ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

1 MERRIWA STREET

GORDON

By Dr Robert V J P Varman
For ALTO GROUP
(c/o Nettleton Tribe)

2005
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The outline of the action required of a qualified archaeologist for the DA conditions is listed as item 94 in Nettleton Tribe's document DA Report (preliminary issue 1), 2 February 2005, 3 - 5 Merriwa Street, Gordon, dated 2 February 2005:

'An archaeological investigation of the site shall be undertaken by a suitably qualified person in this field and a report of findings provided to the Council. Should the report recommend any special measures to be implemented during excavation, then these shall be incorporated into the relevant contract with the site Excavator'.

This report was commissioned by Nettleton Tribe for their clients, ALTO GROUP, on April 11, 2005.

The report is a result of the examination of available historical sources combined with a thorough site assessment in the context of the suburb of Gordon, in particular the subdivision formerly named the Gordon Heights Estate.

No 1 Merriwa Street, Gordon, formed part of Bean's Farm of the 1830s to early 1890s. In 1896/1897 the street was established as part of the Gordon Heights Estate subdivision. There is no direct evidence to indicate that significant building activity occurred in Merriwa Street before the 1930s, unlike in areas closer to the railway station.

Indications are that the 1896 triangular block, then numbered 58, was subdivided during the 1930s at about the same time as the south side of Merriwa Street, the larger part of the block forming the present Fitzsimons Lane, Nos 3 and 5 Merriwa Street. The new subdivision was built upon but the houses were demolished during the mid 1960s and the mid 1970s. After the demolitions the site was modified by excavation and the addition of landfill to convert it to a parking lot.

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The assessment of Heritage Significance found that the site was of no particular Significance in that the site was intensively developed around the 1930s and then redeveloped during the 1960s and 1970s. It is reasonably certain that no earlier remains could have survived these developments. Below ground remains, if these existed and had survived, are abundantly represented all over the former 1896 Estate subdivision intact or in better condition than in the study area. Working class cultural remains of the late 1890s to 1930s are common in the Sydney area.

It is unlikely that any structure was built on the site before the early twentieth century.
1.2 AUTHOR IDENTIFICATION

This report was written by R.V.J.P. Varman, Archaeologist & Heritage Consultant, and was responsible for the site assessment, synthesis of documentary and physical evidence and report writing. The author has 27 years professional experience and specializes in the dating and analysis of artefacts, building technology and built environment.

1.3 LOCATION

No 1 (formerly styled 3-5) Merriwa Street is bound by Merriwa Street to the south, Fitzsimons Lane to the north-east and No 7 - 9 Merriwa Street (office building and carpark) to the west. Merriwa Street is located at the north end of the former Gordon Heights Estate subdivision in Gordon.
2.0 STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS AND HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

2.1 STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The Heritage Act of New South Wales (1977) has provision for the protection of archaeological deposits or features (‘environmental heritage’) relating to the European settlement of New South Wales which are fifty years or older. Sections 139 – 145 disallows the excavation or removal of relics or actions likely to endanger relics. Permits may be granted by the Heritage Council of New South Wales to a qualified archaeologist to excavate or remove relics under stringent guidelines. The site is not listed on the State Heritage Register.

There are other statutory controls: the National Parks and Wildlife Service which is responsible for the protection and conservation of Aboriginal relics in New South Wales. Any discovery or suspected discovery of Aboriginal relics should be immediately reported to the Service and any works related to the discovery halted. The National Trust of Australia (New South Wales) Register has no direct statutory status but the Trust may seek the use of the Heritage Act of New South Wales or the planning powers of local government authorities to ensure the protection of classified and recorded listings on its Register. Considering location and the state of preservation of the site, it is unlikely any Aboriginal relics will be found on the site.

The site is not specifically listed under any planning ordinance by the local governing body, Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council.
2.2 HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

This Statement of Significance is based on documentary evidence and an assessment of aboveground remains in relation to the surrounding streets related to the Gordon Heights Estate subdivision of 1896.

The Heritage Office and NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning have developed guidelines in the form of the NSW Heritage Manual from which the heritage significance of a site or item may be formulated (Assessing Heritage Significance (Final Approved Text. A NSW Heritage Manual Update. NSW Heritage Office, August 2000).

Heritage Significance Criteria

a. An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW’s 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 groups of persons, of importance in NSW’s 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 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 NSW’s cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

f. An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW’s 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 NSW’s:
   - 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
HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

Criterion (a) An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

Based on the surviving documentation there is little evidence that the study area per se was important to the pattern of cultural development of the Gordon area.

Conclusion. Of no Local Significance.

Criterion (b) An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or groups of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

Not applicable.

Conclusion. Of no Local Significance.

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

Surviving features, aboveground and belowground, in the study area are not able to demonstrate important aesthetic, creative or technical achievement.

Conclusion. Of no Local Significance.

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.

Not applicable.

Conclusion. Of no Local Significance.

Criterion (e) An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

It is unlikely that anything was built on the site before the early twentieth century. In terms of possible cultural material, sites such as 3-5 Merriwa Street are relatively common in Sydney and are abundantly duplicated elsewhere in Merriwa, McIntyre,
Moree and Dumaresq Streets, many of the allotments with the first structures ever built on them are still in tact.

**Conclusion.** Of no Local Significance.

**Criterion (f)** An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

Not applicable.

**Conclusion.** Of no Local Significance.

**Criterion (g)** An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's:
- 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.

Not applicable

**Conclusion.** Of no Local Significance.

### 2.3 HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

The subject site is not of Local Significance in consideration of any of the above criteria. It is concluded that the original 1896 block was further subdivided before the land was built upon. Sites such as 3 - 5 Merriwa Street are relatively common in Sydney and in terms of the former Gordon Heights Estate area such sites are abundantly duplicated in Merriwa, McIntyre, Moree, Vale, Ridge and Dumaresq Streets, many with the first structures ever built on them still in tact.

The integrity of the study site has been severely compromised by twentieth century construction and demolition. Parts were excavated away and/or graded, and other parts receiving landfill to convert the two blocks into a car park.

The integrity of the streetscape and archaeology of the general area has been irreversibly compromised along the entire north side of Merriwa Street. Significant redevelopment has taken place and is planned for the south side of Merriwa Street.
3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations were considered for the site arising out of the assessment of Statement of Heritage Significance devised by the Heritage Office and the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning. See item 2.2.

The Heritage Significance for this site was based on a synthesis of the historical assessment and the physical examination of the study site and the local environment.

The conclusion of the author of this report is that the 1 Merriwa Street site should be permitted to be redeveloped without further archaeological involvement.
4.0 HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT

This assessment will commence with the earliest period for which we have some documentary evidence.

4.1 PHASE 1 ca1815 - 1820s.

Gordon/Lane Cove area exploited mainly for timber.

4.2 PHASE 2 1820s - 1896

The first grants are distributed along the west side of the present Pacific Highway (Lane Cove Road) starting in 1823 with grants to Henry Henry and Joseph Smith. James Bean received his holding of approximately 220 acres by 1840. During this time the Gordon area was a centre for timber-getting and orchards.

The area developed quickly and the region’s first churches, schools, stores and post office were established in the part later known as Gordon. The area received a development boost by the coming of the railway during the 1880s and major subdivisions began in anticipation in 1879.

The 1893 Map of the Parish of Gordon, County of Cumberland. Higginbotham & Robinson, shows James Bean’s 220 acres in relation to surrounding properties and roads.
4.3 PHASE 3 1896 - 1920

Gordon Heights Estate subdivision (DP 3337) was formed largely out of Bean’s Farm. The main section was bounded by Lane Cove Road, Vale Street and Moree Street, and there was a western section of allotments to both sides of Ridge Street. One acre, and half acre lots were offered for auction on December 12, 1896.

It appears that the subdivision was aimed at tradesmen and blue collar workers planning to build a modest cottage home on limited finances. However, the economy was still recovering from the depression of the early 1890s and it is seems that working class people with finances available for land and construction were in the minority.

As was often the case with such subdivisions, speculators purchased multiple blocks for later subdivision. This appears to have happened with the Gordon Heights Estate judging by the prolific subdivision of the 1896 blocks after about 1930.

Without undertaking a major study of each property it is not possible to say with absolute certainty which of the December 1896 blocks were soon after built upon. Some idea can be formed of the subsequent development of the Estate by a survey of what has remained until recent times.

The first cottages built on the Gordon Heights Estate subdivision are what would generally be described as ‘working class’ timber cottages. Such cottages ranged from the very simple and unadorned such as No 36 McIntyre Street (the quintessential working man’s cottage) to the slightly more elaborate such as 20 McIntyre Street (partially demolished and rebuilt) and 37 Dumaresq Street. An attractive example of one of the more elaborate timber houses would be 17 Dumaresq Street. These timber houses appear to fit nicely into a time frame of the late 1890s (post- 1890s Depression) to about 1920 (post- World War I). The first of the Estate houses may have been constructed in 1897.

![36 McIntyre Street, Gordon. Basic timber worker’s cottage.](image-url)
20 McIntyre Street, Gordon. Timber worker's cottage with some embellishment.

The Gordon Heights Estate subdivision poster of 12 December 1896 shows the extent of the subdivision. The area under study is part of a triangular block numbered 58. Nos 3 and 5 Merriwa Street only form a part of the original block. Parts of the original block included Fitzsimons Lane and perhaps No 7 Merriwa Street. The section of Merriwa Street opposite the study site has been raised by up to 5 metres, this suggests that the land sloped steeply into the study site before the 1930s.

It is unlikely that block was built upon before about 1930.
4.4 PHASE 4, 1920 - 1960s

The second wave of construction is of a distinctive brick bungalow style popular in Sydney during the 1920s and 1930s.

This phase is typified by an early 1930s subdivision of the 1896 acre and half acre blocks into narrow allotments, sometimes four or more to the original blocks. Houses typical of this period were modest bungalow types, built of double-press and dry-press bricks, and roofed with Marseilles type tiles.

The south side of Merriwa Street is typical of this phase of development though those numbered above 14 appear to be earmarked for demolition for the Elysium Luxury Apartments development. The 1896 subdivision of the south side of Merriwa Street appears to have been amalgamated into a couple of large blocks by 1930 (map unclear). Judging by the style and materials of the existing bungalows, the latter large blocks were subdivided into narrow blocks and soon built upon. In Merriwa Street there is no evidence to suggest that these brick cottages replaced 1897 to World War I timber cottages.

All pre-1960s structures have been demolished on the north side of Merriwa Street but there is evidence of a similar 1930-plus subdivision of land at 3 and 5 Merriwa Street.

The 1930 Map of the Parish of Gordon, County of Cumberland shows the north side of Merriwa Street largely unchanged from the 1896 Gordon Heights Estate subdivision plan. There is no indication that the blocks had been built upon. Judging by the development on the south side of Merriwa Street it would seem that houses were built there from about 1930. However, earlier development is evidenced in McIntyre, Dumaresq and Moree Streets possibly because those streets were closer to Gordon railway station and amenities such as the post office, shops, church and school.

Numbers 3 and 5 Merriwa Street originally formed part of Lot 58 on the 1896 plan.

The raising of the street above numbers 16 to 24 on the south side Merriwa street to the extent of about 4 metres suggests numbers 1 to 5 on the north side of the road originally sloped more steeply than is indicated at present, perhaps retarding early development.
Map of the Parish of Gordon, County of Cumberland... Municipality of Ku-ring-gai. 1930.
4.5 PHASE 5 1960s TO THE PRESENT.

Cottages were built on Nos 3 and 5 Merriwa Street some time after 1930. Remnant boundary walls of brick survive but appear to be of bricks common from the 1940s.

The cottage occupying No 3 was demolished around 1965/1966 and the cottage occupying No 5 was demolished around 1975 (pers. comm. Ken Ng of Nettleton Tribe). The site of the cottages was converted to two car parks on a split level, probably reflecting the demolition sequence.

There is evidence of extensive surface disturbance over the car parking areas involving both excavation and landfill. The south-west corner of the site is probably closest to the level of the land as it was during the 1960s.

4.6 3-5 MERRIWA STREET PHASING SUMMARY

The distance from Gordon Station, the distance from amenities, and the slope of the land (more pronounced before they raised the height of the street) probably retarded the sale and development of this part of the December 1896 Gordon Heights Estate subdivision. The south side of the road wasn’t developed until about the early 1930s.

There is no strong indication that workers’ timber cottages were built soon after December 1896 in Merriwa Street, or particularly on numbers 3 and 5 Merriwa Street (in 1896 part of Lot 58).

If there had been a timber cottage on Lot 58, it would have been constructed in the vicinity of number 3 (centre front of a block was the most common scheme). The after-1930 subdivision would have resulted in the demolition and removal of earlier features and under-ground features disrupted by the excavation for foundations and services (water and drainage).

The demolition of post 1930s features during the 1960s and 1970s would have further disturbed the ground.

The construction of the two parking lots resulted in considerable excavation and dumping of soil and fill.

NOTE: Historical data sourced from the Ku-ring-gai Heritage & Neighbourhood Character Study prepared for Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council, June 2000, by Godden. Mackay, Logan, Keys, Young. Dated plans were particularly useful in reconstructing the sequence of land development from the 1893. See Bibliography.
3 Merriwa Street: corner Merriwa Street and Fitzsimons Lane. View toward west.
5.0 SITE INSPECTION AND ANALYSIS

The site was inspected on May 10, 2005. All parts of the surface of 3 - 5 Merriwa Street were available for inspection.

**No 3 Merriwa Street.**

This refers to the triangular allotment at the west corner of Merriwa Street and Fitzsimons Lane. According the Phasing, a post-1930 dwelling house on this allotment was demolished in 1965 or 1966.

The site is sealed with asphalt at a sloping level conforming to Fitzsimons Lane. A drain and a wire fence are located at the south end of the asphalt surface. Between the wire fence and Merriwa Street is a steeply sloping strip of land planted with various trees and shrubs.

A considerable amount of fill was deposited along the Merriwa Street half of the land and along the east boundary of No 5 Merriwa Street in an attempt to lessen the slope of the land to render it suitable as a parking lot. It is suspected that the durable materials from demolished structures may form part of the fill covering the site.

The stepped brick wall along Merriwa Street boundary probably dates to the mid 1960s. The type of brick used couldn’t be earlier than the 1940s. The wall along the west boundary butts against the Merriwa Street (front) wall and appears to be of a similar date. The latter wall was partially taken down around 1975 when the No 5 house was demolished and access was required from the existing parking lot. A rough drive was established between Nos 3 and 5.

**5 Merriwa Street.**

This allotment is located between No 3 Merriwa Street and the excavated drive of Nos 7-9 Merriwa Street, and backs Fitzsimons Lane to the north. According the Phasing, a post-1930 dwelling house on this allotment was demolished around 1975.

Only the north half of this allotment was converted to parking space. It appears that the north end was excavated and fill was dumped along the mid of the property to create a moderately sloping parking lot. The surface was covered with asphalt. A retaining wall of concrete blocks was built along Fitzsimons Lane and the other end was fenced off with a wire fence.

The only pre-1970s surface found on the entire site is the south half of this allotment. In this area there is a steep rise of up to about three metres along the No3 boundary and along the parking area of this allotment due to the dumping of fill when the parking lots were created. The remainder of this area slopes fairly gently from the level of the
Merriwa Street footpath. The latter area represents the approximate ground level just after the demolition of around 1975. Building materials were noted scattered over the surface but it was not clear if the materials related to the demolished house or to fill that was brought into the area. The area is obscured by shrubs and trees (mostly weed species).

The entire west boundary of the property would have been partially excavated during the construction of the offices and parking area at Nos 7 - 9 because the retaining wall facing Nos 7 - 9 extends in depth from one to up to four or five metres (from south to north).

5 Merriwa Street: north end retaining wall, along Fitzsimons Lane.

5 Merriwa Street: south end facing Merriwa Street. Note depth of excavation along boundary with 7 - 9 Merriwa Street.
6.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

All the following references are available at the Ku-ring-gai Municipal Library, Gordon.


Maps:


Map of the Parish of Gordon, County of Cumberland... Municipality of Ku-ring-gai. 1930.

Maps and documents: DA condition from 1971 requiring the dedication of Fitzsimons Lane to Council, and the title diagrams before and after the dedication. See following pages.