

## Area 15 Town of Waterview Conservation Area

### Landform

The land in this conservation area is located around a small creek (known as Curtis Waterhole) that enters Waterview Bay (now Morts Bay) at its most western point. The area is generally sheltered and includes flat low-lying land near the bay (where Morts Dock was built) rising south to higher land along Darling Street and west to the prominent knoll of Dock Road and Bates Street.

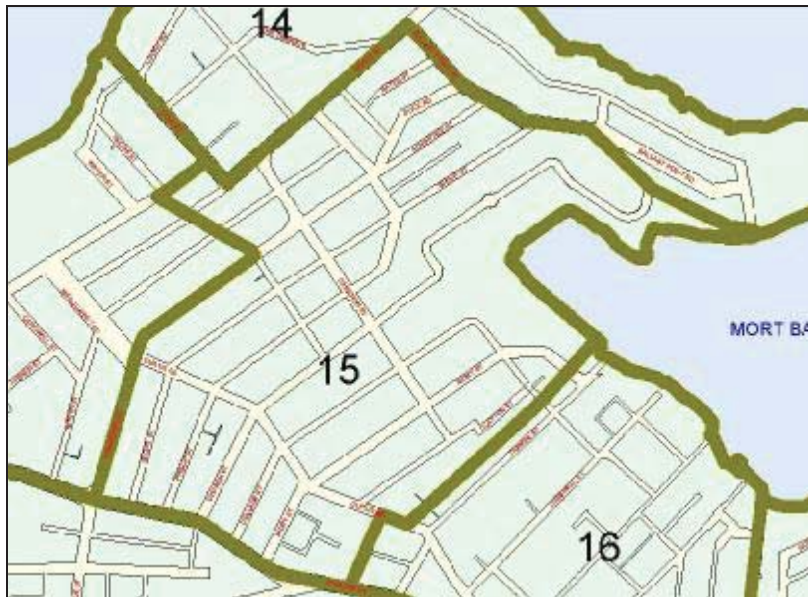


Figure 15.1 Town of Waterview Conservation Area Map.

### History

The area that was later developed by Thomas Mort as the Town of Waterview included land originally purchased from Gilchrist's Balmain Estate in 1836 by Curtis and Lamb. In 1854 these two lots at the eastern end of the bay were purchased by Captain Rowntree and Thomas Holt for a slipway and dry dock. Thomas Mort was impressed with the sheltered bay and joined them in the enterprise.

Mort also accepted the transfer of most of the land around the dock area and commissioned Surveyor FH Reuss to lay out a township of 700 modest residential allotments. Initially Mort sought to provide rental accommodation near the dock to attract skilled labour and he indicated that a building society might be formed to assist purchasers, probably so that there would always be a pool of skilled workers living nearby. Allotments were 1/2 chain (33ft) wide with depths ranging from 84-109 feet, but subsequent resubdivision to allow two houses (terrace or semi) on one allotment occurred at the time of building and produced many smaller parcels. There were no back lanes for night soil disposal.

Small groups of similar houses suggest the area was constructed by small-scale building contractors, or by individual owner/builders.

Mort purchased more land adjoining the original township and after his death in 1877 his trustees continued the dense subdivision and development of this area in response to the growth of Morts Dock Industries and the building boom of the 1880s.

It took forty years from 1857 for the town to be fully occupied. Just over half the allotments had been sold by 1878, but by 1896 the streets created within Mort's Town – Mort, Church, Phillip, Short, College, Rowntree, Curtis, Spring and Cameron Streets – were filled with an assortment of houses, 796 in all, 396 of brick, 348 of weatherboard, 51 of stone and one of iron. Small groups of corner shops and pubs served the community.

By 1861 the dock was leasing facilities to other maritime activities, and it developed its own associated engineering industries. Morts Dock and Engineering Co grew rapidly to become the largest private employer in Australia in a variety of maritime and engineering industries. During the 1940s it built corvettes, frigates and a floating dock. Economic fluctuations affecting the dock also affected its workers. The dock, the Town of Waterview and its pubs were the site of the beginnings of the urban labour movement. The dock closed in 1958; the site was levelled and used as a container terminal. More recently, the land was developed for residential purposes by the Department of Housing.

#### Sources

Solling, M and Reynolds, P 1997, 'Leichhardt: on the margins of the city', *Leichhardt Historical Journal*, Vol. 22, Allen and Unwin.

Reynolds, P 1985, 'The first 22 lots – an overview: Suburbanisation in Balmain', *Leichhardt Historical Journal*, Vol. 14.

Further research by Max Solling.

#### Significant Characteristics

- Regular street pattern made up of wider streets (about 50ft wide) marking the boundaries of the township (Rowntree, Mort, Curtis and Cameron Streets) or giving access to the dock (Church Street) with narrower streets filling the remainder.
- Lack of back lanes.
- A very regular streetscape resulting from:
  - regular width allotments of 33ft (or half 33ft) giving rise to uniform densely developed streets of single or double -fronted houses/terraces;
  - use of limited range of building materials – either rendered brick or painted weatherboard;
  - face brick houses of post c1890 and the fifty-odd stone buildings are noticeable for their different building materials; and
  - remarkably intact collection of single and two-storey attached and detached dwellings, many of them weatherboard.

- Density of pubs.
- Corner stores and small groups of stores and pubs at some cross roads.

#### Statement of Significance or Why the Area is Important

- One of a number of conservation areas which collectively illustrate the nature of Sydney's early suburbs and Leichhardt's suburban growth particularly between 1871 and 1891, with pockets of infill up to the end of the 1930s (ie prior to World War II). This area, through the form and fabric of its houses, corner shops and pubs, its street layout and allotment shapes, demonstrates a remarkably intact area of early workers' housing from 1850s to 1890s with later infill development prior to World War II (ie pre-1939). It is significant for its surviving development prior to World War II.
- Demonstrates through the density of pubs (and former pubs) within the township area its close association with the growth of the urban labour movement. A number of these pubs are of national heritage significance for their historical and enduring social values as part of the history of unionism and of the Ships Painters and Dockers Union in particular.
- Demonstrates, through the nature of its housing, the important role played by Morts Dock as a magnet for workers and the location of their housing.
- Demonstrates, through its rendered and painted brickwork, the nature of construction in Sydney before the ready availability of hard pressed, face bricks.
- Demonstrates the work of Surveyor Reuss.
- Associated with prominent local entrepreneurs and land developers, some of whom were aldermen of Council.
- Demonstrates, with Bodalla Village on the New South Wales south coast, the role of Thomas Mort in providing 'appropriate' housing for his employees.

#### Management of Heritage Values

##### Generally

This is a conservation area. Little change can be expected other than modest additions and discrete alterations. Buildings which do not contribute to the heritage significance of the area may be replaced with sympathetically designed infill.

##### Retain

- All pubs, preferably as public houses, or in related activities (boarding houses etc) or as small-scale commercial uses.
- All pre-1939 buildings, especially timber buildings, and all their architectural details. Replacement of lost detail, based only on evidence, should be encouraged.
- Original finishes, particularly rendered brick houses.

- All remaining sandstone kerbs and gutter.

Avoid

- Diagonally placed chicanes, and other works that diminish the straight line of the original road layout.
- Alterations that change the shape (form) of the pubs – particularly the removal of verandahs or the creation of new verandahs for which there is no historical evidence.
- Alterations that change the shape of the building or original roof forms on the main part of the buildings.
- Removal of original detail. (Encourage restoration from evidence.)
- Additions of details not part of the original fabric of the building.
- Interruption to the almost continuous kerb and gutters.