

From Land Grant to Subdivision

A walking tour of the Berry Estate, Wollstonecraft

Distance: 2 Km
Approximate time: 3 hours
Grading: low to medium



Introduction

The vast Berry estate was one of the first and the largest land grants on the North Shore. Its gradual subdivision over a century from the 1830s to the 1930s has profoundly influenced the character of North Sydney and its suburbs. As each area was opened for development it took on the dominant architectural and planning characteristics of the day. Today the names Berry, Alexander, Edward and Wollstonecraft are memorialised in street and suburb names.

The land was originally owned by the Cammeraygal people. Their numbers and social structures were devastated in the decades following colonization and land was being given away to colonists from the late 1800s. Wollstonecraft and his partner Alexander Berry had applied for land after delivering several profitable cargoes of merchandise to the colony. Berry secured several thousand acres on the south coast at Coolangatta near present day Berry.

In 1821 Wollstonecraft received 524 acres 'exclusive of rocks and sand' on the North Shore as a means of establishing a farm, locating a warehouse to receive timber and agricultural produce from the ever increasing holdings at Coolangatta and escaping the unhealthy environment of Sydney town. By the late 1820s the partners owned more than 30,000 acres between them.

Despite the relatively salubrious environment at his Crows Nest Cottage, Wollstonecraft died in 1832 of a 'long and severe illness' and his estate passed to his sister Elizabeth – wife of Alexander Berry. The Berrys lived on the Crows Nest Farm while Alexander's brothers and sisters managed the south coast property. They began selling and leasing parts of the estate



from the 1830s. Their new neighbours included prominent citizens such as the engineer Colonel Barney, the merchants Joseph Purser and William Carr and the artist Conrad Martens. Waterfront land in Berrys Bay was leased to the P&O company establishing a precedent for industrial use on that site that would continue until the closure of the BP oil terminal there in the 1990s. Land in Balls Head Bay was also leased for industrial use. This would eventually be bought by the North Shore Gas Co. The remains of this complex is still there. Little other waterfront land was alienated and much of the rest estate remained bushland.

The Berry's began building a large mansion, Crows Nest House, in the 1840s. Elizabeth died before its completion and Alexander lived there with his servants from 1850 until his death in 1873. As the sole owner of the estate with the death of his wife, Alexander had begun the systematic subdivision of his land near Lane Cove Road. With his death ownership of the still largely undeveloped estate passed to Berry's brother David who lived at Coolangatta. He died in 1889 with no direct heirs and a surviving cousin, John Hay, inherited the property. A considerable amount of land was given to the Government for the construction of the Milsons Point to Hornsby railway completed in 1893. Hay put several large subdivisions on the market following this. Amidst economic depression little was sold. Further subdivisions were created with wide streets in 1904.

David Berry had bequeathed considerable funds for the construction of a hospital at the township of Berry. In order to satisfy this intent waterfront land in North Sydney was given to the crown for sale or use in 1906. Great hopes were held out for the industrialization of the Balls Head and Berry Island waterfronts but little eventuated beyond the sale of land to the North Shore Gas

Co in Balls Head Bay in 1906 and the construction of a coal loader at Balls Head in 1920. Interestingly the appearance of gas works in what was becoming an exclusive residential area prompted the formation of the first residents' action groups – the Bay Road Progress Association – in 1911.

Sir John Hay died in 1909 and Lady Hay approved further subdivisions in 1911 and 1913. She approved another in 1921 before her death in 1931. There were three more subdivisions around Crows Nest House, subsequently called the Lady Hay estate, in 1931, 1932 and 1934. Subdivisions of the earlier excised properties 'The Priory', 'Rockleigh Grange' and 'Waverton House' began from the late 19th century.

Our walk starts at Don Bank cottage/ museum 6 Napier Street, North Sydney.



Don Bank in the 1960s. The magnolia tree dates back to the 1800s and is still a feature of the garden. It was bought by North Sydney Council in 1977 and restored for use as a museum. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 1301)

This is the oldest surviving timber house in North Sydney. It was built on the far south-eastern boundary of the Berry estate. Known originally as St Leonards Cottage, it dates at least to 1847

although some have suggested it was built on the estate in the 1820s using timber from Coolangatta – the second building after Crows Nest Cottage. It was bought from Alexander Berry by William and Charlotte Carr in 1853 as part of Berry's first systematic subdivision of the estate. The release of so much land prompted the *Illustrated Sydney News* to declare 'North Sydney a rival to the southern city'. Charlotte Carr subdivided her land twice. The lot on which Don Bank then stood stretched along Napier St from Charles St to Berry St. It was subdivided again, and the existing block, formed in 1903. The house itself grew from a simple four room slab cottage to an eight room Victorian Regency villa with views of the Harbour from the heads to the Parramatta River.

Walk up Napier St, cross Berry St. carefully and proceed along Doohat Ave

The lane is built on the site of the grand house **Pictonville** built by Captain Pockley in 1855 on land subdivided from the Berry Estate in the early 1850s when Don Bank was also sold. Pockley's estate extended to Berry St and featured the earliest gas making plant on North Shore. It was named after the town Picton where Pockley's father in law had property. He and his wife raised 12 children there before moving to Killara. Pockley was the Harbour Master at Port Jackson when the 'Dunbar' went down off the heads in 1887. He was for a time the largest ship owner in tonnage in Australia. *Pictonville* was one of the grandest homes in North Sydney.

It was bought by the banker Francis Adams in 1881 and it was renamed *Doohat* after the family property 'Dhu Hat' in Ireland. The estate was subdivided and house demolished in 1916. **No. 1 Doohat Ave**, called *Terzito* was built for

fruiterer Diego Lamaro and was the first house built on the new estate.



'Pictonville', or 'Doohat' as it was known by this time, c.1890. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF654)

Walk down to Pacific Hwy turn left

Woodstock, No. 172 Pacific Hwy

Built in 1870 by John Brown, a timber merchant, on a subdivision of the Berry estate bought in the early 1850s. It was built in the Victorian Regency style – a restrained expression that appealed to some because of its tasteful restraint and to others because it did not require expensive flourishes. Brown supplied timber for Glebe Island and Pymont bridges. He lived there with his wife and 11 children until she died in 1881. The timber yard next door operated until 1886.

Continue up Pacific Highway across Berry St

Before the 1930s the highway was called Lane Cove Rd. It was lined with timber and brick shops and houses – several of them owned by Chinese merchants from the 1890s.

Around the grounds of the North Sydney Demonstration School is the large stone and iron

fence of **Crows Nest House**. Alexander Berry completed the house in 1850 – the residential centre of his still vast estate – it enjoyed extensive views of the harbour and took the name of its more modest predecessor Crows Nest cottage located further up the hill. The fence was erected by Sir John Hay in 1890 after he inherited the property in the 1880s. Note the wrought iron gates featuring a nest of crows. St Thomas church was built a short distance from here, between West and McLaren Sts, with financial assistance from Alexander Berry.



Crows Nest House, enlarged by John Hay, c.1900 (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF629)

Proceed up to McHatton St

Note the old fence ends here. The remainder was demolished when McHatton St was extended and pushed through the house grounds in the second 1931 subdivision of the Lady Hay estate. The school was built at this time and originally called the Lady Hay Public School.

Turn left into McHatton St

The houses on the northern side were built after the land was subdivided in 1932.

No. 16 McHatton St is a good example of Inter War Californian Bungalow style which was influenced by the arts and crafts movement and the horizontal planes of Frank Lloyd Wright. Note the small balcony set into the gable.

No. 14 McHatton St next door was the first house built on the 1932 subdivision. It was designed by architect W Lamrock for JH Tonkin Esq. and was originally finished in brick with a Spanish Mission-style decorative parapet above the central upstairs window. The house was featured in the October 1933 issue of ***Building*** magazine.

Continue on down McHatton St past the school

Middleton, No. 5 McHatton St and **No. 1 McHatton St** were built on the 1921

subdivision of the Lady Hay estate. *Middleton* is designed in the Inter War Old English style. No.1 is in the Inter War Mediterranean style. Both are typical of the large upper middle class houses being erected on the North Shore at this time. These houses were also featured in the 1933 *Building* article as evidence of the 'fine class of residence being erected in the vicinity'.

Proceed around to the right and up to Crows Nest Rd. Turn right again

This part of Crows Nest Rd was created during the 1934 subdivision of the Lady Hay estate. It was pushed through across the site the Crows Nest House which was demolished in this final subdivision. The road had been gradually extended from the south western corner of the Berry estate as the land was subdivided.

The houses along this section of Crows Nest Rd are typical of interwar styles. **No. 53** and **No. 65 Crows Nest Rd** are good examples of Inter War Old English sometimes associated with the

upwardly mobile *nouveaux riche* of the 1920s and 1930s – note the crests on the feature windows.

No. 67 and No. 69 Crows Nest Rd are examples of a more daring and modern design – inter war functionalism. This style is sometimes referred to as streamlined moderne or simply art deco. Unlike the nostalgic Old English style these houses were futuristic – borrowing from the latest European and American trends and using contemporary materials such as reinforced concrete, steel and glass. Note the massing of glass bricks at the front.

Turn left at the Pacific Highway and proceed up to corner of Hazelbank Rd

The **Masonic Hall** across the road was opened in 1922. The building next door at **No. 311 Pacific Hwy** was once the North Sydney Ice Works, one of several factories manufacturing ice for the ice chests that most North Sydney residents used until electric fridges finally dominated the market in the 1960s.



HG Kent's coach building business on the border of the Berry Estate at Nos. 290-294 Lane Cove Rd (Pacific Highway) in the 1880s. There were several coach builders, saddlers and blacksmiths operating along this main thoroughfare in the 19th and early 20th centuries. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF60)

The sites on the right hand northern side were originally subdivided from 1904 and accommodated large Federation style houses. North Sydney Girls High School was opened at the corner of Hazelbank and Lane Cove Rd in 1914 – now the site of **Bradfield College**. The first large home down from Lane Cove Rd was one of the earliest built on the north side of the road. It was completed in 1905 for Stipendiary Magistrate George Henry Smithers and later called *Northlands*. The block was itself subdivided in 1925 to make way for the flats that are there today. The next two houses *Quanda* and *Royston* were demolished for flats in the 1960s or 1970s. The low sandstone garden walls are all that is left of these early 20th century homes.

Proceed down Hazelbank Rd to the small stairway at Sinclair St opposite

The houses on the south side of Hazelbank Rd were built after the 1921 subdivision of the Lady Hay estate and reflect dominant Inter War styles. The street trees probably date to this period.

Proceed down to Gillies St

No. 2 Gillies St, originally called *Hathor*, is the only Federation style house on this road to survive from the early Berry estate subdivisions.

Continue to Morton St

Note the decorative green sewerage vent next to the footpath that probably dates to the first subdivision.



1921 subdivision plan of the Berry / Lady Hay Estate showing new and older lots along Hazelbank Rd. Crows Nest Road is yet to be extended and the old home is still standing (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF2993)

Turn left and head up to Crows Nest Rd

Large Federation era homes with names like Hazeldean, Kingston, Unara and Ingleside lined both sides of Morton St. These probably dated back to the same period of subdivisions as Hathor.

Turn right into Crows Nest Rd

No. 28 was the site of *Boonerah*, a large two storey house.

Cross the road

Tamar, No 23 Crows Nest Rd

A substantial Federation bungalow with strong Arts and Crafts influences built before 1910.



Tamar' c.1910 with its typical Federation era garden of lawns and flower beds. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 687)



Looking west down Crows Nest Rd with Boonerah at No.28 c.1915. By the end of the 19th century a greta deal of the bushland on the Berry Estate had been cleared. Consequently the large houses built there were particularly prominent and often enjoyed the views of the harbour that originally attracted Wollstonecraft and Berry. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 1117)

Proceed down Harriott St

The land extending from here back up the hill to McHatton St was the site of the Rev. WB Clarke's estate and home **Branthwaite**. Clarke was the first rector of St Thomas' Church and a renowned geologist. Alexander Berry was a great benefactor of Clarke's church and a personal friend who enjoyed discussing matters

of science, philosophy and religion. He gave Clarke five acres of land on his estate shortly before clergyman retired in 1870. Harriott St is named after a woman who married into his family. The estate was completely subdivided by the 1930s.

Turn left into Bay Rd

Just around the corner is the large home **Cartref, No. 29 Bay Rd**. Built before 1900 on the Brathwaite estate land, it was the home of the Rev. David Davies who married WB Clarke's daughter Blanche. The house once had extensive gardens and lawns.



Cartref at No 29 Bay Rd c.1900. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 2325)

Cross Bay Rd carefully and continue up to Priory Rd. Turn down and continue around to the left

The Priory, No. 5 Priory Rd

Tucked away on the upper side of the street is *The Priory*. Originally a single storey villa this substantial sandstone house and the large gardens that once surrounded it were one the earliest excisions on the Berry Estate. The land was leased around 1835 by Lieutenant Colonel George Barney, first commander of the Royal Engineers in NSW and the designer of the

Victoria Barracks in Paddington. He bought the property 5 years later. In the 1840s Barney leased the house back to Alexander and Elizabeth Berry while they were waiting for their new mansion Crows Nest House to be completed. Elizabeth died here in 1845. Part of the St Leonards Anglican gentry, Barney's son married the daughter of WB Clarke. He leased *The Priory* for a period to another notable anglican and member of parliament, Francis Lord. After Barney's death it was sold to the Fisher family. Thomasina lived there until her death in 1914

In 1914 the attics were converted to a full floor. The estate was subdivided into 40 lots between 1915 and 1929 and many of those cottages and flats still survive around *The Priory*.



'The Priory' with its extensive lawns and orchards in 1871 while the Fisher family were in residence (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF1055/18)

The building was subsequently converted to flats and in the 1970s local historian and heritage campaigner David Earle lived here and formed the Priory Conservation Co-operative Society which promoted a unique combination of urban and heritage planning through co-operative housing.

Continue down to No. 21 Priory St on the right hand side of the street where a sign shows the public walk

***through modern flat developments.
Follow the path down***

This public access or easement has existed since the early 20th century at least and follows the path of a 19th century creek that ran into Berrys Bay. This creek marked the boundary between the Berry Estate and Thomas Walkers land. The signs warning of wet surfaces indicate the ongoing presence of the watercourse.

Continue through the gates to Riley St at the bottom of the hill. A small pocket park here has a bench if you need to rest

Proceed up Riley St

The row of Victorian filigree style terraces from **Nos. 10–14** may have been subdivided from the Priory Estate or the Rockleigh Grange estate – both of which were early excisions of the Berry Estate. Riley St appears on an 1886 map of North Sydney within the Priory Estate. **No. 10 Riley St** was the home of renowned Australian photographer Harold Cazneaux in the early 20th century.

Continue up Riley St

The trees on your left are relatively recent plantings on the old *Rockleigh Grange* estate – once the home of artist Conrad Martens. They recall the scrub that covered the landscape behind Martens' home. In 1867 he wrote that 'this place is much altered since we first took up our residence here... the original forest is fast receding and small steamers cross [the harbour] every quarter of an hour'.

Martens had moved to the property with his wife Jane Brackenbury Carter who had inherited the property from her parents. They in turn had

bought it from the Berry's in 1835. They lived there with their children until his death in 1878. Martens designed the first St Thomas' Church of which Alexander Berry was a notable benefactor.

Proceed to Edward St and turn left

Rockleigh Grange, No. 40 Edward St

Here are the gates of *Rockleigh Grange*, now part of the Australian Catholic University. The building today is very different to the stone picturesque Victorian Rustic Gothic villa that the Martens inhabited. The house was bought by warehouse owner FB Larke in 1878 and sold again to the Hon John Hughes MLC who altered it and built tennis courts.



Rockleigh Grange after the extensive alterations and extensions, c.1905. Photograph by Harold Cazneaux (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF 2055)

When it was auctioned in 1913 Hardie and Gorman noted that the "*spacious grounds, situated in Edward Street North Sydney [made it] very convenient and suitable for a gentlemen-of-means, professional men, squatters and others*". Instead the Catholic Church bought the property. As the premises for its Apostolic Delegation in 1970 it hosted Pope Paul VI.

Proceed up Edward St to a small unmarked laneway. Turn down the

lane which will take return you to Priory Rd

Turn right and head past The Priory across to Toongarah St.

At **No. 26 Toongarah St** note the elaborate Inter War Spanish Mission style flats, probably built in the late 1920s. This glamorous architectural style was influenced by romantic locations and lifestyles depicted in Hollywood movies of the times. It stood in stark contrast to the more austere red brick flats that predominated from the 1930s and was popularly used in up-market bungalows, flat buildings and motor garages.

Continue past to the red brick block of flats. Between Nos. 16 and 18 is a narrow unmarked laneway. Proceed down here to Waverton Lane. Turn right and then left on to Bay Rd



(below left) Substantial homes line the western side of Bay Rd around 1900. The Bay Road Progress Association was formed in 1911 to protect the residential character of the area. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF2981)

Continue down to Waverton Ave and turn left

At **No. 6** are the townhouses called *Waverton*. These were designed by architects Vickery and Bruce, and built in 1974 on the site of the recently demolished home **Waverton**, one of the earliest excisions of the Berry Estate. Completed in 1845 for Joseph Purser it was bought by William and Charlotte Carr in 1849 who later purchased St Leonards Cottage (Don Bank) and other sites from Alexander Berry.



The Old family outside Waverton house in 1880. (North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF1084/1)

The Carrs called their house *Waverton* after a town in Cumberland, England. The Old family bought the house in 1865 and subdivided the land around it in 1917 and 1952. Most of the surrounding homes in Waverton Ave date from these periods. Waverton remained in the Old family until its demolition in 1974.

Continue around the Avenue to the end of the cul-de-sac.

The remaining view of the harbour above Berrys Bay gives some indication of the panorama enjoyed by the residents of Waverton House through the 19th and much of the 20th centuries.

Return to Bay Rd and turn left and proceed across Carrs Rd, named after William and Charlotte Carr, to

Waverton station on the left hand side of the rd

Waverton Railway Station, originally called Bay Rd Railway Station, was built in 1893 when the controversial and expensive Milsons Point extension to Hornsby was constructed. John Hay provided land from the Berry estate for its construction probably realising the potential it offered for future subdivision. The proximity to public transport was used to promote later subdivisions.



*Waverton station shortly after opening in 1893.
(North Sydney Heritage Centre, PF2980)*

Our *From Land Grant to Subdivision* walking tour ends here at Waverton Station. Our *Waverton Peninsula Walk* will take you further around the point.

**Walking tour notes compiled by the Historical Services team in March 2005 from resources held in the North Sydney Heritage Centre, Stanton Library.
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