

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION – 19–41 RESERVOIR STREET, SURRY HILLS

Archaeological work is being undertaken at 19–41 Reservoir Street, Surry Hills because it was previously used as part of a brickfield in the 1830s and 1840s. It was developed for residential housing by the 1870s. From the early 1900s a number of Chinese immigrants came to live in the houses. The houses were demolished in the 1920s and 1950s for commercial buildings.

The focus of the work by Casey & Lowe and a team of archaeologists and volunteers is to excavate and record the remains of the 19th-century occupation. This work is funded by the NSW Teachers Federation and NSW Teachers Federation Health Limited as part of the redevelopment of the site. The NSW Heritage Council has given approval for this work to be undertaken.

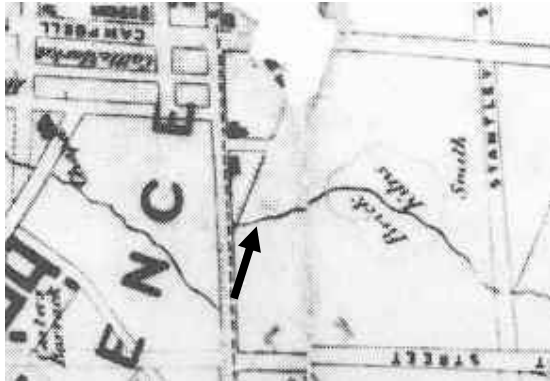


Fig 1: 1843 plan noting 'brick kilns' west of the study area. Arrow indicates the approximate position of the archaeological site.

Aboriginal Occupation

The site, prior to colonial settlement, was on low ground adjacent to a creek which ran through what is now Reservoir Street. This creek linked into another creek which went along Hay Street and emptied into the eastern foreshore of Darling Harbour, initially called Long Cove then Cockle Bay by the new settlers. The original inhabitants of the southern

shore of Port Jackson from South Head to Petersham were the Cadigal. In 1789 approximately 50 percent of the Aboriginal population in and around Sydney Cove was killed by an epidemic, thought by some to be smallpox. This caused dislocation and eventually regrouping of the remnant bands of Aborigines. The Aboriginal occupants of the eastern shore of Darling Harbour would have disappeared soon after settlement because of its proximity to the Brickfields and George Street. No evidence of Aboriginal occupation is expected to be found in this area because of the extensive disturbance caused by brickmaking activities in the 1830s and 1840s.

Land ownership

The archaeological site is part of 105 acres granted to Joseph Foveaux on the 2nd December, 1793, by Major Francis Grose. Foveaux was the first landowner in this area which he called Surrey Hills Farm (sic). In 1800 Foveaux sold this property to John Palmer, a neighbouring landowner. By this time Palmer owned over 300 acres in Surry Hills and Woolloomooloo. Although Palmer died one of the richest men in the colony he suffered financial difficulties in this period and in 1814 was forced by the Provost Marshall to sell his Surry Hills property. Samuel Foster acquired ownership of part of Foveaux's grant at this time. Foster died in 1819.

Around 1843 his heirs, Mary Smith (née Foster) and John Samuel Smith (her son), subdivided what was now called the Fosterville Estate. The sale of the estate in the 1840s, a time of economic depression, was not successful. The study area is part of Section 11 and includes lots 14 and 15. The study area is within land given to John Samuel Smith as part of the partition of the estate in June 1865.

By 1807 Surveyor Meehan's plan suggests that there were houses in the vicinity of the study area but the details of these early maps are not accurate. In 1814 another of Meehan's plan indicated that the 'brickfields' were immediately west of the line of Foster Street and the study area. A plan from 1843

shows the alignment of Foster Street and nearby 'Brick Kilns' (Fig. 1). Christopher Keating, in his history of *Surry Hills* mentions that there were 'brick kilns on Samuel Foster's lots north of Albion Street' and implies an 1820s date.

The Brickfields

This site was identified as part of or adjacent to the brickfields by 1814. The original part of the brickfields centred on the blocks between Campbell, Elizabeth, Goulburn and George Streets. The location of houses in the vicinity of the study area as early as 1807 suggests that its occupants were undertaking some type of local work, either grazing on Palmer's land or possibly brickmaking. Once the clay resources were used up in the original brickfield area brickmaking activities spread out towards Darling Harbour and Surry Hills.

During the early colonial period the site was somewhat outside the town of Sydney. A description of the nearby brickfields in 1788 noted that:

At somewhat less than a league from the camp (Sydney Cove) there is plenty of good clay, and capital brick-kilns are here established and this, tho' a scanty village, is, I assure you, a much frequented and pleasant walk.¹

Another record on the same day in July 1788 remarked that:

His excellency the Governor has set on foot a brick manufactory, which succeeds to his wishes, having already burnt several thousands for his own house.²

Another mention of the brickfield in August 1799 discusses a case of murder where a body was dumped in a clay pit but a line of blood from the pit led back to the (nearby) house.

¹ *Hist. Records NSW Series 1, Volume 2:691.*

² *Hist. Records NSW Series 1, Volume 2:745.*

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The site therefore is part of the nineteenth-century brickmaking area of Sydney. While we know from the 1843 plan that kilns were located nearby the extent of activities in the study area was only conjectural when we did our first archaeological excavation in nearby Albion Street in 1996. It was possible that because of its locality the study area may contain evidence of clay pits, bricks kilns and associated brickfield activities.

Archaeological work on two nearby sites revealed remains of this brickfield. These sites included remains of a brick clamp kiln, clay working areas, impressions of horses hooves and cart tracks as well as some early lead-glazed pottery possibly manufactured nearby.

Residential Housing – Urban Expansion

Terrace housing was built within the site by the early 1870s. William Wright built nos 19–33 which were all leased out to a range of tenants. They were two storey brick houses with 4 to 6 rooms. William Wright the owner of the houses lived at no. 29 in the 1870s. The residents in 1880s were William Walker, accountant; Thomson Helms, George Fletcher, butcher; August Sauerbier, professor of music; Peter Coyle, plasterer; Henry Solomon; Mrs Sarah, ladies nurse; and Julius Moosong, jeweller.

Terrace houses at nos 35 to 41 were also built between 1868 and 1871. Three houses were also built off Wrights Lane. All were two-storey brick houses those on Reservoir Street were larger with 5 or 6 rooms and those on Wrights Lane had 3 or 4 rooms. These were smaller blocks than those at 19–33.

By the early 20th century members of the overseas Chinese community had moved into a number of the houses within the site. No. 41 had been a corner shop for some time and during 1910s to 1930s was occupied by Wah Mee, Sue Fong, George Yuen and Gertrude Poy. Nos 35, 37 and 39 had a mixture of

changing Chinese and European tenants. G. W. Sing and Gee Ick lived at no. 33 in the early 20th century and between the 1920s and 1930s it was a laundry with various operators including Charley Loquet, Sam Sun, Din Yet and I. Nakn. All but a few of the house, within the site had Chinese residents. Evidence of Chinese occupation was found in the excavation underneath Silknet House where there had once been a furniture factory.

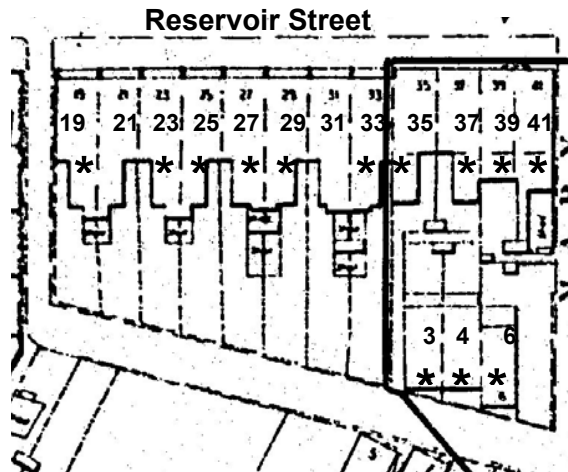


Fig 2: 1888 Water Board plan with houses nos 19 to 41 from left to right. Wrights Lane is at the rear. Houses with Chinese occupants are marked with an asterisk.

The terrace houses at nos 19–33 were demolished in the 1950s, nos 35 and 37 Reservoir Street and 3 Wrights Lane were demolished c. 1922 for the construction of a Turkish bath house, nos 37 and 39 Reservoir and 4 and 6 Wrights Lane were demolished by 1930.

Research Questions

Archaeologists undertake archaeological excavations because the archaeological remains contain information that is considered to be significant as it adds to knowledge and contains types of information not found in written sources. Through using theories and approaches such as landscape studies, material culture, consumerism, gender and ethnicity we can interpret the archaeological remains and give them meaning. In this way we can add to and change our understanding of the past. The main research themes we hope the archaeological evidence will allow us to explore are:

Early nineteenth-century brickfield remains

- Nature and extent of clearing for brick manufacturing.
- Were only bricks made?
- Evidence for brick manufacturing techniques.
- Evidence for early residential occupation associated with the brickfields.

Post-brickfield residential occupation

- Processes of urbanisation and how it interacts with consumerism.
- Nature of Chinese occupation and issues associated with ethnicity, both Chinese and European.
- Evidence for the construction of local neighbourhoods.
- Interpretation of the archaeological evidence through theories of gender, socio-economic status and class structure and patterns of material consumption.
- Role material cultural plays in the construction of social and cultural identities.

References

Casey & Lowe

- *Archaeological Assessment 35–41 Reservoir Street, Surry Hills*
- *Archaeological Assessment 242 Elizabeth and 19–33 Reservoir Streets, Surry Hills.*