



ELIZABETH BAY AND POTTS POINT WALK

Much of the early settlement and development in Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay is reflected in the names that are all about the area. Many of the streets and tall blocks of flats recall those who settled in the area and the grand houses that they caused to be built on their estates. For instance, Wylde Street commemorates Judge Advocate John Wylde, who received the first land grant at what was the very end of the Point in 1822, whilst Macleay Street honours Alexander Macleay, then Colonial Secretary, who received the largest grant in the area in 1828. Macleay's house, designed by the eminent architect John Verge, is one of the few still standing today. In 1831 seventeen grants were formalised on Woolloomooloo Hill, as Potts Point was then called. The houses erected on these were intended to establish the area as one of exclusive and stylish dwellings. However, after only ten years the subdivision of the estates began, and this was the genesis of the area as it is today. By the 1890s Potts Point had become one of Sydney's fashionable suburbs and was known for its large houses set in relatively spacious grounds.

In 1912 the completion of "Kingsclere" at 1 Greenknowe Avenue broke new ground, as it was the first of the large blocks of flats to be erected in the area. By the 1920s Potts Point and nearby Kings Cross and Darlinghurst were known for the proliferation of what were for the time tall blocks of flats. Many of the largest and finest of the period in Sydney are still to be found in these localities. Potts Point was considered to be a select area, as was Elizabeth Bay. By the end of the 1930s the work of many of Sydney's prominent architects was represented across the entire locality. Indeed, the whole area offers a goodly array of architectural treasures and gems from several decades of the twentieth century.

“Wyldefel Gardens” at 8a Wylde Street

is attributed to architect John Brogan, but the inspiration and driving force behind it came from socialite philanthropist William Crowle, who was in this period Sydney’s greatest private collector of works of art. On his travels he observed a modern housing scheme outside of Oberammergau in Germany. “Wyldefel Gardens” was absolutely unique, and the most totally modern apartment complexes in Sydney, if not Australia, when completed in 1936. It consisted of two cascading blocks of apartments separated by stepped gardens. The roof of one apartment served as the garden terrace of the one above as they moved up the hillside. The complex also included tennis courts and a swimming pool.

“Ilan Court”, at 13 Wylde Street

is representative of the scale of many of the smaller blocks of flats erected during the 1920s. Its twisted columns, arched entry and tiled parapet reflect something of the influence of the Spanish Mission style, which became popular here from the middle of the 1920s.

St Neot Avenue

was named after one of the early houses in the locality and is characterised by flats from the 1920s on one side and flats from the 1930s facing them on the other side of the street. Of the latter, No.7 and no.17 might be considered good examples of what is locally termed Interwar Functionalism, overlain with some characteristic Art Deco embellishments.

17 Wylde Street

was designed by the architect Aaron Bolot (see also Ashdown below) and built between 1948 and 1951 for a company called Urban Co-operative Multi-Home Units. It was an early effort to build flats for owner-occupancy. The external expression, one of sweeping horizontal planes, voids where balconies occurred, and exposed columns was also an innovation for post-war Sydney. A pair of lift/fire stairs and open stairs serve only two of the four apartments on each floor. Kitchens and bathrooms are located at the rear of the building, allowing the living rooms and bedrooms to take advantage of the sweeping north easterly aspect.

4 Macleay Street

is generally representative of Functionalist architecture from the end of the 1930s. Its breakfront façade gently cantilevers over the footpath in several places, whilst the brick decoration draws attention to the location of the principal entry. The building is part of a group of four substantial blocks of flats in this section of Macleay Street.

“Macleay Regis”, 12 Macleay Street

was designed by architects Eric Pitt and C C Phillips, and was one of the largest blocks of flats erected in Sydney during the 1930s. Its plan configuration was designed to gain the maximum amount of daylight in every flat. The layout of individual flats bears a close resemblance to Wallace Harrison’s 1936 Rockefeller Apartments near the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan. The building’s spectacular entry porch and ground floor foyers are amongst the finest of any from the 1930s in Sydney.

“Selsdon” at 16 Macleay Street

was completed in 1934 to the design of architects Prevost and Ruwald, who were better known for the numerous pubs that they were responsible for in the 1920s and 1930s. Its medieval character recalls Old English styles, very much associated with Sydney’s domestic architecture during the 1930s, whilst the two pavilions on the roof are rather Romanesque in inspiration. It originally contained 52 flats.

20 Macleay Street

dates from the late 1930s. Its serrated window bays, cantilevering over the street, reflect the influence of Emil Sodersten's City Mutual Life Assurance Building at the corner of Bligh and Hunter Street in the city. Although it is tempting to attribute this building to him, the Twentieth Century Society has not so far discovered any definite documentary evidence that might substantiate this supposition.

73 Macleay Street

represents the influence of the Mediterranean style, introduced to Sydney by English architect Leslie Wilkinson. Wilkinson was head of the School of Architecture at the University of Sydney and familiar with the architectural glories of Italy prior to arriving in this country in 1919. The style is chiefly evident in the design of the balconies and doors in the top floor, as well as the cornice topped by a whimsical suggestion of a roof. Flats of the 1920s and 1930s in Sydney were not always stylistically pure, as is evidenced by the shingled skirts beneath the windows of the middle storeys. These would have been just as happy, if not more so, on a suburban California Bungalow.

The Sheraton Motor Hotel at 40 Macleay Street

is representative of architectural trends around 1960, although the textured bricks at the side of the building were popular in the 1930s as well. The main façade is enlivened by the dialogue between the light and airy balconies, graced by the pattern of the wrought iron balustrading, and the adjacent dark toned tiled wall pieced by square windows. It exemplifies the aesthetic distance between the post war and pre war eras.

"The Manar", 42 Macleay Street

was designed by architects E A Scott, Green and Scott and completed in 1921. It incorporates an earlier dwelling within its fabric. The building, containing residential flats, is designed in a dignified Free Classical idiom. Amongst its most important and influential residents was the publisher and art collector Sydney Ure Smith, who was responsible for the journals *Art in Australia* and *The Home*, and did much to promote art and modern design in Sydney during the 1920s through to the 1940s.

"Werrington" and Wychbury", at 3 and 5 Manning Street

were designed by Emil Sodersten and completed in 1930 and 1934 respectively. They clearly show Sodersten's path from an eclectic approach during the 1920s, evolving into a confident use of the Art Deco style the following decade. The sunbursts at the top of "Wychbury" are particularly noteworthy - Sodersten's assured brick detailing is readily in evidence here.

Crick Avenue

is distinguished by these characteristically small scale apartment buildings with Art Deco overtones. Although brick was not generally favoured for other larger building types, it had connotations of domestic warmth and so was thought appropriate for flat and apartment blocks. This little group suggests something of the variety that was achieved by the use of the ubiquitous brick during the interwar period.

“Kingsclere”, 1 Greenknowe Avenue

was the first tall block of flats to be erected in Potts Point. It was designed for an exclusive tenant market and the individual apartments were quite generous: “... 6 rooms, kitchen, pantry, two bathrooms, lavatories, linen, cooks’ and housemaids’ cupboards. There are two balconies and an escape stair to each flat ...” (*Building*, December 12 1912). The building was fitted out with the latest technology such as automatic passenger lifts, intercoms to each flat, and complete installation of electrical light and power. It was designed by Halligan and Wilton, who dressed it in the brick and sandstone beloved of Edwardian architects.

“Tara”, 3 Greenknowe Avenue

graphically demonstrates the changes wrought in twenty five years when it is compared to its illustrious neighbour. Similarities of height and mass, window proportions and brickwork, however, means that the relationship between the two is relatively harmonious. Its Functionalist (Moderne) exterior is punctuated by a Tudorish arch above the main entry off the laneway.

“Byron Hall”, at 97-99 Macleay Street

was designed by architect C Hamilton and completed in 1929. Its mass of dark bricks, known colloquially as “liver brick”, is relieved by generous projecting balconies and faceted bays of windows, as well as an applique of classically derived detailing. This is especially apparent at the entry and the top of the building, hinting at the influence of the Commercial Palazzo idiom.

This small streamlined building stands at the **corner of Macleay and Orwell Streets**.

It dates from the late 1930s or early 1940s and was formerly part of the adjacent Minerva Café, containing flats and office space. The former Minerva Café and Metro (formerly Minerva) Theatre form an arresting group down Orwell Street. The Café was designed by architect Reginald Magoffin, whilst the theatre was initially designed by C Bruce Dellit. However, the commission was handed over to the nationally important cinema architects Guy Crick and Bruce Furse. Both were completed in 1939. The theatre stands on the site of the early house called “Orwell”, after which the street was named.

“Gowrie Gate”, 115 Macleay Street

was designed by architect Dudley Ward, one of a handful of architects who were influential in disseminating the influence of European Modernism from about 1936 onwards. Its pleasingly detailed brickwork and tightly radiused curved corners are typical of the late 1930s – it was completed in 1938. The less said about the unfortunate recent windows and balcony enclosures, however, the better.

“Cahors”, 117 Macleay Street

was designed by architects Joseland and Gilling, who were to become prominent in the decades after World War Two. The building was completed in 1940. Its simple, monumental massing is reminiscent of the office buildings of the time. It is modulated by some Art Deco embellishments in relief at upper levels, whilst the large blue glazed terra cotta tiles around the entry were the very height of fashionable colouring. The ground floor foyers are intact and of high quality.

“Franconia”, 123-125 Macleay Street

dates from around 1930. Its spectacular, if squat, “Gothic” entry forms a theatrical incident on the street. The base of the building appears to be made from synthetic stone, a material that had originated in America in the last decades of the nineteenth century but was introduced into Australia only around 1927 or 1928. This is, therefore, a very early application of the material, especially for a tall apartment building. It is also quite rare.

“Kingsley Hall”, 1a Barncleuth Square

was completed around 1931. The austerity of much of the exterior is dramatically terminated by decorative brickwork, stepped masses and pointed windows – Art Deco versus Gothic – at the top.

The El Alamein Fountain was the work of the architect and internationally renowned designer of fountains, Robert Woodward. It was designed in 1959 and consists of a “dandelion” of bronze pipes with carefully designed nozzles and a cascade at its base. The fountain won the New South Wales Institute of Architects Civic Design Award in 1964, and spawned a host of similar fountains around the world.

“Marlborough Hall”, 4 Ward Avenue

was designed by architect Emil Sodersten and completed in 1938. The L-shaped plan ensured that the majority of flats in the building were favoured with a north-easterly aspect, and many commanded fine views across to the harbour. As well, a large portion of the site was made available for pleasant gardens and planting. The building contained sixty two flats. Its horizontal expression reflects the experimentation that was taking place in Sydney with aspects of European Modernism – Sodersten had been to Europe and North America a year or so earlier and his work changed after his return as a result of what he had absorbed.

17 Elizabeth Bay Road

is a restrained building from the end of the 1930s that is of interest because of its stepped configuration, responding to the line of the street and gaining the most of the sun, and the modulation of the brickwork that organises its external cladding into horizontal bands.

“Harley”, at 1 Birtley Place

is a modest building in fashionable blond brick, signifying that it was built in the second half of the 1930s. It is, however, distinguished by a multi-hued porch lined in Vitrolite or similar – it is very rare indeed to find intact structural glass surviving in this sort of application in Sydney, let alone three different colours together. It also boasts a very representative Art Deco frieze above the front doors.

“Birtley Towers”, 8 Birtley Place

was designed by Emil Sodersten and completed in 1934. It was amongst the very first, and certainly the largest, apartment block to be erected in Australia as the depression eased. It exemplifies Sodersten’s masterful control in the detail of brickwork, especially seen in the sunbursts and finials at the top of the building, and is credited with making popular the ubiquitous texture brick. It contained 54 flats, six per floor. Although completed with an impressive porte-cochere, there was garaging for only fourteen cars. This is one of the great achievements of Art Deco residential architecture in Australia.

25-37 Elizabeth Bay Road

is a very representative, if eclectic, group of small flat buildings, unified by means of scale, materials and proportions. Exotic names such as “St Ravana” and more prosaic ones such as “Emerson” were also characteristic of the 1920s.

41 Elizabeth Bay Road

is a relatively uncommon building in Sydney: a Tudorish “Old English” commercial building, albeit executed in textured bricks that have suffered the indignity of paint. They do, however, date the building to the second half of the 1930s.

“Scotforth”, 43 Elizabeth Bay Road

was completed around 1930. In the context of Elizabeth Bay and Potts Point classical elements, most especially colossal pilasters, have been employed in a most unusual way to regulate its curved façade. The building is one of the most expressive use of Free Classicism in this part of the city. The original owner maximised the potential of the site by providing some local amenities, that is to say, shops at the bottom of the building. This was relatively common in flat buildings erected between the wars.

“Westchester”, 24-26 Onslow Avenue

was designed by architects Crane and Scott and completed in 1938. A good, representative moderately sized building, it is Old English at the ground level and Art Deco at the top. The inventive brick detailing is of some note.

“The Raymond”, 68 Elizabeth Bay Road

was designed by architect E N Vennard and completed in the late 1920s. It is a rare example of the Commercial Palazzo style, that great idiom of 1920s office building design, applied to a residential building. This building was the first of the so-called blocks of “luxury flats” to be erected in Elizabeth Bay. Its vestibules and lift lobbies are remarkably intact and relatively refined.

“Karori”, 49 Elizabeth Bay Road

is a fairly characteristic block of flats from the 1920s, with dark-toned brickwork and faceted and skirted bay windows, but its flamboyant, be-columned and bracketed porch is noteworthy, as is the pedimented confection perching above the main entrance.

“Blair”, 74 Elizabeth Bay Road

is another fairly characteristic small block of flats, but it is unusual because of the garages underneath. On-site car parking was by no means a commonplace during the first four decades of this century (nor, for that matter, was car ownership). The large open balconies are also of note – many around here have been enclosed to provide additional space or to protect from the elements.

“Ithaca Gardens” in Onslow Road

was designed by the important post-war architect Harry Seidler and completed in 1960. The architectural expression of concrete frame and brick infill is characteristic of Seidler’s residential work at this period. All of its 40 apartments face the harbour and are shaded by recessed balconies and fixed awnings. The structural gymnastics of the folded concrete canopy that forms carports and the dramatic canopy above the main entry are an effective foil to the economical sobriety of the rest of the building.

76 Elizabeth Bay Road

Art Deco motifs executed in textured brick. A typical mixed use building from the 1930s with shops at ground level and flats above, which was relatively common throughout Sydney's Eastern Suburbs.

“Cheddington”, 63 Elizabeth Bay Road

was designed by Emil Sodersten and completed around 1930. It is a good (surviving) example of Sodersten's early, rather eclectic work before he moved on to a resolved Art Deco idiom during the depression. Its Georgian proportions and tiled, hipped roof contrast rather oddly with the exuberance of the Spanish Mission entry zone.

“Adereham Hall”, 71 Elizabeth Bay Road

was designed by architects Gordon McKinnon and Sons and completed in 1934. This, along with “Birtley Towers”, was one of the very first Art Deco style blocks of flats erected in Sydney. It's stepped, sunburst laden parapets continue to be a local landmark. The building, until recently, was never painted, its rendered surface nakedly weathering the elements. This reflects a common practice of the 1930s, that is, exploiting the intrinsic texture and colour of a material for its decorative potential.

81 Elizabeth Bay Road

This is a good example of how the Spanish Mission style was appropriated for flat architecture in Sydney. Its cordova pattern tiles, twisted columns, pierced balustrading facing the balconies and stucco finish are all characteristic of the style, but have been homogenised by a monolithic paint scheme.

94 Elizabeth Bay Road. Simple rectilinear modernism with steel framed windows that turn the corner and a good representative entry constructed with the typical 1930s devices of stepped reveals and a small cantilevered canopy. The building is an effective foil to the curvilinear smooth bulk of “Ashdown” next door.

“Ashdown”, 96 Elizabeth Bay Road, was designed by Aaron Bolot and completed in 1938. It is a fine example of local experiments with the architecture of European Modernism, by an architect who was quite eclectic in his approach to design. It employs a number of the devices associated with Modernism, such as the bold curved bay, planar wall surfaces, metal framed windows in horizontal bands and at corners, a flat roof and metal pipe railings.