ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

HUNTERS HILL HIGH SCHOOL

HUNTERS HILL

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this Report

This Report is an Archaeological Assessment Report about the land now the Hunters Hill High School site. The Report outlines the history and cultural significance of the site; it describes and locates historically significant remains; and recommends measures to mitigate and manage the impact of future developments on the site related to upgrading and enhancing the school buildings and grounds.

1.2 The Development Proposals for the Site and This Report

The NSW Government intends to carry out building and landscaping works at the school. The proposals for the future are in the development stage and have not at the time of writing taken their final fixed form. For the purposes of this Archaeological Assessment Report it is of no importance that new building and landscaping plans are not yet finalized. This Report will review the history of the site and the buildings and structures which were there over time and which represent that history. It will assess how significant these structures are. The structures may be still standing, or might be potential archaeological sites under the ground. The remains which are assessed as significant will be located on plans of the site, by overlaying historic plans with current plans, and recommendations as to how to manage them in any future works will be made.

Therefore this Report will be appropriate for any future works, as well as for those under imminent construction.

The current development proposal is for a new gymnasium/hall, and surrounding civil works and landscaping (See Figure 1.2).

Future works may involve new construction where buildings now exist, and services such as gas, water, electricity, etc, are still in use.

1.3 The Subject Site

The Subject Site is the Hunters Hill High School buildings and grounds. (See Figures 1.1 and 1.2). The address of the school is Hunters Hill High School Reiby Road. The size of the site is about 16 acres. It stretches from The Avenue to the Lane Cove River, with Reiby Road on one side and Mount Street on the other.
1.4 Authorship and Research

This Report is written by Anne Bickford, Director of Archaeology And Heritage Pty Ltd. Much of the historical research about the Subject Site was carried out by Suzie Hoppe of the Heritage Design Services of the Department of Commerce as part of her Heritage Assessment of the remains of the school hall which consist mainly of sandstone walls. This building, burnt down in 2000, was the earliest and most significant building on the Subject Site, so that research concerning it involved research into the site's history from earliest times.

Some further research was carried out by Anne Bickford. The plans and elevations of the development proposals were provided by Project Manager David Lendrum of the Department of Commerce.

1.5 Liaison

The liaison officer for this Report is David Lendrum, Project Manager, Programs Branch, Department of Commerce. The contact details are Level 20, McKell Building, 2-24 Rawson Place, Sydney 2000. The Project Manager's Phone number is 93728562 and Fax: 93728566.

1.6 Form of This Report

The Report has been set out in chapters. The Figures referred to in the text are placed at the end of each chapter where they are first referred to. eg. Figure 1.1 Location Map, is at the end of Chapter 1, 'Introduction'.

FIGURE 1.1 Location Map
FIGURE 1.2 Site Plan. Showing Concept for Proposed New Building and Historic Courtyard
2.0 PREVIOUS REPORTS AND STATUTORY LISTINGS OF THE SITE

2.1 There has been only one detailed report about a structure on the Subject Site. This is the Report on the school hall remains. Other reports listed mention the Avenue Pleasure Grounds, or other aspects of the history of the site. These are:


2.4 Hunters Hill Trust Inc. Web Site. Two reports about the history of the site were downloaded from this site.
   2.4.1 From Pleasure Grounds to High School.
   2.4.2 When Figtree Studios Were in Action.

2.5 Hunters Hill Council
Hunters Hill Heritage Register.
Because of constraints of time no attempt was made to consult this Register. More detail about specific sites may have been found, but the recommendations and conclusions of this Report would not have been changed had I consulted the Register.

2.6 The NSW Heritage Inventory
The NSW Heritage Office administers the NSW Heritage Act 1977 Amended 1998, for the NSW Heritage Council. The Heritage Council has established a State Heritage Inventory which is an electronic database with information on over 20,000 items on NSW Statutory Lists.
I attempted to find Hunters Hill High School on the NSW Heritage Office web site. I filled in various forms in various ways and kept getting the message that the database registered nil information. After a number of minutes, even though the site counsels the user to be patient, I lost patience and clicked off the site. Therefore I have no information on the Subject Site from the NSW Heritage Inventory. Despite this negative finding, I do not think that the NSW Heritage Office database would have provided information that would have changed the conclusions and recommendations in this Report.

\[1\] As this has happened many times before when working on other sites.
3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Cultural Significance

This project has been carried out in accordance with the principles set out in the *Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter* (The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance) 1999 including *Guidelines to the Burra Charter: Cultural Significance*, and the *NSW Heritage Manual* produced by the NSW Heritage Office and the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, 1996.

3.2 Archaeological Assessment

The NSW Heritage Office and the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning of NSW have produced a volume of *Archaeological Assessment Guidelines* 1996. This document has been used in the preparation of this study.

The processes outlined in the *Archaeological Assessment Guidelines* are to carry out detailed historical work on the site; to conduct a physical survey of the site; to synthesise these two fields of research, and from this to assess the significance of the site. The impact of the proposed development on the site is then analysed, and a mitigation strategy to manage this impact is then proposed. The client then applies, with this Report, to the NSW Heritage Office. Once the Excavation Permit Application to the Heritage Office is approved, the client is then contacted and the excavation procedures put in place.

3.3 Assessing Heritage Significance

*Assessing Heritage Significance*. The NSW Heritage Office produced this *NSW Heritage Manual* update in 2001. This document was consulted in the Assessment of Cultural Significance chapter (Chapter 7) of this Report.
4.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE
(Most of this historical information is taken from the Report by S. Hoppe Hunters Hill High School: Heritage Assessment of the School Hall Remains Heritage Design Services, Department of Public Works and Services, March 2003)

4.1 Limitations of the Study

Constraints of funding limited this Report to map and plan sources used by S. Hoppe or in M. Walker's Hunters Hill Heritage Study.

Research in the State Archives or the Mitchell Library (State Library of NSW) may have revealed further maps and/or plans of the site, but as the Walker report is comprehensive, it is unlikely that any plans relevant to this study have been left out of the Walker Heritage Study.

4.2 Aboriginal Occupation

Aborigines would have lived beside the Lane Cove River at the bottom of the school site for many thousands of years. They would have fished for and collected seafood and hunted the animals and birds which lived on and by the river. Shell middens might have been found there before the land was filled in behind the sea wall, and still might remain covered over by the landfill at the Lane Cove River end of the Site.

4.3 1835 Early Land Grants

In 1835 the site was divided into two and the eastern part granted to Mary Reiby and the western to John Rochester.

Plans showing the site exist from 1861 This plan shows what appears to be one or two buildings in the south-west corner of Church Street, but this is outside the Subject Site. No other buildings or structures are indicated until the seawall is shown on a plan dated 1920.

It is known that The Avenue Pleasure Grounds were popular in the late 19th century, and that the wharves were built about 1882 (See below Section ).

4.4 1860s Ferry Services

In the 1860s several ferry services started steaming up and down Sydney Harbour and its rivers. As part of their route they took passengers along the Lane Cove River past the Study Area. Hunters Hill became a popular place for picnics, and ferries would bring parties to the several pleasure grounds - Seymour's Pleasure
The Avenue Pleasure Grounds

The earliest evidence for structures on the Subject Site is on plans of The Avenue Pleasure Grounds which were established in the 1880s. The Pleasure Grounds were the original use of the whole of the School site, and it is the potential archaeological remains of buildings and structures which were constructed for this use that comprise the significant sites on the Subject Site. The Avenue Pleasure Grounds were about 16 acres in area, and developed by the Joubert family, a prominent and active landowning family in early Hunters Hill. The Pleasure Grounds were served by ferries which landed at the nearby wharves. Figure 4.5 shows The Avenue Ferry Wharf and the Mount Street Wharf on the Lane Cove River at the Subject Site. These were built in or pre 1882.

Pleasure Grounds such as this were very popular at the time, and there were two others in the Hunters Hill area, at Seymour’s Pleasure Gardens and the Fern Bay Recreation Grounds. People caught the ferry at Sydney Cove and came for the day to picnic and stroll around the grounds.

A photograph of the 1890s (See Figure 4.3) shows picnic parties walking along the foreshore at The Avenue Pleasure Grounds with a steam ferry docked at a long wharf behind them. Presumably this is the Mount Street Wharf.

By 1920 Reclaimed Land and Seawall

The first evidence of the seawall is in the plan of 1928 (See Figure 4.5), and in a photograph dated to about 1919. (Figure 4.4) This seems a late date for the construction of the seawall, since visitors had been coming to the Pleasure Grounds since the 1880s, but there is no evidence for an earlier date. Meredith Walker’s study dates the Figtree and Mount Street wharves to about 1882 (Hoppe p.4). It is clear from the photograph of about 1890 that the shoreline is natural and unbuilt on. This would be one reason why the Mount Street wharf behind is so long, as it has to extend over the river flats.

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2 Oppen p.5.
3 Hunters Hill Trust Inc web site From Pleasure Grounds to High School, p.1.
4 Oppen. p. 5.
5 In Hoppe. p.5.
6 Hoppe p.4.
7 p. 4.
4.7 1935- c.1940 Film Studios

In March 1935 Mastercraft Film Corporation Limited bought *The Avenue Pleasure Grounds*. They describe the site as a "background of natural bush" and "a splendidly preserved building that would almost seem to have been originally designed for studio purposes,..." In the Mastercraft prospectus quoted here no other buildings of the *Pleasure Grounds* phase are mentioned here but the Dance Hall (to become the School gymnasium). However, in the Plan of 1956 all four of them are shown still standing (See Figure 5.1).

Mastercraft Studios was taken over by Fig Tree Studios in 1937. There is no evidence that any more buildings were constructed on the Subject Site during its film studio days.

4.8 c. 1941 World War II RAAF Supply Depot for Radar Equipment

The RAAF took the site over about 1941 and used it for a supply depot for radar equipment for the whole of the Pacific region. They spent over 20,000 pounds on improvements to the property. Four substantial buildings were erected. These and others can be seen in Figure 5.1, a plan of the Subject Site in 1956.

4.9 Mid 1950s Various Minor Uses

The site was used as storage space by various small companies after the War, but in the mid 1950s the then owners sold it to the NSW Government who first used it as a bus depot and later passed it over to the Education Department.

4.10 1958 Hunters Hill High School

In December 1956 the Department of Education resumed the Subject Site as a location for a high school. Construction on the school buildings began, and the old Dance Hall, the only remaining building from the Pleasure Grounds days, became the gymnasium. The Hunters Hill High School was opened on the site in 1958.

It appears that the gymnasium was the only building still standing and in use from *The Avenue Pleasure Grounds* days.

Tragically the gymnasium burnt down in 2000 and was destroyed. It was the most significant building on the school site, and its sandstone remains are still of considerable significance.

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8 Information for 4.8 to 4.10 is taken from *When Fig Tree Studios Were in Action* from the Hunters Hill Trust web site.

9 *When Fig Tree Studios Were in Action*
4.11 Summary List of Sites of Historical Significance on the Subject Site

4.11.1 *The Avenue Pleasure Grounds* building sites
Paths, stairs, low walls, and landscaped areas for Pleasure Grounds

4.11.2 Wharf sites at sea wall

4.11.3 Sea wall

4.11.4 Sandstone Remains of last existing Pleasure Ground site - the school gymnasium (former Pleasure Grounds Dance Hall)

4.11.5 Potential archaeological remains of the other buildings built for *The Avenue Pleasure Grounds*. 
4.12 HISTORIC PLANS AND PICTURES OF THE SUBJECT SITE IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

FIGURE 4.1 1861 Subject Site
From: M. Walker Hunters Hill Heritage Study
FIGURE 4.2 1886 Subject Site. Showing Original Shoreline
From: M. Walker Hunters Hill Heritage Study
FIGURE 4.3  c.1890 Avenue Pleasure Grounds Lane Cove River.  
Showing Natural Shore Line Before Seawall.
FIGURE 4.4  c.1919 Avenue Pleasure Grounds Showing Boatshed, Path to Dance Hall and Luncheon Hall and Seawall in Background.
FIGURE 4.5 1928 The Avenue Pleasure Grounds Showing Wharves Extending from Seawall, and Original Shoreline
FIGURE 4.6 1929 Water Board Survey Showing the Four Pleasure Grounds Buildings
FIGURE 4.7 After 1937 The Avenue When Film Studios
FIGURE 4.8 School Gymnasium Before the Fire
5.0 OVERLAY OF PRESENT DAY PLANS WITH HISTORIC PLANS TO PREDICT LOCATION OF POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

5.1 The overlaying of plans with some streets and/or structures in common through time is a basic technique in this kind of historical archaeological process.

This technique has been used on a number of sites, and usually, the archaeological remains, if they have not been removed by past excavation, are within a few metres of their assessed location. A predictive model such as this helps in planning and anticipation in the new development excavation phase when the soil deposits and overburden are being removed from the Subject Site. It also helps preserve the archaeological sites in situ if planned constructions are relocated so as to avoid impacting on the predicted archaeological remains.

5.2 The DPWS Site Plan of 1956 (See Figure 5.1) shows the four Pleasure Grounds buildings outlined in heavy black line. These were all standing in 1956.

5.3 Overlaying the 1956 Plan with the 2003 Department of Commerce Hunters Hill High School New Performance Facility Concept Phase Site Plan (See Figure 5.2) shows that the former Luncheon Hall and brick building near it were demolished when the new school was built and covered by other structures. The remains of the former Dance Hall/gymnasium will be partly covered by the planned New Performance Facility and partly preserved in situ in the Historic Court area.

5.4 It is important to note that because of the different surveys done by different surveyors, and the differential enlargement and reduction processes in multiple copying, the plans are close estimates, not accurate representations. Because the remains of the Dance Hall/gymnasium are in situ, a surveyed plan by a professional surveyor would give a more reliable outcome. A survey of the building locations will be useful so that they can be avoided if possible, by new excavation and construction for the proposed new structures for the school.

5.5 It might be decided to avoid the footings of the Pleasure Ground structures; or to excavate them if they cannot be avoided, and to interpret them in some way. It is not important to make these decisions now, as the proposals for the site are still in the concept phase, but they need to be addressed before final the plans for new structures are put into practice.
FIGURE 5.1 1956 Plan of Site Showing the 4 Pleasure Ground Buildings
FIGURE 5.2 Overlay of Pleasure Ground Buildings Onto School Site Showing New Proposal
6.0 PHYSICAL ANALYSIS - SITE SURVEY

6.1 The Site As Identified by Historical Research

Historical research and historical maps have identified the site as being an area initially of natural bushland beside the Lane Cove River, (See Figure 4.1 Plan of 1861), with a prominent sand bank on the river's opposite side.

6.2 Description of the Site

The Subject Site currently contains school buildings and grounds, sloping down to the Lane Cove River.

Current plan drawings, and elevations and sections of the Subject Site have been made by the Department of Commerce staff and included in this Report. These give a good indication of the appearance of the site.

Owing to constraints of time a physical survey of the site by walking over it and taking photographs of general views of the site and physical structures like the sea wall has not been carried out for this Report. The fact that the site survey has not been done will not alter the deliberations, conclusions, and recommendations about the archaeological significance and management of the Subject Site made in this Report.
7.0 CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

7.1 The Concept of Cultural Significance

In Australia the process of finding out whether a heritage item is important or not is called assessing cultural significance.

The importance of the archaeological resources of the Subject Site will be evaluated by following the established heritage procedures.

The criteria for assessment have been standardised in NSW by the Heritage Office and published in the NSW Heritage Manual in 1996. This procedure makes it possible to compare the significance of like items between local government areas, or between states. The NSW Heritage Office has recently published a “NSW Heritage Manual update” in 2001. This is called Assessing Heritage Significance and is an update to the Heritage Assessments guideline of 1996. This new guideline has been used in the preparation of this Report.

7.2 General Assessment Processes and Criteria

In NSW the heritage system requires three steps:

1) investigate significance
2) assess significance
3) manage significance

The Assessing Heritage Significance guideline explains the second step in this process – assess significance. The NSW Heritage Manual is a comprehensive set of guidelines explaining the NSW heritage management system. As well as the additional 12 guidelines documents forming the Manual there are three documents in the category Further Information, and four Companion Documents.

The Statement of Cultural Significance used here uses the criteria established under Part 3A of the NSW Heritage Act 1977 (Amended in 1998) for the listing of items of environmental heritage (defined as ‘buildings, works, relics, moveable objects and precincts’) which are of State or local heritage significance.

The Summary Statement of Significance which follows the assessment of significance using the seven criteria listed below should be a succinct statement written in prose, which answers the question "Why is this item important". It should summarise, not simply reiterate, the analysis addressing the seven criteria.

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10 NSW Heritage Manual "Heritage Assessments" p. 5.
11 Assessing Heritage Significance p.3
12 Assessing Heritage Significance p.7
7.3 Explanation of the Statement of Cultural Significance

An item will be considered to be of State or local heritage significance if, in the opinion of the Heritage Council of NSW it meets one or more of the following criteria:

a) an item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSWs cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);

b) an item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSWs cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);

c) an item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the local area);

d) an item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW (or the local area) for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;

e) an item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSWs cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);

f) an item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSWs cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);

g) an item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSWs
- cultural or natural places; or
- cultural or natural environments
(or a class of the local area's cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments).

While all criteria should be referred to during the assessment, only particularly complex items or places will be significant under all criteria. In many cases, items of environmental heritage will be significant under only one or two criteria.13

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8.0 STATEMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

8.1 Criterion (a) an item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSWs cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);

The sea wall and physical remains of the Mount Street Wharf and Avenue Ferry Wharf where steam ferries docked at The Avenue Pleasure Grounds are of local significance.

The buildings constructed by the RAAF in World War II which were all demolished when the new school was built in the 1950s are more recent, were temporary buildings of galvanized iron, and are not of significance.

8.2 Criterion (b) an item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSWs cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);

8.3 Criterion (c) an item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the local area);

8.4 Criterion (d) an item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW (or the local area) for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;

8.5 Criterion (e) an item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSWs cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);

(This is commonly referred to as Archaeological Significance)

Archaeological remains in the Subject Site have the potential to be significant in the local area. If remains of the paths and the Boatshed, Luncheon Hall, or unknown brick building to the south of the Dance Hall (See Figure 4.6), still exist under the ground, then they will give physical evidence of the area as a pleasure ground and picnic place where many people used to come and spend the day, travelling by ferry, in the late 19th and early 20th century.

As the Dance Hall sandstone foundations and walls still stand after the fire of 2000, they are even more significant as they can be seen and used in imaginative ways to interpret the history of the Pleasure Grounds and subsequent uses of the land before the High School was erected in the 1950s.

8.6 Criterion (f) an item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSWs cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);
8.7 Criterion (g) an item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSWs
- cultural or natural places; or
- cultural or natural environments
(or a class of the local area's cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments).

9.0 SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Historic sites from the phase of The Avenue Pleasure Grounds on the Hunters Hill School site are of local significance and should be preserved if possible. They represent a time and a way of life long gone, when people travelled to such places by steam ferry to picnic at long tables in the Luncheon Hall, promenade around the verdant parklands beside the Lane Cove River, and dance in the purpose built Dance Hall.

Interpretation of this period at the Hunters Hill High School with historic photographs and plans will allow the area to be seen in a new way, and give it a time depth which will add interest to the surrounding environment.
10.0 DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

10.1 The Development Proposal

The development proposals for the school are still in the concept phase. It is important that such attention has been given to the sandstone remains of the Dance Hall/gymnasium, that a Historic Court has been suggested. Any use of the sandstone in structures in the area will allow contemplation about the long past of the school grounds, and the different phases of its history.

10.2 Significance of the Potential Archaeological Remains

The remains of the other pleasure ground buildings besides the Dance Hall may still lie in the ground, or may have been entirely removed by the earlier construction of buildings over them. If possible they should be left in situ undisturbed. If they have to be excavated for service trenches or footings of new structures they should be excavated by archaeologists and recorded by photography and in scale plans. They can then be removed.

The remains of the gymnasium will have special treatment. One Concept Plan has been shown in this report. An Interpretation Plan will suggest and assess different options.

11.0 INTERPRETATION PLAN

The Heritage Design Services Report of March 2003 recommends an interpretation plan for the site:

Any proposal for the future of the site should include an interpretation plan which sets out the history of the site and of the hall. This scheme should be linked to the interpretive panels along the Three Patriots Walk along the High School foreshore on the Lane Cove River. Any parts of the wall to be retained in situ should be interpreted appropriately as part of this plan, and any use of the stone in other parts of the site should also be noted in this interpretive material.

This Interpretation Plan will not be included in this Archaeological Assessment as it is not a regulation part of an Assessment report for the NSW Heritage Office, but be prepared as a separate report to the client. Examples of interpretation panels have been sent to the Project Manager for this project by Anne Bickford as an introduction to the sort of panels which might be produced. These are examples of interpretation panels by Barbara Cameron-Smith, a professional interpretations consultant, for historic sites at some of the National Parks and Wildlife Service historic sites in the Sydney district.

\[14\] p. 16.
12.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY


Reports and web sites consulted have been listed above in Chapter 2.