

MRS DARLING'S POINT¹

The picturesque point of land of the Sydney harbour shoreline, east of Rushcutters Bay, was called Yara-nabe by the aboriginals, probably named after the native tribe living in the area. By 1831 this point had become nicknamed 'Mrs Darling's Point' after the wife of the then Governor. Over time the name was further changed to simply, Darling Point.

Around 1828 this point between Rushcutters Bay and Double Bay was reserved for public purpose with the land being intended for villas. The area was claimed to be beautifully situated and adjacent to Woolloomooloo and Rushcutters Bay where handsome villas were already being built. It was proposed to sell the land in small allotments.

In the days of early settlement, there was not much interest in the land as it was not easy to access. With the construction of New South Head Road woodcutters made their way in, removing the timber, until an almost bare landscape remained.

Despite this, records at the Mitchell Library show that there were many applications for this area dating from 1832. Not only was this piece of land an attractive harbourside location, but advertisements claimed "... The climate of all the lands overlooking the Harbour of Port Jackson ... suitable for the cure and alleviation of every state of uncertain health or confirmed disease; sea-air and sea-bathing, hot or cold, being salutary in every species of complaint."

At a time when water supply was a constant problem in Sydney, Darling Point had an additional feature in its favour, as there were two streams at the end of the Point providing a good source of water. Where the ridge sloped very steeply to Double Bay, the water dripped over the edge of the cliff, forming two big pools, where women brought their washing. It also was a favourite play area, particularly for young boys.

A flight of stone stairs, aptly named '*Break Neck Steps*', gave foot access from the Point to Double Bay. Nearby was a guard house, where soldiers were stationed when convicts were working in the neighbourhood.

While working as builders, the convict gangs had to go up and down Break Neck, carrying their iron balls in hands, but still chained.

However by the 1850s land at Darling Point was thought to be of no value, being too far from town, without gas and other modern conveniences. It was considered to be unsafe at night and was patrolled by mounted police. In addition local residents subsidised a watchman.

¹ From 'The History of Woollahra – a record of events from 1788 to 1960 and a Centenary of Local Government. Prepared by James Jervis and edited by Vince Kelly, Halstead Press, Sydney c1960. Also notes have been taken from 'Darling Point, Chapter V, Houses and People'.

All the land on the point was taken up between 1833 and 1835 with prices varying from £285 for 7 acres to £527 for 8 acres and Darling Point became a suburb of distinctive homes. It was also a focal social centre for many years.

By 1838, 500 acres cost £500, 640 cost £750, and so on in rising scale till one bought 2,000 acres for £3,000.²

Many prominent people of the day built grand houses in the area, generally with stone quarried from the grounds. Major Mitchell, soldier and later Assistant in the General Survey working under the Duke of Wellington, owned all the land between Thornton Street (formerly Government Road) and the shore bounded by Darling Point Road on the east. He built his home in Gothic style, and named it '*Carthona*'. He carved the centre stones of the window arches and doors with his own hands. This house is featured in many old prints and paintings by Conrad Martens. Major Mitchell was later knighted to become Sir Thomas Mitchell.

Other houses in the area were also of Gothic style. It is thought that there may have been a concept at the time for buildings on the point to be as uniform as possible. Iron fretwork was also very much a feature of Sydney's houses at this time. Probably arrived as ballast because it was not a natural product of the 30's and 40's.

Although an area inhabited by distinguished persons, by the 1840s and 1850s a stretch along Darling Point Road became a dumping place for rubbish and a hang out for thieves. After an incident where Sir Thomas Mitchell himself fell victim to being robbed, he had a stone cottage built at the corner of the Darling Point Road and Yarrabee Road for the use of the police.

One of the oldest houses at the end of Darling Point Road was a place called *Lindesay*. In 1830 the Colonial Treasurer, Hon. Campbell Drummond Riddell, had applied for an allotment on the point between Rushcutters and Double Bay. Mr *Lindesay*, the Acting-Governor, directed that sixteen acres be reserved, and with the successful outcome of the application, this beautiful piece of land was granted to Mr Riddell. He then built a charming mansion in the Gothic Style, which he named '*Lindesay*' after his friend. (The 'e' is now omitted.)

Lindesay was offered for sale in 1841 and the land subdivided into 16 blocks. This was the beginning of subdivision of the point into smaller blocks.

Since 1963 *Lindesay* has been owned by the National Trust. The property has been restored to create a picture of the lifestyle of the early colonials. The house has a gracious interior with a fine collection of English and Colonial furniture. Landscaped gardens stretch to the foreshore. It is open monthly to the public.

On the corner block from Darling Point Road, Thornton Street and Hampden Avenue is the beautiful house '*Swifts*'. Mr Robert Lucas Tooth, (of the brewing family), built a small house there in 1875. The family lived there until 1882 when a larger house was built in the style known as Castellated Gothic, resembling the architecture of

² From notes ????? Houses and people, Chapter V, 'Darling Point',

Government House. The story goes that the Tooths wanted a bigger ballroom than the governor, bigger than Government House.

Doug and Greta Moran, (who Greta founded the Moran Health Care Group) bought *Swifts* in 1997 for \$12 million. Sadly by this time the two storeys of sandstone and grandeur had been stripped bare to pay for the former owner's debts.³

On the foreshore of Yarranabee Road, a sea captain named Malcolm began to build a two-storey dwelling with a flagstaff on the top.

It is believed that Captain Malcolm was a smuggler, possibly of rum, among other things, for many years. Eventually traced, customs officials boarded his ship at anchor offshore. By law, after 5 years the law could not touch smugglers, so Malcolm up-anchored and sailed out of Sydney Heads, dumping the customs men on the way.⁴

He never completed the house, nor did he live there and the place became known as *Malcolm's Folly*. It lay vacant for years, but was completed when Captain Malcolm returned about 5 years later. It then had 4 stories, each with a balcony facing the harbour, and a bridge from street level to the top of the flat roof, which was covered with lead. The entrance opened to a small glass room with a large square staircase leading to the four floors below.

There was also a long, roofed passageway leading from the house to the top of a large 3 story servants' quarters alongside. A large boatshed was situated at the water's edge.

The house was then named *Chollerton*.

At one time the house was run as a school for girls, and in the 1890s was a 'Batchelor Establishment', often providing accommodation for travelers. One of the regulars was Mr George Wilcox, who required accommodation when in Sydney from Adelaide, on business.

Eventually in 1899 the whole property was bought by George Wilcox. He divided it into three blocks, one for each of his sons. Sidney drew the Chollerton house, Murray the middle block with a house called *Yatalunga*, and George junior (George Seaborne) the westerly block. This latter block contained a deep stone well from which the sailing ships used to get water. The well was filled by a spring which at the time ran out onto the beach via an adjoining laneway.

'*Okinya*' is the aboriginal name for 'well' and the name chosen by George Wilcox for his house built in 1899.

The land here dropped sharply from the road to the water level, so retaining walls were needed for the construction of *Okinya*. At this time Murray and George owned a brickworks at Bondi. Sand from the brickworks was used to fill behind the retaining walls for both their houses. The buildings were probably built on sand fill with steel rods under.

³ reference: The Australian, January 2008.

⁴ Notes taken from a story told by Auntie Rita to Judy Andrews.

In about 1912 Chollerton was bought from Sidney (who still lived in Adelaide) by Sir George Julius. He upgraded the house by strengthening the balconies, which were becoming dangerous, and closed them in, as well as replacing the flat roof with slate.

Sir George Julius converted the boatshed into a workshop. This creative and enterprising individual used this workshop to build a model mountain, coal-mine, and a railway system which was exhibited for many Sydney charities. It was here in his workshop that he invented, built and developed the 'totalisator'.

By 1947 Chollerton was bought by Dr Spark. The family lived there before buying the next door property, 'Yatalunga', owned by the Phipps, to be their new home. Dr Spark converted 'Malcolm's Folly' into 3 flats which he rented out. His brother lived in the bottom flat.

Dr Spark envisaged the real estate potential of this prime location, and in 1957 had his houses demolished for the construction of the multi-storied *Yarranabee Gardens*.

Council would not approve the plans for the large apartment block because the land area was not large enough. When Okinya was sold by auction the developers were outbid by Mr. Whittle, a builder, who owned the house behind and above the Okinya site because he was prepared to pay any price to prevent his view being built out. The developers were then forced to pay a high price for the property, "Edmonton" (owned by the Arthur's), on the other side of the Chollerton block.

When completed he and his family lived in the pent-house.

Okinya was kept in the family and passed on to George's son, Jack. A separate chapter is dedicated to '*Okinya*'.

In later years an interesting discovery was made by Jack's son, George Edward. As a child, while playing with a friend on a vacant allotment opposite St Marks Church where Yarranabee Road meets Darling Point Road, the boys discovered a tunnel. They followed the tunnel and eventually came out in the 'Grotto' at *Yatalunga*. The 'Grotto' was the nickname to the area at the rear of the Tennis Court where a bricked archway made the entrance to what was once a storage space, and assumedly the tunnel, then at some later time, bricked in.

Captain Malcolm was supposed to have stashed away a fortune in loot somewhere on Darling Point and it is believed to be somewhere in this tunnel.

At the time of the demolition of Chollerton and Yatalunga, descendants of Captain Malcolm requested that any papers that may be found be passed on to them, but any treasure may be kept by the finders.

(Sketch of map showing tunnel)

Photo to consider: Colour print of painting – Sydney, from Mrs Darling's Point by J Skinner Prout (Gai's collection)

The Sydney Ice Co. was established in 1860 behind the old Royal Hotel in George Street, which later became the site of Dymock's Building. Ice was sold at 3d per lb., but 15lb. was the smallest block.