



Researching Property History: A Beginners Guide

Woollahra Library and information Service

Local History Centre

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Stage I: Before You Visit the Local History Centre

Step 1. . If possible, **visit the site of the property.** Even if the building itself is long since demolished, clues to its history may be evident in the surrounding built environment.

While in the area, make sure you have the correct current street address, and note any potential variants to this that may have been used over time . considering such factors as, for example

- ❑ Is the building on a corner site?
- ❑ Does the associated land extend to another street . or could this have once been the case?
- ❑ Does it seem possible the site may have been subdivided from a neighbouring property?

all of which might have affected the means of identifying the property over time.

Get your bearings generally regarding the site . particularly its proximity to some fixed points of reference such as intersections, prominent buildings that are likely to be older or similar in age to the one you are researching, or features such as parks.

Make an estimate of the likely age of the premises based on your own observation . helped, if necessary, by prior reference to some architectural guides on dating Australian architectural styles and building techniques. (The Main Library has a selection, which you might find useful.) And note the surrounding building stock and its age in relation to the property in question.

Step 2. Speak to any **former owners, neighbours, family members** etc, depending upon the circumstances, who might be able to shed any light on the likely time of construction or succession of ownership of the property. Take notes, and borrow any photographs that may be on offer . and bring these to the Local History Centre with you.

Step 3. Gather together any papers you might have relating to the history of the property . such as deeds, family papers, photographs, results of earlier research etc. **Bring them along** . they may make all the difference!



Stage II: At the Local History Centre - First Steps

AVOID UNNECESSARY WORK! . It is just possible that the property you are interested in has been investigated before, and if so, you may be able to benefit from another's research. As well as published sources on the history of our area, the Local History Collection includes copies of all the research undertaken by Library staff over the last 20 years, as well as the more recent work of consultants and others.

Step 1. Use Woollahra Library's on-line public access catalogue (OPAC) to find out if any publications or reports or are held on the property in question. You can search the OPAC at the Local History Centre, the Main Library and any branches within the Woollahra Library service . or from home, via the Internet: www.woollahra.nsw.gov.au - and follow the links from Our Services

To search - enter the address of the property you are investigating (street name, suburb, house number) in the subject field to discover what materials may be held. Published sources are classified and shelved in the general Local History Collection according to the Dewey system, with the prefix **LH** denoting an item held in the general Local History Collection. Other reports are held in the Local History Enquiry Sheets collection, and are accessible to researchers for reading and copying at the Centre. Please note that none of the resources in the Local History Collection are available for loan, but in some cases, duplicate copies of published works may be held in the general (circulating) collection at the Main or branch libraries of our service.

NB - While you are searching the OPAC, **note** any listings for **photographs** held in the Library's **Picture File** (denoted by the prefix **PF**). These can be as helpful to your research as they are interesting. Some of these can be viewed on-line from the Web Catalogue - www.woollahra.nsw.gov.au - and follow the links from Our Services then follow the specific instructions regarding images. For those images not available in electronic format, please note the **PF** number in the catalogue entry to locate a copy in the Local History Centre's Picture File.

Step 2. Use the **Local History Card index**, searching under the address of the property (arranged by street name, suburb name and house number) for possible references to newspaper or journal articles, or photographs relating to the property. Refer to the **Key** to the Abbreviations (displayed on top of the index drawers) to locate items - *for example* WC = *Wentworth Courier*; PF = *Picture File*, *etc.*



Stage III: Beginning Your Original Research - Preparatory Steps

If there are no entries in the OPAC or LH Index for the specific building you are investigating, original research will be required. The Main primary resources you will be using to compile your history, and which are discussed in detail below, are :

- ❑ the Building records of Council as held by the Centre;
- ❑ the *Sands Sydney Directory*;
- ❑ the Rate records of Paddington, Vaucluse and Woollahra Councils as relevant;
- ❑ visual aids such as maps and plans and photographs held in the Local History Collection which can put your findings into context . these are discussed in conjunction with other resources;

The more **background knowledge** you are able to accumulate on the **history of the area** where the property is located, the easier it will be for you to make sense of the records you will be using. In preparation, you may wish to :

Step 1. - Take note of any listings in the OPAC or LH Index for property in the immediate area of the site . especially items in the Local History Enquiry Sheet series. There are often common elements in the history of neighbouring or nearby sites, and looking at files or reports on other property in the vicinity may reduce the time you need to spend with primary sources.

Step 2. . Refer to the Library's pamphlet : Guide to the development of Woollahra's suburbs for a brief summary of the development of the various suburbs, and refer to any background literature recommended on the history of that area.

Step 3. Consult the various **Heritage Listings** available, which, if your property is recorded, could provide helpful information. The field survey sheets frequently provide useful observations regarding the **probable** era of construction, and descriptions of the structure.



These references are :

- Hughes, Trueman & Ludlow *Heritage Study for the Municipality of Woollahra*. Syd., Hughes Trueman and Ludlow/Woollahra Municipal Council, [1984]. LH720.9944/HUG
- National Trust of Australia (New South Wales) [*Survey of Paddington.West Woollahra*] Syd., Nat. Tr. 1982.
- Martin Hayes [*Paddington Heritage Study - Field Record Study of Paddington*], WMC, 1995.
- Perumal, Wrathall and Murphy [*Survey – Conservation Study of Bondi Junction, Watsons Bay*] Syd., WMC,1982.

NB . If you are preparing a report for Council, reference to these documents is advisable.



Stage IV: Estimating the Date of Construction

As will be discussed below, a search of Council's Rate records, coupled with reference to the *Sands Sydney Directory*, provides in the majority of cases the most accurate guide to the time of construction. However, there are some short cuts to dating property that, while not sufficient in themselves, might assist you at this stage of your research.

Step 1. Examine carefully any photographs of the relevant area that you have managed to locate through the Library Catalogue or Local History Card Index (*see note under Step 1, Stage II, above*) noting if the site in question was vacant or developed at the time of photographing.

Step 2. Consult the various records of **Building Applications** (B/As) received by Woollahra, Paddington and Vacluse Councils. These exist in several formats and series :

- ❑ A card index to B/As received by Woollahra Council c1919-c1983.
- ❑ A card index to Applications received by the City Council in respect of Fitzroy Ward (Paddington property) c1948-c1967.
- ❑ The Building Registers of Woollahra Council, 1912-1988 (series of bound volumes)
- ❑ The Building Registers of Vacluse Council, 1910-1948 (two bound volumes)

The card indexes, arranged in alphabetical order according to street and then property, record in chronological sequence applications received to erect new dwellings, or to alter existing ones. The Woollahra Index is **divided into three series** (colour-coded as green, yellow and white) and you will need to refer to the records in all three sequences to find all possible entries. Unfortunately, there are numerous missing records in this series, and since the cut-off point is c1983, reference to this source is no substitute for Council's electronic database of B/As - contact Council's Customer Services section.

The **Building Registers** consist of a series of entries summarising the details of each Building Application received (including name owner, architect or builder, nature of proposed work, estimated value and details of Council's decisions) all entered in order of receipt by Council.

NB - that Building Applications were not required **before 1909** (and the earliest entries in the Woollahra Index and Registers date from c1913) ; also, that evidence of an application is no guarantee



that Council approval was received (unless indicated), nor that an owner proceeded with the proposal even if approved.

Step 3. If the subject property is located in the suburbs of Paddington, Woollahra or Darling Point, you may wish to consult the **Metropolitan Detail Series plans**. Dating typically from the 1880s-1890s, these plans show not only the boundaries of allotments, but also the **footprints** of any structures standing at the time of compilation. From this you can judge whether or not the property was already improved at the time of the survey, and what ~~s~~shapeq(from the building outline) the structure took in that period.



Stage V: Using the Sands Sydney Directory

What is the Sands Directory, and what information can it provide?

John Sands Ltd published the Sands Sydney Directory (held at the Local History Centre on microfiche) between **1858** and **1932**. An annual listing of Sydney residents and where they lived, the Directory may be used to identify successive occupants of a property . or, in the case of non-residential premises, to determine the nature of its commercial use over time. The Directory also provides a means of estimating when a specific property was built (based on tracing the earliest evidence of its occupation). Used interpretatively, it also shows how and when a specific area was developed, and provides a social profile of streets and localities. **House names** may also be recorded.

How do I use the Directory?

NB - A separate guide to the *Sands Directories* has been produced by the Local History Centre to assist you, in detail, with searching the Directory. **In brief** :

Each issue of the Directory is made up of many different indexes, the two most consistently applicable to property research being :

- ❑ The **Suburban Index** in which the residents and businesses of each Local Government Area of the day are set out **under the names of the streets** in which they are located, entries being listed **in order of the location** of each household or business **within the street**.
- ❑ the **Alphabetical Index** . a list of the **names** of all Sydney residents and businesses, accompanied by their street address, in a single alphabetical sequence.

As with the Rate records, the key to searching this source successfully is to refer **firstly** to the **most recent issue** available (1932/3), and to work **backwards** through the issues for **earlier years**, comparing the information given in each issue to that in the previous year's publication. The logic behind this strategy is that, by the 1930s, the situation described in the Directory is closest to that of the present day . *ie* with the suburbs largely established, and a stable numbering system present for most streets, so that in most cases the area described will be recognisable. This makes it easy to identify a property. From this starting point, refer to successively earlier issues, until a year of issue is reached for which you are unable to find any information relating conclusively to the property you are researching. This probably represents the beginning of the history of that particular site.



Why consult Sands before proceeding to the Rate records?

It is often preferable to make a search of the *Sands Directory* **before** proceeding to the Council Rate records, for these simple reasons :

- ❑ the format of the Directory is more consistent from year to year, and more user-friendly than the Council records.
- ❑ the Directory is printed, whereas the Rate records tend to be, until the mid-1920s, handwritten and sometimes difficult to read.



Stage VI: Searching the Rate Records of Council

What geographical areas do the rate records held at the Local History Centre cover?

The original boundaries of the Municipality of Woollahra were established by proclamation and gazetted in April **1860**. However, the boundaries have been subject to changes over the ensuing century and a half. The area now covered by the administration of Woollahra includes :

- ❑ the northern portion of the former **Municipality of Paddington** (proclaimed in 1860, wholly absorbed into the City of Sydney in **1948** and divided between the City and Municipality of Woollahra in **1968**)
- ❑ the temporarily independent **Municipality of Vaucluse** (seceded from Woollahra in **1895**, amalgamated with Woollahra in **1948**).

A further change has taken place more recently . the transfer of **the northern side** of the **Oxford Street, Bondi Junction** commercial strip from Woollahra to Waverley in March 2003.

All these changes are reflected in the series of records held at the Local History Centre. These are :

- ❑ Paddington Council Rate Books, 1860-1932 (microfilm)
- ❑ Vaucluse Council Rate, Assessment and Valuation Books, 1896-1936 (microfilm)
- ❑ Woollahra Council Rate, Assessment and Valuation Books, 1860-1950.
- ❑ Valuation Lists (Department of the Valuer General) for Municipality of Woollahra 1919-1968.
- ❑ Valuation Lists (Department of the Valuer General) for Municipality of Vaucluse 1926-1946.
- ❑ Valuation List (Department of the Valuer General) for the Fitzroy Ward, City of Sydney, 1963.

A description of these records and the information they hold, and a step-by-step guide to using them for researching property, follows.

What are the rate records of Council?

In order to raise revenue from the various land-holders whose property fell within its area of administration, Council had first to identify, list, describe, assess and value each individual holding, as well as to determine who would be responsible for payment of these annual levies for each property. In



the **documentation of this process**, a valuable historical resource was incidentally created for present day researchers . the ~~R~~ate recordsq

In the case of Woollahra Council, the generic term ~~r~~ate recordsqencompasses several interconnected record series, examples of all of which have survived. These are :

- ❑ **Assessments** of property undertaken annually by Council for **every property in its area** of administration as **a basis for establishing the level of rates due** per property, per year;
- ❑ **Rate Books**, which recorded annually the payments due, paid and/or in arrears for every property, and the revenue raised by each street and ward;
- ❑ Council **Valuations**, which replaced Assessments and similarly recorded the process of description and assignment of property values.
- ❑ **Valuation Lists** compiled by the **Department of the New South Wales Valuer General (V.G.)** . documents recording the procedure that system that superseded Council valuations as the basis for establishing rating levels.

In the case of **Paddington** and **Vaucluse** Councils, the various elements of the process (*ie* Assessments, Rates and Council Valuations) were frequently combined in a single document. In general, less detail has survived from the rating systems of these administrations.

How can the information in these documents assist me in my research?

Comparative reference to the rate records compiled **over successive years** can yield information on the following aspects of a property's history:

- ❑ who, in any given year, owned or leased a specific parcel of land, and thus was responsible for payment of the Rates due.
- ❑ the succession of ownership/leasehold of the property . transfers generally being recorded through amendments to the annually compiled base record.
- ❑ whether the property was held as freehold or leasehold (identifiable once the Valuation system replaced the Assessment system, 1908).
- ❑ whether or not the property was vacant or developed, and the nature of any structures that stood on it at the time that the record was created.
- ❑ the age of the building/s standing on the site, as determined by the earliest documentation of the property as an ~~i~~mprovedqland holding.



- ❑ As with the *Sands Directories*, house names may also appear . especially before street numbers became commonplace.

The Rate Books as records of land tenure

Assessment, Rate and Valuation records provide the names of owners and rate-paying lessees of each separately rated property in the relevant Municipality, and, as time progressed, also recorded the rate-payer's address for the receipt of Rate notices. (This latter detail may provide a useful clue as to whether or not the rate-payer also occupied the premises on which he was paying rates.)

During certain periods, the names of tenants and non-rateable occupants were also recorded in the Woollahra and Paddington records. Otherwise, refer to the *Sands Sydney Directory* (see above) for this information.

Transfers of ownership or leasehold were also recorded as Council was informed of them, usually appearing as an amendment to the document that had been compiled at the beginning of each year.

While the Rate records are no substitute for the records of NSW land registration in terms of recording precisely the date of transfer and other details of the transaction, the information can be seen as a guide to the tenure of property in the local area. For detail on tracing transfers through registrations, refer to the Customer Services section at the NSW Office of Land and Property Information, Queen Square, Sydney.

NB - Until 1908, when Council Valuations replaced Council Assessments in Woollahra, lessees of Sir Daniel Cooper (whose Point Piper Estate covered approximately half of the then municipal area) were usually recorded, incorrectly, as the owners of the land they leased. The later records contain the full detail of the tenure hierarchy including both the name of the owner and the rate-paying lessee. As a result, it is possible to approximate the time of the freehold conversion of each Cooper Estate property, provided it occurred **after** 1908.

The Rate records can be a useful resource (particularly when used in conjunction with the *Sands Directory*) for **genealogists** who wish to determine whether or not their ancestors owned or leased property in the Municipality of Woollahra. Tracing all property held by a particular individual is a more



challenging exercise, since all but a few Rate records in the Collection (Paddington Rate Books for the period 1926-1932) are listed by **property** rather than by the names of **owners**.



The Rate Books as records of building activity

Part of the annual assessment or valuation process of Council involved the assigning of both **Improved** and **Unimproved** Capital Values (**ICV** and **UCV**) to every property in the area.

The **unimproved** value took into account the **land value, only**, of a property, while the **improved** value represented **the sum of the land value and the value of any structures** (**improvements**) that had been erected on the land.

Thus, a discrepancy in the ICV and UCV assigned to a particular holding can be taken as evidence of the existence of a building standing on the subject site. In conjunction with the assignment of ICV and UCV, a **description** of the nature of improvements was commonly recorded (eg **fenced land** **dwelling house**), with vacant land also described as such.

By comparing entries for a given property in the Assessments compiled for successive years, the earliest year in which improvements were first recorded for a site can be discovered.

While the distinction between UCV and ICV is not always clear-cut, the Assessments and Valuations usually represent the most accurate available means of dating construction. This method is more reliable than consulting records of Council Building Applications, since there is no guarantee that Council decisions or owner's proposals were actually acted upon. Rate records also provide a more accurate basis for determining the construction date than entries in the *Sands Sydney Directories*, which, being based on the occupation of property does not take into account buildings that are completed but unoccupied.

NB . While the annual compilation of many of the Rate records allows researchers to narrow the time of events such as property transfers or construction activity to a 12 month period, there are two exceptions :

- the Assessment and Valuation records of **Vaucluse Council** were compiled **triennially**.
- the **Valuation Lists** of the NSW Valuer General were compiled at **three to four year intervals**.



Step by step research using the Rate Records

Step 1. First, find your ward...

Early in their respective histories, both Paddington and Woollahra Councils were divided into administrative areas called **wards**. As the population of each area grew, new wards were added, and changes were made to established ward boundaries as demographic fluctuations dictated. Each ward returned an equal quota of aldermen to represent local interests. The revenue contributed through property-based rates was also organised along ward lines.

Because almost all the Rate records in the Local History Collection are, accordingly, also divided by Ward, the first step to consulting the record series is to **determine the ward – or wards - with which your property was associated over a period of time**. Use the Guides to the Wards of Woollahra and Paddington (a series of maps) provided at the Local History Centre to find the relevant ward, and note any adjustments made to ward boundaries that might affect the course of your research.

Step 2. Begin with the record containing the most recent information . the 1968 Valuation List

As when searching the *Sands Directory* (and for the same reasons) your search of the Rate records should begin with **the most recent record available** in the series. Within Woollahra's Local History Collection, the starting point of property research **for ALL property** is the **1968 Valuation List** for the Municipality of Woollahra.

This record was compiled by the Valuer-General following the addition, in 1967, of the former Fitzroy Ward of the City Council (*ie*, Paddington north of the Oxford Street boundary) to the Municipality of Woollahra. Since the former Municipality of Vaucluse had been re-united with Woollahra some twenty years earlier, this 1968 resource covers all property currently situated within the Woollahra Local Government Area.

[NB-Missing volumes may mean that your property is not included].

The 1968 Valuation List is contained in a series of bound volumes, the information for each property entered by street address. The streets are listed in a single alphabetical sequence (by street-name) for the **whole** of the Municipality . **the only Rate record for the Municipality of Woollahra that is NOT arranged by ward**. Under each street name (which appears at the **foot** of every page), properties are listed according firstly to the side of the roadway on which they are situated, and then in order of situation along the length of the street.



The 1968 record has many essential similarities to the earlier records in the Collection, though you will meet changes in format to this model, and variation in the level of detail of information supplied. **As a result, you can use the list below as a general check-list of details to look for when working your way through earlier records.**

Information to note once you have located the relevant entry in the 1968 Valuation List :

- ❑ **date** of record.
- ❑ the **location** of the entry within the document in relation to nearby property. (These may become useful points of reference as your search progresses into earlier documents, and familiar markers and identifiers disappear from the record.)
- ❑ **name and address of owner**, and whether or not the property is **owner-occupied**.
- ❑ evidence (as amendments to the record) of any **transfers** of ownership or leasehold, and transfer numbers (hand-written additions to the document).
- ❑ details of the **land parcel** . **dimensions, allotment identifiers, etc.**
- ❑ description of the property, noting nature of **improvements** (if any).
- ❑ Evidence of **cancelled** entries, which indicate a major change of circumstance necessitating re-valuation by the Valuer-General. Examples of same could be the re-subdivision of a land parcel into two or more smaller holdings, or, conversely, its absorption into a larger, consolidated holding.

Step 3. Working 'backwards' through earlier V G Valuation Lists...

For property in **Paddington** there is only one Valuation List held in the Collection that pre-dates the 1968 record. This is the Valuation List compiled for the Fitzroy Ward of the City of Sydney in **1963**. This document is contained in a series of bound volumes arranged alphabetically by street-name, with a page for every entry (*ie* for every individual property). The order of entries reflects the position of property within each street. Street names appear towards the middle of each page, on the left-hand side, with street numbers on the right.

For property in **Vaucluse**, pre-1968 Valuations have survived for the period **1926 to 1946**, and (as part of the Municipality of Woollahra) for **1949 to 1962**. All of these records are on microfilm. The documents are arranged alphabetically by street, with a page for every entry (*ie* for every individual property). The order of entries reflects the position of property within each street. Street names appear towards the middle of each page on the left-hand side, with street numbers to the right.



For **Woollahra** property, pre-1968 Valuations have survived for the period **1919 to 1962**. Of these, the **1934 - 1962** records are on microfilm. The record series is **divided by ward**, and within the ward divisions, the **information** is arranged alphabetically by street, with a page for every entry (*ie* for every individual property). The order of entries reflects the position of property within each street. Street names appear towards the middle of each page, on the left-hand side, with street numbers to the right.

An incomplete series of pre 1934 Valuation Lists is held in bound volumes.

General Tips for searching the VG records

When using these pre-1968 Valuations, note the salient details in the records as advised for the 1968 Valuation List (see - Stage VI, **Step 2**).

NB . that in ALL RECORDS within the VG Valuation series, where **transfers** occur, the last two digits of the associated Transfer number represent the year in which Council was informed of the transfer. Thus, the number T456/72 appearing in respect of a transfer indicates that this was the 456th transfer of property noted in the Municipality in 1972. As such, this is a guide to the time of transfer.

Look, **in addition**, for an indication of the **Estate name** under which the land was first released (recorded, when this detail is available, on the right hand side of the page, above the street number). You may be able to find a **subdivision plan** held in the collection that shows the site of your property at the time of its release for building development, and in the context of the subdivision. (See Stage VI, *Resources to use in conjunction with the Rate records*).

Knowledge of the estate name and allotment identifiers can be vital when you reach a stage in your research that pre-dates the use of other identifiers such as streets, street numbers, house numbers.

In the case of property in Woollahra, you can follow entries in the VG Valuation Lists back to 1919, and in the case of property in Vaucluse, to 1926. However, Council compiled Rate records exist in parallel to the earlier (pre 1950) VG records for both Municipalities, and may be preferable resources due to their format . which allows faster scanning of the information.



Step 4 Using Council Rate, Valuation and Assessment Books

The key to searching the various Council-compiled Rate records series in the Local History Collection is, again, to work backwards from the information in the most recent available document, through to the earliest reference to your property that you can locate. Note, on the way, all the salient historical details as identified in the check-list under Stage VI, Step 2. Since there is some variation in scope and format between the records created by the three Councils covered in our Collection, each records set is discussed separately.

Researching Property located in Paddington

The Local History Centre holds microfilm copies of the Rate Books of Paddington Council for the period **1860-1932** (originals held City Council Archives). As you will note, the records for the final 16 years of Paddington Council's operation are missing. For coverage of the twenty years during which the City Council administered the suburb, consult the Archives Department of the City Council. For further information, contact:

City Archivist :

02 9265-9618

www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/hs.

The Paddington Council Rate Books for the period **1926-1932** are the only Rate records in the Local History Collection that are NOT arranged by property, but consist instead of **an alphabetical list of the Rate-payers** of the Municipality, by ward, followed by information on the property each owned or leased. While useful for genealogists, this does not provide a convenient starting point for researching property, leaving researchers with three options :

- ❑ Search the 1932 record for the name of the Rate-Payer identified from the **1963** VG Valuation List, in the hope that the property remained in the hands of one owner or one family for the intervening period.
- ❑ **Browse all entries** in the relevant ward of the 1932 record looking for a reference to the property in question.



- Temporarily **by-pass the 1926-1932** records and refer to the 1925 Rate Book (arranged within wards divisions, by property). Then, having established the identity of the relevant Rate-Payer, **work forwards** through the 1926-1932 records, using the Rate-Payer's name as the key to the entries. Be alert for transfers, and note that, in some years, a separate listing for all deceased estates held in trust appears at the end of the document.

Continue your search back into the pre-1925 Rate Books, noting historical changes such as transfers of ownership, and aiming to reach a point where the site of your property is described as a vacant, or partially improved land holding. Note that details and identifiers become fewer in the earlier records . the reason for using the later records to establish points of reference such as ownership of neighbouring property, and/or the proximity of your property to features such as major buildings or intersections.

The series of streets in the Paddington rate Books are entered in order of their locality rather than alphabetically. Refer to the summary that appears at the beginning of each ward division for a full listing of the streets in each ward in the order in which you will find them in the body of the document.



Researching Property located in Vaucluse

An incomplete set of Council Rate records surviving from the separate local government administration of Vaucluse is held on microfilm in the Local History Collection. To search the history of property covered by the area that seceded from Woollahra in 1895 (which included the Vaucluse Estate, the village of Watsons Bay and the South Head area) you will need to refer to these documents. The Vaucluse Council Rate records cover the period **1896-1936** . thus finishing twelve years short of the re-amalgamation of Vaucluse and Woollahra in 1948. Some of this information gap is, however, offset by Valuation Lists of the Valuer General for the Municipality of Vaucluse, covering **1926-1946** (see *above* . Stage VI, Step 3.)

While the record series is characterised by variety of format, the greater part of the Vaucluse Rate records consist of Combined Rate and Assessment/Valuation Books, in which the assessment or valuation was compiled triennially, with the annually based rate records entered on a series of interleaved pages. The Assessment/Valuation details were updated where necessary by amendments to the base document.

Since the Municipality of Vaucluse was not divided into separate wards, the Rate Books consist of a single sequence of street-by-street listings for the whole area. The series of streets in the Vaucluse Books are entered in order of their locality rather than alphabetically. From time to time a summary appears either at the beginning or end of a document giving a listing of the streets the order in which you will find them in the body of the document.

Work back through the records, noting historical changes such as transfers of ownership, and aiming to reach a point where the site of your property is described as a vacant, or partially improved land holding. Note that details and identifiers become fewer in the earlier records . the reason for using the later records to establish points of reference such as ownership of neighbouring property, and/or the proximity of your property to features such as major buildings or intersections.

While much of the suburb of Vaucluse was developed in the early years of the 20th century, the nearby locality of Watsons Bay is made up of many pre 1890s buildings. To research property in the Vaucluse/Watsons Bay/South Head area prior to the 1895 secession, refer to the following details of the Rate records for property in the Municipality of Woollahra, which administered the area from 1860-1895.



Researching Property located in Woollahra

Having searched back to the early **1950s** using the V G compiled Valuation Lists, you may prefer to continue your search into earlier years using the Council compiled records of Assessment, Valuation and Rate payments. (Pre 1919, Council records are the only available documents.) While some of the Council compiled record series give slightly less detail than those of the Dpt. of the VG, the frequency of compilation (*ie*, annual) is an advantage for narrowing down the timing of the changes recorded, and the format of the record makes these documents faster to read.

For property that has always been part of the Woollahra Local Government Area (*ie*, not Vaucluse or Paddington property), these Council compiled records cover the period **1860-1950** in an almost complete set of annual records, available at the Local History Centre on microfilm.

Follow the same check-list of points to look for as advised when searching the VG Valuation Lists (see Stage VI Step.2) in order to build your profile of the property with regard to its age and succession of owners. You may also wish to look for house-names, and, with reference to Cooper Estate property, evidence in the post 1908 records of the freehold conversion of the land.

Where Assessments and Council Valuations are available in addition to Rate Books, always refer to the former in preference for the greater level of detail they provide. These documents are generally interspersed between the Rate Books on the microfilms, with Assessment records beginning in the early 1860s and extending through to 1908, and Council Valuations covering the period 1909-1918.

All three record series (Assessments, Council Valuations and Rates) are divided by ward, and within these divisions are arranged according to the **location** of the property rated, rather than by the name of the Rate-payer. The earliest of these records (*ie* those compiled during the 1860s and 1870s) are loosely structured documents, with property entered in an approximate locality order, and with many inconsistencies and few identifiers included.

From the 1880s, however, the order of the documents reflects with increasing precision the situation of the property, in a **street-by-street** series of listings. Each property is entered under the name of the relevant street and according to the **side** of the street that it fronted, and then according to its order



within the length of the street. The street name appears in all Council documents at the top of the page, usually on the left-hand side.

From **1922 forwards**, the streets are entered in **alphabetical order** throughout the documents. Prior to that, the streets were grouped by locality. To find the position of your street within the pre-1922 records, look for the **Summary** that appears at the end of each annual record, and which lists the streets in the order in which they appear in the body of the document. In some years, the Summary also provides a page reference for each street.

As you work back through these records, you will notice details became fewer. Depending upon the age of the building (which in turn determines the length of your search) you may find yourself using records for which there are no street numbers, or in which your property is listed under the name of a subdivision and identified by allotment and section numbers.

The greater the level of information that you have been able to gather about the property in the more recent records, the easier you will find these last stages of the research, and the more successful you are likely to be.



Resources to use in conjunction with the Rate records

There are several further records that can help you navigate your way through the information in the Rate records.

Council Block Plans

These records show the **boundaries of allotments**, coupled with details such as street numbers, allotment numbers and references to resources held by the NSW Office of Land and Property Information , Queens Square, Sydney. (<http://www.lpi.nsw.gov.au>)

A set of current block plans of the Woollahra Local Government area is held at the Local History Centre, as well as incomplete series of plans dating from the 1930s. Used comparatively, the information on these plans can assist researchers to make visual sense of the details they have uncovered in the documentary record.

Subdivision Plans

The Local History Centre holds an extensive collection of these plans, produced to describe and promote **land releases**, and showing the allotments of a particular subdivision, often with details of the dimensions of a site included, and sometimes with handwritten annotation recording the purchaser or purchase price overlaying the original printed drawing.

Some of the Library's holdings of these plans are paper-based copies dating from the time of the sale of the land. Others are copies on Aperture Card copies (readable on the Library's fiche Reader/Printers) of materials held at the State Library of New South Wales.

To identify the subdivision relevant to your property, refer to the details in the pre-1968 Valuation Lists of the Valuer General. records subdivision. To discover whether or not the Local History Centre holds an aperture card copy of the relevant plan, consult the Local History Card Index using either :

- the name of the subdivision, when known (eg, Folly Estate, Vacluse) or
- the name of the suburb, sub-divided by the heading Maps, plans etc

Look for the abbreviation **AC** (Aperture Card) in the left-hand (Location) column, and the number that follows it, which identifies the specific plan within the Aperture Card collection.

If no Aperture Card copy of the relevant plan exists, it may still be worthwhile browsing through the collection of non-indexed maps and plans, which are grouped by locality.



Stage VII : Biographical 'Extras'

Depending upon your reasons for undertaking research into the history of a property, you may wish to enrich your discoveries with further information on the people who were associated with the house and land.

Sometimes personal events in the lives of a former owner or occupant of a house (births, deaths, marriages) may go far to explain the twists and turns in its history. For example a death often leads to the disposal of a property, or marriage to the acquisition of a new home.

The two main biographical sources in the Local History Collection are:

- ❑ *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Melb. Melb Univ Pr., 1966 and
- ❑ *A Biographical Register 1788-1939*. Canb., ADB/ANU, 1987.

Other useful resources include:

- ❑ *Australian men of mark*. Syd., Maxwell, 1889.
- ❑ *Who's Who in Australia* (held on microfiche 1906-1988)
- ❑ *The Cyclopedia of New South Wales*. Syd., 1907.

For information on early residents of the area, the resources of the Archives Office of New South Wales *Genealogical Research Kit* may be useful.

However, there are many ways of tracing details of less prominent families or individuals, some suggestions for which follow.



Records of Births Deaths or Marriage

Can be found on Indexes to Civil Registration held on CD ROM or microfiche at the Local History Centre. From these can be traced the year of these various events. Certificates may be obtained from the relevant state authorities, which give greater detail.

The Probate Index of the Supreme Court of NSW 1800-1982 (held on microfiche) gives the exact date of death of New South Wales residents who died leaving wills. With this detail established, copies of Death and Funeral notices, and possibly an Obituary, may be found in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Details of Profession or Occupation:

May be traced through entries in the *Sands Sydney Directory* and sometimes in Valuation records. This can be the clue to finding biographical information within Directories of particular occupations or services, or in published histories of companies or industries.

Family and Local Histories

The Local History Centre is amassing a considerable resource on the local history of other Sydney and regional areas. In some cases residents of our own area may prove to have links with other suburbs or with country districts, information about which can be pursued through these sources. The Index to the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* can be a worthwhile starting point for discovering such links.

The Library also actively pursues the collection of published histories of local families. These are listed in the main catalogue (OPAC) and can be found by entering the family name in the subject field.

Your research need not stop here!

A visit to the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Macquarie Street, Sydney could be a worthwhile exercise. For further details on their collection . some of which is available on-line, visit their web site at www.sl.nsw.gov.au.

You can also add to and refine your knowledge of the succession of ownership of the land in question by visiting the NSW Land and Property Information Office, Queens Square, Sydney. Refer to their website at: www.lpi.nsw.gov.au.