

Historic East Ward Walk

This walk - which should last about two hours - takes you along a selection of various streetscapes and houses that make up part of the East Ward of Willoughby. Buses run along Victoria Avenue to the starting point, or plenty of parking is available.

ROBINSON STREET

Starting from the corner of Robinson Street and Victoria Avenue, walk along Robinson Street.

This street has an unusual "traffic calming" device, having islands of plantings that create a curved, narrow roadway out of what was a straight street. Constructed in 1983, this strategy does not seem to have been followed anywhere else in the City.

Robinson Street is named after Sir Hercules Robinson, Governor of NSW 1872-1879, and first appears in the Rate Book of 1884.

The small houses and semis in the area between Victoria Avenue and Albert Avenue were mostly built around 1905 and present a strong contrast to the more luxurious homes further along Robinson Street. They were in a neglected state till recently, but most are now in the process of restoration and, in some cases, extension.

Crossing Albert Avenue, on the left hand side we see some quite magnificent examples of large "High Federation" style homes built about 1910.

These include No.31 and No.29, which have some typical Art Nouveau leadlight window panels. Also No.27, No.23 and No.21 - restored and extended.

Opposite these are three identical Federation bungalows Nos.24, 26, 28 built in 1913 and each purchased in that year for £1025 (\$2050).

No.22 is a "Californian bungalow" style home with typical sandstone verandah, and was one of the last houses built in the street, in 1924.

Once more on the left hand side of the street, No.17 "Coringa" in Federation style with typical tuck pointed brickwork.

No.13 "Millbank" a very grand Federation home, note the wonderful leadlight doors.

No.11 "Strathmore" another grand Federation house with Art Nouveau leadlight doors and interesting bay window treatment. Both the latter houses have slate roofs.

On the opposite side of the road is an interesting example of how a traditional Federation house can be extended without overly affecting the style or street appearance. No.6 has a large but sympathetic upper floor extension.

When you reach Johnson Street turn right and then left into Holland Street.

HOLLAND STREET

Holland Street first appears as such in the Rate Book of 1904-05. Before that time it was part of Olga Street. There are some fine houses here too - most are less imposing than those in Robinson Street - but look out particularly for No.22 built in 1913 by Fred Holland who built many of the homes in the street and after whom the street is named. Originally the house stood on three blocks of land and had a tennis court. It has been beautifully restored in the original style by the current owners, including garden details.

Other homes of interest in the street are Nos.27, 25, 18, 15 and 13, all of which are smaller Federation cottages in good condition. No.11 "Canonbury" built in 1911 is an elegant Federation home and No.9 "Quimba" built in 1913 is similar, both well restored and extended.

No.3, originally a pair with No.5, was a medium size Federation house with a slate roof "well maintained but offers scope to improve" when it was auctioned in 1985; it has had vast extensions added in character with the house and been roofed with corrugated iron.

Towards the Mowbray Road end there are some typical "Californian Bungalow" style homes - note Nos.4, 2 and 1, built between 1928 and 1933.

Turn right into Mowbray Road.

MOWBRAY ROAD

First appearing in 1872 it was named after Mowbray Point on Middle Harbour to which it was mistakenly believed it would run.

Continue walking down Mowbray Road for a short distance. On the south side of the street you will see "Windsor Gardens" (No.258). Now retirement units, it was built originally in 1888 for Frank Coffee an American journalist and called "Iroquois" after a ship in the American Squadron that visited Sydney. The Coffee family lived there till c.1926. In 1945 it was renamed "Windsor Gardens" and became a popular Reception Centre for about forty years. It then fell into disuse and disrepair with various development proposals put before Council. Eventually in 1993 permission was given for establishment of a retirement village. A new building has been added, and further development is occurring.

On the north side of the street between Hercules and Holland are two interesting houses - but difficult to see because of high walls.

No.251 originally named "Heidelberg", renamed "Werribein" during the First World War, and later called "Seven Gables". Built

in 1902, it is very different to the average house built at this time

No.253 "Strathdene" a late Victorian house built in 1896 in attractive Italianate style. The home has been restored since the 1950s when it was vacant for a number of years and vandalised.

Walk back to Holland Street.

Between Holland Street and Stanley Street is "Oakfield" No.241. Built by Fred Henry Holland - who gave the name "Oakfield" to the sub-division - for his own use in 1891. Note the date, August 1 1891 incised on the stone verandah base. With bull-nosed corrugated iron roofed verandah and leadlight front door and sidelights, it originally had an Italianate tower, iron fluted columns and wrap-around verandahs on both floors. It was turned into five flats in 1925 when much of the original design and decoration was lost. In the 1960s and 70s restoration rediscovered marble fireplaces, cedar skirtings, pressed metal ceilings etc., and the original wine cellar was pumped clear of 5 feet of water. It now has storage for 1100 bottles.

Walking towards Sydney Street the houses on the north side of Mowbray Road are an interesting collection. Nos.237 and 235 were built between 1913 and 1915 with Art Nouveau leaded glass work. Nos.231 "Aviomeor" (built 1907-08) and 225 (built 1910-11) are also worth a look with leadlights and sandstone balustrades and a rather Arts and Crafts look. No.223 is a most unusual two storey building with chalet style roof, described as a "villa" and "building incomplete" in the 1960 Rate Book.

On the corner of Mowbray Road and Sydney Street is St. Stephen's Anglican Church. The building you pass just before the church is the original "Chapel of Ease" which was opened in 1872. Much extended in 1920, the original stone walls can be seen incorporated in the sides of the existing building. The main church building was designed by Edmund Blacket in the Gothic Revival style and the builder was Alexander Simpson (whose own house still stands on the corner of Mowbray Road and Devonshire Street). It was dedicated on 19 April 1884. A modern extension carried out in 1960 can be seen as you turn left into Sydney Street. The church is listed on the National Trust Register.

SYDNEY STREET

Turn left at Sydney Street which was first mentioned, though not by name, in the Minutes of 1869, and first rated by name in 1882. A pleasant tree lined street with an eclectic collection of styles and some very attractive gardens.

On the right hand side is No.71 "Trentham" Nursing Home. Originally Nos.71 and 73 were built c.1888. In 1924 they appear to have been joined together and later combined with No.75. In 1956 these blocks became the "Trentham" Nursing Home, however it is not clear if a new building was erected at that time or whether the old buildings were used.

No.77 is Victorian, built 1894-95, but with a new tile roof. Of interest is that confusion sometimes arises when dating buildings in Sydney Street, as before 1924 that part of what is now Sydney Street on the other side of Mowbray Road was called Sydney Road and was separately numbered. When the two were integrated this caused all the house numbers to be altered. In 1924, No.77 was No.15.

On the left side of the street note the group of shops Nos. 80 - 84 built in the early twentieth century and nicely integrated with the neighbourhood.

No.94 one of the oldest houses in Chatswood in near original condition. A typical late Victorian cottage it was built in 1883. In 1885 the tenant was Rev. Daniel Murphy of St. Stephen's.

On the corner of Fry Street is No.96, a charming example of a well maintained bungalow of 1916 vintage.

On the opposite corner is No.98 which was built as a grocery store in 1885 and has been a shop of one kind or another ever since - it is the oldest existing shop in East Chatswood.

Continuing along Sydney Street, there has been much "dual occupancy" development in this part of the street.

No.106 is an interesting brick and wood house, possibly c.1910, but could be earlier.

On the left just before you reach Forsyth Street is the east side of Bales Park. This is on the site of old Chinese market gardens. Established in 1930, in 1932 it was named Central Park. In 1957 it was renamed Bales Park after Alderman Joseph Bales who was Mayor of Willoughby at various times between 1931 and 1947. It is a popular playing ground for sport and on the far side near Stanley Street is a children's playground and a Bocce pitch (a form of bowls).

FORSYTH STREET

Turn right into Forsyth Street, named after the Forsyth family who played a dominant role in the early development of the Willoughby area. James Forsyth, a tanner, was married to Margaret Todd at Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1837. He emigrated to Australia joining the gold rush at Sofala. He was apparently successful and his family - wife, his sons Thomas, John and Robert and daughters Margaret and Sarah Jane - joined him in 1863. In 1869 James Forsyth purchased 278 acres of land in the bush at North Willoughby for £3 an acre. He and his sons established successful tanneries in the area. The family has supplied many Aldermen and Mayors of the Municipality. One of James' grandsons Robert Todd Forsyth was the first to break away from the tanning industry and established a business as an auctioneer in 1898. The firm of R.T.Forsyth Real Estate is still in existence and their main office is still at 236 Penshurst Street near the same site where the first office was established.

There are several delightful small original cottages in this street.

No.40 has unusual Art Nouveau style leaded windows, built c.1914.

No.36 "Willoughby Villa". Built by James Forsyth in 1883-84. It follows the general model for early Victorian detached housing (although later in time) with bull-nose verandah and double-hung French doors. Interestingly this is listed as being owned by a Forsyth until 1924 and again from 1945 till 1952.

No.34 "Penzance", similar in style to No.36, a single storey sandstock Victorian cottage built c.1890, this was probably either rendered or painted brickwork originally, iron columns and typical ogival roofed verandah with double-hung french doors.

At the intersection in Penshurst Street to your left is a pair of terrace type Victorian semis, Nos.232-234 Penshurst Street - early 1900s (next door is the modern office of R.T.Forsyth at No.236).

Opposite is No.191, a Baby Health Centre designed by Eric Nicholls an associate of Walter Burley Griffin and opened in 1948.

PENSHURST STREET

Turn right into Penshurst Street. Shown on a map of 1854 it was first rated in 1882, it is named after the home of William Muston called "Penshurst" which stood in spacious grounds in Penshurst Street north of Victoria Avenue. The gates to "Penshurst" are now at the entrance to Willoughby Park.

The area from here to Laurel Street is fairly nondescript with a mixture of mostly 1950s & 60s flats and small houses and a small shopping centre.

On the left hand side just before Laurel Street is No.105 Penshurst Street, "Pommy Lodge". A Gothic Revival sandstone building, erected in 1871, it was originally used as a Congregational Church. It became the home of George Leafe a local storekeeper in 1896. In 1976 it was listed on the National Trust Register. Unfortunately it is loomed over and surrounded by very undistinguished buildings.

On the south-east corner of Penshurst and Laurel Streets is "Laurelbank", 87 Penshurst Street. The 1884 Rate Book lists two houses and land on this estate and the owner is given as Joseph Myerscough, a nurseryman. By 1885 the estate has been subdivided, "Laurelbank" is named and the owner is given as Joseph Griffiths. It is difficult to know the exact date of the existing house. In graceful Colonial style with some Victorian and Italian influences it is built of brick, cement rendered to look like stone. The sandstone foundations are very thick and used to incorporate a large cellar. Walls are thick, the roof is of imported slate and the front door has panels of Waterford glass with flower designs. The verandah has a frieze of decorative iron lace. It now belongs to the Masonic Lodge and has been well restored.

Behind the main building is a modern Masonic meeting hall and behind that is a stables building with gable ended roof, fretted barges and finials and stucco walls dating from the same period as the house.

LAUREL STREET

As you walk along Laurel Street:-

On your left is the Fire Station, 53 Laurel Street. The Willoughby Fire Station was established in October 1905 in a leased cottage adjoining the present building. The station was manned by six volunteers - East Willoughby Volunteer Company - and had a hose reel with a tee-bar in the centre and firemen, not horses, pulled it along. The cottage was added to and purchased in 1908 and is still adjacent to and attached to the station. In 1915 the current building was opened and upstairs additions were added in 1930.

On the right hand side of the street, No.64 timber cottage, built c.1900.

The Scout Hall No.58, whose foundation stone was laid in 1923 by William Morris Hughes, the local member, was the gift of Joseph Griffiths of "Laurelbank" on the stipulation that the hall was never to be let or hired to anyone but the Scouts or Guides..

HOLLYWOOD CRESCENT DETOUR

Next to the fire station, a detour via Hollywood Crescent - a backwater of charming and well maintained, mostly Californian Bungalows - is possible. It will bring you back to Laurel Street.

Coming back into Laurel Street you will pass Willoughby Workshop Arts Centre (No.33 Laurel Street) established in a disused furriers and dyers factory in 1963. The Centre is a non-profit organisation financed by members' subscriptions and class fees. Painting, sculpture, pottery, children's art, and film appreciation are among the activities fostering its aim of "appreciation, study and performance of and participation in creative arts". There are regular exhibitions of members' work.

Back in Laurel Street, No.46 is a timber cottage, built c.1905.

No.29 is a Victorian shop - once a stationers - now the Attic Conversion Centre. With an attached Victorian house, No.27, has a recent upper storey addition.

KEARY STREET

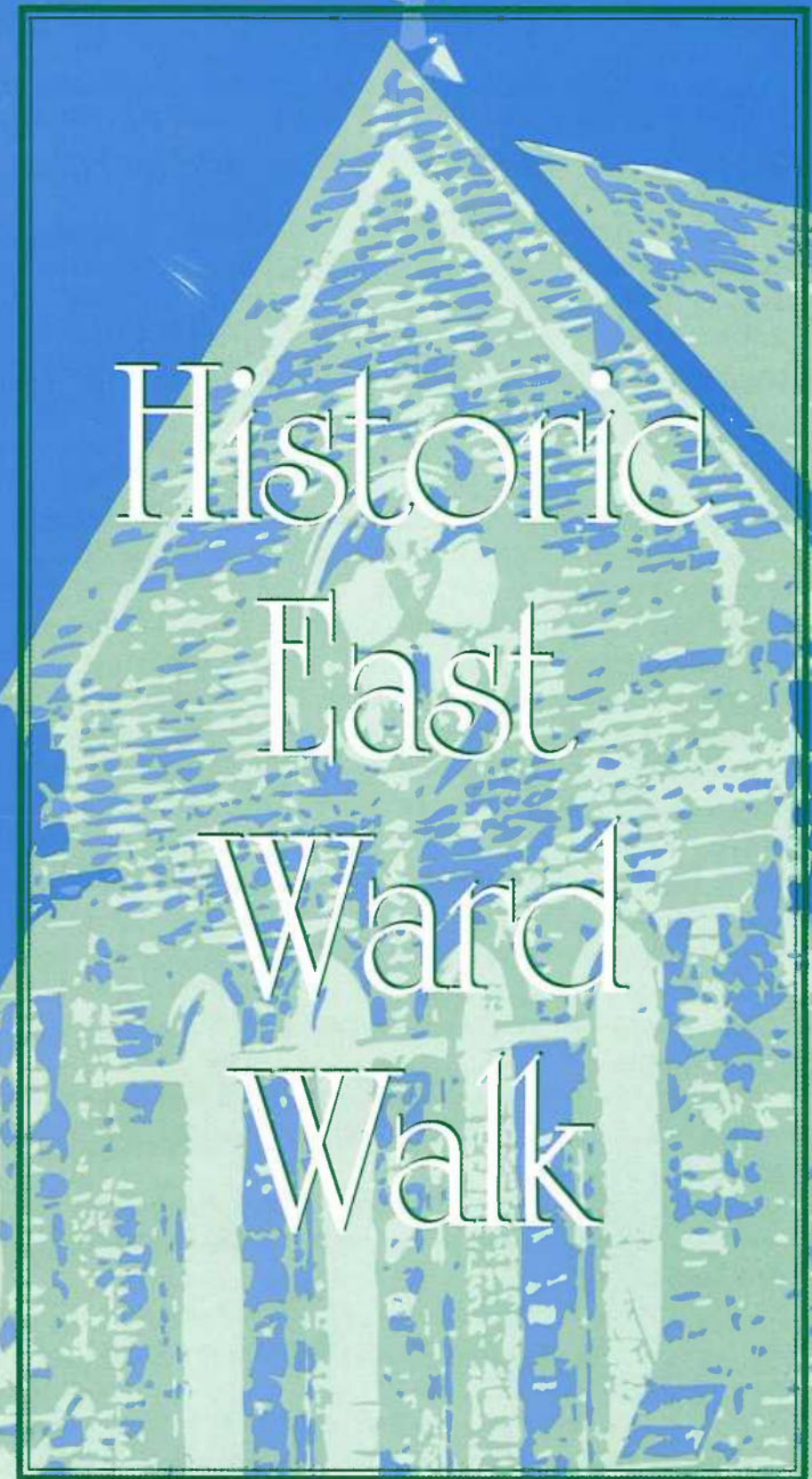
Turn back slightly, and left into Keary Street.

Named in Council Minutes of 1882, the land belonged to the Keary brothers, coach makers and importers of harness equipment.

On the corner of Keary and Oakville Road is Willoughby Infants School. Founded in 1863 when most of the surrounding area was bush, the current building dates from 1934.

Turn left into Oakville Road.

Historic East Ward Walk



OAKVILLE ROAD

This street features a number of magnificent mature paperbark trees.

No.28 Oakville Road. A typical neighbourhood shop with attached house, common before the advent of the car and supermarkets, this was built in 1906-07.

No.26 a modest timber cottage built 1891-92.

No.14 early Federation style built 1905-6. It has a most unusual round window detail.

Nos.10 & 12 small Federation semis in original condition, built 1903. No.12 has upper floor addition in roofspace.

Nos.4, 6 & 8 Shop, house and barn now architect's office, late Victorian single storey built c.1900. It was Hannafords Feed Store 1907-15.

From here we turn left into High Street and walk north.

HIGH STREET

No.98 "Oakville", single storey brick c.1890, in fairly original condition with bull nose verandah, decorative barges and iron lace. The infill with coloured glass on the verandah ends was probably added later. Retrace your steps to cross High Street at the pedestrian crossing. Walk north to the corner of Laurel Street.

On the corner of Laurel Street is Willoughby Presbyterian Church built 1925.

Nos.129 and 131 are a pair of matched bungalows. Altered, but interesting. Pebble dash and arched entrances, built c.1911.

No.141 another building of interest c.1917.

No.143 "Tyneside", built 1883, was the home of Robert Forsyth, tanner, and family. "Tyneside" - named after the area in England where his mother was born - replaced the original house built near the tannery by James Forsyth his father. A sandstone building, it has front and rear iron lace balconies and original fleur-de-lis picket fence. It had extensive landscaped gardens, a bridge over a creek and a ballroom. A coachhouse existed on the site until the 1960s. The house is on the Register of the National Trust

No.161 High Street is Thomas Todd Forsyth's original house. It was the gatekeeper's cottage for the Tannery. Behind the new jazzy paving slate facing, the original house is fairly intact. Stan Street used to be called Tannery Road.

On the opposite side of the road (between 146a and 154) is a small drainage reserve, which covers the remnant of one of the many creeks that ran from here to Middle Harbour, and were one of the reasons for the proliferation of tanneries and potteries in the area.

No.171 "Rosewall" now four flats, built 1883-84 on 5 acres for Thomas Todd Forsyth, tanner, and family. Thomas was another son of James Forsyth. The house was named after the maiden name of his paternal grandmother, and originally included stables,

a football ground and a bowling rink.

No.179 Federation style house built c.1910. Like most of the building in this area it was on Forsyth Estate land.

A large neighbourhood shopping centre follows.

Cross at the zebra crossing to St Thomas' church and school.

The original St Thomas' church - dedicated to St. Thomas the Apostle - was opened in 1928 and for many years doubled as church and primary school. In 1941 the two-storey Primary School was opened in Horsley Avenue. A new and larger church was erected in 1961 and the old church adapted to school use.

No.190 was built in 1910 for the Horsley family - occupation given as "farmer" in the Rate Books - who gave their name to Horsley Avenue.

No.206 "The Witch's Hat" and No.208 "The Captain's Cottage" are two of the quaintest houses in Willoughby. Both belonged at one time to Dr. Crabbe whose name was given to the adjacent Crabbes Avenue. Dr. Crabbe, who later lived and practised in No.208, came to Willoughby in 1899 and was an alderman of the Council from 1900 to 1905. No.206 was built in 1900 and No.208 could be older - a house being on the site at least from 1872 - but we have not been able to establish when this particular house was built.

Retrace your steps to cross High Street at the pedestrian crossing. Walk North to the corner of Laurel Street.

HORSLEY AVENUE

This area was orchards, gardens and light grazing in the early days and, later, Chinese market gardens.

No.26 Horsley Avenue - the Evangelical Formosan Church of Sydney, formerly the Willoughby Gospel Chapel belonging to the Open Christian Brethren Movement, built in 1928, extended in 1972.

Cross Penshurst Street at the pedestrian crossing and into Clanwilliam Street.

CLANWILLIAM STREET

No.1 Clanwilliam Street, an original Victorian cottage, built in 1880-82.

Nos.3 & 5 semi-detached Victorian cottages of rendered brick built in 1886. These are typical workers houses of the period.

No.7 "Landsboro" a Federation house with an interesting verandah treatment.

Uniting Church Willoughby (formerly Methodist Church) on a site donated by James Forsyth. It cost a little less than £800 and was opened in 1901. There are four foundation stones laid on the same day, Mrs Robt. Forsyth, Jas. Forsyth sen., W.H.McKeown esq. and Mrs. Howard Fleming. Four generations of Forsyths attended the opening.

No.12 a two storey Victorian house c.1885. Upper verandah

filled in and iron lace missing. There are some very old palms at the side, typical of the planting in Victorian times.

Turn right into Sydney Street.

SYDNEY STREET

No.142 a free standing two storey terrace built in 1882-83.

No.146 a small Victorian cottage.

No.150 Federation style.

Nos.162-188 neat little semis c.1936 with well tended gardens

No.161 Federation style with unusual diagonal and round window treatments.

Nos.202-204 Victorian semis in almost original condition.

These were built by The Industrial Building Society in 1900-1901.

Nos.206-212 originally identical to the above but much altered.

Next to these is a new development taking the place of similar semis.

DENSHURST STREET

On the corner of McMahon Street is "The Willoughby" hotel. Opened in 1899 it was described as one of the finest buildings in the northern suburbs with its own vegetable gardens and poultry yard. The street arcade and first floor balcony and awning have been replaced in the latest refurbishment. There is rococo decoration above and on the roof line. It was leased by Joseph Knight Smith from 1901 to 1928. He was an alderman from 1901-1918 and built many properties in the area including the shopping centre next to the hotel. The centre still bears the inscription Knightsmiths Buildings 1920.

The walk ends at the corner of Penshurst Street and Victoria Avenue, from where you can catch a bus. If you came by car, walk left down Victoria Avenue to take you back to Robinson Street. On the way you will pass 2NSB FM local radio station which started in 1983 and Caroma Pottery which started life as Mashman's Pottery in 1885.

More information about the area can be found at the Willoughby City Library, 407 Victoria Avenue, Chatswood

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