ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

NORTHERN CONCOURSE

CENTRAL STATION

SYDNEY

January 1999

For Abigroup

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Wendy Thorp
Cultural Resources Management
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Archaeological Assessment: Central Station - Northern Concourse

SECTION 1.0

PRECIS OF THE REPORT

1.1 The Investigation

The subject of this investigation is the archaeological resource which may be contained within the area of the northern concourse at Sydney Central Station. The report has been prepared to meet the conditions of Sydney City Council and the NSW Heritage Council with respect to improvements being made to this site. Its principal objectives are to determine if there are archaeological issues to be addressed in the course of the current development and, if so, the most appropriate means of managing them.

1.2 Historical Framework

The study area is located on land which, prior to European settlement, was part of a large area of sand dunes stabilised by stands of trees. The removal of this vegetation for building, industry and settlement led to erosion and the destabilisation of the dunes. By the early decades of the nineteenth century the site was largely deforested and covered by grass swards. There is no known European use pre-dating the construction of the several public establishments founded here in the early years of the nineteenth century to take advantage of the separation between the main settlement and its fringes. These included the Benevolent Asylum and Carters Barracks.

The study area is located on land that was first alienated for use as Sydney's third cemetery. Opened in 1820 the first portion dedicated for the cemetery became the Church of England section; the study area is located on what was its western boundary. By the mid-nineteenth century the burial ground was in a deplorable and overcrowded state and was the subject of considerable public criticism. It was finally closed for burials in 1888. Until the end of the nineteenth century the site remained intact but in an increasingly neglected and vandalised condition.

The proposal to extend the city railway which had been established to the south of the cemetery in the 1850s required the resumption of large numbers of properties to the north including the old burial ground. Approval to exhume and relocate the remains and the gravemarkers was given in 1901 and the work was completed by 1902. The work was painstaking and thorough with excavation carried to a depth of two metres over the entire site to ensure that all human remains were found and removed before the construction works commenced for the railway. As well as the burials the work also required the demolition and removal of all buildings, walls and other features contained within the cemetery.
The construction of the new terminal and its supporting platforms and buildings was carried out between 1902 and 1906. Apart from the exhumation, levelling and clearing the study area was not directly involved in this period of work. Although important additions were made elsewhere on the new station site after its initial construction programme the study area only contained minor tracks devoted to goods traffic. This almost vacant site became important when the decision was made to electrify the system in 1915. It provided a location for a new station and eight platforms which were constructed in the period 1925 - 1929. The results of this building programme remain on site having been subject largely only to programmes of modernisation in the following years.

1.3 The Archaeological Resource

The study area has had only one identifiable use prior to the construction of Central Electric being part of the Sandhills Cemetery. There is reliable documentation to show that the burials and other features were comprehensively removed at the beginning of the twentieth century to allow for the extension of the city railway. Prior to the construction of Central Electric the site contained only two minor goods lines. The impact of the various works associated with the construction of Central Electric in the 1920s preclude the likelihood of any relics of this minor use being found within this site. The physical evidence retrieved from the cores taken within this site support this conclusion.

1.4 Cultural Significance

The site encompassed by the study area has associations with an important historic place in Sydney's history, the Devonshire Street Cemetery, but these are not demonstrated in the current fabric and there is no likelihood of archaeological evidence of this phase of development. Similarly the potential for archaeological evidence of relics relevant to the railway development and which pre-date the construction of Central Electric is minimal. The site has no scientific or research value for archaeological purposes. The principal significance of this site is contained within the above ground fabric in its demonstration of an important phase of development in Sydney's rail network.

1.5 Management

This analysis has identified that the proposed work is unlikely to disturb any relics. It will not be necessary, therefore, for the proponents of the development to make application to the Heritage Council for an Excavation Permit prior to the commencement of the work. It should be noted, however, that should any deposit, feature or relic of substance and significance be exposed during the course of excavation the owners/managers of the site are required to notify the Heritage Office of NSW. Relics are protected by the Heritage Act of NSW which requires responsible management of them. It is recommended that:

- no further archaeological work be undertaken for this site.
SECTION 2.0

THE INVESTIGATION

2.1 The Study Area and Subject

The subject of this investigation is the northern concourse area of Central Electric Station a part of the Sydney Central terminal. In the Conservation Plan for the station this is part of Precinct 5, described as "Central Electric", and to a lesser extent part of Precinct 3, "Sydney Terminal". The excavations which are being undertaken as part of Olympic related upgrading, are on two levels. In the area of the east-west subway excavations are to be carried out on the western ramp and central ramp and three small areas close to the ramps. On the second level excavations are to be carried out adjacent to escalator 10 and in the area of platforms 14-17 and to a lesser extent between platforms 18-23. Several of these areas already have been excavated for earlier works.

The investigation broadly encompasses the European "heritage" values of this site with respect to a possible archaeological resource. Heritage values are understood to mean the appreciation of and value placed upon the resource by contemporary society in terms of the criteria expressed in the Burra Charter and formalised by the Heritage Office of NSW. Archaeological evidence, or relics, is defined by the Heritage Act of NSW to be physical evidence (structures, features, soils, deposits and portable artefacts) that provide evidence of the development of NSW, of non-Aboriginal origin and fifty or more years in age.

2.2 Consent Condition

The work has been initiated by a condition of consent for the development required by Sydney City Council. This condition is that,

"the applicant shall apply to the Heritage Council of NSW for an Excavation Permit, in accordance with Section 139 of the NSW Heritage Act, prior to any excavation taking place on the site".

An Excavation Permit is only sought when the excavation entails a strong probability that relics will be disturbed or destroyed by the work. The potential for relics to be contained within a site is determined by means of an archaeological assessment. The conclusions presented in this report determine the need or otherwise for application to be made for an Excavation Permit.
For this reason Abigroup, who are responsible for the works within the study area, have commissioned this assessment. This course of action had been taken on the advice of the Heritage Office of NSW.

2.3 Status of the Site

The site was included in the archaeological assessment made for the entire Central Station site by HLA-Envirosciences Pty Ltd in 1995. The areas of Precinct 5 and Precinct 3 including the study area were found to have minimal or no archaeological potential. "Minimal" was defined as "likely not to contain archaeological material" (HLA-Envirosciences Pty Ltd, An Archaeological Zoning Plan for Central Station and Adjacent Areas, 1995).

The area of Central Station is identified in the Archaeological Zoning Plan for Central Sydney to be one of Archaeological Potential - Partially Disturbed. This is an indicative assessment and not based on a comprehensive and specific site evaluation. Central Station has been the subject of an extensive conservation management plan (Heritage Group State Projects, Sydney/Central Station Conservation Management Plan Volumes 1 and 2, State Rail Authority 1995).

2.4 Methodology

This report has been prepared in accordance with the principles established by the Heritage Office of New South Wales presented in "Archaeological Assessment Guidelines" (Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, 1996).

2.5 Objectives and Tasks

The principal objectives of the work have been to identify whether there is an archaeological issue to be addressed prior to or during the course of redevelopment. This report identifies what may be retained in the ground as an archaeological resource, the significance of that material and the most appropriate means of managing it in the event of it being disturbed during the course of future development. To this end the following tasks have been undertaken:

- primary and secondary historical research sufficient to determine the physical development of this site in addition to that presented in earlier studies;
- a review of the available physical evidence;
- a determination of the probable archaeological resource;
- an evaluation of cultural significance with reference to standard criteria;
- recommendations for management strategies;
- complete documentation of the programme to standards acceptable to Council and the Heritage Office of NSW.
2.6 Authorship, Client and Acknowledgements

This report has been written and researched by Wendy Thorp to meet the requirements of Sydney City Council and the Heritage Office of NSW. It has been prepared on behalf of Abigroup. The work draws on both primary and secondary sources. A complete bibliography is attached to this report (Section 7.2). The author would like to thank for his assistance Mr Stuart Lemaire (State Rail).

Figure: The Study Area
The archival information is presented in sections which generally represent the principal periods of development and change. These are:

- The Pre-European Environment
- Early European Uses
- The Devonshire Street Cemetery
- Resumption and Exhumation
- The Evolution of the Railway
- Additions and Electrification

This section presents evidence derived from archival sources which is used to describe the evolution and occupation of the study area. This description provides the basis for assessing what may be retained in the ground as archaeological evidence of that development as well as providing a context for determining the significance of that resource. The information contained in this analysis has been drawn from both primary and secondary sources cited in Section 7.2.
The earliest description of land now occupied by Central Station including the study area was provided by Governor Phillip. In 1788 he looked towards the area of Surry Hills and saw that,

"between Sydney Cove and Botany Bay the first space is occupied by a wood, in some parts a mile and a half, in others three miles across; beyond that is a kind of heath, poor, sandy and full of swamps. As far as the eye can reach to the country is one continued wood" (1).

The land was part of a range of sand hills. These dunes were stabilised by stands of blackbutts, bloodwoods, angophoras and banksias rooted in fairly poor soils (2). With the removal of this vegetation and the erosion which resulted from it vast drifts of sand were borne into the city by winds or engulfed nearby fences, roads and houses.

The dunes were separated from the brickyards which occupied Brickfield Hill by a valley now occupied by Belmore Park and the Haymarket. A stream ran through this valley across George Street and then emptied into Darling Harbour. Another stream ran through the Government Paddocks. In the 1830s the valley was obliterated by the introduction of approximately one million cubic metres of earth which had been removed from Brickfield Hill and placed in this depression to make the incline into the town less steep and more manageable for horse traffic (3).

As the settlement expanded out from Sydney Cove most natural resources, and particularly timber, were removed from the landscape either to be used in building, in industry or to make way for pasturage or other settlement. This was the case on the study area. By the first decades of the nineteenth century views show the land for several miles around the settlement to be devoid of trees and shrubs. Principally it was characterised by rolling hills of grass occasionally broken by a tree stump or split rail fences.
3.2 Early European Uses

For the first decades of the nineteenth century the land encompassed by the study area did not even appear on maps of the settlement. It was considered to be too distant to be a part of it; cartographic representations of the city stopped at Brickfield Hill. Meehan's plan of the city in 1807 shows the area to be completely undeveloped. In 1810 it was said that,

"Pitt Row at that time virtually terminated at Bathurst Street ending in what is termed a dead road. Beyond this street was what might be said to be the country, for there were only a few dwellings dotting the slope down the Haymarket... The Haymarket was taken up by the Government Brickyards and the place beyond was quite out in the country" (1).

Land grants made in the 1790s and early 1800s, principally in Surry Hills and Ultimo, provided the boundaries for the later development of the study area. The latter, also for a short time, was in private ownership. Originally all the land south of Hay Street is said to have been known as Tom Cribb's Paddocks. Tom is said to have sold or bartered his land to the Government in exchange for nine heifers (2). Thereafter the land was popularly known as the Government Paddocks or the Cleveland Paddocks, the latter referring to the Cleveland Estate close by.

There is no evidence to show that either owner made any particular use of the site. The first European additions to the now greatly modified landscape were those public institutions which were thought to be better placed on the fringes of the town providing for a comfortable separation between the increasingly respectable settlement and the less reputable poor and destitute of the Benevolent Asylum, the convicts of the Carters Barracks or the departed pioneers in the cemetery amongst others.
The Benoist/Tyndall Asylum, Cemetery and site of future railway with a track crossing in 1889 (SAO/NWM Map 85(8))
3.3 The Devonshire Street Cemetery

Between 1793 and 1820 Sydney’s principal burial ground was on the site of the present St Andrew’s Plaza between St Andrew’s Cathedral and the Town Hall. In the later years of its existence the cemetery was almost filled to capacity. It became neglected and overgrown, in places a dumping ground. A new site was a necessity and it was considered desirable that this should be some distance from the town. The new site was reserved in 1818 by Governor Lachlan Macquarie. It comprised four acres surrounded by a high brick wall. This original grant encompassed what was to become the Church of England section with its principal frontage to Elizabeth Street. The study area lies within the extreme western portion of this grant. None of the surveys of the site during the nineteenth century show any of the cottages contained within the Church of England Section to be on the study area.

The area of the cemetery was expanded through the addition of several land grants. Ultimately it enclosed sections devoted to each major Christian denomination as well as a Jewish section. The new cemetery was consecrated in 1820 and was subject to strict rules with respect to the size and placement of vaults.

By the 1830s the appropriately named Sandhills or Devonshire Street Cemetery was already overcrowded and the Church of England section was a cause for particular concern because of the shallow and multiple burials contained within it. In 1859 the City Health Officer stated that this section had attracted many public complaints and expressions of concern because of its condition. Although it had been closed for general burials family vaults were still in use and additional burials were made each week. Some coffins were less than two feet from the surface (1).

In 1878 the Minister for Public Works gave instructions for a Bill to be drafted which would provide for the closure of the cemetery. Apart from the health issues raised by the Bill it was also intended to provide for the extension of the railway. It did not proceed; it was not until 1888 and several thousand additional burials later before the cemetery was finally closed for all interments.

During the later years of the nineteenth century the burial ground with its thousands of memorials and gravestones remained a picturesque relic of a former time. However, it had lapsed into a deplorable state. It was covered in places with near impenetrable scrub, many tombstones had fallen over and some had been broken into.
The extent of the Cemetery in 1885 (ML M Ser 4 611.17/1)
3.4 Resumption and Exhumation

Since its construction in the 1850s on the government paddocks beyond the cemetery several proposals had been made to expand the railway to the north, closer to the city. Several sites were considered but the land to the north always remained the favoured area to be resumed for this purpose. The most controversial issue in this proposal was the need to exhume and relocate the remains of the thousands buried in the former Sandhills Cemetery.

Parliamentary approval for this step was granted in 1901. From that year some 30,156 burials were exhumed; a new cemetery was constructed at La Perouse to provide for the relocated remains. The exhumation process was a lengthy and painstaking one undertaken by the Department of Public Works. The excavation of the site was carried out to a depth of six feet to ensure that all remains were located and removed in a dignified manner (1). Photographic evidence shows the extent and thoroughness of the work including the complete removal of the wall surrounding the cemetery and all buildings and gravemarkers contained within it. The works associated with the exhumation and demolition were completed in 1902.
3.5 The Evolution of the Railway

Until the later years of the nineteenth century the city railway site terminated at Devonshire Street where it faced across those few metres of thoroughfare the gates of the cemetery to the north. Work on the first terminus commenced in 1852 and continued intermittently until the 1860s. The inadequacy of this first station was overcome by the construction of a new terminus in 1871. This was located on land just to the south of Devonshire Street. The new station and its several platforms were opened in 1874.

By the end of the century the available land surrounding this terminus had been overtaken by a haphazard growth of sheds, platforms and other works. Proposals were made in the later 1890s to extend the system over the site of the old burial ground. After several reports and investigations the Parliamentary Standing Committee accepted a proposal in 1901 to remove the Sydney Terminal to the northern side of Devonshire Street (1).

The construction of the new terminal and its supporting platforms and buildings occurred between 1902 and 1906. The work involved, following the exhumation of the cemetery, the demolition and levelling of all other works in the area. By 1902 it was reported that,

"all the old buildings and the human remains have been removed from the site... the levelling of the whole site is practically completed" (2).

The work involved in constructing the new station encompassed excavation and levelling of the area on the eastern side of the block and building up areas on the west near Lee Street to make it level with the old station site. The station was opened to the public in 1906.

Apart from the exhumation, levelling and clearing the study area was not directly involved in this period of work.
The nineteenth century railway station, 1896 (ML M4 811.1746/1896/1)
3.6 Additions and Electrification

Several important additions were made to the new station after the initial programme of construction including the parcels post office in 1910 (extended in 1912) and the western wing and the clock tower in the years between 1915 and 1921. Within the study area though, there were only two tracks used for goods traffic (1).

Electrification of the system had been proposed in 1909 and approved in 1915 but the War caused the project to be delayed; work did not occur until 1925-126. The study area was included in the land impacted upon by the works associated with this major development termed Central Electric. The massive construction works included the fly-overs, a ramp from Eddy Avenue, two new entrances and the extension of the Devonshire Street subway from Chalmers Street. Platforms 16 - 23 were constructed in the period 1926 - 1929. Essentially the eight tracks provided four for the city railway and four for county traffic. An above ground station provided a link to move passengers and baggage to the Sydney Terminal. The northern concourse was constructed to contain the ticket windows and the departures board.

The site has been the subject of numerous works since its construction but these have largely been cosmetic improvements. The structures built in the 1920s remain the principal components within the study area.
Central Railway Station in 1913; the western carriage shed is described as the "up carriage shed" (SRA Archives).
SECTION 4.0

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

4.1 Pre-Existing Features

The only known European use of the site prior to the construction of Central Electric was as part of the original grant and subsequently Church of England portion of the Sand Hills or Devonshire Street cemetery. All the burials, markers, walls and other features of this burial ground were completely and thoroughly removed in 1901-1902. Before the construction of Central Electric the site did contain some goods lines.

4.2 Structures and Services

The site contains the platforms, ramps and escalators associated with the northern concourse of Central Electric constructed in 1925-1929 and modified on several occasions since that time.

4.3 Geo-Technical Evidence

Some geo-technical testing has been undertaken on the site. It has revealed a profile of surfaces including concrete slab, asphalt and tiles over deep deposits of fill. The latter is characterised by silty clay soils and gravel over sandstone rubble. The fill and rubble varied in depth to up to nearly 3.5 metres. No cultural material appeared in any of the cores.

4.4 Conclusions

The study area has had only one identifiable use prior to the construction of Central Electric being part of the Sandhills Cemetery. There is reliable documentation to show that the burials and other features of this burial ground were comprehensively removed at the beginning of the twentieth century to allow for the extension of the city railway. Prior to the construction of Central Electric the site contained only two minor goods lines. The impact of the various works associated with the construction of Central Electric in the 1920s preclude the likelihood of any relics of this minor use being found within this site. The physical evidence retrieved from the cores taken within this site support this conclusion.
SECTION 5.0

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

5.1 Evaluation Criteria

"Heritage significance", "cultural significance" and "cultural value" are all terms used to describe an item's value or importance to our own society. This value may be contained in the fabric of the item, its setting and its relationship to other items, the response that the item stimulates in those who value it now and in the historical records that allow us to understand it in its own context. An assessment of what is significant is not static. Significance may increase as more is learnt about the past and as items become rare, endangered or are found to document and illustrate aspects that have acquired a new recognition of importance.

Determining cultural value is at the basis of all planning for places of historic value. A clear determination of significance permits informed decisions for future planning that will ensure that the expressions of significance are retained, enhanced or at least are minimally impacted upon. A clear understanding of the nature and degree of significance will determine the parameters for and flexibility of any future development.

An historical analysis provides the context for assessing significance. This analysis is presented in Section 3.0. An assessment of significance is made by applying standard evaluation criteria to the facts of the item's development and associations. These criteria are divided into two categories:

- Nature of Significance
- Comparative Significance

The four basic criteria used in the nature of significance category are those of Evolution and Associations (Historic), Creative and Technical Accomplishment (Aesthetic), Community Esteem (Social) and Research Potential (Scientific). Comparative significance is assessed according to rarity or representative values.

Items have value if they meet at least one of the nature of significance criteria and are good examples of either or both of the comparative criteria.
5.2 Assessment of Significance

The site encompassed by the study area has associations with an important historic place in Sydney's history, the Devonshire Street Cemetery but it is not demonstrated in the current fabric and there is no likelihood of archaeological evidence of this phase of development. Similarly the potential for archaeological evidence of relics relevant to the railway development and which pre-date the construction of Central Electric is minimal. The site has no scientific or research value for archaeological purposes. The principal significance of this site is contained within the above ground fabric in its demonstration of an important phase of development in Sydney's rail network.
6.1 The Proposal

The work is intended to create ease of access to and from the platforms at Sydney Central Station by means of passenger lifts and a stair. The project also encompasses the enlargement of the western, central and southern sections of the northern concourse for the anticipated increased traffic flow resulting from visitors to Sydney for the Olympic Games. Four lifts are to be excavated at the concourse to a depth of two metres into the bedrock. Another lift is to be located in the Eastern Suburbs stairwell and is to be excavated six metres into the bedrock below the concourse level. Platform 14-15 is to be excavated seven metres into bedrock below the platform level.

6.2 Management of the Archaeological Resource

This analysis has identified that the proposed work is unlikely to disturb any relics. It will not be necessary, therefore, for the proponents of the development to make application to the Heritage Council for an Excavation Permit prior to the commencement of the work.

It should be noted, however, that should any deposit, feature or relic of substance and significance be exposed during the course of excavation the owners/managers of the site are required to notify the Heritage Office of NSW. Relics are protected by the Heritage Act of NSW which requires responsible management of them.

It is recommended that:

- no further archaeological work be undertaken for this site.
SECTION 7.0

DOCUMENTATION

7.1 Endnotes

Section 3.1


2. Doug Benson and Jocelyn Howell, *Taken for Granted The Bushland of Sydney and Its Suburbs*, 44.


Section 3.2


Section 3.3


Section 3.4

1. NSW Parliamentary Papers 1901, 759

Section 3.5


2. PWD Annual Report 1904-5, 4-5.

Section 3.6

1. Plan of Central Railway Station 1913.
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