

Lot 83

Dangar's plan of Newcastle

Newcomen Street

Archaeological Assessment

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for
Baybarge Pty. Limited

August, 1992

1. Preamble.

1.1 Professional responsibility.

This assessment complies the provisions of the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance* (the Burra Charter) and the Heritage Council's Procedural Guidelines for Historical Archaeological Sites.

1.2 Format of the report.

The first part of the report is this preamble.

Part 2 describes the development site.

Part 3 is its historical record.

Part 4 contains a brief statement of heritage significance based on that history.

Part 5 deals with the proposed development.

Part 6 details the heritage items on the site and the impact of the development as proposed upon those items.

Part 7 contains logistical options available to the developer concerning the archaeological investigation of the site.

Part 8 is an application to excavate the footings and foundation of one of the heritage items.

2. The Site.

The site is on the east side of Newcomen Street one lot north of the Church Street intersection and is lot 183 in Deposited Plan No. 532687.

The block is rectangular, the short side of the rectangle fronting the east side of Newcomen Street. The remains of a brick wall (see Part 5.1) stand along this boundary.

The land is below street level and falls from west to east (see contour plan attached). At the west end, a mound of demolition rubble spreads down from the brick wall. The rubble is comprised mainly of sandstock bricks in lime mortar but contains also pressed bricks, cement and modern perforated bricks.

East of this mound the land forms two terraces, the higher terrace extending across 3/5 of the site to end in a stone retaining wall above the lower terrace.

In recent years double gates have been installed at the north end of the Newcomen Street frontage and an earth ramp constructed to allow vehicular access. The rebuilt section of the wall adjacent to the gate and the tubular steel gate frame suggest a late 1940s-1950s date.

3. The Historical Record.

The first structure on the site appears to have been what the *Newcastle Morning Herald* on 22nd September, 1939, referred to as a "guard's house" which is shown on James Meehan's 1818 plan of Newcastle and which was located at the rear (west end) of the block. Although the building does not appear on later maps, it was still standing in 1939.

According to this report, the land, which is Lot 83 on Dangar's plan of Newcastle, was originally granted to Major John S. Jackson, military commander in Newcastle, in 1839. Jackson promptly sold it to Dr. George Brooks, the Government Medical Officer in Newcastle, who in the same year built a house at the west end of the block. Maps of the period show this house extending the full width of the block though on scale it was only 3-4 metres deep. Remains of a brick wall on the north boundary, which may have been a replacement wall, indicates a return wall 4.5 metres east of the building alignment.

The property remained in the Brooks family, first in the hands of Brooks' widow, subsequently his daughter Mrs Hannah Kenrick, until 1873 when it was bought by Frederick Ash, founder of the firm which bore his name. The house was still owned by the Ash family at the time of the *Herald's* report though they had not been in continuous occupation. For many years the Misses Donaldson's School for Girls operated there. The house, then a hundred years old, was declared by the *Herald* to be "still in a good state of preservation. (copy maps and newspaper account courtesy Dr. John W. Turner, University of Newcastle).

Photographs dating to the 1880s show small, unidentified, structures at the rear (east) of the block, seemingly on

the lower terrace. Whilst most appear to have been timber-framed, one, presumably, was guard's house.

The *Newcastle Herald's* account of the condition of the house in 1939, the premium placed upon any accommodation during and immediately after World War II and the evidence of the double gate suggest that the house was demolished in about 1950. Presumably the guard's house went at the same time or before. According to oral information, the site has been derelict ever since. Neither the historic record nor site inspection indicate that any substantial was ever built between Brooks' house and the lower terrace.

Although this information is brief, it is not considered necessary to impose on the developer the obligation for detailed historical research. The major heritage items will not be impacted by the proposed development while the cost of detailed historical research is likely to be out of all proportion to the probable results of that research.

4. Statement of Heritage Significance.

In view of the two early structures, the site is of extreme heritage significance having potential to yield by archaeological methods information concerning the early years of Newcastle's second settlement. The extensive periods of occupation by both the Brooks and Ash families suggest that the site could contain meaningful deposits relating to the social history of Newcastle. The archaeological record also has the potential to yield information concerning Newcastle's private schools not to be found in the documentary record.

5. The Proposed Development.

The development proposed is to erect a free-standing three-storied commercial/residential building with basement car parks which are to be stepped down the existing slope. The building will be set back three metres from the Newcomen Street building alignment to permit a forecourt but the basement will be set back five metres (see sectional drawings attached). The position of the building is not certain. The proposal before Council allows for 3.5 metre driveways on each side of the building, but Council has expressed concern about shadow cast on residential units to the south and may require the building to be set against the north boundary.

Vehicular access will extend to the lower terrace, thence by a 180 degree turn into a sub-basement car park which is limited to the lower terrace. A second car park is to be located at the east end of the floor above and this extend to a point five metres east of the Newcomen Street building alignment (see sectional drawings attached).

Apart from the bore-holes required for steel frame construction, there will be no excavation of the lower level. Development there involves a concrete slab over the existing ground surface. Part of the upper terrace will be removed and this excavation will extend into the rubble mound but will stop short of the site of Watson's house. Any sub-surface remains of the house are to be sealed by a concrete retaining wall to be poured across the existing surface, the only penetration of that surface being by concrete piers at the corners of the new building.

6. The Heritage Items

There are four structural features which are protected by the NSW Heritage Act while historic evidence indicates possible archaeological remains at the east end of the site.

6.1 Brick wall.

A lime-mortared sandstock brick wall stands along the Newcomen Street frontage. This was not built as a free-standing wall but was the front wall of Dr. Brook's house. The 1880s photographs, which were taken from the west, show a central door with a timber architrave and what appear to be three flanking doors on each side. Inspection of the surviving section of this wall indicates that the flanking doors were ornamental recesses. The door was later bricked in. The use for this purpose of sandstock bricks identical in size and colour to those in the rest of the wall suggests that blockage occurred when the rest of the house was demolished, although a c.1950 date for demolition is not commensurate with the fact that the bricks in the infill are set in lime mortar.

Demolition of all but the front wall has left that wall virtually unsupported and it is in imminent danger of collapse. Indeed, approximately a third, the northern end, has already collapsed or been demolished. Although of considerable heritage significance, the surviving section of the wall is in such poor condition that its retention in its present form is not feasible. It is hoped that part of the wall may be retained as dwarf walls flanking the entrance to the new building. This may not prove structurally viable and could not be achieved should Council insist on the building being sited along the north boundary.

The contour of the site coupled with historic photographs suggest that Dr. Brooks' house was of two stories with the upper storey at street level. Part of the building could survive beneath the present ground level if only in archaeological form. However, the site of the building will not be impacted by the proposed development (see sectional drawings attached).

6.2 The north stone boundary wall.

Two sections of a lime-mortared stone wall survive on the north boundary. To judge from the mortar, both sections predate the brick structure and therefore could have been convict-built. Such survivals are rare in Newcastle and it is hoped that the walls or part of them can be incorporated into the development. This may not prove feasible.

The west surviving section is badly eroded on the north face near the base, though there has been some attempts to patch the damaged sections with brick and cement. The east section has shifted from vertical. Both sections, therefore, are structurally unsound.

It is hoped that these walls or part of them can be stabilised and retained as features of the site. Whether this proves feasible depends in part on the nature of their footings and foundation. As with the brick wall, retention will not be possible should Newcastle Council require the new building to be erected along this boundary.

6.3 Stone retaining wall.

The upper terrace ends with a north-south retaining wall. Its history is not known. It is clearly of later date than the features referred to above. An 1880s date is suggested since at that time the lower terrace was levelled to permit the construction of several small buildings shown in photographs of the period.

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This wall will not be affected by the development as proposed (see sectional drawings attached).

6.4 The well

According to survey information, there is a sealed well in the east end of the upper terrace (see contour plan attached). Since it must have been sunk before and presumably sealed at the time of municipal water reticulation in the late 1880s, the well and its contents have considerable potential to yield information of archaeological significance. However, the well will not be impacted by the development proposed (see sectional drawings attached).

6.5 The guard's house and timber-framed buildings.

The historical record indicates that the pre-1818 guard's house and later timber-framed buildings were on the lower terrace. Little excavation at this level will be necessary for the development proposed. In fact, the archaeological deposit will be sealed by a concrete slab to be used partly for external car parking and partly for vehicular access to the basement car parks (see sectional drawings attached).

6.6 Unrecorded structures and artefact assemblages of heritage significance.

Although the main house was only 4.5 metres deep and can be avoided by the site redevelopment, there is adequate circumstantial evidence to suggest the existence of outbuildings not shown in the cartographic record.

In 1839, the standard kitchen was detached from the main house as a precaution against fire. An early Victorian kitchen involved open hearths and substantial brick-built ovens which could only be built at ground level. No prudent householder would have had his kitchen on the

ground floor of a two-storied house. The existence of a detached kitchen must be assumed. A detached privy must also be assumed for the period before invention of the water closet. That these structures do not appear on any map is no surprise. Subsidiary outbuildings were seldom shown on maps of the period.

The historical record reveals two periods of occupation by families of significance in Newcastle, each of sufficient length to suggest that meaningful assemblages of artefacts are likely to have accumulated on site. Although rubbish pits then as now were usually dug away from the house so the major assemblages are probably at the lower level of the site, this cannot be certain. Artefact assemblages are also found in association with kitchens and privies and therefore may survive in close proximity to the Brooks'/Ash house, that is, within the area affected by the basement car park.

7. Logistical Options.

A developer is obliged by statute to have recorded professionally all features of heritage significance before they are disturbed or destroyed. This obligation extends to structures and deposits which may reasonably be assumed to have existed and which may survive in archaeological form. It is open to the developer to have the recording done in the course of site development, in advance of development or by a combination of both.

7.1 Recording in the course of development.

This option is not recommended. There are too many unknown factors which could interfere with the development programme.

Firstly, the precise location of the detached kitchen and privy are unknown. In the event that substantial evidence of them be revealed by excavation for the basement car park, the developer could incur costly delay in the development programme while, at that stage, he would have little opportunity to change his proposal so as to avoid further investigation.

7.2 Recording partly in advance, partly in the course of development.

This option is not recommended as such. It does not guarantee that the delays referred to above will be avoided. It also doubles the cost of organising and equipping an excavation team. However, given the nature of this site, recording partly in advance, partly in the course of development may prove the most practical solution (see Part 7.4)

7 A.3 Recording in advance of development.

Experience both in Australia and in America has established that excavation and recording in advance of development is, with few exceptions, both more efficient from the archaeological viewpoint and less costly to the developer. This is particularly true when the nature and extent of the archaeological resource is, to all intents and purposes, unknown. If, for example, preliminary excavation at the rear of the house yielded remains of the kitchen, privy and associated deposits so complex or extensive as to require detailed archaeological excavation and recording, this knowledge in advance would allow the developer to revise his proposal by, say, reducing the area of the car park so as to avoid further investigation. In all cases, excavation and recording in advance of development frees the site from further obligation under the NSW Heritage Act so that development can proceed unimpeded.

7 A.4 Recommended option.

The site of the 1839 house can be avoided, but the location of the assumed kitchen and privy are not known. Since the kitchen is likely to have been built close to the house, it is possible that it will be impacted by the basement car park.

It is recommended that a back-hoe be employed for a day to remove, under archaeological supervision, the rubble from the area to be impacted by the west end of the car park. Mechanical excavation with assistant volunteer labour should reveal whether relics, structural or artefactual, occur within the area of impact. On the basis of that information, a realistic decision as to the necessity for further archaeological excavation can be made.

This work can be carried out concurrently with the test pits at the base of the north wall.

8. Excavation and Recording.

✓ All standing structures are to be recorded by Mr Barney Collins, heritage architect.

Since the site of Dr. Brooks' house, the well, retaining wall and lower terrace will not be impacted by the proposed development, initial archaeological excavation will be limited:

✓ i) to mechanical removal of the rubble overburden at the west end of the site in order to ascertain whether relics of heritage significance survive in this sector, and

✓ ii) to test pits adjacent to the south face of the north boundary wall to ascertain the nature of its footings and foundation.

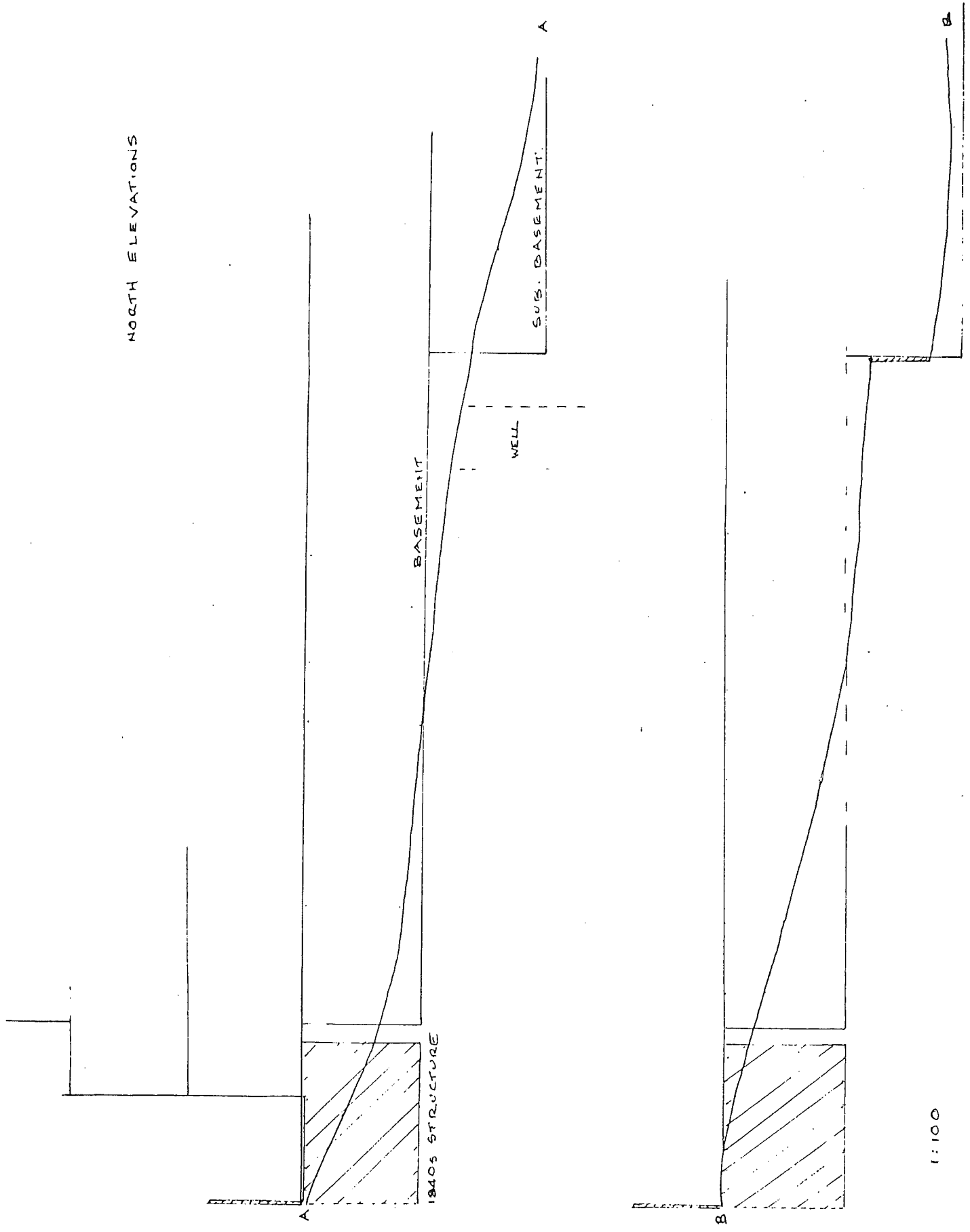
✍ In the event that excavation i) reveals relics requiring archaeological investigation, a detailed research design and methodological approach can be formulated

For excavation ii), four one-metre test holes are considered sufficient unless there is observable change in building technique in which case further test holes may be needed to explain the change. These excavations will have the dual purpose:

- ✓ a) of determining the nature of the footings and foundation and the feasibility of conserving the wall or any part of it
- b) of ensuring that no additional recording is necessary in the event that the walls are demolished.

It is not envisaged that excavations so limited in extent will yield artefacts in sufficient quantity to require sophisticated sorting and analysis. Should any diagnostic artefacts be recovered, they will be recorded and retained.

NORTH ELEVATIONS



1:100

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9 August, 1993

13 AUG 1993

Mr Jonathan Semken
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(16) G.M.

Dear Jonathan,

Re Newcomen Street, Newcastle

Further to our telephone conversation today, I confirm that no excavation at the west end of the block is now warranted, but on my calculations the retaining wall and the top two metres of the well will be impacted by the rooms and stairway to be built on the car park level (see elevations attached). Although apparently of 1880 and pre-1880 date, these structures are not considered of such heritage significance as to justify any change in your proposal. However, since both are protected under the Heritage Act, both should be dealt with archaeologically.

1. The stone retaining wall

This should be recorded photographically and, in addition, two small (c.0.5x0.5m.) are proposed:

- i) to determine and record the construction method
- ii) in an endeavour to date the wall more accurately.

At the same time, similar excavations and recording of the north boundary wall could take place so that:

- i) the feasibility or otherwise of conserving the wall can be determined and
- ii) that wall is fully recorded so that no further work need be done should conservation prove unfeasible.

A photographic record of the brick wall fronting Newcomen Street could also be undertaken at this time as it seems unlikely that much of the wall can be retained as part of the new proposal.

2. The well.

As previously advised, the well is likely to have been sunk before and presumably sealed at the time of municipal water reticulation in the late 1880s. Hence the well and its contents have considerable potential to yield information of archaeological significance.

Although only the top two metres will be impacted, those two metres need to be excavated by hand and the contents recorded and analysed.

