



historical
walking
tours

CITY OF SYDNEY 
city of villages

EXCHANGE COMMERCIAL & RETAIL SYDNEY

Historical Walking Tour



Front Cover Image:
Sydney Arcade interior, 1890
(Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

EXCHANGE

From imposing banks to opulent shops and old warehouses, much of Sydney's commercial history can be seen in its buildings.

Detail from a Grace Bros catalogue, 1922
(Image: City of Sydney Archives)

Sydney's shops demonstrate the evolution of retailing from elaborate Victorian shopping arcades to multi-storey department stores.

This walk will take you through the heart of the City's financial and retail district — Martin Place, George Street and Pitt Street — pointing out landmarks, their architectural features and the history behind them.



PLEASE ALLOW
1-2 HOURS FOR THIS TOUR.

Start at
St James Station (1) (1926)
on Elizabeth Street, opposite
Market Street.

**Sydney's
history
is all around us.**

Our walking tours will lead you
on a journey of discovery from
early Aboriginal life through to
contemporary Sydney.

Clover Moore

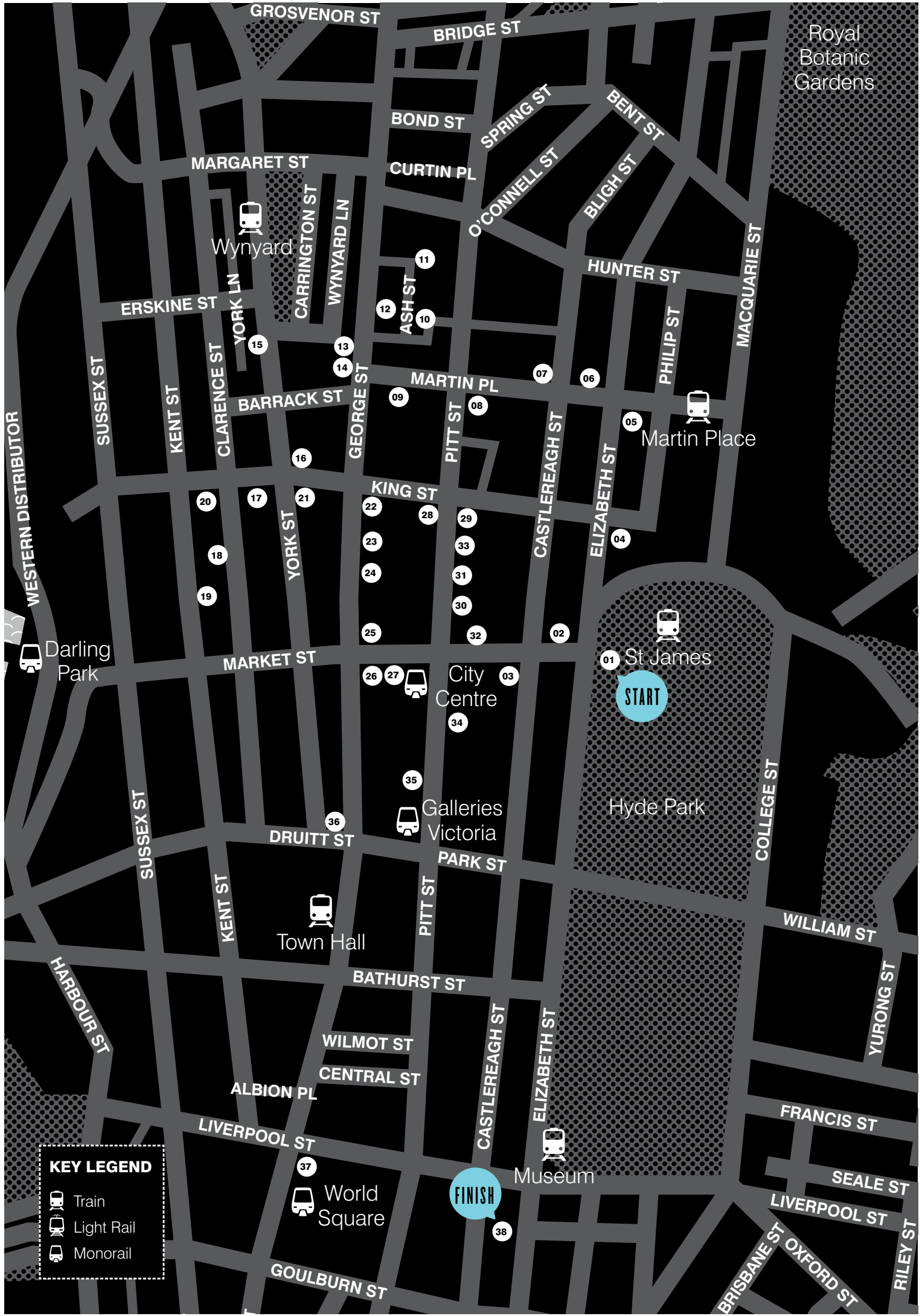
Clover Moore MP
Lord Mayor of Sydney

FEBRUARY
1922



Voile
Brock
29/6

Voile
Brock
29/6



Royal Botanic Gardens

Wynyard

Martin Place

Darling Park

City Centre

Galleries Victoria

Town Hall

Hyde Park

Museum

World Square

KEY LEGEND

-  Train
-  Light Rail
-  Monorail

GROSVENOR ST

BRIDGE ST

BOND ST

MARGARET ST

CURTIN PL

SPRING ST

BENT ST

CARRINGTON ST

WYNYARD LN

O'CONNELL ST

BLIGH ST

ERSKINE ST

YORK LN

ASH ST

HUNTER ST

SUSSEX ST

KENT ST

CLARENCE ST

BARRACK ST

GEORGE ST

MARTIN PL

CASTLEREAGH ST

PHILIP ST

MACQUARIE ST

WESTERN DISTRIBUTOR

BARRACK ST

MARTIN PL

KING ST

PITT ST

YORK ST

YORK ST

YORK ST

KING ST

PITT ST

CASTLEREAGH ST

ELIZABETH ST

YORK ST

YORK ST

YORK ST

MARKET ST

MARKET ST

MARKET ST

St James

START

SUSSEX ST

KENT ST

DRUITT ST

PITT ST

PARK ST

HARBOUR ST

BATHURST ST

WILMOT ST

CENTRAL ST

ALBION PL

CASTLEREAGH ST

ELIZABETH ST

COLLEGE ST

WILLIAM ST

YURONG ST

LIVERPOOL ST

LIVERPOOL ST

LIVERPOOL ST

Museum

FINISH

GOULBURN ST

FRANCIS ST

SEALE ST

LIVERPOOL ST

BRISBANE ST

OXFORD ST

RILEY ST

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01 ST JAMES STATION

In the 1920s, the railway was extended from Central Station into the city, shifting the retail focus from Haymarket back towards the city centre. St James Station brought shoppers to the edge of Sydney's retail district, and from there they wandered off to Gowings, Farmer's (now Myer), and David Jones.



Elizabeth Street entrance to St James Station, c1940s
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



Opposite the station are the **David Jones Department Stores** on Elizabeth Street (2) and Market Street (3).

02 + 03 DAVID JONES DEPARTMENT STORE

From its humble beginnings in 1838, David Jones Limited became Sydney's most elegant department store. The store on the corner of Elizabeth, Market and Castlereagh Streets (2) was opened in 1927. The glamorous ground floor interior is ablaze with mirrors, marble and lights. Located diagonally opposite, the second David Jones building (3) was completed in May 1938 to mark David Jones' trading centenary.

04

Walk down Elizabeth Street until you reach Martin Place. On the way you will see the **Old Supreme Court** (04) 102 Elizabeth Street, on the corner of King Street, and the former **Sun Building** (05), 60–70 Elizabeth Street.

05 THE FORMER SUN BUILDING

The Sun newspaper was an afternoon daily, which ran from 1910 until the 1980s. This building was the last of the great newspaper buildings to be built in the city, and the spectacular Skyscraper Gothic style confidently portrayed the commercial power of the media. Built in 1929, the Sun Building is one of only three in the city to be designed in this architectural style. The other two are The Grace Hotel and the State Theatre which you will also see on this tour.

i MARTIN PLACE

The city council designed and planned this long thoroughfare as "the financial and insurance centre" of Sydney. The widening and extension through to Macquarie Street began in 1923 but was not finished until 1935, after an expensive legal battle with landowners seeking compensation. The area was closed to cars in the 1960s and 1970s. Martin Place is lined with imposing banks and insurance buildings that aim to impress. The grand designs and lavish materials convey prestige as well as wealth, strength and security.



View east along Martin Place, 1933
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

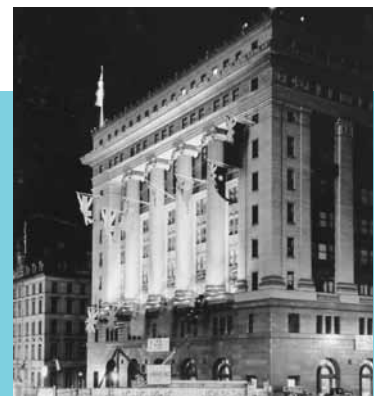


Martin Place is a large pedestrian plaza stretching from Macquarie Street to George Street. On the northern side of Martin Place, between Elizabeth and Castlereagh Streets, is the **Commonwealth Savings Bank** (6).

06

COMMONWEALTH SAVINGS BANK

This imposing building was built as the headquarters for the Government Savings Bank of NSW and opened in 1928. Go inside and have a look at the banking chamber—originally one of the largest in the world—which incorporates both Australian and imported marble and a plaster and pressed metal ceiling.



Commonwealth Bank on Martin Place illuminated for the visit of the Duke of Gloucester, 1934
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

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07

to

08



As you walk down Martin Place you will see the **Mutual Life and Citizens' Assurance building** (07) corner Castlereagh Street, with its logo on the tower, and the **Commonwealth Trading Bank and Headquarters** (08), corner Pitt Street. Cross Pitt Street and continue down to George Street. Running along the block between Pitt and George Streets on your left is the **GPO** (09) No. 1 Martin Place.



Mutual Life and Citizens' Assurance Building (Photograph: Gary Deirmendjian collection, City of Sydney Archives)

09

GENERAL POST OFFICE

The General Post Office (GPO) was constructed in stages from 1866–91. It is the most notable work in the city by Colonial Architect James Barnet. The realistic carvings facing Pitt Street and Martin Place by Italian-born sculptor Tommaso Sani, caused a public scandal. They were viciously attacked by the press and Parliament as being “hideous in form and expression” and attempts were made to force Barnet to remove them.



Keystone detail (Photograph: Gary Deirmendjian collection, City of Sydney Archives)

In the late 1990s, the site was redeveloped into a hotel and major conservation works were undertaken. Down in the basement, parts of Sydney's first water supply, the Tank Stream, were uncovered and some historical interpretation of this watercourse has been provided.



General Post Office, c1907 (Image: City of Sydney Archives)

10

to

11

Turn right into George Street and then right again into the narrow lane, Angel Place. This series of laneways was preserved as part of the Angel Place office development. Discover the **City Recital Hall** (10) and the former **Palings Warehouse** (11) in Ash Street before walking up Palings Lane to George Street. On your left is **Société Générale House** (12) 350 George Street.



Ash Street, 1920s (Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

12

SOCIÉTÉ GÉNÉRALE HOUSE

This insurance house was built in 1895 for the Equitable Life Assurance Society of America, under the supervision of their visiting architect Edward Raht. You may view the grand interior from the entrance foyer only. Please follow any direction issued by the Concierge. No photography allowed.



On George Street directly opposite Martin Place are two more bank buildings: **Westpac Bank** (13) 341 George Street and the (former) **National Australia Bank** (14) 343 George Street.



George Street near Wynyard, 1930s (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

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13 + 14 WESTPAC BANK AND (FORMER) NATIONAL AUSTRALIA BANK

These two bank buildings terminate the vista down Martin Place to George Street. The old photograph shows the Bank of New South Wales (13) and the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney (14) in 1933 shortly after their completion.



(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Cross over George Street and wander up the pedestrian section of Barrack Street to York Street and turn right. Lift your eyes and look for the miniature Eiffel Tower on the **AWA building** (15) 45–47 York Street.

15 AWA BUILDING

Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Ltd (AWA) was a household name from the 1930s to the 1950s as both a broadcaster and a manufacturer of radios, record players and other electrical equipment. Wireless House, its headquarters on York Street, became a Sydney landmark when it was built in 1939, the steel tower being the highest structure in the city until the 1960s.

16 Wander south along York Street until you reach The Grace Hotel. Along the way you will see a remarkably intact streetscape (the so-called York Street Wall) which retains many fine 19th and early 20th century buildings. Look out for the former warehouse of the furniture emporium **Beard Watson & Co** (16) on the left at 22–26 York Street. The original sandstone façade has fluted detailing including fluted pilasters with ornate capitals, vermiculated courses, swag mouldings, dentils, parapet and broken pediments topped by urns.

17 THE GRACE HOTEL

The Grace Building was constructed in 1930 for Grace Brothers as a department store and offices. The Gothic skyscraper design, particularly the spectacular corner tower, was modelled on the Chicago Tribune Building (1922). The Grace Building was requisitioned by the Australian Government during World War 2 and used by the US Army Services of Supply and the Royal Navy as a service base for Pacific operations. The building was extensively refurbished in 1995 and opened as The Grace Hotel in 1997.

The GRACE BUILDING

corner of
YORK AND
KING STS.

**SYDNEY'S
LOWEST
RENTALS**
All Rents
22½% down

*Why Not Have Your Business
Address Here?*

IN The Best Building
ON The Main Street

FROM The Harbour Bridge
TO The Sydney Town Hall

HOW WOULD THIS LOOK ON YOUR LETTERHEADS
Apply - - H. L. CROSS & CO. 84 Pitt Street,
Sydney.
or the Secretary, GRACEBROS LTD. Broadway, Sydney

Grace Hotel (Image: City of Sydney Archives)

At this point you may wish to take a detour to see the warehouses along Clarence and Kent streets.

EXCHANGE COMMERCIAL & RETAIL SYDNEY

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18 DETOUR: STOCKPILING IN THE CITY

to

20

The streets of York, Clarence and Kent between Erskine and DrUITT Streets are peppered with late 19th and early 20th century warehouses. These buildings serviced the busy wharves of Darling Harbour and the expanding retail businesses along George and Pitt Streets. Today many of them have been converted into offices and residential units. If you have time, you might like to wander around the block bounded by King, Clarence, Market and Kent Streets. Keep your eyes open for the arches of old carriageways which led to courtyards behind the warehouses. Highlights include the “twin” **warehouses** at 197–199 Clarence and 340 Kent Streets (18) and at 201–207 Clarence and 346–348 Kent Streets (19)—both groups of warehouses back onto shared central courtyards. Also of interest is **Broughton House** (20) an imposing former warehouse of the ironmonger John Keep & Sons dating from 1900.

21

Head down King Street towards George Street, passing by the **Forbes Hotel** (21), 30 York Street, corner King Street.

to

25

Before crossing George Street, look across at the **Darrell Lea shop** (22) corner King Street opposite you and also to the right down George Street to the **Strand Arcade** (23) 412–414 George Street, **The Block, Dymocks** (24) 428 George Street and **Myer** (25) corner Market Street. Cross and walk down George to Market Street.

22

DARRELL LEA SHOP

This exuberant building was constructed in 1863–64 for Ashdown & Co, wholesale and furnishing ironmongers. It later became the Royal Exchange Hotel in the 1930s and most recently the flagship store for Darrell Lea chocolates.

23

STRAND ARCADE

Named after The Strand in London, a smart and fashionable shopping street, Sydney’s Strand Arcade opened in April 1892. Today it still retains the small elite boutiques that defined the Sydney shopping experience of the 1890s.

24

DYMOCKS BUILDING (THE BLOCK)

The Block was built by the Dymock’s firm in 1926–1932 following the demolition of the Royal Hotel and shopping arcade. The enclosed shopping promenade above Dymocks retains terrazzo floors, silky oak shopfronts, and leadlights in the shop windows. It is a hidden gem of Sydney retailing.

25

MYER

The former retail emporium of Farmer and Company (established in 1840) was built between 1928 and 1957. The store included an art gallery, roof garden and restaurant. In 1960 Farmer & Co was taken over by the Melbourne retail giant Myer. The store traded as Grace Bros from 1983 to 2004.



Before crossing Market Street, pause and look up at the old **Gowings building** (26) and the **State Theatre** (27) next to it. Then cross over to take a closer look at each of these buildings.

26

FORMER GOWINGS BUILDING

Since 1868, Sydneysiders have “Gone to Gowings”. The firm became a public company in 1920 and the Gowings Department Store was purpose built for the company in 1929. Gowings closed its doors in 2006.



(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

27

STATE THEATRE

The State Theatre opened on 7 June 1929 in a blaze of colour and light. It is the third building on our tour designed in the Gothic skyscraper style. Above the theatre is an 11-storey office tower. The interiors of the State Theatre are lavish and it is worthwhile going on a guided tour.



2UW attendant and lift driver at the State Theatre, 1936
(Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)



Walk down Market Street until you get to Pitt Street. At this point you may wish to take a detour to Pitt Street Mall.

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28 DETOUR: PITT STREET MALL

to Pitt Street Mall, created in 1988, contains many layers of Sydney's commercial and retail history. There is the old **Liverpool Arms Hotel** (28); the former **Australian Mutual Fire Insurance Society Building** (29); the **Strand Arcade** (23); the façades of the **City Bank Hotel** (1903) (30) and an **old Bank of NSW** (31); and the landmark **Sydney Tower** (32) which opened in 1982. Have a look up at the parapet on the **Soul Pattinson Chemist building** (33). Can you see the phoenix rising from the ashes? W H Pattinson rebuilt his pharmacy in 1886 after a fire and named the new building *Resurgam*.



Pitt Street, 1960
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

34 Turn right into Pitt Street. As you walk look out for the **City Tattersall's Club** (34), 202–204 Pitt Street, with its prancing horse on the parapet, and **The Arthouse Hotel** (former School of Arts) (35), 275 Pitt Street.

35 THE ARTHOUSE HOTEL

Mechanics Institutes and Schools of Arts were central civic buildings in many 19th century towns. Founded for the educational improvement of skilled working class men, they quickly became popular with clerks, schoolteachers and professional men. The former School of Arts in Pitt Street was refurbished as a hotel in 2002 and the restored interior decoration is impressive.

Turn right and walk down Park Street to the **Queen Victoria Building (QVB)** (36) George Street between Market and Druiitt Streets.

36 QUEEN VICTORIA BUILDING (QVB)

There have been markets on this site since 1810. The Queen Victoria Markets replaced the old George Street markets in 1898. They were designed for the Council by the City Architect, George McRae, and aspired to be the grand shopping arcade of Sydney rather than produce markets. The imposing Romanesque building was never successful as markets. The QVB was refurbished in 1986.



Queen Victoria Building, 1919
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

37 You can finish your walk here, or wander down George Street to discover the sites of two of Sydney's largest and grandest department stores: **World Square** (37) on the site the once vast Hordern's Palace Emporium, and the **Former Mark Foys Department Store** (38) between Elizabeth and Castlereagh Streets.

38 FORMER MARK FOYS DEPARTMENT STORE

Mark Foys started out on Oxford Street, but moved to this site in 1909. The purpose-built store grew from three to six storeys over the years. It closed in 1983. Notice the distinctive white glazed bricks and deep yellow terracotta trim announcing *Hosiery, Shoes, Corsets* and other items for sale.



Mark Foys c1930
(Historic Houses Trust of NSW)



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walking
tours



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More information can be found at the City's website:

www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/history

or call the City of Sydney on **9265 9333**

We welcome your feedback:

history@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

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www.dictionaryofsydney.org



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CITY OF SYDNEY: 9265 9333

council@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS): **13 14 50**

STOP!

ON THE FOOTPATH

LOOK!

RIGHT, LEFT AND RIGHT AGAIN

LISTEN!

FOR ANY OTHER TRAFFIC
INCLUDING PUSH BIKES

THINK!

IS IT SAFE FOR ME TO CROSS?

CROSS!

WITH CARE AND KEEP ON
LOOKING FOR OTHER VEHICLES

This brochure was prepared by the
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HWT 3