



historical
walking
tours

CITY OF SYDNEY 
city of villages

PORT PYRMONT

Historical Walking Tour



Front Cover Image:
Pyrmont Incinerator in 1976, before its demolition
(Photograph: City of Sydney)

PYRMONT



The Pyrmont peninsula belonged to Sydney's industrial heartland in past decades, with its wharves, goods yards, woolstores and factories contributing enormously to the city's economic wealth.

Much of the area had become derelict by the 1990s, but developments on former industrial sites have led to an influx of new residents in recent years.

This tour visits key sites in the industrial and maritime history of Sydney, as well as exploring an often overlooked Sydney community. It is something of a "ghost" tour, as many of the sites no longer exist or have been put to other uses.



PLEASE ALLOW
2 HOURS FOR THIS TOUR.

Walk involves stairs and steep inclines. Alternatively you may do it as two shorter tours of (1) Pyrmont and (2) Ultimo. Take advantage of the Sydney Light Rail and/or Sydney Monorail to save time.

Start at western end of Pyrmont Bridge (1).

BAD PYRMONT

In 1806, what the Sydney Gazette described as a "select party of ladies and gentlemen" went to the peninsula for a picnic. Its lush vegetation, and a "pure and unadulterated spring" reminded one of the guests of the spa at Bad Pyrmont in Germany. John Macarthur, ex-officer of the NSW Corps, who had bought land here, adopted the name. By a curious coincidence, the members of the Gadigal people who then occupied the area called it Pirrama.

Sydney's history is all around us.

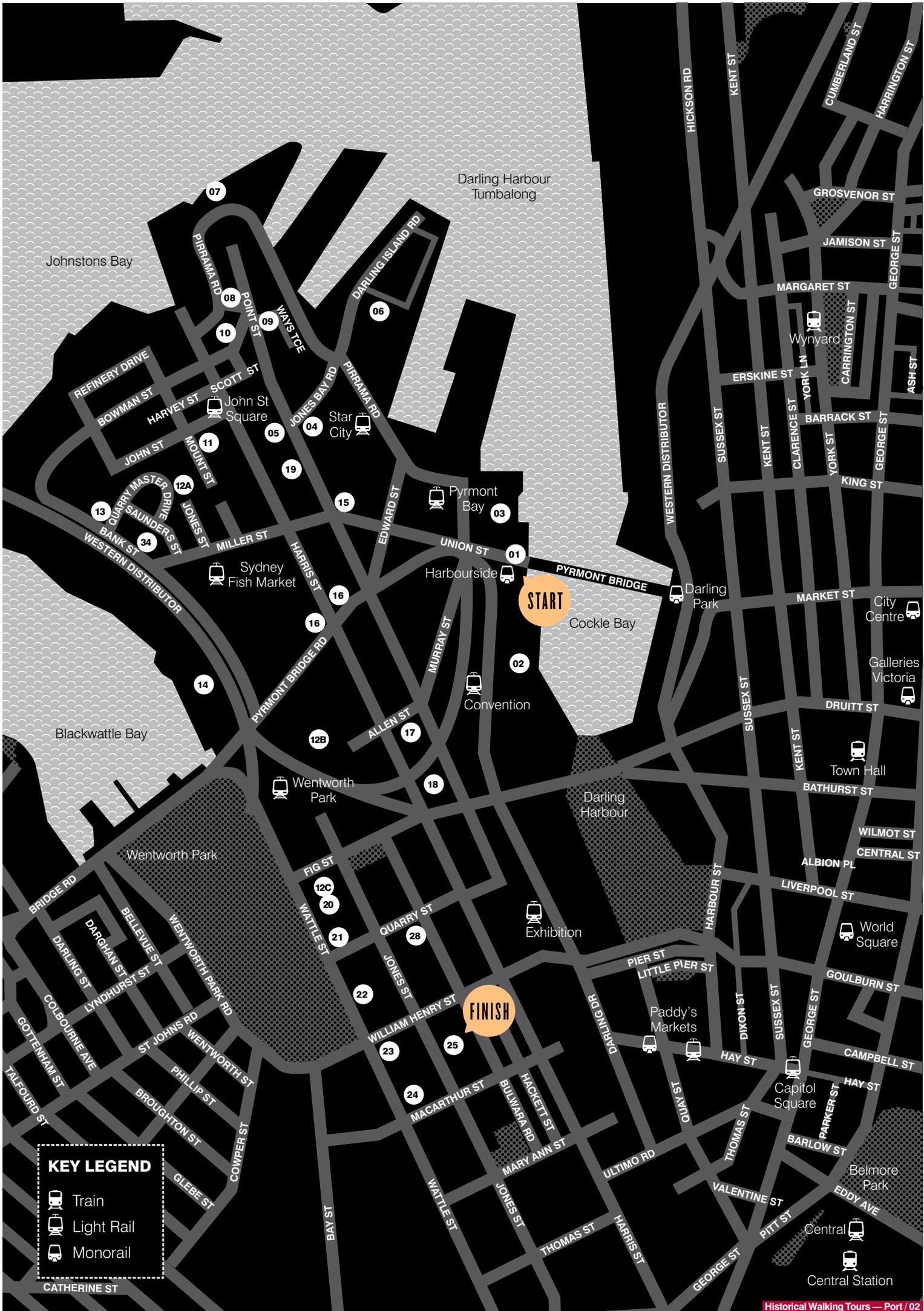
Our walking tours will lead you on a journey of discovery from early Aboriginal life through to contemporary Sydney.

Clover Moore

Clover Moore MP
Lord Mayor of Sydney

Derelict Pyrmont Baths, c1929
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)





KEY LEGEND

-  Train
-  Light Rail
-  Monorail

01 PYRMONT BRIDGE

The first Pyrmont Bridge (1857) was a low wooden structure with a manually operated centre span. The current Pyrmont Bridge (1902) was once the main route west out of Sydney. Although the 1902 bridge was closed to motor traffic in 1981, it was saved from demolition and now carries the monorail and pedestrians to Darling Harbour. Because of its significance as one of the largest and one of the first electrically operated swing bridges in the world, and because of the superb design of Percy Allan's timber girder approach spans, it was declared a National Engineering Landmark in 1992.



Horse and cart traffic across the Pyrmont Bridge
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

02 FORMER RAIL LINE AND GOODS YARD, NOW DARLING HARBOUR COMPLEX



Darling Harbour, showing railway goods yards and Sheds, c1910
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The Darling Harbour goods yards became important in the 1870s with the growth of the wool industry and the construction of many woolstores on the peninsula. Other industries took advantage of this intersection between rail and shipping for exporting and importing, and by 1918 there were sidings all the way to the end of the Pyrmont peninsula as well as a rail loop (now the Sydney Light Rail). The growth of road freight meant that by the early 1980s the great woolstores emptied, the goods yards fell into disuse, and businesses in the area languished. Massive redevelopment of the area since the 1980s created Sydney's Darling Harbour which includes the Chinese Gardens, Harbourside Shopping Complex and the Australian National Maritime Museum.

03 AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

The Australian National Maritime Museum, opened in 1991, was designed by Phillip Cox. The high walls and diving roof forms were designed to accommodate the masts of boats inside the museum. The museum also contains floating attractions including the ex-RAN Oberon class submarine *Onslow*, moored next to the Daring Class destroyer *Vampire*. Historic vessels visiting Sydney tie up here.



Darling Harbour in the early 1990s, showing the newly completed Australian National Maritime Museum (Photograph: Adrian Hall/ City of Sydney Archives)



Turn right and walk along Murray Street and through Pyrmont Bay Park. There is pedestrian access around the finger wharves. Cross Pirrama Road to Jones Bay Road and walk uphill to (4) and (5).

04 STAR CITY, FORMER PYRMONT POWERHOUSE



Powerhouse in 1919
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Star City is on the site of the Pyrmont Powerhouse; the original façade is preserved on Pyrmont Street. Sydney's first electric street lights twinkled to life with the opening of the Powerhouse in 1904. Star City, opened 1997, contains a casino, theatres, restaurants and a hotel.

05 ST BEDE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Most of the stone for the tiny St Bede's was quarried locally. Catholic stonecutters, masons, builders and labourers worked on it voluntarily, completing it in 1867.



St Bede's, Pyrmont
(Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)



Retrace your steps along Jones Bay Road to Pirrama Road, cross over to reach the former **Darling Island** (6).

06 DARLING ISLAND

Darling Island was originally separated from the mainland by a mud flat, which was first bridged by a causeway in the 1840s. From 1851, the Australian Steam Navigation Company (ASNC) occupied the island, steadily reclaiming land around the causeway, so that by the 1870s the island had become a peninsula. Ships were built and repaired here until the 1890s. The NSW government bought the site, and wharves and rail links were built to handle wheat and coal shipments. From 1951, the wharf known as "Pyrmont 13" was the first landfall in Australia for hundreds of thousands of post-war immigrants. On the western side are two tall buildings constructed for the Navy between 1903 and 1912, the Ordnance Stores and the Royal Edward Victualling Yard.



Docked ship at Darling Island
(Photograph: State Library of NSW)



Continue left along Pirrama Road until it curves around left to reach Pyrmont Point Park, former site of the **Pyrmont Baths** (7), and **Tied to Tide** sculptural installation.

07 PYRMONT BATHS SITE

Harbour baths were built at Pyrmont Point in 1875. In 1901 the swimming basin was enlarged and deepened, with a smart shore building containing 85 dressing boxes, showers, club rooms, refreshment rooms and a gym. The pool was tidal, and the floor was sand. One resident remembered: "You could see the bottom, clear as you like. We used to catch yabbies in that pool". Pyrmont Baths became a central meeting place for amenity-starved residents of Pyrmont and Ultimo. When the Baths were threatened with demolition in 1929, the locals took over their administration and kept them going for another 17 years before they were finally demolished. Pyrmont Point Park was created in 1995. At the water's edge is the sculptural installation **Tied to Tide** by Jennifer Turpin and Michaelie Crawford, which rises and falls with the tides.



Derelict Pyrmont Baths, c1929
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

08 Take the steps up to Gibba Park to enjoy panoramic views of the harbour. Alternatively, retrace your steps along Pirrama Road and take the lift up to the Park. Then walk on to Point Street. On your right at the corner of Bowman Street is a fine house, formerly the **Caledonian Hotel** c1880 (08). On your left, at 12–20 Point Street is the **Ways Terrace** (09).

09 WAYS TERRACE FLATS

These flats were built by the City Council in the 1920s as workers' housing. They were designed by Leslie Wilkinson, whose architectural contribution to Sydney continues to be commemorated by an annual lecture at Sydney University. Walk through for a view across to the city.



Go down Bowman Street past a row of old terrace houses, turn left at Cross Street, then right into **Scott Street** (10).

PORT PYRMONT

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10 SCOTT STREET

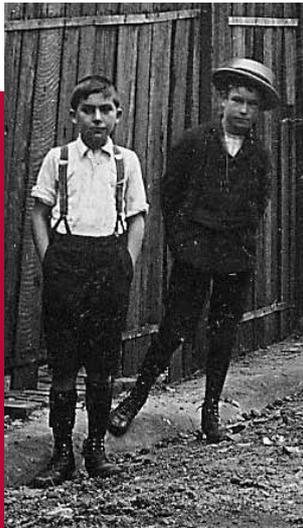
This little group of 1870s houses with corner shop was supposed to be demolished for a factory back in the 1950s. They were then bought by the City Council, which also had grand plans for the precinct in the 1970s, but squatters moved in, politics took hold and eventually the buildings were saved. Artists have painted them over the years.



(Photograph: John Prescott)

11 JOHN STREET SCHOOL

The main two-story block was built 1891–92. It was designed by William Kemp, the NSW Architect for Schools, who was also responsible for the Technical College Block in Mary Anne Street and Technical Museum in Harris Street. As well as education, John Street provided amenities. It was only at school that many children were able to have showers and proper baths, and the building of the school gymnasium in 1919 was a boon to the budding champion athletes of Pyrmont. But from a peak of 650 students in 1920, the number fell to 245 in 1933 as houses were demolished for woolstores and flour mills, and the school was closed. It is now a community centre.



Boys in Pyrmont, 1916
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

i CSR IN PYRMONT

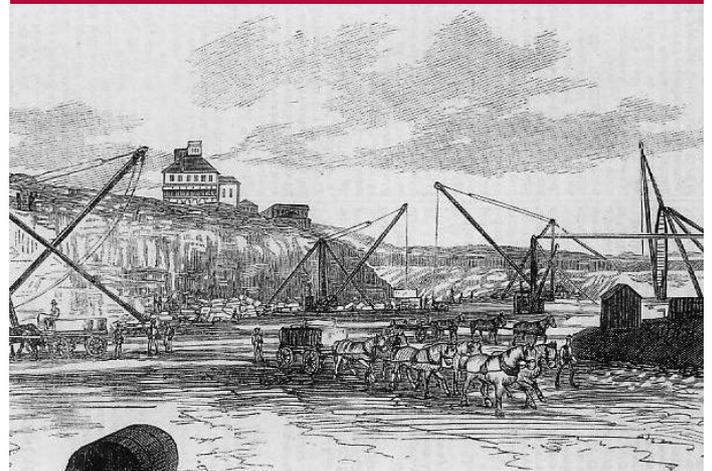
The Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) first acquired land at Pyrmont in 1878, and eventually owned 31 acres (77 hectares). Houses and streets—such as Jones Street between Bowman Street and the harbour—disappeared as CSR expanded. CSR provided thousands of jobs, some of them unpleasant, dangerous and unhealthy. Products included not only sugar, golden syrup and molasses from the refinery but industrial alcohol and rum from the distillery, and particle board from the caneite factory. Operations were finally wound down by the early 1990s, and much of the former CSR site is now occupied by the Jacksons Landing residential development. Look out for interpretive signs in the precinct.



Turn left and walk to the end of Mount Street. For a shorter walk, head down the stairs to (lower) Mount Street. Otherwise turn right for the Clifftop Walk. This area formed part of the CSR site. At the end of the Clifftop Walk, go down the stairs or ramp to Quarry Master Drive. Turn right and follow the cliff to inspect a face of “yellow block” sandstone (12A), once part of Saunders’ Paradise quarry. Saunders’ quarrying operations were awarded an Historic Engineering Marker in 2005 commemorated with a plaque.

12 QUARRY SITES

The tough quality of Pyrmont sandstone was well known by 1855. When the entrance and steps of the Australian Museum had to be replaced, the Colonial Architect insisted that the stone must come from the “best bed of the Pyrmont Quarries”. Buildings using Pyrmont stone include Sydney University, the General Post Office and the Art Gallery of NSW, along with many other government buildings, insurance companies and banks. The quarries would provide many jobs, but would contribute to changing the peninsula from an attractive retreat to having a blasted, treeless appearance. “Paradise” Quarry (12A) was one of several run by the Saunders family, along with “Purgatory” (12B) and “Hell Hole” (12C).



Saunders’ Northern Quarries, Town and Country Journal, 8 December 1883
(Image: City of Sydney Archives)

PORT PYRMONT

Historical Walking Tour

13

to

14

To take a detour to the site of the **Griffin Destructor** (13) and the **Fish Markets** (14) continue down Quarry Master Drive to the right. Otherwise retrace your steps past the stairs, and walk through the gap in the building on your left. This path follows the dramatic sandstone escarpment and links back to (lower) Mount Street. Turn left into Miller Street and proceed to Harris Street, crossing over to reach the **War Memorial** (15).

13

DETOUR: PYRMONT INCINERATOR SITE

The residents of Pyrmont already had to deal with smoke from the Pyrmont and Ultimo Powerhouses in 1932 when Sydney City Council decided to build its new garbage incinerator at Pyrmont. The incinerator was designed by Walter Burley Griffin, the designer of Canberra, and his wife Marion Mahony Griffin, and was a stunningly modern cubist-inspired building with richly decorative detailed work based on Aztec motifs. It was decommissioned in 1971 and fell into disrepair, then was demolished in 1992 to make way for the large block of home units that now occupy the site. Previously on this site was “Tinkers Well”, where Aboriginal people continued to camp and gather cockles and oysters as late as the 1830s. It was one of the landmarks that disappeared as the cliffs were quarried back.

15

WAR MEMORIAL

Of the 750 local men who enlisted during World War I, 150 died and many more were wounded. All men who served are listed on the War Memorial, which is topped by an angel of peace holding a shield bearing the legend “Their name liveth for evermore”. It was sculpted by Gilbert Doble.



Facing Harris Street, turn left and walk to Bridge Road. On either side of Harris Street are two historic **Pubs** (16).

16

PUBS

The Pyrmont peninsula once boasted 25 pubs, with each industrial concern and wool store having its own associated hotel. The name of the Quarryman’s Arms is a reminder of one of the earliest major industries on the Pyrmont peninsula. The Dunkirk was originally known as the Butcher’s Arms, while nearby Bank Street was once known as Abattoir Road.



Quarryman’s Arms 1911
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

17



You can end your Pyrmont tour here by turning left onto Pyrmont Bridge Road and returning to Pyrmont Bridge (01). Alternatively, take a tour of Ultimo. Continue down Harris Street to Allen Street. Ahead are the former **Pitt, Son and Badgery No. 1 Woolstores** (17), followed by **Goldsbrough Mort Woolstores** (18).



Pitt, Son and Badgery No. 1 Woolstores
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

18

GOLDSBROUGH MORT WOOLSTORES

In 1883, Richard Goldsbrough built a warehouse in Pyrmont Street for storing thousands of bales of wool. By World War II, 20 multi-storey warehouses had been built in Pyrmont and Ultimo to cater for what was then Australia’s major export industry. Goldsbrough’s store used hydraulic goods and passenger lifts, and had the largest floor area of any building in the colony, with its own railway siding. It burned down in 1935 and the present building went up on the site. By the beginning of the 1970s the woolstores had begun to empty as the wool brokers relocated activities to the new Yennora Wool Centre, west of Parramatta. The Goldsbrough Mort Woolstores were converted into apartments in 1995.

19

WOOLSTORES

to

25

Other woolstores in the area include: Schute Bell (19), Winchcombe Carson (20), Commonwealth Wool and Produce No. 1 (21) and No. 2 (22), New Zealand Loan & Mercantile (23), Farmers and Graziers No. 1 (24) and No. 2 (25).



Your tour of Pyrmont ends here. Walk up to William Henry Street and follow it along until you reach Harris Street. Turn right at the corner and continue south towards Broadway. This is the start of the City of Sydney’s walking tour of Ultimo called “Renewal”.

To get back to town, either retrace your steps to Pyrmont Bridge, or take the monorail or light rail from the Paddy’s Market Station, just behind the Powerhouse Museum at 500 Harris Street, back to the city and Central Railway Station.



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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

This brochure was prepared by the
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HWT 8