



historical
walking
tours

CITY OF SYDNEY 
city of villages

PASSION SYDNEY'S WILD SIDE

Historical Walking Tour



Front Cover Image:
Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross, 1965 (Photograph: City of Sydney)

THE CROSS

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ings Cross, along with its adjoining locales of Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay, has a rich and risqué history.

Once the domain of grand houses and stylish apartments, “The Cross” eventually became the city’s red light district and an entertainment zone that never sleeps.

But along with sailors, soldiers, tourists and suburbanites out for a night on the town, it has also been home to Sydney’s Bohemia, the haunt of artists, actors, writers and musicians. It continues to attract anyone hoping to find what the painter Donald Friend described in the 1940s as the “genuine Berlin air” of the Cross, where “Everybody is wicked”.



PLEASE ALLOW
1½ HOURS FOR THIS TOUR.

If you want to go into Elizabeth Bay House, add an extra hour. There are lots of coffee shops and pubs en route. Start at Kings Cross Station. Turn left and walk along Darlinghurst Road (1).

**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

William Street in 1970
(Photograph: National Archives of Australia, A1200,L84004)





Royal Botanic Gardens

Woolloomooloo Bay

Elizabeth Bay

Beare Park

Rushcutters Bay

START

FINISH

Kings Cross

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01 DARLINGHURST ROAD

Darlinghurst Road is many things. It is the city's red light district, backpackers' mecca and home for temporary and long-term residents. Many famous people have lived in the street, including poet and activist Mary Gilmore, artist William Dobell, cartoonist Emile Mercier, and the "gun doc". In the 1930s and 1940s its Bohemian atmosphere made its cafes and nightclubs a magnet for writers, artists and musicians. The nearby Garden Island naval base and Woolloomooloo docks brought in many servicemen during World War II and the Vietnam War, and this led to the introduction of American-style bars and strip clubs. On the eastern side of the road, notice the Art Deco building at No. 52, now the Council Neighbourhood Service Centre and Library. This is a place to find more information about The Cross. On the corner of Roslyn Street is the Empire, formerly the site of the legendary Les Girls. Darlinghurst Road is also where the first Mardi Gras protest march for gay rights ended in a riot and 53 arrests in 1978.

Continue along Darlinghurst Road to the end. To the left is Macleay Street and opposite are the **Fitzroy Gardens** (02).



Pink Pussycat Club
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

02 FITZROY GARDENS AND EL ALAMEIN FOUNTAIN

This was the site of *Maramanah*, the house occupied by eccentric aunts in Robin Eakin's book *Aunts up the Cross* (1965). The aunts had their own private orchestra and could see no good reason to pay taxes or conform to any of the usual behaviour expected of "respectable" society. The house was sold to the City Council in 1945 and demolished to build the park. The El Alamein Fountain, designed by Robert Woodward, was built in 1961. The dandelion effect of the arrangement of its bronze pipes has become a symbol of Kings Cross.



El Alamein Fountain
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Turn left and walk along Macleay Street to **Orwell Street** (03).

03 ORWELL STREET

In Orwell Street you will see many examples of Art Deco buildings. The Metro building, designed by Bruce Dellit in the 1930s, was previously known as The Minerva Theatre. In the 1960s it was the venue for the groundbreaking musical *Hair*. For a time in the 1970s it was a supermarket. Today it has been restored and is the headquarters of Kennedy Miller Mitchell Films, makers of *Mad Max* and *Babe*.

Retrace your steps along Orwell Street, turn left into Macleay Street, then left into Hughes Street, home of the **Wayside Chapel** (04), 29 Hughes Street.



Two women outside Minerva French Perfumery in 1941
(Photograph: Russell Roberts Walkabout collection, State Library of NSW)

04 WAYSIDE CHAPEL

The Wayside Chapel was set up in 1964 by the Reverend Ted Noffs of the Methodist Church (now the Uniting Church). As well as the Chapel, it houses a Crisis Centre offering crisis accommodation, food, clothing, counselling and referrals to 2000 people a week. It also offers telephone and face-to-face counselling, health care and bathroom facilities for the homeless and those in need, and support to homeless and at-risk youth.

Continuing down Hughes Street, turn right into Tusculum Street, and right again into Manning Street, to reach **Tusculum** (05), 3 Manning Street.

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05 TUSCULUM

When the first land grants were made on Woolloomooloo Hill (now Potts Point) houses there had to meet several conditions—they had to cost at least £1000, face the city, and be approved by the Governor. *Tusculum*, designed by John Verge for the merchant Alexander Brodie Spark and completed in 1835, was typical of the mansions that once dominated the landscape of this precinct. Originally there was an open colonnade of Doric columns at ground level, but in 1851 merchant William Long rebuilt it with the two-storey Ionic colonnade we see today. *Tusculum* went through many uses, ending up near-derelict before being restored in 1988 as home of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. A new building at the rear contains an architectural bookshop open to the public.



Tusculum (Photograph: Max Dupain / Australian Institute of Architects)



Turn right at Macleay Street, and walk back along the street to the intersection of Greenknowe Avenue. Cross over to the corner building known as **Kingsclere** (06), 48 Macleay Street.

06 KINGSCLERE

Kingsclere, completed in 1912 and designed by Halligan and Wilton, was the first block of high-rise apartments built on this street and among the first in Sydney. They aimed at an exclusive market, with features such as two balconies and two bathrooms for each flat, luxurious wood panelling and automatic passenger lifts. In the 1920s and 1930s, Macleay Street became known for its fine apartment buildings designed by prominent architects, including the *Macleay Regis* at No. 12 (1939), *Manar* at No. 42 (1926) and *Byron Hall* at No. 97–99 (1929).



Kingsclere, 1912 (Photograph: Building magazine, December 1912, State Library of NSW)



Continue down Greenknowe Avenue, then turn left into Onslow Avenue, to reach **Elizabeth Bay House** (07), 7 Onslow Avenue.

07 ELIZABETH BAY HOUSE

Elizabeth Bay House was the home of Colonial Secretary Alexander Macleay from 1839. The design is attributed to John Verge, who also designed *Tusculum* and *Rockwall*, which you will see later on this walk. From 1841 to 1927, the 54 acre (21.8 hectare) estate was progressively lost to subdivisions. Between 1928 and 1935 it became a squat where some of Sydney's Bohemian artists lived rent-free with beautiful harbour views, but without electricity. It then became a reception venue, then flats. A City Council plan for it to be used for receptions—and as a residence for the Lord Mayor—was set aside by the NSW Government in 1976 and it was finally restored and opened to the public as a house museum in 1977. Its magnificent elliptical, domed saloon with its curving, cantilevered staircase is one of the finest interiors of a 19th century Australian building. Don't miss out on going inside.



Staircase at Elizabeth Bay House (Photograph: Ray Joyce / Historic Houses Trust of NSW)



On leaving Elizabeth Bay House you may turn left and find the stairs back up to Macleay Street, or take a detour right onto Billyard Avenue to reach **Boomerang** (08), 42 Billyard Avenue.

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08 BOOMERANG

Boomerang brought the Hollywood-influenced Spanish hacienda style to Sydney. It was designed by English architect Neville



Hampson for the music publisher Frank Albert, who lived there from 1926 until his death in 1962. It was named after his company's Boomerang trademark, the brand name for his popular sheet music and a range of mouth organs. Unoccupied from 1962 to 1978, it has since changed hands several times, becoming one of Australia's most expensive city houses. Note: this is a private residence, not open to the public.



Just around the corner from Boomerang is Beare Park, a good vantage point for viewing the harbour or taking a break. Then retrace your steps along Billyard Avenue past McElhone Reserve. Across the road you will see a stairway—proceed up the stairway and follow the “dog-leg” footpath between apartment buildings which takes you back to Macleay Street. Turn left into Macleay Street, then right into Rockwall Crescent to the old mansion **Rockwall** (09) on your left.

09 ROCKWALL

This is one of the remaining original grand residences of Potts Point. Its gardens once extended to Macleay Street. It was designed by John Verge and built 1830–37 as an “Italian villa” for John Busby, who achieved fame by overseeing the construction of Busby's Bore, a tunnel that brought fresh water into the city when the original Tank Stream was running dry. Italianate verandas were added later, and over its life the house has been many things, including a school for girls. By the 1960s it was virtually derelict, but was restored in the 1990s for the adjoining hotel (now Rockwall Apartments). Today, it is back in private hands.



Rockwall, c1840
(Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)



Retrace your steps back to Macleay Street and turn left. Continue past Challis Avenue to “**The Yellow House**” (10), 57–59 Macleay Street.

10 THE YELLOW HOUSE

This 1897 terrace was once owned by Frank and Thelma Clune, patrons of the arts. In 1957 it became the Terry Clune Gallery, and artists who exhibited there included Russell Drysdale, John Olsen and John Perceval. From 1970 to 1972 Martin Sharp, a young Sydney artist, turned the gallery space into what he described as “an artist community in the south, in the sun, and probably one of the greatest pieces of conceptual art ever achieved”. Virtually every surface was painted with images inspired by the Surrealists and Van Gogh. The house was named after Van Gogh's Yellow House in Arles and was the venue for cabarets, plays and films. Artists involved included Brett Whiteley, Peter Weir, Jim Sharman and George Gittoes. In 2003 it was reinvented as apartments, with an art gallery space on the ground floor. Remnants of the 1970s work were found in the building, restored and repositioned for public view.



Painter at work at the Yellow House, early 1970s
(Photograph: © Rennie Ellis Collection, held at Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

i DETOUR: GARDEN ISLAND

If you continue north along Macleay Street and Wylde Street you will reach the Royal Australian Navy base, HMAS Kuttabul, incorporating Garden Island. There has been a naval base on Garden Island since 1858. This picture shows it c1920. It was joined to the mainland by the building of the Captain Cook Graving Dock in 1942. Many of the old colonial villas of the area are now part of HMAS Kuttabul. For more information on guided tours call the Naval Historical Society on 9359 2372.



Garden Island when it was still an island, c1920
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



You may wish to take a detour and view Garden Island. Otherwise, go back a few steps along Macleay Street, then turn right into **Challis Avenue** (11).

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11 CHALLIS AVENUE

Challis Avenue is named after John Henry Challis, who arrived in Sydney in 1829 and became a successful local merchant. He was a great benefactor of the University of Sydney, leaving his property to the University to form the Challis Bequest. The street has many fine town houses built in Greek Revival style, as well as Romanesque style terraces with elaborate colonnaded verandas. A fine example is the **Garcia Centre** (12).

12 GARCIA CENTRE FOR PERFORMING ARTS

In 1909 the Sisters of Charity, located nearby, bought these four terraces before they were completed as houses, and converted them to the Garcia School of Singing and Music. The inspiration behind this was Sister Mary Paul of the Cross, previously known as Madame Christian, a great oratorio singer and a teacher of Nellie Melba. She had renounced a brilliant singing career to enter the order in 1894.



Turn left into Victoria Street. On this corner are the imposing walls of **St Vincent's College** (13).

13 ST VINCENT'S COLLEGE

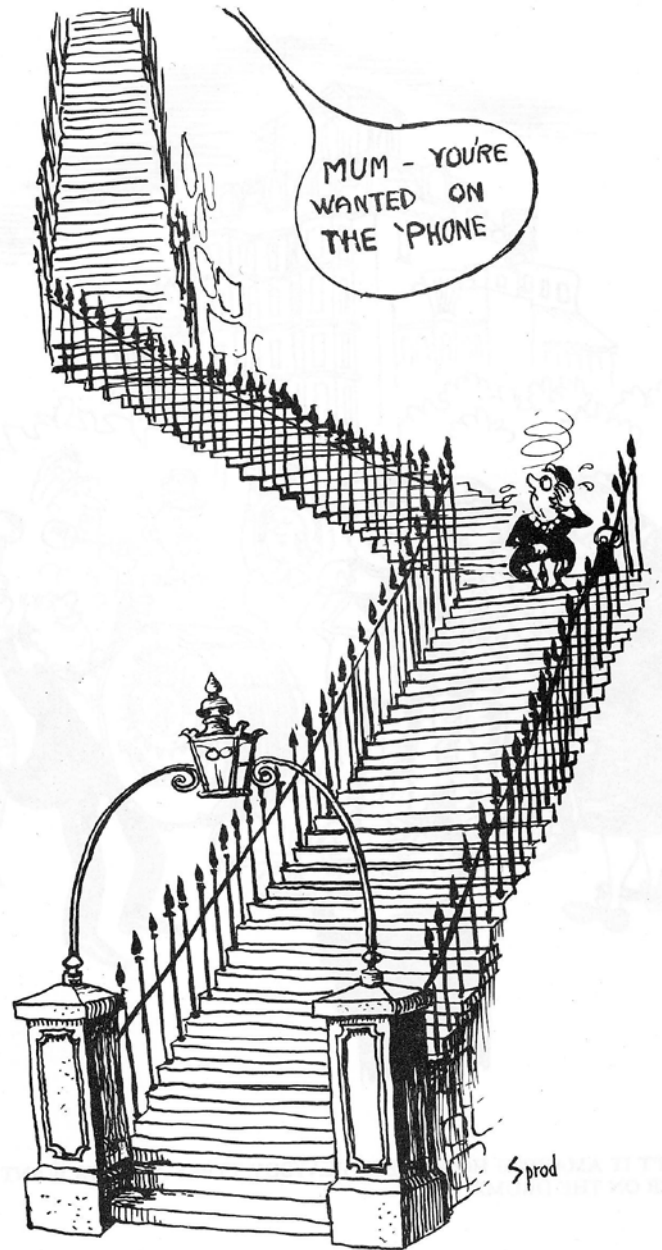
The Sisters of Charity acquired an old residence called *Tarmons* on this site, for a convent. They established a free hospital in 1857 and a school for the local children in 1858. A few years later St Vincent's Hospital moved to its present location, leaving room for the school to expand, as semi-rural Potts Point became a dense inner city location. St Vincent's College now has about 700 students, with 160 boarders.



On your right, across Victoria Street are the **McElhone Stairs** (14) and further down the street you will find the **Butler Stairs** (19).

14 + 19 MCELHONE STAIRS + BUTLER STAIRS

These stairs were built about 1870 to link the neighbourhoods of Kings Cross and Potts Point with Woolloomooloo. They had been separated by an escarpment, and the divide was social as well as physical. This is seen in the classic 1920s Australian silent film *The Kid Stakes*, based on the Fatty Finn comic strip, where the rich boy from Potts Point is contrasted with his poorer cousins from The 'Loo.



Take the **McElhone Stairs** to enjoy the Woolloomooloo detour. Continuing down Victoria Street leads to the site of one of the first "**Green Bans**" (18) of the 1970s.

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15 DETOUR: WOOLLOOMOOLOO

to

17

The 'Loo is one of Australia's most internationally famous place names, mentioned not only in the Monty Python 'Bruces' sketch, but in F Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, perhaps because this was many visitors' first landfall in Australia – and the name couldn't be more Australian. The name is derived from the local Aboriginal language, variously spelt as **Walamul, Wooloo Mooloo and Wallamoula**. The navy still ties up here (15), but the "**Finger Wharf**" (16), one of the largest in the world, has now been turned into residential units, hotel accommodation and restaurants. Also in the area are several pubs and the legendary pie cart, **Harry's Café de Wheels**, Cowper Wharf Road (17).



Harry's Café de Wheels
(Photograph: Paul Green / City of Sydney)

18 VICTORIA STREET AND THE GREEN BANS

Victoria Street contains many beautiful old terraces and is lined with plane trees that meet in the middle to form a leafy canopy over the road. When developers wanted to demolish terraces in the 1970s to build high rise apartments, the Builders' Labourers Federation (BLF) imposed Green Bans on the houses. Residents refused to leave their properties, and after a long battle, some places were saved and the new development was not as intrusive as had been planned.



Walk on down the street until you arrive at No. 202 on the left hand side, formerly the house of Juanita Nielsen (20).



East side of Victoria Street, 1974
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

20 202 VICTORIA STREET

Juanita Nielsen came from a wealthy family and could have chosen to live a quiet life. Instead she became heavily involved in the campaign to save Victoria Street. She was the proprietor of a local newspaper *NOW* which she used to crusade for the retention of the street. Her vocal support of the Green Bans and her refusal to sell this house may explain why she disappeared on 4 July 1975, assumed murdered.



Juanita Nielsen
(Photograph: courtesy Elizabeth Butel and Tom Thompson, Kings Cross Album, 1984)



Continue down Victoria Street and you reach **Kings Cross** (21) itself, where William Street, Darlinghurst Road, Victoria Street and Kings Cross Road meet and cross.

21 THE CROSS

The intersection of many streets, including the crossover of Darlinghurst Road and Victoria Street at William Street, was originally named Queens Cross to celebrate the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. In 1905 the name was officially changed to Kings Cross. William Street then was much narrower than it is today. It was widened in 1916, and the building of the Kings Cross tunnel in the 1970s extended it through to Bayswater Road. The buildings at the top of the Cross have sprouted bright advertising signs for many decades, and the current large Coca-Cola sign has become a Kings Cross landmark.



Kings Cross, c1950
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



If you want to begin exploring the other side of The Cross, known as Darlinghurst, cross over the intersection, continue down Victoria Street, turn left into Craighend Street then right into Nimrod Street.

22 STABLES THEATRE

The Nimrod Street Theatre at 10 Nimrod Street was founded in 1970 when a group of young actors, writers and directors including John Bell, Anna Volska, Richard Wherrett, Ken and Lilian Horler and Ron Blair turned an old stable into an intimate and provocative theatre space. They produced new Australian plays and radical new versions of Shakespeare in a steady stream until 1974 when they moved to bigger premises in nearby Belvoir Street, Surry Hills. The Nimrod Street Theatre was renamed SBW Stables Theatre and in 1979, the Griffin Theatre Company took it over.



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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
History Program at the City of Sydney.
5th edition, September 2011.

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