

4.0

Comparative Analysis

4.1 Preliminary Explanation

For the purposes of this study it was felt necessary to define this comparative analysis as dealing with 5 main aspects as follows;

- a precinct containing Indigenous sites of significance
- a public recreation reserve including a beach swimming enclosure
- a reserve containing natural bushland
- an historic house site
- an historic fort

Each aspect is dealt with in the following sections.

4.2 A Precinct of Indigenous Sites

A number of archaeological surveys have been undertaken in and adjacent to Nielsen Park during the last 20 years. A summary of these studies is provided below to provide a local archaeological context to the current investigation.

- **Tessa Corkhill 1990** - *Survey for Aboriginal Sites at Strickland House, Vauclose* Corkhill undertook a survey of 5 hectares of land comprising the Strickland House estate, just south of Nielsen Park. No new sites were found, however one previously recorded midden site was located and assessed. Corkhill's report recommended conservation of the site within the Hermitage Foreshore Reserve.
- **Elizabeth Rich 1983 & 1984** – *Hermitage Foreshore Reserve – Survey and Test Excavation of a Midden*. Rich undertook a survey and limited test excavation within the Hermitage Foreshore Reserve. During a survey in December 1983 for a proposed walkway, Rich found 3 middens, axe grinding grooves and a potential archaeological deposit. An additional midden was found along the alignment of a proposed fence. In 1984 Rich carried out limited test excavation at the site which found a cultural sequence approx 600 mm thick and containing a variety of rock platform shell fish species.
- **Attenbrow 1992** – *Port Jackson Archaeological Project Stage II*, As part of the Port Jackson Archaeological Project, Attenbrow carried out test excavation at two sites within Nielsen Park (45-6-1045 'Hydrofoil Cave' and 45-6-0560 'Mt Trefle Cave').

A total of six 50cm by 50cm squares were excavated within deposits at Mt Trefle Cave. Deposits ranged between 150 mm to 700 mm deep to natural sandstone bedrock. Stone artefacts, bone and shell artefacts, faunal remains, charcoal and ochre were recovered. Two bone unipoint artefacts and six pieces of worked shell (scrapers) were found. Stone artefacts were predominantly made from quartz with forms characteristic of the late Bondaian period (the last 1,600 years). A total of 48 species of shellfish were identified, the dominant species being hairy mussel,

black nerita and oyster. Carbon dates on charcoal and shell recovered during excavation indicated early occupation approximately 1,200 years ago.

One square metre was excavated within deposits at Hydrofoil Cave, a small rockshelter on Bottle and Glass Point. Deposits were approximately 800 mm deep. Faunal remains, shell artefacts, stone artefacts and charcoal from an Aboriginal hearth were recovered. A fish hook file and 2 fish hooks were found, but very few stone artefacts. The deposits were highly disturbed by modern visitation and use. The dominant shellfish species represented were black nerita, limpet, heavy turban and hairy mussel. A shell sample was submitted for carbon dating, however the results had not been received at the time of writing.

AHIMS Site Register Search

A search of the DEC *Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS)* for sites within Nielsen Park, returned a total of 14 sites. Site types and frequencies are as follows:

- Rock Shelter with Midden – 4
- Midden – 3
- Rock Shelter with Art – 3
- Rock Shelter with Deposit – 2
- Axe Grinding Groove / Rock Engraving – 1
- Rock Shelter with Art & Midden – 1

The AHIMS search results show a predominance of middens and a variety of rock shelter sites. Site patterning in Nielsen Park reflects the topographic, geological and environmental context of the area. Rock engravings, axe grinding grooves and rock shelters are all found in areas of sandstone outcropping. Midden sites are found in greatest number on the margins of the estuary.

(Archaeological & Heritage Management Solutions Pty Ltd)

4.3 A Public Recreation Reserve

For a comparison with similar harbourside reserves with netted swimming enclosures it is necessary to list the existing harbour and related pools with reserves that approach Nielsen Park at least in a visual sense. Although there are some 20 enclosed public swimming baths in Sydney Harbour and its tributaries, there are only 6 that are comparable in character that have a landscaped shoreline reserve adjoining and these are -

- Balmoral netted enclosure
- Clifton Gardens pool
- Forty Baskets Beach pool
- Little Sirius Cove baths
- Little Manly Cove baths
- Parsley Bay enclosure

The remainder, even on the Hawkesbury, Georges and Port Hacking River environments are small enclosures with minimal beachfronts and little shore space and all are generally surrounded by suburban development.

Nielsen Park pool area is the largest of the other six in Sydney Harbour and has more easily accessible recreation space than the others: only Forty Baskets Beach probably has more natural bush adjoining.

Historically, as a recreation reserve the Clifton Gardens reserve is the oldest and has albeit on a smaller scale, a similar character to Nielsen Park, though without the historic built environment if the buildings of the former Clifton Gardens army precinct are excluded. Clifton Gardens represented the late 19th century version of a harbourside park reached in an isolated way by ferry from Sydney Cove while Nielsen Park is the early 20th century equivalent although each are on opposite sides of the harbour.

Of all the similar harbourside reserves with public baths Nielsen Park would appear to be unique in that it combines the following aspects;

- it retains a rich collection of Indigenous cultural heritage.
- it encompasses the last surviving parcel of remnant bushland in the eastern suburbs consolidated in one continuous shoreline.
- most of the reserve area was once part of a famous estate being Vaucluse house and it has historic buildings relating to the Wentworth family
- a large historic harbour fort is located within its boundaries
- it has a large protected swimming beach relatively close to the influence of the harbour entrance plus associated infrastructure.
- there is a range of a large areas for picnicking and public recreation and numbers of support buildings of architectural interest.
- It resulted from the socio-political motivations of residents to preserve foreshore land in public ownership in the early 20th century.

Possibly no other park reserve on Sydney Harbour, with the exception of Ashton Park, has captured the public imagination to the extent of the efforts to preserve it for future generations and at the same time provide an invaluable space for potential healthy recreation and relaxation in pleasant surroundings.

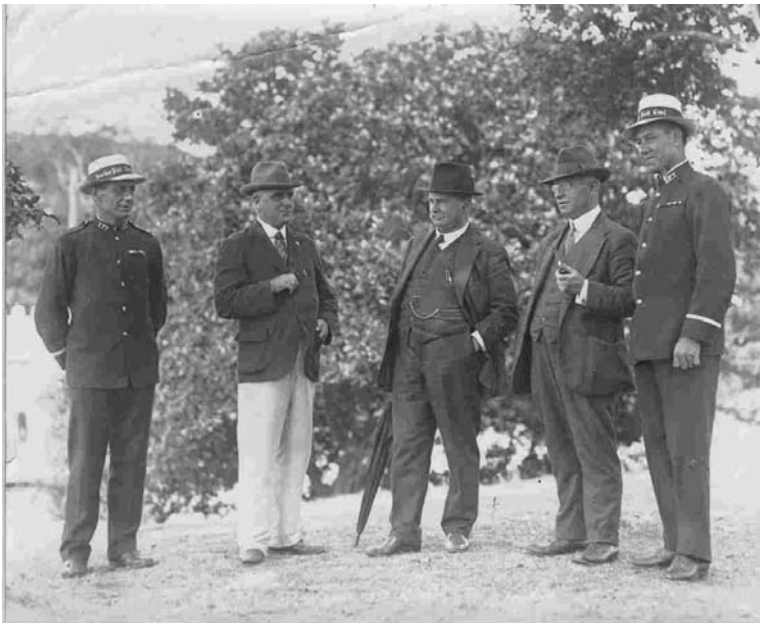


Figure 20

Trust members inspect the Park with uniformed rangers from Vaucluse (left) and Nielsen Park (right) Trusts. c1927. Note the campaign ribbons being worn by the Rangers. *NPWS Collection.*

The Dressing Pavilion remains part of a small number of Inter-War Mediterranean Style baths pavilions in Sydney, which comprise the Bondi Beach Pavilion, the

Bathers' Pavilion at Balmoral Beach and the Brighton Le Sands Beach Pavilion. These three other examples have to varying extents had their original functions changed while the Nielsen Park example remains virtually unchanged and provides the same facilities as was originally intended.

The three other examples of pavilions were all built in 1928 at the height of a development boom and reflected the heightened public aspirations of that time, particularly in regard to beachside recreation. By contrast the Shark Beach pavilion was built at the height of the Great Depression in 1932 using restricted resources. It also differs from the other three; it was purposely made to be subservient to the park landscape is accordingly set well back from the beach. The others were sited on the beach and busy roads and were meant to be dominant landmarks adjacent to the baths or main surf beach.

Nielsen Park's pavilion has the distinction of retaining its original function while the other pavilions have largely been adapted for different uses as originally planned. It was also designed as a single function dressing and bathing facility for beach patrons based on open courtyard planning; the others were multi-function complexes with the Bondi building incorporating a stage and open air cinema. Bondi was also the only example to demonstrate internal open courtyards similar to Nielsen Park and may have been influential in the design for the Park Dressing Pavilion.

4.3.1 A Natural Bushland Reserve

While the remaining parts of the natural bush landscape in Nielsen Park have been affected by human intervention over a long period they still retain a varied collection of important native species such as the remnant Angophora forest and Kunzea heath. The reserve also importantly contains a virtually undisturbed harbour foreshore in one of the most prominent parts of Sydney Harbour with many impressive natural sandstone outcrops and cliff formation throughout the Park. This area contains examples of *Allocasuarina portuensis* and *Acacia terminalis terminalis*, both shrubs listed as endangered species on Schedule 1 of the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. Listing requires that a recovery plan must be prepared and consideration given to the species in assessing the impacts of developments and activities with the aim of minimising adverse impacts. This varied combination of natural features has assisted in the retention of an important range of birds and animals as well as marine animals along the foreshore.

What makes Nielsen Park probably one of the most remarkable harbourside reserves is that it still possesses a rich diversity of plant types, many being of original pre-settlement species and all within an urbanised eastern area suburb. Coupled with its other main function of a public reserve having planted park spaces makes it relatively rare on the southern shores of the harbour and it is to be compared favourably with the bushland of South Head which is still in the process of regeneration by NPWS after being cleared in the 19th century by the colonial military forces.

4.3.2 An Historic House Site

The 'Greycliffe House' estate can still be appreciated in its built form thanks initially to being part of Vaucluse House estate. This was preserved from residential subdivision until the early 20th century by the Wentworth family and then at a critical time when re-development seemed inevitable by public intervention in the form of the Government resumption as a reserve as a result of community pressure.

There are some harbourside estates with their original houses that can portray their original relationship to the harbour but they are now few in number. Those other notable examples with their support buildings are as follows:

- *Vaucluse House* and *Carrara* (Strickland House) at Vaucluse
- *Admiralty House* at Kirribilli
- *Carthona*, Darling Point
- *Government House* at Government Domain, Farm Cove

Two further examples are found on the upper reaches of the Parramatta River:

- *Garryowen* (part of Callan Park) at Rozelle
- *Yaralla* (part of Thomas Walker Hospital) at Concord

Of all those examples Greycliffe probably retains a more immediate relationship to the harbour with the exception of Carrara and like Carrara also has a landscaped setting very similar to what it has always had, bearing in mind the natural setting; Yaralla being an artificially planned landscape setting.

Greycliffe was also part of that group of residences planned and built on the lower reaches of the harbour originally in response to Governor Macquarie's desire for all harbourside buildings to be in the picturesque Tudor Gothic idiom. A style used by Francis Greenway for public buildings such as Dawes Point and Fort Macquarie Batteries and Government House stables. This theme was continued during the Victorian era and it became fashionable to own a Gothic inspired style of harbourside villa. Usually referred to as 'Marine Villas' many such residences were built facing the lower reaches of the Harbour. Apart from Government House and Vaucluse house, the privately owned examples which survive include Bishopscourt (originally section designed by Hilly), Callooa, Carthona, The Swifts and Lindsay at Darling Point, Gladswood House at Double Bay and the Hermitage at Rose Bay.

This design of house gradually lost favour towards the end of the 19th century to the Italianate style which had been inspired by the introduction into Australia in the 1840's of the 'Italian Villa' style.

In comparing the architectural quality of Greycliffe with similar houses of the period, what would appear a relatively straightforward matter seems to have proved to be much more difficult. While there are some pre 1850 examples surviving of similar design such as Carthona and Lindsay at Darling Point, and many others from the 1860's up to 1890, there appear to be very few examples surviving from the 1850's. This would be explained possibly because Sydney at that period was the main centre of building and other contemporary examples have fallen victim to the pressure of urban development and resources were dissipated elsewhere due to the gold rush fever of the 1850's and the shortage of tradesmen.

The only other comparable examples extant are;

- Bega Rectory (c1850) – designed by Edmund Blacket
- Kirribilli House (1859) – architect unknown
- Roslyndale at Woollahra (c1856) – designed by Francis Clarke
- Bishopscourt at Darling Point (c1858) – designed by Edmund Blacket as a major rebuilding of John Hilly's earlier cottage.

All examples surviving are of equal architectural quality to the high standard of *Greycliffe*.

Similarly, few 1850's examples of Victorian Picturesque Gothick Gardener's Cottages remain; the only examples so far located are the lodges in the Royal Botanic Gardens. Those few forming part of country estates in the Southern Highlands, all of a latter date. The Gardener's Cottage is therefore the only early example of the 1850's to survive in NSW.

The survival of *Greycliffe's* Gardener's Cottage is now a relatively rare example in Sydney of what was once a common practice both in the Georgian and Victorian periods, of building lodges (usually at the gate entrances to estates), gardeners and farm or estate workers cottages. They were sometimes even in the form of small terrace houses or as is the case at *Greycliffe* as a cottage containing space for two self-contained dwellings in the traditional English estate manner.

Other later examples known to have survived in Sydney include; the *Domain Lodge* for *Government House*; the *Hermitage Lodge*, Vaucluse; *Toxteth Lodge*, Glebe; the Gardener's Lodge at Camelot Estate, Narellan; The Gatehouses for Old Government House, Parramatta and the estate cottages at *Yaralla*, Concord.

4.3.3 An Historic Fort Site

During the 19th and early 20th centuries a large number of harbour batteries were built in Sydney Harbour, Botany Bay and at various places on the coast including Newcastle. As a result of a Royal Commission and a Defence Committee recommendation in 1870 a series of supplementary forts were built in Sydney Harbour in the 1870's, all being designed by Colonial Architect James Barnet. All were built in accordance with then current British military requirements even though in 1870 all British Regiments in Australia returned to Britain leaving a relatively untrained colonial army personnel to man the new and extended batteries to be built. The Steele Point Battery (at times referred to as Shark Point) was comparable to the new group of batteries being 'outer defences' namely; Middle Head (7 guns), Georges Head (2 guns), Inner South Head (5 guns) and Steele Point (3 guns) with one battery being 'inner defences' at Bradleys Head (2 guns). All were built from either the natural or quarried sandstone construction having open gun pits, below ground passages and magazines and above ground barracks built from either sandstone or of timber (as at Steele Point).

In 1871 construction started at Steele Point (the date is inscribed in a stone lintel of an outer passage) and appears to have been completed in 1880. A later valuation of the fort described it thus:

'A Battery with three gun pits connected by open passages and covered passages to magazine, shell and artillery store and two shell and lamp recesses built of stone. Quarters with outhouse and store and pickets fence. Barbed wire fence surrounding fort, including gates jetty and approach. Roads and sundry improvements.'

During the 1880's and 1890's technological gunnery advances saw the replacement of the original battery at Steele Point but any further development of it seems to have been halted in 1910 with the removal of the guns. In contrast other contemporary harbour and coastal batteries were updated even during World War 2.

Therefore Steele Point Battery is directly comparable with all of its other four harbour contemporary batteries and has added significance in being virtually unchanged over the last 100 years, it is the only fort to retain its original barracks.



Figure 21

Nielsen Park during occupancy of the 61st Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Company, c1944. Note the temporary barracks located near the present day sewage-pumping station and trailer-mounted generator for powering the searchlights. *Courtesy Barbara Milford.*



Figure 22

William Notting Memorial. Styled as a Roman Seat it is the only example of such a feature on Sydney Harbour, April 2004. (David Sheedy)