

# CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

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## Archaeology and Heritage Places

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### PROGRESS REPORT NO. 1

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION 95-101 GEORGE STREET, PARRAMATTA

### WEEK 1: 14-18 June 2005

#### Defining the Site

The excavation area occupies land at the junction of George and Charles Streets Parramatta; it has the street address of 95-101 George Street. This is to be redeveloped with a thirteen-storey commercial building. It encompasses land that is likely to have been occupied from the 1790s by at least two convict huts on their garden allotments fronting the original alignment of George Street. Subsequently this land was granted to Robert Armstrong; the area of the grant includes 93 George Street (beyond the area of investigation). Apart from a substantial private residence constructed on part of the site in 1883 and several buildings constructed during the first half of the twentieth century relatively little is known of the use and development of this site. Defining the extent and nature of occupation is one of the prime objectives of the work. The work is being carried out within the parameters of permits issued by the Heritage Council of NSW (for settlement archaeology) and National Parks and Wildlife Service (for the archaeology of Aboriginal people).

#### Initial Work

The first work to be carried out on site was the removal of approximately 300mm of rubble left over from the demolition of buildings in 2003 on the Charles Street frontage and floating concrete slabs on the majority of the site. These had been laid from the 1950s onwards for a building constructed at 95-97 George Street for the NRMA. This building was also demolished in 2003. The removal of these two components revealed some elements of intact foundations as well as more extensive levels of demolition material and bedding sand for the slabs.

It was necessary to pile the Charles Street frontage and some of the George Street frontage to ensure the stability of the site before excavation could commence here. These piles form a continuous barrier along the edge of the site. As they were excavated the material displaced by the piles was recorded and a virtual profile of the site stratigraphy was established from this evidence. This helps to determine the potential levels of future excavation as well as giving some clue to the nature of the deposits. It appears that there may be up to 1.5 metres of European settlement deposits (at least at the edge of the site). No evidence of Aboriginal material was recovered during this work.

#### Commencement of Investigation

The archaeological investigation of the site has been commenced in the land defined as 99-101 George Street. The position was selected to work in best with the needs of the development programme and the extent of the area first opened was selected because of its relationship to a known historical profile, that is, the development of those two subdivisions of the land. These are twentieth century subdivisions and help to make sense and provide a context for the elements that are first revealed on the site. As these elements are removed these property boundaries will become less relevant.

#### The Early Twentieth Century

The removal of extensive demolition rubble revealed three substantial buildings. At 9 Charles Street was a double bay-fronted house probably erected around 1920. It had several later additions including a garage. This house had been constructed over the line of a major sewer built from east to west across this site in 1912. The sewer is two metres below the surface but the deposits above it, under the former house, are slumped over the line of the excavation.

Before the house was built and before the sewer was laid through the site this portion of the block was paved on several occasions, probably from the 1890s through to about 1900. The earliest paved level was formed from a deposit of early nineteenth century sandstock bricks, most with shell lime mortar adhering, dumped and then compressed by a roller to form a hard and impervious surface

approximately 3-4cm thick. In places crushed sandstone pieces were used to the same purpose. The second surface was laid over the brick paving and was formed from large pieces of sandstone rubble compressed to form a hard surface of similar thickness to the earlier bricks. Finally over the top of both, sometimes separated by fill used to level the older surfaces bitumen was laid over this area. All of these surfaces were cut through when the sewer was laid and when the house was built here. At this time we have not identified what they related to; they extend only as far as the subdivision line of 9 Charles Street to 101 George Street.

At the front of the block, at 101 George Street, was a large house/shop in the form of a terrace. Each half was found to have two front rooms opening from an entrance foyer and hall, a cross hall where stairs led to an upper level, a sitting room, kitchen and laundry. This building was probably erected in c. 1910. There was evidence of several internal changes as well as the addition of a substantial building immediately behind. This building was constructed on a base of reused nineteenth century bricks; the source of these is unknown. The George and Charles Street buildings were separated by a timber fence.

Next to 101 George Street was a small domestic/commercial building at 99 George Street. At the front it was built abutting the wall of 101 George Street. Behind a small passage separated the two. There was evidence of several changes and additions made to the wings behind this house as well as the establishment of gardens, climbing plants and improved drainage. It was separated from 95-97 George Street by a timber and fibro fence.

### **The Later Nineteenth Century**

After recording these twentieth century features by surveys, photographs and stratigraphic descriptions they are progressively being removed; at this time only 9 Charles Street remains intact and the front portion of 99 Charles Street. Below are several features that were built on the site in the c.1890s (at these times the dates are assigned based on stratigraphic relationships only). Below 101 George Street is the remnant of a wooden building that was already in existence in 1892. It was probably built in the later 1880s or c. 1890. All that remains is the outline of two walls, the base being a distinctive red brick. At the eastern end is what appears to be the base of a large sandstone structure, possibly a hearth. Associated with this building is a distinctive hard yellow clay surface that we are still following to the south into the area of 9 Charles Street.

Below this hard clay surface is a deposit, over the same distance to date, of mixed fill and rubble and wastes such as coke and charcoal that is up to 150mm depth. It appears to have been laid deliberately to raise the level of the site.

Below this levelling fill, under the remnants of the wooden building on George Street may be the remains of an earlier timber building. At this time we have exposed some post holes and a very distinctive black yard surface that appears to relate to this structure. It only extends back as far as a level commensurate with the back of the twentieth century George Street buildings. A separate surface was laid over this, the later one a 20-30mm compacted loam. This may have been a renewal of this yard area. One peculiarity of the black surface is that it is extremely clean; there is no evidence of wear or use, not even an artefact left on the surface. At this time, as with all the features at this early stage of excavation, we have assigned a tentative date of c. 1870. We have no clues as to its use.

### **Mid-Nineteenth Century**

Below the distinctive black surface described above is another extensive layer of fill up to 200mm deep. Below this over the entire site cleared to date is a level of grey sandy soil, heavily charcoal flecked into which have been cut a number of features. These include a sandstock brick drain, shallow channels up to nine metres in length, post holes, and just uncovered, what appear to be a series of lined and connected pits. We have not progressed far enough in the excavation to begin to interpret these features and they have only been tentatively assigned a mid-nineteenth century date.

### **Questions**

Several questions have already been raised in this early stage of excavation, the most significant being the issue of original topography. Several sites have been or are being excavated in the near vicinity of 95-101 George Street. Directly across the road, the present Meriton apartments site was excavated to original ground level and its assemblage of features related to convict occupation. This distinctive sandy site was, at that point at or just below the present street level. Our excavation has reached at least half a metre below the street and no evidence has been revealed of an original ground surface. At a site currently being excavated at the corner of Hunter and Macquarie Streets, at a point higher than our excavation area, the original ground level has been reached approximately 1.5 metres above our present level. It suggests that 95-101 George Street is in some kind of topographic depression but it is

not clear how the ground levels varied so much from one side of George Street to the other. This issue of topography will be pursued throughout the coming weeks.

### **Next Steps**

In the second week of the excavation we will remove the remaining twentieth century features at 99-101 George Street and bring this portion of the site to the same approximately mid-nineteenth century level taking the opportunity to examine the extent of some of the features already revealed and attempting to interpret the diverse range of elements that have just started to be seen in the mid-century context.



View south across the excavation area exposed to date showing the buildings at 99 and 101 George Street and 9 Charles Street.