

## ST MERVYNS 572 NEW SOUTH HEAD ROAD, DOUBLE BAY



*St Mervyns c1958*

*St Mervyns* was built for the solicitor and property developer Edward Percy Simpson in 1887. It was designed by the architect John Horbury Hunt, who was responsible for a number of prominent buildings in the Woollahra area. In fact, Hunt's own home was almost opposite *St Mervyns* on what is now Horbury Hunt Place.

*St Mervyns* was typical of Horbury Hunt's work of the period. Constructed of red brick, it borrowed heavily from Hunt's earlier ecclesiastical commissions, most notably his work on Grafton Cathedral, with wide distorted pointed arch windows, tall gables and a shingle tile roof. Large and forbidding, *St Mervyns* has been described by Horbury Hunt's biographer as being "*oppressively heavy and sombre without any touch of gaiety and lightness*".

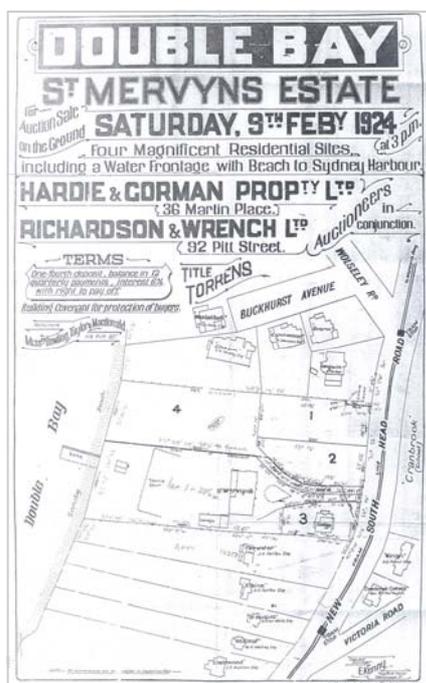
In many ways *St Mervyns* could be likened to its owner Edward Percy Simpson, who one contemporary source described as a *handsome but austere and intimidating figure*. Simpson was born in 1858 into a grazing family. In 1881 he was admitted to practice and became a highly successful solicitor, company director and conservative political figure.

During his career Simpson was a chairman of Richardson and Wrench, and his directorships included *Morts Dock and Engineering Company* and *The Sun* newspaper. Politically he was heavily involved in the establishment of the National Party of New South Wales in 1917 and this, coupled with his influence on *The Sun*, led to the comment being made in 1921 that he could *determine the composition of State Cabinet*.

Simpson was an avid sportsman throughout his life with many interests, including yachting and golf. He was the Vice Commodore of the Sydney Yacht Squadron between 1920-28 and President of the Royal Sydney Golf Club between 1920-30, during which time he was instrumental in the purchase of the Club's Rose Bay land.

He died a wealthy man in 1931 having lived at *St Mervyns* until 1917. It was at *St Mervyns* that his daughter Helen was born in 1897. Helen went on to become a lecturer, broadcaster and popular author, publishing many novels, including *Boomerang* and *Under Capricorn*, between 1925 and her death in 1940.

By 1927 there was little left of the extensive grounds of *St Mervyns*. The process of subdivision had began in 1924 with the release of four lots, upon two of which was subsequently built the block of units known as *Buckhurst*. *St Mervyns* itself appears to have been converted into flats c1930, and finally demolished to make way for the modern unit building *St Mervyns*, at No. 8 St Mervyn's Avenue, in 1965.



*St Mervyns Estate*  
1924

From Maps and Mansions by David Stanley  
Local History Centre  
Woollahra Library  
Sherbrooke Hall  
Double Bay NSW 2028