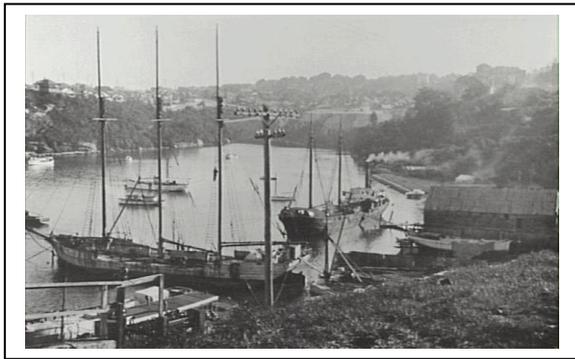


“Boatsheds all around”

A walking tour of eastern Berrys Bay

Distance: **3 km**
Approximate time: **3 hours**
Grading: **medium to high**



Introduction

Berrys Bay takes its name from Alexander Berry, business partner and brother-in-law of early land grantee Edward Wollstonecraft. The whole of present day suburbs Wollstonecraft and Waverton were part of the large Wollstonecraft land grant (524 acres). Edward Wollstonecraft and Alexander Berry were business partners who settled on this side of the harbour and built Crows Nest Cottage - from which the suburb of Crows Nest takes its name. The Berry/Wollstonecraft partnership also received land on the South Coast at the Shoalhaven River. Alexander Berry was married to Elizabeth Wollstonecraft (Edward's sister) and after Edward's early death in 1832, the partnership was shared by Alexander and Elizabeth. Elizabeth died in 1845 and their impressive pyramid shaped tomb stands as a memorial to her in St Thomas' Rest Park. Upon Alexander Berry's death in 1872 the land at Coolangatta (on the Shoalhaven) and in North Sydney passed to David Berry - the town of Berry bears his name.

This walk takes in the western half of McMahons Point fronting Berrys Bay and opposite Balls Head. In 1817 Governor Macquarie gave a grant of 80-acres of land on the North Shore to ex-convict William Blue and he named this area, encompassing the present day suburb of McMahons Point, 'Northampton Farm'. This was a working farm on which he and his family cultivated vegetables and fruit for the Sydney market. Prior to receiving his land grant he was living in the Rocks and had started the first ferry service across the Harbour from Dawes Point to Blues Point in 1807.

After Blue's death in 1834 Northampton Farm was divided up amongst his children William, Robert, John, Susannah and Mary. And contrary



to his will, the family began to subdivide and sell portions of the property from as early as 1836. In 1859 William Chuter, second husband of Blue's daughter Susannah, auctioned the Chuter Estate. In 1882 John Blue subdivided and sold his land north of the Chuter Estate. South of the Chuter Estate was Mary French's estate and this was also subdivided and sold between the 1850s and 1880s.

Berrys Bay was home to a thriving maritime industry from the 1870s to 1930s. Boatsheds and wharves stretched from Blues Point in the south to the edge of present day Waverton Park at the head of the bay. Well established boatbuilders such as William Dunn, Walter Ford and William Langford moved their yards here in the 1870s. Joining the boatbuilders on the waterfront in the 1880s was the wood stacks and steam mills of John W Eaton's timberyard.

During the 1970s and 1980s, increasing property values, especially of prime waterfront land, coupled with the rezoning of waterfront land from industrial/commercial to residential, spelt the death of many harbourside industries including slipways. Berrys Bay has not been immune from this trend.

The John W Eaton timberyard site off West Crescent Street was partially rezoned residential in the 1980s and built upon with apartments, whilst the remainder of the site was converted into the Sawmiller Reserve. Further north along the Berrys Bay foreshore, the former Groom Bros. Boatyard was sold by Stannards and the site was rezoned whereupon the buildings were demolished and apartments built on the site. Whilst the remainder of the Stannards site between Munro and John Street was reconstructed as the North Sydney Marine Centre.

***Our walk begins at the Commodore Hotel
Proceed west along Union St; walk on left side of street towards Berrys Bay.
Turn left into Dumbarton St***

Dumbarton is a Scottish word, believed to have come from a ship of that name. It was the ancient capital of the Kingdom of Strathclyde, now Scotland. The northern end of the street used to be known as LITTLE BLUE STREET.

Cross over. Continue along Dumbarton St and turn right into John St

Named for John Blue, eldest son of Billy Blue and located on the parcel of land he inherited from his father in 1834. John subdivided the property in 1884.

John Blue was born in 1815 and was the youngest of Billy Blue's children. He was an alderman of the Borough of Victoria from its inception in 1869 until the 1880s and prior to the amalgamation of the three local councils to form North Sydney. He was also landlord of the "Old Commodore Inn" in 1850-1866. Later he kept two other hotels and was variously described as a lighterman and towards the end of his life as a shipowner.

Towards the end of his life John lived at **Aston Villa (no. 111 Union St)** which he had built in 1884. He lived here until his death in 1891 aged 76 years.

Continue walking along John St noting railway bridge

The North Shore line was extended from St Leonards to the ferry wharf/tram terminus at Milsons Point in 1893. The railway bridge and line here is part of the original railway line which operated before the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932. The railway line was diverted after Waverton Station via a tunnel below Bank/Ancrum/Euroka Streets to new stations at North Sydney and Milsons Point. This former railway line services the stabling yards *behind Luna Park in Lavender Bay.*



North Shore railway line above Berrys Bay, c.1893. (Courtesy Art Gallery of NSW)

Note on right the entrance to North Sydney Marine Centre. The section of waterfront between here and Munro Street has had an extraordinarily complicated history of ownership and occupancy by numerous boatbuilders since the 1870s. Complicating matters is the duplication of names, even within families such as with the Dunn’s.

The foreshore site south of John St was probably the location of the first commercial boatyard in the bay in 1877. Boatbuilder **William Dunn** moved his operations from Lavender Bay to this site in Berrys Bay in 1877.

At the foot of the southern side of John Street **Charles Dunn** established a boat building shed and wharf in the 1878 leasing the yard

from W. Waterhouse. He seems to have moved away for a period from this site after 1884. Charles Dunn died, aged 41 years, in 1891 at the French St residence of his brother-in-law George Reynolds. He was buried in St Thomas’ Cemetery.

Apart from William and Charles Dunn, there was a Charles E Dunn and a William A Dunn. The Dunn Family constructed at least 61 known vessels before 1940, ranging through tugs, ferries, launches, trawlers, schooners, lighters and steam yachts. They are particularly known for ferries; *“The directors of the Sydney Ferries Limited have accepted the tender of Messrs Dunn of Berrys Bay...for the building of two steamers for the north shore ferry”* (1901)

Occupying the site of Dunn’s boatshed is the present boatyard complex (**North Sydney Marine Centre**) owned by the Stannard Brothers Group, through a private company Launches and Realty Pty Limited. Some of the boatyard facilities are operated by other Stannard companies, e.g. Stannard Bros, Slipway Engineering Pty Ltd and the Dreadnought Trading Pty Ltd. There are also many individual tenants (e.g. a sailmaker, a diesel mechanic, a ship designer, several boat builders, and a charter boat operator), who lease various sheds, slips, etc. from Stannards, but who operate independently.

The present Stannards marina site evolved “like topsy” with numerous operators in an agglomerate of mostly makeshift buildings. The present marina was totally rebuilt and rationalised in the 1990s with the northern portion of the site sold for residential redevelopment.

Stannard connections to North Sydney go back to the 1930s when Allan Stannard’s father

moved back to the north shore in 1937 purchasing William Reginald Holmes property in East Crescent St, Lavender Bay. Due to site restrictions at that location they looked for and found this site in Berrys Bay and relocated here soon after.

Stannard's yard survived relatively untouched until the early 1990s, partly because the railway line to Milsons Point had isolated the boatyard site from the nearby pressure of residential development. In 1993, the Sydney Morning Herald lamented: *“At Berrys Bay, behind North Sydney, only the last in a long line of marine sites to fall victim to the high price of harbourside real estate, a barge, a floating dry dock, ferry, fishing vessel; and 14 launches have been given eviction notices”*. Stannards at this time sold the southern portion of the site and redeveloped and modernised the boatyard facilities immediately off John St.

Another occupant of the site between John and Munro Sts was **Bjarne Halvorsen Limited** who operated from this site for a brief period from 1958 to 1963 as Australian Fishing Industries. The site, comprising land, wharves and buildings, was bought that year by Stannards. This enabled them to build larger boats and undertake major shipbuilding not possible at their yard in Lavender Bay.

W. M. Ford senior moved his existing boat building business to Berrys Bay about 1880 to what was the southern half of the Stannard's site (now the adjoining apartment complex). W. M. Ford junior ran the yard here for many years, and built many well-known boats, including some surprisingly large boats considering the primitive looking facilities seen in photographs. Among Ford's boats was the Sydney Harbour ferry 'Lady Hopetoun' (now a major exhibit at the Sydney Maritime Museum), the second 'Ena' for

Thomas Dibbs, the first motor boat built in Sydney (the 'Marionette' for Mark Foy), and dozens of sailing boats and motorboats. Ford also built colliers, missionary ships, large steam ferries (including 'Kulgoa' of 338 tons), and about 500 flat bottomed boats for loading phosphate at Nauru and Ocean Islands



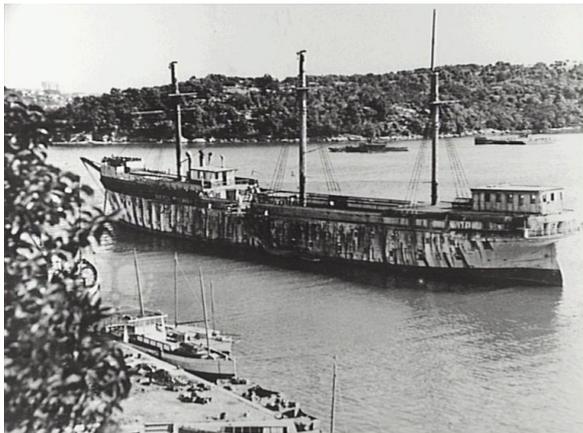
W.M. Ford's ramshackle and primitive boatyard in the 1880s. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 906/1)

In 1921 architects Ross and Rowe designed a shed for Ford's shipbuilding yard (1921) at which time the site comprised two slipways and the proposed building plus adjoining property below the Victoria Street embankment, and a shed to the left of Victoria Street to water. By the 1920s Ford's boatyard was described as *“probably the most extensive works in Sydney”*.

Berrys Bay was also the graveyard of many once proud sailing ships and vessels, most notable of these being the **Sobraon (ex HMS Tingira)**.

According to J. H. M. Abbott, *“one morning recently...[I saw] a famous, notable, and honourable ship being towed up the fairway of Port Jackson past Walsh Bay. It was HMAS Tingira R.A.N. (retired) and she was making what may possibly be the last of her many*

voyages to a shipyard in Berrys Bay. One knew she was going there, having recently read in the newspapers of the purchase of from the naval authorities by Mr W.M. Ford the well-known shipbuilder of North Sydney.”



*HMS Tingira lying in Berrys Bay, 1928.
(Courtesy State Library of NSW)*

Mr Ford opened the ship for viewing by the public and gave the money raised to charity. Local resident Vera Swift also recalls that during the Great Depression the ship served as a hostel for the unemployed.

The ship was decommissioned in 1927 and towed to Berrys Bay and over the ensuing 14 years she passed through many hands; at one stage it was contemplated converting it into a maritime museum. In 1932 she was used as a viewing platform for the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge; later she was reduced in status to a coal hulk, and in 1937 the ship was the subject of a court action over a mortgage dispute until in 1941 she finally met her doom at the hands of ship breakers. The teak, still in excellent condition, was sold to the Railway Department. In 1942 North Sydney Council petitioned the Maritime Services Board to remove the hulk of the ‘HMS Tingira (ex Sobraon)’.

Another notable hulk that was a once prominent landmark opposite the Berrys Bay boatyards was the **Bhering** a former Hudson Bay whaler, later an ammunition dump, and at one time used as a Chinese boarding house. As Chinese crew were not allowed to land in Australia under a 100 pound penalty it was the habit of certain ships trading to China to exchange crews in Sydney. The Chinese crew was transshipped to their floating boardinghouse, where they were lodged with food and bedding provided until their ship arrived.

Continue past the entrance to the marina. Take the short flight of steps on left

John Street Baths

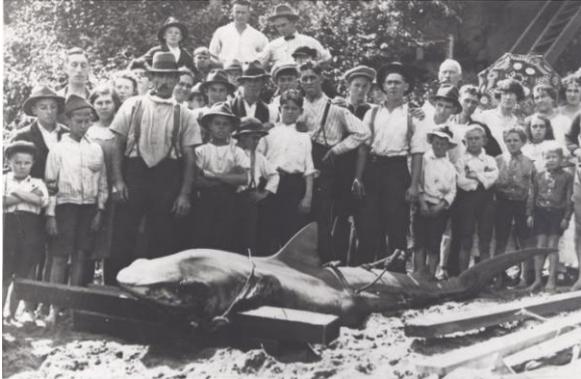
I learned to swim in Berrys Bay. There was a little pool down there, fenced around to keep the sharks out... and there was an old sailing boat there called the “Tingira”, a training ship, an old thing and we used to muck around and swim out to that and dive off it and play around.

Jack Sullivan, Oral History Interview 1996

North Sydney Council applied for a lease from Sydney Harbour Trust in 1925 for a bathing enclosure at the foot of John Street and *“asking if Council will arrange for surrender of Mr Jorgenson’s lease or submit an alternative proposal excluding the site of boatshed and slip”*

Boatbuilder Albert Groom recalls when Council decided to build a pool at the foot of John Street. *“Unfortunately at low tide there wasn’t much water in it and [people] used to swim outside the pool”*. This was despite the presence of sharks in Berrys Bay. Indeed Bill Barnett recalled that his Uncle Sid “every Christmas he’d go out to catch a shark and never missed”.

The harbour pool was closed in 1986 due to lack of insurance coverage. Another major factor in its closure was water pollution from nearby industrial sites and effluent from sewerage systems. It was dismantled and removed by cranes and barges in early 1988.



Sidney Barnett, smoking a pipe, stands behind the shark he caught in Berrys Bay in 1922. This picture is taken in West Crescent St. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 1070)

In the 1900s there were a number of small boatbuilders located north of the foot of John St towards the present lower Waverton Park playing fields. On an 1882 subdivision plan depicting John Blue's grant is “**J. Hilton** ship building sheds”. These were located along the waterfront near the foot of John St. Near this was a wharf, below John Blue's home. Hilton's sheds appear to still be there in 1909 as shown on Blue's Estate plan as “ship building shed” south of Bay Road, and below the property known as **Monte Cristo** and between the waterfront and railway line.

Also near the foot of John St, Anton Jorgenson leased a boatshed here until the early 1920s. The lease was then transferred to Mark Lane Stevedoring Co.

South of the very foot of John St, **Reg Adams Pty Ltd** applied to council for a letter from NSMC to get Sydney Harbour Trust permission

to build a jetty. “*As the whole of our work being carried out at the present time it trawler work and is rated as semi-defence work and also that we have been advised that we may be going over to defence work within the next few weeks*”. (9/7/1941)

Council had no objection to this 1941 application for the company to erect temporary buildings and jetty for the purpose of conducting a boat building business on the southern side of John Street as it was classified as defence work. The business operated until 1945.

The Daily in 10/8/1944 noted the launch of a 200 ton salvage tug for the United States of America and designed by Reg Adams. The vessel was called ‘Esperance’ and “great praise was due to the enterprise and organisation of Reg Adams, Clayton and Co, who had in three and a half years, founded a ship building yard where six vessels were now under construction all of which would be used to defeat the enemy”.

Return back up John St to Dumbarton St and turn right. Walk along to Victoria St

No. 1 Mitchell St

The large Victorian house at the intersection of Mitchell and Victoria Sts is variously known as **Charlton House** or **Waringa**. This was the former home from 1887 of the Borough of Victoria Mayor and surveyor Andrew W. Charlton. The house is located on one of the earlier subdivisions of William Blue's land grant. This land formed part of the Chuter Estate which was carved up in the late 1850s.

The property was acquired by the Railway Commissioners and sold to laundry proprietor Hamilton in 1910. Hamilton's laundry was a large building at 160 Blues Point Rd (end of

Mitchell St) which was a prominent landmark for many years until the 1970s with its tall red brick chimney stack.

Continue right over the railway bridge and into Munro St

William Ray reclaimed a portion of Berrys Bay (previously owned by Adamson). Prior to the construction of the railway line and shown on an 1871 map, *“wm chuters fresh water hold, partly excavated in rock”*. This water hole was located at the foot of Susannah St near Chuters boundary fence.

Munro St was reconfigured when the railway line was built in 1893. Some properties were resumed at this time.

No. 2 Munro St was the former site of **St Adrians** built about 1898 by surveyor Albert W Charlton. The prominent building was originally named *Capri* and passed from Mrs A. W. Charlton to Mrs Carlisle and thence acquired by merchant George E Bryant in 1908. The house was located on land originally owned by Mathew Charlton senior.

The house was demolished in the 1950s and a business known as Munro Machinery (operated by Diecut Pty Ltd) established a premises here. The company’s business was the purchase of old machinery for repair or resale.

This site was the subject of numerous complaints over many years from residents. The McMahons Point Lavender Bay Progress Association was the most vocal opponent, complaining of the *“indescribably untidy appearance of the company’s land and buildings”* despoiling the beauty of the harbour foreshores.



The progress association also complained that the “premises are the breeding places of rats and other forms of vermin”. This could well be justified in this 1959 view of the site. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 154/1)

The factory was eventually demolished and the present flats building known as *No. 4 Munro St* erected here in about 1975.

Between here and the waterfront was a network of battleaxe blocks with foreshore access. Of the original homes built here before 1869, only **No. 10 Munro St** survives. This early weatherboard cottage was owned by the Rae family for many years. Originally built by Thomas Adamson senior, it was eventually purchased by Walter Rae about 1911 - 1913, though he had lived here since 1900.

According to Mrs Leila Rae, great granddaughter of Mr Rae there was a hall on the land at the back of the house when she used to visit for family gatherings. This building was used as a picture theatre run by Leonard Rae with a small projection room. She remembered it being there from about 40 years ago and possibly in the 1950s. Leonard Rae was an accordionist and also had a ventriloquist doll and put on Punch and Judy shows here too.

Other former houses in Munro St include:

No. 16A Munro St was the home of the Courtney Family for many years. They had a boatshed on the waterfront. The Courtney family produced two well known sportsmen, cousins Jack and Tedda Courtney who played rugby league for the North Sydney Bears and the latter represented NSW and Australia. Both men were also well known 18ft sailors.



Courtney's boatshed, about 1930. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 517)

Nos. 12 and 14 Munro St were built by Robert Robertson before 1869. No. 12 was purchased by John Warren in 1876 and named 'The Hollow'. This was in the possession of the family many years. No. 14 next door was occupied from 1875 by John Rae. He bought it in 1891.

8 Munro St is now a unit block arranged over five levels to the waterfront and built in 1975 to the design of Peter Duffield and Associates.

Adjoining Ford's yards to the south were **Groom Bros.** For over 50 years, the Groom Bros. operated a ship engineering and marine repair yard in Berrys Bay (1938 - 1992).

In those days, of course, most of the ships were steamships - very few diesel ships about at all. We had work on the boilers of these ships and

quite often we'd have to knock asbestos. They talk about people getting asbestosis but we used to knock all the asbestos off the boiler valves before we could get at the valve to take it off and repair it. And at times we'd be covered in asbestos and breathing it in and coughing it up, but luckily none of the brothers smoked and we found that we were able to manage to work with that." Oral History Interview, Albert Groom
In the 1990s Stannards sold the site and Groom Bros were forced to give up their business here. According to Don Groom "we have been given notice by the owners, Stannard Bros. to vacate the site by April 1 as they want to redevelop it... The fourth generation of the family is now employed here...In the late 50s and 60s, the company was even used exclusively by the P&O line to work on such famous ships as the Oronsay, Orsova, Oriana, Canberra and Orcades...and when hydrofoils were introduced to Sydney harbour [they] were maintained solely by Groom Bros and their staff.



James, Walter, Albert, George and William Groom, about 1945. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 905/3)

The Groom Bros workshop (the little wooden structure on the waterfront) was relocated from the site above down to this location in 2000 with the redevelopment of **Nos.16-18 Munro St.** The present luxury apartments are known as

The Waterman and prior to their construction, all the sheds, buildings and structures were demolished in 1995 and the site remediated (necessitated by more than 100 years of industrial use).

North of the foot of Munro St and adjoining the Ford yard was another operation **Einersen Bros** ship chandlers and metal merchants. Neil and Bernard Einerson (stevedores) formerly of Balmain moved into 16 Munro St between 1911 and 1913. They sold out to Walter Ford (junior) in the mid-1920s.

At the foot of Munro St, walk along the Boatbuilders Walk

This pedestrian boardwalk was completed by North Sydney Council in 2005, linking up with **Sawmiller Reserve**.

This reserve acknowledges the former industrial use of the site - the **John W. Eaton Ltd** timber merchants (*below – North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF2144*) John Eaton started a small sawmill near the site of the present day North Sydney Railway Station in 1880.



His brother, Frank, later relocated the mill to this part of the Berrys Bay waterfront, where it remained until 1982. The head office was located in West Crescent St, McMahons Point.

When the mill was established at Berrys Bay everything was transported by water. Anthony Eaton's earliest memory of the yard was in about 1938 when he was ten years old accompanying his father when he went to check *“if the watchmen were working and those sort of things... I used to ride on their powered launch”*.

The majority of the timber coming in to the mill was partly manufactured and transported to the site by barge. Eaton's had its own power house, two sawmills, engineers shop, joinery shop and a blacksmiths shop. Eaton's did have their own wharf and crane so they could unload logs/load timber from smaller vessels. After World War I however more timber was transported by road. Anthony believes that at one time there were up to 22 small trucks servicing the mill via West Crescent Street. Prior to that time horses and carts navigated the steep incline of Blues Point Rd.

The heyday of the timberyard was between the 1890s and 1920s. In 1940 when Anthony Eaton started work at the family business he recalls there were about 100 employees. Wartime work included providing the timber for bunks for the conversion of the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth cruise ships to troop ships.

Eatons had an engineer's shop, they had a blacksmith's shop, and then a joinery shop, which they used to make prefabricated churches and things like that, for the islands... [There were] many, many storage sheds. They had their own powerhouse. They burned sawdust and mill waste for power. They had their own electricity generating plant. As far as I know it was one of the first ... in North Sydney.
Oral History Interview, Anthony Eaton

Despite the proximity of the timberyard to residents, there were comparatively few

complaints. Don Barnett recalled that *“the only problem was the smoke stack down the bottom... [in] certain breezes it used to get on my grandmother’s washing, [particularly] if it was blowing a northerly”*. He did not recall that noise was a great problem.

Increasing land values, coupled with the hilly terrain of the site, the predominance of road transport and the loss of a local working population led the company to relocate parts of the business during the 1950s and the site was vacated entirely by 1980.

It was a great sprawling timber yard, not run on the best lines I don’t suppose but – there again, they met their demise by pressure from residents. The residents started to close in...I don’t think it ever incurred the wrath of the residents. They all used to come to me how they liked to see it happening you know.
Oral History Interview, Bob Gordon

Exit the reserve via West Crescent St

Note **2 French St** a Victorian cottage on your left as you exit Sawmiller Reserve. There is some confusion as to the exact history of this delightful house. It was most likely built about 1875-1877 and the owner/occupant from 1879 - 1930 was tailor Henry Nitzschmann and his wife Louisa. The house has been variously known as *Hadley* and *Tullibardine*.

Across from this cottage at the intersection of French and West Crescent Streets sits the uncharacteristically high rise *Harbourmaster Flats*.

West Crescent Street and the **Barnett family** are synonymous. At various times members of the Barnett family lived at nos. 6, 10 and 12 West Crescent St. For four generations the

Barnett family lived in McMahons Point and built boats. They have a long and proud boatbuilding and sailing heritage. The first of the family to settle at Blues Point was Benjamin Barnett (known as ‘Ben the Whaler’) who was a boatman and he ferried travellers from McMahons Point to Circular Quay in the 1850s. **Benjamin Barnett senior** and his wife moved to West Crescent St in 1871, purchasing lot 7, section C of the Pockley Estate.

Benjamin senior’s son **Sidney Spurling Barnett** lived in West Crescent St, McMahons Point all his life. Sidney was a shipwright and was employed all his life at nearby Eatons’ timberyard carrying out maintenance on their floating plant (barges, tugs and punts). He was the grandfather of sailor and boatbuilder Don Barnett.



Launch of the ‘Lois’ at Sidney Barnett’s boatshed, 12 West Crescent St in 1935. Sid Barnett Senior standing second from left (hand on boat), Sid Barnett Junior standing first on left at stern (behind boy holding hat). (Courtesy State Library of NSW)

Don Barnett’s earliest memory is of watching the 18-footer World Championships on Sydney Harbour from Bradley’s Head when a gale stopped the race. His grandfather Sid Barnett senior was regarded as one of the top forward

hands of his time and sailed in the Australian champion Kismet in 1913. His father, Sid Barnett junior, was seen as an up-and-coming skipper when he died from pneumonia at the age of 31.

Don Barnett first started sailing competitively as a bailer boy on the family boat, the Amy. Four out of the crew of six were Barnetts. At the age of 21 he won the Australian Championship for 12-foot skiffs. His fondest memory, however, is reserved for the Ajax. The name of this 18-footer was carried over from a boat sailed by his father in the 1930s. In the late 1950s the Ajax won Club, State and Australian Championships and promoted the NSW 18-footer Sailing League to change handicap times.

Like his father and grandfather, Don Barnett was a boatbuilder and served his apprenticeship at Hayes Boatyard in Careening Cove in the 1940s and 1950s.

Bill Barnett

Don's cousin Bill Barnett (nicknamed 'Bronco Bill') was one of Sydney's finest wooden boatbuilders. Sailing dinghies, 18 footers and America's Cup yachts were all crafted in his shed at Berrys Bay. His great grandfather, grandfather and father were all boatbuilders at Berrys Bay.

“Right down the line we were all boatbuilders...My grandfather worked at Fords up the bay and dad served his time at Fords up the bay and when they came out of their time they just naturally went round the waterfront working at various yards...”

Bill built his own timber house at McMahons Point (**No. 6 West Crescent St**) – next door to the place where he was born in 1914, the eldest of a family of four. *“By the time he was 11 he had already built his first dinghy. He says he has*

no idea how many boats he has built, but the number must be in the high hundreds”. (National Times, 1976)

Bill began to make a name for himself as a boatbuilder with the construction and launching of the first cold-moulded 26 foot surf life-saving boat. For some years these surfboats were a mainstay of Bill's business, along with the Dragons and the 5.5 metre boats that the yard specialised in.

However, in 1975 disaster struck. An adjoining shed caught fire, and the resulting inferno destroyed the Barnett boatshed. Despite the loss of most of his equipment in the fire Bill continued to work on boats which could be brought up the slipway adjoining the yard.

Bill's good friends rallied to his cause - and built a brand new boatshed in the space of one weekend. The Council granted Bill permission to continue his operation and the Barnett boatyard was back in business. He was still working from the shed and slipway in 2005.

Apart from the Barnett family, West Crescent St also hosted a number of other boatbuilders from the 1870s, including William Goddard, shipwright Thomas Cummins and ship owner John Stevens.

Model Boat Racing

Model boats were a popular pastime for men and boys in the first half of the 20th century. Many of the men who sailed in open boats over the summer, raced models during the winter months. They often constructed their own 2-foot models and sailed them competitively in local bays and waterways.

The wooden models were small enough to be carried on trams of buses and then assembled

at the water's edge. The North Sydney Two-Foot Model Boat Club met on Sunday mornings on the beach below Bill Barnett's former boatshed in West Crescent St.

In the 1940s, Don Barnett remembers sailing two foot models in Berrys Bay over the winter months, His grandfather, uncles, brother and cousins were all involved and even his grandmother helped by making sails for the model boat. Competition was fierce among the model boat enthusiasts, many of whom sailed the 18-footers in the summer months.



Model boats being made ready for racing in Berrys Bay, 1940. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 1248/1)

George McGoogan sailed model boats with the North Sydney Club from 1938 for four seasons. At that time he recalls some 20-30 people were involved in racing. Prince and Benny Barnett, and Bill to a lesser extent, were involved with the Club. The Barnetts were the umpires and knew sailing backwards. Their role was to look for people pushing their models. The twelve-inch models sailed on Sunday mornings whilst the two-footers sailed in the afternoon. Races lasted a couple of hours with a time limit of 2 ½ hours and courses were set.

Model boat racing declined after World War II and models died out completely in the 1950s.

The steps to the Berrys Bay waterfront here are actually known as **Dowling Street**. Named for Edward Dowling (1843-1912), public servant and Federationist. He became the full-time secretary of the Board of Technical Education when it was set up in 1883 and did most of the executive work involved in establishing the Sydney Technical College and its early branches. He retired from the public service in 1889. Edward Dowling owned several parcels of land along this western side of West Crescent St from the 1870s. He later sold his land to Robert Webster Cooper in 1886, but retained a portion of land on the north corner of West Crescent Street at the Blues Point Road corner.

Next door to the Barnett Family was boatbuilder **William Langford**. He moved his boatyard from Lavender Bay to Berrys Bay in the 1870s. He acquired a parcel of land in West Crescent St from Smeal in the 1870s. He sold the dwelling house and sheds to Thomas Dibbs in 1889/90 who in turn sold the property to SCEGS Shore between 1914 and 1916.

Rowing has been part of Sydney Church of England Grammar School's (Shore) tradition since the 1890s. The coaching of the early teams was done by the headmaster Robson, rowing up near Lane Cove baths before rowing back to the shed in Berrys Bay.

Berrys Bay and Balls Head Bay had originally provided good water for rowing, however increasing traffic on the harbour became a problem and a new shed was acquired further up the river in 1919.

Neighbour Don Barnett remembered that SCEGS “had all sorts of rowing skiffs down there

and they'd train there...they used to race up Nepean River...for the Head of the River”.

No. 2 West Crescent St

These 'space age' apartments were designed in 1968 by Stan Symonds for John and Ivy Moore and completed in 1973. Sandstone from the former house on the site was reused in landscaping and retaining walls.

Continue to end and Blues Point Rd. Turn left at Blues Point Rd

Note the sandstone fence and railing now surrounding **No. 58 Blues Point Rd.** 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 was built on lot B. The apartments at the rear in West Crescent St occupy the site of the former Victorian house demolished before the 1960s.

Walk uphill in Blues Point Rd

McManus Street

Located on part of the original land grant made to Billy Blue in 1817 (Northampton farm). The McManus family was related by marriage to the Blue family. Mr. P. McManus was an Alderman of North Sydney Council 1908-1916.

Continue uphill in Blues Point Road

French St is named after James French, the second husband of Billy Blue's daughter, Mary. He lived for some time on Mary's share of

Northampton Farm at Blues Point. Working as a Crown Lands Ranger he obtained a grant of land still known as French's Forest.

Take note particularly of **nos. 5-13**, a short walk down the hill on the left, a group of five identical, gabled-corrugated iron roofed single storey terraces in the Federation Queen Anne Style. The houses were built in 1903 by John Samuel Whatmore and they bear the names: *Omega, Delta, Gamma, Beta* and *Alpha* respectively. Each features a projecting gable-roofed bay with half-timbering and bracketing to the gable ends, and three double hung windows, being the narrow windows flanking one wider window. Chimneys are located on party walls. The group is particularly distinctive for the manner in which each house steps down the hill from East to West.

Return back to Blues Point Rd. Continue up the hill passing Mil Mil St on your left

Formerly known as *Carr St* after John Carr who owned a home in Lavender Bay in the 1870s, Mil Mil is believed to be the Aboriginal name for Goat Island. There is a fine view across the water to the Island from the end of the street. The meaning is thought to be "place of many eyes".

Continue along Blues Point Rd and turn left into Princes Street

Prince St features a nice group of single and two storey federation cottages built in the period immediately following the subdivision of the Estate of Henry Prince in 1900 and 1903.

On the shorter southern side of the st **Nos. 11-17** were built by Joseph Hopwood and named *Lexington, Anona, Chezales, Boronia*

respectively. **No. 19** was built between 1914 and 1916 for Mrs Ellen Holmes and named *Arawa*. **No. 21** the two-storey house at the western end of the street was built in 1902/03 for contractor Charles William Watt and named *Stratheric*.

The northern side of the street features a mix of single and two storey Federation homes at **nos. 12-40** built during the first decade of the 20th century (1901-1909) by various builders. Known house names include: *Irvine (No. 40)*, *Edin (No. 38)*, *Wai Tero (No. 36)*, *Awapui (No. 34)*, *Kalingo (No. 30)*, *Delmont (No. 28)*, *Dorothy (No.26)*, *Toxthville (No. 24)*, *Claremont (No. 22)*, *Pauline (No. 20)*, *Olga (No. 18)* and *Roseville (No.16)*.

Continue to end and turn right into Queens Ave

The houses in this street are also built on the subdivision of Henry Prince's estate. On your left as you enter Queens Ave is a nice set of terraces, **nos. 1-13**, built by William Edward Cullam in 1904 (he occupied No. 1). The house at **no. 15 Queens Ave** was built in 1905-06.

On the western side of the street terminating at Mil Mil St is another group of predominantly Federation houses erected between 1906 and World War I. Some of the houses had names such as Rathdowney (No. 24), San Remo (No. 22), Balmoral (No. 20), Wai Nui (No. 16), Awanui (12), Trita (No. 4) and Senga (No. 2).

Turn right and walk along Queens Ave to Mitchell St

North Sydney Council resumed and demolished a number of houses in Mitchell and Victoria Sts in 1926 for the extension of Queens Ave.

No. 12 Mitchell Street

This is the former Sikman and Coates furniture factory. This art-deco styled industrial building was erected in 1937 on land owned by North Sydney Council following works for the extension of Mitchell St in 1926.

Presently housing the offices of DDI Adworks. The former factory building was converted by visiting German architect Frank Winter in 1994. The design retains the historic art deco exterior.

Our “Boatsheds All Around” walking your ends here in Victoria Street. To return to North Sydney walk uphill to Blues Point Rd.

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