



historical  
walking  
tours

CITY OF SYDNEY   
*city of villages*

# HIDDEN SYDNEY'S LITTLE LANEWAYS

Historical Walking Tour



Front Cover Image:  
Reef Knot The Sky is Falling

Angel Place 2008 temporary art installation for Laneways By George!  
(Photograph: Paul Patterson / City of Sydney)

# EXPLORE



Explore the city's laneways and minor streets, the ones the casual passer-by doesn't see.



**PLEASE ALLOW  
1 TO 2 HOURS FOR THIS TOUR.**

*Start at Phillip Lane,  
just south of Bridge Street.*

*Enter Phillip Lane (1) from Macquarie Street and walk through the archway to Phillip Street. On your way, look to your left along the length of the lane behind the Macquarie Street buildings, where once town houses had their tradesmen's entrances and gardens.*

J B Henderson's 1852 painting Old Tank Stream, Sydney, shows the area behind George and Pitt Streets where laneways eventually evolved. (Image: State Library of NSW)

Sydney was settled around a freshwater stream that formed the back boundary of properties fronting the earliest main streets, and a series of informal paths provided rear access to gardens, stables and storage areas.

In time these laneways became formalised, oblivious to any planner's grid. Other laneways developed to provide access to the rear of commercial buildings that came to dominate the area. Charming walkways or grungy service lanes, today they contribute complexity to the tapestry of the city.

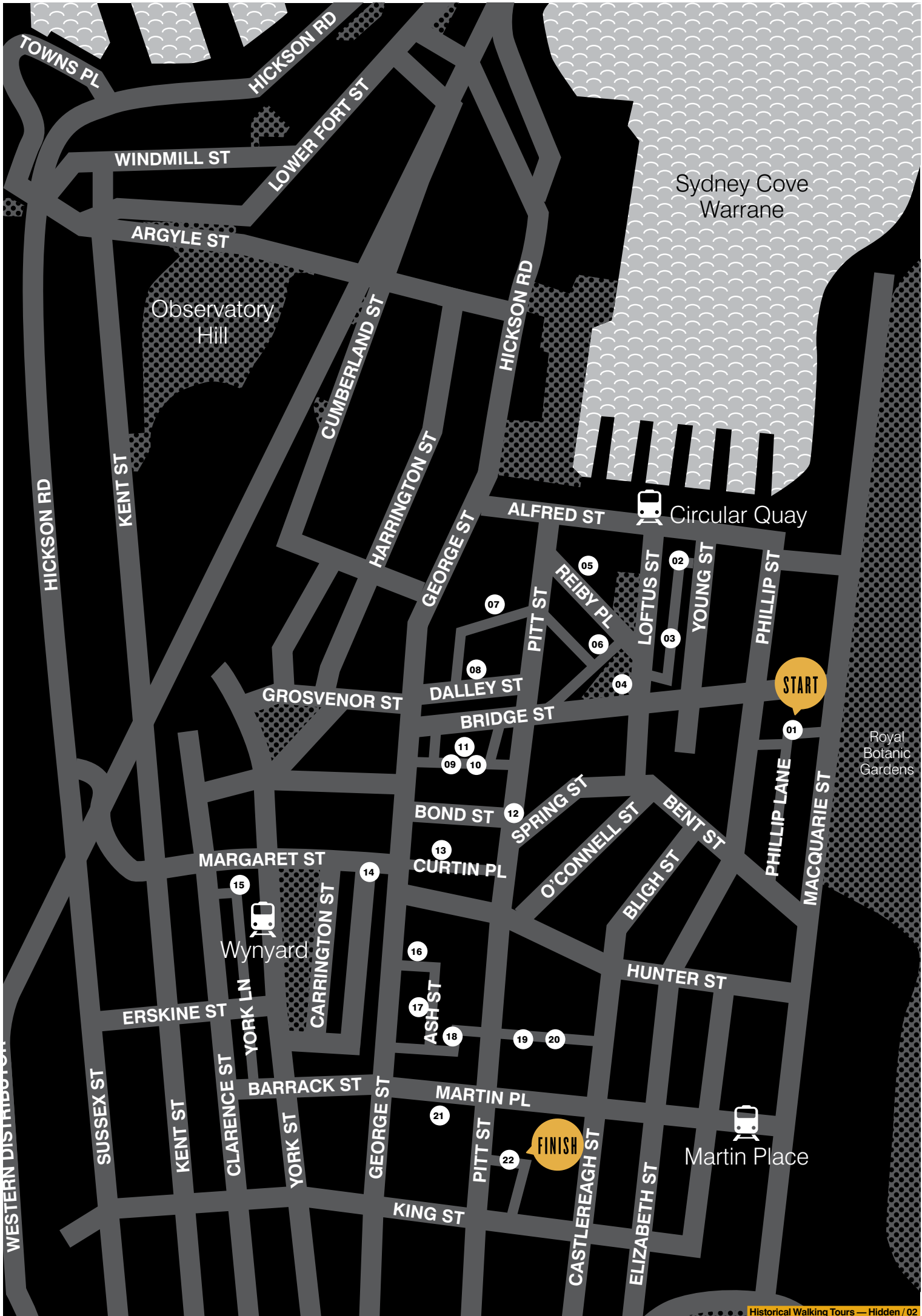
**Sydney's  
history  
is all around us.**

**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**





Sydney Cove  
Warrane

Observatory  
Hill

Circular Quay

Royal Botanic  
Gardens

Wynyard

Martin Place

START

FINISH

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## 01 PHILLIP LANE

This is the last survivor of several laneways that were established by the 1840s to service Macquarie Street houses. The white Astor apartments on the left were built in 1923, an early example of fashionable apartment living in the city. On the right is the rear of the Chief Secretary's Building, occupied from 1878. The laneway's low sandstone archway, remnant sandstone guttering and cobblestone paving echo a past kind of streetscape that has all but disappeared from the city.

*In front of you across Phillip Street is the Museum of Sydney. If you have time, take a look inside, but to continue the walk, pass the museum, cross Bridge Street, head down the left side of Young Street and turn left into **Customs House Lane** (02). Before Circular Quay was built in the 1830s this area was waterfront property, still retaining some mangrove vegetation and dotted with early boat building sheds. Hence the odd shaped blocks, unaligned streets and little lanes.*

## 02 CUSTOMS HOUSE LANE

Hinchcliffs Woolstore, on the south-west corner, built 1860–1880, is a rare survivor from the time when Circular Quay was a centre for international shipping and wool was Australia's greatest export. Imagine the bales being raised on the hoist pulleys that are still attached to the building. In the second half of the 20th century the building was set up with dormitories and a soup kitchen and used as the Matthew Talbot Hostel for unemployed men. Inside Customs House you can take a look at the in-floor city model, catch an exhibition, have a coffee or borrow a book from the City of Sydney Library.



(Photograph: City of Sydney)

*Half way along Customs House Lane, turn left into **Loftus Lane** (03) and follow the dog leg through to Loftus Street. You are now facing **Macquarie Place** (04).*

## 03 LOFTUS LANE

For most of its life this laneway has served as back entrance to the buildings on Loftus Street, housing customs agents, shipping brokers and wool buyers. The old sandstone three-storey building on the right, which forms the rear of the Gallipoli Club, was built in 1876. This and Hinchcliffs are the only remaining woolstores in the Circular Quay precinct.

## 04 MACQUARIE PLACE

There was once a through street at Macquarie Place, but this is now given over to public space joining a little park packed with items of historical interest, including the Obelisk of Distances, the anchor of the Sirius, a Victorian drinking fountain and the remnants of what was once a glass-domed entrance to an underground "men's convenience". This area is a popular drinking hole at the end of the day when the surrounding office blocks close for business.



(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

*Two little lanes run between Macquarie Place and Pitt Street. Take a look at **Reiby Place** (05) before entering through the archway into **Bulletin Place** (06).*

## 05 REIBY PLACE

Today Reiby Place is lined with slick glass and concrete, but its name commemorates one of the city's earliest entrepreneurs. Before this area was drained, Thomas and Mary Reiby had a house in waterfront Macquarie Place. Mary Reiby, convicted for horse stealing, became a wealthy and respected widow, and in 1817 her house became the first premises of Australia's first bank, the Bank of New South Wales. Reiby's face is on the \$20 note. The Gateway building offers a range of food options.



(Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

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## 06 BULLETIN PLACE

The Basement has long been a favourite jazz venue in the city. Beyond this, warehouses and stores from the mid 19th century preserve a little enclave of “olde Sydney”. The Bulletin newspaper was published here from 1880, and writers such as Henry Lawson and A B Banjo Patterson would have frequented this little street. This lane possibly inspired the lines in Patterson’s famous poem Clancy of the Overflow about dingy offices and folk with “stunted forms and weedy, for townfolk have no time to grow, they have no time to waste”. Prove him wrong by spending a little time here enjoying a meal or a cup of coffee.



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

When you arrive on Pitt Street, cross over to the western side and into dog-legged **Underwood Street** (07). Follow it down to **Dalley Street** (08).

## 07 UNDERWOOD STREET

Here is another reminder of how remote the original waterfront has become, as this is the place where James Underwood built Sydney’s first commercial shipyard in 1798. The red brick building at the bend in the lane is unusual, employing an architectural style that was more commonly used in domestic apartment buildings of the 1930s and 1940s.

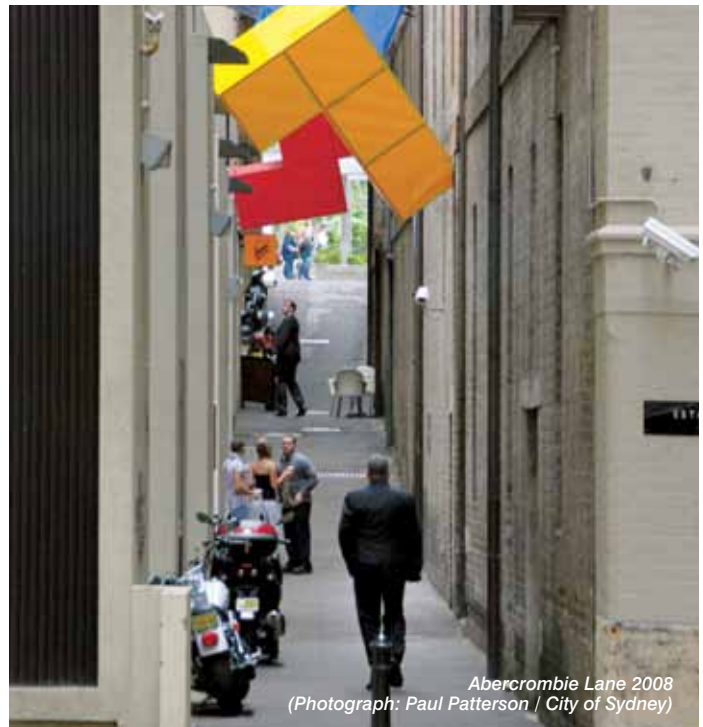
## 08 DALLEY STREET

What’s in a name? Dalley Street, named for politician Victor Dalley, was once called Queen’s Place. And its continuation across George Street was called Charlotte Place (now Grosvenor Street). Queen Charlotte was George III’s queen. Queen’s Court (Dalley Street) was part of a warren of tiny lanes and courtyards that grew up along the banks of the Tank Stream between the “official” George and Pitt Streets.



Queens Court, off Queens Place (Dalley Street), 1875  
(Photograph: State Library of NSW)

Turn right at **Dalley Street** (08) and follow it to George Street. Ahead, across the road, is the Brooklyn Hotel and Johnsons Corner, landmarks in Sydney since 1912. If you’re not in need of a drink, turn left and walk up George Street. Before crossing over Bridge Street, notice the Metropolitan Hotel, a match for the Brooklyn, and the solid Burns Philp & Co building, one of Sydney’s old shipping firms. Turn left into **Abercrombie Lane** (09).



Abercrombie Lane 2008  
(Photograph: Paul Patterson / City of Sydney)

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## 09 ABERCROMBIE LANE

On the corner of Abercrombie Lane is the George Patterson Building, refurbished as an upmarket bar after a fire gutted the building in 1996. This building retains many original features, including some atmospheric fire-damaged walls. Walking down Abercrombie Lane it is easy to imagine that you are heading for the Tank Stream.

**“The spot chosen for the settlement was at the head of a cove, near the run of fresh water which stole silently along through a very thick wood, the stillness of which had then, for the first time since the Creation, been interrupted.”**

*(David Collins, Account of the English Colony of New South Wales, 1802)*

When the water supply became inadequate, convicts were set to work digging holding tanks into the watercourse, and so it became known as the Tank Stream. Today the stream runs silently through a city drain below the pavement.



Just before you reach Pitt Street, turn left into Tank Stream Way (10) and left again into Bridge Lane (11). Either of these lanes will take you back to Bridge Street.



Abercrombie Lane featuring an art installation (Photograph: City of Sydney)

## 10 + 11 TANK STREAM WAY + BRIDGE LANE



Tank Stream Way (left) in the foreground and Bridge Lane (right) (Photograph: City of Sydney)

Tank Stream Way was once part of Hamilton Street which ran from Bridge to Hunter Streets, named after Hamilton's biscuit factory. Most of it disappeared under the Australia Square development, leaving two remnant laneways, and this section was renamed in 1981. In Bridge Lane, once the site of the town's first lumber yards, look for the old warehouse doorway, now entrance to the Establishment Hotel. As late as the 1860s there was still vacant land sliced between small cottages in this area, but by the end of the 19th century it had become a favoured location for warehouses, including several tea merchants' stores.



You are now back at Bridge Street. Turn right, and immediately turn down Pitt Street. Take a look down Bond Street, but keep walking on until you reach Curtin Place.

## 12 BOND STREET

Bond Street remains on the grid, but most of its buildings were swept away for the construction of Australia Square, opened in 1967. In the early decades of the 20th century, Bond Street was a honeycomb of small shops and businesses, including printers and publishers. The influential magazine *Art in Australia* was published from here, and Bond Street studios attracted tenants such as artist Sydney Ure Smith and photographer Max Dupain.



Bond Street, looking east, in the 1880s (Photograph: State Library of NSW)

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Curtin Place, formerly Little George Street (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

## 13 CURTIN PLACE

This lane, formerly Little George Street, forms the southern boundary of the Australia Square site. John Curtin was Australian Prime Minister, 1941–45. Between this and Bond Street, underneath the skyscraper, was once the romantically named Robin Hood Place. Two other little lanes, Hamilton Street and Little Hunter Street run off Curtin Place.



At George Street, cross over to Margaret Street, then turn left again into Wynyard Lane.

## 14 WYNYARD LANE

A laneway of loading docks and car parks, the back end of city businesses. But note the hotel entrance in this 1919 photo of the lane. This area was taken up with military barracks until the 1840s, and when the barracks were closed in the 1840s, the military commander, Edward Buckley Wynyard, ensured that his name was applied generously to the places in this precinct.



Imperial Hotel, Wynyard Lane, 1919 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



At the end of Wynyard Lane you arrive at Wynyard Street and Regimental Square. Notice the fine bank building ahead and the equally fine piles to your left on George Street. This is the heartland of 19th century commercial Sydney. Turn right, walk up Wynyard Street and cross over the top of Wynyard Park to York Street.

Stay on the park side of York, and notice across the road the distinctive Art Deco Transport House with its green tiled facade. Walk through this building (an entrance to Wynyard railway station) to **York Lane** (15). Turn left and follow it to the end. You will cross Erskine Street and arrive at Barrack Street.



York Lane, 1938 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

## 15 YORK LANE

This is Sydney's longest laneway. Just before Barrack Street there are some remnants of old warehouses on the right, and on the left some residential apartments. Residents here were some of the early adopters of the current trend towards inner city living that began in the 1980s.



Barrack Street offers opportunities to fuel up with food, with choices ranging from street stalls to the elegant banking chamber of the old Savings Bank of NSW. Turn left and return to George Street. Cross over and walk north until you reach Palings Lane.

## 16 + 17 PALINGS LANE + ASH STREET



(Illustration: Australian Builder & Contractor's News, 8 December 1888)

The elegant complex of up-market restaurants, pools, bars and spas on George Street is entered through narrow Palings Lane, which despite its very contemporary feeling, has been on or close to here for a long time. It was named because it led through to the large 1880s Palings Building in Ash Street. W H Paling was a musical entrepreneur who imported and eventually manufactured pianos and sheet music. Upper floor rooms in Palings building, and many others in this area were rented out to teachers of music and dance, and as artists' studios. Ash Street also housed the headquarters of the Liberal Party of Australia for many years.



When you reach the end of Ash Street you have arrived at Angel Place.

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## 18 ANGEL PLACE

In front of you, at the intersection of Ash Street and Angel Place is a covered way that goes through to Martin Place, Sydney's grandest street. Turn right and face towards George Street. On either side are rough hewn trachyte stone facades of two fine commercial buildings, the one on the right built in 1896, the other in 1904, both designed by American immigrant, Edward Raht, who introduced this neo-Romanesque style to Sydney. Look up and catch a glimpse of Sydney's little white Eiffel Tower, the AWA Tower, in the distance. Now turn and walk back to Pitt Street past the City Recital Hall, definitely a hidden city gem. The old Edwardian Angel Hotel on the corner of Pitt Street shows off period timber fittings, stained glass and lovely turquoise tiles.

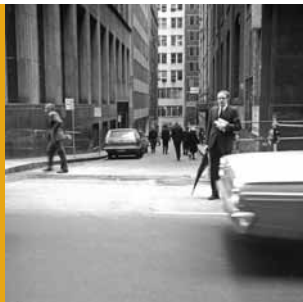


Interior of City Recital Hall (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

At Pitt Street, cross over and walk down Penfold Place (19) and Hosking Place (20).

## 19 + 20 PENFOLD PLACE + HOSKING PLACE

W C Penfold & Co is one of Sydney's oldest firms. In 1886 Penfold bought out a printing business that had been on this Pitt Street site since 1830, and in 1912 the firm bought the eight-storey Hosking House in Hosking Lane behind, for an expanded print works.



Hosking Place, 1967 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

These private laneways have served the firm, and acted as a short cut for locals for all this time.

John Hosking was Sydney's first elected Lord Mayor. He had to step down from this position when he was declared bankrupt in the 1840s depression. If only he could see this piece of real estate now!

Retrace your steps to and head to Martin Place. You may wish to call in at the GPO to see the Tank Stream artefacts (21). Finish your tour at Rowe Street (22).

## 21 TANK STREAM

If you enter the GPO building at No.1 Martin Place directly under the clock tower and head downstairs, you will find eating and shopping temptations as well as an exhibition of objects found in an archaeological dig on this site. They include an excavated segment of the original drain which channels the Tank Stream.

## 22 ROWE STREET

No street in Sydney has had more words written about it than Rowe Street. By the early 20th century its fine run of terrace houses was being converted to small shops and galleries, and Rowe Street was the closest thing Sydney had to European chic. Upstairs rooms were used as artists' studios, and the commercial Notanda Gallery was a gathering place for the artistic community. In adjoining shops you could borrow a book or buy an elegant hat. Many people remember window shopping for the latest in interior design and Parisian frocks, buying some music at Rowe Street Records or enjoying a bohemian espresso at Horton's Gallerie.

The street remains, but the buildings were demolished to make way for the construction of the MLC Centre in the 1970s. Many people still mourn its passing, and it continues to be cited as a cautionary tale against overdevelopment and wholesale destruction of the fine grain fabric of the city.



Notanda Gallery, Roycroft Bookshop and Henriette Lamotte's hat boutique, Rowe Street, c1950 (Photograph Kerry Dundas, State Library of NSW)





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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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