North Sydney History Walks

Neutral Bay

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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

Neutral Bay

Length: 3.5 kms

Difficulty: Medium/hard with steep gradients

Introduction:

Neutral Bay (Harbour) was so named after all 'neutral', or non-British, vessels were ordered to anchor here as a security precaution in 1792. By then the local Cammeraygal people must have been aware their land was being taken without treaty or payment. In 1814 John Piper bought 700 acres (283 hectares) apparently as a gift to his daughter and son-in-law. The name Thrupp was thereby associated with the area though Sarah and Alfred never lived here. Daniel Cooper bought the land in 1828 and it remained with the family until the early 20th century. Their delayed release of land affected the architectural character of the suburb. In the 1880s, Walter Liberty Vernon developed lots along Wycombe Road with his Neutral Bay Land Development Company. An English architect, Vernon thereby helped to introduce English Revival architecture to Sydney. His own house *Penshurst* looked like a medieval manor. With further subdivisions, Neutral Bay acquired a very uniform appearance. Although the period is associated with the creation of the Australian Commonwealth - sometimes called Federation - the aesthetic was quite English. Tastes changed and Georgian Revival and Mediterranean style houses were built from 1910 to the 1930s. Medium and high-density flats replaced homes and their large gardens from the 1950s but the suburb retained many original houses.

This walk will help you explore the rich heritage of a suburb which is still a showcase of late-19th and early 20th century architecture demonstrating Australians' affection for English-style architecture.

1) Neutral Bay Wharf entrance

The unpainted brickwork, decorative arch and stuccoed parapet of this early 20th century wharf entrance epitomises the aesthetic which still characterises much of Neutral Bay.

2) 2 Hayes Street

Built on the site of *Thrupps Cottage*, one of the area's first European dwellings, *The Hastings* is attributed to the architect Edward Jeaffreson Jackson who lived in North Sydney (St Leonards) from 1885 to 1908 and promoted the English Revival architectural styles. The multifaceted exterior - with battlements, varyingly-shaped windows,

brick, stucco and timber finishes - characterises the picturesque ideal at the core of the English Revival aesthetic.

3) 4 and 4a Hayes Street

Kcot Sedar was built in 1928. The name is the reverse of 'Radestock'. It is an excellent example of typical residential flat design of the period. The shingling shows the influence of the Arts and Crafts aesthetic. The garages are original. *Kcot Sedar* contrasts with the neighbouring building completed in modernist International-style in 1959. While they serve an identical function, the buildings are starkly different. The historical aesthetic of *Kcot Sedar* was rejected in favour of 'timeless' simplicity in the later building.

4) 19-21 Hayes Street

This was the Neutral Bay Post Office from 1926 until 1971. It remained a post office until 1986. Its neo-classical style shows the shift away from English Revival architecture and possibly the influence of William Hardy Wilson, the great champion of Georgian Revival architecture in Sydney.

5) 15 Wycombe Road

Rathmore was one of at least 12 properties given to the Red Cross for use as convalescent homes for returned soldiers in New South Wales during World War One. *Graythwaite* in North Sydney was another. *Rathmore* was gifted in 1918 by Mary Davy (also Davey) who owned several local houses.

6) 23a Wycombe Road

Walden was designed by Stacey Neave, partner of WH Wilson, in 1910. It may have been the first Georgian Revival house in Neutral Bay. With its symmetrical frontage and classical columns, *Walden* bears the unmistakable influence of early Australian colonial architecture – the original Georgian period. *Walden* was built for Mary Davy, daughter of Quaker immigrants. The name probably refers to Saffron Walden, the family's home in Essex, long a Quaker town.

7) 1 Wallaringa Avenue

Wallaringa Mansions takes its name from the Spain family house that stood some 50 metres up the rise. Opened in 1910 as a respectable private hotel, it epitomises the English Revival aesthetic of the area. Used for affordable boarding after World War Two, the complex was restored and reopened as exclusive 'gated community' residences in the early 2000s.

8) 5 Wallaringa Avenue

Home of the artist and children's book author May Gibbs from 1925 until her death in 1969, *Nutcote* was designed in the Mediterranean style by BJ Waterhouse - uncharacteristically given the architect's other designs and Gibbs' English heritage. Threatened by redevelopment, it was acquired by North Sydney Council because of its historical significance in 1990 and opened as a museum.

9) 146 Kurraba Road

Hollowforth was designed by EJ Jackson in 1893 for English-born Edward Threlfall. Its size exemplified the prestigious character of Neutral Bay. It had 13 rooms at a time when workers' cottages typically had four. The design makes full use of materials, finishes and shapes in the tradition of Arts and Crafts architecture. The use of wall-hung shingles shows the influence of North American-born architect John Horbury Hunt. *Hollowforth* impressed BJ Waterhouse who would design local homes in the Arts and Crafts style.

10) 29, 31, 33 Shellcove Road

These are three of the best examples of 20th century Arts and Crafts architecture in Sydney. Nos 31 and 33, *Ailsa* and *Brent Knowle*, were designed by BJ Waterhouse in 1908 and 1914 respectively. No. 29, *Keynsham*, is the work of Frank Buckle. Note the complex 'picturesque' exteriors and roof planes which resemble the curve of thatching.

11) 39 Shellcove Road

Alfred Spain, whose family owned *Wallaringa*, co-designed *Gundimaine* in 1902-03. It was manorial with 14 rooms, a service wing and outbuildings. Its tall, striated chimneys, and overhanging oriel windows, make it an excellent example of the Queen Anne style of English Revival architecture most associated with Richard Norman Shaw in Britain. Divided into flats in the 1920s, *Gundimaine* was restored and converted into three apartments and one townhouse in the 1980s.

12) 49 Shellcove Road

Derived from the work of Greene and Greene, who designed Arts and Crafts houses in California, the so-called Californian Bungalow was introduced to Australia around 1915 and embraced by a population already familiar with the English Revival aesthetic. *The Cobbles* is one of the most interesting examples of the style in Sydney. It was designed by, and for, Samuel George, 'SG', Thorp in 1918.

His architectural partner, James Peddle, worked in California from 1911 to 1914.

13) 55 Shellcove Road

The 1858 Gothic villa *Honda* was one of the first houses on the Cooper Estate. It was home to the colonial Commissioner for Roads and Bridges William Bennett, and family, from 1864 to 1889. *Honda* became a boarding house in the 20th century. It has since been extensively refurbished.

14) 42 Shellcove Road

This house, built around 1923, is an excellent example of the Inter-war Mediterranean style which was part of the reaction against English Revival design. Professor of Architecture, Leslie Wilkinson, did much to promote Mediterranean style design in Sydney arguing that it was more suited to the climate than English-derived architecture.

15) 60a Shellcove Road

San Michele was designed by architect John Shirley in the 1930s. It appears to be named after, and inspired by, the villa owned by author Axel Munthe on Capri in the Mediterranean and described in his 1929 memoir, *The Story of San Michele*. It is another fine example of the Sydney Inter-war Mediterranean style.

16) St Augustine's Anglican Church

This 1925 church replaced a smaller wooden building. It was designed in a 20th century Gothic style, which employed brick rather than stone. The architect, Howard Joseland, had worked with Vernon on the Neutral Bay Land Company development. The church features spectacular Great War memorial stained-glass windows.

17) 91 Shellcove Road

Isla was designed by EJ Jackson in 1903 in his signature style with a mix of shapes and materials. Jackson may have worked with James Peddle who, in the following decade, would partner with SG Thorp to begin what became the enduring architectural firm of Peddle, Thorp and Walker.

18) 120 Wycombe Road

Wycombe Road was formerly called Cooper Street. The stretch below Shellcove Road was renamed by WL Vernon after his home village in England, High Wycombe. This section remained Cooper Street until 1902. No. 120 was built in 1890-91 as the Cooper Estate was being subdivided.

19) 124 Wycombe Road

Called *Rangatiri*, a Maori word for 'chief', this bungalow was built in 1891-92. The block was subdivided and the *faux* Victorian duplex built behind in 1988.

20) 126-132 Wycombe Road

This unusually large pair of English Revival Queen Anne semi-detached dwellings was built between 1899 and 1901. Once identical, Nos 126-128 have been altered. Note the original shared chimney on Nos 130-132.

21) 134 Wycombe Road

The picturesque detail of this villa, originally called *Lathallan*, is typical of the early 1900s. The treatment of the porch arch, the chimneys, upper storey shingling and the juxtaposition of brick and stone, mixes curves with straight lines.

22) 143 Wycombe Road

Built in 1894, *Yeronda* was one of the first houses constructed on this upper section of Cooper Street (now Wycombe Road). It is an excellent early example of Queen Anne style English Revival design with its turreted upper storey and mix of red brick, terracotta and slate.

23) 144 Wycombe Road

The line of villas and gardens once extended unbroken to Military Road. No. 144, built in 1906-07, is the last survivor north of *Lathallan*. The love of complexity, which united the various forms of English Revival architecture, is obvious.

24) 47 Yeo Street

In 1890 St John's was the first local Presbyterian church. The men of Neutral Bay volunteered for King and country in large numbers in World War One. Like St Augustine's, St John's contains several memorials to those killed. Its 1912 pipe organ, built by Charles Richardson, is one of the best remaining examples of its type.

25) 28-30 Yeo Street, Neutral Bay Fire Station

As Government Architect from 1890 to 1911, WL Vernon influenced the design of many public buildings. With its mix of roughcast and plain brick and its striking triangular parapets, the 1908 Neutral Bay Fire Station is a particularly fine example of his legacy. It also shows the ongoing influence of Arts and Crafts design through the work of English architect CFA Voysey.

26) **Neutral Bay Public School**

Neutral Bay Public was established in 1886. The large brick building on the corner of Yeo Street and Ben Boyd Road was built in 1897 and enlarged in 1910. The original building was probably not painted and the decorative terracotta tiles beneath the gable and windows were intended to contrast with the brick. Dame Mary Gilmore, one of Australia's most respected writers and poets, taught here in 1890.

27) **173 Ben Boyd Road**

This large Italianate villa was built in 1887 for George Yeo, who called his house *Yeoville*. There were once harbour views from the balcony.

28) **95 Ben Boyd Road**

This house was built on a rock outcrop in 1885. The writers Darcy Niland and Ruth Park lived here in the early 1950s.

29) **69-71 Ben Boyd Road**

This unusual pair of large semidetached villas was built in 1891-92. They are in the Italianate style, very popular in Sydney before English Revival architecture took hold.

30) **62 Ben Boyd Road**

This was a shop dwelling in 1891, one of the few shops in this area. It was listed as a Post Office in 1893, and was probably superseded by the Post Office in Hayes Street in 1926.

31) **16 Ben Boyd Road**

Bengallala was built in 1911 for Wilfred Spruson, a founding member of the Town Planning Association of New South Wales which included Walter Liberty Vernon. The house shows the influence of CFA Voysey with its dramatic pitched roof, and the 'battered' or sloping chimneys. Detail was important in Arts and Crafts houses - note the sympathetic font chosen for the inscription near the gate. Its strikingly English design is all the more interesting because architect Donald Esplin was Australian-born.

32) **Ben Boyd Memorials**

Ben Boyd Road is named after the man who lived in waterfront *Craignathan* (now demolished) in the 1840s. These memorials were installed by Council and the Royal Australian Historical Society in 1931. Celebrated then as a daring entrepreneur and adventurer, he is now less favourably remembered as a pioneer of 'blackbirding' - the practice of indenturing South Sea islanders.

North Sydney

NEUTRAL BAY
2089

KURRABA POINT
2089
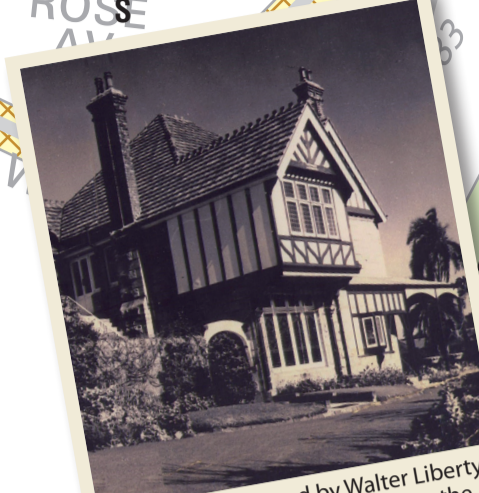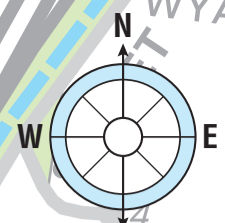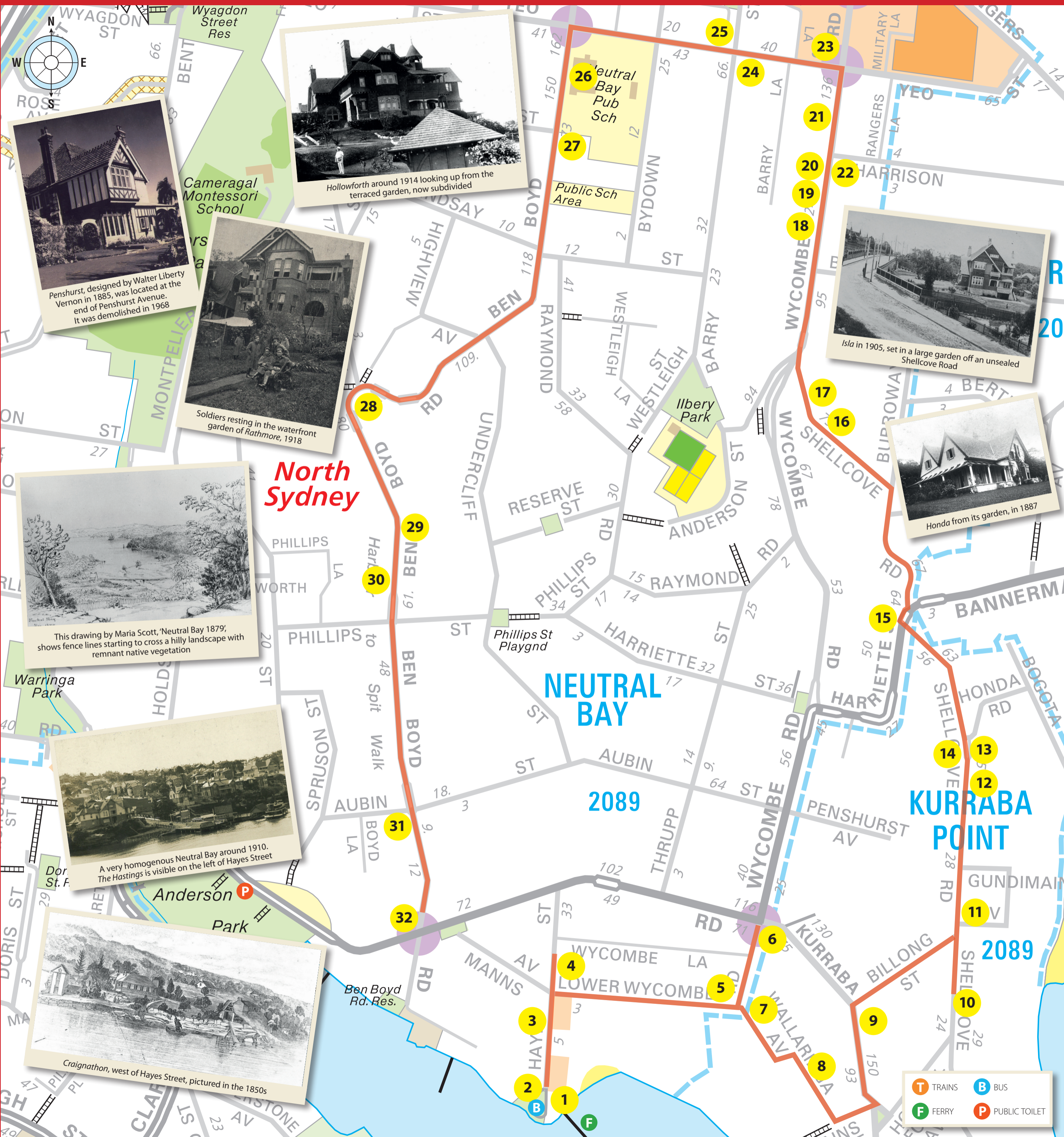
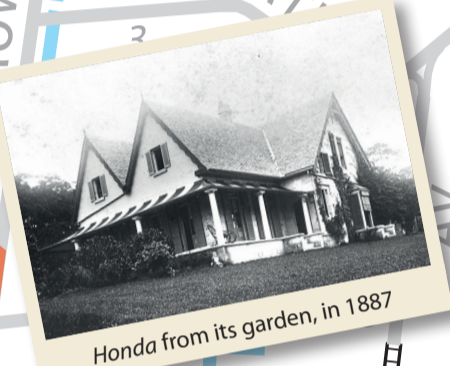*Penshurst, designed by Walter Liberty Vernon in 1885, was located at the end of Penshurst Avenue. It was demolished in 1968*
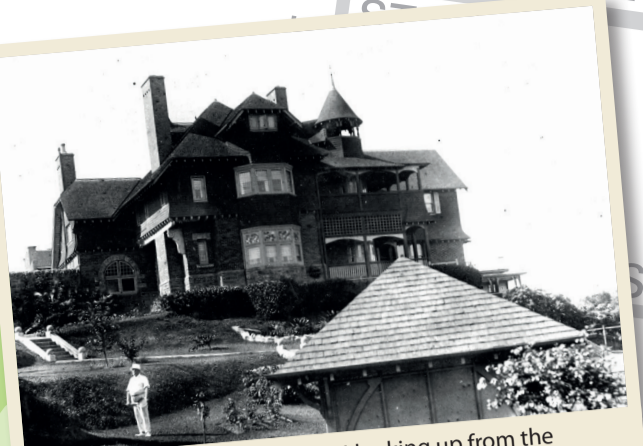
Hollowforth around 1914 looking up from the terraced garden, now subdivided

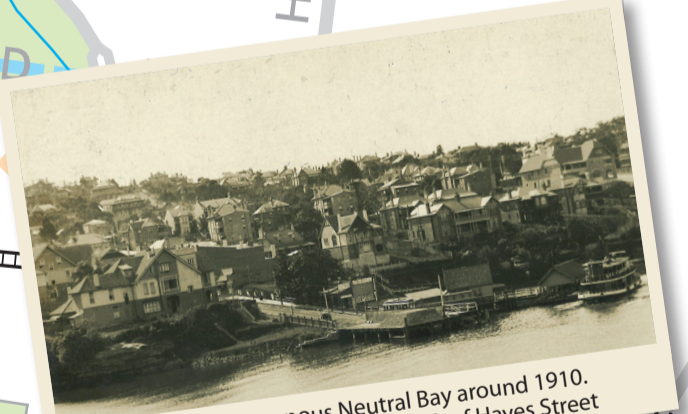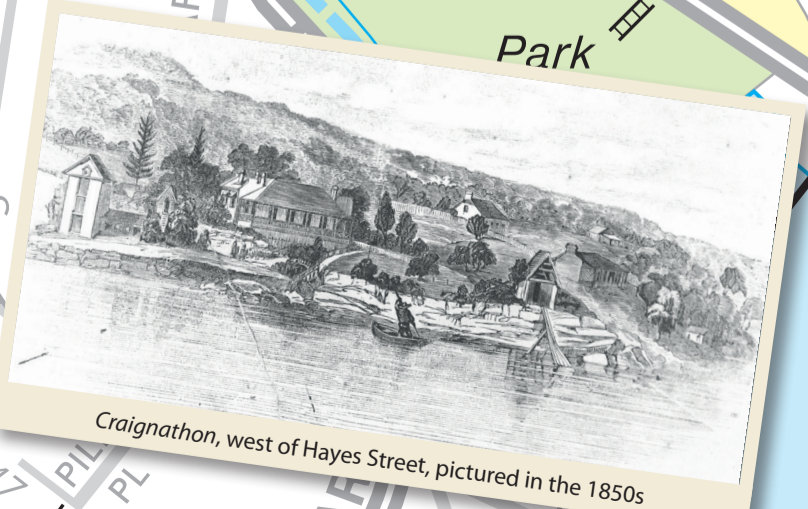*Soldiers resting in the waterfront garden of Rathmore, 1918*

This drawing by Maria Scott, 'Neutral Bay 1879', shows fence lines starting to cross a hilly landscape with remnant native vegetation

A very homogenous Neutral Bay around 1910. The Hastings is visible on the left of Hayes Street

Craignathon, west of Hayes Street, pictured in the 1850s

Isla in 1905, set in a large garden off an unsealed Shellcove Road

Honda from its garden, in 1887

Cameragal Montessori School

Warringa Park

Ilbery Park

Phillips St Playgnd

Anderson Park

Ben Boyd Rd. Res.

Wyagdon Street Res

T TRAINS   B BUS
F FERRY   P PUBLIC TOILET