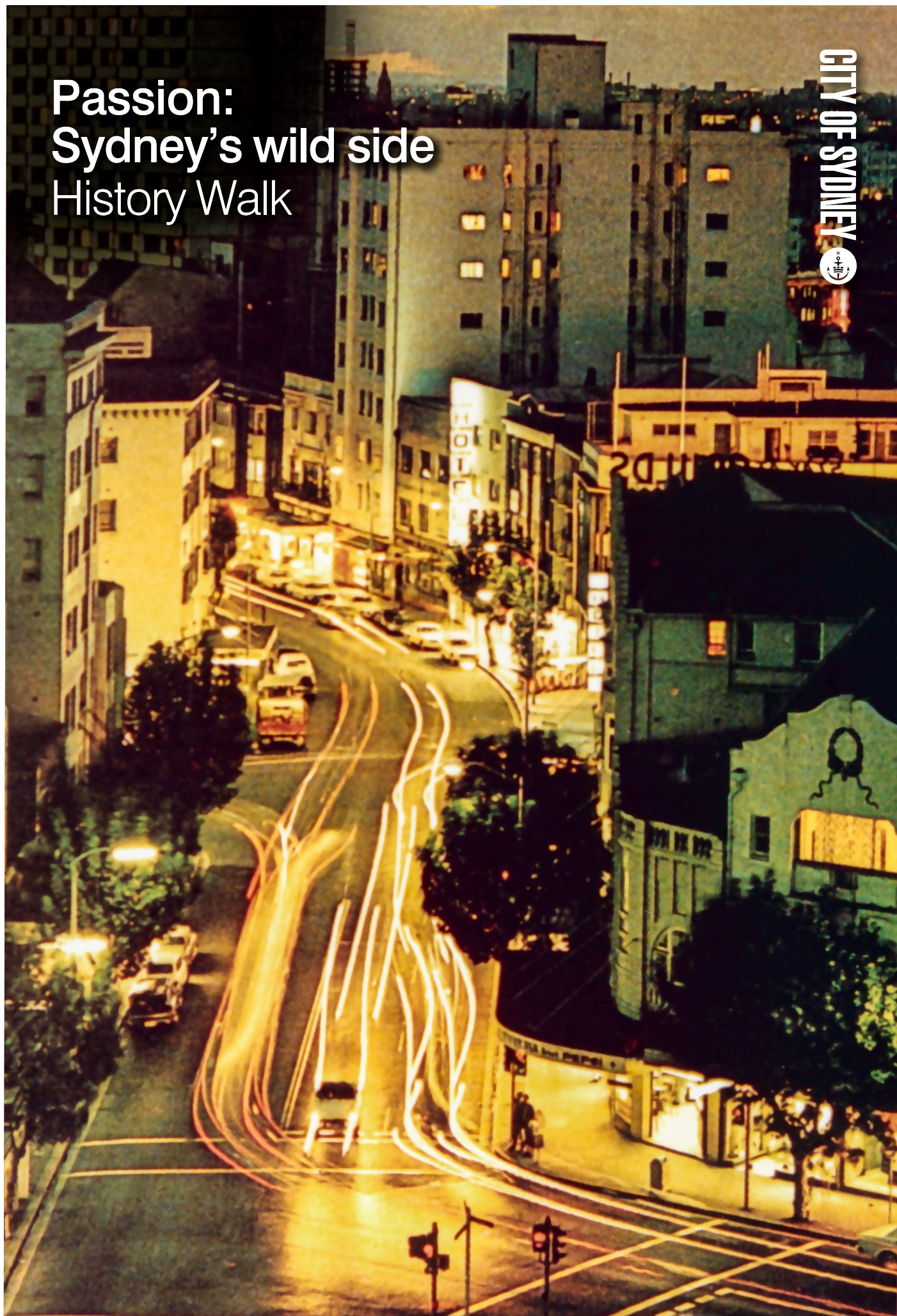


Passion: Sydney's wild side History Walk

CITY OF SYDNEY



Passion: Sydney's wild side History Walk

Kings Cross, along with its adjoining locales of Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay, has a rich and risqué history. Once the domain of grand houses and stylish apartments, 'The Cross' eventually became the city's red light district and an entertainment zone that never sleeps. But along with sailors, soldiers, tourists and suburbanites out for a night on the town, it has also been home to Sydney's Bohemia, the haunt of artists, actors, writers and musicians. It continues to attract anyone hoping to find what the painter Donald Friend described in the 1940s as the 'genuine Berlin air' of The Cross, where 'everybody is wicked'.



Allow 1 hour for this tour.

If you want to go into Elizabeth Bay House, add an extra hour.

There are lots of cafes and pubs en route. Start at the intersection of Kings Cross Road, Darlinghurst Road and William Street.

1

The Cross



Kings Cross, 1940s (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

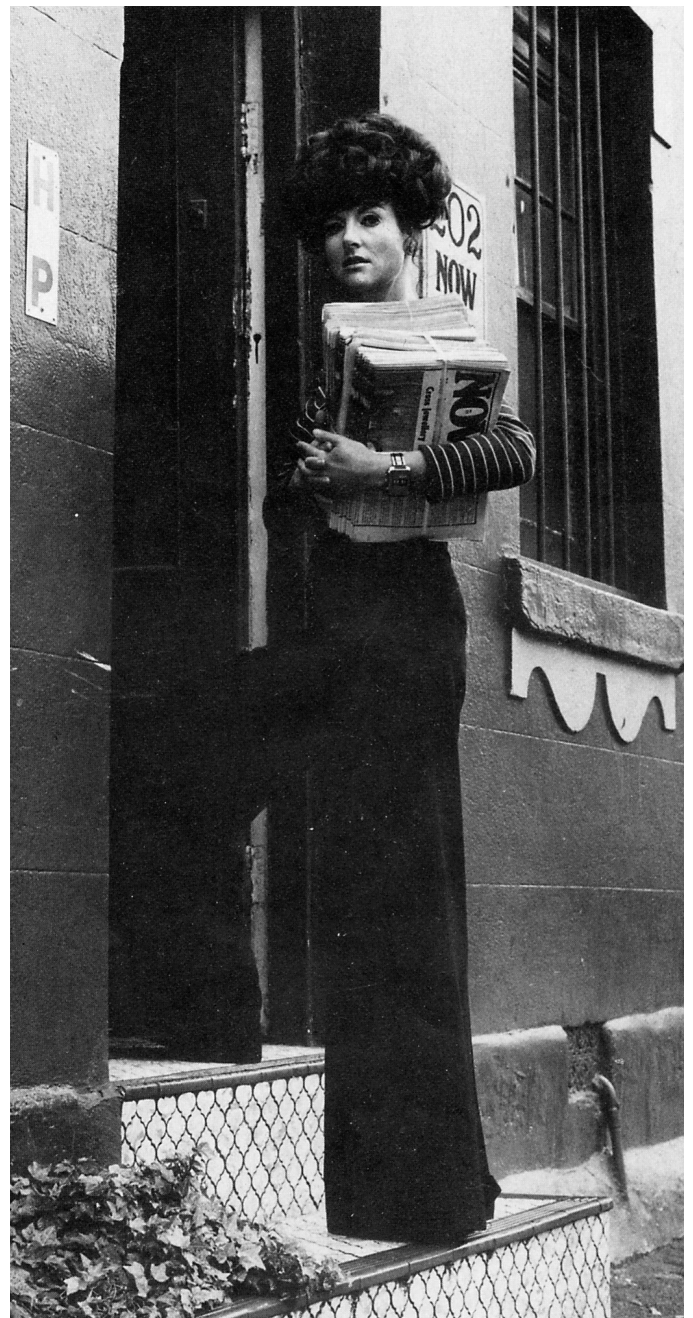
The intersection of many streets, including the crossover of Darlinghurst Road and Victoria Street at William Street, was originally named Queens Cross to celebrate the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. In 1905 the name was officially changed to Kings Cross. William Street then was much narrower than it is today. It was widened in 1916, and the building of the Kings Cross tunnel in the 1970s extended it through to Bayswater Road. The buildings at the top of The Cross have sprouted bright advertising signs for many decades, and the current large Coca-Cola sign has become a Kings Cross landmark.



Walk northwest along Darlinghurst Road, turn left and proceed to **202 Victoria Street (2)** on your right.

2

202 Victoria Street



Juanita Nielsen (Photograph: courtesy of Elizabeth Butel and Tom Thompson, Kings Cross Album, 1984)

Juanita Nielsen came from a wealthy family and could have chosen to live a quiet life. She became a community activist who published the local magazine, NOW. She actively and vocally opposed the redevelopment of Woollahroomooloo and Victoria Street, running an ongoing campaign in her magazine and supporting the trade union green bans. In a newspaper interview in October 1974 Nielsen was described as follows: 'she has no time for ratbags interested in publicity or pushing some political line, but she has real concern for the little people pushed out by developers'. Nielsen disappeared on 4 July 1975 under mysterious circumstances, assumed murdered.



Continue north along Victoria Street until you reach **Butler Stairs (3)** on the left side of the street.

3

Butler Stairs

The Butler stairs were built in about 1870 to link the neighbourhoods of Kings Cross and Potts Point with Woolloomooloo. The neighbourhoods had been separated by an escarpment, and the divide was social as well as physical. This is seen in the classic 1920s Australian silent film *The Kid Stakes*, based on the Fatty Finn comic strip, where the rich boy from Potts Point is contrasted with his poorer cousins from The 'Loo. It is likely that the Butler Stairs were named for James Butler, an alderman for Fitzroy Ward on Sydney Council in 1863-69.



Head north along Victoria Street toward Orwell Street.

4

Victoria Street and the Green Bans



East side of Victoria Street, 1974 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Victoria Street contains many beautiful old terraces and is lined with plane trees that meet in the middle to form a leafy canopy over the road. When developers wanted to demolish terraces in the 1970s to build high rise apartments, the Builders' Labourers Federation (BLF) imposed Green Bans on the houses. Residents refused to leave their properties, and after a long battle, some places were saved and the new development was not as intrusive as had been planned.



Head north along Victoria Street toward **McElhone Stairs (5)** on your left.

5

McElhone Stairs

McElhone stairs were built in c1870 to link the neighbourhoods of Kings Cross and Potts Point with Woolloomooloo. The McElhone family is the namesake for this staircase. Arthur McElhone (1868-1946) was one of the City of Sydney Council's longest-serving aldermen. He represented the Fitzroy Ward from 1899 to 1946, with a small break while the council was administered by Commissioners in 1928-30. His father John and his younger brother William had also been aldermen; the brothers McElhone had served together in 1908-27. William McElhone was Lord Mayor in 1922 and Arthur was briefly Lord Mayor for two months in 1935 when the incumbent died. Arthur's son John was an alderman in 1946-53.



Take the **McElhone Stairs (5)** to enjoy the Woolloomooloo detour, or continue along Victoria Street until you reach **Embarkation Park (6)** on the left.



Detour: Woolloomooloo

The name, Woolloomooloo, is derived from the local Aboriginal language, variously spelt as Walamul, Wallamool and Wallamoula. The navy still ties up here, but the 'Finger Wharf', one of the largest in the world, has now been turned into residential units, hotel accommodation and restaurants. Also in the area are several pubs and the legendary pie cart Harry's Café de Wheels, Cowper Wharf Roadway.

6

Embarkation Park



Woolloomooloo Bay, 19th century (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Known informally as the Mick Fowler Reserve after the Victoria Street Green Bans campaigner, this place was later officially named Embarkation Park. A memorial to the embarkation of troops for World War 1 was erected on this site in 1921 and taken over by council in 1934. It was relocated across Cowper Wharf Roadway in the 1970s. From Embarkation Park you will have a good view of the 'Loo, one of Australia's most internationally famous place names. It was mentioned not only in the Monty Python 'Bruces' sketch, but in F Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, perhaps because this was many visitors' first landfall in Australia.



Continue along Victoria Street and turn right at **Challis Avenue (9)**. **St Vincent's College (7)** is on the right and the **Garcia School of Music (8)** is a little further up Challis Avenue.

7

St Vincent's College



Tarmons, 1845

(Painting: George Edwards Peacock, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

The Sisters of Charity acquired an old residence called Tarmons on this site, for a convent. They established a free hospital in 1857 and a school for the local children in 1858. A few years later St Vincent's Hospital moved to its present location, leaving room for the school to expand, as semi-rural Potts Point became a dense inner city location.

8

Garcia School of Music

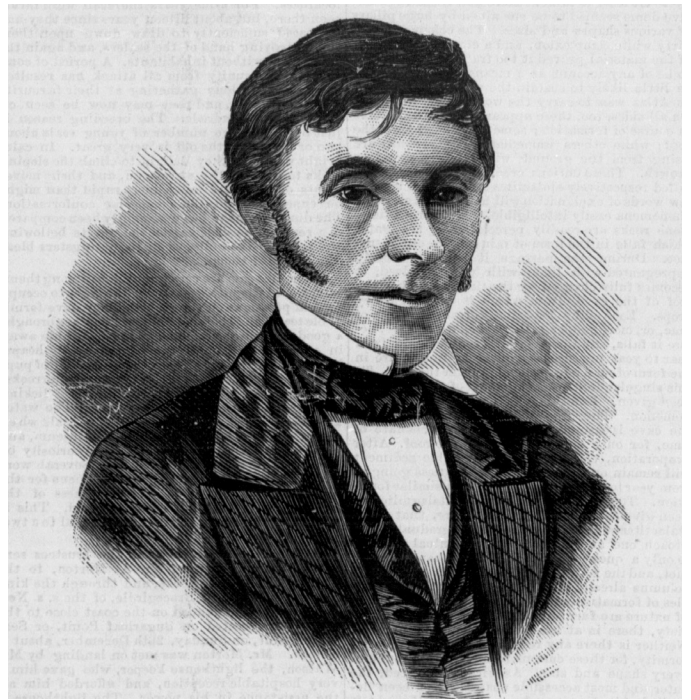


An article about Nellie Melba's teacher at the Garcia School of Music, still teaching at 90 years of age (Image: *Australian Women's Weekly*, 16 July 1938, p. 2, courtesy National Library of Australia)

In 1909 the Sisters of Charity, located nearby, bought these 4 terraces before they were completed as houses, and converted them to the Garcia School of Singing and Music. The inspiration behind this was Sister Mary Paul of the Cross, previously known as Madame Christian, a great oratorio singer and a teacher of singing. She renounced a brilliant singing career to enter the order in 1894.

9

Challis Avenue



John Henry Challis (Image: *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 15 January 1881, p. 17, courtesy National Library of Australia)

Challis Avenue is named after John Henry Challis, who arrived in Sydney in 1829 and became a successful local merchant. He was a great benefactor of the University of Sydney, leaving his property to the university to form the Challis Bequest. The street has many fine town houses built in the Greek Revival style, as well as Romanesque style terraces with elaborate colonnaded verandas. A fine example is the **Garcia School of Music (8)**.



Walk up Challis Avenue and turn left onto Macleay Street. **Yellow House (10)** is on the left.

10

Yellow House

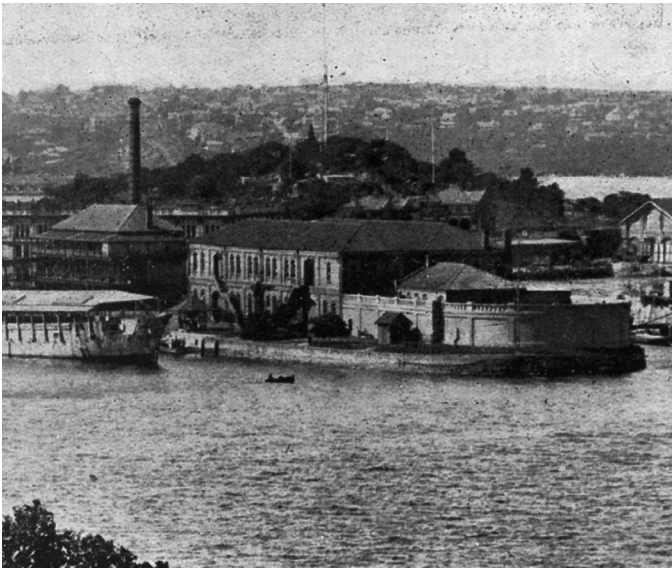
This 1897 terrace was once owned by Frank and Thelma Clune, patrons of the arts. In 1957 it became the Terry Clune Gallery, and artists who exhibited there included Russell Drysdale, John Olsen and John Perceval. From 1970 to 1972 Martin Sharp, a young Sydney artist, turned the gallery space into what he described as 'an artist community in the south, in the sun, and probably one of the greatest pieces of conceptual art ever achieved'. Virtually every surface was painted with images inspired by the Surrealists and Van Gogh. The house was named after Van Gogh's Yellow House in Arles and was the venue for cabarets, plays and films. Artists involved included Brett Whiteley, Peter Weir, Jim Sharman and George Gittoes. In 2003 it was reinvented as apartments, with an art gallery space on the ground floor. Remnants of the 1970s work were found in the building, restored and repositioned for public view.



Take a detour to Garden Island or walk south on Macleay Street and turn left onto Jones Al and take the stairs. Turn right onto Billyard Avenue, right onto Onslow Avenue and right onto Onslow Place.



Detour: Garden Island



Garden Island when it was still an island, c1920
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

If you continue north along Macleay Street and Wylde Street you will reach the Royal Australian Navy base, HMAS *Kuttabul*, incorporating Garden Island. There has been a naval base on Garden Island since 1858. It was joined to the mainland by the building of the Captain Cook Graving Dock in 1942. Many of the old colonial villas of the area are now part of HMAS *Kuttabul*.

11

Elizabeth Bay House



Staircase at Elizabeth Bay House
(Photograph: Ray Joyce / Historic Houses Trust of NSW)

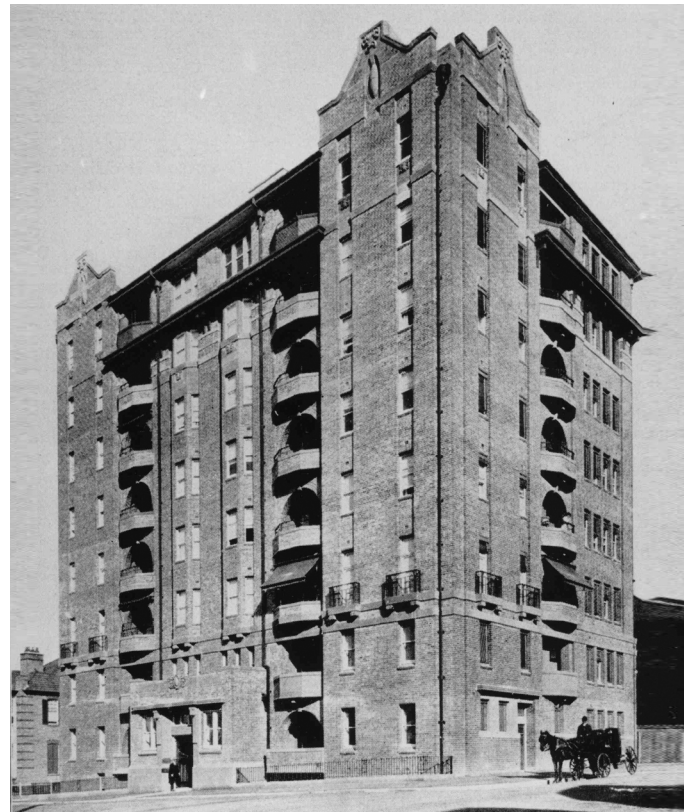
Elizabeth Bay House was the home of colonial secretary Alexander Macleay from 1839. The design is attributed to John Verge, who also designed **Tusculum (13)**. From 1841 to 1927, the 54 acre (21.8 hectare) estate was progressively lost to subdivisions. Between 1928 and 1935 it became a squat where some of Sydney's Bohemian artists lived rent-free with beautiful harbour views, but without electricity. It then became a reception venue, then flats. A council plan for it to be used for receptions – and as a residence for the Lord Mayor – was set aside by the NSW Government in 1976. It was finally restored and opened to the public as a house museum in 1977. Its magnificent elliptical, domed saloon with its curving, cantilevered staircase is one of the finest interiors of a 19th century Australian building. Don't miss out on going inside.



Head back to Onslow Avenue and walk south until you reach the roundabout. Turn right onto Greenknowe Avenue and follow it west back to Macleay Street. **Kingsclere (12)** is on the southeast corner of Greenknowe Avenue and Macleay Street.

12

Kingsclere



Kingsclere, 1912 (Photograph: *Building*, December 1912, State Library of NSW)

Kingsclere, completed in 1912 and designed by Halligan and Wilton, was the first block of high-rise apartments built on this street and among the first in Sydney. They were at an exclusive market, with features such as 2 balconies and 2 bathrooms for each flat, luxurious wood panelling and automatic passenger lifts. In the 1920s and 1930s, Macleay Street became known for its fine apartment buildings designed by prominent architects, including the Macleay Regis at No. 12 (1939), Manar at No. 42 (1926) and Byron Hall at No. 97–99 (1929).



Turn right on Macleay Street and turn left onto Manning Street to reach **Tusculum (13)**.

13

Tusculum



Tusculum, c1880s (Photograph: William Sargent, State Library of NSW)

When the first land grants were made on Woolloomooloo Hill (now Potts Point) houses they had to meet several conditions – they had to cost at least £1000, face the city, and be approved by the Governor. Tusculum, designed by John Verge for the merchant Alexander Brodie Spark and completed in 1835, was typical of the mansions that once dominated the landscape of this precinct. Originally there was an open colonnade of Doric columns at ground level, but in 1851 merchant William Long rebuilt it with the 2 storey Ionic colonnade we see today. Tusculum went through many uses, ending up near-derelict before being restored in 1988 as home of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects.



Head west and turn left onto Tusculum Street, then turn left onto Hughes Street.

14

Wayside Chapel

The Wayside Chapel was set up in 1964 by the Reverend Ted Noffs of the Methodist Church (now the Uniting Church). As well as the chapel, it houses a crisis centre offering accommodation, food, clothing, counselling and referrals to 2,000 people a week. It also offers counselling, health care and bathroom facilities for people who are homeless and those in need, including at-risk youth.



Head east and turn right onto Macleay Street, walking south until you reach the corner of **Orwell Street (15)**.

15

Orwell Street



Two women outside Minerva French Perfumery, July 1941
(Photograph: Russell Roberts, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW and courtesy Tourism Australia)

In Orwell Street you will see many examples of Art Deco buildings. The Metro building, designed by Bruce Dellit in the 1930s, was previously known as The Minerva Theatre. In the 1960s it was the venue for the groundbreaking musical *Hair*. For a time in the 1970s it was a supermarket. From 1982 to 2019 it was the headquarters of Kennedy Miller Mitchell Films, makers of *Mad Max* and *Babe*.



Continue along Macleay Street until you reach **Fitzroy Gardens and El Alamein Fountain (16)** on the left. Continue along Macleay Street which changes to **Darlinghurst Road (17)**.

16

Fitzroy Gardens and El Alamein Fountain



El Alamein Fountain, Macleay Street, Kings Cross, 2003
(Photograph: Paul Green, City of Sydney Archives)

This was the site of Maramanah, the house occupied by eccentric aunts in Robin Dalton's book *Aunts up the Cross* (1965). The aunts had their own private orchestra and could see no good reason to pay taxes or conform to any of the usual behaviour expected of 'respectable' society. The house was sold to the City of Sydney Council in 1945 and demolished to build the park. The El Alamein Fountain, designed by Robert Woodward, was built in 1961. The dandelion effect of the arrangement of its bronze pipes has become a symbol of Kings Cross.

17

Darlinghurst Road

Darlinghurst Road is many things. It is the city's red light district, backpackers' mecca and home for temporary and long-term residents. Many famous people have lived in the street, including poet and activist Mary Gilmore, artist William Dobell, cartoonist Emile Mercier, and the 'gun doc'. In the 1930s and 1940s its Bohemian atmosphere made its cafes and nightclubs a magnet for writers, artists and musicians. The nearby Garden Island naval base and Woolloomooloo docks brought in many servicemen during World War 2 and the Vietnam War, and this led to the introduction of American-style bars and strip clubs. On the eastern side of the road, notice the Art Deco building at No. 52, now the neighbourhood service centre and library. On the corner of Roslyn Street was the site of the former Carousel Club and its legendary drag cabaret show, Les Girls. Darlinghurst Road is also where the first Mardi Gras protest march for gay rights ended in a riot and 53 arrests in 1978.



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8th edition, August 2024