



historical
walking
tours

CITY OF SYDNEY 
city of villages

PARADE OXFORD STREET

Historical Walking Tour



Front Cover Image:

William Yang, Poppy King Float, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, 1999 (Photograph: National Library of Australia, nla.pic-vn3097638) (detail)

OXFORD ST

B

By the early 1800s there was a track running from Sydney to South Head, which eventually developed into “The South Head Road”, the route for fashionable outings for Sydney’s elite.

In 1875 it became Oxford Street, and similar to its London namesake, it became a centre for shopping.

The widening of Oxford Street (1910–14) to help modern motor cars get to the eastern suburbs, also made possible its modern reputation as a boulevard, a place to see and be seen. Oxford Street has hosted many parades: military and celebratory, ceremonial and political. People from all walks of life can be seen along Oxford Street.



PLEASE ALLOW
1½ HOURS FOR THIS TOUR.

There are many cafes and pubs en route, and buses run along Oxford Street frequently. Start at the southern end of Hyde Park (1).

**Sydney’s
history
is all around us.**

Our walking tours will lead you on a journey of discovery from early Aboriginal life through to contemporary Sydney.

Clover Moore

Clover Moore MP
Lord Mayor of Sydney

William Yang, Marching Boys, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, 1995 (National Library of Australia NLA nla.pic-3118087.)



*Marching Boys.
William Yang. '95.
Sydney Gay & Lesbian
Mardi Gras*

PARADE OXFORD STREET

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01 HYDE PARK SOUTH

Officially set aside in 1810, Hyde Park has long been the focus for ceremonies and protests. The **ANZAC Memorial** dominates the southern end of the park. Designed by Bruce Dellit, it is a stunning example of the Art Deco style. The memorial opened in 1934 with the sculpture *Sacrifice* by Rayner Hoff as its centrepiece. At the corner of Liverpool and College Streets, pointing up Oxford Street, is the **Emden Gun**, salvaged from the German raider sunk by HMAS Sydney in 1914.



Cross over College Street. At the intersection of Liverpool and Oxford Streets is the **Burdekin Hotel** (2).

02 BURDEKIN HOTEL

The hotel's name is a legacy of Thomas Burdekin and his family, who once owned vast tracts of real estate in Darlinghurst and Woolloomooloo. Thomas' son, Sydney Burdekin, was the Mayor of Sydney in 1890–91. The previous hotel building with its distinctive onion dome was demolished in 1911 as part of the widening of Oxford Street. The City Architect designed the replacement hotel we see today.



Oxford Street in 1910 before widening
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



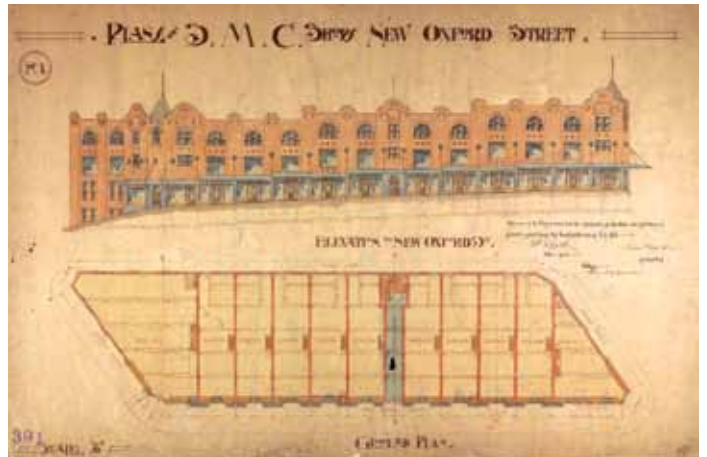
Continue uphill to Oxford Square at the intersection with Riley Street.

03 WIDENING OF OXFORD STREET

Motivated by the ideals of the “City Beautiful Movement” in Europe and America, the City Council resumed the entire northern side of Oxford Street from Liverpool to Bourke Streets in 1909, demolishing and rebuilding it over the next five years. Where the old street had been 60 feet (18.3m) wide, it was now 100 feet (30.5m) (3A). The once congested shopping street became a boulevard with large commercial outlets and professional chambers, including the **Sydney Municipal Council Shops** (3B).



Cross the street to the Oxford Square Monument Apartments, formerly the site of Buckingham's Department Store (4).



(Images: City of Sydney Archives)

s7-35/5

OXFORD STREET RESUMPTION

CITY COUNCIL LEASES 50 YEARS TERM

FOR SALE BY PUBLIC AUCTION AT THE ROOMS 98 PITT ST SYDNEY.
THURSDAY JULY 6TH 1911 at 11:30 a.m.

Auctioneers in connection with
RICHARDSON & WRENCH LTD
RAINE & HORNE

Plans of lease and all particulars can be obtained at Auctioneers' Rooms.

All measurements are subject to the official Plan.

WM Gordon City Surveyor

SPLENDID BUSINESS SITES

BURTON 60'
CROWN 60'
OXFORD 100' wide
ST 60'

LANE 10'

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04 BUCKINGHAM'S

Oxford Street remained a vital shopping strip after it was widened and the lower end was dominated by large department stores such as Reuben Brasch's, Edward Arnold's, Winn's and Buckingham's Emporium Palace. Clothing, manchester, haberdashery, and soft furnishings could all be bought at Buckingham's, the self-styled "People's Draper". Buckingham's became a household name with their army of door-to-door salesmen who offered merchandise on time payment schemes. The Buckingham's building was unoccupied when it mysteriously caught fire in 1968.



Buckingham's 1966
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

You are now on the stretch of Oxford Street which exploded as a nightclub precinct in the 1970s, known as the "Gay Golden Mile" (5).



05 "GAY GOLDEN MILE" 70S AND 80S



Sydney Gay Guide 1982
(Private Collection)

From the late 1960s and 70s, Oxford Street began to draw the gay sub-culture across from Kings Cross, which was becoming increasingly hostile due to the rise of the drug culture and the boom in heterosexual prostitution. **Ivy's Birdcage** at No. 191 opened early in 1969, shortly followed by International Vanities better known as **Capriccio's** at No. 163. Cap's became famous for its innovative drag shows.

By the late 1970s and early 80s, Oxford Street was widely seen as the heart of gay Sydney, with many businesses, bookshops, nightclubs, pubs and back rooms clustered in and around the streets: **Patch's** (No. 33), the **Exchange Hotel** (No. 34), **Tropicana** (No. 85) (now the Midnight Shift), **Flo's Palace** (No. 97), **Palms** (No. 124), **253 Sauna** (with its sign ironically directing clients to the "Entrance at Rear"), and **Club 80** (now the site of Berkelouw's bookshop).

The explosion of venues led to the establishment of alternative gay entertainment guides and a newspaper, *The Star* (later the *Sydney Star Observer*). The *Star's* offices were located at 292 Crown Street for many years. Next door was the **Link Bookshop** (No. 290) and across the road also on Crown Street was **Link Headquarters** (No. 249) and **Ruby Reds** lesbian wine bar (No. 273).

Late on the night of 24 June 1978, Sydney's gay and lesbian community held its first celebratory Mardi Gras, which the police turned into a confrontational affair by arresting 53 people. Although homosexual acts remained illegal in NSW until 1984, this annual event gradually gained wider acceptance. Today Mardi Gras has grown into a month-long celebration of gay and lesbian sub-cultures, but the parade remains a potent mix of political protest, creativity and extravagance.

The 1970s also saw the rise of punk rock in Australia, at low-rent venues such as **French's Tavern** (a former wine bar) and the **Oxford Tavern** (now the Oxford Hotel at No. 134) which came to be known as **The Funhouse**.

You may like to make a detour down Crown Street with its many boutiques and cafes. Otherwise continue uphill to Taylor Square. Lord Mayor Allen Taylor was the driving force behind the widening of Oxford Street, and the square was named after him in 1908. The first Mardi Gras protest march in 1978 departed from Taylor Square. At the corner of Bourke and Campbell Streets is **Kinselas** (06).

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06 KINSELAS

Founded in 1830, Charles Kinsela, funeral director and embalmer, became the largest firm in Sydney and introduced our first motor hearses in 1920. This was the business' headquarters from 1932 to 1982. The art deco interiors were designed by Bruce Dellit. In 1982 the premises became a theatre-restaurant, then a bar and nightclub, taking advantage of the boom in Oxford Street nightlife.



The Australian Funeral Director, 1935 (Society of Australian Genealogists)



Wander down Bourke Street to see some other significant gay sites, Nannas, which served coffee with atmosphere until 4am at 312a Bourke Street, and the **Beresford Hotel** at No. 354 (7C).

07 "GOING GAY"

In the 1970s, many pubs on and near Oxford Street started to "go gay", providing a swathe of alternative venues that opened earlier in the evening. These pubs provided ready-made outlets for the emerging free gay press and created new spaces for building community networks and promoting gay activism. The **Cricketer's Arms** (7A) on Fitzroy Street is celebrated as the district's "original" gay hotel (1973). Others soon followed suit. As you move along Oxford Street you can or could find the **Oxford** (7B), the **Beresford** (7C) and **Flinders** (7D), the (former) **Albury** (7E), the **Unicorn** (7F), and **Bar Apollo** at the **Hotel Imperial** (7G) up in Paddington. The Beresford was the first venue to advertise in the gay press and to actively seek gay clientele. The lane between the Beresford and Flinders Hotels was often the scene of street parties.



Taylor Square Convenience 1934 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

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Also down Bourke Street is the **Object Gallery** (08), Australian Centre for Craft and Design, housed within the former chapel of St Margaret's Hospital for Women. Founded in 1894 to provide maternity care to inner city single mothers, the hospital was based at Bourke Street from 1910 to 1993.

Retrace your steps to Taylor Square. You may wish to visit **The Bookshop** (09) at No. 207, the oldest lesbian and gay specialist bookshop in Sydney, before crossing Oxford Street to reach the former **Men's Convenience** (10), now closed. Built in 1908 by the City Council, the underground Men's Convenience catered to the many men who caught trams here, visited the courthouse, or frequented pubs in the vicinity.

You are now in Oxford Street's "Law and Order" precinct, containing the **Supreme Court's Darlinghurst Courthouse** (11), **the former Darlinghurst Police Station** (12), and the former **Darlinghurst Gaol** (13).

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LAW AND ORDER

Begun in 1836, the Greek Revival façade of the **Darlinghurst Courthouse** (11) was meant to signal the importance of law and order, as did its dominating position on Darlinghurst Hill, making it visible throughout the city.

Darlinghurst Police Station (12) (1897–1987) saw a lot of action in its time. In the 1920s a vicious turf war was fought amongst gangs for control of sly grog, prostitution, illegal gaming and drugs around Darlinghurst, Kings Cross and Woolloomooloo. The role of corrupt police in organising these lucrative "trades" led to Darlo Station becoming known among police as "Goldenhurst". The people arrested during the first Mardi Gras in 1978 were held here, as were those arrested in raids on Club 80, a gay venue.

Darlinghurst Gaol (13) first housed prisoners in 1841, and executions were held in public here until 1853 — look for the skull and crossbones just inside the Burton Street entrance! In 1921 East Sydney Technical College opened here, and its art school influenced commercial art, design and advertising in NSW, as well as attracting artists to the area. In 2005, the TAFE campus relocated to Ultimo, and the site is now occupied by the National Art School. The grounds are usually open and the art school has a year-round program of exhibitions and events.



Darlinghurst Gaol, 1887 (Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

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14 Make your way to Burton Street. **The Sydney Jewish Museum** (14), housed within the Maccabean Hall, can be seen at the intersection with Darlinghurst Road. On the right is **Green Park** (15).

15 GREEN PARK

Green Park is named after the gaol's hangman, Alexander Green, notorious for his drunkenness and botched hangings. His hut was once located here.

By the mid-1970s Green Park had become a well-known gay beat as people walked from Kings Cross to the night club scene on the Gay Golden Mile. Today "The Wall" (the eastern wall of Darlinghurst Gaol) is more associated with commercial prostitution. The Gay Holocaust Memorial located in the park beside Darlinghurst Road is a community project that commemorates the people murdered during the Nazi Holocaust because of their homosexuality.



(Photograph: David Morgan / City of Sydney)

16 Walk through Green Park to reach **St Vincent's Hospital** (16) on Victoria Street.

16 ST VINCENT'S HOSPITAL

Five Irish Sisters of Charity came to Australia in 1838, becoming the first female religious order in Australia. They founded St Vincent's as a free hospital for the poor and disadvantaged in 1857, moving to the current site in 1870. St Vincent's is in the forefront of HIV/AIDS care and research, and of cardiac, lung and bone marrow transplantation, as well as providing a clinic and outreach service, and palliative care for patients with terminal diseases.

17 Continue along Victoria Street to Oxford Street and turn left. Cross Oxford Street. The Grand Pacific Blue Room was formerly the **Greek Social Club** (17). Fashionable shopping, dining and entertainment are found on both sides of the street here at the edge of Paddington. Continue past the College of Fine Arts. You may wish to call in and see the exhibition programme at the **Ivan Dougherty Gallery** (18).

22 Further uphill is the **Victoria Barracks** (19) and **Paddington Town Hall** (20), containing the local library and the Chauvel Cinema. The first Sleaze Ball was held at the Paddo Town Hall in 1982 to raise funds for Mardi Gras. Across Oatley Street is the **John Thompson Reserve** (21), commemorating the poet and broadcaster (1907–1968) who founded the Paddington Society, and was the father of actor Jack and film critic Peter. Adjacent is the **Walter Read Reserve** and **Paddington Reservoir Gardens** (22): both were once part of Sydney's early water supply system. Cross Oxford Street and turn right. On your left is **Juniper Hall** (23).

23 JUNIPER HALL

Built by Robert Cooper, emancipist and distiller, for his third wife and many children, this generous Georgian villa was named after the berry used to flavour gin. It is the oldest surviving house in Sydney's eastern suburbs. In 1852 it housed the Society for the Relief of Destitute Children and in 1905 the first Children's Court in NSW began sitting here. Saved only minutes before demolition in 1984, it was restored by the National Trust in 1988.



Juniper Hall, 1895 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

24 Continuing along Oxford Street, there is a range of art and fashion boutiques and on the right is the sandstone **Uniting Church** (1877), site of **Paddington Markets** (28).

24 ART AND FASHION IN PADDINGTON

25 The fruits of "gentrification" in Paddington include the profusion of art galleries, antique shops, restaurants and fashion outlets, one of the earliest being the gallery opened by the Czech immigrant Rudy Komon in the 1950s. The 1960s and 70s saw a new-found confidence in Australian painting, writing, music, design and food, which was reflected in Paddington. In a house just off Oxford Street in 1971, Katherine Brisbane and Philip Parsons founded Currency Press, the first specialist Australian performing arts publisher. In 1973, Warren Fahey founded the specialist music store **Folkways** (24) at No. 282, and its associated record label, Larrikin, until its closure in 2009. Also along this strip you will find the **Australian Centre for Photography** (25) and **Dinosaur Designs** (26), who started out at nearby Paddington Markets in the early 1980s, as well as lots of fashion boutiques. And further along the street in Woollahra, **Claude's restaurant** (27), established by Josephine and Damien Pignolet in 1976, helped to transform Sydney's eating habits, becoming one of the city's gastronomic temples.

28 PADDINGTON MARKETS

Starting in 1973 in the grounds of the Uniting Church, Paddington Markets is a place for innovative artists, designers and craftspeople to sell their work. The Saturday markets have been a launch pad for many famous names in the Australian fashion industry, such as Third Millennium, Bracewell, and Von Troska. Eastside Arts also use the church and hall as a live music venue.

29 You may wish to continue along Oxford Street to reach the **Paddington Gate** entrance to **Centennial Park** (29), opened in 1888 to celebrate the centenary of NSW. Originally known as the **Lachlan Swamps**, this area once supplied fresh drinking water for the city via **Busby's Bore**. In 1901 the park was the site of the proclamation of Australian Federation.

From here there are frequent buses back to the city or out to the Eastern Suburbs.



historical
walking
tours



Discover more of historic Sydney with the other walking tour brochures in this series.

More information can be found at the City's website:

www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/history

or call the City of Sydney on 9265 9333

We welcome your feedback:

history@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

This story is one of many layers

www.dictionaryofsydney.org



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in an alternative format please contact:

CITY OF SYDNEY: 9265 9333

council@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS): **13 14 50**

STOP!

ON THE FOOTPATH

LOOK!

RIGHT, LEFT AND RIGHT AGAIN

LISTEN!

FOR ANY OTHER TRAFFIC
INCLUDING PUSH BIKES

THINK!

IS IT SAFE FOR ME TO CROSS?

CROSS!

WITH CARE AND KEEP ON
LOOKING FOR OTHER VEHICLES

This brochure was prepared by the
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HWT 6