

## Area 9

## Brennan's Estate Conservation Area

This area comprises all of JR Brennan's estate, excepting the southwestern allotments recently redeveloped from industrial purposes to multi-unit residential uses. It also includes on its northern boundary, the allotments facing O'Neill Street, created from the last subdivision of the Maida Estate in 1915.

### Landform

This conservation area is sited on the southeast slopes of the main Lilyfield Road/Darling Street ridge. It overlooks Whites Creek and across to Annandale. From the eastern end there are extensive views northeast across Rozelle Bay towards Anzac Bridge and the industrial structures on Glebe Island. Streets run parallel across the slope of the land, following the line of the estate's boundaries.

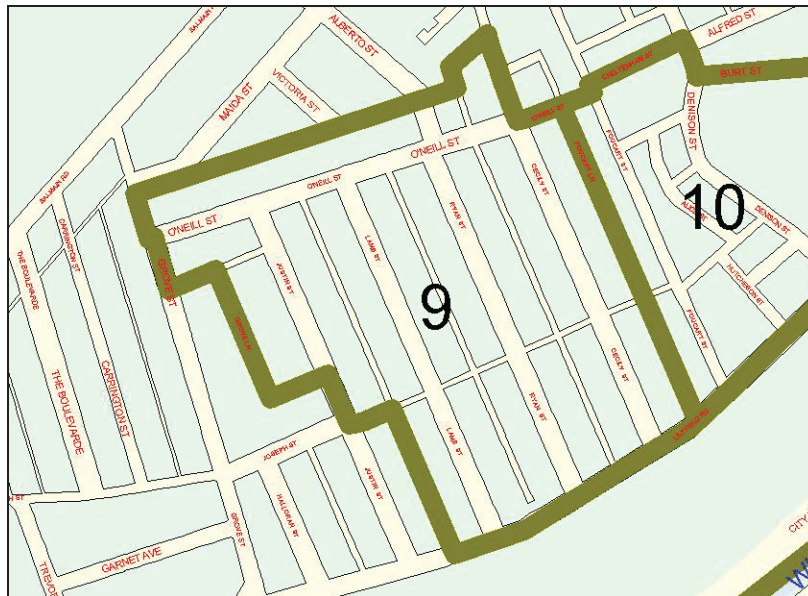


Figure 9.1 Brennan's Estate Conservation Area Map.

### History

The rapid growth of Sydney's population and the consolidation of wealth and investment following the gold rush led to a westward expansion of the city and its industries. Numerous small water dependent industries found sites among earlier maritime activities on the edges of the harbour, while other manufacturing sought the flatter land and creek beds of the colonial estates which had once encircled the city. For the majority of people transport was by foot, so where industry went workers housing soon followed.

This area comprises workers' housing built to serve the industries along Whites Creek and Rozelle Bay. It covers much of John Ryan Brennan's subdivision of the land he inherited after his father's death in 1874, from his bankrupt estate. Its northeastern boundary (Foucart Lane) abuts the southwestern boundary of Balmain's 550-acre grant of 1800. Brennan's subdivision provided wide roads aligned north/south and 875 very small regular allotments (18-20ft-

wide), perhaps indicating a determination to gain as much from the land as possible, and to avoid the financial failure of his father. Roads were extended from adjoining estates: Joseph Street from the Orange Grove Estate to the west was quickly narrowed to provide two additional allotments at each street frontage. In 1890 64 per cent of the dwellings then constructed were of weatherboard, free standing and single-storey. There were two small groups of shops – on the corners of Joseph and Ryan Streets, and on the highest part of the land in Lamb Street.

The 1890s Depression halted industrial growth and its associated residential development, and some parcels of land, generally furthest from the major employment centres on the mouth of Whites Creek and in Rozelle Bay, were not taken up until the 1920s – some with housing, others with small industry. Some of those early twentieth century industrial buildings remain, now converted to residential purposes. Others outside this conservation area have been demolished and the land redeveloped for housing.

Most of the conservation area was developed in the 1880s/1890s, with the more remote sections taken up in the 1920s. The estate appears to have been fully developed by 1940.

#### Sources

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

#### Significant Characteristics

- Wide streets.
- Back lanes.
- Buildings step up and down the slopes, following the landform.
- Regular shaped allotments.
- Regular modules of development – mostly one single-fronted house on one allotment. Some double-fronted houses cover two adjoining allotments.
- Single-storey scale predominates.
- Frequent groupings of two to five houses – as terraces, or pairs of semis or as single-fronted detached dwellings.
- Uniformity of building style generally, of 1880s and early 1900s.
- Small pockets of 1920s and 1930s free-standing cottages.
- Consistent setbacks.
- Lack of decoration generally – these are workers houses.
- Occasional decorative detail suggests some pretension to style – painted tiles to front of house, timber bargeboard detail, tile paths.
- Weatherboard is the dominant building material: in 1890 64 per cent of houses were of weatherboard. Note early timber church, O'Neill Street.

- Brick is second most important building material, used either plastered, where bricks were of lesser quality, or as face brick.
- A number of fibro clad buildings.
- Roofs largely of terracotta tile or iron, occasional slate.
- Many sandstone kerbs and gutters; most uninterrupted by vehicular access.
- Street tree planting of *melaleuca quinquinerva* and of *callistomen* from the 1970s.

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

- One of a number of conservation areas that 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 was intensely developed 1880s-1890s, and this forms the major element of its identity. It is significant for its surviving development from this period and the pockets of later infill development prior to World War II (ie up to 1939).
- Through its pattern of subdivision and the scale, shape, siting and materials of its buildings it provides a very intact example of a late nineteenth, early twentieth century suburb built for working men and tradesmen.
- The density and regularity of its development across the landform, the views so created out of the area, together with the small-scale detail of its modest architectural decoration result in a place of aesthetic value.
- It demonstrates through its remaining factories and the town houses that have replaced others, the mixed industrial/residential/retail nature of suburban development of that period, before the rise of cheap public transport, and before the urban reform movement sought to separate land uses into zones.
- Through its small scale regular housing and the narrowed width of Joseph Street, it demonstrates a continuing theme in residential development throughout suburban Australia – the owner's determination to gain as much as possible from his land.
- The concentration of free-standing houses in an area of narrow allotments demonstrates possibly both early fire regulations and the social status attached to a free-standing house.
- Demonstrates the role of timber as a building material in nineteenth century Sydney especially for the most modest end of the housing market, and the proximity of the timber yards in Whites Bay.
- Demonstrates, through its groupings of three to five identical houses, the work of small-scale building contractors who constructed the suburb.
- Illustrates through the existence of back lanes the reliance on the night soil cart before the reticulation of sewerage systems throughout suburban Sydney.

## 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 pre-1939 buildings especially timber and fibro-clad buildings except those which are so compromised that they can no longer demonstrate their history.
- All original face brick buildings, unplastered and unpainted.
- All original plastered and painted finishes to external walls.
- The form of the original buildings and in particular, the roof form over the main part of the building.
- Back lanes.
- All original architectural details.
- Sandstone kerbs and gutters, uninterrupted by vehicular access.

### Avoid

- Amalgamation of existing lots to create larger building sites.
- Demolition of any timber or fibro-clad building.
- Demolition of any pre-1939 building except as outlined above.
- Skinning or recladding of original external walls except with the same material but only where necessary for safety of structure.
- Two-storey additions. (This is an area of modest workers housing.)
- New two-storey buildings.
- High front fences which hide the front garden from public view.
- Interruption to the almost continuous kerb and gutter line.

### Notes

Further work could include investigation of whether low two-storey pavilion additions could be added to the rear of these houses, without an adverse impact on the original building and its setting, and on the streetscape.