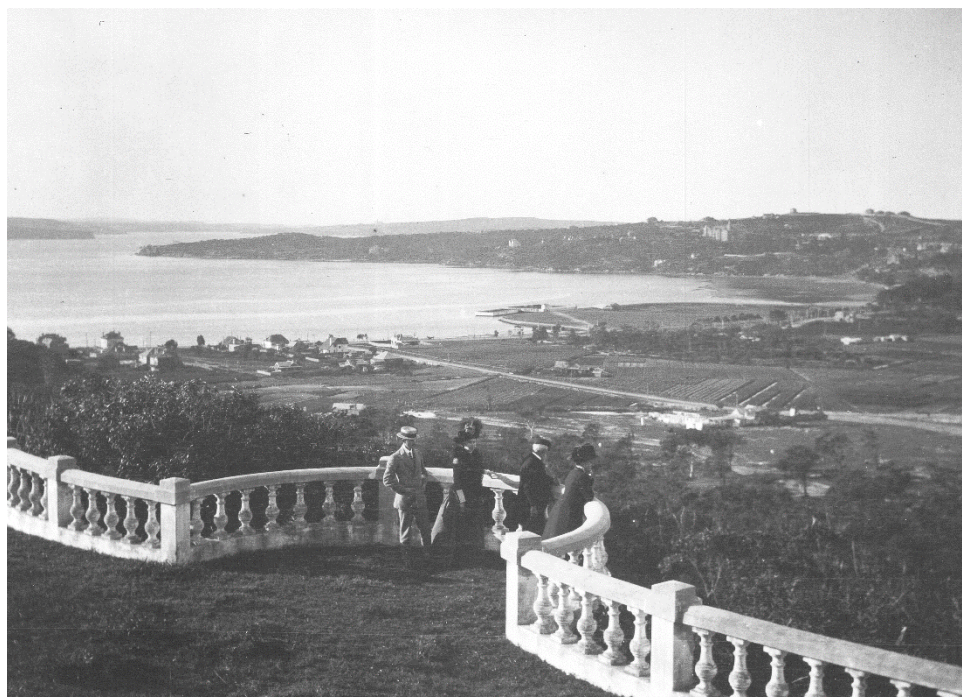


Bellevue Hill and the Cooper's Bellevue Hill-Bondi Estate



View over Rose Bay from Mark Foy's pleasure grounds Victoria Road, Bellevue Hill, c1910. Woollahra Libraries Digital Archive f000791

Early history of the locality

Indigenous history

The area extending westwards from the South Head to the modern Sydney suburb of Petersham is acknowledged as the traditional land of the Cadigal people.¹ Within the Municipality of Woollahra, archeological demonstration of traditional indigenous culture and way of life exists in known clusters of sites, recorded and protected as heritage items.²

The introduction of European land ownership altered the balance under which the Cadigal had lived and used the land. Continuous European occupation of the South Head locality began with the establishment of a Look-out post (forerunner of the South Head Signal station) on what is now Signal Hill in 1790. The post was at first manned by eleven men, accommodated in time in modest but permanent structures built in present-day Robertson Park, Watsons Bay. The first issue of land grants in the South Head region followed, early in the ensuing decade.

¹ “Cadi was on the south side of Port Jackson, extending from South Head to Long Cove (Darling Harbour) (King in Hunter 1793). Cadi, the bay of Cadi, is probably 'Kutti' which is the Aboriginal place name for Watsons Bay”. Australian Museum ‘Clan Names Chart’ <http://australianmuseum.net.au/clan-names-chart>

² [NSW Office of Environment and Heritage Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System](#); for reasons of cultural respect and preservation the precise location of items in this register are not broadly divulged.

These events collectively marked the establishment of Watsons Bay as an important strategic point for the colony's defence and a centre of early colonial maritime activity – and with this, the beginning of European settlement of the locality. The early operations at South Head would have also led to increased foot traffic along the ridgeline route that became the Old South Head Road - the passage between the outpost and the Sydney settlement. This waking path traversed the locality which would become known as Bellevue Hill.

All of these developments had implications for the Sydney coastal Aboriginal community - the most immediately deleterious being the introduction of disease to which the indigenous population had no acquired immunity. But nor did these events preclude an enduring aboriginal presence, the subject of recent studies which have articulated a history in which local European and Aboriginal stories overlapped and intersected³.

The Point Piper Estate – from Crown to Cooper

Among the formative influences upon the European history of New South Wales was the empowerment of the early governors to grant land – recipients initially limited to free settlers and emancipists, but broadened under successive governors to extend to members of the marine and military forces in the colony. The Point Piper Estate - also known as the Cooper estate, after the family which was its longest single owner - was an extensive land holding of 1,320-acres in total, initially accumulated by a colonial naval officer, Captain John Piper. Piper's holding was built up through a combination of crown land grant and purchase – a process begun in 1816 with the promise of 190 acres centred on Eliza Point (Point Piper).

Piper's supplementary lands included a further grant of 500 acres issued directly from the crown, plus some 630 acres of land subject to earlier grant allocations that through various means were brought under Piper's practical ownership, and finally consolidated in the title awarded to Cooper and Levey.

An early parish map which can be viewed online (portion reproduced below) shows land fronting the north-western side of Old South Head Road, from the eastern edge of Piper's 500-acre grant to a line today represented by the route of Towns Road/Bay View Hill Avenue, divided into seven parcels granted to early colonial settlers. These holdings ranged in area from 50 to 80 acres, and are shown in the names of William Bradley, Thomas Hall, Richard Partridge, John Foster, William Piper (relationship to John Piper, if any, unknown) William Jenkins and Samuel Breakwell. Of these seven parcels, the 60-acre Breakwell grant alone eluded Piper's acquisition. This land, granted to Irish convict Samuel Breakwell, lay to the north of present- day Fernleigh Avenue - the roadway that today marks the northern boundary of the former Point Piper estate.

³ Irish, Paul *Hidden in plain view: the Aboriginal people of coastal Sydney*. Syd., NewSouth, 2017.



Plan of the Parish of Alexandria, County of Cumberland⁴

In 1826, with Piper in serious financial difficulty, the greater part of this landholding⁵ was acquired intact by the firm of *Cooper and Levey* - a partnership of emancipists, Daniel Cooper and Solomon Levey, of the *Lachlan & Waterloo Company*. Following a long running dispute with the Crown over the precise extent and boundaries of their entitlement, a consolidated grant was issued to Cooper and Levey to settle the area covered by the 1,130-acre residue beyond the 190-acre Eliza Point parcel. The estate, as officially granted, was bound in present-day terms by Old South Head Road to the south, Jersey Road/Ocean Street/Ocean Avenue to the west, and Fernleigh Avenue to the north – within which area parts of the modern suburb of Double Bay (released by the crown as a village in 1834) were excluded.

In 1847, through an agreement negotiated between Daniel Cooper and John Levey – the sole beneficiary of Cooper's late partner Solomon, who had died in 1833 - the estate in its entirety was concentrated into the hands of the Cooper family.

Alienation of the Cooper estate lands

An early indication of Cooper's plans to realise the asset of the Point Piper estate can be found in an 1844 trig survey of the lands, held in the Mitchell Library. Cooper had privately commissioned Colonial Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell to produce this plan, and his instructions had clearly included the siting of several new roads to open up the land, and the subdivision of the estate into portions suitable for sale or lease.⁶

⁴ [Plan of the Parish of Alexandria, County of Cumberland](#) M Z/M2 811.181/1841/1

⁵ Piper had also held the original Brown-Hayes grant of Vacluse, acquired at this time by William Charles Wentworth.

⁶ *The Estate of Point Piper, surveyed trigonometrically and divided into allotments [cartographic material]*. (1844). Sydney: S.n.

<http://archival-classic.sl.nsw.gov.au/album/albumView.aspx?itemID=855860&ACMSID=0>

The estate at this time would have been viewed as inconveniently remote from the main Sydney township, and of interest only to those with the means to both create self-sufficient establishments and service their own transport needs. Reflecting this reality, Mitchell's scheme set out primarily to provide generously-sized allotments suited to gentlemen's estates.

Despite his clear intent in 1844 to raise revenue from the estate, Cooper's plans were thwarted by the protracted economic downturn that began with the 1840s depression. His death in London in 1853 then led to the immediate imposition of restrictions, via the terms of his will, on the sale of the Point Piper lands, prohibited until the beneficiary named in relation to the Point Piper estate (a great-nephew) would reach his majority.

For this and other strategic reasons, the Point Piper estate was first unlocked and developed on a leasehold basis, for which there was provision in the will of Daniel Cooper. This movement began in earnest from the mid-1850s, the life of the leases typically set at 99-year duration and subject to conditions qualifying the terms of occupation and improvement of each land parcel. Nevertheless, the 1889 Municipal Map of Woollahra suggests, by the total lack of detail, that no activity had taken place in the locality of what became the Bellevue Hill-Bondi Estate.⁷



Extract from Municipal Map of Woollahra/Higginbotham and Robinson, c1889

In 1885, the Cooper estate (in the person of Daniel Cooper- the England-based great nephew of its emancipist founder) vested the authority in its Sydney agents, Edmund Compton Batt and

⁷ Municipal Map of Woollahra/Higginbotham and Robinson, c1889.

John Mitchell Purves, to make sales from the estate at their discretion.⁸ In the early twentieth century, largescale freehold releases, along with the freehold conversion of former leaseholds – also authorised by the estate – gradually dispersed the Cooper holding.

By 1912, when the Bellevue-Hill-Bondi estate was first offered for auction, freehold tenure was not only well established, but a matter of public expectation.

Bellevue Hill – from carriage stop to suburb

A route had been cleared to the South Head observation post and settlement as early as 1803. In 1811, the second year of Lachlan Macquarie's governorship, a road was built by a party of 21 soldiers of the 73rd regiment, the work commencing on the 25th March and famously completed in ten weeks, an achievement commemorated by a monument at Watsons Bay. Initially known as the South Head Road, the addition of the word 'Old' became a necessary point of distinction once an alternative route following the harbor shoreline was built in the early 1830s, and referred to as the 'New South Head Road'.

The modern suburb of Bellevue Hill is skirted by Old South Head Road, and the place-name was officially adopted by Governor Macquarie in 1820 when he instructed Major Druitt, civil engineer to the colony, to:

*'direct a finger board of a pretty large size to be painted with the Name
'Belle Vue' and fixed on the Centre of a Circle or Mound on the Top
of the Hill hitherto vulgarly called 'Vinegar Hill'.*

(quoted in *History of Woollahra*/ James Jervis,
Syd., WMC, 1960 p.70)

However, Macquarie's reference was limited to the environs of present-day Bellevue Park – a fashionable meeting place and scenic vantage point in colonial times, once Old South Head Road was made trafficable, and excursions to South Head became a customary leisure activity for members of the 'carriage class'.⁹ A roadway from the main thoroughfare to the carriage stop was built by Major Druitt, and so valued by the establishment was the panoramic view available from this small knoll that when public access was denied in 1830, when Cooper and Levey fenced their land on the Point Piper estate, the colonial administration reacted at once. The administration was prepared to use the acquisition of a single acre at the Bellevue summit (an area later increased to 2-acres) as a bargaining point in the long-running dispute between Crown and the partnership over the extent of its holding in Double Bay. An agreement was not finally reached until 1853, when the small knoll was reserved as a circular park at the top of the knoll. Woollahra Council appointed the trustees in November 1888. Today it is known as Bellevue Park.

⁸ Broomham, Rosemary *The Coopers of Woollahra: land dealings on the Point Piper estate, 1820-1920*. Syd., WMC, 2000 p. 21

⁹ Jervis, James *A History of Woollahra* Syd., WMC., 1960 p. 70



View of Bellevue Park from Old South Head Road 1970s
Source: Woollahra Libraries Digital Archive pf06360/0994



Bellevue Park, Bellevue Hill – 1970's.
Source: Woollahra Libraries Digital Archive pf006360/170

The name Bellevue Hill gradually came to apply to the emergent suburb. Victoria Road appears on the 1844 Trig map of the Point Piper estate as one of several 'new roads cleared of bushes and levelled' and in time it was a frontage for a number significant early houses.

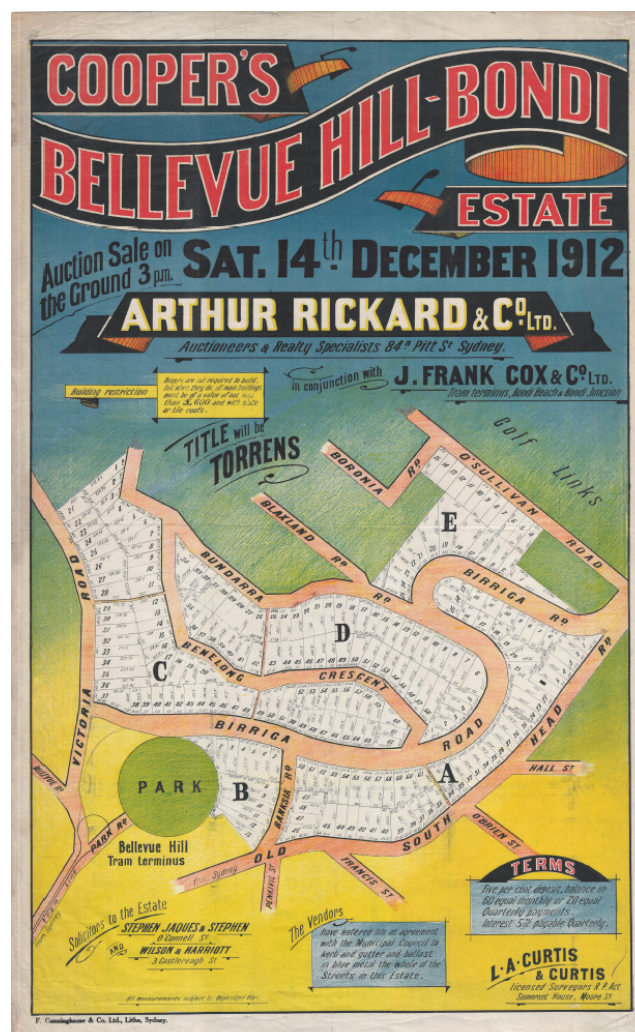
The mid 19-century settlement of the area began on Cooper estate leaseholds at the northern (harbour) end of the future suburb, and on the heights. Early landmark houses such as the Tooth family's *Cranbrook* (Blacket, c1858) and John Fairfax's *Ginnahgulla* (Weaver and Kemp, 1857-8) led this trend – both properties with frontage to Victoria Road. In time these were joined by further important houses fronting Victoria Road – Judge Josephson's *St Killian's* (1883) and Mark Foy's *Eummemerling Hall* - the latter with grounds on either side of the

roadway, the eastern land used as a pleasure ground with a maze and a water features and a look out to take advantage of the view.

As subdivision activity took up the vacant land along the ridges and slopes north-west of Bellevue Park, the name 'Bellevue' was frequently invoked in their promotion, the subdivision and sale of the Bellevue Hill-Bondi estate a case in point.

The Bellevue Hill-Bondi estate

The last of the land to be alienated from the Cooper estate in large-scale releases, the Bellevue Hill-Bondi estate was submitted to the market in three separate selling exercises. Despite the estate name, none of these three subdivisions included any part of the neighbouring suburb of Bondi, which falls entirely within the municipality of Waverley, separated from Woollahra by the Old South Head Road boundary. The subdivision name was presumably invoking, as a selling point for the land, the proximity of a desirable landmark – Bondi Beach, already a byword for scenic beauty and leisure when the land went to sale, located within feasible walking distance of the estate, and soon after to be a tram destination on a line running through the estate.



Sales Poster for the first release of
Cooper's Bellevue Hill-Bondi Estate, 14 December 1912. SLNSW

The 1912 release was centered on the newly constructed estate road named 'Birriga' – eventually the route taken by the extension of the Bellevue Hill tramway to Bondi Beach. In broad terms, the estate took in land bound on the south by the section of Old South Head Road between the Banksia and O'Sullivan Road intersections, on the east by O'Sullivan Road to its intersection with Boronia Road, and to the west by the length of Victoria Road from Birriga Road northwards to the northern edge of No 131 Victoria Road.

The Cooper family's Sydney agents had first considered the release of this land in 1908. Progress was delayed by drainage problems – both as a physical challenge to the development, and a notional issue in negotiations with Council. New legislation (the Local Government Act of 1906) required contributions from land developers to ameliorate future costs to councils left to address drainage problems arising from their works. Agreement on this matter between the Cooper estate and Woollahra Council was not reached until December 1911,¹⁰ a year before the land's release.

Drainage problems also hampered construction work on the first Bellevue-Hill-Bondi subdivision, as the necessary cuttings and embankments re-arranged the natural landscape into a network of roads and building sites. The steep terrain compounded problems already posed by the fragile, sandy soil - easily subject to wash-away and collapse. Persistence in the face of a succession of trials was handsomely rewarded by the results of the December 14 1912 auction, handled by Arthur Rickard & Co, at which, in the face of a property downturn, 148 of the available 227 allotments were sold, in what was hailed by the *Herald's* property reporter as a record sale:

The week ... opened up with a record sale last Saturday at Bellevue Hill, when Messrs. Rickard and Co. disposed of nearly £37,000 worth of land in allotments. Mr. Rickard practically cleared the whole subdivision, and at remarkably good prices.

(Sydney Morning Herald 21.12.1912 p. 10)

While the first-mentioned selling point in the land's promotion was the outlook available from the estate – with views to both harbour and ocean – emphasis was also placed on the comparative proximity of the tram terminus, then situated above Bellevue Park, alongside what would become the main frontage to the Bellevue Hill Public School. Even greater promotional weight was placed on the parliamentary announcement of what was to come: an extension of the tram route, running through the length of the estate along the newly built Birriga Road. A full-page advertisement for the subdivision, published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* a week before the land went to auction, included the following :

An Important Feature is the excellence of the Bellevue Hill Tram Service, and a still more important one is the fact that the extension of the line from the present Terminus to Bondi Beach has been passed by Parliament, and runs right through the ESTATE. We have endeavoured to show the course of this new line, which follows the Birriga-road from the terminus. This in itself should be sufficient to recommend Cooper's Bellevue Hill Bondi Estate as a paying investment.

(Sydney Morning Herald 7.12.1912 p. 14)

¹⁰ *Op.cit* p. 34.

.. the Bellevue Hill-Bondi tram [pictured] on the Birriga road to Bondi. It runs right through the Estate, which is but a few minutes' walk of Bondi Beach itself.

2nd Subdivision

COOPER'S BELLEVUE HILL-BONDI ESTATE

Auction Sale on the Ground at 3 p.m.

SAT. 1st. MAY 1915

ARTHUR RICKARD & CO. LTD.
Auctioneers & Realty Specialists
84 Pitt St Sydney.
in conjunction with
J. FRANK COX & CO. LTD.
From Torrens Road Block and Bonville Section.

TITLE TORRENS

TERMS
Five per cent deposit, balance 100 equal monthly or 10 equal quarterly payments.
Interest 5% payable quarterly.

Building Restriction
Houses are not intended to be built but when they do, all new building must be of a value of not less than £2,500. Semi detached £5,000 and with store or the roof's.

SELLERS TO THE ESTATE
STEPHEN JAMES and STEPHEN O'Connell Esq.
R WILSON and HARRIOTT Esq. Careborough St

All measurements and distances subject to Department Plans.

9



Sales Poster for the third subdivision of Cooper's Bellevue Hill-Bondi Estate, 15 March 1919. SLNSW.

The third subdivision was offered for sale in 1919, with unsold portions auctioned in 1921.



Sales Poster for the third subdivision of Cooper's Bellevue Hill-Bondi Estate, 19 November 1921. SLNSW.

The development and occupation of the Bellevue Hill-Bondi estate completed the transition of Bellevue Hill from a sparsely settled enclave for members of the colonial gentry into a fully-fledged middle-class suburb – albeit with social distinctions between the northern and southern precincts of the area. The Cooper estate imposed minimum standards for the improvement of the allotments in the subdivision, with a building requirement for slate or tile roofing, and a value of at least £600 set for every dwelling. However, the comparatively modest housing stock that resulted was reflective of the overall shift in character driven by the development.