

# Como Heritage Trail: Heritage Interpretation Plan

Prepared by AMBS Ecology & Heritage  
for Sutherland Shire Council

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# 1 Introduction

Sutherland Shire Council (SSC) has commissioned AMBS Ecology & Heritage to prepare a Heritage Interpretation Plan for a Walking Trail around the Como Peninsula. The aim of this Heritage Interpretation is to provide the relevant information for the production of:

- The Como Heritage Trail Map – provide data for graphic designer to prepare map
- The Como Heritage Trail Brochure(s) – provide data for graphic designer to prepare map
- The Como Heritage Trail interpretative signage – five signs required detailing specific information placed at various locations on the Trail - provide data for graphic designer to prepare map.

The overarching aim of the Como Heritage Trail is to enhance the visitor experience with stories and images with an ability to excite an interest in the history of the local area.

## 1.1 The Study Area & Aims of the Interpretation

Como is within the Sutherland Shire Local Government Area (LGA) and is located on the southern shore of the Georges River, approximately 15km south of the Sydney CBD (Figure 1.1). The location of the Como Walking Trail has been identified by SSC as a circuit around Como bounded on the south by Bindea Street, to the west by Woronora Crescent to the north by the Georges and Woronora Rivers through Paruna Reserve and to the east by Como Parade. The Trail is approximately 4.5 kilometres in length and the majority of it would be graded easy for walking. A part of Paruna Reserve would be graded medium for bushwalking due to the presence of informal bush steps.

Six locations have been identified for interpretative signage along the Trail. They are:

- Como Rail Bridge & Station
- Como Pleasure Grounds
- Como Hotel, Scylla Bay & Como Public School
- Como Railway Station
- Henry Lawson Reserve
- Paruna Reserve

The SSC manages the Como Heritage Walking Trail, which traverses various Council zones; mainly Zone E2 Environmental Conservation, E3 Environmental Management and RE1 Public Recreation under the Sutherland Shire Local Environment Plan 2015 (SSLEP). The SSC requires that all aspects of Como life pre- and post-European settlement are captured, with a maximum four stories per sign, thus a total of 20 stories to describe the proposed interpretive themes.



Figure 1.1 The locale of the Como Heritage Trail.

## 1.2 Methodology

The report has been prepared in accordance with NSW Heritage Council guidelines on *Heritage Interpretation Policy* (2005) and *Interpreting Heritage Places and Items* (2005). It is also consistent with the principles of the *Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance 2013*.

This Heritage Interpretation Plan has been informed by the *Como Pleasure Grounds and Heritage and Environmental Trail Masterplan and Conservation Management Plan* (CMP) prepared in 2002 by Spackman and Mossop for SSC.

### 1.3 Heritage Context

The conservation and management of heritage items, places, and archaeological sites takes place within the framework of relevant commonwealth, state or local government legislation. Non-statutory heritage lists and registers, ethical charters, conservation policies, and community attitudes and expectations can also have an impact on the management, use, and development of heritage items. The following describes the relevant statutory and non-statutory heritage listings for the study area.

The following statutory and non-statutory lists and registers have been reviewed to identify the location and significance of historic heritage items and places in the vicinity of the study area:

- National Heritage List (NHL)
- Commonwealth Heritage List (CHL)
- State Heritage Register (SHR)
- RailCorp Section 170 Register
- Sydney Water Section 170 Register (SW S170)
- Sutherland Shire Council LEP 2015, Schedule 5
- National Trust of Australia (NSW) Register
- Register of the National Estate (RNE)
- State Heritage Inventory (SHI)
- Office of Environment and Heritage Aboriginal Heritage Information System (AHIMS)

**Table 1.1 Heritage items and places are within the study area, or its near vicinity.**

Item ID	Description	Address	Heritage Listing	Significance
01624	Como Rail Bridge	Over Georges River	SHR	State
4576032	Como Rail Bridge	Over Georges River	SW S170	State
4570509	Woronora—Penshurst pipeline	282, Woronora Dam to Penshurst Reservoir Woronora, Sutherland, Penshurst,	SW S170	Local
0904 A0913*	Former Como railway bridge (now cycleway), lattice girder railway bridge	North of Cremona Road MGA Zone 56, 321771°E, 6236675°N	LEP	State
0901	House (including the bush setting, the simple form of the building, the roof form and finishes, the wall finishes and the sea wall)	39 Bonnet Avenue Lot 4, DP 318689	LEP	Local
0902	House	105 Como Parade Lot 1, DP 505159	LEP	Local
0903 A0907	Como Pleasure Grounds	End of Cremona Road Lots 3–10, DP 3134; Lot 648, DP 752064	LEP	Local
0905	“Cafe de Como”—house	2 Cremona Road Lot 1, DP 366566	LEP	Local
0906	House	41 Wolger Street Lot 1, DP 883870	LEP	Local
A0908	Pavilion site	End of Cremona Road Lot 5, DP 3134	LEP	Local
A0909	Boat shed	End of Cremona Road Lot 1, DP 366566	LEP	Local
A0910	Sea walls	End of Cremona Road Lot 648, DP 752064	LEP	Local
A0911	Tidal baths	End of Cremona Road MGA Zone 56, 321792°E, 6236490°N	LEP	Local
A0912	Scylla Bay	End of Cremona Road	LEP	Local

A0914	Como railway bridge (current railway bridge)	Lot 1, DP 193039 North of Cremona Road MGA Zone 56, 321722°E, 6236636°N	LEP	Local
A4302	Woronora—Penshurst pipeline From Woronora Dam to Penshurst reservoirs, via former Como railway bridge across Georges River	MGA Zone 56, 316075°E, 6230855°N	LEP	Local

Note: 'A' denotes archaeological site.

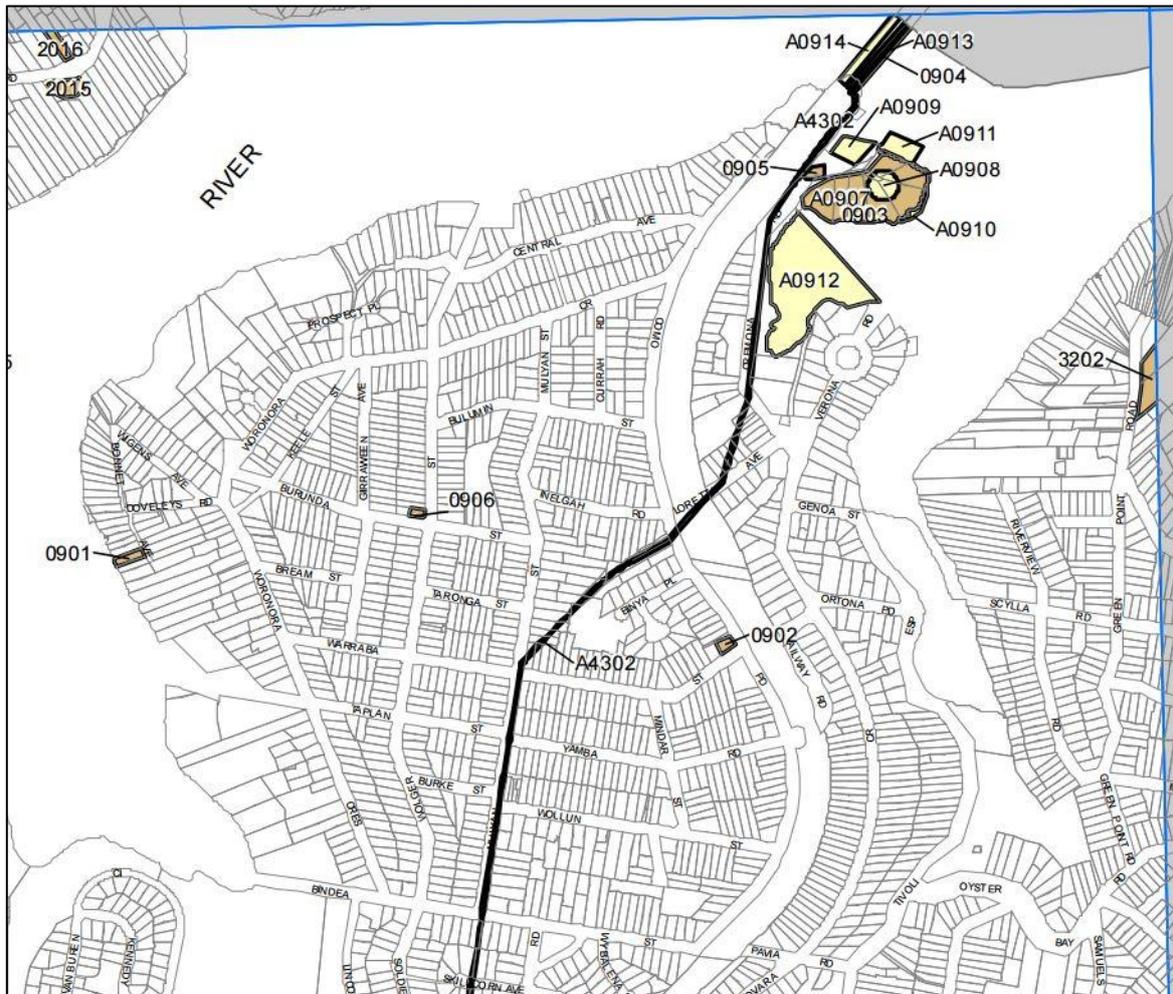


Figure 1.2 Detail from SSC LEP heritage map 7150\_COM\_HER\_005\_020\_20150424.

Thirty-six (36) Aboriginal heritage sites have been recorded on Office of Environment and Heritage AHIMS database. The most common site types recorded in the local area are rockshelter, midden and art sites.

Table 1.2 Summary of Aboriginal site types previously recorded near the study area.

Site Type	Number
Shelter with Midden	11
Midden	8
Shelter with Midden and Art	6
Shelter with Deposit and Art	5
Shelter with PAD	3
Shelter with Art	1
Shelter with Deposit	1
Axe Grinding Groove	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>

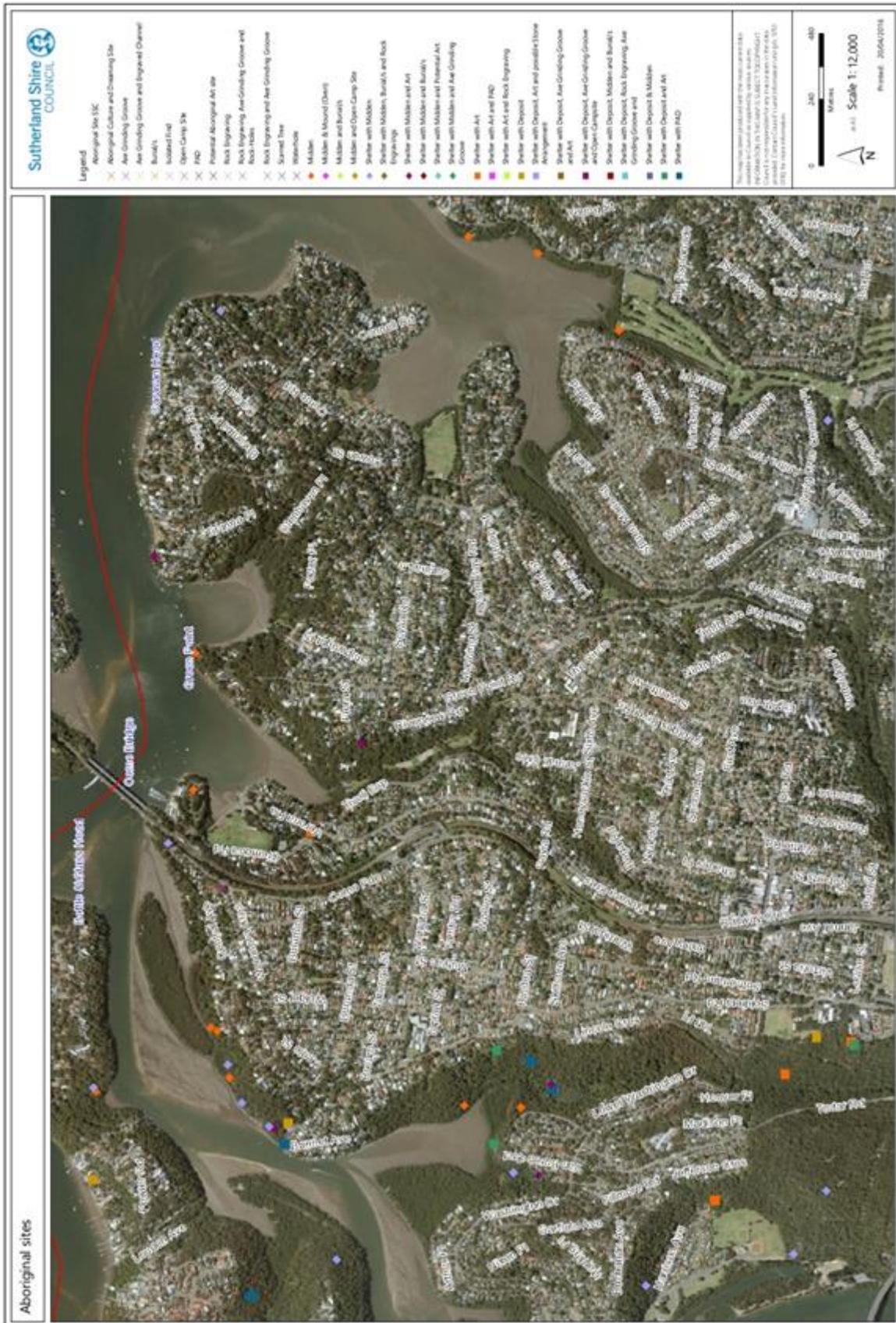


Figure 1.3 Aboriginal heritage sites previously recorded in the Como area (source: Sutherland Shire Council).

## **1.4 Author & Acknowledgements**

This interpretation plan has been prepared by AMBS Director Historic Heritage, Jennie Lindbergh, with invaluable assistance from Heritage Consultants Chantal Danieli and Jenna Weston. The Aboriginal heritage component has been prepared by Chris Langeluddecke, AMBS Director Aboriginal Heritage.

The authors acknowledge the assistance and contribution from Sutherland Shire Council Project Manager, Project Delivery Group, Anthony Russell and Natural Area Manager Brendan Graham.

## 2 Interpretation Process

Heritage places contribute to an understanding and character of a community by providing tangible evidence of its history and identity. At times of change, they help to preserve a connection to the past, and can provide a point of reference for interpreting the past to future generations. Article 15 of the Burra Charter refers to managing *Change*, which should be guided by the *cultural significance* of the *place* and its appropriate *interpretation*. In addition, Article 25 explains that:

*The cultural significance of many places is not readily apparent, and should be explained by interpretation. Interpretation should enhance understanding and engagement, and be culturally appropriate.*

Heritage interpretation aims to explain or illustrate the story of a heritage item or place in a way that engages the community in its continuing care and protection, and thus conserve the significance of the place. It is often also a source of enjoyment and learning for local residents and visitors to an area, and itself contributes to the character of the place. Interpretation would further provide mitigation for any loss of heritage significance during times of change and development to the place.

Heritage interpretation can incorporate various ways of experiencing and appreciating a heritage item or place. It commonly encompasses a range of actions, including the retention and maintenance of historic fabric, documenting changes to a place, installation of explanatory signage, landscaping, commemorative naming policies, heritage-themed public art, heritage-themed web-pages, walking trails, tours, and other activities.

The primary objective of this interpretation plan is to provide an insight into the changing nature of the place of Como; the stories that illustrate its development from the pre-contact environment, its development as a holiday and picnic destination and the introduction of infrastructure.

### 2.1 Heritage Interpretation Plan Objectives

The following objectives have been identified for the Como Walking Trail heritage interpretation plan:

- Identify potential audiences for the interpretation.
- Identify potential media, content, and locations for the interpretation, taking into consideration:
  - the extent to which heritage items or places have been impacted by changes to the local area, including loss of heritage significance,
  - opportunities and constraints presented by the available historical resources, such as historic photographs,
  - the needs and character of the local audiences,
  - opportunities and constraints presented by the proposed walking trail.
- Outline the key historical themes that are associated with the history and development of the Como Peninsula that are relevant to the Como Walking trail.
- Identify themes and stories which are susceptible to interpretation, and which would help to communicate the tangible and intangible heritage values associated with the local area.
- Record local memories and stories about the place, if possible.
- Identify strategies for implementation of the plan, including consultation with key stakeholders, evaluation, and refinement of the proposed themes and content.

## 2.2 Audience

Heritage interpretation should be accessible to the widest possible audience, and as such should offer multiple levels of information, which responds to different levels of experience, and education, and different forms of understanding and culture.

### 2.2.1 Audience Accessibility

Some general principles addressing audience accessibility are:

- Interpretive signage, if used, could include a range of information at different heights to enable viewing by adults, children, and people who use wheelchairs.
- A heading and/or short overview paragraph should introduce each signage panel. Headings should be presented in plain language, which is accessible to people who have difficulty reading English.
- Images, simple line drawings or silhouettes should be included in interpretive signage to assist children and people with reading difficulties to comprehend the information being presented.
- Children are more likely to respond to elements which encourage active engagement with the local environment. For example, information included on the lower section of a signage panel could be framed as questions regarding the local heritage environment. Urban design and public art could be directed to encourage physical interaction with interpretive material.
- Tactile experiences are also essential to people with visual impairment.
- The use of historical images, quotes or first person descriptions, and public art can be used to present alternative cultural perspectives or ways of viewing and appreciating stories of the past.
- Web pages can be used to attract future visitors, and/or provide additional and alternative forms of information about a site.

### 2.2.2 Health and Safety

Health and safety issues associated with the Como Heritage Walking Trail are generally the same for those for any recreation or natural area. The major concerns within the trail are issues of public safety near the water, access to the knoll in the Pleasure Grounds, which is of great concern to Council due to rock falls and erosion, and access to Paruna Reserve. The knoll in the Pleasure Grounds.

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) requires that people with disabilities are given equal opportunity to participate in and contribute to, the full range of social, political and cultural activities. Sutherland Shire Council has an Access Policy, adopted in 1995, with the objective of providing equal access to council parks, waterways and recreational areas. In addition, all new parks, and re-design of parks, should be made accessible to the disabled to Australian Standard 1428.2, wherever possible. Equality of access includes ability to use barbeque facilities, picnic furniture and playground equipment.

### 2.2.2 Stakeholders and Community Interest Groups

People living on the Como peninsula and the wider Shire of Sutherland, in particular Scylla Bay and Jannali, have a strong interest in key community issues and the Como Walking Trail project. In line with this sense of community, there are a number of identified major stakeholders and active community groups that will have an interest in the Interpretation Strategy. Particular community groups include:

- SSC Parks & Reserves Unit –
  - Manager of Parks and Reserves Mr Gwyn Cleaves

- Natural Area Manager Mr Brendon Graham
- SSC Bushcare Coordinator
  - Ms Dayna Mellor
- Sutherland Shire Aboriginal Advisory Committee.
  - Bruce Howell
- SSC Local Studies Librarian
  - Ms Helen Mc Donald
- Chief Information Officer Sutherland Shire Council
  - Mr David Mc Niven
- Manager Communications
  - Ms Kathryn Lord
- Sutherland Shire Henry Lawson Society Contact
- La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council
- SSC Heritage Committee
- Henry Lawson Society
  - Jenny Watson
- La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council
  - Chris Ingrey
- Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council
  - Brad Maybury

AMBS has undertaken consultation with the La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council the Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council, both of whom represent the local Aboriginal community in the Como area.

### **2.3 Interpretation Media**

The content and locations for interpretive media should reflect the place they seek to explain. The choice of interpretive media influences how important themes and stories can be communicated to, and experienced by the community. A variety of media can be used to appeal to different audiences, including children and non-English speakers, and to encourage people to explore and appreciate the history and cultural significance of the local area. A variety of media can also be used to create various layers of messages and meanings, presenting different cultural perspectives or levels of complexity.

The choice of interpretation media would be constrained by considerations of safety and security, and where signage is outdoors, it should be resilient and easily repairable to withstand extremes of climate.

### **2.4 Then and Now Interpretation Signage**

Interpretative signage can take a variety of forms, ranging from a single image transferred onto a vertical surface, to a standalone sign with a combination of text, images, maps or other graphics. Then and Now signage would allow for comparisons between historic images of sites and places with similar views today.

- Signs would be sited and orientated so that people can make a visual connection between past and present landscapes. Siting would also aim to minimise hazards, damage and /or graffiti.
- Interpretation signs endeavour to capture particular aspects that have interest to the local and wider public. Each interpretative sign would include a maximum of four stories per sign, to ensure engagement with the themes selected.

- Appropriate acknowledgment of the source of images can invite further investigation of the rich collection of historic photographs held by the local resources.
- Design of the signs would respond to the layout, landscape and recreational character of the site selected for interpretation. Suitable fabrics are stone, timber, marine grade stainless steel and/or bronze

#### 2.4.1 *Web Based Heritage Information*

Heritage-themed web pages can be linked to way-finding signage and now and then interpretation signage, to provide an additional form of access to site-specific historical information and as the basis of a self-guided heritage walking trail. Links to web-based information would provide access to further site-specific explanatory text, plans and/or images.

Web-based interpretation, managed by the SSC, would be appropriate in the context of the Como Walking Trail.

### 3 Historic Context

The following provides a historic background to the interpretation content and includes a summary outline of the key events and themes relevant to the Como Walking Trail.

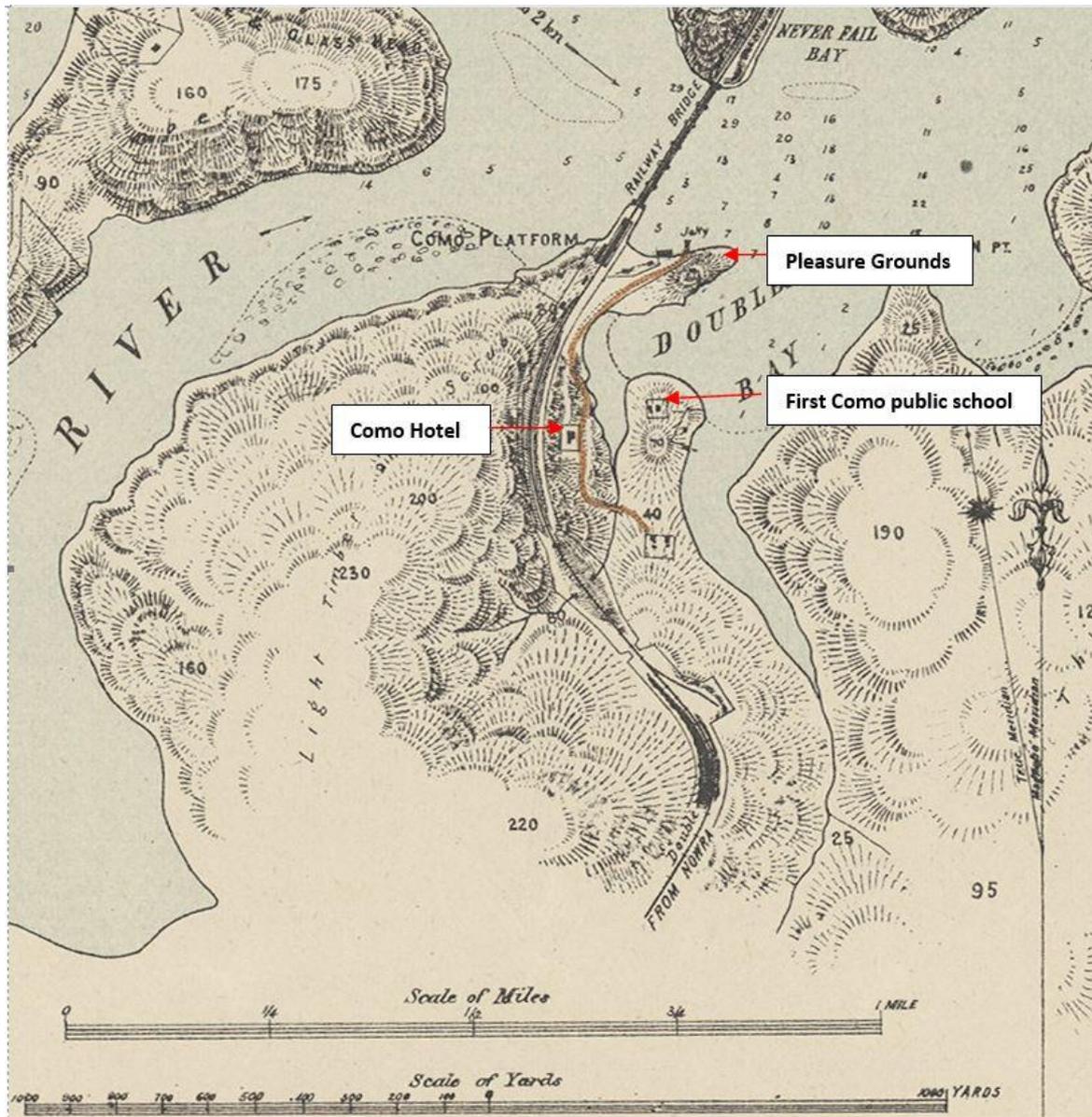


Figure 3.1 Como Peninsula and local environment with locations identified. Double Bay is now Scylla Bay (Detail from 1894 Reconnaissance map of the Como Railway Bridge and adjacent country / G.G. Anderson, Licensed Surveyor, Lieut. B.D.F.A).

### 3.1 Understanding Como

**Table 3.1 Key historical events associated with the development of Como.**

Date	Event
Pre-1770	Aboriginal occupation
1770	The <i>Endeavour</i> sails into Botany Bay and lands on the southern shore at Kurnell
1796	Bass and Flinders explore and name Port Hacking
1815	James Birnie becomes the first recorded landowner at Kurnell
1827	Robert Dixon, assistant to Surveyor General John Oxley, undertakes the first survey in the Sutherland Shire region
1856-61	Thomas Holt purchases 12,000 acres of land in Sutherland Shire, including Como
1864	Tom Ugly's punt begins operation across the Georges River
1878?	The German Concordia Club opens (later renamed Como Hotel)
1879	The Royal National Park is created
1881	The Holt-Sutherland Estate Land Company Ltd is formed and offers 99 year leases
1882	Work on the Illawarra Railway Line commences
1883	The Worinora Hotel opens in conjunction with the Como post office at Como The German Concordia Club establishes a club at Como
1884	Como public school opens on the peninsula
1885	The Illawarra Railway Line reaches Sutherland and the railway workers relocate to the Heathcote. Como Public School closes Murphy's Pleasure Grounds and boat sheds are established next to the Como rail bridge.
1887	The German Concordia Club is renamed the Como Hotel
1888	Holt dies after having returned to England
1893	Earliest evidence of the Murphy's first boatshed
1899	The Sanbrook brothers operate a paddle steamer, <i>Telephone</i> , between the Pleasure Grounds at Como and Parkesdale
1900	The Holt Sutherland Estate Act passes, and Holt Sutherland Estate Company Ltd tenants able to convert land from leasehold to freehold
1905	Paul Buchholz takes over the Como Hotel
1906	The Sutherland Shire is proclaimed
1920	The first road linking Sutherland and Como is completed and called Soldiers Road
1921	Como Public School opens in its current location. Como is officially declared a village
1926	Como School of Arts opens
1929	Tom Ugly's bridge opens
1930s	Spooner Scheme enables Depression relief work with road construction linking Sutherland to Como, construction of the Carina Bay footbridge, and reclamation of Scylla Bay
1942	WWII: boats confiscated and Como boat sheds demolished as a wartime security measure Sutherland Shire enters into time payment with the Bryants to purchase the Pleasure Grounds site for £4000.
1951	Sutherland Shire Council becomes owner of the Pleasure Grounds and maintenance works on the site begins removing the existing buildings
1970s	Reclamation of part of Carina Bay negates the necessity of the footbridge
1972	A new railway bridge is constructed, and the railway station is moved half a mile to the south
1974	20 metre pool constructed at the Como Pleasure Grounds
1996	The Como Hotel burns down
1983	The old shop in the Como Pleasure Grounds reopens as a restaurant.
1985	The old railway bridge is converted to cycleway and walkway
2000-1	Como Hotel rebuilt replicating original
2004	Works undertaken at the Como Pleasure Grounds

### 3.2 Paruna Reserve: Aboriginal Cultural Heritage

The earliest inhabitants of Como were the Dharawal people, whose territory comprises the area south of Botany Bay and the Georges River, south towards Nowra, and across to the upper reaches of the Georges River in Sydney's west. Limited information is recorded about the Aboriginal inhabitants of Como and surrounds following contact with Europeans and the establishment of Como, however evidence of their occupation and use of the area remains in the presence of archaeological sites and historically recorded traditional stories.

Aboriginal occupation of the Sydney basin is likely to have spanned at least 20,000 years, although dates of more than 40,000 years have been claimed for artefacts found in gravels of the Cranebrook Terrace on the Nepean River (Stockton and Holland 1974; Nanson *et al* 1987; Stockton 1993). Late Pleistocene occupation sites have been identified on the fringes of the Sydney basin and from rockshelter sites in adjoining areas. Dates obtained from these sites are 14,700 BP at Shaws Creek in the Blue Mountain foothills (Kohen *et al* 1984), c. 11,000 BP at Loggers Shelter in Mangrove Creek (Attenbrow 1981, 2004), and c. 20,000 BP at Burrill Lake on the South Coast (Lampert 1971). The majority of sites in the region, however, date to within the last 3,000 to 5,000 years, with many researchers proposing that occupation intensity increased from this period (Kohen 1986; McDonald 1994; McDonald and Rich 1993). Such an increase in occupation intensity may have been influenced by rising sea levels, which stabilised approximately 6,500 years ago. Older occupation sites along the now submerged coastline would have been flooded, with subsequent occupation concentrating along, and utilising resources of, the current coastlines and the changing ecological systems of the hinterland (Attenbrow 2003).

A study of the Sydney region reveals that Aboriginal sites are distributed across the whole range of physiographic units and environmental zones, although certain types of sites may be more frequently associated with certain parts of the landscape (for example, shelter sites are particularly common in areas of Hawkesbury Sandstone), and different parts of the landscape contain different resources, which may be seasonally available or highly localised (Koettig 1996). Shell middens are common in the region around the shores of bays, rivers, harbours and the coast, in areas where shellfish are available.

The study of Aboriginal archaeology in the Sutherland Shire region was largely pioneered by FD McCarthy, who excavated rock shelter sites at Lapstone Creek and in the Capertee Valley (McCarthy 1948, 1964). On the basis of this work, McCarthy was able to establish a tripartite system known as the Eastern Regional Sequence (ERS), which could be used to interpret the Aboriginal past of the region based on stone tool indicators (see also Attenbrow 2003:153-8).

McCarthy's sequence divided the material past into three phases, beginning with the Capertian (over 5,000 years ago), a phase characterised mainly by scrapers and pebble tools made by free-hand percussion, while only limited evidence for bipolar flaking is evident in this period. Tools were determined to generally consist of flakes with retouch and usewear, and to be larger on average than those recovered from later periods of occupation. The Bondaian period was thought to begin around 5,000 years ago, and to be characterised by types of retouched flakes known as backed artefacts. Backed artefact types include Bondi Points (named after their initial discovery near Bondi Beach in Sydney) and geometric microliths. Tools from the Bondaian period were considered to be generally smaller than tools recovered from Capertian period deposits. The final, most recent phase is known as the Eloueran, and is characterised by the elouera type stone adze flake. However, it is now considered that eloueras are part of Bondaian technology, and that this phase of the last 1,600 years, in which eloueras and bipolar pieces predominate, is Late Bondaian; while the Early Bondaian occurred from 5,000-2,800 BP, and the Middle Bondaian

occurred from 2,800-1,600 BP (in which a greater amount of Bondi Points and bipolar flaking are seen; Dallas 2002:36).

Although current research suggests that McCarthy's theoretical framework may no longer be appropriate, and the ERS is under review, the three phases were noted during excavations at Curracurrang Cove in the Royal National Park, from which the first sequence of radiocarbon dates for the Sydney region came. A basal date of approximately 8,000 years BP was found, which is very similar to the dates produced from similar material at Capertee. The middle levels of the Curracurrang rock shelter site have been dated as ranging between 2,500 and 850 years BP, and were rich in artefacts with over 1,000 microliths recovered (Megaw 1968a, 1997:9).

The uppermost levels of the Curracurrang shelter were rich in faunal material, including single- and double-ended spear barbs made from animal bone. These artefacts, as well as shell and bone debris, provide evidence of local Aboriginal exploitation of the marine and inshore environment prior to European settlement. The site also contained human burials, with associated artefacts indicating contact between the local Aboriginal community and Europeans. Studies of stone waste flakes from the site included geological thin sectioning of tools, which indicated distant sources of raw material, particularly chert from the Bateman's Bay.

Excavations at three sites around Wattamolla Lagoon, immediately north of Curracurrang, provided a variation on this pattern (Megaw and Roberts 1974). Prey such as fish, shellfish, seals and marine birds were exploited. The earliest radiocarbon sample from the site dates to 2,000 BP, and the stone tool technology was consistent with this date. The site also contained evidence of the complex manufacture of worked bone and shell fishing implements, showing parallels with other sites of the last phase of Aboriginal coastal settlement.

Surrounding Wattamolla and Curracurrang are several engravings of animal figures, of the type best represented in the Ku-ring-gai Chase/Hawkesbury vicinity. Excavations at one painted rock shelter, located above the Hacking River at Audley, contained a midden where valuable contextual evidence had been destroyed by looting. A handful of artefacts were recovered; however, dating was unable to be undertaken. The site at Audley nevertheless retained Aboriginal art, including depictions of local fauna and hand stencils.

Research undertaken at Captain Cook's Landing Place at Kurnell utilised a multi-disciplinary approach to interpret the latter periods of archaeology (Megaw 1968b). The site has been recognised by archaeologists, from the 1960s onwards, as a large open midden and camp site used over at least 500 years, and radiocarbon dates of  $360\pm 110$  BP from the upper midden and  $1,330\pm 100$  BP from the lower midden were obtained (Dallas 2002:Table 2.2). Archaeological investigations in the region indicated that the area had Aboriginal occupation history going back to at least 5,000 BP. The midden demonstrated utilisation of the coastal food resources, including Sydney cockles, oysters, turban shells, mussels, and snapper and bream fish varieties. Evidence of more widespread hunting was demonstrated in remnants of seal, dolphin, whale, a range of marsupials, dingo and marine bird species (Neve 2000:1; Megaw 1997:10).

### 3.2.1 *Understanding Aboriginal Places Within Como*

Thirty-six Aboriginal heritage sites have been recorded on the OEH AHIMS database within the Como area. It is important to note that this number represents only those sites that have been identified and reported to OEH, and that more are likely to be present across the landscape.

#### *Rock shelters*

A common site type in many parts of the country, rock shelters are naturally formed hollows or overhangs in a cliff, usually found in coastal, mountainous or hilly terrain. Rock shelters are often

habitation sites, either transient or semi-permanent. Some rock shelters also contain examples of rock art, artefact scatters and/or middens. Rock shelters are the most commonly recorded Aboriginal site type recorded in the Como area, representing 75% of recorded sites, either alone or in association with another site type.

#### *Shell Middens*

Shell middens result from Aboriginal exploitation and consumption of shellfish, in marine, estuarine or freshwater contexts. Middens may also include faunal remains such as fish or mammal bone, stone artefacts, hearths, charcoal and, occasionally, burials. They are usually located on elevated dry ground close to the aquatic environment from which the shellfish has been exploited and where fresh water resources are available. Deeper, more compacted, midden sites are often found in areas containing the greatest diversity of resources, such as river estuaries and coastal lagoons. Approximately 70% of the recorded Aboriginal heritage sites in the Como area are shell midden, either alone or within rock shelters.

#### *Rock Art*

Art is found in shelters, overhangs and across rock formations. Techniques include painting, drawing, scratching, carving engraving, pitting, conjoining, abrading and the use of a range of binding agents and the use of natural pigments obtained from clays, charcoal and plants. 12 Aboriginal art sites have previously been recorded in the Como area, all within rock shelter sites.

#### *Axe Grinding Grooves*

Axe grinding grooves are elongated depressions formed by grinding and sharpening of ground-edge implements such as axes or hatchets. One axe grinding groove has been previously recorded within the Como area.

### *3.2.2 Traditional stories*

The La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council has indicated that it is their preference that interpretation prepared for the Como Heritage trail focus on traditional stories relating to the area, rather than recounting the physical heritage and archaeology of the area. Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council have indicated their approval of this approach for the initial signage used as part of the heritage trail project, but that should scope be available in the future for additional signage to be installed, consideration should be given to the interpretation addressing the physical, archaeological sites within the reserve.

Author C. W. Peck (1875-1945) collected and published a number of traditional Aboriginal stories in the 1920s and 30s, as narrated to him by Aboriginal informants. Unlike most earlier descriptions of traditional Aboriginal stories, Peck's publications contained site specific information, and can be related to specific locations. Two of the recorded stories, one originally published in 1925 collection and one published in the *Sydney Mail* in 1928, refer to the Georges River, and are presented in full below.

#### *Why the Waratah is Firm*

*The whole George's River tribe were camped on the flat between the bouldered cliffs that stand up high on each side of the stream. The weather had been very dry. Hot winds brought the yellow dust from the and regions of South and Central Australia and they wilted the vegetation of New South Wales and parched the people. One of those droughts, so well known to us, was withering the land. Though the happening took place many thousands of years ago, and though the story may have been altered in the telling by so*

*many fathers right down the line, the story of the drought is the same as that we can tell of such a dry time.*

*The river had not been in flood for many moons, or, perhaps, years. Fish and eels were scarce. Only the big holes had them. Those holes are very deep, especially in that part of the river that has great flat rocks lying athwart it and stretching out on each side of the bed. Seventy feet is considered to be the depth at many places.*

*Most of the people were lolling in the shade. Only the hardest stood motionless on the rock bottom with poised spear, while the hidden baiters gently scattered fine pith from the cabbage palm or chewed up seeds of the macrozamia, to attract the fish and bring them to the surface.*

*Warmeela, the son of the King, was the hardest of all, and Krubi, his lubra, was never done warning him about the risks he took in war and in the hunting. Even now she stood under the myrtles, and with a waratah that she held in her hand she beckoned Warmeela to come to her.*

*Warmeela took no notice. Instead, he glanced to the west, for away over there great thunderclouds swelled slowly but surely up, and the faint zephyr that swung softly down the ravine ceased altogether. The hot air stood still. The only movement was the thrust spear as with a zip it pierced the water, and the quick kick of the impaled fish as he was suddenly lifted out and dropped into a crevice that prolonged his life for a little while, but in the water of which he soon struggled his last.*

*Then came the roll of thunder. The clouds blotted out the sun. A shade like the blackened haze of an eclipse spread over the river. One of the baiters went back to the myrtle scrub. Warmeela remained. Then the other went, and only Warmeela still stood by the hole. The tribe was moving back to a huge cave they knew of that had been formed by the rolling together some time long since, of several boulders. There was shelter for every man, woman, and child.*

*Warmeela's spear was poised. Like the cracks of millions of whips at the one time the first crash came and with it a frightful jagged fork of lightning. Warmeela was struck. His spear was hurled from his hand over the water, and stuck quivering many feet deep in a soft place on the opposite bank. There was a charred mark down its whole length, and the bone point was wrenched off. Warmeela lay prone amongst his struggling fish. A brother rushed to him and bore him back to the tribe.*

*Rain poured down. Roll after roll, crash after crash; thunder and lightning shook the hills. The wind came tearing through the giant gums and swirling amongst the shrubs.*

*Warmeela was unconscious of it all. He knew nothing of the consternation of his tribe. His old mother chafed his hands and the king gazed stupidly. Krubi, his pretty wife, held his head on her arm.*

*The storm rolled off again as quickly as it came, and then Warmeela opened his eyes. They were now useless. A print of a gumtree lay across his face, and the limbs were marked over his eyes. His sight was gone. A white streak appeared in his jet-black hair and one arm hung paralysed at his side. The next morning he tried to walk, and it was seen that he had a terrible limp.*

*Blind!*

Now Warmeela was most fond of the honey of the waratah. The great *Doryanthes excelsa* produced much honey, but ants and gnats got that. Seldom did any aborigine regale himself with the juice of that flower, because he did not like the taste of ants nor the stings of flies. The waratah was different. Its honey, though less, is sweeter, and mostly there were no insects in the flower at all. But though it may seem strange to us, the bloom of the waratah was at that time very soft.

That was the statement of a broken-hearted native, whom the white called Griffiths, to the pioneer out Taralga way about sixty years ago. His real name was Coomerkudgkala.

Poor Warmeela. He had been so strong, so agile, so big hearted and so high-spirited. He now stumbled amidst the rocks. He would suffer none but Krubi to lead him. And often Krubi had to engage herself with those things that women did, but always before she was half through the task, Warmeela called her. If she did not come at once he went off by himself.

The waratahs were blooming again, for a year had gone by, and Warmeela often put out his hand hoping to feel one.

He still hated to be handed anything. He wanted to feel and fetch and carry for himself.

Two flowers bothered him. The big yellow *Podolepis acuminata* and the flower of the native Musk (*Olearia argophylla*) often deceived him, and once some other flower poisoned him.

One day Krubi, his beautiful wife, came upon him when his heart was sad and he was ill and depressed. She asked plaintively the reason for his sadness. Warmeela felt for her hand and answered slowly, saying that he did not know one flower from another. He said he would drink of the honey of the waratah, but he could not find it. He too often mistook others for it.

Krubi promised that she would find a way so that Warmeela should always know the flower he wanted so much.

She led him to the place where the lightning had struck. She found a mark of it on the rock and she followed it knowing not why. Warmeela was willing to hold her hand and be led. The mark lay straight on over the flat rocks and the boulders, to the eroded bank. It showed on the bare root of a gumtree that it had split. Krubi looked up at the shape of the tree and she saw that it was the one printed on her husband's face. She sat beside the gum and there she was inspired. She spoke, and Warmeela did not understand the words. No one knows what she said. After a time she got up, and bidding Warmeela to wait, she sped over the rocks and logs until she found the beautiful red waratah. She returned with it and held it close to the crack in the gumtree. The soft pistils were drawn up and they stiffened. Krubi held the flower to Warmeela, and when he felt the difference he clasped his big hand over it. He clasped too hard. He bent the red pistils. In that moment a big red light lit the sky. A red ball descended, lighting up the firmament in such a way as to startle all who saw it. Some screamed and rushed about.

Not so Krubi nor Warmeela. They knew what no one else knew. The prayer of Krubi had been answered and thenceforth Warmeela would have no difficulty in distinguishing the flower he loved.

Source: Peck, C W (1925, pp52-55) *Australian Legends: Tales handed down from the remotest tribes by the autochthonous inhabitants of our land*, Sydney, Stafford.

Stone-Throwers

Two young aborigines - brothers - were journeying up George's River in order to inspect a piece of country in which the *Persoonia* grew plentifully. Its berries, called by us "geebungs," were green and unpalatable a few weeks before, and these two men thought that by this time they must be ripe; so without telling anyone else of their intention they set off. Sometimes they heard people not far away and they hid, and even when a wallaby or a bandicoot made a noise by scampering through the undergrowth they stopped and remained still until all noise had ceased. But when a large stone fell just in front of them they were completely nonplussed, and they peered up amongst the branches of the great eucalypti and looked carefully along the top of the high bank and amongst the boulders and the undergrowth of myrtles and ferns. They saw no sign of anything that could have caused the stone to fall, so they went on.

They had not gone far when they were again startled by the crashing down of another big stone. This one they examined, and their keen eyes detected hair on it that they knew came from no animal they had ever seen. They had no sooner touched this hair than there appeared before them a "wullundigong." He was a little man completely covered with hair, and immensely strong. He barred their way, and the two men were so afraid that they fainted. When they came to their senses again the "wullundigong" had gone. They knew then that they should not continue their journey to the place of the *Persoonias*; but, thinking that the "wullundigong" had gone for good, and that no one would again disturb them, they did go on. They reached the place, and found that the berries were quite ripe; but when they went to shake the tree in order to make those quite fit to eat drop to the ground they were horrified to find that the "wullundigong" sat in the branches. He looked very fierce, and grinned at them and made a horrid barking noise. In this fright they each seized a stone and hurled it at the hairy animal. The stones both found their mark, and with a cracked skull the "wullundigong" dropped to the ground.

The men were overjoyed and seized him by the arms, intending to drag him from under the trees to a clear place so that they might better examine him, and perhaps get his kidney fat, for they believed that if they ate this fat they would be possessed of the strength of the animal.

But the moment they touched it its spirit entered into each of them, and they became stone-throwers. Their arms grew long and of great strength, and hair grew all over them and over their bodies. They became human "wullundigongs." They ate all they wanted of the *Persoonia* berries, and then went back to their people. But they felt that they could not mix with them as they did before; so they climbed up amongst the boulders, and could not forbear the inclination to hurl stones down amongst the tribe. They were seen and with cries of "Wullundigong! Wullundigong!" the people ran away. They followed, and being human they could sometimes shed their "wullundigong" persons and become men.

In this form they married, and their children were natural stone-throwers. They have never died. As "wullundigongs" they go away and live for periods in rocky places, and as men they join a tribe and are received in silence, and they choose wives; but if they can be caught just before the change takes place or while it is in progress they are killed.

And Jhola's son was accused of being a "wullundigong." The little chap was certainly very hairy, and Jhola knew that the old doctor was watching him, hoping to find him in the state of transition. The child had shown no inclination whatever of any stonethrowing disposition. His father was just a stranger who had come limping into the tribe one day, and because he limped he was kindly treated. He was not known to be a "wullundigong." No one had ever seen him turn hairy or throw stones. Jhola, too, was watchful, and the day came when the boy became very angry because a dog persisted in rubbing up against him, and he seized a stone. The doctor saw him, and he raised his spear. But Jhola could

certainly throw a stone, and before the spear was hurled the doctor lay with a skull just as cracked as had been that of the old "wullundigong."

No one blamed Jhola. She succeeded in persuading the people that her son was no hairy stone-thrower, and the new doctor never at any time tried to make out that he was.

Source: Peck, C.W. "Aboriginal Legends, No XI- The Stone-Throwers", *Sydney Mail*, 14 March 1928, p. 58.

### 3.3 Thomas Holt and the Development of Como

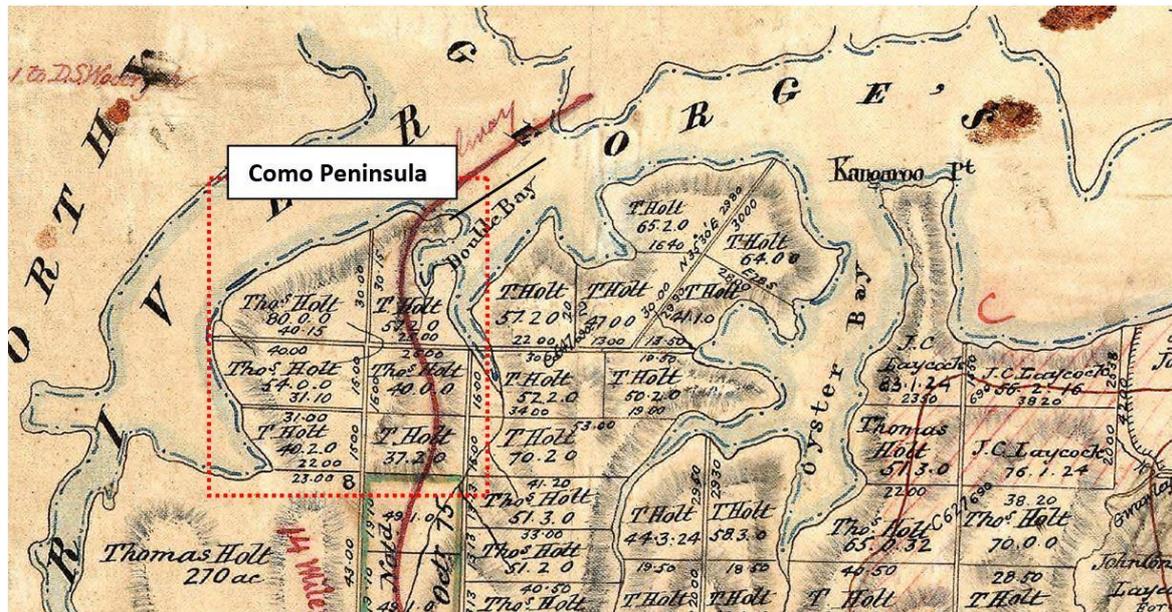


Figure 3.2 c.1882 Parish of Sutherland map showing the broader Como environment and an indication of the extent of Thomas Holt's landholdings (ipi image 14039301.jp2).

Between 1856 and 1861, Thomas Holt, a wealthy pastoralist, wool merchant and politician purchased 12,000 acres of largely undeveloped land in the Sutherland Shire, and which included Como (Neve 1971:2). Holt resided in Marrickville at *The Warren*, overlooking the Cook's River, though he eventually built a mansion on the Sylvania foreshore, *Sutherland House*, which was completed in 1881. In that year, Holt decided to move back to England, dying on 5 September 1888 at his home in Kent, leaving his Sutherland estate to his son Frederick (Geeves 1972; McDonald 2008; Neve 1971:2-4). The land in the Como area, near the junction of the Waranora River (now Woronora), was known as Double Bay on the Georges River, and identified in 1868 as Double Bay Paddocks 1,2,3 referred to as paddock No 29, which lay between the Oyster Bay Paddock and Waranora Paddock (Bonnet Bay). Double Bay referred to Mimosa Bay (Scylla Bay) and Carina Bay (Salt 2001:8).

In 1881, the Holt-Sutherland Estate Company Ltd was formed and in 1888, the first land subdivision was offered as 99 year leases with an option to convert to freehold. The venture offered small acreages which, with the advent of the 1890s Depression, was particularly successful as it provided an opportunity for the unemployed to be self-sufficient by developing market gardens, growing fruit and vegetables and raising poultry (Geeves 1972; Neve 1971:4).

The *Holt-Sutherland Estate Act 1900* granted a new lease to the newly-formed Holt-Sutherland Estate Company following the bankruptcy of the old company. Although, tenants could convert their land from leasehold to freehold, in exchange for 25 years rent, some left their rented farms for Menai and Heathcote when these areas came on the market several years later. Further subdivisions were then offered under the new terms (Neve 1971:4).

Life in the early part of the twentieth century was difficult for local Como residents, with few services or facilities. Sutherland Shire Council, which was formed in 1907, determined that the western side of the railway line was the best location for an access road. However, it was another five years before tenders were called and not until 1919 that construction began on the road between Sutherland and Como. Construction was facilitated by a Federal government grant to employ returned soldiers from WWI on the work. As such, it became known as Soldiers Road and was officially completed in 1920.

In 1914, a syndicate purchased approximately 135 acres (55 hectares) of land close to the railway station from the Holt-Sutherland Estate Company, as this area was considered more appealing for development. Como was promoted as the coming suburb, and although the river blocks sold well, land was still being advertised into the 1920s (McDonald 2008).

When the original Como Rail Bridge was decommissioned, the railway station was also made redundant and a new Como station was built half a mile to the south at the level crossing on Railway Parade. The Warraba Street level crossing was closed on the 5 June 1972, and the replacement road bridge, together with the new, though incomplete station was commissioned on 19 November 1972, to coincide with the transfer of city-bound trains to the new bridge. Southbound trains used the new bridge one week later on 26 November. Work on new roads to the station included Railway Road as a divided road with a median strip from Novara Crescent to the railway, and a subway beneath the railway and pedestrian crossing about 35ft south of the subway. Car parking spaces were also provided in close proximity to the station (St George and Sutherland Shire Leader, 11 February 1970).

### **3.4 The Como Pleasure Grounds**

The Como peninsula is first mentioned in 1884, when a one-year lease agreement was signed between Thomas Holt and railway contractors, Charles Gibson Millar and Edwin Francis Millar, for the use of 5 acres of land. The sketch accompanying the lease indicates that there were already two jetties on the peninsula, one to the east of the boat slip and another on the eastern most point (ML MSS 2170 ADD ON2030 14(21)). The land was likely used to store equipment for the upcoming construction of the new railway and bridge that would see excursions running to Como by December 1885.

The opening of the new railway generated a lot of interest, and the Holt Sutherland Estate Land Company entered into lease agreements with the Department of Lands in order to occupy and expand upon the existing boatshed and recreational facilities of the pleasure grounds. The company entered into a Lease for Special Purposes with the Department of Lands for a jetty on piles from 1 January 1885 – 31 December 1899 and in 1886, the company applied for separate permission to occupy land for the purposes of a boat slip next to the Jetty. The lease was valid from 1 January 1886 – 31 December 1892, and the accompanying sketch indicates that four structures were already in place behind the proposed boat slip at the time. In 1889, a boatshed and jetty complex was built at the shore line below the promontory, which could be reached by steps from the station.

Whilst James Murphy, Manager to the Holt Sutherland Estate Land Company, has often been attributed as the owner and creator of the pleasure grounds and boatsheds in local histories, there is no supporting definitive documentary evidence for the early period. Local historians assert that his brother, John, was in fact the leaseholder of the pleasure grounds, arguing that he had invested a great deal of money in the associated boatsheds and café. From 1908, the Sands Directory for Cremona Road lists a JT Murphy as the owner of the refreshment rooms, boatshed and pleasure ground. However, this is assumed to be a misprint of JF Murphy as the boatsheds had already been converted to freehold by John Francis Murphy in 1901. The 1909 Sands

Directory again confirms JF Murphy as the owner of the refreshment rooms, boatsheds and pleasure grounds. This is the same year that John Murphy sold his share of the boatshed business to Michael V Murphy and Joseph S Smith. Murphy's boatshed has survived, in part, as an element of the current marina (Curby 2015:46)

Although the pleasure grounds were always privately owned, they came to be regarded as a public park with free entry for tourists and day-trippers attracted by the cultivated scenery and facilities. Popular activities included fishing, boating, bathing, picnicking, camping, swings and a razzle-dazzle for children, and steam-driven paddle-wheel river boats (*Evening News* 25 October 1887; *Sydney Morning Herald* 27 January 1899). It was also recognised that the unrestricted use of this area by tourists greatly contributed to the large and increasing railway passenger traffic to Como on weekends and holidays. Historic photographs also map the development of the pleasure grounds from a wild and un-landscaped peninsula prior to 1890 to an Edwardian style pleasure ground by 1906 equipped with an expansive promenade encircling the stone stepped terraces, which had been completed as early as August 1906, and stretches along the shore of Scylla Bay to the Como Hotel (Salt 1997:5). The distinctive ziggurat-shaped terraced garden walks crowned by a summer house atop the rocky knoll from which there were panoramic views of the river and bushland, and is where a band played during summer. Throughout the grounds there were picnic tables for the convenience of picnic parties and many summer houses were dotted about the landscape, along with a large communal shelter pavilion. Photographic evidence has been cited as indicating the presence of baths on the point (Morton 1987:8). However, the evidence for this is inconclusive and there was a dance hall on the flat ground above these, therefore it is more likely that the baths were on the south side of the grounds where the low wall is extant. Photographs also depict the fence set back from the café and in a similar arrangement to the existing fence at the site today. Fencing, which remain on the same alignments, restrict entry to the boatsheds except through the pleasure grounds, indicating the close links between the two businesses.

Boatsheds were also an integral part of Como's appeal and a major drawcard for leisure seeking visitors from the city; the first was Murphy's boatshed, which is now part of Como Marina. The second shed was constructed by JH Wills on the western side of the steep railway embankment. Wills' boatshed is listed in the 1908 Sands Directory, though it may date back to the 1890s. The third shed, originally known as Press's and later as the Federal Boatshed, was on the eastern side of the railway line and was reached via steps down the railway embankment close to the present bicycle track (Morton 1987:12).

Following John Murphy's death in 1912, James Murphy took his brothers to court over settlement of his will, in particular, James had a vested interest in the Como properties and boat letting business, which he eventually bought. While the will was being contested, William Jordan, John Murphy's assistant ran the boat letting business and Sydney Smith oversaw running the boatshed and the store at the pleasure grounds. James Murphy secured title to John Murphy's boatshed and pleasure ground in early 1921, keeping the Murphy and Federal sheds; however, he was not a success. By 1914, George A Rollings is the proprietor of the refreshment rooms, boatshed and pleasure grounds. JH Wills ran his business until 1918, when the lease and the trading name of the Como Boat Letting Company was sold to Jens Simonsen, who planned to expand the business. However, Simonsen transferred the lease to James Bryant in 1921, who successfully ran it with his son Ernest. After James Murphy's death in 1924, his boatshed business was overseen by The Perpetual Trustee Co. Ltd until 1929, when the boatshed and pleasure grounds were bought at auction by James and Ernest Bryant and Jane Peacock White. This ensured that the Bryant's owned all the boatsheds and 150 boats for hire. In addition, the Bryant's began to charge admission to the pleasure grounds; however, the Great Depression and the dramatic rise in unemployment rates saw a downturn in the business. In 1928, concerned local residents petitioned Council, for the second time in a decade to improve access to Como for

motorists. The Como Progress Association also pressed for urgently needed works at Como and requested that the Shire construct public swimming baths, *which would be a boon to the district* (*Propeller* 18 January 1929:2). In 1929, Council promised to undertake several projects at Como; the reclamation of the mud flats in front of the Como Hotel, construction of a tidal pool and a stone retaining wall across Scylla Bay; however, the projects dragged on until the 1940s (*Propeller* 18 August 1929: 3). The site of the public tidal baths was located to the east of Murphy's boatshed.

By 1942, with the advent of WWII, Bryant's business came to a grinding halt when all but two of his boats were taken as a security measure. Also during this time soldiers regularly camped in the pleasure grounds, and an armed soldier was on permanent guard on Como Bridge. Concurrently, the responsibility for caretaking and maintenance of the grounds was transferred from Bryant to the Council by a time payment contract between the two parties for the purchase of the pleasure grounds for £4,000, plus interest. The title was transferred to the Shire Council following expiration of the contract in 1951 (Morton 1987:32).

Como's popularity and value recovered in the post-war period. There was a rapid growth in the local population and of smaller subdivisions along the river, which cut off public access. The provision of easy access and boating facilities to a large catchment of people who lived just inland from the river was always a vital part of Como's attraction and probably contributed to the recovery of its popularity. There was a change in the Pleasure Grounds' visitation demographics during the 1940s with higher numbers of local residents replacing waning Sydney day-tripper numbers. The popularity of combining a trip in a motor car with an outing, made Como a less popular destination for Sydneysiders, as the highway crosses at Sans Souci and passes directly beside the National Park. The National Park offered the growing popularity of bushwalks, boating and picnics as well as the pleasure grounds at Audley and the beach at Garie, were competition for an out-of-the-way place like Como, though functions and events continued to be held at the pleasure grounds. The Como and District Sub-branch of the Returned Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia, who held a New Year Revel in 1948; the Malleable Castings Cricket Club picnic for 500 employees was held there in 1945; the NSW GT Employees Welfare Association, held their 1945 annual picnic at the grounds; the Rockdale Church of Christ often held moonlight picnics in the grounds during the 1940s; the NSW Fire Brigades Sutherland District, used the grounds for a fire fighting demonstration in 1949 (Morton, 1987:31-2). Three of these came from the Hurstville area on the north side of the river, indicating that Como had quite a wide catchment of visitors, along the railway. Nonetheless, the increase in local crowd numbers contributed to deteriorating ground and facilities conditions and as such letters were written to Council requesting action be taken for improvements to facilities and implementation of crowd control measures. In 1951, changes were made to structures within the grounds, some of which had been there for 40 years or more; several shelter sheds and picnic furniture were replaced and Council barbeques, picnic tables and the bathing change rooms above the tidal pool were removed. Between 1968 – 1972, with the allocation of State Government funds for the new rail bridge over the Georges River and associated works, the promontory and pleasure grounds were modified at the same time. Previously, the pleasure grounds, cafe and boatsheds formed a nucleus for Como, as commuters and travellers dismounted from trains immediately at the complex. Re-location of the railway station further isolated the pleasure grounds peninsula and marooned the cafe from its daily customers.

In the 1970s, the deteriorated condition of the tidal baths caused the Council Engineer to request its closure. However, the local residents petitioned Council and the baths were refitted with new mesh, board walks and diving boards (Morton 1967:35, 36). Again in 1974 after agitation by locals, the new 20 metre chlorinated pool was opened on a flat area above the tidal pool, inevitably increasing use of the grounds during summer and Council embarked on a

beautification program to restore the grounds to a *place of peace and tranquillity where family groups may enjoy a day swimming and picnicking by the river* (Morton 1967:36)

The pleasure grounds site was the subject of a Masterplan process in 2002 by Sutherland shire Council, which aimed to restore the grounds and provide improved recreational facilities for the local people of Sutherland Shire. With increasing recognition of the site's historic and aesthetic significance, the process aimed to retain the heritage significance of the site whilst upgrading and improving the existing facilities.

An official ceremony held in Como Pleasure Grounds in November 2004, to acknowledge the work undertaken on the site, reconfirmed the appeal of the pleasure grounds to the community, being described as having an 'indefinable magical quality' (McDonald 2008).

### **3.5 Como Hotel & Scylla Bay**

Prior to 1883 and perhaps as early as 1878, it is thought that the German Concordia Club was responsible for building a private residential, recreational and social club retreat overlooking Scylla Bay for its members, including the German Consul, who mostly came from Sydney (Salt 2001:4). Many of the German migrants working on the railway were housed at the Club or frequented it from the local construction camp. From about 1887, the club became known as the Como Hotel.

While the Concordia Club catered to the German community, the Woronora Hotel was established by Thomas and Annie Hanley (Handley) on 3 February 1883 near the Como railway camp to cater to the Australian railway workers and their families, as well as fishermen. At the same time, the first postal service was commenced from the hotel. A causeway built up of mud and stone provided easy access to the Woronora Pub and the German Club from the railway camp across Scylla Bay until 1888. The hotel reportedly had heavy gauge English galvanised iron walls and roofing with a large number of rooms possibly as many as 20, including a cellar, most of which had an earthen floor (Midgley 1989:470-471). Among the hotel's boarders was the second school teacher at Como, Mr Edgar Robinson, who replaced Mr John Halstead in 1884. When the railway camp closed in 1885, the Woronora Hotel licence was also transferred to Heathcote, at which time the hotel closed to become a private residence and guest house (McDonald 2008; Neve 1971:5).

With the closure of the old Woronora Hotel in 1887, and the loss of patronage from the railway workers to the German Club, a new Como Hotel opened, though it was not officially licensed until 1890. The Post Office was also relocated from the Woronora Hotel to the first floor of the new Como Hotel (*St George & Sutherland Shire Leader* 1 February 1984:41). Following a period of disrepute, the Roman Catholic Church purchased land on the Como Peninsular including the hotel, and for a short time the hotel was turned into a Convent. In about 1890, the hotel was sold and the publican George Cubbon obtained his first liquor license, who is believed to have erected the fascia to the front of the hotel bearing the name Como Hotel (Salt 2001:14). In 1905, Paul Buchholz took over the hotel, when it is identified as Buchholz's Hotel on the subdivision plan. Buchholz transformed the hotel into a lavish European-style hotel, resort and German reception house, the verandah floors were of local timber and laid by a shipwright using the ship-lap techniques of a boat builder and the stonework was by Mr Henderson using sandstone quarried from the escarpment at Como West (Salt 2001:15). The hotel became a weekend tourist destination for the wider community, with Buchholz particularly encouraging Germans living along the Georges River to use it as a meeting place, and once again the German Consul frequented the establishment. Paul's brother-in-law, Thomas Paul Bockelmann, had been inspired to compose a waltz by Richard Strauss when he was introduced to him during his visit to Bendigo in the late 1890s. The Como Waltz, c.1900-1909, was dedicated to Buchholz and his wife

Louisa. A descendent of Luisa and Paul tracked down the sheet music in 2004, which was orchestrated by Sven Liebeck and played by the Sutherland Shire Orchestra on 10 April 2005 at the Como Festival. This was the first time it had been heard for 100 years and that it had been played by an orchestra, and was recorded for posterity (Salt 2001:15-16). Until WWI, the hotel was closely associated with Como Pleasure Grounds, a symbiotic relationship had developed between Murphy and Buchholz, and visitors to the Grounds hired boats and rowed down Scylla Bay to the hotel. A wide promenade connected the two with the land between used as a picnic area (Petitt-Young 1988).

In 1914 and roughly contemporary with the outbreak of WWI, Como was subdivided and, with the motor car making Cronulla Beaches more accessible, there was a decline in visitors to the Como Hotel and the Pleasure Grounds. After the death of his wife Luisa in 1912, Buchholz leased the hotel to Ernest Caten and then to Donald O'Donnell. Following the war, the hotel became a popular local watering hole with a succession of publicans owning the building- Edmund Cliffe (1920), Sydney Watkins (1922), David Dawson (1924), John Priddis (1927), William John Lawrie sold to John Benedict Williams in 1937. The number owners within such a period indicates that it was not particularly lucrative between the Wars, and that the Depression of 1929-35 had an impact on trade. The picturesque waterfront setting of the hotel was changed during these years when Scylla Bay was reclaimed and a playing field was formed.

There is little mention of the hotel until 1954, when Sutherland Shire Council announced that it intended to purchase it for use as a Community Hotel with the profits to benefit the Shire; however, Tooth & Co. Ltd, who owned this and another four hotels in the Shire, was not interested. In 1983, Tooth sold the hotel to Comdox and Gundalm Pty Ltd whose proposal to erect a four storey building of 42 flats and a carpark behind the hotel was refused by Council (*Pictorial News* 24 July 1984:27 and *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 July 1984:3). Between 1988-89, the hotel was restored to its original splendour by new owner Brian Palmer, with the Italian Connection restaurant (*The Leader* 4th May 1989:6). The refurbishment was designed by Stephenson and Turner, the architects responsible for the Queen Victoria Building, who refurbished the exterior and interiors, including bar downstairs, which was restored to a 1920s style.

The hotel survived the bushfires of 1994, when it was owned by the former Australian rugby league player Arthur Beetson, only to burn down during an electrical fire on Sunday 3 November 1996 at 3.15am. The hotel, which had recently been extensively renovated, was completely gutted. The fire was deemed to be accidental, starting in the hotel restaurant and required eight fire brigade units more than two hours to extinguish (*Sydney Morning Herald* 4 November 1996). The licensee's sister and nephew were the first to be rescued from the fire by neighbouring resident Greg Saul, who stacked chairs to form a make-shift ladder to reach them (*Sydney Morning Herald* 4 November 1996). Affectionately known as the Como Hilton, the hotel was rebuilt, 4 years later between 2000 and 2001. It cost around \$5 million for the Como Hotel Holdings Pty Ltd syndicate to rebuild and operate the hotel, designed to replicate the original (McDonald 2008). It featured the original brickwork and retained the burnt door to the hotel's restaurant, which was salvaged from the fire and hence, the name for the pub's Burnt Door Brassiere when it reopened on 8th November 2001. In 2013 the Como Hotel sold for \$4.6 million to the Riversdale Group, a hospitality company partly-owned by businessman John Singleton (*Leader* 4 March 2013).

### 3.5.1 Scylla Bay

In 1929, it was decided to link Como with Sutherland, and with funding from the state government's 'Spooner scheme' for unemployment relief, the works began in 1930. The largest associated Depression project was the reclamation of the mud flats of Scylla Bay, which began in

1931 with the construction of a stone retaining wall and draining the area. Supply of funds were inconsistent and work stopped and started several times and manual dredging works was slow. The works lagged during 1938 and 1939, while the Council sought additional funds from the Minister of Works and Local Government. In 1940 the finance was finally made available and the reclamation and stone retaining wall was finished in the early 1940s (Kirkby Index, 1931:191). The area of reclamation became playing fields, which remain heavily used to this day (McDonald 2008). However, the outcome of the changed landscape was that visitors could no longer row or sail to shore below the Como Hotel.

During WWII, six-foot-deep 'zig zag' anti-aircraft trenches were dug into the reclaimed area near to the current tennis courts, which were cleaned out each morning by Como Public School boys (McDonald 2008). By October 1943 all trenches were filled in (Kirkby Index 1943: 423).

### **3.6 Como Rail Bridge & Station**

The first steam railway line in NSW, from Sydney to Parramatta, opened on 26 September 1855. By the early 1870s, land owners and residents of the Wollongong area began to lobby for the construction of an Illawarra Railway, to provide passenger and coal transport services for the local coal mining industry. In 1873, the Public Works Department initiated an official railway survey, between Sydney and the Illawarra, which marked out a route that crossed the western side of Holt's Sutherland Estate, via Tom Uglys Point; however, a later survey favoured a route further to the east, via Neverfail Bay, which was selected (see Figure 3.1 above). A single track from Illawarra Junction to Sutherland was completed by December 1885. The line was duplicated as far as Waterfall by March 1891, and electrified between Hurstville and Sutherland by August 1926 (Singleton 1945:50-53). The Illawarra Line was a vital link to the Port Kembla Steel Works and as such, during WWI and WWII it was under constant surveillance by the military. In addition, the Como Rail Bridge was charged with explosives to be blown up in the event of invasion or sabotage (Leach 2004:5).

A grand ball celebrating the opening the railway to Illawarra was held at the Wollongong Town Hall on Wednesday 3 October 1888 at 8pm, under the patronage of the Governor and Lady Carrington who formally opened the line. Ball tickets were sold and these included a first class return rail ticket to Wollongong available for three days and sold from all stations on the Illawarra line, there were both gentlemen's and ladies tickets (*The Bulletin* May 1998: 548). Railway construction was labour intensive and large groups of 'navvies' followed the work, setting up camps along the route. Many of the navvies travelled with wives and families, and some of their camps became the sites of later towns and villages. The railway construction camp at Como was established on Verona Range, near the location of the Como Public School, housing about 120 workers and their families. Following completion of the railway, the camp closed and the workers moved to the camp at Heathcote for the next stage of construction.

The line crosses the Georges River on the Como Rail Bridge which was the tenth in a series of twelve lattice-girder wrought iron bridges commissioned between 1871 and 1887 by John Whitton, Engineer-in-Chief (1856-1899). Whitton's preference was to construct rail bridges that would accommodate a second track; however, the finances were not forthcoming and the bridge over the Georges River at Como was constructed with a single track only (Singleton 1984:14). When the line was duplicated a decade later the tracks were gauntleted which accommodated the two lines, but was inadequate to the traffic (Singleton 1984:18). The bridge has a span of 956ft (291m) supported by six pairs of concrete filled cast iron piers supplied by the Stockton Forge Company of the USA. Local legend has it that a workman fell into one of the columns during the concrete pour and could not be rescued; a memorial plaque apparently disappeared during the conversion of the bridge from a rail bridge (Stilgoe 1996:4). Originally, the span joints had been encased in cast-iron columns, that concealed and may have added strength to the

joints and provided a decorative base to the springing of the 13 lattice arches. The northern abutment is of dressed sandstone ashlar, whereas the southern was an embankment built up from displaced soil and later encased in sandstone blocks. The southern embankment forms a promontory on which the original Como Railway Station was built (Bogle 2006:24-25).

The arrival of the Illawarra Railway opened up the Sutherland area to increased settlement and Como became an increasingly popular destination for holiday makers and day-trippers as well as prospective purchasers of waterfront properties. The original Como Station opened to cater to the holiday makers, day-trippers and tourists attracted by the beautiful riverine environment. The pressure of holiday-makers was so great that although the bridge was not load-tested for anything other than work trains until January 1886, on 24 December 1885, the Commissioner for Railways approved advertisement of services to Como and Sutherland between 26 December 1885 and 4 January 1886 (*The Leader* 12 December 1885:8-9). Newspaper reports note hundreds of day-trippers alighting at Como Railway Station to view the sights along the river, also noting the bridge as one of the most beautiful in the world (*Sydney Morning Herald* 28 December 1885:7). The advertised timetable shows numerous services in each direction during the Christmas and New Year season when demand to visit was so high that there was extreme crowding and insufficient tickets. At the end of the holiday period the service to Como and Sutherland was restricted to weekends with five services each way on Saturdays and two on Sundays (Stilgoe 1996:3). There is little information regarding the station building; however, photographs indicate that it was a simple weatherboard single-storey building with hip roof and awning. It was of the first type of railway building accommodating a residence, ticket office and waiting room.

The first Station Master, Mr Cuneo, started the Railway and Tramway Hospital Fund, and he was succeeded by Mr Crawford (later Inspector Crawford). Mr Stevens, who succeeded Mr Crawford had prevented a serious railway mishap by his prompt action in diverting a runaway brake van from going onto the bridge and thereby crashing into a steam passenger train coming in the opposite direction. The brake van ran into the river under the bridge, where it lay for a week. The Night Officer at the Railway Station was Mr Kinkade who died whilst working at Como. The men worked 12 hour shifts (*The Bulletin* May 1989: 441-443). The gate-keepers' residence stood at the level crossing to manually operate warning bells and the gates, until the erection of warning lights and mechanical boom gates. The first gate-keepers were the Hendersons, Watermans and Martindales (*The Bulletin* May 1989:470-471).

Water was supplied to Sutherland Shire from the Nepean Scheme dams via a 15cm pipe from Penshurst to Miranda in 1911. However, this soon proved inadequate to the burgeoning population and the Woronora Dam was constructed from 1927 and completed in 1941. Despite plans for a pipeline from the dam to Penshurst it was not until 1942, after numerous delays, that the pipeline was commissioned. When it reached the Como Rail Bridge the 106cm pipe had to be divided into two smaller diameter pipes attached to each side of the bridge, and re-combined on the north side of the bridge.

The traffic congestion across the bridge eventually saw construction of a new rail bridge with two lines immediately up-river from the old bridge. The old bridge was decommissioned in 1972 and ownership transferred to the Metropolitan Water, Sewerage and Drainage Board (now Sydney Water). Following removal of the tracks, the deck was converted to a footpath and cycleway, linking Como to Oatley, the cost of which was shared by Sutherland and Kogarah Councils. At the same time, the station was also made redundant and the station buildings were demolished, though the platform remains largely intact. A power sub-station was built on the site, which is no longer publicly accessible; however, a subway beneath the embankment provides access to the west side.

### 3.7 Como Public School

The Como Public School was opened on 16 April 1884. The Department of Public Instruction finally approved the school at Como, when the application was supported by the arrival of railway workers and their families, substantially increasing the population. Thomas Hanley, who owned the local Woronora Hotel, was also a leading figure in several attempts to establish a school (Smith 1987:249). The Department had considered an application made in 1883 for a tent school; however, an inspector advised *that as the school may be needed two years, I recommend a movable wooden building instead of a tent* (Smith 1987:249). The land for the school, on the point overlooking Scylla and Double Bays so that it was often referred to as School Point, was leased from The Holt Sutherland Estate Land Company Ltd. By February 1884, a single temporary timber and iron building measuring 30ft by 16ft, surrounded by a paling fence, was completed and ready for use. Originally named Worinora, the school was renamed Como Public School within a month of opening and its location on Verona Range made it easily accessible to the railway workers camp (Midgely 1990:566)

The first teacher, Mr Halstead, was replaced six weeks after the school's opening by a new teacher, Edgar J Robinson who remained in residence until the schools' closure, despite his complaints to the Department that he had not been paid for the first few months. He was also not provided with accommodation, and was forced to pay for his board at the local Woronora Hotel; a sum of 2 pounds 10 shillings per week which was a considerable portion of his £150 annual pay. In May 1884, Mr Robinson applied for a teacher's residence to be constructed within the school ground at the Department's expense as he was also supporting his parents. His mother taught needlework to the girls attending the school (Smith 1987:250). An initial tender for the teacher's residence submitted by Michael R Corby to the Department on 6 June 1884, for £147 was rejected as the *iron lined and floored with pine, verandah and two brick chimneys together with two iron 400 gallon tanks and spouting laid to them* was deemed too expensive (*The Bulletin* May 1997:423-426). A subsequent tender by Mr Cody of £56 for a residence at the east side of the school building, using the frame-work and some basic materials from an old building in the area was finally accepted (Smith 1987:251). Work commenced in June 1884, with the finished residence occupied by Mr Robinson by 3 September 1884. By the end of the year, enrolments had increased to 85 children with a night school to educate young railway navvies, and a special class for drawing and painting had been established (*Evening News*, 15 September, 1884).

Following completion of the railway and relocation of the railway workers camp to Helensburgh, the school closed in October 1885 (McDonald, 2008). This also coincided with the end of the lease on the land and its inclusion in the Holt Sutherland Estate Land Company subdivision. However, following negotiations, the Department resumed the land for £368,15 shillings, rather than the £1,397 assessed by the Holt company (Smith 1987:252). The land was retained until 1923, with the aim to construct a new school on the land, when the property was acquired by Sutherland Shire Council for £1,000 pounds (Cole 1988). It has been suggested that by late November 1886, the Department of Public Instruction had accepted a tender from Mr William Gee of 68 pounds, 12 shillings for the removal of the school building from the site and its re-erection at Ingleburn (Midgely 1990:566). The building was apparently used at Ingleburn until a new school building was opened in the latter part of 1892. It was then put up for sale and eventually was used as a School of Arts until a few years before WWI. However, it has also been suggested that the buildings fell into disrepair until in 1908, when the Senior Constable of Sutherland, E Lewis and a local, Mr Harry Morris, dismantled the building (Cole 1988). The teacher's residence remained on site and was used as the residence of Mrs Maria Meyer, Sutherland's first teacher who had taught at the Sylvania school when it opened in April 1884. Following closure of the school, Mrs. Meyer was appointed to Sutherland and left the Como School Teacher's residence in April 1892 (Midgely 1990:566).

Completion of the road from Sutherland to Como and the 1914 subdivision, which followed the Holt Sutherland Act 1900 and the release of 12,000 acres resulted in a population increase sufficient to warrant a new public school; *50 children are enough to form a good school* (Cole 1988:14-15). The new Como Public School was a one-roomed brick building with verandah on Genoa Street and was located on resumed land, originally owned by James Murphy. The building, to accommodate 56 pupils, was completed on 28 January 1921 and was opened on the following day by the Minister for Education, Mr Mutch. In his speech, Mr Mutch, commented on the difficulty in obtaining funds for the school from his Department and applauded the Progress Association and president, Mr H Bosman, for its efforts in securing the new building while many other districts would have to wait until funds were available (Hurstville Propeller February 1921). Enrolments reached 68 within weeks of the school's opening with children coming by boat from East Menai (now Illawong), and from 'The Bonnet' (Como West), Como Village, Greenpoint, Coronation Bay, Oyster Bay and the area later to be known as Jannali and the first Principal was Mr Frank Middenway, until April 1924. As well as regular lessons, the children planted beans, beetroot and chillies (<http://www.theleader.com.au/story/2576109/como-public-school-marks-130-years/>). By early 1923, tenders were called for an extra room to be added to the building and extension of the verandah the full length of the classroom and the end enclosed for protection from the weather. However, it was not until November 1924, when Mr E Egan was Principal, that the addition to accommodate over 80 students was completed (Cole 1988). The school's population continued to grow and in October 1971 Como Public School celebrated its golden jubilee with official guests and former students from the class of 1921 attending the event (*St. George and Sutherland Shire Leader* Wednesday 27 October 1971).

### 3.8 Henry Lawson in Como

Henry Lawson, and his contemporary Banjo Paterson, are among the best-known Australian poets and fiction writers. Lawson was given a State Funeral and buried in Waverley Cemetery following his death on 2 September 1922.

Jules Archibald, founder of *The Bulletin* and donor of the Archibald Prize for Australian Art, published Lawson's first poem, *A Song of the Republic* and remained a lifelong friend. Archibald was one of Lawson's sponsors by publishing his works and often paying for contributions in advance. Lawson's personal life went into a steady decline after he returned from London in 1902 and he was often drunk, becoming a sad, familiar figure wandering the streets of Sydney. He also suffered from mental instability as a result of manic depression and had frequent stays at the Mental Hospital, Darlinghurst to dry out. He was imprisoned several times for failing to pay maintenance to his wife Bertha and their two children, and for minor debts. Although Lawson could be difficult and aggressive when drunk, a committee was formed by his friends and admirers for his care, and a Commonwealth pension and State stipend were eventually obtained for him. Friends also organised to send him away from Sydney for periods to remove him from the influence of drink. He was cared for by Mrs Isabel Byers, his housekeeper, for most of the time from 1903 until his death. *Angus and Robertson* and *The Bulletin* continued their support of Lawson by publishing some of his work; however, the quality of his work was also in decline. Lawson died in a cottage in Abbotsford where he had been living with Mrs Byers on 2 September, 1922 at the age of fifty-five and was given a state funeral, one of the largest Sydney had ever seen (<https://library.sydney.edu.au/collections/rare-books/online-exhibitions/lawson/decline.html>).

Mr Tom Mutch MLA, later the Minister for Education, also befriended Lawson often spending time away from the city with him on camping holidays in the bush of the far south coast or into Gippsland (*The Sutherland Shire Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin*, October 1971). It is believed, that during and after WWI, Henry Lawson rented a small fibro cottage in what is now Paruna

Reserve, east of the Bonnet, which may have been one of those excursions away from Sydney and the temptations of drink. However, he would apparently row to the Como Hotel where he became a well-known identity, often found in his favourite corner of the bar of the hotel where, in his own words he brooded with *The ghost of the man I might have been*.

In 1954 the West Como Reserve was dedicated as the Henry Lawson Memorial Reserve by Councillor J Stanswell to commemorate Henry Lawson's association with Como. *An Afternoon at Como* dedication concert was organised by the committee secretary, Mr RD (Bob) Walshe, on Sunday 19 September 1954 (*The Bulletin* February 1990:520). The dedication concert was enjoyed by an audience of 600, in particular a special message sent for the occasion from Lawson's widow Mrs Bertha Lawson. An afternoon of entertainment included the Bushwackers Band singing *Cobb & Co*, *Reedy River* and *Freedom on the Wallaby*, the West Sydney Singers performance of *Andy's Gone with Cattle* and *Drover's Dream*, an Australian play, *Saltbush Bill's Second Flight* put on by the boys from the local high school. There were readings of Lawson's poems and stories and an art exhibition with unveiling of a life size portrait of Henry Lawson by Andrew Lomnici of Jannali. The money collected at the event went toward purchasing children's playground equipment for the reserve. Many Australian-themed concerts have been held in the Reserve over the years, to commemorate the anniversary of Lawson's death in September. In 2017, the Henry Lawson Society plans to recreate the Australian themed concert in the Reserve in celebration and commemoration of the 150 years since Henry Lawson's birth.

### 3.9 Interpretation Themes

Commonwealth and NSW State Government authorities have developed a series of historical themes, which provide a framework for researching and interpreting information about significant heritage places in Australia. The following tables outline the historical themes and storylines associated with the Como Walking Trail.

Australian Themes	NSW Themes	Local Themes
Peopling Australia	Aboriginal cultures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aboriginal occupation and use of the Como area, and midden Aboriginal heritage sites within Paruna Reserve</li> <li>2. Traditional stories relating to the Georges River area</li> </ol>
Building settlements, towns and cities	Towns, suburbs and villages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Thomas Holt &amp; the Holt-Sutherland Estate Company; the Development of Como</li> <li>4. Como Pleasure Grounds: a popular holiday destination</li> <li>5. The Railway comes to Como; improved tourist facilities</li> <li>6. A place to stay on the Bay: The Concordia Club and the Como Hotel</li> <li>7. Establishment of Como Public Schools</li> <li>8. Recognising a great Australian: Henry Lawson Reserve</li> </ol>

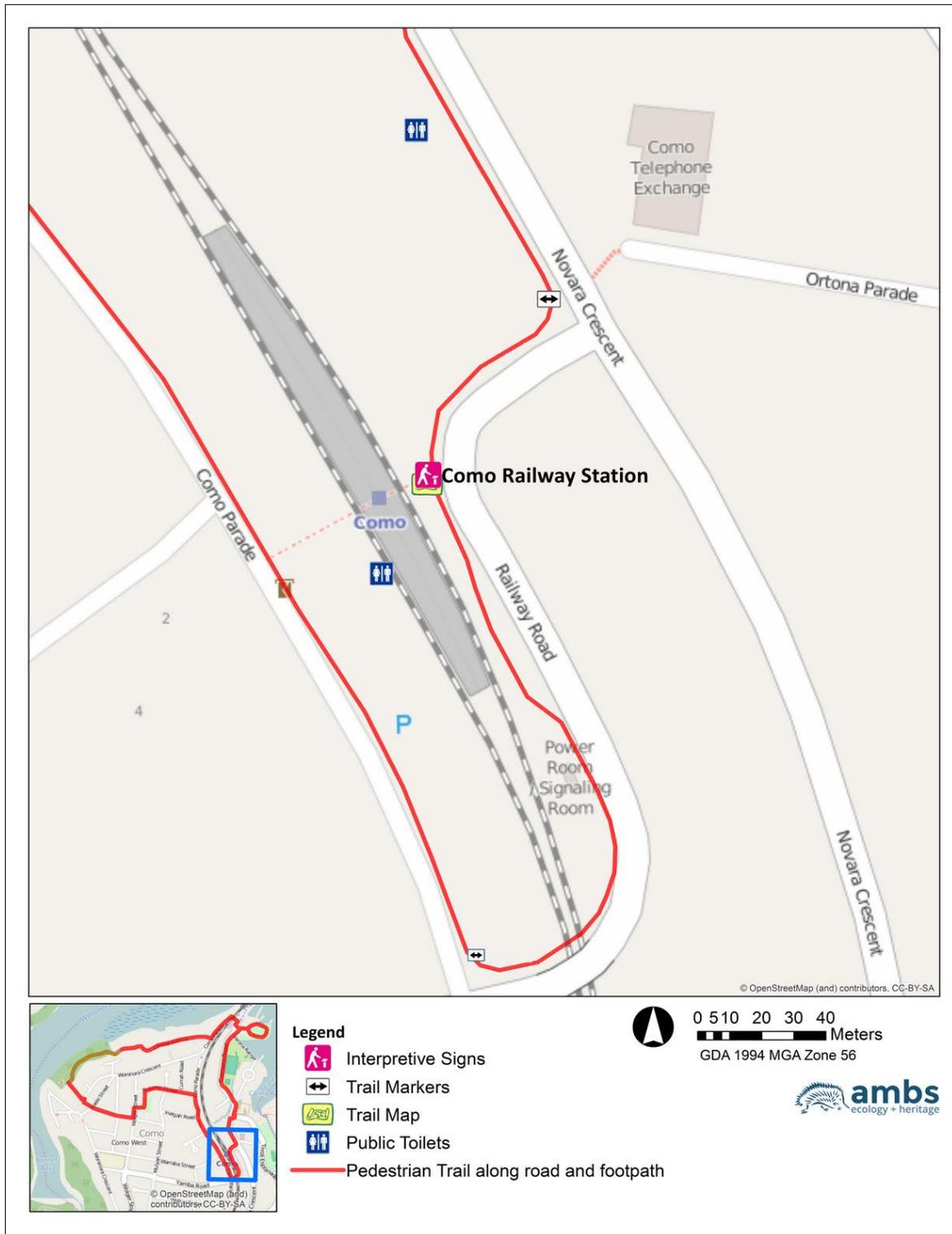
### 3.10 Locations for Interpretation

The content and locations for interpretive media should reflect the place they seek to explain. Key historical themes and storylines, consideration the historic association or other heritage values of each site, the likely audience of the interpretation, and the design treatment should be specific to each site. The locations for the interpretation signage or other media of the Como Walking Trail are identified provided in Section 4, Interpretation Content, below.

## **4 Interpretation Content**

This section provides an historic overview followed by the relevant images and storylines identified to illustrate the historical themes for each location within the Como Walking Trail. The images are primarily sourced from the State Library of NSW and the National Library of Australia, and are likely to be out of copyright. However, copyright information would be confirmed and relevant permissions sought following determination of the preferred themes for interpretation.

## 4.1 Thomas Holt & the Holt-Sutherland Estate Company; the Development of Como



**Figure 4.1** Location map and site for interpretation sign at Como Railway Station.

Between 1856 and 1861, Thomas Holt, a wealthy pastoralist, wool merchant and politician purchased 12,000 acres of largely undeveloped land in the Sutherland Shire, which included Como, and in 1881, the Holt-Sutherland Estate Company Ltd was formed. In 1888, the first land subdivision was offered as 99 year leases with an option to convert to freehold. The venture offered small acreages which, with the advent of the 1890s Depression, was particularly

successful as it provided an opportunity for the unemployed to be self-sufficient by developing market gardens, growing fruit and vegetables and raising poultry.

Construction of the Illawarra Railway and the rail bridge over the George's River, with a stop at Como Pleasure Grounds, contributed to a short-lived increase in the local Como population with the arrival of the railway workers. The increase led to the establishment of the first Como Public School near the railway workers camp; however, following completion of the railway, the workers moved on to Heathcote and the school was forced to close. The population had grown sufficiently to justify opening a new Como Public School in 1921, after a period of nearly 40 years since the school on Verona Range had closed.

Sutherland Shire Council was formed in 1907, a time when there were few services to Como which meant the area remained sparsely developed. It was not until 1919, that construction of a road from Sutherland to the western side of Como began, funded by a Federal government grant to employ returned soldiers. Completed in 1920, the road was known as Soldiers Road. Water was not reticulated to the area until 1942 following construction of Woronora Dam in 1941, and the Woronora to Penshurst Pipeline in 1942. Prior to 1952, there area was not sewered until construction of the Cronulla-Sutherland Sewage Treatment Plant. The provision of reticulated water and a sewerage system in the post-war period was the impetus to increased development of the Como peninsula with an influx of population. An improved transport system also contributed to an increase in the population and development of the local area.

Congestion on the rail bridge had been an issue since it opened in 1885; however, it was not until 19 November 1972, that Australia's longest prestressed steel bridge opened to city-bound trains with the south-bound line opening a week later. The new Como Railway Station opened at the same time some 900m to the south of the old station.



**COMO** <sup>39/1</sup>  
**QUEEN'S**  
ON THE GROUND  
**SATURDAY**  
**28<sup>TH</sup> MAY**

**JUBILEE**  
TOWNSHIP  
**GEORGE'S RIVER**

NEW SOUTH WALES CELEBRATES THE JUBILEE.  
MONSTER DISTRIBUTION OF LAND AT  
**QUEEN'S JUBILEE BIRTH DAY.**  
LAND AT A NOMINAL FIGURE IN EASIEST TERMS EVER OFFERED  
PICNIC & MUSIC PROVIDED  
VENDORS: THE INTERCOLONIAL INVESTMENT LAND AND BUILDING COMPANY (INCORPORATED IN SYDNEY)  
£1 DEPOSIT & 2/6 WEEKLY PER LOT FOR 10 YEARS TO LARGEST BIDDERS  
FREE TRAIN TICKETS FROM GARRARD & HAMILTON 122<sup>A</sup> ELIZABETH ST.  
TO PLATFORM AT THE ESTATE

**GARRARD & HAMILTON,**  
122<sup>A</sup> ELIZABETH ST SYDNEY, AND MONTAGUE ST BALMAIN

S.T. LEIGH & Co  
Sydney.

(Out of Copyright - nla.obj-230150337: Queen's Jubilee township Como, George's River: auction sale on the ground Saturday, May 28th, plans & free train tickets to platform at the estate, 1887)



*(Picture Sutherland Shire Image MF004244 Construction work for duplicating the Como Railway Bridge, ca. 1970s -- ).*



*(Picture Sutherland Shire Image MF005733 Construction of new railway station at Como, 1973*

## 4.2 Como Pleasure Grounds: a popular tourist destination



**Figure 4.2** Location map and site for interpretation signs for the Como Rail Bridge and Como Pleasure Grounds.

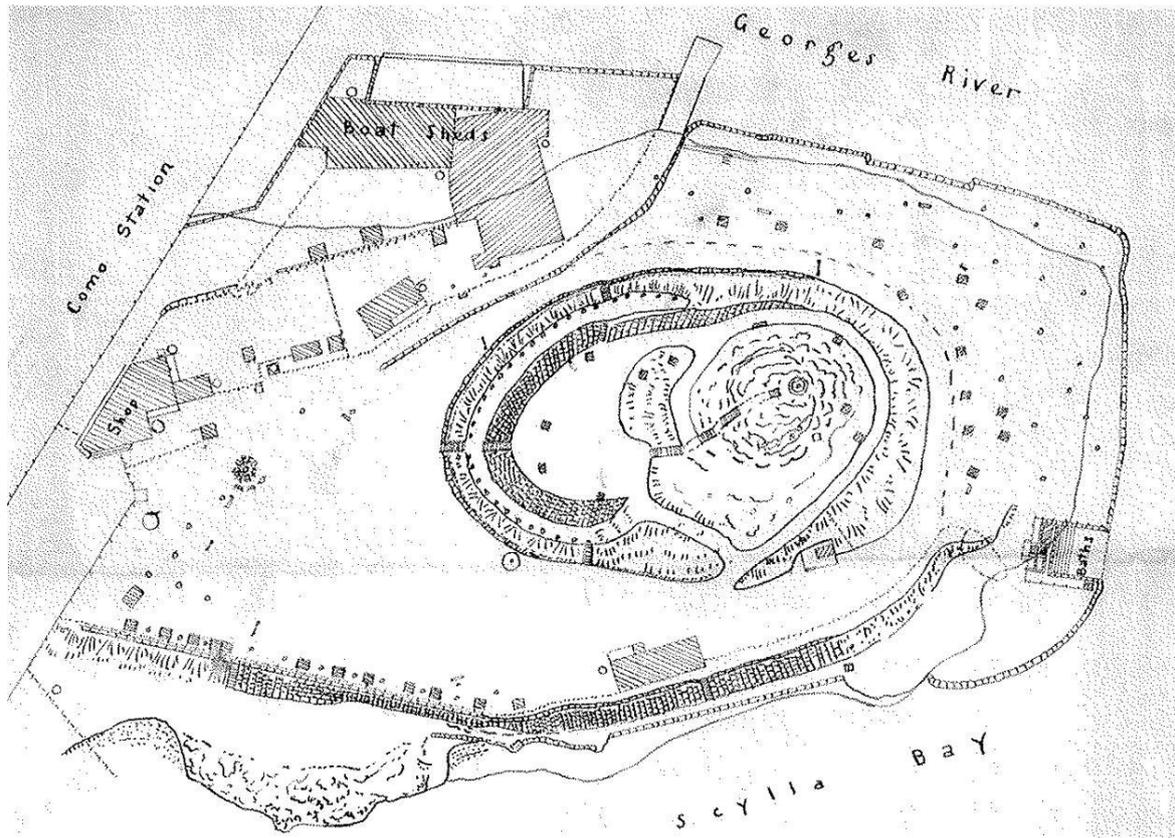
The Como Pleasure Grounds developed from a wild and un-landscaped peninsula prior to 1890 to an Edwardian style pleasure ground by 1906, continuing to attract visitors to the present day. Como peninsula is first mentioned in 1884 when 5 acres for the railway was leased from Thomas Holt for the railway construction. Development of the Pleasure Grounds from at Como is usually attributed to James Murphy, Manager to the Holt Sutherland Estate Land Company. The interest generated by the arrival of the railway motivated the Holt Sutherland Estate Land Company to

expand the existing recreational facilities on the peninsula. The arrival of the railway in 1885, saw numbers of day-trippers and holiday makers soar and additional train services were required. However, the Como steamer wharf, on the west side of the rail bridge continued to flourish after completion of the railway. Weekend and holiday excursions to the Como Pleasure Grounds by paddle steamer continued to be popular, as were enchanted moonlight cruises on the steamers.

The pleasure grounds were privately owned, but were regarded as a public park with free entry for everyone, attracted by the facilities. It was the fashionable place to be and to be seen at one's best while strolling through the cultivated scenery and along the expansive promenade encircling the stone stepped terraces, which had been completed as early as August 1906. The distinctive ziggurat-shaped terraced garden walks crowned by rocky knoll with a summer house from which there were panoramic views of the river and bushland, and where a band played during summer. Throughout the grounds there were picnic tables for the convenience of picnic parties and many summer houses were dotted about the landscape, along with a large communal shelter pavilion. Popular activities included fishing, boating, bathing, picnicking, camping, swings and a razzle-dazzle for children, and steam-driven paddle-wheel river boats.

Boatsheds were an integral part of Como's appeal and a major drawcard to the site and there were three boatsheds at Como; Murphy's boatshed, which is now part of Como Marina, JH Wills boatshed on the western side of the steep railway embankment, and the third, originally known as Press's was later known as the Federal Boatshed, on the eastern side of the railway line and reached via steps down the railway embankment close to the present bicycle track.

After Murphy's death in 1924, his boatshed and pleasure grounds were bought by James and Ernest Bryant and Jane Peacock White, who charged admission to the grounds. However, the dramatic rise in unemployment during the Great Depression saw a downturn in business. From 1938, Council was to construct a tidal pool for the local community to the east of Murphy's boatshed; however, this dragged on into the 1940s. In 1974, the new 20 metre chlorinated pool was opened on a flat area above the tidal pool, inevitably increasing visitation during summer and Council embarked on a beautification program to restore the grounds as *a place of peace and tranquillity where family groups may enjoy a day swimming and picnicking by the river*. With increasing recognition of the site's historic and aesthetic significance a Masterplan was prepared in 2002, to provide guidance regarding the retention of heritage significance whilst upgrading and improving the existing facilities. An official ceremony held in Como Pleasure Grounds in November 2004, to acknowledge the work undertaken on the site, reconfirmed the appeal of the pleasure grounds to the community, being described as having an indefinable magical quality. In 2005, the National Trust Heritage Festival was held at the Pleasure Grounds.



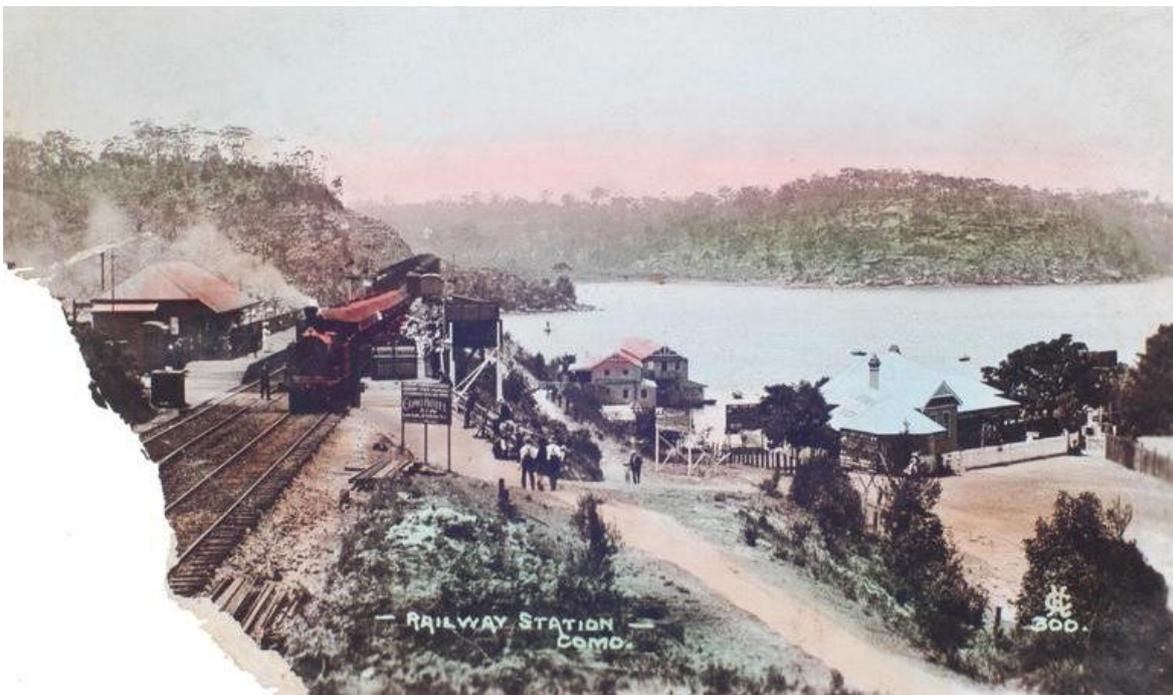
(Murphy's original plan for his Pleasure Grounds 1881, Salt 2001:10. However the presence of the railway, terraces and facilities indicate that this plan should be later).



(Picture Sutherland Shire Murphys boatshed, Como, ca. 1912 MF006\MF006264)



Picture Sutherland Shire Image MF004\MF004763 Wills boatshed and paddle steamer on Georges River, Como Railway Bridge to right ca1900-1910



(Picture Sutherland Shire Image MF003\MF003136 Railway Station, Como, CK 300, 1908)



*(slnsw a116297 View at Como, Illawarra ca. 1900-1910)*



*(Picture Sutherland Shire Image MF006\MF006219 Murphy's Pleasure Grounds, Como, ca. 1914)*

### 4.3 The Railway comes to Como: the Station, Bridge and tourists

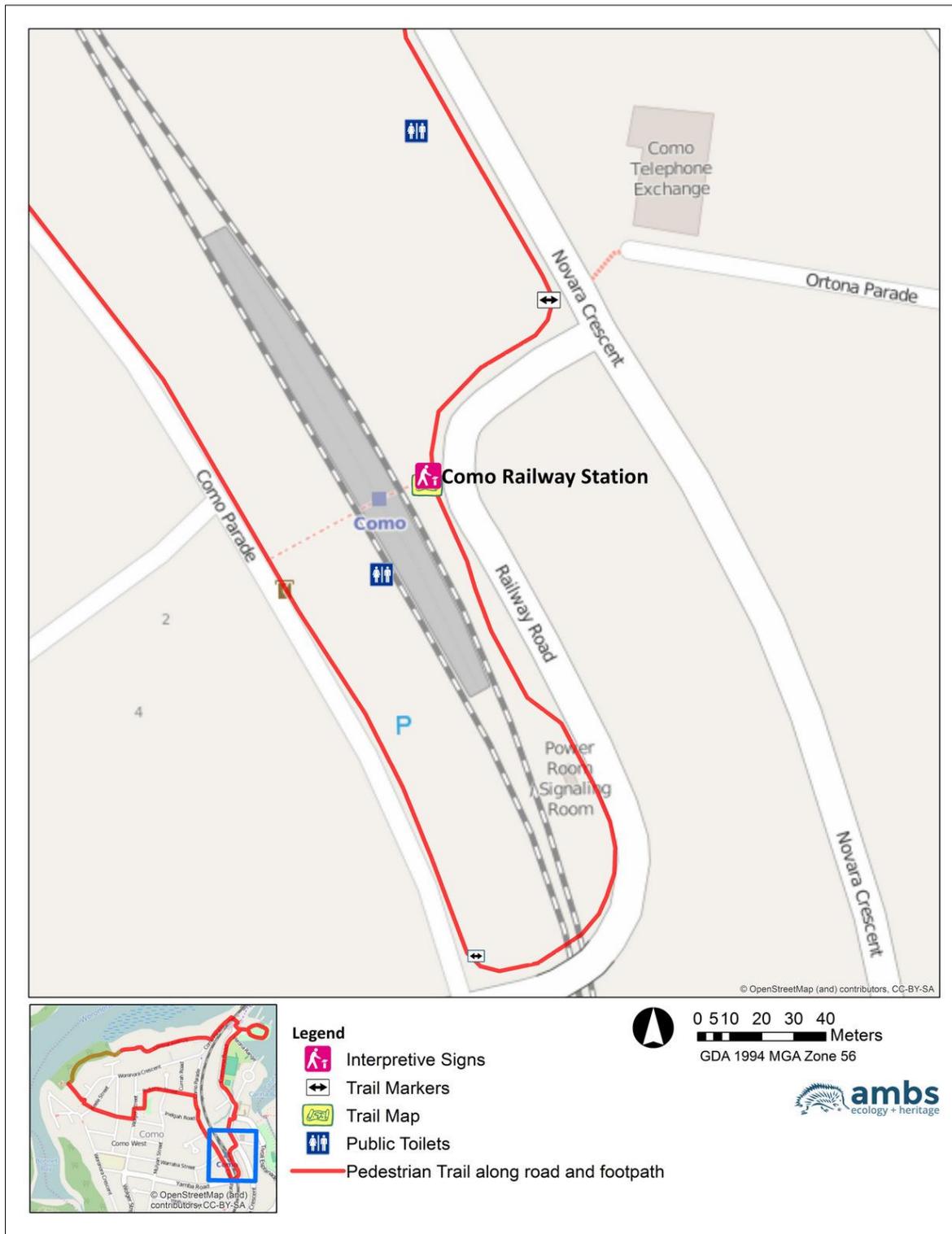
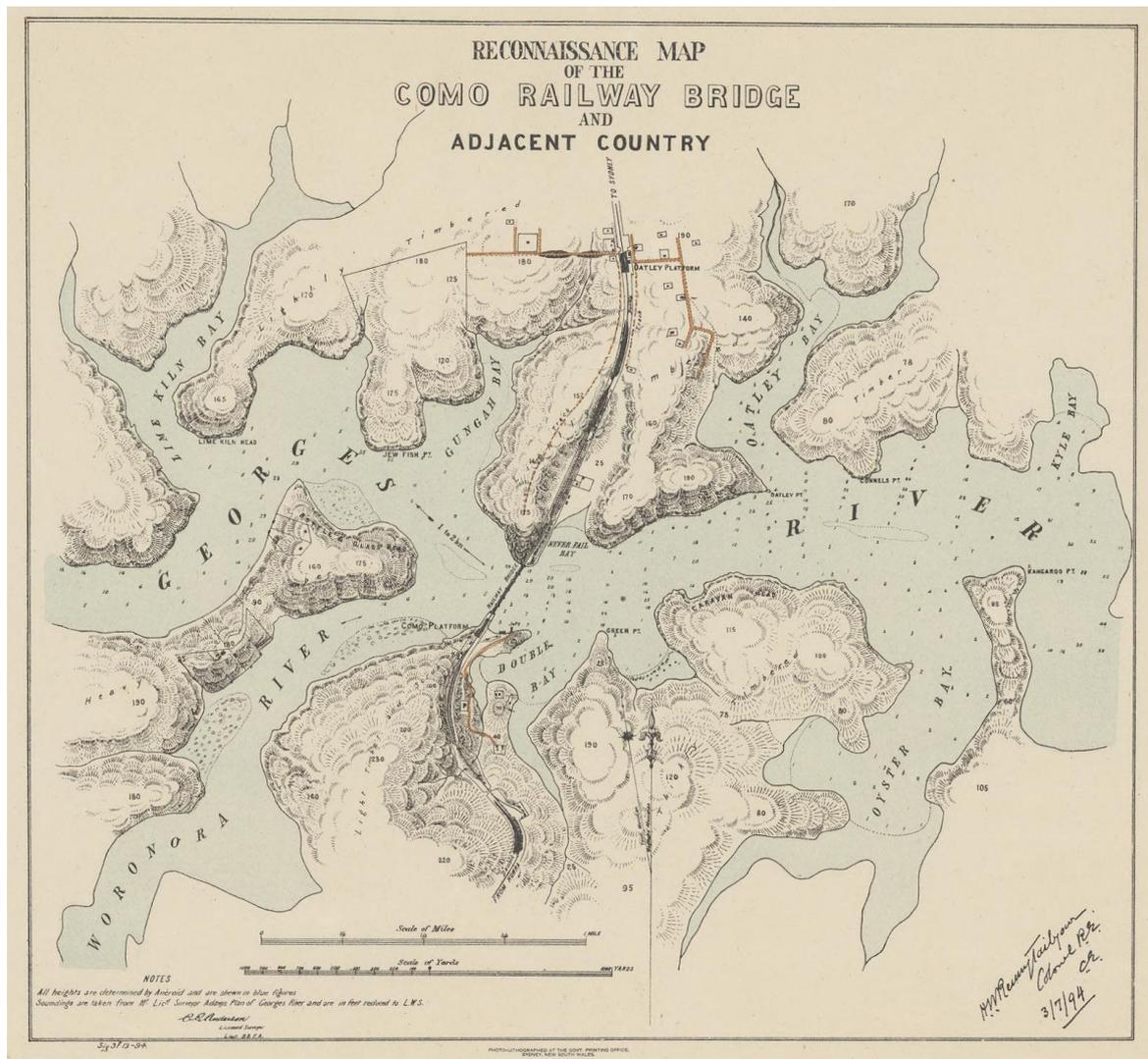


Figure 4.3 Location map and site for interpretation signs for the Como Rail Bridge and Como Pleasure Grounds.



(1894 Reconnaissance map of the Como Railway Bridge and adjacent country / G.G. Anderson, Licensed Surveyor, Lieut. B.D.F.A).

The Como Rail Bridge was the tenth in a series of twelve lattice-girder wrought iron bridges commissioned between 1871 and 1887 by John Whitton, Engineer-in-Chief (1856-1899). The bridge carried the Illawarra Railway (1884 – 1889) across the Georges River reaching Sutherland by December 1885. John Whitton’s bridges were usually constructed to accommodate future line duplication; however, the money was not available for the Como Rail Bridge. As a consequence, when the line was duplicated in 1891, the two lines were gauntleted, combined into one line, on each side of the bridge, creating a bottleneck and causing delays. In addition, although the bridge was not tested for passengers until January 1886, services to Como were approved from 26 December 1885, to cater to holiday-makers and picnickers.

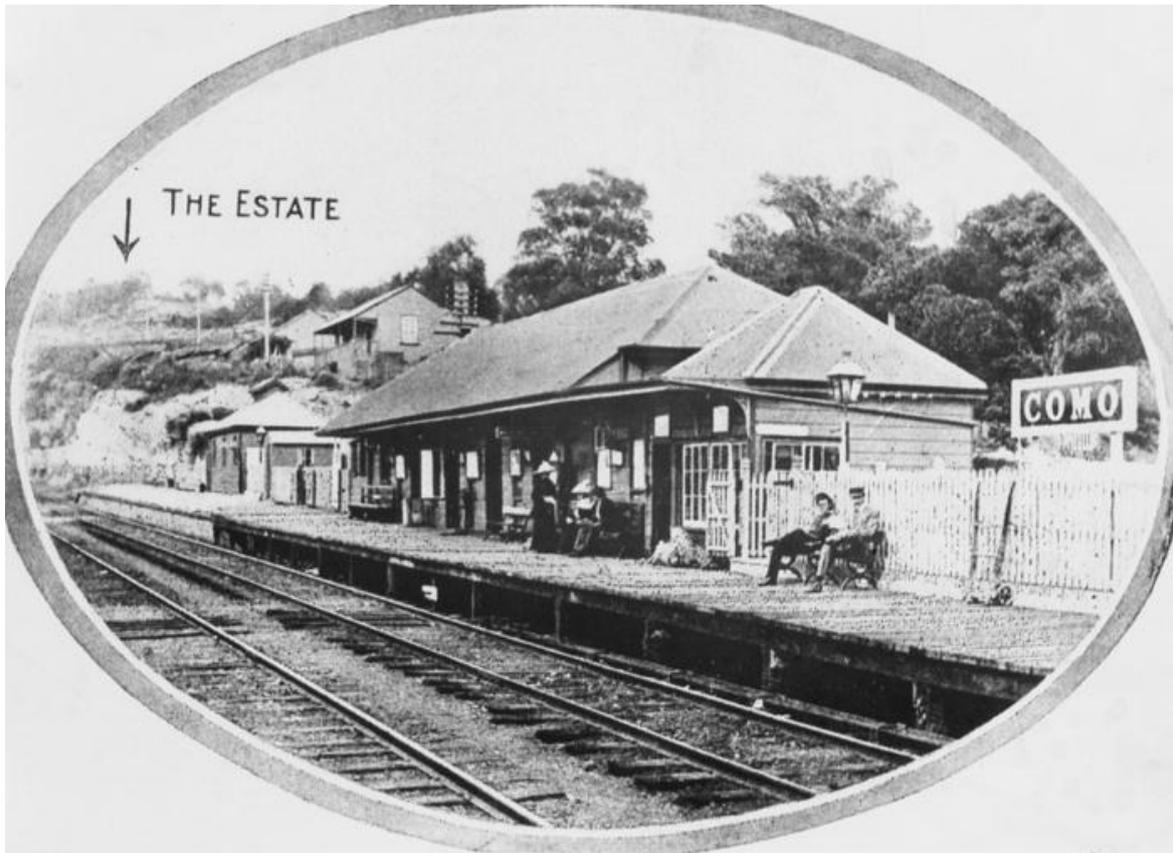
In 1885, the bridge was described in the Sydney Morning Herald as being *one of the most beautiful railway bridges in the world*. It has a span of 956ft (291m) supported on six pairs of concrete filled cast iron piers. Originally, the span joints had been encased in cast-iron columns concealing and perhaps adding strength to the joints. The columns provided a decorative base to the springing of the 13 lattice arches but were removed, perhaps during WWI when the bridge was charged with explosives to be blown up in the event of invasion or sabotage.



*(Josef Lebovic Gallery collection no. 1 colourised postcard by Charles H. Kerry 1884-1917)*

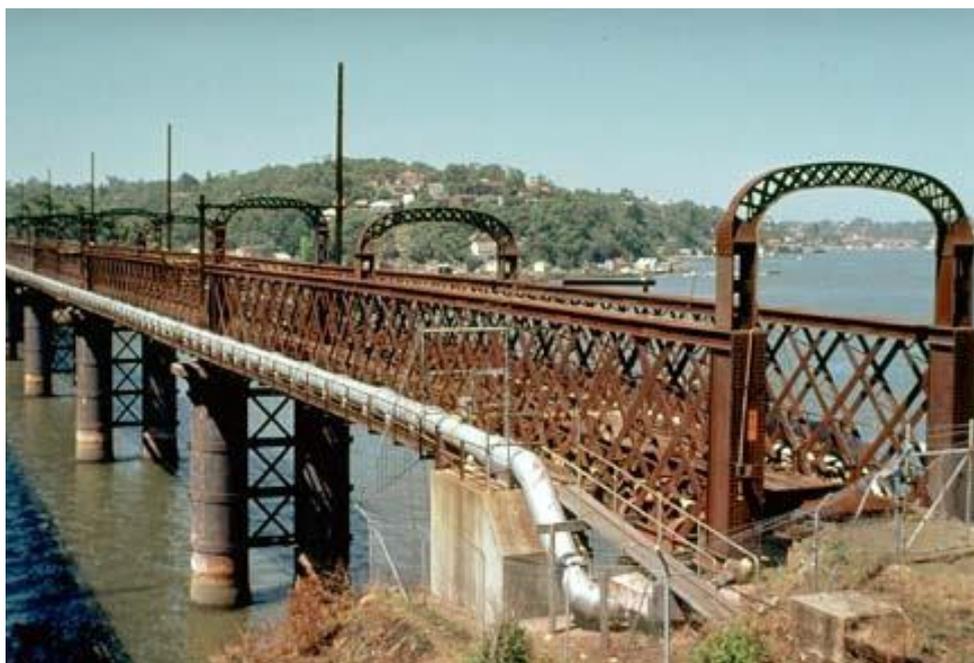
The first Como station building was a simple weatherboard single-storey building with hip roof and awning. The building had a ticket office and waiting room as well as accommodation for the station master. The gate-keepers' residence stood at the level crossing. The gate keeper manually operated warning bells and the gates. The first gate-keepers were the Hendersons, Watermans and Martindales.

The first Station Master, Mr Cuneo, started the Railway and Tramway Hospital Fund, and he was succeeded by Mr Crawford (later Inspector Crawford). Mr Stevens, who succeeded Mr Crawford had prevented a serious railway mishap by his prompt action in diverting a runaway brake van from going onto the bridge and thereby crashing into a steam passenger train coming in the opposite direction. The brake van ran into the river under the bridge, where it lay for a week.



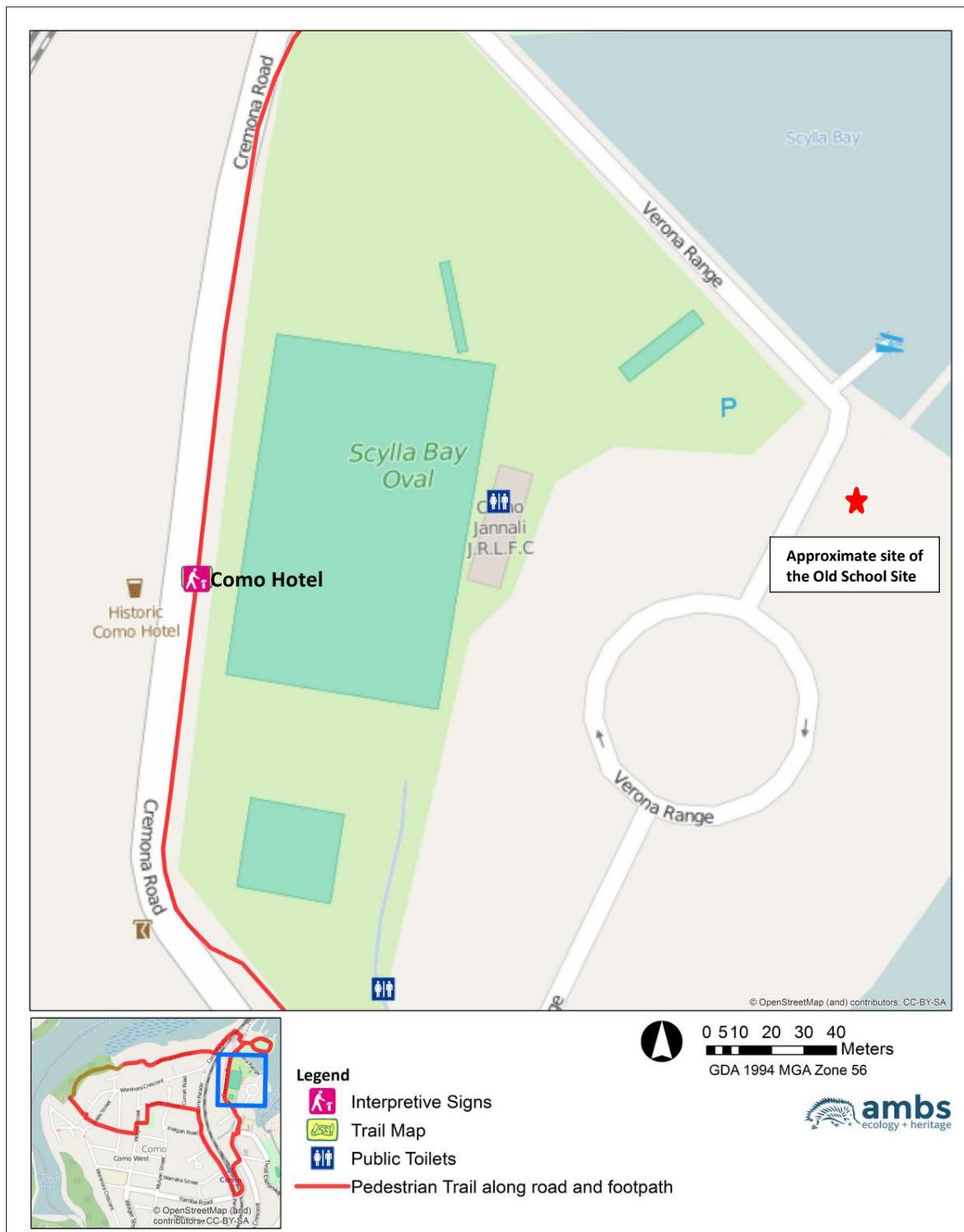
(Picture Sutherland Shire Image MF003\MF003148 Como Railway Station c.1913)

Water was supplied to Sutherland Shire from the Nepean Scheme dams via a 15cm pipe from Penshurst to Miranda in 1911. However, this soon proved inadequate to the burgeoning population and the Woronora Dam was constructed from 1927 and completed in 1941. Despite plans for a pipeline from the dam to Penshurst it was not until 1942, after numerous delays, that the pipeline was commissioned. When it reached the Como Rail Bridge the 42-inch pipe had to be divided into two smaller diameter pipes attached to each side of the bridge, and re-combined on the north side of the bridge.



(RNE Place\_ID 15915 – Image RT10600 - RT10602)

#### 4.4 A place to stay on the Bay: The Concordia Club and the Como Hotel



**Figure 4.4 Location map and site for interpretation sign for Como Hotel & Scylla Bay.**

Perhaps as early as 1878, the German Concordia Club built a private residential and social club overlooking Scylla Bay for its members. The club became a popular location to relax and for romantic getaways for members escaping from the city. When construction of the railway began in 1882, many of the German migrant workers were housed at the club or, if housed at the railway workers camp on across the bay, were frequent visitors. A causeway of mud and stone was built across the bay to link the railway workers camp with the railway work site and the club.

While the Concordia Club catered to the largely Sydney-based German community, in 1883, Thomas and Annie Hanley established the Woronora Hotel near the railway workers camp to cater to railway workers and their families as well as local fishermen. The Woronora Hotel, or Wonnie as it was known, was little more than a slab hut of wattlebark, iron and hessian, from where the first local postal service operated. Following relocation of the railway workers to Heathcote on completion of the railway, in 1887, the hotel ceased trading and became a private residence and guesthouse. In 1913, the building was subdivided, with fishermen living in one side, and the Martindale family, one of the early gatekeepers at the railway level crossing, living in the other.

In 1887, the German Concordia Club became known as the Como Hotel with the Post Office relocated from the Woronora Hotel. The Hotel was a handsome Victorian Italianate building with wide verandahs and perhaps as many as 20 rooms and a cellar. In the late 1880s, the Hotel apparently became a sly grog shop for a time and was then acquired by the Roman Catholic Church and was transformed into a Carmelite Convent. However, in 1890, the first liquor license for the hotel was granted to George Cubbon, who also erected the fascia proclaiming the Como Hotel.

In 1905, the hotel is known as Buchholz's Hotel after the licensee. Paul Buchholz transformed the hotel into a lavish European-style hotel, resort and German reception house, to become a weekend tourist destination for the wider community. Buchholz particularly encouraged Germans living along the Georges River to use it as a meeting place. Paul's brother-in-law, Thomas Paul Bockelmann, after being introduced to Richard Strauss during his visit to Bendigo in the late 1890s, was inspired to compose a waltz. The Como Waltz, c.1900-1909, was dedicated to Buchholz and his wife Louisa. In 2004, a descendent of the Buchholz's tracked down the sheet music, which was orchestrated by Sven Liebeck and played by the Sutherland Shire Orchestra on 10 April 2005 at the Como Festival. This was the first time that it had been played by an orchestra and been heard for 100 years, and was recorded for posterity.

Until WWI, the hotel was closely associated with Como Pleasure Grounds, a symbiotic relationship that had developed between Murphy and Buchholz. A wide promenade connected the two with the land between used as a picnic area, and visitors would hire boats and row down Scylla Bay to the Hotel. The Hotel survived the bushfires of 1994, only to burn down during an electrical fire on Sunday 3 November 1996 at 3.15am. The hotel, which had recently been extensively renovated, was completely gutted. Affectionately known as the Como Hilton, the hotel was rebuilt, 4 years later between 2000 and 2001.

In 1929, funding from the state government's Great Depression 'Spoooner scheme for unemployment relief' meant that it was possible to link Como with Sutherland. The largest associated project was the reclamation of the mud flats in Scylla Bay, which began in 1931 with the construction of a stone retaining wall and draining the area. However, funding was inconsistent with work stopping and starting several times and manual dredging works was slow., lagging through 1938 and 1939, while the Council sought additional funds. In 1940, the finance was finally made available and the reclamation and stone retaining wall was completed in the early 1940s. The area of reclamation became playing fields, which remain heavily used to this day. However, the outcome of the changed landscape was that visitors could no longer row or sail to the shore below the Como Hotel. During WWII, six-foot-deep 'zig zag' anti-aircraft trenches were dug into the reclaimed area near to the current tennis courts, which were cleaned out each morning by Como Public School boys. By October 1943 all trenches had been filled in.

In 1926, Dawson Carey opened the Como Butcher at 51 Cremona Avenue south of the Como Hotel. The shop, now run by Dawson's son Ted, has barely changed since it opened, retaining the white tiled walls, pale blue decorative plaster ceiling and the traditional butchers' block and

butchers' hooks hanging from the original railings. The shop, and the Ted the butcher now in his 80s and still living out-the-back, retain the trappings of the traditional butchers' shop where the meat is cut to order, and sawdust spread on the floor each day until Health Inspector's put a stop to the practice in the early 2000s. The shop has otherwise remained the same, while Como has changed *When me dad built the shop, boats would pull up outside. My dad never worked by times, he worked by the tides.* However, following the reclamation of Scylla Bay craft could no longer moor outside the old Como Hotel and pop in for a schooner, or outside the butcher's so they could grab some chops for tea. Things were even quieter *When Adolf Hitler came on the scene everything just died, I had me jobs to do, counting ration coupons, and I worked a mincer, with no safety guards or anything, worked by leather straps.* The Como Butcher shop is one of the last reminders of quieter and slower past.



(Picture Sutherland Shire Image MF003\MF003140 Como, ca. 1884).

This view of Como c.1884 shows the area as still largely undeveloped, though work on the railway and bridge is underway in the background, left, and a sparse collection of dwellings is visible on Verona Range, and may include the *Wonnie*.



*(Out of Copyright – nla.obj-148979938-1 Como Hotel 1883)*

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Photo by W.H.P.C.

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(out of Copyright: nla.obj-164742147-1 Como [music] valse 1909)

## 4.5 Establishment of Como Public Schools



**Figure 4.5 Location map and site for interpretation sign at Como Public School.**

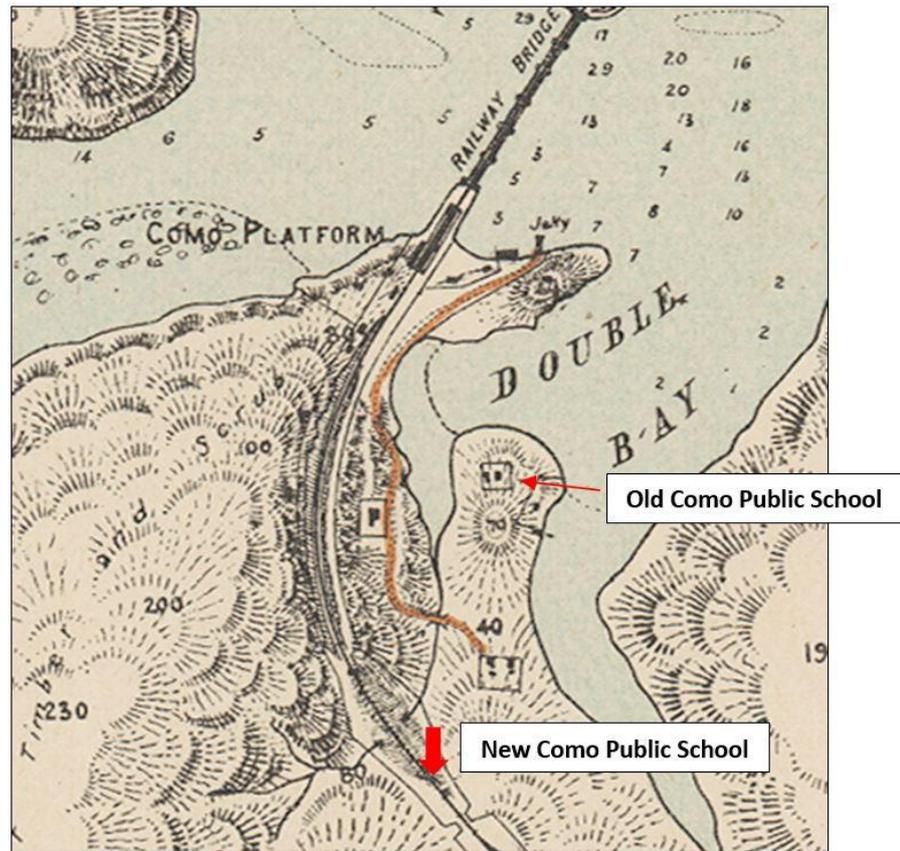
The first Como Public school opened on 16 April 1884, with 38 students on Verona Range at the end of the point overlooking Scylla and Double Bays, which was therefore often referred to as School Point. The location was near to the railway workers camp, which was the major source of pupils and motivation for its establishment. The building was a simple 30ft by 16ft one-roomed timber and iron building, which was an improvement on the original proposal for a tent school.

Edgar J Robinson was the second teacher, the first only lasting six weeks, and remained as the teacher until the school closed. He was not provided with accommodation, and had to pay his board at the local Woronora Hotel; a sum of £2, 10 shillings per week which was a considerable portion of his £150 annual pay. In May 1884, Mr Robinson applied for a teacher's residence as he was also supporting his parents and his mother taught needlework to the girls. The residence was constructed at the east side of the school building, using materials from an old building in the area. By the end of the year, enrolments had increased to 85 children with a night school to educate young railway navvies, and a special class for drawing and painting had been established. However, following completion of the railway and relocation of the railway workers to Heathcote, in 1885, student numbers collapsed and the school closed.

On 29 January 1921, a new Public School was opened on Cremona Road, to the south of the earlier school, by the Minister for Education, Mr Mutch. In his speech, Mr Mutch, commented on the difficulty in obtaining funds for the school from his Department and applauded the Progress Association and president, Mr H Bosman, for their efforts in securing the new building while many other districts would have to wait until funds were available. The ceremony was followed by an oyster luncheon put on by the Progress Association, planting of trees by the attending Councillors and an afternoon of children's sports.

Enrolments reached 68 within weeks of the school's opening with children coming by boat from East Menai (now Illawong), from 'The Bonnet' (Como West), Como Village, Greenpoint, Coronation Bay, Oyster Bay and the area later to be known as Jannali. The first Principal was Mr Frank Middenway, who continued in the position until April 1924.

In 1936, Sydney was in the midst of the severest and longest drought ever experienced. Beginning in 1934, the Great Drought did not break until rain fell in all water catchment areas in 1942. Drastic restrictions were imposed, including mandatory one third cuts to brewery production. The severity of the drought was such that although construction of the Woronora and Warragamba Dams had been planned work had not begun. Woronora Dam was completed in 1941, and the Woronora to Peshurst Pipeline in 1942, to supply water to the Sutherland district. The 42-inch pipes splits into two smaller pipelines, suspended to each side of the Como Rail Bridge merging to a single pipeline at each side of the river. On Wednesday 25 November, 1936, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that because of the scarcity of water in the district *many school children of Como and Engadine carry their own drinking water to school in bottles. Yesterday's warm sunshine caused them to drink deeply.* Pupils depicted are left-right; Anthony Kolin, Robert Harris, Marcia Gould and Dorothy Scott, with Ernest Hall depicted alone.



(National Library of Australia: 1894 Reconnaissance map of the Como Railway Bridge and adjacent country / G.G. Anderson, Licensed Surveyor, Lieut. B.D.F.A)

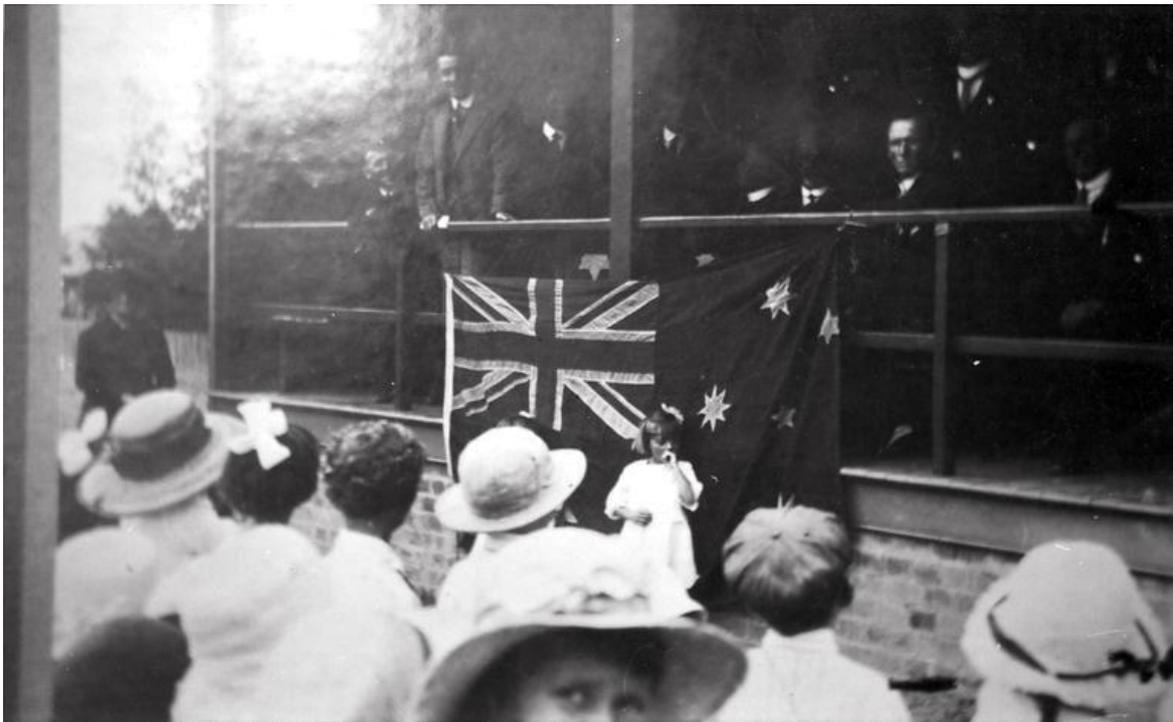


Powerhouse Museum Glass plate negative (1 of 193), Como Hotel, Como with Illawarra railway line, glass, photographer possibly Arthur Phillips, Australia, c. 1900 (author=Powerhouse Museum |access date=24 November 2016 |publisher=Powerhouse Museum, Australia)

The image above shows the bay with the Como Hotel, railway station and Pleasure Grounds around Scylla Bay in 1895-1905 before the reclamation of the bay. Also visible is the causeway constructed to provide access between the railway workers camp and the Hotel. Visible on Verona Range, right, is the first Como Public School. Although the area remains largely undeveloped, compared with the image above, landscaping of the pleasure grounds is evident and the land at the head of the bay has been cleared and 'tamed'.



*Detail from above showing the school house on Verona Range*



*(Picture Sutherland Shire Image MF004442: Official opening of Como East Public School, 1921)*



(Picture Sutherland Shire Image MF004442: Students at Como Public School, 1920)



(SMH 1936:18 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/rendition/nla.news-article17270716.5.html?followup=42f5538d90556ea49180025fc2d64188>)

## 4.6 Interpreting Henry Lawson Reserve

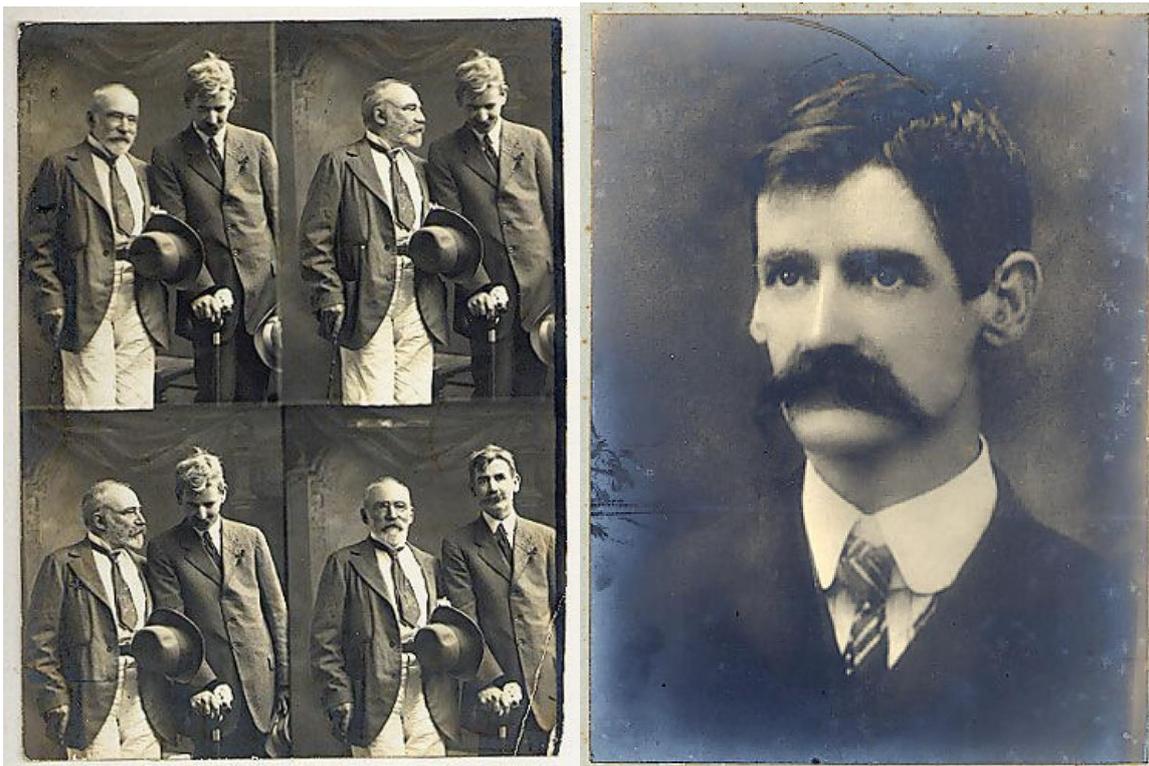


Figure 4.6 Location map and site for interpretation sign at Henry Lawson Reserve.

Henry Lawson was one of Australia’s greatest poets and writers. He wrote for ordinary Australians and he fought to promote the democratic rights of all. However, his drinking habit worsened after he returned from England in 1902, and he could be difficult and aggressive when drunk. A committee of his friends and admirers was formed and a Commonwealth pension and State stipend were also obtained to care for him. Friends also organised to send him away from Sydney for periods to remove him from the influence of drink. It is believed, that during and after

WWI, Henry Lawson rented a small fibro cottage in what is now Paruna Reserve, east of the Bonnet, which may have been one of those excursions away from Sydney and the temptations of drink. However, he would apparently row to the Como Hotel where he became a well-known identity, often found in his favourite corner of the bar of the hotel where, in his own words he brooded with *the ghost of the man I might have been*. Among his visitors, was Dame Mary Gilmore, Lawson's equally renowned mother, Louisa; activist, suffragette, writer, newspaper owner and editor.

On Sunday September 19 1954, the West Como Reserve was dedicated as the Henry Lawson Memorial Reserve by Councillor J Stanswell to commemorate Henry Lawson's association with Como and a special message sent for the occasion from Lawson's widow Bertha Lawson. Attended by 600 people, *An Afternoon at Como* and dedication concert and was organised by the committee secretary, Mr RD (Bob) Walshe. The entertainment included the West Sydney Singers performance of *Andy's Gone with Cattle* and *Drover's Dream* and, *Cobb & Co*, *Reedy River* and *Freedom on the Wallaby* performed by the Bushwackers Band. There were readings of Lawson's poems and stories and an art exhibition with unveiling of a life size portrait of Henry Lawson by Andrew Lomnici of Jannali. The money collected at the event went toward purchasing children's playground equipment for the reserve. Many Australian-themed concerts have been held in September in the Reserve over the years. In 2017, the Henry Lawson Society plans to recreate the Australian themed concert in the Reserve in celebration and commemoration of the 150 years since Henry Lawson's birth.



Henry Lawson with his lifelong friend and supporter Jules Archibald in 1919, left, and on his return to Australia in 1902 (Copyright University of Sydney).



(Advertisement for Henry Lawson Concert organised by RD Walshe *The Bulletin* Feb 1990:520).



Schoolboys from Sutherland Intermediate School performed *Saltbush Bill's Second Flight*, based on a poem by AB (Banjo) Patterson (Copyright: Picture Sutherland Shire MF003\MF003480).

#### 4.7 Interpreting Paruna Reserve, Aboriginal Stories from the Georges River

At Following consultation with la Perouse and Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Councils recommendation, the proposed interpretation focuses primarily on traditional stories of the

Georges River area. This section contains names or images of deceased people, and may cause distress to some readers.



Figure 4.7 Location map and site for interpretation sign at Paruna Reserve.



*Out of Copyright, State library NSW Digital ID: a730005 "Last of the Georges River Tribe, NSW" Workers on the Holt Sutherland Estate, 1880. Jim Brown, Joe Brown, Joey, Biddy Giles, Jimmy Lowndes, ca. 1860-1909*

The earliest Aboriginal inhabitants of Como were the Dharawal people. Evidence of their lives the area can be seen in Paruna Reserve, where natural rock overhangs and hollows were used as ongoing shelters. These rock shelters still contain food remains in the form of shell middens, stone tools and art.

*Why the Waratah is Firm*

*adapted from CW Peck's Australian Legends: Tales handed down from the remotest tribes by the autochthonous inhabitants of our land, 1925.*

*The whole George's River tribe were camped on the flat between the bouldered cliffs that stand up high on each side of the stream. The river had not been in flood for many moons, or, perhaps, years. Fish and eels were scarce. Only the big holes had them.*

*Most of the people were lolling in the shade. Only the hardest stood motionless on the rock bottom with poised spear. Warmeela, the son of the King, was the hardest of all, and Krubi, his lubra, was never done warning him about the risks he took in war and in the hunting.*

*Then came the roll of thunder. The clouds blotted out the sun. A shade like the blackened haze of an eclipse spread over the river.*

*Like the cracks of millions of whips at the one time the first crash came and with it a frightful jagged fork of lightning. Warmeela was struck. Warmeela lay prone amongst his struggling fish. A brother rushed to him and bore him back to the tribe.*

*The storm rolled off again as quickly as it came, and then Warmeela opened his eyes. They were now useless. His sight was gone. A white streak appeared in his jet-black hair and one*

*arm hung paralysed at his side. The next morning he tried to walk, and it was seen that he had a terrible limp.*

*Now Warmeela was most fond of the honey of the waratah. Though it may seem strange to us, the bloom of the waratah was at that time very soft.*

*The waratahs were blooming again, for a year had gone by, and Warmeela often put out his hand hoping to feel one. He still hated to be handed anything. He wanted to feel and fetch and carry for himself. Two flowers bothered him, they often deceived him, and once some other flower poisoned him.*

*One day Krubi, his beautiful wife, came upon him when his heart was sad. Warmeela did not know one flower from another. He said he would drink of the honey of the waratah, but he could not find it. He too often mistook others for it.*

*Krubi promised that she would find a way so that Warmeela should always know the flower he wanted so much.*

*She led him to the place where the lightning had struck. Krubi looked up at the shape of the tree and she saw that it was the one printed on her husband's face. She sat beside the gum and there she was inspired.*

*She spoke, and Warmeela did not understand the words. No one knows what she said. After a time she got up, and bidding Warmeela to wait, she sped over the rocks and logs until she found the beautiful red waratah. She returned with it and held it close to the crack in the gumtree. The soft pistils were drawn up and they stiffened. Krubi held the flower to Warmeela, and when he felt the difference he clasped his big hand over it. He clasped too hard. He bent the red pistils. In that moment a big red light lit the sky. A red ball descended, lighting up the firmament in such a way as to startle all who saw it. Some screamed and rushed about.*

*Not so Krubi nor Warmeela. They knew what no one else knew. The prayer of Krubi had been answered and thenceforth Warmeela would have no difficulty in distinguishing the flower he loved.*



Out of Copyright, Source: *Australian Legends: Tales handed down from the remotest tribes by the autochthonous inhabitants of our land* (1925) by C. W. Peck, illustrated by George Pownall.



No. 1. THE WARATAH, (*Telopea speciosissima*, R. Br.)

Out of Copyright, *The Waratah*. Source: *The Flowering Plants and Ferns of New South Wales - Part 1* (1895) by J H Maiden, illustrated by Edward Minchen

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