

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

170 PYRMONT STREET

PYRMONT



November 1998

For S. A. Simmonds & Associates

Wendy Thorp
Cultural Resources Management

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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 land at 170 Pymont Street, Pymont. The report has been prepared to meet the conditions of Sydney City Council with respect to the redevelopment of this site. Its principal objectives are to determine if there are archaeological issues to be addressed in the course of future development and, if so, the most appropriate means of managing them.

1.2 Historical Framework

Situated on the edge of a ridge which probably supported scrub and some taller stands of timber, the study area was first alienated for European purposes in 1794 as part of a land grant of twenty-four acres made to John Malone. By 1818, and probably for many years before this date, this land grant was purchased or acquired through some other means by the principal landholder of the peninsula, Surgeon John Harris. His home was at Ultimo House, now within the site of Sydney Technical College. There is no evidence to show that the study area was ever used or developed, apart from being cleared, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. The estate was subdivided in 1859 but the study area, although surrounded by terraces and commercial premises and, on one side, a meat market remained unoccupied until the turn of the century. The house at 170 Pymont Street was constructed by the Scottish and Australasian Investment Company as a rental property, probably in 1899. It was certainly occupied as such by 1901. It remained the property of this company at least until the 1930s. It has always been used for residential purposes except for a short time in the 1920s when it was also used as a small shop.

1.3 The Archaeological Resource

The house which occupies 170 Pymont Street was the first and only European development. Apart from fill used to level the slope it stands on and some services the site is unlikely to contain substantial or significant archaeological evidence either within the ground or as under-floor deposits in the house.

1.4 Cultural Significance

The potential archaeological resource of this site is assessed to have minimal significance.

1.5 Management

It is proposed to build a five storey building supported by concrete slabs on this site. There will be minimal excavation but sufficient to disturb any cultural material. The assessment has shown that there is unlikely to be any archaeological resource within the site other than fill. There is no requirement for investigation or recording of this material.

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 property at 170 Pyrmont Street, Pyrmont. This residential property is at the intersection of Pyrmont and Murray Streets. It is within the Parish of St Andrew in the City of Sydney. The site is occupied by a single storey, semi-detached terrace.

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 Status of the Site

The site has not been the subject of any earlier archaeological assessment or investigation although an assessment has been prepared of the larger area bound by Bunn, Pyrmont and Murray Streets (Godden Mackay for Meriton Apartments, 1993).

2.3 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).

2.4 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;

- 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.

2.5 Authorship, Client and Acknowledgements

This report has been written and researched by Wendy Thorp to meet the requirements of Sydney City Council. It has been prepared on behalf of S. A. Simmons and Associates Pty Ltd. The work draws on both primary and secondary sources. A complete bibliography is attached to this report (Section 7.2).

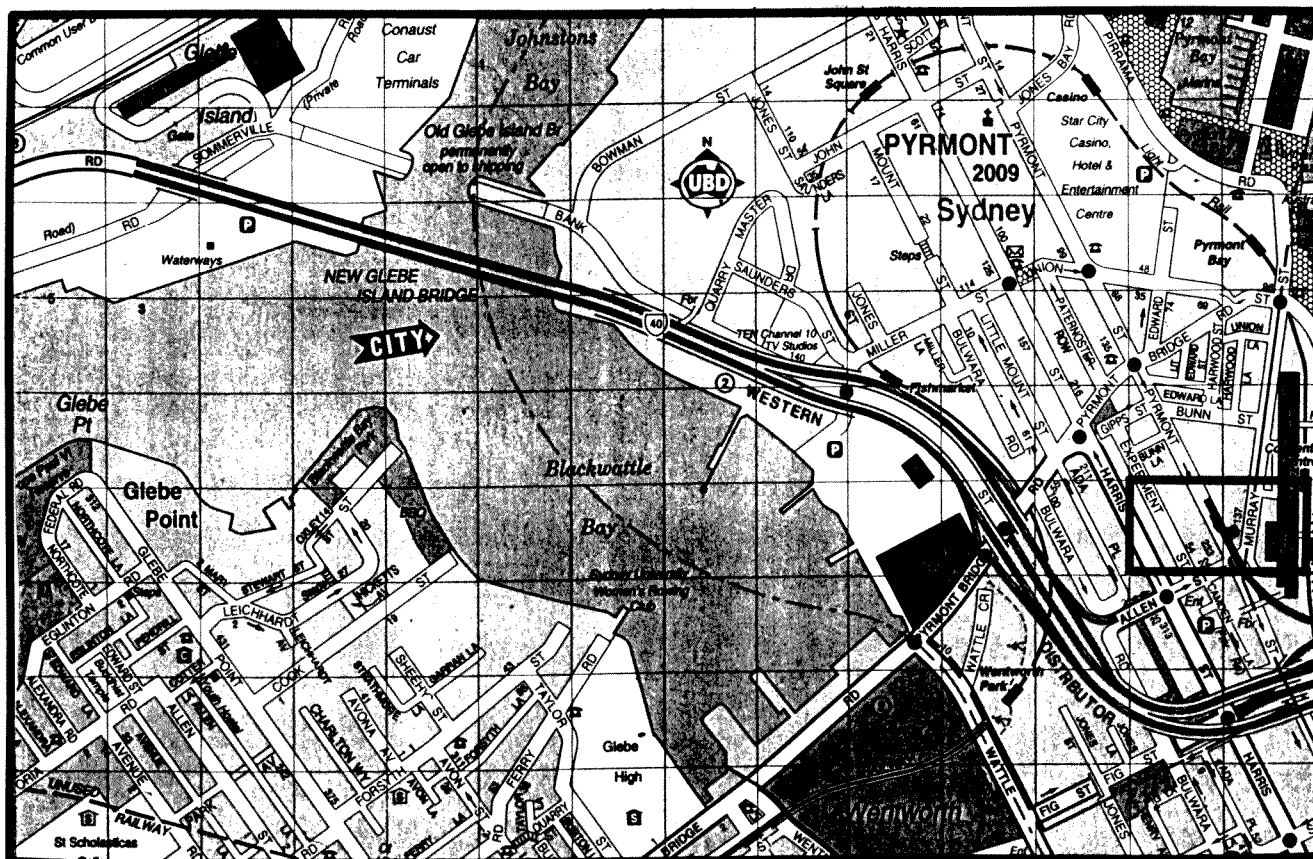


Figure: The Study Area

SECTION 3.0

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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 archival information is presented in three sections which are:

- The Pre-European Environment
- Alienation: The Harris Family Estate
- The Scottish and Australian Investment Company

3.1 The Pre-European Environment

Cockle Bay, in the years before it acquired that name, was much deeper in extent than it would come to be in the years of European settlement. The head waters of this bay lapped at what would be later the site of Hay Street. Where the bay met the land it was marshy, swampy ground with numerous rivulets feeding into it; at low tide it was covered with sand and mud. The swamps were fringed with mangroves (*Avicennia* and or *Aegicerus* sp), ti-tree (*Mealucca* sp.), swampy oak (*casuarina glauca*) and swamp mahogany (*Eucalyptus robusta*) (1).

Beyond the marshy flats were gently sloping footslopes, prone to seasonal waterlogging, which were covered with sandy clay loam. With an underlying geology of Hawkesbury sandstone they supported scrub that gave way to heavily forested hills. The tree cover here included Sydney peppermint (*Eucalyptus piperita*), red bloodwood (*Eucalyptus gummifera*), blackbutt (*Eucalyptus pilularis*) and smooth barked Angophora Costata (2). The trees and scrub rose up the ridge that would be later developed for the suburbs of Pymont and Ultimo.

The position of the study area on the rising part of the slope suggests that originally this land was covered with scrub and some taller timber. It may have suffered some erosion. It seems likely that this pre-European environment survived for some considerable time at least into the middle part of the nineteenth century. It is also likely for this reason that less evidence of the process of clearance would be found in the sub-soil; the original harsh methods of deforestation and burning had been modified to some degree by the nineteenth century.

3.2 Alienation: The Harris Family Estate

The study area occupies a small portion of the original European land grant of twenty-four acres made to John Malone by Lt. Governor Grose in December 1794. There is no evidence to suggest that Malone ever lived at or improved this property. Eventually this land was purchased or subsumed by some other means by the largest landholder on the peninsula, Surgeon John Harris. Harris had acquired nearly two hundred acres in this area through government grants between 1803 and 1806. There is no evidence to show how or precisely when he acquired the additional land of Malone's but it is likely to have been in the period in which he was granted his other large properties (1). It had certainly been so by 1818.

The Ultimo Estate as it came to be known had its focus at Ultimo House a two storey Georgian mansion now within the site of Sydney Technical College. There is no evidence to suggest that Harris made any particular use of the land within the study area other than, perhaps, clearing it. The only known development in this area was on the eastern side of Murray Street. This was a house known as Mrs Bunn's cottage. It occupied a 1.5 acre allotment given by John Harris to the daughter of a family friend as a wedding present in 1828. The girl and her husband, Captain George Bunn, settled here (2) and the house became a landmark of the district during the nineteenth century.

Harris died in 1838 leaving his estate intact. Due to uncertainties with respect to the position of the legatees no subdivisions were made of this great tract until 1859. Ultimo remained essentially a rural landscape with some quarrying at the northern end for the first half of the nineteenth century. The only thoroughfare was Harris Street. Apart from Bunn's cottage close by there is no evidence to suggest that any of the land on or around the study area was developed except by clearance until the second half of the nineteenth century.

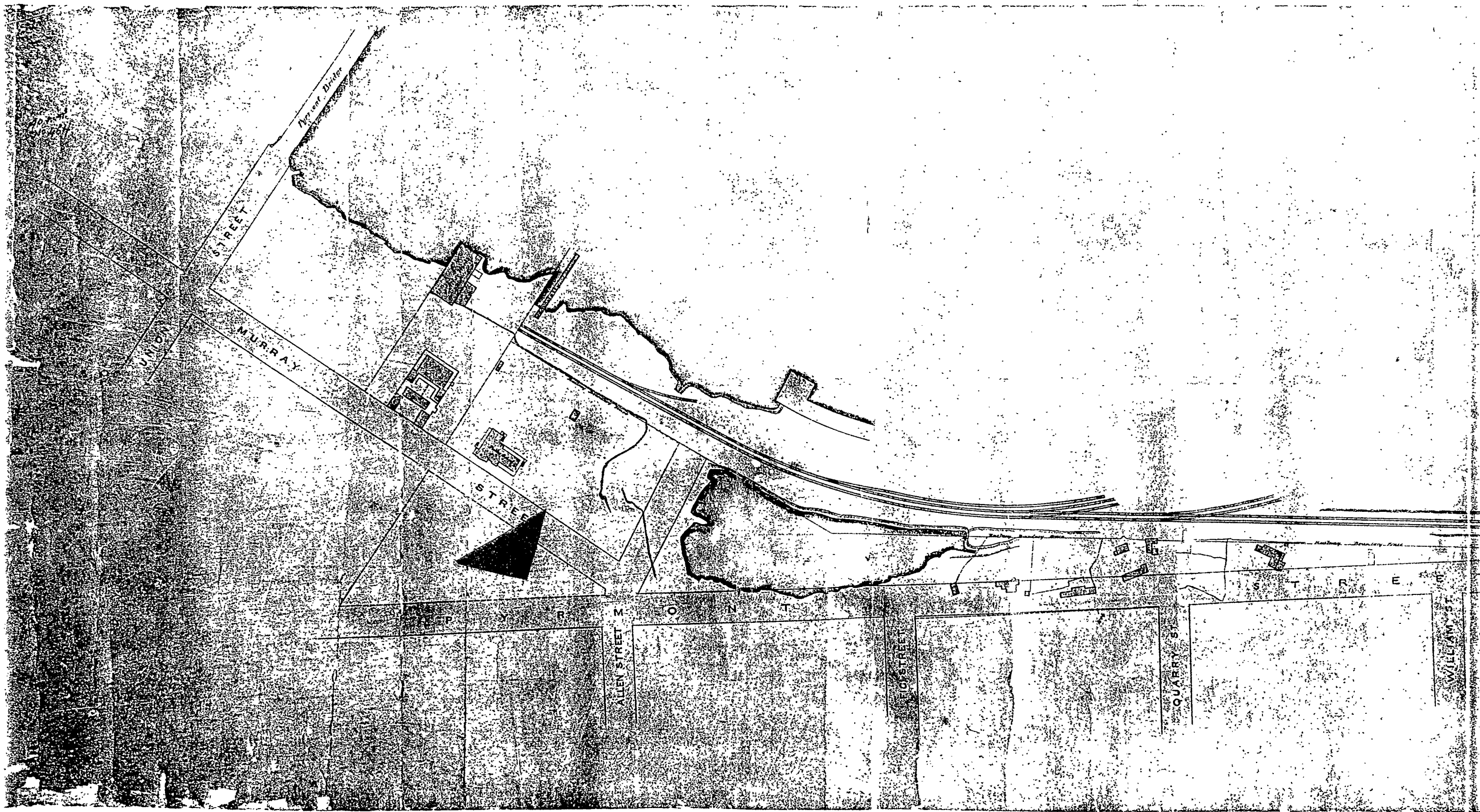


Figure: The study area, still vacant, and environs c.1860s-70s (undated plan)

(Source: SAONSW AO Map 464)

3.3 The Scottish and Australasian Investment Company

Although the subdivision of the Ultimo Estate was made in 1856, with the study area being numbered Block 47B, sale of the land or leases was not initiated until 1859. After that year a massive building programme was undertaken which led to Ultimo rapidly taking over Pyrmont as one of the most densely populated inner city areas. It was largely occupied by working class people very often employed in the district in the various trades and industries which had their premises there.

Most of the land in the vicinity of the study area is shown to be vacant on the 1865 town survey (1). Even by 1888, when the blocks to the north around Harwood Street, Pyrmont Bridge Road and Edward Street were closely developed as well as the Bunn Street frontage of the block containing the study area, the land along Pyrmont Street in this block was almost completely vacant (2). An undated subdivision plan of this period shows the entire site subdivided and ready for sale.

By 1897 the street frontage of Pyrmont Street had been developed to Number 130. Beyond this point to the land at the corner formed by Pyrmont Street and Murray Street then occupied by the Meat Market, the land was still vacant. It was listed only as "land" in the Council Rate Assessment Book. It was at that time owned in part by George Harris, of the original Harris family, and the Scottish and Australasian Investment Company (3). The latter owned the portion now occupied by 170 Pyrmont Street.

Between that date and 1901 the semi-detached houses that occupy 168 and 170 Pyrmont Street were constructed by the Scottish and Australasian Investment Company as investment properties. Sands Directory records an occupant of 170 Pyrmont Street in 1900; it seems likely that the house was built in 1899. The house was valued at thirty-seven pounds (4). It was described as brick-built with a tiled roof in the Council Rate Assessments.

The two houses at 168 and 170 Pyrmont Street remained the property of the Scottish and Australasian Investment Company at least until the 1930s. For a time during the 1920s the Council rates record the building at 170 in use as both a house and a shop. It remains a residential property.

(Source: ML M Ser 4 811.17/1K3)

SHEET K3

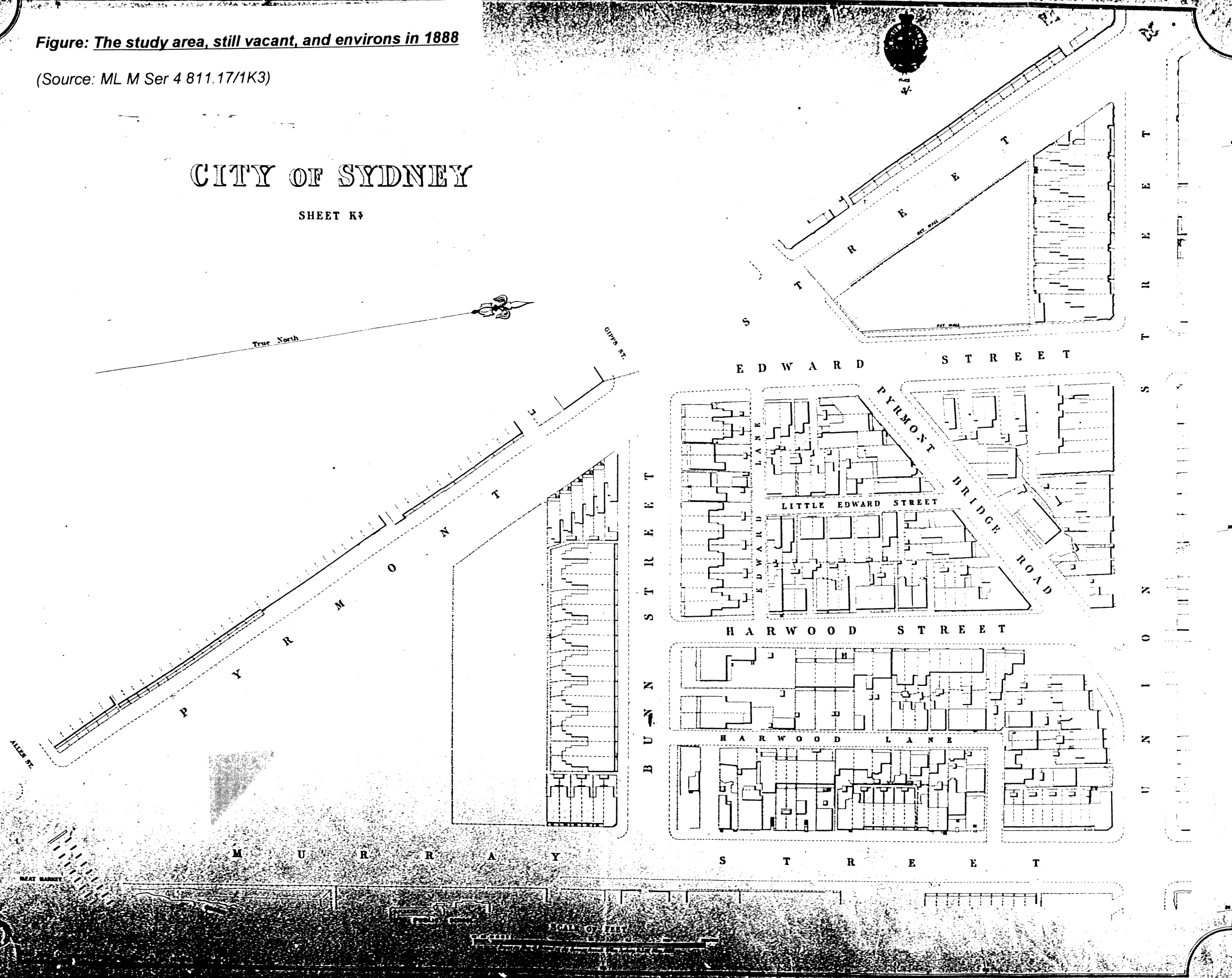


Figure: The study area, subdivided for auction c.1890s (undated plan)

(Source: ML Subdivision Plans Pyrmont SP811.1737/2)

CITY LEASEHOLD PROPERTY

PYRMONT

Fronting the

Darling Harbour Railway

TO BE SOLD AT THE ROOMS
AT 11 A.M. ON FRIDAY 30th SEP.

RICHARDSON & WRENCH

MURRAY ST.

PUBLIC WHARVES

RESUMED FOR RAILWAY PURPOSES

ST.

SECTION

ONE

HARRIS ST.

C.A. ATCHISON, Licensed Surveyor
Opposite Ch. Bank

Sketch of the Pyrmont area showing the Darling Harbour Railway and the location of the property to be sold.

GIBBS, SHALLARD & CO. LITHO

SECTION 4.0

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

4.1 Topography

The study area is located at the edge of what was a ridge on part of the slope leading down to the waters of Cockle Bay. It is likely that some fill has been introduced to the site to level it prior to the construction of the present house.

4.2 Structures and Services

There are no surveys or plans which show this house as it was first built but it is likely that, although modified, the building has not essentially changed its envelope from the original design. Apart from services which may be found in the back yard it is unlikely that there will be evidence of any other significant structure or feature on this property. At best only an out-house may have been demolished and this is unlikely to have left much, if any, evidence.

Within the house, the type of construction typical for the period, particularly tongue and groove floor boards, precludes the accumulation of a sub-floor cultural deposit.

4.3 Geo-Technical Evidence

Some geo-technical testing has been undertaken on the site. It has revealed a profile of fill in the backyard comprising bricks, cobbles and building rubble over residual soil, the fill up to a depth of 1.8 metres. There is a similar profile in the front yard although here the fill is less than half a metre. The cores confirm what may be concluded from the historical evidence with respect to levelling a sloping site prior to construction. The material used in the fill is likely to be introduced wastes; it does not represent an earlier building phase on this site.

4.4 Conclusions

It may be concluded that;

- there is no evidence to show that the site was developed in any way, other than cleared, during the nineteenth century;
- the first and only known European occupation of the site was the residential development undertaken by the Scottish and Australasian Investment Company in 1899. This house, now modified, still occupies the site of 170 Pyrmont Street;
- prior to development the site, which was on the slope of a ridge, is likely to have been filled and levelled to accommodate the new development. Geo-technical

- Testing confirms this to be the case with the fill being building waste brought from elsewhere to this site;
- the site is unlikely to contain archaeological evidence of occupation or development except this material.



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 material contained in this site, largely fill deposited during the last years of the nineteenth century to accommodate a residential development and use of the site, is assessed to have no cultural significance as a scientific resource. Examination of the material will reveal no more information than is now available from archival sources or other physical evidence. There is unlikely to be any evidence of any out-buildings in the back yard of this property.

It is highly unlikely that the underfloor deposits of the house will have any value as an archive of occupation; the construction techniques of the period preclude the accumulation of material of this nature.

The site is assessed to have minimal significance as a cultural resource.

SECTION 6.0

MANAGEMENT

6.1 The Proposal

It is proposed to construct a five storey building on this site. It will be supported by concrete slabs which will not require major excavation but sufficient to disturb the upper profile in which would reside any substantial traces of occupation.

6.2 Management of the Archaeological Resource

This analysis has identified that the proposed development is unlikely to disturb 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

1. Evidence derived from excavation of tidal zones Paddys Market. Godden Mackay and Wendy Thorp, *Market City Development Paddys Market Archaeological Excavation Volume*, 35.
2. Doug Benson and Jocelyn Howell, *Taken for Granted The Bushland of Sydney and Its Suburbs*, 42.

Section 3.2

1. M. Matthews, *Pyrmont and Ultimo A History*, 11.
2. 13.

Section 3.3

1. NSW Water Sewerage and Drainage Board, *Trigonometrical Survey of Sydney 1865 Sheet*.
2. NSW Department of Lands, *Metropolitan Detail Series Sydney Sheet K3, 1888*.
3. Sydney City Council, *Rate Assessment Book 1897*, Denison Ward.
4. *Ibid.*, 1901.

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Private Publication. 1982.

7.2.2 Guides and Directories

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City and Suburban Directory 1858-1932

7.2.3 Land, Property and Council Records

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7.2.4 Maps and Plans

Plan of Pyrmont Estate as Divided into Building Allotments for Sale by Auction by Mr Smart 1839

ML M2 811.173/1839/1

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