

# PARADISE PURGATORY AND HELLHOLE

a history of  
Pyrmont and Ultimo

19 March 2005 – January 2006



*Paradise, Purgatory and Hellhole*, in the Australian Communities Gallery, explores the complex and rich history of the inner Sydney suburbs of Pyrmont and Ultimo. The exhibition has two entry points and we recommend that you enter via the Kings Cinema foyer. Loosely organised into four sections: 'The first changes', 'Pyrmont sandstone', 'An industrial heartland', and 'Overdevelopment or urban village?', the exhibition evokes the grit, smoke, noise and above all the sense of community that has helped the area evolve into the urban environment that it is today.

## Syllabus links

The exhibition and the 'Things to do or discuss' and extension activities can be easily integrated into or adapted for the following syllabus areas:

### Primary (Stages 2 and 3)

- English — talk and listening, skills and strategies, reading and viewing texts, producing texts, context and text.
- HSIE — change and continuity, cultures, environments, social systems and structures.
- Science and technology — built environments.
- Creative arts — the substrand of 'appreciating' in the visual arts.

### Secondary (Stages 4 and 5)

- History — investigating history, changing rights and freedoms, people power and politics in the post-war period, Australia's social and cultural history in the post-war period, constructing history, and thematic studies.
- Geography — investigating the world, global issues and the role of citizenship, changing Australian communities, issues in Australian environments.
- Studies in Society — cities and society, conflict and society, current issues in society.

### Secondary (Stage 6)

- Geography — urban places.



Ultimo House (1804–1933). Reproduced courtesy State Library of NSW.

## Exhibition introduction and themes

### Introduction

This exhibition takes its name from the three sandstone quarries that have given the Pymont Ultimo peninsula its distinctive character.\*

Once abundant in fresh water and game for its Aboriginal inhabitants, by the early 1800s the peninsula was becoming the industrial heart of Sydney and home to the men and women who worked in its factories, abattoirs, wharves and wool stores. Since 1893, the area has also been the Powerhouse Museum's community.

*Paradise, Purgatory and Hellhole* tells the story of the industries that transformed the peninsula and of the people who worked in them, their hard work, triumphs and tragedies. Today, a walk along Harris Street is a walk through the changing history of our local community.

\* The names of the quarries refer to the degree of difficulty in working the stone and to its quality.

### The first changes

When land-holders John Macarthur and John Harris settled on the peninsula in 1804–06, it was a beautiful location with sandstone cliffs, Moreton Bay fig trees, fresh water and bush. Although no account survives of Aboriginal occupation, their presence is evident in the middens that exist along the foreshore.

In 1836 Edward Macarthur began to subdivide the land and by 1891 Pymont and Ultimo had become the most densely populated area in NSW.

### Audiovisual

*The changing face of a community*

A montage of people who have lived in Pymont and Ultimo from 1800 to 2005

### Things to do or discuss

- What is the story behind the naming of Ultimo?
- Watch the audiovisual, *The changing face of a community*. What changes do you see? Find out more about the changes over the past two centuries in the rest of the exhibition.

### Pymont sandstone

The Saunders family quarry business began its operation in Pymont at an opportune time. The gold rushes of the 1850s sparked a building boom, and Pymont was the source of some of the best building stone available.

The need to transport sandstone from the quarries led, by 1850, to the building of Pymont Bridge and the Darling Harbour railway lines. The peninsula was already home to companies such as City Iron, Fifes Ironworks and the Darling Harbour flour mill.

### Things to do or discuss

- Name some of the public buildings in Sydney that were built using sandstone quarried from Pymont.
- The Pymont Bridge and the Darling Harbour railway lines were once vital links between the peninsula and the city. What led to their construction in the second half of the 1800s?
- Touch and feel the difference between the samples of Paradise, Purgatory and Hellhole sandstone.

### An industrial heartland

In the 1890s, Pymont and Ultimo were thriving industrial suburbs with a combined population of 19 177. Rail connected the suburbs to the port and trams took workers to their jobs. The railway yards, wharves, wool stores, power stations and mills created employment for local residents.

By 1900, Pymont and Ultimo were providing Sydney with power for its lights and trams and were a centre for the distribution of Australian wool, flour, milk, sugar and other foodstuffs.

### Audiovisuals

*A typically industrial suburb*

Howard McKern started work at the Sydney Technological Museum in 1945 as an assistant chemist, he left as deputy director in 1977. During that time Howard witnessed great changes in Ultimo and at the museum.

*Running time: 8 minutes*

### *Pymont in the past*

Phillip O'Toole describes life in Pymont during the first half of the 20th century. Ninety-two-year-old Phillip and his three sisters and five brothers were all born in Pymont. His father used horses and carts to run his business, the Austral Sawdust Company, picking up sawdust from Pymont's seven timber mills.

*Running time: 8.5 minutes*

### **Things to do or discuss**

- Watch the audiovisuals and listen to the interviews. Find out what life and community was like in either Pymont or Ultimo and consider the changes over the years.
- Phillip O'Toole, whose family lived in Pymont, recalls a strong sense of community. What evidence in the exhibition supports this?
- What sort of industries would one have found on the peninsula in the early 1900s?
- How long has the museum been part of Ultimo?

### **Overdevelopment or urban village?**

The peninsula has seen enormous change in the past 30 years, with the population climbing from a low of 1590 in 1981 to almost 14 000 today.

As Sydney continues to expand, suburbs such as Pymont and Ultimo have been identified as suitable for high-density housing. During recent re-development, the challenge has been to maintain a sense of community and preserve local heritage.

### **Audiovisuals**

#### *A sense of history*

David Hegarty, who runs a multimedia design company in Ultimo, loves working here but is concerned that 'what is attractive to people like us, we destroy by being here'.

*Running time: 3 minutes*

#### *A diverse neighbourhood*

Ultimo is home to a large Chinese community. May Sue Kee Ng and her son-in-law Ze Tao Zheng describe their life here during the past 30 years. Ray and Jennice Kersh grew up in Ways Terrace, public housing, in Pymont in the 1950s, they share fond memories of a close-knit community.

*Running time: 12 minutes*



Pymont quarry by A Tischbauer, 1893, reproduced courtesy State Library of NSW.

### *A century of change*

From newsreels of Ultimo and Pymont during the 1910s to *Concrete city* which charts the re-development of Pymont in the 1990s, this compilation shows the transformation of the peninsula.

*Running time: 24 minutes*

### *Personal stories*

Narelle Thirkettle describes the transformation of Ultimo since she moved here in the 1980s. She also talks about campaigning for open space in the suburb. Artist Jane Bennett documents the changing nature of Pymont, from the last remnants of the Industrial Revolution to the new entertainment, leisure and gambling industries.

*Running time: 12 minutes*

### **Things to do or discuss**

- Watch the audiovisuals to learn more about the people and community of Pymont and Ultimo and the transformation of the area during the 20th century.
- A number of artworks are displayed in the exhibition, each linked to the area in its own way. Choose one and find out what inspired the artist to select their theme.
- Over the years, residents have protested against various developments in the area. What were some of these developments and what strategies were used in campaigning against the changes?
- Illustrate, with examples, the new industries that have emerged from the area's industrial past since the 1990s.

## Activities

### Extension activities in the museum

- Visit *The curious economist: William Stanley Jevons in Sydney* on level 4 and look at the 1854 map of Sydney. Find out what Sydney and Ultimo were like in the 1850s, according to an economist of the time. Listen to the three of the ten excerpts of Jevons' social survey of 1850s Sydney: Introduction, Social class, Ultimo.
- Find out about the weird and wonderful objects the museum used to collect; visit *Animal, vegetable and mineral* on level 3 (6 April – 18 July).
- Visit the 'Measuring wellbeing: what do we value?' section in *EcoLogic: creating a sustainable future* on level 2. Find out more about community attitudes towards change in our environment.
- To learn more about transport in Sydney in the late 1800s visit the following displays in *Transport* on level 2: spring cart, hansom cab, omnibus and tram.

### Post-visit activities

- Walk down Harris Street between John and MacArthur Streets (about 1.4 km). Note the changes that have taken place in terms of land use.

Discuss the impact that such changes had or will have on the environment and the community.

Map the land use along Harris Street between John Street and Union Square and note any sign of urban decay (for years 10+).

- In groups of four or five, discuss what life was like in Pymont and Ultimo early last century. Things to consider include transport, technology, work, entertainment, family, values, aspirations, fears, etc. Select the theme(s) and illustrate by drawing a picture. Present your work to the rest of the class.



A 1905 exhibition in the Technological Museum (now the Powerhouse) in Ultimo.

## Further resources

- Fitzgerald, Shirley, *Sydney 1842–1992*, Hale & Iremonger, 1992
- Fitzgerald, Shirley and Golder, Hilary, *Pymont and Ultimo: under siege*, Hale & Iremonger, 1994
- Hughes Turnbull, Lucy, *Sydney — biography of a city*, Random House, 1999
- Matthews, Michael R, *Pymont and Ultimo — a history*, Pymont Ultimo History Project, 1982
- Pymont and Ultimo resource material available in the Powerhouse Museum Research library: Contact reference librarian Philippa Rossiter email [philippar@phm.gov.au](mailto:philippar@phm.gov.au)  
Tel 02 9217 0258
- Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, *Decade of renewal: Ultimo + Pymont* booklet, May 2004. A free copy is available online at [http://www.pymontultimo.com/downloads/ULTIMO\\_PYRMONT.pdf](http://www.pymontultimo.com/downloads/ULTIMO_PYRMONT.pdf)
- Barani (Yesterday): An introduction to the Aboriginal History of the City of Sydney  
<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/barani/main.html>
- Port: Pymont & Ultimo — City of Sydney self-guided historical walking tour brochure, available through City of Sydney outlets  
[http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/hs\\_history\\_walking\\_tours.asp](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/hs_history_walking_tours.asp)

### Please note


The websites referred to in these notes were available and suitable at the time of publication. We advise teachers to check sites before recommending them to students.

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**For more information on the exhibition  
*Paradise, Purgatory and Hellhole: a history of  
Pymont and Ultimo*,  
visit the Powerhouse Museum's website  
<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com>**

For more information about education support or your booking, contact Education and Visitor Services at the Powerhouse Museum:  
Telephone — (02) 9217 0222  
Fax — (02) 9217 0441  
Email — [edserv@phm.gov.au](mailto:edserv@phm.gov.au)

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