
PRINCE HENRY HOSPITAL

Heritage Conservation Area

A diverse complex of buildings in a coastal landscape, the hospital played an important role in the treatment of infectious diseases from the 1880s until 1986. The site is important to Aboriginal people and to the many former staff and patients of the hospital, and contains a considerable archaeological resource.

The extent of the Prince Henry Hospital heritage conservation area corresponds with the area of the Prince Henry Site listed on the State Heritage Register. A number of specific elements within the heritage conservation area are listed as heritage items, including the extensive area of the Historic Precinct.

What is the area's significance?

Aesthetic Significance:

The location of the Hospital by the sea, the design and siting of buildings in a spacious open setting, their relationship with each other and the layout of the site itself, created an aesthetically distinctive complex with Pine Avenue as its central axis. The buildings and landscape provide evidence of the prevailing attitude to health care during a number of important phases of development. The Flowers Wards and the remains of the early infectious disease hospital, including Ward 16, the former Nurses Quarters, the former Nurses Dining Hall/Nurses Lecture Hall, the Bush Wards and the site of the Male Lazaret, demonstrate the isolation required for the treatment of infectious diseases and early attitudes to public health, which saw health benefits in being by the sea.

The architectural character of these early buildings contrasts with later buildings built after 1934, after the Hospital changed its name to Prince Henry and a new phase of expansion began. The larger scaled Heffron and Delaney Medical Ward Buildings, the Matron Dickson Nurses Home, and the McIlrath Pathology Building provide evidence of changing practices in medical care and staff accommodation, as well as contributing visually to the ambience of the place. A range of ancillary buildings, such as the former Water Reservoir, the Memorial Clock Tower, Water Tower, and 'Hill Theatres' (Operating Theatres No.2 and No.3) add visual as well as technological interest.

A number of cultural landscape features including the Norfolk Island Pine trees along Pine Avenue, plantings of palms, New Zealand Christmas trees and banksias, rock cuttings, retaining walls, early road alignments and sandstone kerbs, provide evidence of human intervention in this coastal landscape. The North Cemetery, although separated from the present hospital site, is an important component of the cultural landscape.

Historic Significance:

The Prince Henry site was the most important site for the treatment of infectious diseases in New South Wales from its inception in the 1880s, when, as the Coast Hospital, it became the first public hospital in New South Wales in the post-convict era. The Hospital played a prominent role in treating and overcoming infectious diseases and later as a general hospital and teaching hospital for the University of NSW, until its closure was announced in 1988. Its isolation led to the establishment of the first ambulance service in New South Wales from within its grounds.

Social Significance

The history of the Prince Henry site is interwoven with Aboriginal people and wider communities, many of whom were patients or worked on the site and still visit it. The site is valued by Aboriginal people for its historical associations and Aboriginal occupation prior to European occupation, as well as its associations with Aboriginal people treated for infectious diseases. The Prince Henry site is also important to many of the thousands of nurses, doctors and administrators who value their training and achievements at the hospital, which gained them a high reputation throughout New South Wales and Australia. Many former nurses have remained actively associated with the site, and have created a museum to conserve its history and artefacts. They come to the site to enjoy its ambience and continue to use the Interdenominational Australian Nurses War Memorial Chapel, built in memory of service nurses, many of whom died at sea. (Godden Mackay Logan, May 2002)

Technical/Research Significance:

A coastal landscape of high scenic and scientific value is enhanced by the beach, headlands and pockets of indigenous vegetation. A geological exposure area has research and educational value relating to the development of the present coastline and to the climate and vegetation of the area twenty million years ago.

Much more about the history of the Prince Henry site is yet to be learnt from the rich array of known and potential Aboriginal and historical archaeological sites, from further research and archival recording, and from the oral histories of those who worked or trained there. The Prince Henry site contains both identified archaeological features and areas of known archaeological potential. These elements are part of the total physical record of the first post-convict era hospital in New South Wales. The physical evidence at the site documents, and therefore provides opportunities to investigate evolving medical practice associated with the treatment of infectious disease. In a wider context the site reflects changes and development in state health policy for more than 100 years. The research value of the site's historical archaeological resource is only moderate, however, because of the physical impact of ongoing development. Although the extant archaeological resource is therefore not intact, and there are extensive documentary sources available, the place has potential to yield information about site use and occupation. The spectrum of archaeological features across the site also provides a rare opportunity to use archaeology as an investigative tool on a wide scale. The historical archaeological resource at the Prince Henry site also contributes to the total ensemble providing an indication of former activities or features. They are therefore part of the site's wider social and historic value and have educational and interpretive potential (Godden Mackay Logan, 2002).

Themes Represented:

The following historical themes, identified in the 1989 Randwick Heritage Study, are directly illustrated in the conservation area:

- Modifying the landscape
- Government and institutions
- Evolution of culture- religion and education

The following themes are indirectly represented:

- Transport and communications
- Suburbanisation

