Halvorsens** to expand their boat building. In 1938 Halvorsens built a new boatshed on same site as previous sheds. Halvorsens acquired a boatyard in Ryde (1937) and eventually moved their operations there.

In 1939 this site at the foot of Ben Boyd Rd was taken over and leased by the RAAF as a base for their marine fleet (as a wartime measure).

The smaller wooden boatshed was demolished and sometime between 1941 and 1944 extensive concreting undertaken on site.

In 1951 the site was purchased by the RAAF from Halvorsen family and it was used as a site for its air sea rescue operations. It was then transferred in 1963 to the Customs Service at which time the large metal shed used in the Halvorsens era was reduced to about half of its former size to make way for new brick building. In the late 1960s a brick administration building was erected.

A new customs shed was built in 1986 and the Halvorsen boatshed remodelled by extensive reconcreting and recladding of building, reused timber poles and possibly other material from this shed. The Halvorsen slipway in the main part of the shed was remodelled by removing existing slipway rails, realigning and covering in a further 175mm of concrete.

Proceed along Adderstone Ave to Clark Rd and enter park

Dedicated in 1898, **Anderson Park** was named for Alderman William Anderson, Mayor of North Sydney 1914-1918, and additional land was added in 1928. Apparently, locals visiting Anderson Park referred to 'going down the bay'. They gathered mushrooms, some the size of plates and boys paddled in the harbour in canoes made of sheets of old corrugated iron.

On 17th July 1934, Anderson Park became the runway for an aeroplane flown by one of Australia's most famous aviators "Smithy" (see below). Charles Kingsford Smith was intending to compete in the Melbourne Centenary Air Race from England to Australia. The plane, a Lockheed Altair (The Lady Southern Cross), was shipped to Sydney where it was then taken by

lighter to Anderson Park. Crowds of spectators watched in suspense as the powerful aeroplane guided by Smithy and Taylor [(Sir) P G Taylor] daringly lifted above trees, power lines and the sea wall on their short journey to Mascot airport. A speed of 180 miles per hour was attained during the flight. However, the aviators were unable to participate in the Centenary Air Race because modifications to the aircraft could not be completed in time, and instead they made the first trans-Pacific flight from Australia to the USA in October-November 1934.



Preparations for Sir Charles Kingsford Smith's takeoff from Anderson Park, 1934. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 1066/3)

Our *A Place to Work and Play* walking tour ends here at Anderson Park.

These walking tour notes were compiled by the Historical Services team in History Week 2008 from resources held in the David Earle Local Studies Collection, North Sydney Heritage Centre Stanton Library. Ph: 99368400