ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

OBSERVATORY HILL

SYDNEY

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For Edaw

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1.0 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 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 or 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 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. The NSW State Heritage inventory Project (SHIP) has produced standard evaluation criteria which are compatible with the criteria used by the Australian Heritage Commission in assessing items for the Register of the National Estate. The criteria are divided into two categories:

- Nature of Significance
- Comparative Significance

1.1 Nature of Significance

The four basic criteria used in this category area:

- Evolution and Associations (Historic)

An item may be significance for this reason because of the importance of its associations with the history of its locale, region, state or country.

- Creative and Technical Accomplishment (Aesthetic)

An item meeting this criterion is important for the way in which it demonstrates creative and technical excellence, innovation or achievement.

- Community Esteem (Social)
An item is considered to be significant for the reasons of its spiritual, social or cultural associations with a particular community.

- Research Potential (Scientific)

These items have the potential to contribute to an understanding of the history or historic environment of their locale, region, state or country by means of the information contained within them.

1.2 Comparative Criteria

- Rarity

An item is significant because it represents a rare, endangered or unusual aspect of the history of a place or its historic environment.

- Representative Qualities

Items of this quality are significant because they represent an important class of historic items or environments.

Items have value if they meet at least one of the "nature" of significance criteria and either of the comparative criteria.

1.3 Historical Themes: SHIP Methodology

The NSW State Heritage Inventory provides a series of historical themes which may be used to identify the broad context for individual items thus making comparison possible between items. Observatory Hill demonstrates the following State Themes from the NSW State Heritage Inventory:

- Agriculture
- Convict
- Environment
- Communication
- Technology
- Townships
- Science
• Defence
• Housing
• Cultural Sites
• Leisure
• Sport
• Health
• Education
Observatory Hill has been one of the most important components in the development of the city almost from the first day of settlement. It has been associated with some of the most vital and unique enterprises of the town and, along with the area of the Government Domain, Bridge and Macquarie Streets, it represents one of the most important government or civic precincts in the town.

The hill has provided a site for seminal enterprises and those which have had outstanding importance to the progress of the city, state and country, in some cases drawing international attention and renown. It was the site of the first and third windmills in Australia, the second permanent hospital, one of the earliest signal stations, the most substantial Observatory in the country, one of the earliest and the most important of the National schools and the major Colonial powder magazine between 1810 and 1833. It was a key component of early colonial military thinking being the first defensive work in the country and the first fort. In this it is illustrative of the fears of both external threat and internal strife that plagued early Australian thought. The site also has been a focus for public displays, for example, it was the site for the first public display of outdoor electric lighting in 1863.

Observatory Hill has provided a focus or common point for the citizens of Sydney and for them to be linked to a much wider community. The fall of the timeball each day was visible to a large part of the town and the signal station on the hill forged a link between the town and the harbour. The signal station provided telegraphic communication with the rest of NSW. During the earliest years of the nineteenth century the fort provided a medium for commemorating events of local and national significance through its role as a saluting battery.

The site has close associations with numerous figures of outstanding historical stature many of whom have had a direct influence on the form and use of the site. These figures include nearly every Governor of NSW from Phillip onwards throughout the nineteenth century and many Colonial and Government Architects including Francis Greenway, Mortimer Lewis and James Barnet amongst others. Military Officers have played an important role in the design and form of the buildings including Lieutenant Watts, Macarthur, Barrallier, Bellasis and Minchin. The Astronomers have been particularly influential on the form not only of the Observatory but the environment surrounding it. They have included Russell, P.P. King, Scott and Wood. Many important educationalists have taught at the school or learnt their profession there and many thousands of people have had their primary education provided at Fort Street and gone on to influence society in many professional avenues. The hill also is a pre-eminent site of convict endeavour. It has been shaped by their labour and many of the buildings current and gone owed their existence to them.
2.2 Community Esteem (Social)

Observatory Hill has played an important role for many specific communities or groups including the scientific community, the military garrison (up to 1848), and many thousands of students who have attended Fort Street School. It has been the scene of considerable political interest and influence. Apart from these specific interest groups, however, Observatory Hill has, from the later years of the nineteenth century, been a focus for recreation, a green part of the city highly valued for its environment and views by both residents and tourists. During the later years of the twentieth century it has become a focus for nostalgia and heritage consciousness.

2.3 Creative and Technical Accomplishment (Aesthetic)

Observatory Hill provides one of the most spectacular vantage points in Sydney. The strategic and aesthetic opportunities provided by it have been valued throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries as witnessed by its selection as the site for so many enterprises of unique importance to the town as well as the numerous drawings, paintings and photographs produced of and from it. The views, mature landscape, the quality of the buildings and their patina of age make it one of the most pleasing and unique environments in contemporary Sydney. The Observatory in particular is noted for the quality of its scale composition and design.

The mature landscape and buildings encompassed by Observatory Hill contain elements which document changing tastes and fashions of well over one hundred and fifty years. These encompass not only architectural styles but changing tastes in landscape design and public tastes such as bandstand concerts.

2.4 Technical Research Significance (Scientific)

The buildings and potential archaeological sites on Observatory Hill offer unprecedented opportunities for investigation of specific aspects of the development of the hill and its various sites as well as unusual technical aspects such as milling and astronomy. They incorporate nearly two hundred years of change, technical development, tastes and ways of living. As such they provide a resource for ongoing research and interpretation.

2.5 Comparative Criteria

Wendy Thorp for Edaw
The various components of Observatory hill represent rare, unusual and often unique aspects of the history of the city, NSW and Australia. In this they are of National significance.

3.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Observatory Hill has been one of the most important components in the development of the city almost from the first day of settlement. It has been associated with some of Sydney’s and the colony’s most vital and unique enterprises and, along with the area of the Government Domain, Bridge and Macquarie Streets, it represents one of the most important government or civic precincts in the city.

It has close associations with numerous figures of outstanding historical stature many of whom have had a direct influence on the form and use of Observatory Hill. These figures include nearly every Governor of NSW from Phillip onwards throughout the nineteenth century and many Colonial and Government Architects including Francis Greenway, Mortimer Lewis and James Barnet. Military Officers have played an important role in the design and form of the buildings including Lieutenant Watts, Macarthur, Barrallier, Bellasis and Minchin. The Astronomers have been particularly influential on the form not only of the Observatory but the environment surrounding it. Many important educationalists have taught at the school or learnt their profession there and many thousands of people have had their primary education provided at Fort Street and gone on to influence society in many professional avenues. The hill also is a pre-eminent site of convict endeavour. It has been shaped by their labour and many of the buildings current and gone owed their existence to them.

The hill has provided a site for seminal enterprises and those which have had outstanding importance to the progress of the city, state and country, in some cases drawing international attention and renown. It was the site of the first and third windmills in Australia, the second permanent hospital, one of the earliest signal stations, the most substantial Observatory in the country, one of the earliest and the most important of the National schools and the major Colonial powder magazine between 1810 and 1833. It was a key component of early colonial military thinking being the first defensive work in the country and the first fort. The site also has been a focus for public displays.

Observatory Hill has provided a focus or common point for the citizens of Sydney and for them to be linked to a much wider community. The fall of the timeball each day was visible to a large part of the town and the signal station on the hill forged a link between the town and the harbour. The signal station provided telegraphic communication throughout NSW and during the earliest years of the nineteenth century the fort acted as a medium for commemorating events of local and national significance through its role as a saluting battery.
Observatory Hill has played an important role for many specific communities or groups including the scientific community, the military garrison (up to 1848), and many thousands of students who have attended Fort Street School. It has been the scene of considerable political interest and influence. Apart from these specific interest groups, however, Observatory Hill has, from the later years of the nineteenth century, been a focus for recreation, a green part of the city highly valued for its environment and views by both residents and tourists. During the later years of the twentieth century it has become a focus for nostalgia and heritage consciousness.

Observatory Hill provides one of the most spectacular vantage points in Sydney. The strategic and aesthetic opportunities provided by it have been valued throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The views, mature landscape, the quality of the buildings and their patina of age make it one of the most pleasing and unique environments in contemporary Sydney. The Observatory in particular is noted for the quality of its scale composition and design. The mature landscape and buildings encompassed by Observatory Hill contain elements which document changing tastes and fashions of well over one hundred and fifty years. These encompass not only architectural evolution, but fashions in landscape and design and popular tastes such as bandstand concerts.

The buildings and potential archaeological sites on Observatory Hill offer unprecedented opportunities for investigation of specific aspects of the development of the hill and its various sites as well as unusual technical aspects such as milling and astronomy. They incorporate nearly two hundred years of change, technical development, tastes and ways of living. As such they provide a resource for ongoing research and interpretation.

The various components of Observatory hill represent rare, unusual and often unique aspects of the history of the city, NSW and Australia. In this they are of National significance.