

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

Parramatta Justice Precinct, Former Parramatta Hospital Site, George & Marsden Streets, Parramatta

Archaeological work is being undertaken on the former Parramatta Hospital site, near the corner of George & Marsden Streets, Parramatta because it was previously occupied by the colonial British from the 1790s. The focus of the work by Casey & Lowe and a team of archaeologists and volunteers is to excavate and record the remains of the 216-years of occupation. In addition a team of archaeologists led by Dr Laila Haglund, in association with the three local representative Aboriginal groups, will be undertaking archaeological work to identify archaeological remains associated with Aboriginal use of this site. The three Aboriginal representative groups are the Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council, Darug Tribal Aboriginal Corporation and Darug Custodians Aboriginal Corporation.

The work is part of the redevelopment of the site for the new Parramatta Justice Precinct and is managed by the NSW Dept of Commerce on behalf of the Attorney-General's Department and Western Sydney Area Health Service. The NSW Heritage Council has given approval for this work to be undertaken on a site considered to contain remains of State Heritage Significance. As part of this project the anticipated extensive remains of three early convict hospitals (c1789-1840s) will be retained within the proposed redevelopment. There is a rare opportunity for extensive heritage conservation of archaeological remains.

Aboriginal History

The Darug Aboriginal people lived at Parramatta before the British came in 1788. The Burramatta, the local group, spoke the Darug language. Parramatta is part of their traditional hunting and fishing grounds. Ducks, mullet, crayfish, shellfish and turtles lived in the freshwater streams feeding into Parramatta River. Fish, shellfish, molluscs and eels were found in the saltwater parts of the river. Shellfish remains found in Aboriginal middens include: rock oysters, cockles, mud whelks, mud oysters, winkles and horn shells. Aboriginal people used canoes made from the bark of the bangalay (*E bitryoides*) or the stringybark tree (*E agglomerates*). The men used spears and the women shell hooks to catch food from the river.

Early accounts by white settlers remarked on the dexterity with which the men of the inland tribes climbed trees to

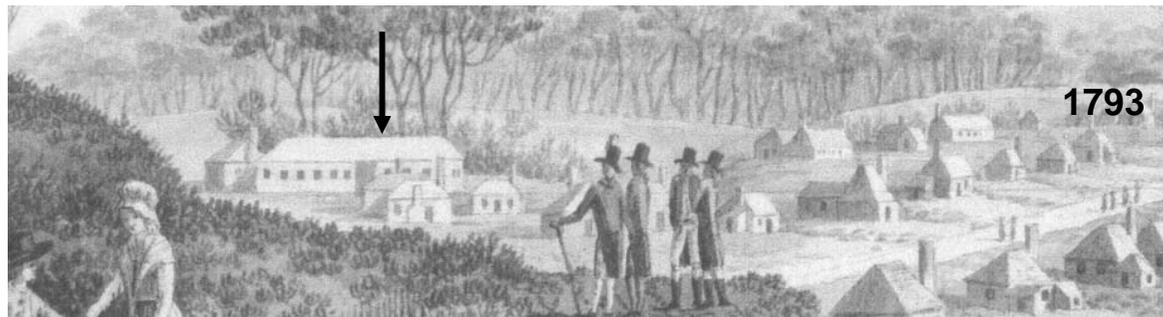
obtain possums (usually with assistance of smoke) involving cutting notches for toeholds 'with a stone hatchet'. It has been argued that possums and other tree dwelling animals were the staple food of the woodland tribes and edge-ground hatchets were the dominant subsistence item in the toolkit for the inland tribes. A number of these were recently found at the eastern end of George Street.

As this site is so near to Parramatta River it would have been an important area for camping and fishing for 10,000 or more years. Aboriginal presence in Parramatta was documented by the British who set out from Sydney Cove to explore the Parramatta River and locate fertile land to grow the crops needed to sustain the new arrivals.

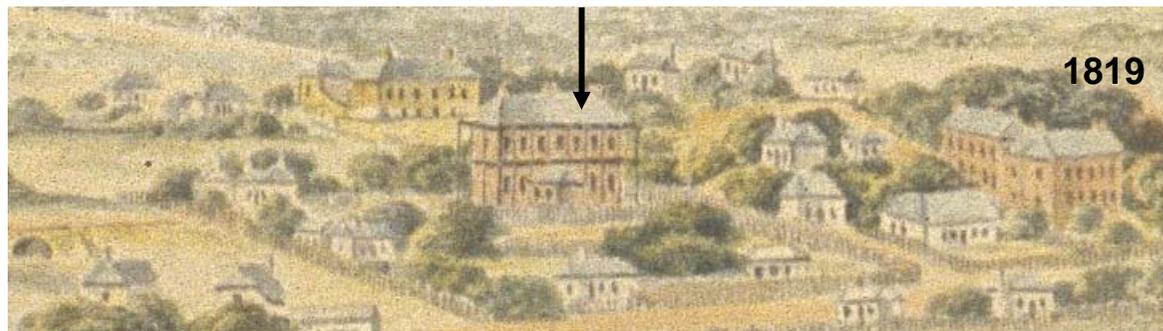
Parramatta's Beginnings

Governor Phillip sent out exploring parties to survey Sydney Harbour and the river at the head of the harbour shortly after landing at Sydney Cove. On Sunday 2 November 1788 Governor Phillip and others, including marines, established a military redoubt at Rose Hill. Convicts were sent to Rose Hill to commence farming as the land was more fertile than at Sydney or Farm Cove.

With the success of farming at Rose Hill, Phillip decided to expand the settlement. In 1790 Governor Phillip and Surveyor Augustus Alt laid out a town plan with High Street (George Street) running between the planned site of Government House and the Landing Place a mile distant to the east along George Street.



The 2nd convict hospital (arrowed) in 1793 with Spanish sailors in the foreground. Brambila.



The 3rd convict hospital (arrowed) in 1819. Joseph Lycett painting, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW

As set out, George Street was 205 feet (63 m) wide and a mile (1.6 km) long. On either side of the street huts were to be erected, each capable of containing 10 persons, and at a distance of 60 feet (18.5 m) from each other, with a garden area allotted at the rear of each hut. The huts were to be built of wattle and daub and the roof thatched and were to be 12 by 24 feet (4 by 8 m). The convicts built the new street and the huts from July 1790. By September 1790 bricks were being fired for a barracks and store house, a wharf was built at the eastern end of George Street and 27 huts were being built along High Street (George Street).

Phillip renamed the township Parramatta by November 1791. Parramatta means lots of eels and was the name given by the traditional owners. Parramatta township referred to the area from the foot of Rose Hill and the land for one mile along the creek (Parramatta River). In a painting by Brambila (1793), an artist on a Spanish expedition, the main street has rows of modest timber huts regularly spaced along the street leading towards Government House (Fig. 2.1). For a period Parramatta became the main township with Sydney being less important.

The Convict Hospital

The first convict hospital in Parramatta, and the third hospital in the colony, was established by 1790. Watkin Tench observed in November 1790,

a most wretched hospital, totally destitute of every convenience. Luckily for the gentleman [Thomas Arndell] who superintends this hospital, and still more luckily for those who are doomed in case of sickness to enter it, the air of Rose Hill has hitherto been generally healthy.

In December 1791 Tench further reported:

a new hospital has been talked of for the last two years, but it has not yet begun; two long sheds, built in the form of a tent, and thatched, are however finished, and capable of holding two hundred patients; the sick list of to-day contains three hundred and eighty-two names.

The Second Hospital operated from c. 1792 until c. 1818. David Collins describes the foundations of the hospital laid

in April 1792, during Governor Phillip's administration of the colony. By December 1792 he observed:

At Parramatta a brick hospital, consisting of two wards, were finished this month [December]; and the sick were immediately removed into it. The spot chosen for this building was at some distance from the principal street of the town, and convenient to the water; and, to prevent any improper communication with the other convicts, a space was to be inclosed and paled in round the hospital, in which the sick would have every necessary benefit from air and exercise.

Rev. Samuel Marsden, described the 2nd Hospital in 1818, this hospital is open day and night for every infamous character to enter; there are no locks or bolts to any of the doors. There is not so much as a room to lay a dead man or woman in until they can be removed to the grave; but the dead lie in the room with the living patients.

In 1817 Lieutenant Watts, Macquarie's aide-de-camp, who enjoyed the confidence of Mrs Macquarie, was ordered to draw up plans for a new hospital. He had already produced plans and supervised work for the Military Hospital on Observatory Hill, Government House at Parramatta, as well as the towers of St Johns Church, Parramatta. He considered that the Second Hospital was 'entirely decayed and Unfit to be Inhabited by the Sick'. Plans for a new hospital were approved on the 16 April 1817 and the hospital was under construction by December 1817.

According to Governor Macquarie the new hospital was built of brick, two Stories high, with an upper and lower Verandah all round, with all necessary Out offices for the residence and occupation of 100 Patients, with Ground for a Garden and for the Patients, to take Air and exercise in, the whole of the premises being enclosed with a High Strong Stockade.

Reference

Casey & Lowe Pty Ltd *Excavation Permit Application, Parramatta Hospital Site, Marsden Street, Parramatta* (2005)



The Convict Hospital from the river c1870.

Research Questions

The archaeological evidence recorded from the site is expected to help us answer research questions which further our knowledge and understanding of the history of Parramatta. Areas of research include:

- The Parramatta Convict Hospitals and Health Care for Convicts. How was the health of early convicts managed.
- Convict and Free Life in Colonial Parramatta, what do their artefacts tell us about the different lives these two groups lived.
- The Landscape of Colonial Parramatta and how it changed following British arrival and became a landscape of control for management of the convicts.

Site Inspection

Public Open Days will be organised so the public can visit the site. These will be advertised in the local papers.

Volunteers

If you would like to volunteer ring Mary 0419 683 152.