

Walk on water: A guide to Sydney's water features History Walk

CITY OF SYDNEY



Walk on water: A guide to Sydney's water features History Walk

From the drains and sewers under the surface of the ground to spectacular fountains in parks and plazas, the city is full of water features. Some you are meant to ignore, some are there to be noticed and enjoyed. This water-divining guide reveals Sydney's well-springs and early feats of water engineering. Across the length and breadth of central Sydney, you will find high-concept water sculptures, ponds for reflection, pools for play and places to spend a penny.



Please allow about 2 hours for this walk.
Start at the **Tank Stream Fountain (1)**.

1

Tank Stream Fountain



Tank Stream Fountain, 1989 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The settlement of Sydney was centred on a stream of fresh water that emptied into Sydney Cove / Warrane. This sculpture by Stephen Walker was donated to the city by *Sydney Morning Herald* publisher John Fairfax and Sons in 1981. The cascading fountain with bronze animals is an invitation to children to play. Its dedication 'to all the children who have played around the Tank Stream' calls to mind the human landscape of this area before it was a city.



Walk east along Alfred Street until you reach Phillip Street, turn left and enter the eastern end of Circular Quay to view the **1788 Shoreline (2)** markers in the pavement.

2

1788 Shoreline



1788 Shoreline marker (Photograph: Brett Boardman, City of Sydney)

Circular Quay encroaches over the natural shoreline of Sydney Cove / Warrane. At East Circular Quay, the 1788 shoreline is indicated in the granite paving by cast bronze discs. The first constructed shoreline, reclaimed to form Circular Quay, is mapped by a continuous band of white granite.



Walk back to Phillip Street and head south until you reach the corner of Bridge and Philip streets, where you will find the **Colonial drains - Museum of Sydney (3)**.

3

Colonial drains - Museum of Sydney

The town's original water source was the Tank Stream, but pollution soon made its water unsuitable for domestic use. The completion of Busby's Bore in 1837 enabled the delivery of fresh water to the town centre from Lachlan Swamps (now part of Centennial Park). Tangible reminders of 19th century water engineering include exposed drains at the Museum of Sydney.



Walk north along Bridge Street toward Macquarie Street and cross the road to reach Conservatorium Road. **Early water engineering (4)** is at the Conservatorium of Music.

4

Early water engineering – Conservatorium



Barrel drain dating to 1840s revealed in archaeological excavations at the Conservatorium of Music, 1998 (Photograph: courtesy Casey and Lowe Pty Ltd)

The building which now houses the Sydney Conservatorium of Music was designed by convict architect Francis Greenway and commissioned by Governor Macquarie. Completed in 1821, its original purpose was stables for nearby Government House. Archaeological excavations undertaken in 1998 uncovered the remains of a colonial drainage system.



Follow the pathway behind the Conservatorium of Music through the Royal Botanic Garden until you reach **Wuganmagulya (Farm Cove) (5)**.

5

Wuganmagulya (Farm Cove)



Wuganmagulya (Farm Cove) by Brenda L Croft (Photograph: Jamie Williams photography)

Sydney's Royal Botanic Garden covers the area which the original clans of Sydney called Wahganmuggalee, later renamed Farm Cove by Governor Arthur Phillip. It was once a hunting and ceremonial ground for the Eora people. Here too, the British made their first attempts to grow crops. Brenda Croft's art installation *Wuganmagulya (Farm Cove)* is set into the foreshore walk around the cove. It pays homage to the Eora and other clans who travelled great distances to attend ceremonies here. It depicts rock carving figures similar to those found elsewhere in the Sydney basin, and the names of women and men, places, animals, tools and rituals from the clans and language groups of the Sydney area.



Walk south-east through the Royal Botanic Garden and turn right on Mrs Macquaries Road. Walk south along the road and just after you pass the main entrance to the gardens turn right into the gardens for the **Lewis Wolfe Levy Fountain (6)**.

6

Lewis Wolfe Levy Fountain



Lewis Wolfe Levy Fountain, Royal Botanic Garden, 1962 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

A bronze statue of a young girl standing amid reeds, a heron and frogs beckons people to drink at the red granite drinking fountain near the Woolloomooloo Gate in Sydney's Royal Botanic Garden. The fountain, unveiled by the NSW Premier Sir Henry Parkes in 1889, was a gift from the Levy family in memory of Lewis Wolfe Levy (1815–85), politician and businessman. The statue, by the English sculptor Charles Bell Birch (1832–93), is an important example of art nouveau in Sydney.



Retrace your steps back to Mrs Macquaries Road, which becomes Art Gallery Road. Walk south along Art Gallery Road and turn right into The Domain. Walk west through The Domain and then cross over Hospital Road into the courtyard of the Sydney Hospital and Sydney Eye Hospital, where you will find **Robert Brough Memorial Fountain (7)**.

7

Robert Brough Memorial Fountain



Robert Brough Memorial Fountain (Photograph: Sally Couacaud, City of Sydney)

Dedicated to the memory of Robert Brough (1857–1906), a popular Sydney actor, this magnificent Victorian fountain is tucked away in the northern courtyard of Sydney Hospital. The distinctly Australian design comprises a group of broilgas surmounted by black swans displaying their crimson beaks. The fountain was imported from the Colebrookdale Factory in England and was installed near the Nightingale Wing of the hospital in 1907.



Head west toward Macquarie Street and turn left to find ***Il Porcellino* (8)**, which sits outside Sydney Hospital.

8

Il Porcellino



Il Porcellino (Photograph: Jamie Williams photography)

'The Little Pig' was a gift to the city of Sydney from the Marchesa Fiaschi Torrigiani as a memorial to Thomas Fiaschi and Piero Fiaschi, her brother and father respectively, who were eminent doctors at Sydney Hospital. Sydney's *Il Porcellino* is an exact replica of the bronze monument known as Porcellino, a 1630s sculpture of a wild boar by Pietro Tacca which stands in the straw market in the heart of Florence. It is believed to bring good luck if passers-by rub its nose and drop coins into the base pool, and is placed here to help raise funds for the hospital.



Retrace your steps north along Macquarie Street until you reach Martin Place. Turn left onto Martin Place and view ***Passage* (9)**.

9

Passage



Passage by Anne Graham, Martin Place, 2001
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

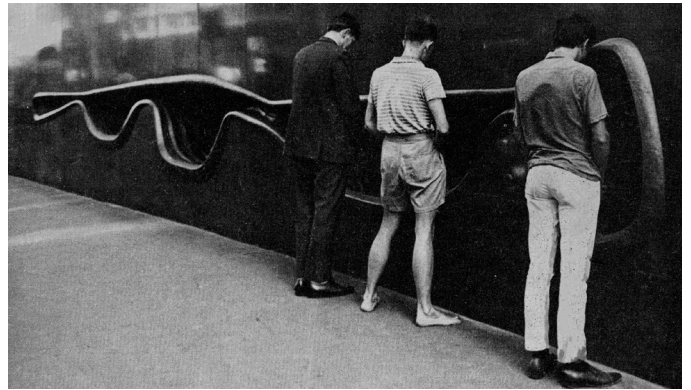
This installation in Martin Place called *Passage* was created by Anne Graham in 2001 for the Sydney Sculpture Walk. As documented in Joseph Fowles' book *Sydney in 1848*, the site was once occupied by two Georgian cottages. The walls of these cottages are traced with inlaid black granite and stainless steel grilles. The three bronze bowl fountains represent washrooms in the rear of the houses, where water carried from the Tank Stream would be stored for use in the kitchen and laundry. A corridor and four rectangular rooms are defined by inlaid granite paving. When conditions permit, mist jets and fibre optic lighting mark out the domestic spaces of the past.



Walk west through Martin Place and turn right onto Elizabeth Street. Walk north along Elizabeth Street and turn left into the building on the corner of Elizabeth and Hunter streets, now also the entrance to Martin Place metro station. On level 2 of the building, you will find The Art Space, which features ***Tom Bass - Fountain* (10)**.

10

Tom Bass - Fountain



'An attractive bronze urinal' from *Oz* magazine
(Reproduced by permission of Richard Neville)

An early example of public art commissioned by the private sector, Tom Bass' *Fountain* was originally installed in 1963 in the P and O Building, which was formerly located on this street corner. *Oz* magazine in February 1964 published a satirical photograph that showed three men apparently peeing in the fountain. Since then the work has been commonly referred to as 'The Urinal'. The photograph was the subject of a legal battle during which the editors of *Oz* were accused of promoting 'public peeing'. The artwork continues today to provoke attention because of this history and because of its distinctive structure.



Walk south along Elizabeth Street and then turn left onto St James Road and enter Hyde Park to view ***Busby's Bore Fountain* (11)**.

11

Busby's Bore Fountain



Busby's Bore Fountain, Hyde Park (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Busby's Bore was Sydney's first reliable water source. The main public outlet for Busby's Bore was a pipe raised on trestles which cut across Hyde Park, where Sydneysiders would queue to purchase water at 3 pence per bucket. It's not certain where in Hyde Park this water service was situated, but today, Busby's Bore is commemorated by this fountain in Hyde Park North.



Walk south through Hyde Park until you reach the corner of the park at junction of Elizabeth and Park streets.

12

Hyde Park North Men's Lavatory



Underground public convenience, corner Park and Elizabeth Streets in Hyde Park, 2002 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

It is unclear just what the ladies did before 1910 when their first public convenience was built in Hyde Park. The Lord Mayor in 1916 declared that facilities for ladies should be provided 'under cover of chalet or cloak room accommodation so as not to be made too conspicuous. A range of substantial men's loos were built in the early 20th century, many underground. Filled-in or repurposed reminders of these can be found at Hyde Park, Wynyard Park and Macquarie Place.



Walk east along Hyde Park until you reach the corner at the junction of Park and College streets.

13

Sandringham Gardens



Original mosaic design by Lyndon Dadswell, April 1953
(Plan: City of Sydney Archives)

This fountain is part of an elaborate memorial to King George V and King George VI. Previously, a bandstand stood on the site. Officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II in February 1954, Sandringham Garden and Memorial Gates are testament to the royal fever that gripped Australia in the early 1950s. But the mosaic on the base of the fountain tells a different story. Its designer Lyndon Dadswell wanted to give the memorial to the two dead kings an Australian flavour by incorporating motifs inspired by Aboriginal art. It was an emerging trend at this time for Australian artists and designers to take inspiration from Aboriginal art, without considering the question of cultural appropriation. This mosaic is believed to be the first example of the use of Aboriginal-inspired motifs in an urban architectural context in Australia.



Walk north through to the central avenue of Hyde Park until you reach **Archibald Memorial Fountain (14)**.

14

Archibald Memorial Fountain



Archibald Memorial Fountain, 1937 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

This distinctive art deco showpiece is the legacy of a private citizen, J F Archibald, and is quintessentially Sydney. The fountain was built in Hyde Park North in 1932 to commemorate the association between Australia and France in World War 1. The work of French sculptor François-Léon Sicard, it depicts a bronze Apollo surrounded by other mythical figures.



Walk north-east toward the junction of Prince Albert Road and College Street. Cross at the pedestrian lights and follow Prince Albert Road until you reach **Frazer Memorial Fountain (15)** on your right.

15

Frazer Memorial Fountain



Frazer Memorial Fountain, 1930s (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Given the scarcity of domestic plumbing in colonial Sydney, merchant John Frazer's gift of two decorative, canopied drinking fountains to the people of Sydney in the 1880s was a generous and welcome gesture. Designed in the Italian Renaissance style, the Frazer Fountain on Art Gallery Road is more ornate than its Gothic style twin in Hyde Park south. The fountains were designed by the City Architect, Thomas Sapsford, and carved in Pyrmont sandstone by Lawrence Beveridge. The original design featured cups dangling from the large water basin for people to take a drink. Eventually the City council realised the health hazards of communal cups. In 1934 they replaced the basin and taps with the new 'bubble stream' design. While no longer functional, the Frazer Fountains are excellent examples of some of Sydney's early, decorative drinking sources.



Retrace your steps back to the pedestrian lights and cross the road toward St Mary's Cathedral. Walk south along College Street and turn left past the front of the cathedral. Walk east until you reach the entrance to **Cook + Phillip Park (16)**.

16

Cook + Phillip Park



Cook + Phillip Park Pool (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The many uses of water at Cook + Phillip Park are testament to Sydney's love of water — from the harbour to Yurong Creek, from bathing to competition, and from playing to meditation. The swimming pools in the complex are used for children's games and sporting events. The Yurong Water Garden and the pools of reflection on College Street act as major structural elements to balance the weight of the roof of the pools below. Inside the aquatic centre, adorning the walls of the main pool, 8 large panels painted by Sydney artist Wendy Sharpe depict the life story of Australian champion swimmer, aquatic performer and actress, Annette Kellerman (1886-1975).



Walk east through the park until you reach **Yurong Water Garden (17)**.

17

Yurong Water Garden



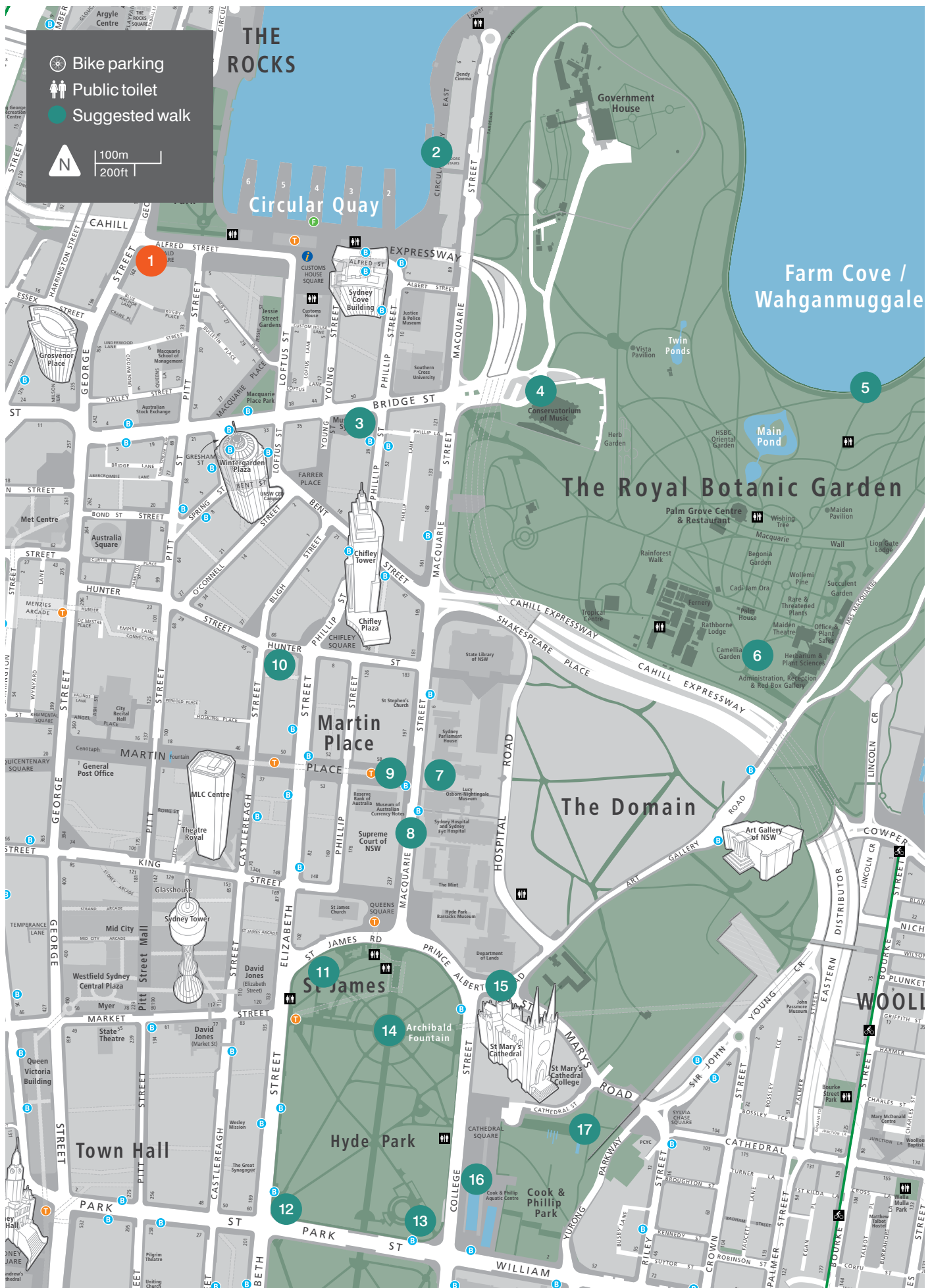
Yurong Water Garden by Anita Glesta (Photograph: Brett Boardman/Spackman Mossop Michaels)

This environmental artwork by Anita Glesta was inspired by Yurong Creek, which once ran from the edge of Cook + Phillip Park through the mangrove swamps down into Woolloomooloo Bay. Roughly hewn boulders of sandstone, reflecting the natural and cultural heritage of the area, and original pavers from the former park have been arranged to form a course for the creek which flows down three terraces of gardens, retracing the path of the original.



Your walk ends here.

Map of walking tour



Download the free Sydney Culture Walks app.

Enjoy more walks and historical points of interest direct to your mobile.

sydneyculturewalksapp.com



Please reuse or recycle this guide.
9th edition, October 2024