

Area 12 The Valley (Rozelle and Balmain)

Landform

This conservation area comprises a large but tightly formed valley which falls south and east from the Darling Street ridge towards White Bay affording enclosed views to industrial workings of the port city in the bay.

It includes a number of subdivisions/part subdivisions around the highest land in the Leichhardt Municipality on either side of the Darling Street ridge and across Victoria Road. It includes land east of Wellington Street to White Bay. It also includes the civic buildings and the commercial zone of Rozelle on both sides of Victoria Road, the land east of the Darling Street ridge beyond the commercial zone, the civic and commercial buildings of Balmain retail centre, small groups of shops along Darling Street and the former retail area of Evans and Beattie Streets.

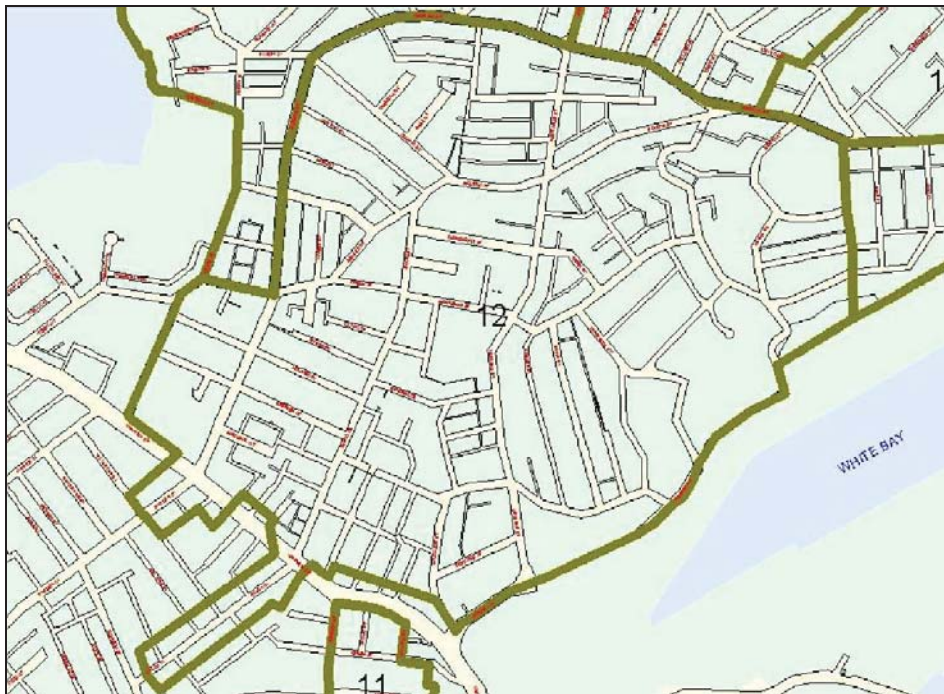


Figure 12.1 The Valley Conservation Area Map.

History

When sales of John Gilchrist's Balmain 550-acre grant were resumed in 1852, Surveyor Charles Langley subdivided the remaining acres into 46 (later 47) sections, using existing routes such as Darling Street, and other contour-hugging tracks, such as Beattie Street and Mullens Street to delineate the parcels. The sections were purchased over the next thirty years by wealthy investors, local speculators and builders.

The largest of the estates put together from Langley's subdivisions was the 19 acres of the Merton Estate purchased by piano importers Paling and Starling, druggists George and Frederick Elliott and estate agent Alfred Hancock. It occupied the land between Terry Street and Evans Street. It was subdivided by its owners into 197 allotments generally 30ft x 100ft with 50ft-wide grid

pattern of roads, and was auctioned by local agent and developer, Alfred Hancock from 1874.

A miscellaneous collection of service and consumer trades servicing these new dwellings appeared along Evans Street in the 1870s making it the main commercial thoroughfare along the upper reaches of the Balmain peninsula.

By the 1880s the growth of industry, including noxious industry, in White Bay and along Whites Creek, made the south and east-facing slopes of the Darling Street ridge unattractive for a more affluent residential market. Those who could find employment in these industries would seek housing within walking distance, as public transport – then the horse drawn bus or later the steam tram – were too expensive. Canny speculators, such as Hancock (later Mayor of Balmain) sold to small builders who constructed very dense workers' housing for rentees or purchasers on small budgets. By 1891 a large part of this area had been built upon.

The arrival of the government-owned steam tram at the junction of Darling Street and Victoria Road in 1892, provided relatively more affluent residents along its route with transport to the city, and a greater choice of employment away from places within immediate walking distance from home. The advent of the tramway probably explains the major impetus to growth in the area particularly to the west of Evans Street, so that in the 1890s much of Terry, Wellington, Merton and Nelson Streets were built upon with one-storey brick semis, pairs or small groups of terraces (two to an allotment) and double-fronted single-storey houses (one to an allotment). Most of these buildings were constructed by local builders such as Robert Gordon, William Whitehorn and James Gibson, whose small-scale operations are indicated by the small groups of similar houses or terraces.

From the 1850s, Booth's Saw Mill on White Bay provided a cheap source of timber and weatherboards, promoting weatherboard houses as the norm for workers' housing throughout Balmain until brick terrace housing became prevalent in the late nineteenth century.

The extension of the steam tram service along Darling Street by 1900 encouraged shopkeepers to relocate there to catch the passing trade, and Evans Street was superseded as a commercial centre.

The Metropolitan Detail Survey Sydney Water Archiveⁱ suggests that almost all the land east of Wellington Street was built upon by 1905.

By 1907 the precinct was generally known as Rozelle.

Sources

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

Further information provided by Max Solling.

Significant Characteristics

- Contour hugging main roads – Evans, Beattie and Reynolds.

- Outline of subdivisions, size and aspect of allotments, determined by route of main roads.
- Wider residential roads off Darling Street ridge, with grid subdivision pattern, but
- Generally narrow roads between main access roads.
- Narrow, often shallow allotments.
- Back lanes are rare.
- Dense urban environment.
- Continuous lines of buildings create sharply defined lineal spaces.
- Buildings stepped up and down hill, following the topography.
- Houses sited close to road near Darling Street ridge; and sited onto the road alignment nearer to White Bay.
- Small front gardens near Darling Street; there are fewer gardens towards White Bay.
- Tree planting is minimal except where wider main access roads provide enough room – Langley, Roseberry, Llewelyn and Reynolds Street.
- Large stands of trees in parks and open spaces.
- Small range of housing types: single-fronted, single-storey timber terraces, two-storey terraces, free-standing timber or stone single-storey cottages.
- Some larger villas on high land around Smith Street, and more generous terraces in similar locations.
- Scale predominantly limited to one or two storeys.
- Pubs with verandahs act as punctuation marks in the streetscape.
- Corner stores.
- Commercial premises (and former commercial premises) with attached dwellings along Evans and Darling Streets.
- Small industrial/warehouse buildings occur throughout the area.
- Variety of materials – large number of timber, plastered brick, some later (1890s+) face brick and a few stone buildings.
- Roof materials vary – iron is common, terracotta tiles, some slate.
- Stone retaining walls.
- Remnants of iron palisade fences define some street frontages.
- Suspended awnings to commercial facades along Darling and Evans Streets.
- Sandstone kerbs and gutters.

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 is important for illustrating development for workers' and artisan housing particularly from 1871-1891 which forms the major element of its identity. It is significant for its surviving development from that period and the later infill development up to World War II (ie pre-1939).
- Retains evidence of all its layers of growth within that period from the late-1870s.
- Through its important collection of weatherboard buildings, including the now rare timber terraces, it continues to demonstrate the nature of this important/major construction material in the fabric of early Sydney suburbs, and the proximity of Booth's saw mill and timber yards in White Bay.
- Through the mixture of shops, pubs and industrial buildings it demonstrates the nature of a Victorian suburb, and the close physical relationship between industry and housing in nineteenth century cities before the advent of the urban reform movement and the separation of land uses.
- Demonstrates through the irregular pattern of its subdivision the small-scale nature of the spec builders responsible for the construction of the suburb.
- Demonstrates the nature of some private subdivisions before the introduction of the Width of Streets and Lanes Act of 1881 required roads to be at least one chain wide.

Maintenance 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

- Existing width and alignment of streets: avoid chicanes which cut diagonally across the carriageway.
- Existing back lanes.
- All buildings pre-1939 and particularly all timber buildings
- All original plaster finishes to external walls - reconstruct where necessary.
- All original unplastered face brick walls.
- All original external architectural detail, decorative tiles, plaster mouldings, chimneys, roof ridges and finials, commercial signs etc.

Encourage replacement of lost elements, but only where evidence is available.

- All remaining sandstone kerbs and gutters.
- All corner stores, corner pubs and industrial buildings within the residential areas, and encourage their restoration. Consider small-scale commercial or professional uses for these buildings, if original uses no longer operate, as a reference to their original uses.
- Street and park planting; reinstate where necessary

Avoid

- Amalgamation that might lead to a change in the densely developed streetscape.
- Demolition of any pre-1939 building, particularly those pre-1910.
- Demolition of any remaining timber building.
- Additional storeys above the existing form of the building.
- Posted-verandahs over footpaths to commercial premises where no evidence can be provided to support their reconstruction. Encourage restoration of verandahs where evidence exists.
- Removal of plaster to external walls, where part of the original construction. Removal of original architectural details.
- Additional architectural detail for which there is no evidence.
- Inappropriate fences such as high brick walls, new iron palisades on high brick bases.
- Interruption to the almost continuous kerb and gutter line.

Endnotes

¹ Solling & Reynolds, p 81.
