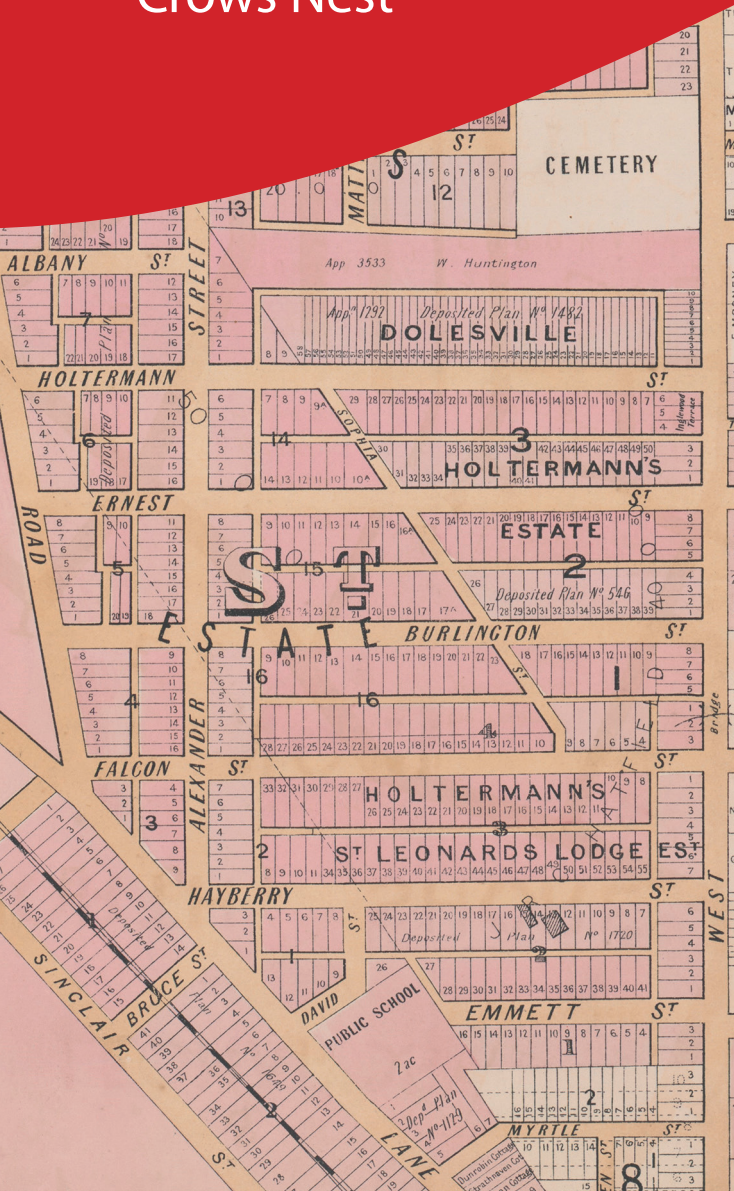# North Sydney History Walks

Crows Nest

North Sydney History Walks

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

Crows Nest

Length: 3.2 kms

Difficulty: Easy

Introduction:

Crows Nest is named after the farm and cottage established by Edward Wollstonecraft on his 1821 land grant. The estate passed to Wollstonecraft's partner Alexander Berry after his death. The Lane Cove Road (now the Pacific Highway) roughly marked the eastern boundary of the estate. Berry added to the holding with purchases to the east of the road. Subdivided after his death in 1873, that land forms the heart of present-day Crows Nest.

On this walk you will discover the architectural and social history of a working and lower middle class suburb that acquired its essential character from the 1880s to the 1920s.

1) Cammeraygal and North Sydney Girls High Schools

No. 192 Pacific Highway was the original North Sydney Girls High School. Its motto 'Towards High Things' is still visible on the front wall. Opened in 1914, the school was evidence of a new public commitment to girls' education. Several of the first teachers were university-educated women. The school's design also reflected the English Revival aesthetic promoted by the Government Architect Walter Liberty Vernon. North Sydney Girls High moved to the Crows Nest Boys High School site on the other side of the highway in 1993, after that school closed. Those buildings had been built in a similar style in 1912 as Crows Nest Public School. Bradfield Senior College subsequently occupied No. 192 until Cammeraygal High School opened here in 2015.

2) 194 Pacific Highway

This was the site of the 20-room house *Wenonah* built for barrister and politician Richard Edward O'Connor in 1898. O'Connor was a close friend and political ally of Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton. They co-founded the Australasian Federation League of New South Wales in 1893 and co-authored the Constitution Bills before the Federation of Australian colonies in 1901. O'Connor moved to Kirribilli near to Barton's home after both men became High Court Justices in 1903. *Wenonah* was sold and in 1911 converted into a hospital, the Mater Private, by the Sisters of Mercy. It was demolished in 1993 and replaced by flats.

That development included the creation of Mater Gardens on the site of *Wenonah's* front garden. All that remain of the property are the large Canary Island palms.

3) Myrtle Street houses

Myrtle Street, created around 1879, has some of the oldest surviving cottages in North Sydney. Several still have original features. Most rear gardens have been subdivided, but the properties show the scale of typical late-19th century housing. The set back at No. 46 has allowed the retention of its front cottage garden. No. 24, built in 1879, was the first house in the street. It is a good example of a respectable brick cottage in Victorian-Regency style with its symmetrical rounded shuttered French doors and central door. Nos 20, 22, 28 and 40 were built in 1880-81. No. 34 was built in 1883-84. Nos 29 and 31, dated to 1896, are an unusual pair of semi-detached timber houses. Most semi-detached dwellings were brick. Thomas Redgrave at No. 31 was an accountant, while the quarryman Henry McLellan lived in No. 33 around 1896.

4) 58 and 58a West Street

Osterley and its semi-detached twin *Otranto* were designed by architect Gordon McKinnon in 1909 and built in 1910 for Robert and Ruth Weare. They lived in *Osterley* and rented out *Otranto*. The beautiful detailing in the timberwork, the windows and the chimneys is typical of the English Revival aesthetic so popular in the decade after Federation in 1901. The mix of materials – brick, tile, stone, timber and coloured glass – reflects the many trades employed, and the pervasive influence of the English designer and thinker William Morris who celebrated skilled labour. The houses were built on what was probably part of a garden or orchard, evidence of the gradual filling of West Street allotments.

5) 41-45 and 72-76 West Street

Terraced housing, three or more dwellings sharing common walls, was the high density accommodation of its day. Most North Sydney terraces were built near the harbour. West Street, however, has several examples of one and two storey terraces. These sets were built in 1887 and 1898 respectively and are excellent examples of the terraces that characterised Sydney's inner suburbs in the late-19th century. 'Italianate' elements, such as parapet urns, and highly decorative filigree ironwork are typical. The pattern on the balcony of Nos 41-45 was registered in 1872. That on Nos 72-76 dates to 1883.

6) 60-64 West Street

The construction of these three substantial shops in 1893 suggests optimism despite a Depression still in effect. They were variously occupied by a butcher, tobacconist and greengrocer, all of whom may have lived upstairs. The Corinthian columns on the upper façade are entirely decorative and therefore called pilasters. They echo the classical aesthetic of the nearby terraces.

7) 82-84 West Street

This pair of shop dwellings was built in 1905-06. The façade reliefs show the three feathers of the Prince of Wales, also regarded as a symbol of Welsh identity, and the Australian coat of arms which was not adopted officially until 1908. Possibly the owner William Griffiths wished to express his Welsh ancestry and his loyalty to Australia. The reliefs appear to be hand-moulded. Griffiths continued his hairdressing business in his new building.

8) 61-67 Hayberry Street

This was the site of *St. Leonards Lodge*, a large bungalow built in the 1850s for colonial Auditor-General and politician William Lithgow upon his retirement. The house and its extensive gardens was bought by Bernard Otto Holtermann in the early 1870s and subdivided after his death in 1885 giving rise to the name Holtermann Estate, on which the houses north to Holtermann Street were built over the next 20 years.

9) 51-57 Hayberry Street

This group of four single-storey Victorian brick cottages were originally identical. All were built by William Wormald in 1890. The central door and portico is unusual and it may be that the design was copied from a publication. The similarity saved on cost and suggests these were a speculative development. Wormald became a prolific local builder after moving to West Street in 1884. His sons James and Henry followed their father's trade and built many more houses in the early 20th century.

10) 14 Hayberry Street

This was originally a Salvation Army Hall. It was opened in 1910, coinciding with the 21st anniversary of the Army's presence in the area. The building could accommodate 250 people and was enlarged in 1923. It was originally unpainted.

11) 5 Alexander Street

Originally called the Protestant Hall, this 1914 building saw many momentous meetings which evidenced both division and unity in Australian society. Men were given 'send-offs' here before leaving for the front in World War One. In 1915 Labor Premier William Holman was heckled here for allowing naturalised German-Australians to remain employed in the public service. Members of the Protestant Orange Order held regular meetings here occasionally attacking Catholicism. Addressing a crowd here in 1922, Prime Minister Billy Hughes stressed the importance of the British Empire and 'White Australia'. During the 1930s the Crows Nest Labor Party branch met regularly in Miss Hall's Dance Studio upstairs. The Art Deco façade probably dates to 1930.

12) 38-58 Burlington Street

This row of 11 near identical detached cottages is an excellent example of the high quality speculative building projects that characterised Sydney's suburban streets in the first decades of the 20th century. All were the work of builder George Fitzgibbon who bought the land then employed a group of specialised tradesmen to complete the project in 1904-05. It was probably Fitzgibbon who decided upon the design from floor layout to decorative detailing, guided by previous projects, existing houses or publications. These houses survive in near original condition, most with their bricks unpainted, to evoke the aesthetics of a streetscape from the early 1900s.

13) 16-24 Holtermann Street

These 1903-04 semi-detached houses are an interesting counterpoint to the Burlington Street cottages. They were a speculative development and therefore share decorative elements such as the triangular gable motif. But here builder Thomas Irvine chose wide fronted semi-detached houses rather than narrow detached cottages. Note the common chimneys.

14) St Michael's Greek Orthodox Church

Opened in 1969, this church served the growing Orthodox congregation of northern Sydney which had previously shared the Methodist Church in Holtermann Street. Because of the constraints of the site, it was built as a basilica-type church unlike the larger, cruciform-shaped and domed St Nicholas' in Marrickville. Both churches exemplified the trend in post-war ecclesiastical architecture for simplified shapes referencing traditional designs.

15) Atchison Street (east end)

This section of Atchison Street was part of a large land sale in 1901. These houses were built after 1904. They are a typical mix of detached and semi-detached brick and timber homes of the period and make an interesting contrast to the Hayberry Street houses and the speculative developments of Burlington and Holtermann Streets.

16) St Thomas' Rest Park

This park was formerly St Thomas' Cemetery. It is the oldest European burial ground on the North Shore. Alexander Berry donated the land to St Thomas' Anglican Church after his wife Elizabeth died in 1845. She was the first person buried here beneath the sandstone pyramid. An inscription at the base of the southern side notes the entrance to the vault. Alexander and Elizabeth's brother Edward Wollstonecraft are also buried here. The pyramid is possibly the only one of its kind in Australia. Decrepit and unused, the cemetery was turned over to North Sydney Council and landscaped as a 'rest park' in 1967.

17) 205 West Street

Corner locations were favoured for local shops because they provided a larger street frontage. Often the shop keeper lived above their business. This shop dwelling was built in 1905-06 and was a confectionery shop.

18) Nos 218 and 220 West Street

Before refrigerators and supermarkets, people shopped regularly at local corner shops. These examples were built before 1890. Between 1906 and 1911, No. 220 was run by Chinese greengrocers, Lewis Kee and then W. Wong. Crows Nest was home to several Chinese shopkeepers in the 1900s. Some had moved from North Sydney, others from Cammeray after their market gardens were subdivided for houses. They provided cheap fruit and vegetables even as they were vilified in the press and parliament of 'White Australia'. The display windows of No. 220 were probably replaced when the building was repurposed.

19) 196a West Street

Crows Nest was largely unaffected by the 1960s apartment boom, possibly because the smaller lot sizes made development expensive. This modest set of six flats was built in 1940. It is a good example of quality construction and design before the impact of World War Two made materials and labour scarce.

20) 52 Ernest Street

In 1889-90 Robert Johnston built a tiny three-room house here and oddly enough called it *Berg*, German for mountain. After moving to the South Head lighthouse, where he worked, Johnson rented his house out. It was apparently altered in the 1900s, for the existing building is a fine example of a Federation-era cottage. The unusual central chimney probably reflects the original floorplan. The cross gabled roof is also unusual. The use of slate tiles with terracotta ridge-caps and finials indicates quality detailing.
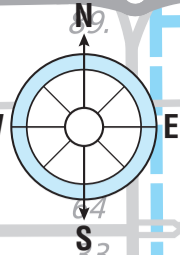
21) 29a Willoughby Road

Sydney once had many fine shopfronts. Those designed before the 1950s typically featured careful detailing at street level and above the awning. This set of shops was designed in 1929 in the Inter-war Georgian Revival-style by the architectural firm Morrow and Gordon for the pharmacy chain Soul Pattinson. The original street frontage is gone but it is possible to see the 1929 detailing above the awning. The architects were probably influenced by the *Crows Nest Hotel*, a short distance away.

22) Crows Nest Hotel

The *Crows Nest Hotel* was built in 1927 for the brewing company Tooheys. Several earlier applications were opposed in deference to 'the quiet and good nature of the neighbourhood'. The Georgian Revival or Free-Classical design was uncharacteristic of architects JE and ER Justelius who usually created streamlined Art Deco hotels. Note the Corinthian pilasters on the façade. The fanlight windows are a Georgian element. It reputedly had the longest bar in Australia. Thirty-three bedrooms accommodated travellers and visitors.

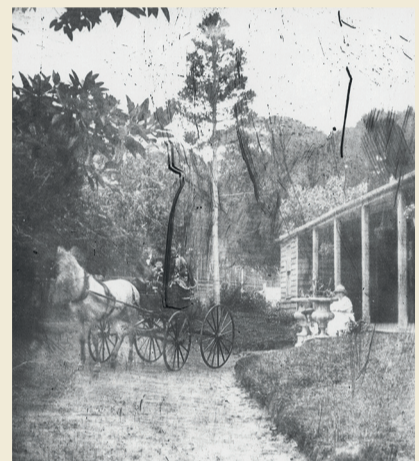## 23) 6 Willoughby Road (cnr Pacific Highway)

This building was designed in 1938 by architects Rupert Minnett and Cullis-Hill for the drapery business OJ Williams. It took advantage of its triangular site on the highway and replaced a similarly-shaped building from the early 1900s. Sometimes labelled Art Deco, its styling is more accurately called Inter-War Functionalism. It reflected the new status of Crows Nest as a commercial centre which had benefitted from the car traffic that came with the completion of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932 and improvements to the newly-named Pacific Highway.

St Thomas' Cemetery before landscaping c.1970

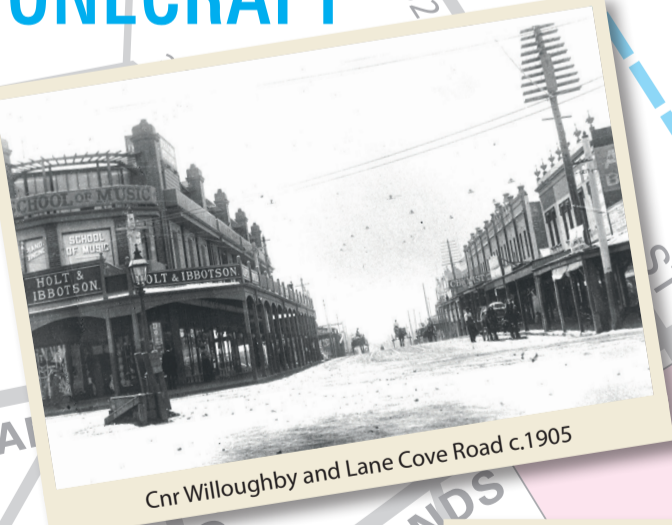HG Kent's blacksmith shop, 413-415 Lane Cove Road 1885

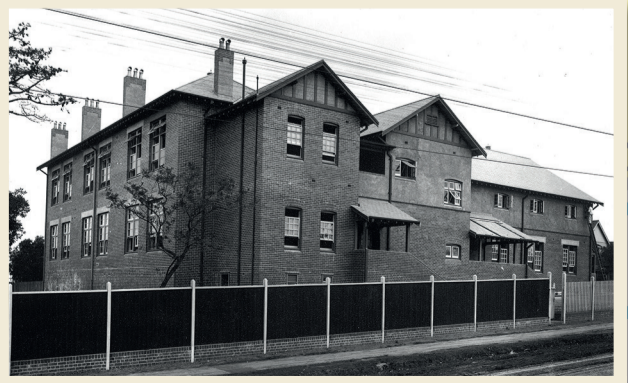Holtermann Family carriage *St Leonards Lodge* c.1875

Crows Nest Hotel, cnr Falcon Street and Pacific Highway c.1955

Cnr Willoughby and Lane Cove Road c.1905

North Sydney Girls High 1914

Ah Sing's store, No. 5 Willoughby Road c.1905

Looking south along Lane Cove Road from Myrtle Street c.1930

North Sydney

2065

CROWS NEST

Cahill Playground

WOLLSTONECRAFT

Marist College

St. Leonards Park

T TRAINS	B BUS
F FERRY	P PUBLIC TOILET