

Introduction to *Sydney's Streets: a Guide to Sydney's Street Names* (1995) by Shirley Fitzgerald

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The history of street names in the old city core of Sydney is fantastically complicated. Having attempted what I now consider to be the near impossible, I am convinced that there could be no better exercise to impress on the mind the difference between a planned and an unplanned city. While careful mid-nineteenth century plans of Melbourne and Adelaide resulted in a reasonably stable street layout and street naming, Sydney's has been the subject of ongoing modifications, alterations, and confusion. In 1905, when the City Council decided to minimise duplication of names, it was confronted with multiple Victoria lanes, places and terraces, four Hart's Lanes and multiples of over 100 other street names. And this was after several concerted attempts in the late nineteenth century to rationalise the namings. Back in 1875, it had removed five Union Streets, a name not indicative of strong worker's associations so much as of haphazard connections between irrational street alignments.ⁱ There has been a plethora of Crown streets/roads/lanes and an unnerving replication of names, within close proximity to each other.

Many would argue that the haphazard quality of its street alignments gives Sydney a charm that no city constrained by grids or directed into planners' artistic curves of roads could ever achieve. This may well be so. It also created a rich history, but one that will never be entirely recaptured from the records. This present document is very much a draft which could be expanded and refined more or less indefinitely, but never completed. Some areas have been worked over in more detail than others, but no one area could with certainty be said to be complete.

Sydney's first streets were mere foot tracks, some of them following paths long used by the local Aborigines. Here and there a chain gang slashed vegetation and broke rocks to lay a road according to some bureaucratic plan, but often local usage resulted in following the lines of least resistance. Goats and bullock herds knew how best to get where they were going. There were early dreamers with grand plans for the laying out of Sydney, but mostly pragmatism and immediate convenience won the day.

Once things had settled down a bit, early officials attempted to encourage householders to take responsibility to 'keep the Streets opposite their respective Dwellings in good Repair and the Footpaths clean'ⁱⁱ – a self help program doomed to failure in a society weighed down with sojourners and felons. When Lachlan Macquarie arrived in the colony in 1810 he gave early attention to the state of the roads, ordering alignments, reformings, widenings and the demolition of encroaching buildings. These activities were motivated by a personal interest in town planning. The more prosaic motivation of encouraging law and order led him to 'name the Principal Streets' and direct 'posts and fingerboards with the Names of the Streets painted on them, to be erected in conspicuous parts of the different Streets....' He further decreed

that the streets were 'henceforth to be known and called only by the new Names'.ⁱⁱⁱ But the colloquial naming of streets cannot be stopped by decree, and no governor could ever suppress entirely the desire of subsequent generations of officials to put their stamp on the city through the re-naming of places.

In 1950 Charles Bertie, one-time City Librarian, wrote a paper on 'The Street names of Early Sydney', which began with a disclaimer as to 'completeness' and an observation that it was a subject which:

"allures from afar, yet as I follow, flies." (Goldsmith: Traveller)

And Bertie was only attempting to get the record straight up until the time of Governor Macquarie!^{iv}

Before launching into the minutiae of specific names, some general comments are in order.

As a rough rule of thumb, the more important the street, the more likely it is to remain, unaltered and without a name change, but there are many exceptions to this 'rule', as even a passing familiarity with the changing fortunes of the original High Street (George Street) indicates. In common with many of Sydney's streets, George Street has experienced several changes in the length which bore this label, numerous levellings and various realignments. Alignment at the Circular Quay end has been altered several times this century, the most significant being the redevelopments of 1936-40 which removed the original market-place configuration near the present MCA building, which had evolved at the beginning of European settlement.^v

On the other hand, the onset of depression in the late 1920s meant that George Street escaped a projected street widening scheme. From 1905 when it got the powers to resume land, the Council embarked on an ambitious program of resumptions for street widening and 'slum' clearance. Often new streets were created using the same names as obliterated streets, providing a sense of continuity which, for the purposes of this present study, is altogether confusing and false. While resumptions often led to the creation of new streets, their main impact was to reduce the number of streets.

In addition to road widenings, there was the obliteration of streets caused by the building of new markets near the head of Darling Harbour between 1909 and 1938, the State's resumptions in The Rocks and Miller's Point in 1901, and the wharf construction which followed. This resulted in a rearrangement of streets right around the edges of the harbour within the city boundaries and beyond – many of which have been altered again to accommodate the construction of a freeway system across Darling Harbour and the Pyrmont Peninsula in the second half of the 20th Century. The expansion of the railways impacted on street layout, especially on this peninsula, while the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the expressways leading to it resulted in obliterations and realignments of some of the City' oldest roadways. In recent decades, the rewards offered to developers who could

amass large 'parcels' of land encouraged the sale and removal of streets. Currently, preservation of laneways is valued for the heritage significance of maintaining the fine grain of the City's fabric.

The naming of streets tells something of the social history of the place. Macquarie bequeathed a very British and monarchist flavour to the central streets – the ducal titles of the sons of George the Third – York, Cumberland, Sussex, Clarence, Cambridge and Kent – and the given names of the current monarch, George III, and his queen, Charlotte. To these were added the names of various British officials - Bathurst, Liverpool, Castlereagh, Pitt etc., and NSW Governors - King, Hunter, Macquarie, Bligh and so on. Lesser colonial luminaries also managed to get good representation, having got in on the ground floor, so to speak. Sometimes these are grouped geographically, as with the notables of the law whose names adorned the often lawless Woolloomooloo - Dowling, Forbes, Plunket, Stephen, Windeyer, Burton, Judge. Later subdivisions allowed similar kinds of namings, as in the case of the creation of the new suburb of Rosebery in the 1920s. The fifth Earl of Rosebery was a former Prime Minister of England, and the streets in the subdivision were named for British politician and knights of the realm – Salisbury, Ripon, Asquith and so on.

With the notable exception of Rosebery, in residential areas outside the centre of the city, names were often less pretentious and more likely to reflect local events and uses. Early landholders did well in the naming stakes, but so did lesser landlords and householders, especially in the case of small streets which often took their name from the owner of the first house or the main run of houses. For this reason small streets often have a succession of names in the 19th Century, as landlords handed on property and names changed accordingly.

The habit of using children's first names for streets in early subdivisions has resulted in a range of female names appearing on the map, but it is often impossible to guess at who those Marys, Adas and Marions were.

Industries resulted in names like Albion (after a brewery) Goodlet (after a brickworks) or, more directly, Sugar House Lane and Abattoir Road. The carving up of an early nursery bequeathed to odorous Chippendale a bunch of flower-named streets – Pine, Myrtle, Wattle, Rose – while Corfu Street recalls the settlement of a fishing community in Woolloomooloo in the late nineteenth century and Baltic Lane, long gone beneath the concrete of the freeways is a reminder of the days when Darling Harbour was home to the coastal timber trade.

These kinds of names give meaning to a place altogether different from the formal labels of royals and officials. So too do names like Paradise Row, used to designate one of the most notorious streets of jerrybuilt barrack-type houses which sheltered too many of the city's poor in the 1840s and fifties. At the very bottom of the social scale of streets, and most likely to disappear from the record quickly were names like Cuthill's Yard and Frying Pan Alley – colourful and evocative, but tenuous.

As names changed, so too did the suffixes – the terms street, avenue, road, lane. These all signal varieties of status, and changes in their use indicates changed perceptions of place. 'Street' is widely accepted as a generic term, and is therefore often dropped from conversation, as in 'let's meet on the corner of Castlereagh and King'. It is also a label which indicates an inhabited, present place, in contrast to the term 'road' which is frequently used to indicate the direction to somewhere else, as in Art Gallery Road, meaning the road that went to the Art Gallery, or Pyrmont Bridge Road. When roads ceased to be interpreted as going somewhere else, and became integrated within the built up area, the label 'Road' was often changed to 'Street'. Once part of Botany Road became built up, for example, it became Regent Street. The roadway which is currently called Broadway provides perhaps the clearest example of alterations in nomenclature which followed changing perceptions of function. It was first referred to as Parramatta Road – the road to Parramatta - then became Parramatta Street as housing was built. Eventually, after the city toll gates were moved to its western end it came to be known as George Street West, linking it indisputably to the city. The name Broadway was acquired when George Street West was widened in the 1930s.

The term 'row' was used in the initial settlement for several streets which subsequently became substantial, but in general 'Row', 'Court' and 'Terrace' indicated narrow streets, often created by haphazard house-building and often bearing the builder's name, as in Tegg's Row or Lee's Court. 'Place' sometimes had the same connotation, as in May's Place. With time the possessive 's' was dropped, while most 'rows' and 'courts' became 'lanes' or 'places'. The term row is sometimes confused with R.O.W which stands for 'right of way', an understandable confusion given that both are normally narrow passages.

Well ordered and fully intended 'lanes' or 'places' of a later era are often adjacent to wider streets of the same name – Loftus Street, Loftus Lane, Kellett Street, Kellett Place. This pattern of street layout often indicated actual or intended provision of service lanes for sanitary collection. These lanes were colloquially known as 'dunny lanes'. The City provided this service in some places by the 1860s.

One vital exception to the use of 'place' to designate a small street was the naming of Martin Place. The street was widened by stages from the 1880s to the 1930s, and as it became larger and grander the name Martin Place was extended to cover all its sections. Here the term 'Place' carries the meaning of 'significant' or 'important' place – a meaning well understood by the many Sydneysiders who staunchly refused to accept the attempt to change it to 'Martin Plaza' in the 1970s. Similarly the common use of 'Lady' rather than 'Mrs' for Mrs Macquarie's Road indicates a recognition of the grandness of the area, or perhaps a reluctance to accept that the Governor's lady really was just plain 'Mrs'.

Intuitively, it would seem that 'lanes' and 'places' would become less numerous over time, as building sites were consolidated and covered larger

areas of ground. Although this is the general trend there are examples of lanes being created – for example, Kendall Lane, in The Rocks, appears on a map c.1860 as covered in buildings, but reappears by the early twentieth century, when what is now called Nurses Walk also begins to appear on maps. Public roadways in Sydney have constantly been the subject of negotiation.

The term 'avenue', which refers to a tree lined street, is common in the suburbs, but rarely used in the city. It tends to be confined to the eastern portions, perhaps because trees had not been so heavily removed here in the early stages of settlement. The use of the term in the English sense of a wide, treelined prestige street, similar to the French 'boulevard' does not occur.

Because the alteration of the suffix tells a story of the meaning of the location, every effort has been made in this guide to track their frequent changes. However, what appears in these lists can only roughly approximate the full complexity of these alterations. Even if all the maps and directories in existence were tapped, this would undoubtedly miss the usages which were never official, or which were specific to local communities. Similarly, when a name was altered officially, it is often not possible to know when the new name would have become the one commonly used.

After its creation in 1842, the City Council was the body which named streets, or at least formalised names in use.^{vi} On several occasions there was a wholesale renaming as in 1875, when about 60 street name changes were approved.^{vii} The motivation for many of these changes was to eradicate duplication. Albert Street, Circular Quay was renamed Alfred Street, in honour of the Prince who was the subject of an assassination attempt in Sydney a few years earlier. This then presented problems for Alfred Street, Woolloomooloo, which was changed to Best Street, and Alfred Street Pyrmont, part of which became McCredie Street. Albert Street, Pyrmont was also considered for renaming, but remained unchanged following a petition from residents. And so on and on. Duplication and confusion continued to be a problem, with over 100 streets being renamed in 1905.

Wholesale renamings such as these inject a new series of names into the city's streets which reflect current interests and personalities. Simply being an alderman in 1875, for example almost certainly resulted in achieving this 'fame' – Gould, Merriman, Rowe, Day, Kippax were all aldermen, and now they are all street names.

Anyone could petition the Council requesting a name change. Occasionally the reason given was that a name was needed, as Mrs E Shorter suggested when she asked that a name be given to the lane at the back of her house, 'unless it is too insignificant to notice'. Her humility was rewarded, and the lane was named Shorter Lane.^{viii}

More usually, a renaming was requested to enhance respectability – and thereby, it was hoped, house prices. Residents of the northern section of Kent Street felt that 'the disrepute which the Press and the Public attach to Kent Street does not apply in any respect to Kent Street North, and is found to be

prejudicial to the valuable properties erected there'.^{ix} Their proposal to change the name of part of the street did not meet with success, but the petitioners from Little Gipps Street in Surry Hills had more luck. They claimed that the 'evil repute' connected with Gipps Street, recently renamed Reservoir Street, spilt over into Little Gipps Street. The 'unenviable notoriety' which was attached to this 'ill-favoured name' led them to ask that the street be named Mackey Street, 'with the consent of Alderman Mackey'.^x Just why the name of Gipps was so on the nose was not alluded to in the petition, but everyone knew about the brutal assaults on those who inadvertently strayed in to the path of the Gipps Street larrikin gang.^{xi} In the case of Woolloomooloo Street, it was simply association with the whole notorious district which encouraged residents to ask for a name change in 1905. The Council obliged, renaming it Cathedral Street, but mercifully a petition to the State Government to get the whole area of Woolloomooloo renamed St. Kilda fell on deaf ears.

The official files are generally silent about the specific reasons for naming. When Bulwara Lane was altered to Hackett Street in 1950 the file had appended to it in hand-writing – 'in honour of the Hon Charles Hackett, MLC, a resident therein for many years', and when it was agreed to name McAlister Lane in 1952 the Council's proceedings recorded that McAlister was the local postman and good samaritan of many years standing. But this kind of information is not usually available, and in most cases THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME IS NO MORE THAN A BEST GUESS, based on what is known of the history of the area and the timing of the naming. Readers of the following lists will become aware of the nuances. 'Named for' indicates that this is known, or that the connection is very obvious. A non-committal statement – 'so and so was an early landlord in this area' – indicates a plausible and likely connection rather than a known one. A 'perhaps' signals that we are in the realm of conjecture. When a specific date is given this means that a gazetted notice or a resolution of the Council has been cited, while a c.1870 or c.1915 indicates that the change began appearing on maps and in directories about this time.

ⁱ *Proceedings of Council*, 1905, pp 251-3; *Minutes*, 5 Oct, 1875

ⁱⁱ Bench of Magistrates, *Sydney Gazette*, 23 April 1809, 1c

ⁱⁱⁱ *Sydney Gazette*, 6 October 1810, 1b

^{iv} C. H. Bertie, 'The Street Names of Early Sydney', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol 36, Pt 1, 1950, p 15.

^v Grace Karskens, 'George Street North: The Rocks, Sydney An Historical and Archaeological Study 1788-1980s'. Conybeare, Morrison & Partners for Sydney Cove Authority, 1989.

^{vi} In the nineteenth century the procedure was straightforward. The Council approved a name change and had it gazetted. Under the 1919 Local Government Act, Ord 30, proposed changes were advertised to allow for public comment, and sent to the Minister for Local Government for approval.

^{vii} *Proceedings of Council*, 5 Oct, 19 Oct, 16 Nov, 1875.

^{viii} CRS 23/29 no.209a, 12 Oct, 1875.

^{ix} *Ibid.*

^x CRS 28/1885/1901.

^{xi} Christopher Keating, *Surry Hills, The City's Backyard*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1991, pp 66-7