

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The archaeological excavation of the Conservatorium site for the redevelopment of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and the Conservatorium High School commenced on 11 May 1998 and minor aspects of this work were completed in 2001 as well as the interpretation of the archaeological remains and the Stables building. The focus of the archaeological program was the evidence associated with the historic occupation of the site since c. 1800 up to the early twentieth century.

The site

The Conservatorium site is the location of the extant Government Stables built between 1817 and 1821. The Stables were converted in 1913 to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music which still occupies the site today. It was sited in the Governor's Domain and is adjacent to the Sydney Botanic Gardens who are responsible for maintaining the Conservatorium grounds.

The redevelopment

The redevelopment of this building and its grounds required the bulk excavation of all areas adjacent to the building. This was to allow for the placement of the new Conservatorium facilities underground so as not to impact on significant visual aspects of the building. Aspects of the works required the exposure of earlier fabric inside the building.

The archaeological results

The archaeological remains found at the Conservatorium site belong to seven phases of occupation and alteration of the site.

Phase 1 (pre-1788 – c. 1800), the earliest phase, contains the evidence found for the original landscape. An important focus of this phase was the results of the palynological (pollen) and soil research. As the excavation did not deal with the excavation of *in situ* Aboriginal artefacts or deposits there is no detailed analysis of the Aboriginal occupation of the site. The main results of the pollen analysis 'indicate the Conservatorium site near the apex of the ridge was located within eucalypt Low Open Forest. The forest understorey was dominated by shrubs rather than the grasses and ferns found in otherwise similar dry sclerophyll forests and woodlands on fertile/frequently burnt sites around Sydney Harbour, e.g. along the Lane Cove River'.¹ There was a general 'paucity' of grass pollens while there was an abundance of shrub pollens.

The evidence for the Aboriginal practice of using fires to maintain grazing areas is also discussed. While the nature of the pollen evidence is equivocal it does tend to support the 'importance of frequent fires and/or grazing in maintaining grasslands in the Sydney district' prior to European occupation.

Phase 2 (c. 1800 - c. 1815) covers the initial European use of the area for a bakehouse and windmill. This involves the discussion of the results from the excavation of the bakehouse and the various archaeological remains, possibly including the cistern.

The bakehouse was built in association with a small timber windmill which was located to the south. No remains of the windmill were found within the study area. Only part of the bakehouse remains survived the 1913 construction of Verbrugghen Hall within the

¹ Macphail Vol 5: Chapter 22.

quadrangle of the Government Stables. The remains consisted of the western part of an L-shaped building and artefacts from a disturbed rubbish dump. These artefacts included lead-glazed earthenware, cream ware and Chinese porcelain. The windmill and bakehouse were mostly associated with John Palmer, the Commissary who ran the government storehouse for many years. The bakehouse was demolished c. 1813 and the mill c. 1815 at the order of Governor Macquarie.

Phase 3 relates to the construction of the Stables. This is divided into two main sub phases, 3.1 and 3.2. Phase 3.1 relates to the alteration of the landform for the construction of the Stables while Phase 3.2 is the construction of the Stables.

Phase 3.1 (c. 1817) presents the evidence of extensive land clearing on southern side in the form to two stone quarries, and ‘dips’ created by the removal of shrubby undergrowth. Inside the building alluvial deposits formed that are thought to be the result of the clearing activities on the southern side. A quarry punch, probably used by convict workers, was found in Quarry 1 (Drawing 6.1).

Phase 3.2 (1817-1821) saw the construction of the Government Stables and the designed landscape and road and drainage system. This phase was the main focus of the archaeological work in 1998. These extensive remains included:

- the slope built above the quarries to form barriers to the southern side of the Stables.
- the southern Forecourt and road which was the entrance to the Stables quadrangle.
- remains of two roads, which linked the Stables to First Government House and to Mrs Macquarie’s Road in the Botanic gardens.
- a storm-water system that operated in the landscape to drain the slope, roads and the Stables building. This system included dish drains and a range of underground drains.
- fabric details associated with the construction of the Stables including early floors, the internal drainage system and the configuration of some original rooms.

Phase 4 (c. 1840-1845) presents the evidence for the redesign of the landscape following the relocation of Government House to the north of the Stables. The main evidence for this phase on the southern side included the burial of the eastern extension of Road 2, and the construction of a replacement drainage system (elliptical drain) underneath the Forecourt. In the western area a stone wall was built to enclose a plantation of trees to limit views of the Stables. This allowed for the excavation of numerous garden beds behind the wall and the disposal of household rubbish into these garden beds.

Phase 5 (c. 1845-1913) contains much of the evidence associated with the occupation of the Stables and deposits associated with the occupation of Government House. These include the extensive rubbish dump, context #850, found in the eastern area from which were recovered 1069 items. The artefacts from this dump were mostly associated with the occupants of Government House. These remains included champagne bottles, fine drinking glasses, large quantities of utilitarian ceramics, stout bottles, a range of clerical items, condiment and toiletries. The western garden beds continued in use in this phase. Other evidence includes a range of buttons ‘lost along the way’ which were found in the road gravels, the artefacts from the backfill of the cistern in the 1860s, as well as other rubbish dumps. This section involves a detailed analysis of the various contexts and their artefacts which informs us about the range

of activities undertaken at the site and provides insights into the lifestyle of the Governor, his family and their staff and servants.

The latter stages of this phase saw the alteration of the original southern slope (Slope 1) by the changing of the levels in this area. The southwestern area was reformed - garden beds and drains were buried, Road 3 was remade and a large sandstone drain was built - most probably in the 1860s.

Phases 6 and 7 presents the evidence for the alteration of the landscape for the Conservatorium of Music during the early twentieth century. These two phases saw the rebuilding of the southern slope, the building of Verbrugghen Hall and in the 1930s the construction of a modern circuit road which finally removed most of the southern Forecourt which had survived from c. 1820.

The meaning of the archaeological evidence

The detailed interpretation of the archaeological evidence is found in Chapters 12 to 16. This is where the research significance of the archaeology is explored and revealed, giving its meaning within a theoretical and social context. The main research questions that the archaeological evidence allows us to address are below for detailed discussions please see each section.

1. Pre-European environment

Evidence pertaining to the topography, geomorphology, vegetation etc. of this site prior to colonisation may contribute to research in the environmental history of the Sydney region, Aboriginal land management practices, historical ecology etc.²

2. European transformation of the landscape

The Conservatorium site is located within one of the most significant historic and symbolic landscapes created by European settlers in Australia. The area is located between the sites of the original and replacement Government Houses, on a prominent ridge. While the utility of this ridge was first exploited by a group of windmills, utilitarian purposes soon became secondary to the Macquaries' grandiose vision for Sydney and the Governor's Domain in particular. The later creations of the Botanic Gardens, The Garden Palace and the Conservatorium itself, re-used, re-interpreted and created new vistas, paths and plantings to reflect the growing urban and economic importance of Sydney within the context of the British empire.

Modifications to this site, its topography and vegetation, can therefore be interpreted within the theme of landscape as an expression of the ideology of colonialism. It is considered that this site is uniquely placed to address this research theme which would act as a meaningful interpretive framework for archaeological evidence relating to environmental and landscape features.³

3. Food production in the early colony

Remains relating to the windmill and bakery may provide significant detail relating to many historical questions surrounding early attempts at food

² Ireland 1998b:35.

³ Ireland 1998b:35.

production in the colony. Such remains could also contribute to research into the foodways, diet and technological strategies of the first colonists.⁴

4. The construction, modification and use of the Stables

Because of the cultural significance of the Stables building, archaeological evidence relating to its construction, modification and use over time will contribute valuable detail to historical research into the work of Greenway, technological and architectural strategies used in the early colony, details of the use and operations of the Stables, history of the Conservatorium etc.

In addition to these four questions a new research question was identified which addresses the research potential of the material culture associated with the occupation and use of the Stables and, where relevant, Government House. This question was designed specifically to address the evidence from the large rubbish dump believed to be associated with Government House, as well as the Stables.

5. Material culture of the Governors, their staff and servants

The material culture associated with the occupants of both the Stables and Government House should provide tangible evidence of hierarchical behaviour within a pre-eminent household in Australia. This evidence should assist in understanding the lifeways of these occupants which should shed light on how this hierarchy was maintained and mediated through material culture. The evidence for hierarchical behaviour should be understood in the context of the defining of Australia in the late nineteenth century as an 'egalitarian and prosperous' society.

⁴ Ireland 1998b:35.