



historical
walking
tours

CITY OF SYDNEY 
city of villages

COLONY CUSTOMS HOUSE TO MILLERS POINT

Historical Walking Tour



Front Cover Image:
George Peacock's 1845 view of Customs House with The Rocks
in the background (Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

COLONY



The earliest European Sydneysiders, convicts, soldiers, whalers and sailors, all walked this route. Later came the shipping magnates, wharf labourers and traders.

The Rocks and Millers Point have been overlaid by generations of change.

But amongst the bustling modern city streets remnants and traces of these early times can be found. Pubs and churches, archaeological digs and houses all evoke memories of past lives, past ways.



PLEASE ALLOW
1-2 HOURS FOR THIS TOUR.

Start at
Customs House
(1).

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

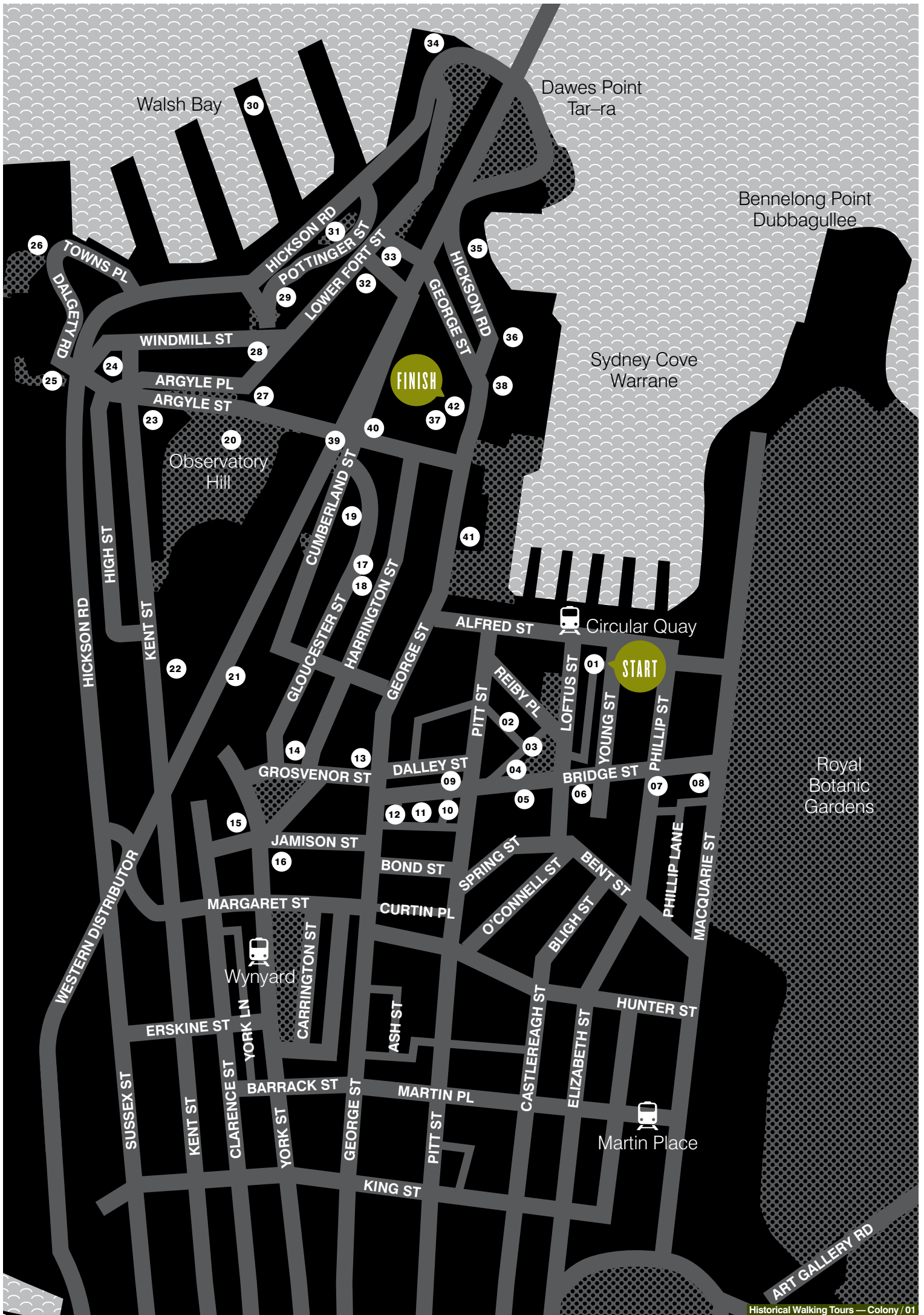
**Our walking tours will lead you
on a journey of discovery from
early Aboriginal life through to
contemporary Sydney.**

Clover Moore

Clover Moore MP
Lord Mayor of Sydney

Illustration showing Circular Quay viewed from Lower George Street in 1874 (Image: City of Sydney Archives)





Walsh Bay

Daves Point
Tar-ra

Bennelong Point
Dubbagullee

Sydney Cove
Warrane

Observatory
Hill

Circular Quay

Royal
Botanic
Gardens

Wynyard

Martin Place

FINISH

START

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01 CUSTOMS HOUSE

Customs House was where shipping was cleared and goods passing through the port of Sydney were taxed and cleared for sale or export. When the port was busy the House was crowded and noisy, the scene of raised tempers, delays and disputed dealings. Customs House was surrounded by public houses, shipping companies and general maritime activities.



Customs House in 1928
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



Walk down Loftus Street alongside the House. A flag flies permanently on the site where the first British flag was raised. For some Australians, this is the site of invasion. In the little lane behind Customs House you can still see the old Hinchcliffs Woolstore with its loft pulleys.

Now cross over Loftus Street and head for Macquarie Place. Opposite the park, through an archway, is **Bulletin Place (2)**.

02 BULLETIN PLACE

This rare historic streetscape provides a glimpse of some of the early warehousing which used to dominate this precinct. Bulletin Place was where J F Archibald's famous weekly *The Bulletin* was published from 1880. This area, as a haunt for journalists and newspaper men, is regularly featured in late 19th century literature about Sydney.



Retrace your steps to **Macquarie Place (3)**.



Bulletin Place 1937, viewed from Pitt Street
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

03 MACQUARIE PLACE

Originally swampy mangrove land on the banks of the Tank Stream, the colony's first water supply, this small piece of land is awash with historic relics. The Obelisk marks the point from which distances to all places in the colony were measured. This sandstone monument was designed by Francis Greenway, who was sent to the colony for forgery and became Sydney's first Colonial Architect. His legacy is visible in many of Sydney's best-loved convict buildings.

The imposing statue of Thomas Sutcliffe Mort (whose many achievements are listed on the plinth) looks out over Bridge Street, the premier financial street.



Macquarie Place in 1932
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

04 BRIDGE STREET



Bridge Street was named for the wooden footbridge that crossed the Tank Stream. From the start, the town was both physically and socially divided by the Tank Stream. On the eastern side were the Governor's house and the tents of the civil establishment. To the west were the makeshift barracks of the military and the convicts. Many signs of this social division remain today.



View along Bridge Street in the 1890s
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

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05

On **Bridge Street** (04) the impressive sandstone **Lands Department Building** (05) is directly opposite **Macquarie Place**. Other government buildings to the east include the **Education Department** (06), the **Museum of Sydney** set back on the site of the first Government House (07) and the **Chief Secretary's Building** (08).

to

12

Turn right and head for **George Street**. On your way you will pass the **ASX/Australian Stock Exchange** (09) the **old Exchange Hotel** (10), the headquarters of **Burns Philp** (11) which was once one of the major shipping companies in the Pacific, and the **Metropolitan Hotel** on the corner (12).



Lands Department Building, 1963
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

13

GROSVENOR PLACE TOWERS

Before you leave the Metropolitan Hotel corner, notice its architectural similarity to the buildings diagonally across **George Street**. The old red-brick **Johnsons Corner** and **Brooklyn Hotel** were designed in about 1910 by **Walter Liberty Vernon**.

Grosvenor Place towers behind these old buildings. A condition for building this tower (designed by **Harry Seidler** and constructed between 1982 and 1987) was that **Johnsons Corner** and **The Brooklyn** be retained.



Head to **Grosvenor Place** (13). Walk up **Grosvenor Street** past some fine old late 19th century facades to **St Patrick's Church**.



Looking north along **George Street** from the corner of **Grosvenor Street**, c1900
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

14

ST PATRICK'S CHURCH

This simple Gothic sandstone church was designed by **J F Hilly** and built in the 1840s on land donated by **William Davis**, a convict, who took part in the **Irish Rebellion** in 1798. The church has been the traditional heartland of **Sydney's Irish working class Roman Catholics**. Many inner city children were educated at **St Patrick's school**. A visit to this recently restored church and associated buildings is a worthwhile detour.

15

to

16

This area was dedicated by **Governor Hunter** as a church precinct and is still known as **Church Hill**. After convicts burnt down the first church near **Sydney Cove**, **St Philip's Anglican Church** was built here in 1798–1807. The current **St Philip's** (15) which you can see dates from 1848. The former **Scots Presbyterian Church** (16) was built to replace an older one demolished to make way for the approaches to the **Harbour Bridge**.



Continue walking for a while down **Harrington Street**, pass under the **Cahill Expressway** and take the old worn steps on your left up to **Cumberland Place** (17) and **Susannah Place** (18).

17

CUMBERLAND PLACE

Early maps show a lane on the alignment of the **Cumberland Place steps** as early as 1807. They lead into **Gloucester Street**. You are now in a network of streets and laneways that form the heartland of old residential **Sydney**.



(Photograph: State Records of NSW)



Directly opposite **Susannah Place** (18) is the site of an archaeological dig which exposed remains and foundations of hundreds of houses, shops and hotels which were all crammed into this small site. Check out the excavated remains in the entrance to the **Sydney Harbour YHA** and learn more about the people who lived here at the **The Big Dig Archaeology Education Centre**. From **Susannah Place** make your way up the hill to the **Australian Hotel** (19).

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18 SUSANNAH PLACE

These little houses and the corner shop (58–64 Gloucester Street) date from the 1840s. They are now a museum where authentic interiors, including outhouses and basement kitchens, allow visitors to imagine typical mid 19th century working class life.



(Photograph: Ray Joyce / Historic Houses Trust of NSW)

19 THE AUSTRALIAN HOTEL

This is a typical early 20th century hotel, built in 1914. It retains its original pressed metal ceilings and etched glass fittings. The split level bar follows the rugged lie of the land. The odd shape of the land is a result of street re-alignments for the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.



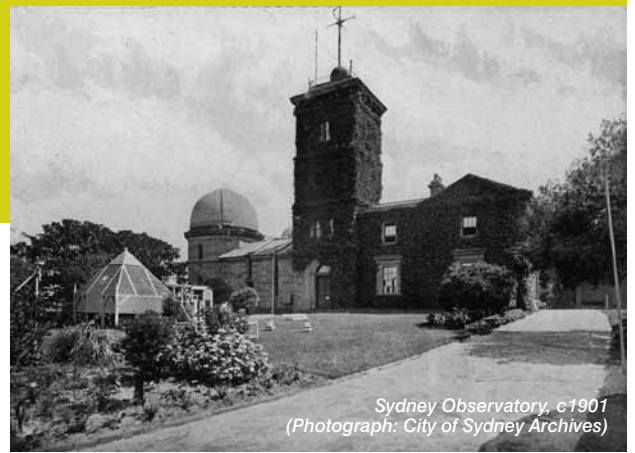
A short distance north along Cumberland Street, take the subway under the Harbour Bridge Stairs. The hill in front of you is **Observatory Park (20)**.



Australian Hotel c1932
(Photograph: Adam Forrest Grant / City of Sydney Archives)

20 OBSERVATORY HILL PARK

This is the site of Sydney's first windmill. Also known as Fort Phillip and Flagstaff Hill, it eventually became known as Observatory Hill after the building of the sandstone observatory in 1858. While the colony's astronomers were making scientific observations from this building, local Sydneysiders knew it best for its timekeeping. Every day at 1pm the ball on top of the tower dropped to signal the correct time. The entrance to the Observatory is up the hill. It is open daily, and its gardens provide wonderful views of the harbour and **Walsh Bay wharves (30)**.



Sydney Observatory, c1901
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



Around the hill from the Observatory is the **National Trust Centre (21)**. If you are short of time you may leave out this section, walk down the hill and rejoin the tour at the **Garrison Church (27)**.

21 THE NATIONAL TRUST CENTRE

The oldest building in this complex is the two storey former 1815 military hospital, now facing the expressway. This later became the famous Fort Street School, the first school to provide for teacher training in the colony. The National Trust Centre includes the S H Ervin Gallery, cafe and shop.

Fort Street Model School during construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, 1932 (Photograph: State Records)



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i MILLERS POINT

The second half of this walk will take you through a precinct where old 19th century sandstone buildings live side-by-side with red brick structures created in the first decades of the 20th century by the Sydney Harbour Trust. Thousands of men were employed cutting a deep swathe through the sandstone to create a two-tiered roadway system serving the new Walsh Bay wharves. The Trust then in-filled the new landscape they had created with utilitarian brick houses, shops and pubs. After that, building practically halted. The small-scale village atmosphere of Millers Point is a surprise find for many visitors fresh from the towering commercial buildings of the surrounding city.



Millers Point 1882 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

22 Backtrack down the **Agar Steps** on your left (22) to a little row of terrace houses and then to Kent Street. Opposite the Agar Steps along High Street are early 20th century houses built by the Sydney Harbour Trust.

23 Turn right and head down Kent Street to Argyle Place. Just before the corner, on your right, is the little **St Brigid's Church School** (23), Australia's oldest Roman Catholic building constructed 1834–35. On the corner is the post office. Diagonally opposite is the **Lord Nelson Hotel** (24), one of the oldest pubs in Sydney.

24 LORD NELSON HOTEL

Built in 1836 by former plasterer William Wells as his home, the Lord Nelson obtained its liquor licence in 1841, one year before the town of Sydney was proclaimed a city. This makes it one of the oldest pubs in Sydney.

25 From here head right along Argyle Place. Or you may take a detour left, past the village shops built by the Harbour Trust to the old red brick **Pallisade Hotel** (25). Then track past the hotel and into Merriman Street, down to **Clyne Reserve** (26) at the end, and back along the walkway in front of the fine old townhouses perched high on the rocks—perfect for watching the horizon for expected ships—back to the **Lord Nelson** (24). Walk along Argyle Place past the village green to **Garrison Church** (27).

27 GARRISON CHURCH (HOLY TRINITY)

This was the first official military church in NSW and serviced the military garrison at Dawes Point. Imagine the spectacle of the redcoats marching up Lower Fort Street from the artillery barracks to attend morning prayer. Although the church was officially called the Holy Trinity Church, it continues to be known as the Garrison Church. Military flags still adorn the church's interior.



(Photograph: Gary Deirmendjian collection, City of Sydney Archives)

27 Make your way down Lower Fort Street to the **Hero of Waterloo** (28) on the corner of Windmill Street.

28 HERO OF WATERLOO

The rough-cut sandstone walls and heavy timber beams of the interior of the Hero of Waterloo evoke an atmosphere of the rough mariners' life. This hotel was built by George Paton, a stonemason, in 1843. The Hero of Waterloo is the source of many local stories of concealed trapdoors, shanghaied sailors and rum smuggling.



Hero of Waterloo (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

28 Cross Windmill Street to **Ferry Lane** (29).

29 FERRY LANE AND THE PADDOCK

This flagstone laneway once led to the waterfront. The history of the area is told in the plaques and signs in the lane and in the reserve below, called The Paddock.

29 Follow Ferry Lane to Pottinger Street, looking out for the interpretive signs along the way. Either cross Pottinger Street to a walkway that takes you to the upper level of Wharves 6/7 or turn right and follow Pottinger Street to Hickson Road. There are a number of restaurants, cafes and bars along this road and on the waterfront.



Walsh Bay wharves, 1932 (Photograph: Adam Forrest Grant / City of Sydney Archives)

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30 WALSH BAY WHARVES

These huge two-storey timber wharves were part of the massive reconstruction generated by the Sydney Harbour Trust (later the Maritime Services Board), set up by the government in 1901 to “modernise” Sydney’s chaotic and inefficient waterfront. The wharves were intended to be built using concrete, but due to shortages of materials after World War I, timber was used. The wharves and their associated shore sheds form a rare group of industrial buildings and were built over a number of years after 1910. They were refurbished in 2003.



(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

31 Retrace your steps to *The Paddock*, and head along the lane on the left half-way up *Ferry Lane* that runs along the rear of the fine Georgian houses on *Lower Fort Street*. You will reach this street if you take the steps on the right. On the corner is the Georgian house **Clyde Bank** (31). Almost directly opposite you is the **Harbour View Hotel** (32), which was built by the Sydney Harbour Trust.

32 Head down into *George Street (North)* back towards *The Rocks* passing the **Cast Iron Urinal** (33).

33 CAST IRON URINAL

This is the last remaining cast iron urinal in the city. Public conveniences and urinals (or *pissoirs*) were common streetscape elements in early 20th century Sydney.



Cast iron urinal on *Observatory Hill* in 1960 before relocation to *George Street* (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

On the opposite side of the road is **Tar-ra / Dawes Point** (34).

34 TAR-RA / DAWES POINT

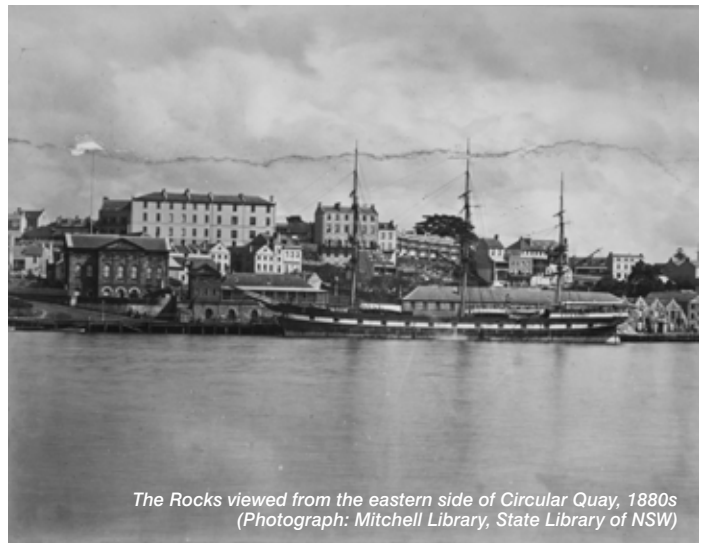
Tar-ra is the name that Aboriginal people gave to this point. Lieutenant William Dawes, an astronomer sent by the British Board of Longitude to establish an observatory, was also a linguist. His friendship with Patyegarang has resulted in one of the earliest dictionaries of Aboriginal words which is now archived in London. The first gun was placed here in 1788, but ongoing commitment to fortifications was half-hearted. According to Governor Bligh in 1808, most of the gun emplacements were of more danger to the user than to the target and many of the gun carriages had been eaten out by termites.

Dawes Point Park has archaeological excavations and interpretation relating to the fortification that was here until it was demolished in 1925 to make way for the *Sydney Harbour Bridge*. Continue down along *George Street (North)*. You are now returning to **The Rocks**.

You may wish to end your tour here and leave exploring *The Rocks* until another time. **The Sydney Visitor’s Centre** (37) offers information and brochures, while nearby in *Kendall Lane*, **The Rocks Discovery Museum** (42) tells the history and archaeology of *The Rocks*.

THE ROCKS

The higgledy-piggledy streets and narrow laneways which still define *The Rocks* record the first places the convicts and ex-convicts made their own. The vision of the convicts living in barracks weighed down by ball-and-chain is overstated. Many more convicts simply worked for the government during the day and worked for themselves the rest of the time, building houses, opening shops, running pubs and creating a new life in *The Rocks*. Today *The Rocks* is a living museum and practically every place has a story to tell.



The Rocks viewed from the eastern side of *Circular Quay*, 1880s (Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

Not to be missed: **Campbell’s Stores** (35), **ASN Co Building** (36), **Sydney Visitors Centre** (37), **Mariners Church** (38), **Argyle Cut** (39), **Argyle Stores** (40), **Museum of Contemporary Art** (41) and **The Rocks Discovery Museum** (42)



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www.dictionaryofsydney.org



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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

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HWT 2