



Willoughby City Facts

Northbridge

Willoughby City Council

Community Services Division

The Cammeraygal People: The Cammeraygal people of the Guringai nation lived in the Willoughby area until the 1820s. By 1830 there were no Aboriginal people following a traditional lifestyle in the area.

Name: Up until 1913 the Northbridge area had no specific name. At this time the New North Sydney Investment and Tramway Company owned most of the land in the area and were selling it in lots. The Company called the area Northbridge for two reasons. Firstly, the area being developed was north of the Suspension Bridge and secondly, the suspension bridge itself was often referred to as the “north bridge” as it was the first bridge north of Sydney harbour.

The Early Days: The first Crown grant in the Northbridge area was made in 1837, but because of the rugged terrain the area was left undisturbed by European settlers until the first public auctions of land in 1855. One of the first settlers on the peninsula was Henry Hocken Bligh who purchased land in 1856. He was a signatory to the petition for the incorporation of Willoughby as a Municipality and he was Mayor of Willoughby in 1869 and 1871. Another early resident was William Twemlow who lived at “The Hermitage”, a large two-storey sandstone house at Fig Tree Point, from the mid 1870s till his death in 1909. It was inaccessible by land and he used the waterway daily to journey to his business in the city. The house was later owned by Sir Edward Hallstrom but was demolished after his death in 1970. The area is now called Hallstrom Close.

Suspension Bridge: With the land boom of the 1880s, land was sold and resold. Eventually most of the land belonged to the North Sydney Investment and Tramway Company or the North Shore and Middle Harbour Land Company, who were planning to build a tramway and a bridge across Long Bay gully in order to open up the area for sales of residential land. The depression of 1892 saw both companies go into liquidation. Prior to the depression, the Cammeray Bridge (then called the Suspension Bridge) had been completed and was opened to traffic in January 1892. It was considered one of the engineering wonders of Sydney and soon became a great tourist attraction. It had taken two years and nine months to complete and cost £42,000. A toll of threepence return for adults and one penny for children was charged. The tramway however, was not yet built and due to the Depression land sales were very slow and Northbridge did not develop as had been hoped.

In 1912 the bridge was handed over to the Government as a gift by the New North Sydney Investment and Tramway Company, on the condition that the bridge is repaired and the tramway extended to the north side. The tramway was extended to the area north of the bridge in 1914. The terminus was in Sailors Bay Road near the public school. In 1937 the Suspension bridge was closed to all traffic and reconstructed as a concrete arch bridge. The reconstruction was completed in 1939.

The 1920s: The First World War interrupted development, but in the 1920s, with the extension of the tramway and the imminent prospect of the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, there was considerable growth in Northbridge. Six church buildings, three kindergarten/primary schools, Northbridge Theatre, Northbridge Baths, and a vast number of private dwellings and shops sprang up. The Depression of the Thirties and the 2nd World War brought a halt to this and little more development took place until the late 1940s.

Northbridge Golf Course: Originally in an area dedicated to public recreation in 1910 and called Middle Harbour Park, 20 acres were rededicated by Council in 1923. A proposal for a golf course on the site was made in 1926, but it was not until 1933, when the Government agreed to subsidise the

work as an emergency relief project that construction of a 9-hole golf course began. It was opened officially in 1935 and later extended to an 18-hole course. The course is owned by Willoughby Council but leased to the Northbridge Golf Club.

Churches: St Mark's Anglican Church on Tunks Street was officially dedicated in March 1928, although regular services had been held in various private homes in Northbridge since 1919. A smaller church had been built in 1921, however a growing population meant that a larger church was soon desperately needed and the land for the present site in Tunks Street was purchased in 1925. St Philip Neri Catholic Church on Sailors Bay Road was opened in 1942. A previous church, St Ciaran's, had been opened in 1926 in the same grounds. It served the purpose of both a church and school and is now incorporated in St Philip Neri Parish School. The Uniting Church, corner of Gunyah and Baringa Road, was formerly the Northbridge Methodist War and Peace Memorial Church which was officially opened in 1955. Services had been held since 1924 in a church hall in the same grounds.

Shops: The first shop was established on the corner of Woonona and Sailors Bay Road in 1915. By the 1930s six estate agents, one bank, two bank agencies, four grocers, three butchers, three fruiterers, a baker, two boot makers, three drapers, five refreshment rooms, two stationers (with lending libraries), one ironmonger, one tobacconist, one hairdresser, four doctors, two dentists, and one chemist traded along Sailors Bay Road and Strathallen Avenue. In 1961 Northbridge Plaza a large shopping mall on Sailors Bay Road near Eastern Valley Way was opened. It has since been much expanded.

Schools: Northbridge Public School on Sailors Bay Road was officially opened in April 1923, with an enrolment of 159 and a staff of five plus Headmaster A. G. Mitchell. St Philip Neri Catholic Parish School on Baringa Road (originally called St Ciarans) and was opened in 1927 with 18 pupils. The name was changed to conform to the name of the church in 1983.

Parks: The area that is now Clive Park, at the corner of Sailors Bay and Coolawin Roads, was dedicated for recreation by 1884. The park was named in 1913 after Clive Backhouse, Mayor from 1912 to 1913. Munro Park in Flat Rock Gully was acquired by Willoughby Council for parkland in 1927. Northbridge Park off Sailors Bay Road encompasses the Northbridge Golf Course, the Northbridge Oval and Pavilion, the Scout Hall, the Girl Guides Hall, the Norman Landers Memorial Library, the RSL Hall, tennis courts and Memorial Gardens. Warners Park, off The Outpost, contains the Northbridge Bowling Club. The park was named after J.R. Warner, the owner of the former "Waratah" Dairy, who donated part of the land.

Northbridge Baths: Northbridge Baths opened in 1924 on Widgiewa Road on the shores of Middle Harbour. Originally the swimming area was only 100 feet by 25 feet. There is now a 50 metre multi-lane pool with separate diving area.

Further reading:

***The Suburb of Northbridge a Community History* by Esther Leslie at 994.411WIL**