

Renewal Ultimo

History Walk

CITY OF SYDNEY



Renewal Ultimo History Walk

Until 1850, Ultimo was semi-rural, with cornfields and cow paddocks. Members of the Gadigal people still harvested cockles on its foreshores. Then the landscape was remade by sandstone quarrying on Ultimo's western edge and by the construction of a railway and goods yard on its eastern shoreline. The suburb became crowded with factories, woolstores and housing for workers. Today it has a new identity as a cultural precinct as industrial sites are adapted for entertainment and education. This tour of Ultimo starts in greyness and ends in the technicolour of Darling Harbour.



Allow one to 2 hours for this tour.
Begin the walk at Railway Square outside the former **Marcus Clark building (1)**.



Harris Street, Ultimo, 1989 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

1

Former Marcus Clark building



Former Marcus Clark building at Railway Square, 1957
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

When the Marcus Clark department store was completed in 1928, it overlooked a lively retail and entertainment district. But when the underground railway was built, the centre of gravity for shoppers shifted away from here. After World War 2, customers preferred the new suburban shopping centres and cinemas, so education became the real growth industry in this area. The state government bought the store in 1966 and it is now part of the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system.



Continue along Broadway, past the tower building belonging to the **University of Technology Sydney (UTS) (2)**. Turn right into Jones Street.

2 and 3

University of Technology Sydney (UTS)



Former headquarters of John Fairfax showing signage for the Herald Sun newspaper, 1963 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The expansion of UTS (formerly NSW Institute of Technology) is more evidence of Ultimo's education revolution. A large city campus now clusters around the 1970s tower building (2). Among the sites taken over by UTS is the former headquarters of John Fairfax (3), where journalists and printers produced the *Sydney Morning Herald* and other newspapers until 1995. Incidentally, both the UTS tower and the Fairfax building (now UTS 10) have featured in polls of Sydney's least-loved landmarks!



Continue along Jones Street towards Mary Ann Street.

4

Ultimo House

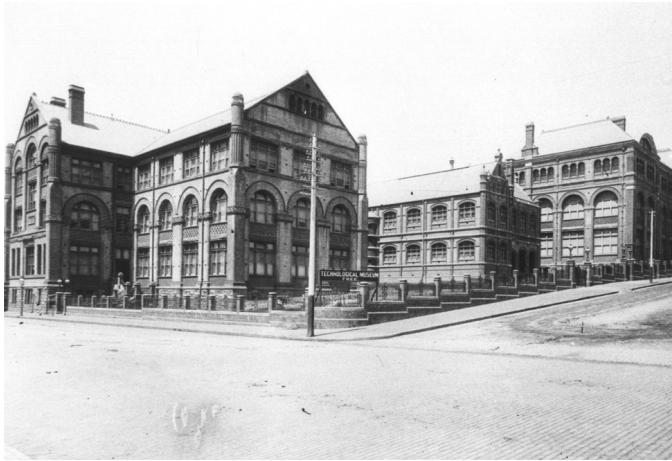
As you follow Jones Street – which cuts through the campus of TAFE's Ultimo College – you are walking in what were once the grounds of Surgeon John Harris' Ultimo House. The house was demolished by 1933 (site at 4). But when it was built c1805, and especially after Francis Greenway remodelled it in the 1810s, Ultimo House was a grand mansion. Harris even had his own deer park here! Industrialisation had already changed the character of the area by 1890, when the NSW Government bought land here for a technical college.



Turn right at Mary Ann Street and walk towards Harris Street.

5 to 7

Technical Education in Ultimo



Technical College and Museum, 1894
(Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

Today the buildings on Mary Ann Street are part of TAFE's Ultimo College. The original **Sydney Technical College (6)** opened in 1892; a brave investment for a government in the middle of an economic depression. The 'Federation Romanesque' college building – designed by W E Kemp and decorated with carvings of Australian animals by W P Macintosh – was a handsome contrast to nearby factories and houses. But it also represented opportunity for thousands of students who attended evening classes in subjects including agriculture, engineering and commerce.

The building labelled '**Commercial High School (5)**' was intended to be co-educational but it only ever housed Sydney Boys High from 1892–1928. The headmistress of Sydney Girls High refused to bring her charges to grimy industrial Ultimo, so the Technical College occupied their space instead, which was rebuilt as **Turner Hall (7)** in 1910–11.

The Technical College expanded towards Thomas, George and Wattle streets, encircling Ultimo House which was demolished in the 1930s. The grounds of John Harris's mansion are the 'sacred site' of technical education in NSW. Sydney Technical High School held classes in Ultimo House from 1911–24, while UTS and the University of NSW both began as units of the Technical College.



Turn right along Harris Street towards Thomas Street.

8

Technological Museum



A favourite exhibit, now in Powerhouse Museum (Photograph: State Library of NSW)

The Technological Museum (later the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences) opened in 1893. The exhibits, ranging from musical instruments to model locomotives, drew generations of families to Ultimo on Sunday afternoons. But the collection outgrew the 1893 building, and was inherited by the Powerhouse Museum. Today, the building is part of the Sydney Institute of TAFE and is used for functions.

9

ABC Ultimo Centre

The radio and television studios of the ABC's Ultimo Centre continue a local tradition of entertainment. In the 1870s southern Ultimo was scattered with small dairies and the paddocks were regularly used for shows. At night, flares made of greased cotton waste on sticks lit up the tightrope walkers and strongmen hefting blocks of local sandstone.



From the corner of Harris and Thomas streets, look right towards Broadway.

10 and 11

Cyclorama and Glaciarium

There were other landmarks of popular culture in this area. The site of the Cyclorama, which opened in 1889, lies beneath the UTS buildings neighbouring ABC Ultimo Centre on Harris Street. It presented a circular painted panorama of the Battle of Gettysburg, which sounds static but was enlivened by the use of mirrors, magnifiers and sound effects. Sydney writer Frank Clune remembered that, as a child, he was completely carried away by the spectacle. The Cyclorama survived the arrival of moving pictures but closed in 1906. The site was then used for an ice rink, the Glaciarium, run by the nearby **Sydney Cold Stores Ltd (11)**. The 'Glacie' attracted skaters from all over Sydney until the run-down facility was closed in the 1950s.



Retrace your steps along Harris Street, turning right down Ultimo Road as far as Quay Street. Turn right again towards the corner of Quay and Thomas streets.

12

The Benevolent Asylum



The former Benevolent Society building, now part of a hotel in Haymarket (Photograph: Adrian Hall, City of Sydney Archives)

The **Benevolent Asylum (12)** opened in 1904, took in destitute women and children until the 1920s, and provided handouts to struggling families for much longer. Its forbidding façade has been incorporated into a hotel. Nearby, remnants of Ultimo's entertainment tradition have been replaced by apartments. Her Majesty's Theatre was near the Thomas Street corner. It opened as The Empire in 1927, was later remodelled and renamed as Her Majesty's, rebuilt after a 1970 fire and closed in 2001.



Retrace your steps along Quay Street past the Ultimo Road intersection.

13

UTS Haymarket Campus



Fruit Market under construction, 1911 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

In the 1900s the city council began building new produce markets on reclaimed mudflats at the head of Darling Harbour, close to the railway and wharves. After the markets moved out of the city in 1975, UTS adapted the Fruit Market, which dates from 1911. The redevelopment has retained its distinctive bell tower, as well as the market façade and signs along Quay Street.



Walk along Quay Street towards the light rail tracks.

14

Market City

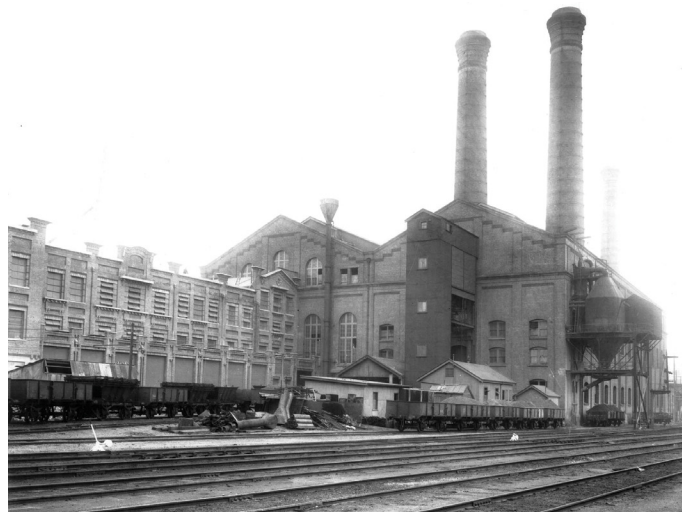
Market City rises from the walls of Municipal Markets 1 and 2, built in 1909–10. Along with shops and cinemas, it houses the popular Paddy's Market. Wherever produce markets were established in Sydney, they attracted second-hand dealers and street performers; by the 1870s the name 'Paddy's' was attached to these 'fringe' market fairs. When Markets 1 and 2 opened, Paddy's came too and operated in the area for most of the 20th century.



At the end of Quay Street, walk up the stairs take the left-hand walkway to the **Powerhouse Museum (15)** on Harris Street.

15

Powerhouse Museum



Ultimo Power Station (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The Ultimo Power House, built in 1899, produced electricity for Sydney's trams (and choking clouds of coal dust over Ultimo). When the trams stopped in 1961, the building was redundant until it was redesigned as the Powerhouse Museum, which opened in 1988. This successful adaptation of an industrial building is one of Australia's most well-known museums, with a collection of over 385,000 objects covering science, technology, industry and transport, but also music, decorative arts and social history.



Cross Harris Street to the corner of William Henry Street.

16

Ultimo Community Centre

This multi-purpose centre was designed by Lawrence Nield to minimise traffic noise from Harris Street and maximise sun on the large internal courtyard. Along with a sports hall, craft room and childcare centre, it houses the Ultimo Library and Jessie Street National Women's Library. Named in honour of feminist and peace activist, Jessie Street, this specialist library collects archival and printed material by and about Australian women.



Walk up William Henry Street, turning right at Bulwara Road to Quarry Street.

17

Uniting Church and Harris Centre



Harris Centre with the spire of Ultimo Uniting Church (Photograph: Kate Fisher)

The church and adjoining manse date from the 1880s and reflect the influence of the Harris family. Descendants of Surgeon John Harris still owned large portions of Ultimo and lived there in the 19th century. The church was built on land donated by John Harris (a Mayor of Sydney and great-nephew of the first John), while an 1897 bequest from George Harris helped fund the Harris Centre, which the Uniting Church runs in the manse.



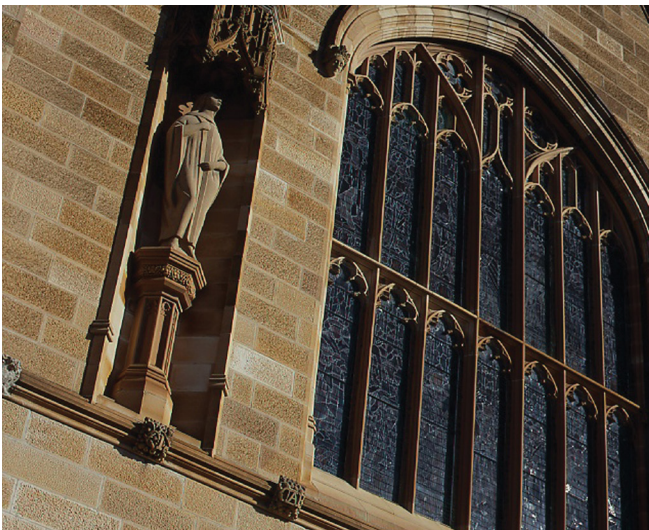
Turn left down Quarry Street to Jones Street corner.



At this point you may wish to take the optional detour (18 to 20) or, from Jones Street corner, retrace your steps along **Quarry Street (21)** towards Harris Street.

18 to 20

Ultimo Quarries



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

Sandstone from the Ultimo-Pyrmont peninsula built many of Sydney's public buildings and has enriched its cultural heritage. This escarpment was quarried to build University of Sydney in the 1850s and stone was taken from the Quarry Street area for the first stage of the General Post Office. As quarrymasters such as the Saunders family moved further north into Pyrmont, new uses were found for Ultimo's abandoned sites. **Ultimo Public School (18)** is

tucked into one disused quarry and gives some idea of the scale of operations. Left empty, the quarries could be dangerous. In the 1880s putrefying rubbish piled up in an old excavation just north of Quarry Street, giving off gases that caught fire when a nearby workman boiled his billy. They burned for some time. Eventually massive woolstores would occupy many of the worked-out quarries. **Commonwealth Wool and Produce No. 1 (19)** and **Winchcombe Carson Woolstore (20)** were built against the scarred cliffs at the turn of the 20th century. They used the terrain to develop a system of 'gravity baling'. Heavy loads of wool came in at the Jones Street level and were moved easily through the store's display, examination and auction floors using chutes, to emerge at Wattle Street.

21

92 Quarry Street

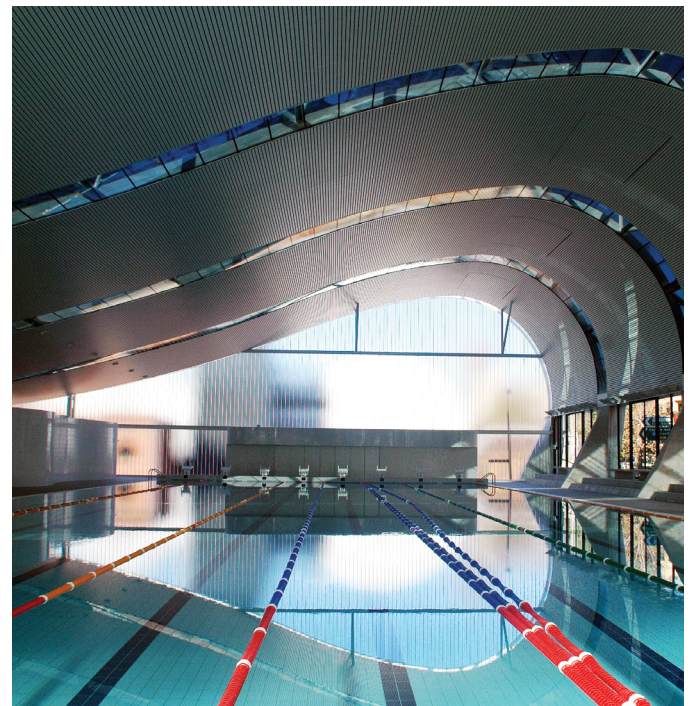
This cottage, dating from the 1860s, is a rare reminder that sandstone was not only exported to build Sydney's monuments, but was used to house the workers who quarried it.



Cross Harris Street and turn right.

22

Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre



Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Ultimo's newest landmark is built on the site of another woolstore which burned down in 1992. The aquatic centre, named after Olympic swimming champion Ian Thorpe, contains pools, a sauna, steam room and gymnasium. It opened in 2007 to cater for the fast-growing population of the inner city. With its striking wave-shaped roof, the centre was the last public building designed by the late architect, Harry Seidler.



Turn left at William Henry Street, take the left-side pavement over the Darling Harbour rail line (incorporated in today's light rail system). Then follow the walkway under the flyover to arrive at the edge of Darling Harbour.

Darling Harbour



Darling Harbour, 1992 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Before World War 2, the Darling Harbour rail yard was a clearing house for goods moving to, from and around Australia. It linked into the railway network at nearby Central station, and connected producers to the wharves where their wool, wheat or frozen meat was shipped. With the post-war growth of road freight and container terminals, the Darling Harbour rail system lost its function. Ultimo's warehouses and woolstores were gradually emptied. The goods yard was virtually derelict in 1984, when the state government began to redevelop Darling Harbour as a tourist-recreation-cultural park. This urban playground begins under the freeways, stretching up to Pyrmont Bridge and beyond.



If you have time, wander along Chalder, Prospect and Hordern streets, which have a number of early timber houses. Otherwise, retrace your steps to King Street. Turn right and then cross at the second set of lights. Look out for the art deco façade of the Burland Hall opposite while you wait at the lights.

23

Hydraulic Pumphouse



The Hydraulic Power Co Ltd on the right of Pier Street, August 1932 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The pumping station was built in 1890, in those pre-electric days when wharf cranes, wool presses and heavy bank doors were powered by hydraulic pressure. As late as the 1970s, lifts and doors in some city buildings were still using this system. The former pumping station is now a restaurant and bar.

24

Site of the former Entertainment Centre

The construction of the Entertainment Centre on this site in the early 1980s uncovered fragments of Darling Harbour's great iron wharf (1874). This engineering marvel – running from Liverpool Street around the head of the harbour and along the Ultimo shoreline – was the making of the 'old' Darling Harbour. It encouraged the expansion of the goods yard, which would finally swallow the wharf itself in the 1920s.

25

Chinese Garden



Looking across the Chinese Garden, c1988 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The garden celebrates the sister state relationship of Guangdong province and NSW. It also reflects long-standing Chinese connections to the markets in Ultimo and Haymarket, where communities grew up around Chinese merchants. Older residents of Ultimo remember pak-a-pu lotteries and the Chinese fish and chip shop that stayed open all hours. The gardens are built on another significant industrial site. In the 1870s, Thomas Mort built a freezing depot here for his Fresh Food and Ice Company, using techniques pioneered by engineer, E D Nicolle. These Australian innovations in refrigeration revolutionised the country's export trade as well as its eating habits. The new technology also changed the face of Ultimo: the goods yard was soon surrounded by big commercial dairies, cold stores and a skating rink!

26

Tumbalong Park



Entertainers around Tumbalong Park (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Entertainers are often found around Tumbalong Park, not far from the Ultimo paddocks where jugglers and strongmen performed in the 19th century.



This is the end of your Ultimo tour. It has presented a sample of Darling Harbour attractions. To visit sites north of the Pyrmont Bridge try the City of Sydney Historical Walking Tour called 'Port'.



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