

Final
Heritage Impact Statement (Archaeology)
Proposed Redevelopment of the
Museum of Contemporary Art



Report to
Root Projects Australia

On behalf of the
Museum of Contemporary Art

October 2008

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Heritage Impact Statement (Archaeology)

Proposed Redevelopment of the Museum of Contemporary Art

Statement of Heritage Impact for:

The proposed redevelopment of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) carpark for the extension and upgrade of the MCA. The carpark covers part of the site of the Naval Dockyard (1795-1850). A number of archaeological investigations / testing at the site have shown that remains of the stone-built docks survive beneath the carpark surface in varying states of condition.

Date prepared:

27 October 2008 (final).

Heritage Listings:

The remains of the docks and the dockyard are protected under the relics provisions of the NSW *Heritage Act* 1977.

Statement Prepared by:

This Statement of Heritage Impact was prepared by Tony Lowe and reviewed by Dr Mary Casey of Casey & Lowe for in response to the Director General's Requirements for the Project Application for the MCA redevelopment on behalf of the MCA. The statement adopts the model suggested by the Heritage Office *Heritage Manual* (1996).

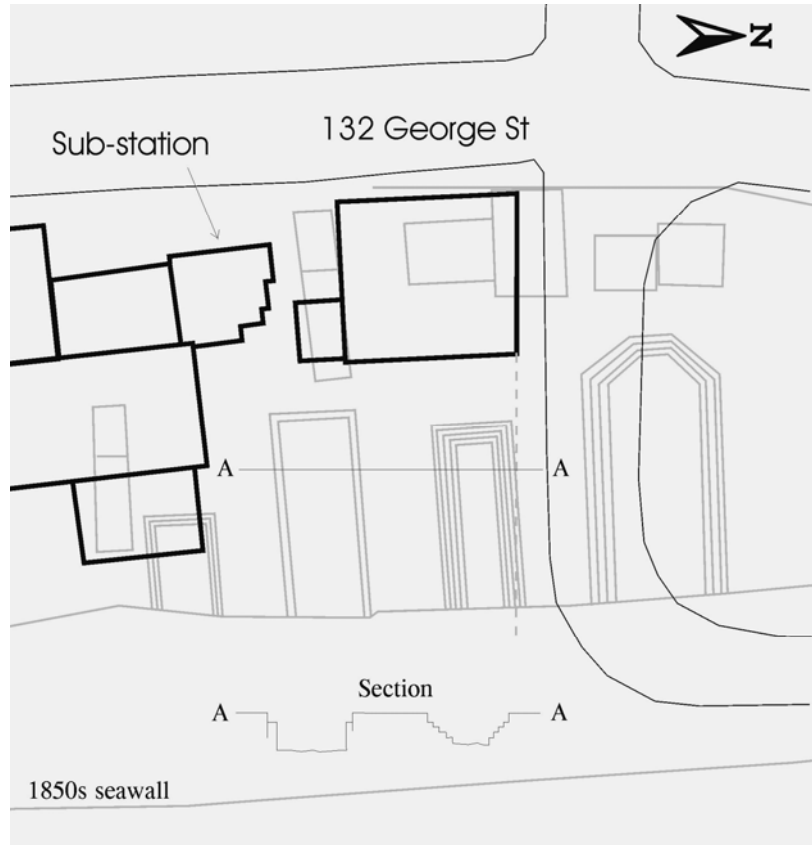


Figure 1: The site.

Historical Background:

The carpark site is part of the Naval Dockyard, which was ordered to be constructed by Governor Hunter in 1796 in order to repair shipping. A series of construction phases up to 1800 involved the erection of two brick joiner and smithy's workshops, sheds for repairing vessels and for the workmen, a steamer, a storehouse, a warden's lodge, an apartment for the clerk and sheds for the government boats when they were hauled onto the shore.

The dockyard employed a number of convicts. The first list of employment returned to England in 1797 reported that 16 convicts were employed at the Dockyard as shipwrights, caulkers, boat builders, labourers and watchmen. This rose to 35 in August 1800. The Government Dockyard was very busy during 1803 and 1804. It repaired several ships, constructed the *Integrity*, a punt and five rowing vessels and rebuilt the *Supply*.

1807 the Dockyard was described as 'much improved'. Activities included building and repairing boats for Government use and providing for the repair of visiting ships.

Governor Lachlan Macquarie wrought major changes to the Dockyard and associated foreshores. He enlarged the old Dockyard.

In 1827 Peter Cunningham described the Dockyards:

*the government dock-yard, against the surrounding wall whereof are built the working-sheds and storehouses; with its boat-landings and little wet-docks, scooped out of the adjoining shore; the high buildings of the commissary stores, - beyond which is the wooden wharf, jutting out into the harbour...*¹

and the type of work undertaken there:

*At the colonial dock-yard...all the Government vessels load, unload, and are repaired; government boats are kept; and the depot of coals for government use is situated. The naval portion of the work is preformed by gangs of competent convicts from the barrack; the jail-gang being usually tasked with the loading and unloading of vessels.*²

A description of the Dockyard given c. 1824 to 1830 by a nearby resident noted:

*The Dockyard extended from Cadman's to the Commissariat Stores. At the north end of it was a store end on the water. The cottage residence of the overseer (Daniel Egan) was in the north-east corner. Two small docks fit only for boats were in the centre of it. In the south-east portion of it were workshops. All of it was enclosed with a stone wall.*³

The Dockyard probably closed down in the 1830s. The use and configuration of the Dockyard appears to remain unchanged until the 1850s when Semi-Circular Quay was extended to the north and Argyle Street was extended eastwards to the water.

¹ Cunningham 1827, Vol. 1:42.

² Cunningham 1827:52.

³ R.H. Kemp, *SMH* 6 October, 1897.

Docks

There were four docks in the dockyard (Fig. 1). The southern three are entirely or partially within the MCA carpark area. Of these docks, the northern and southern docks are shown on historic plan as being stepped, indicating they were meant to repair ships, the vessel secured by horizontal timbers. The middle dock had straight walls, indicating that it served to load and unload ships.

Circular Quay

The construction of Semi-Circular Quay, later renamed Circular Quay, began in 1837 with a large stone seawall and reclamation of the mudflats. This included raising the low areas by some two feet (600mm). Further works were undertaken in the 1850s. The construction of Semi-Circular Quay was undertaken under George Barney, Colonial Engineer. This work extended along the western side of the quay up to the Government Dockyard and was not extended further to the north until later.

In the 1850s a timber wharf was erected around to Campbell's Wharf. The old Dockyard was mostly demolished with the docks being filled in. The line of Argyle Street was extended over the top of the largest dry-dock (north of the carpark).

Ordnance Stores and early twentieth century

The Dockyard land was eventually occupied by Naval Ordnance. A plan from 1865 notes the use of the southern part of the property by the Ordnance Department. Army use of the area and specifically Ordnance use is identified by the 1870s in *Sands Directory*. According to *Sands* the Ordnance Stores are located to the south of Argyle Street as late as 1895. The Naval Ordnance buildings are visible in an 1871 photograph of west Circular Quay. The northern part of the property was listed in 1857 as being occupied by the Harbourmaster's Department.

By the early twentieth century a brass foundry occupied the site. By 1914 it was no longer recorded in *Sands* and the occupant is listed as the chemical laboratory of the Department of Agriculture followed by the Department of Labor & Industry until at least the 1930s.

All structures in the carpark area were demolished at the time of the demolition of the Commissariat Building in 1939. The MCA building was constructed as the Maritime Services Board Building in 1946-1953.

Description of Item:

The identified site is the carpark to the north of the MCA building. It contains the archaeological remains of two docks with another one intruding into the southern end of the site. Sections of the docks have been exposed during various testing programs – these indicate that the middle dock has standing sandstone walls on the southern and northern sides while the western end has been cut into bedrock. The upper coursing of the northern dock has been removed, leaving the mortar beds on which the stonework was placed. Intact stone coursing has been found in the northwest corner and northern sides at depth. No remains of the southernmost dock have been found and it may have been removed by the construction of the MCA building. The entrances to all the docks is in the grassed area to the east of the MCA carpark site.

In the dockyard period the area around the docks was work space and it would have been occupied by equipment and structures, including cranes and various other structures and buildings associated with ship repair and building. Later the site was used for naval ordnance and foundry-related activities.

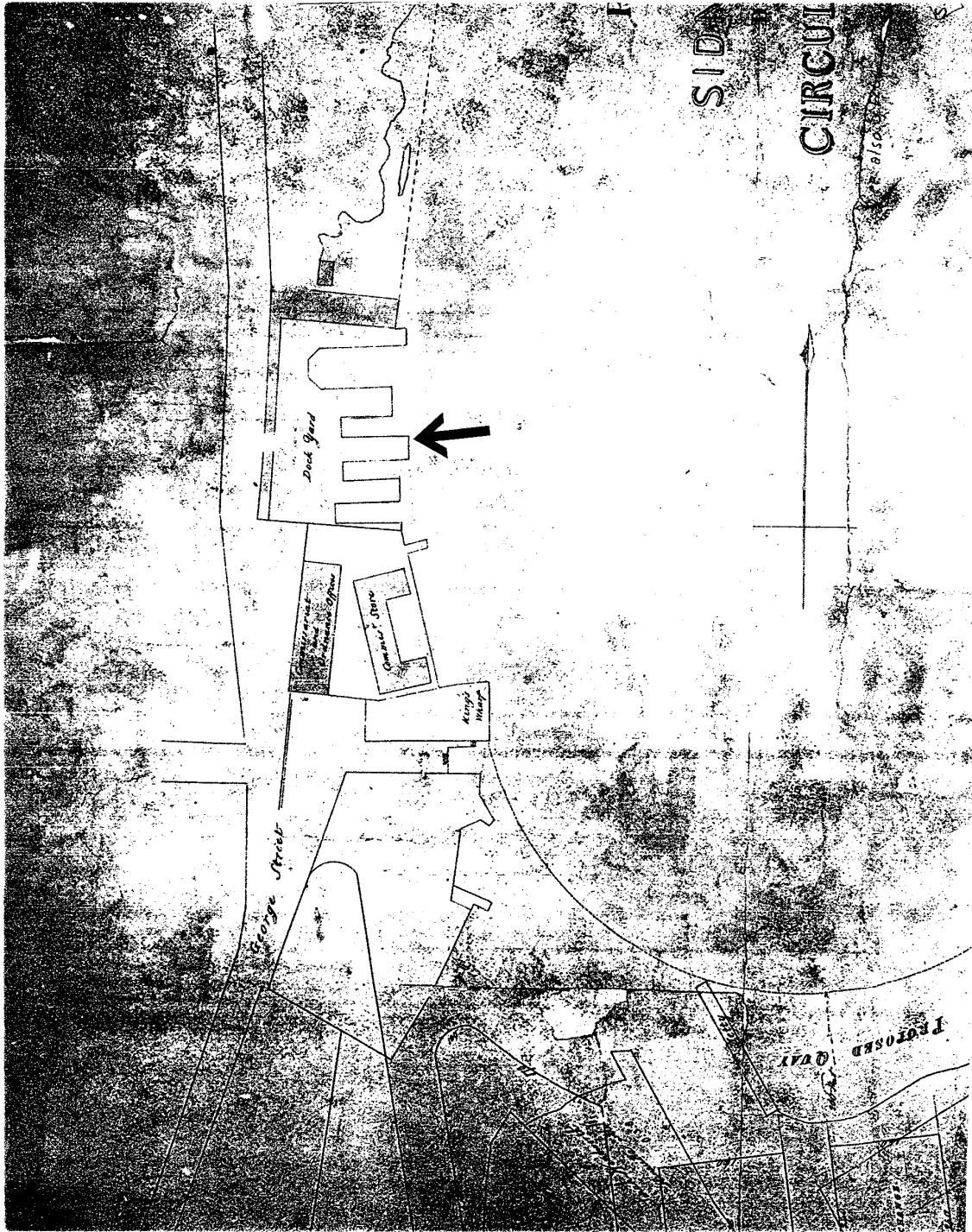


Figure 2: The dockyard (arrowed) in 1845. SR Map 5636. The large dock at the north is under the extension of Argyle Street.

Heritage Significance of Item:

The heritage significance of the archaeological remains within the carpark has been assessed as follows:

Historic Significance

- From 1797 the study area was part of the original Dockyards established by Governor Hunter and was the first official naval Dockyard established in Australia. By 1800 there were a series of work buildings and convict workers had been employed there since 1797. These buildings and docks were rebuilt and amended. During the period of Governor Macquarie the Dockyard was upgraded and took on its more developed form of a walled site with excavated docks and a variety of buildings. The extant dock remains are thought to relate to this period.
- The Dockyard was mainly used for the maintenance and repair of British Naval ships but it also repaired transports, supply ships, sealers and whalers.
- The Dockyard provided for maintenance of the ships that were essential for the running of the Colony. Ships brought supplies of grain from the Hawkesbury and distributed them to Sydney. Water transport and its maintenance was an essential requirement for the functioning of the Colony.
- Following the closure of the Dockyard this site was occupied by the Ordnance Department. This Department was established after 1833 and signifies the development of British Naval interests in the South Pacific.

Social Significance

There has been no public consultation on the social significance of the archaeological remains of this site. It is anticipated, however, that some members of the contemporary Sydney community will value the archaeological remains of this site for their links with our early colonial past, with Governor Macquarie and with development of important elements of our maritime history.

Technical/Research Significance

Environment

- This site may contain evidence of the early landform and topography of the western foreshore of Sydney Harbour dating to pre-1788. This information may add to our understanding of the topographical changes in Sydney Cove.

Aboriginal Occupation

- It is likely that any remains associated with the pre-1788 Aboriginal occupation of the area will have been destroyed or removed by the extensive construction activities and modification of the area since 1788.

Historical Occupation

- This site should contain the remains of the earliest Dockyard built in Australia including the Macquarie-period dock structures. While some remains are damaged and in disrepair, sections of these remains are substantially intact as they are sub-surface structures.

- The docks in association with other aspects of the Dockyard are likely to contain archaeological structures, features, deposits and artefacts that will inform us about early maritime practices associated with shipbuilding, maintenance and repair.
- These remains may also inform us about day-to-day activities in the Dockyard and the convicts who worked there.
- Later use of the study area by the Ordnance Department and later activities are likely to have left little in the way of significant archaeological remains.

The archaeological structures, features and deposits on this site are able to contribute knowledge on research into various research questions:

- What was the nature of the early Dockyard? How were the docks constructed and what do these differences indicate about their function?
- How does this evidence inform us and add to our knowledge of early shipbuilding, maintenance and repair within the early Australian maritime industry?
- Is there evidence for the day-to-day activities of the convicts employed at the Dockyard and their general working conditions?

Archaeological studies previously undertaken at the site have provided knowledge into the above questions.

Educational Significance

The interpretation of the archaeological fabric of this site would help educate members of the public about the use of the foreshore during the early days of the colony, provide direct contact with original remains from the early colony which are not found elsewhere in New South Wales and offer a tangible link to a significant aspect of our maritime past.

Rarity

The early naval Dockyard was the first purpose-built dockyard in Australia. The remains of the stone docks are some of the oldest and most intact remains associated with New South Wales' early maritime history. They are a unique link with our colonial past.

Research Potential

Does the site contribute knowledge which no other resource can?

The archaeological material from this site has the potential to supply primary evidence about the technology used at the docks and perhaps in the construction of early ships. It is possible that the artefactual evidence could provide additional information about the use and development of the place.

Although the site is reasonably well-recorded by plan and pictorial material, the smaller detail and the day-to-day functioning of the docks is unknown. The archaeological remains of the docks would be likely to provide valuable evidence for their physical operation. Details of their construction and the methods employed to stabilise vessels are not explicit in the sources at hand.

Statement of Heritage Significance

- The study area is part of the original naval Dockyard established by Governor Hunter in 1797. This was the first official dockyard in Australia. It was used for naval ship repair and construction.
- The Dockyard was largely developed and given its final configuration of four docks by 1822 under Governor Macquarie. These docks provided maintenance to the ships that were essential to the running and growth of the colony at a time when water transport was the most efficient and widely used means of trade and supply.
- Substantial remains of two of these early stone docks survive within the study area and along with the dock underneath Argyle Street they are the oldest stone docks in Australia.
- The docks' remains should be able to supply invaluable details on their construction and function, details which are not available through other sources. These remains have the potential to inform us about past practices in the repair of sailing ships.
- The study area has strong links with the colonial past of New South Wales through the role the structures within the study area played in the maintenance of the early colony through the provision of stores and the repair and construction of ships essential to the survival of the colony. This area played an important role in the establishment and development of the early colony.
- Other sets of archaeological information would provide evidence of the original topography and how it was altered by European settlement.
- The communities of Sydney and New South Wales have an attachment to the colonial history of Sydney and evidence of its maritime history.
- The remains of the early docks and associated deposits and features within the study area have state heritage significance. Other archaeological remains within the study area have a lesser degree of significance.

Proposed Impact:

The proposed redevelopment will see a building erected on the site. In order to minimise the impact on the archaeology of the site the design and structural solution has avoided the use of bulk excavation associated with the new building. A number of structural piles of various sizes will be introduced both within and around the historical docks (Fig. 3). A new lift pit is located on the southern side of the building between the southernmost docks. Services, including piping for a seawater exchange system, will be introduced above the current ground level (see attached Figure 4).

Discussion of Proposed Impact:

Impact on Archaeological Remains

The proposed piling and footings will impact on the work areas around the docks and will introduce structural elements inside the docks. The piles within the docks will impact on the floors of the docks (believed to be bedrock), to a minor extent their fill (believed to be sand and rubbish deposits dating to the 1850s), and to the walls of the docks should lateral displacement occur while the piles are being inserted. The piles and pad footings outside the docks will impact on dockyard work areas. The lift pit will impact on the work surface and any archaeological features that may exist between the docks in this area.

The size of these impacts will be minimised and the areas to be impacted will be recorded beforehand, meaning that the loss of archaeological fabric and knowledge will be minimised. An idea of the relative areas to be impacted and the areas that will remain undisturbed can be obtained from Figure 3 below. While the optimal size of the piles and pad footings has still to be determined, the majority of the site and its archaeological resource will remain undisturbed by the building above.

No remains associated with the Aboriginal use of the land are expected to have survived the major modification of the site in the period after 1796.

Impact on Visual Elements

The site area is currently an open carpark but the docks and the dockyard are not interpreted or explicit in the space. The new building will mean the docks' link to the cove and the dockyard will be much harder to read, but will be of benefit in that the proposed interpretation within the new development will make the historical use of the place and the nature of the underlying remains clearer.

Methodology for Mitigating Impacts:

Archaeological Recording

The effect of the major subsurface impacts (piles, pad footings, lift pit) can be mitigated to some extent by archaeologically recording their location prior to the works. The location of the docks and other features has been determined by several archaeological site investigations, and this information has been used to determine the locations of major building footings so as to avoid the line of the dock walls. A recent archaeological testing program was undertaken at the site over the period from 24–26 September 2008 with the intention to more accurately determine the location of the dock walls, to enable the structural design to be located away from these areas. This was successfully carried out with the findings recorded by Casey & Lowe and considered in the structural design presented in Figure 3.

Interpretation

The new building provides an opportunity to interpret the site and its archaeological remains. Up to the present time the existence of the dockyard and the docks has not been interpreted on the site, partly due to the site's present usage does not present a ready opportunity to do so.

The redevelopment will contain an interpretation zone which will incorporate an artistic project/s for the interpretation of the site, and the development and history of the place. The MCA is also interested in making available heritage and archaeological tours which will educate interested members of the community and visitors on the history of the site, including its indigenous histories and archaeological remains.

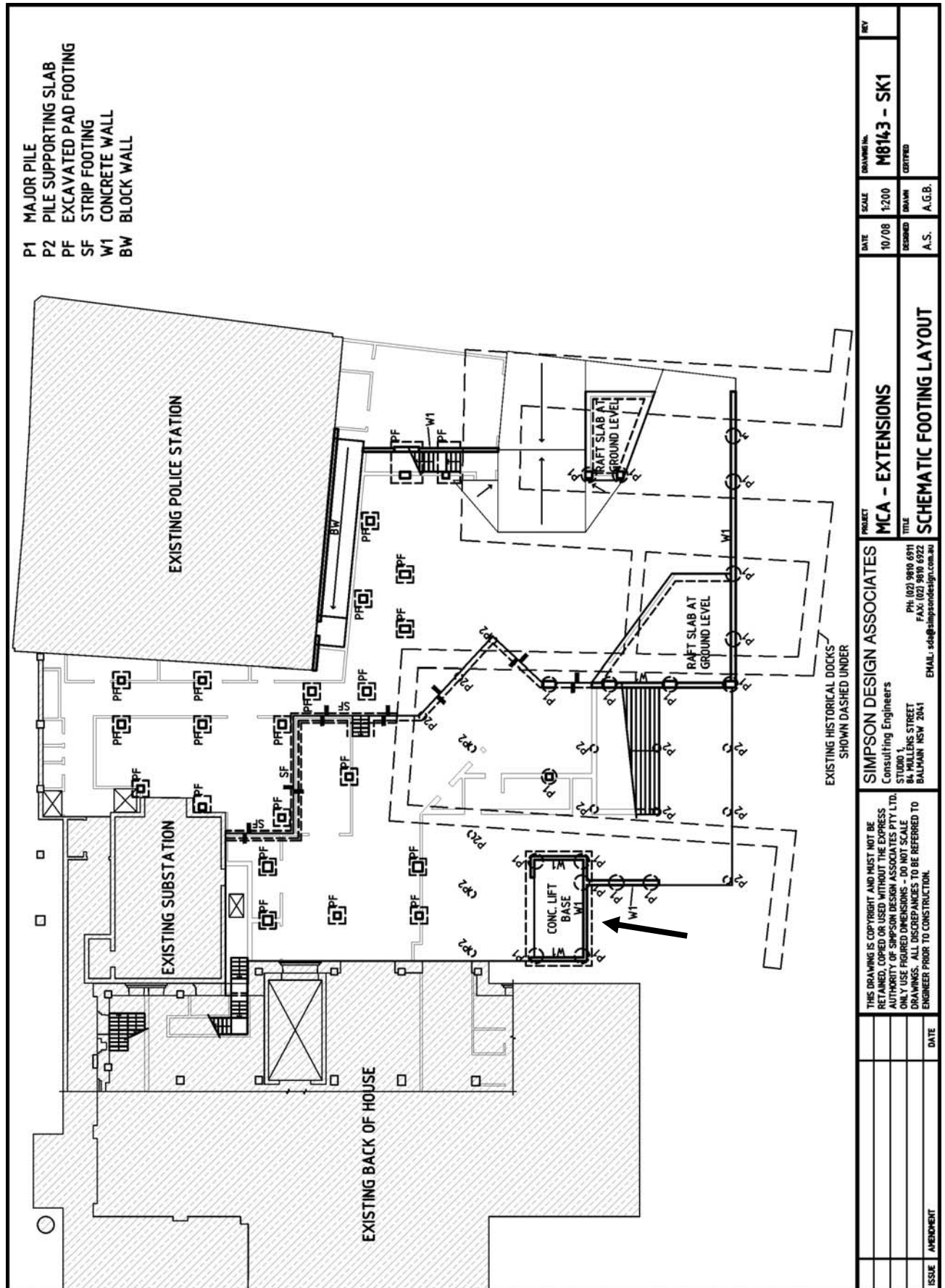


Figure 3: Plan showing indicative pile and pad footing locations in relation to the docks. The proposed lift pit is arrowed.

The proposal impacts on the heritage significance of the item in the following way:

Archaeology

The proposed development will have an impact on the archaeological features associated with the dockyard and the docks. These features would share the place's high level of heritage significance. This impact has been mitigated through the archaeological site investigation and location of the structure away from the dockyard walls.

The future removal of the proposed piles inside and outside the docks will need to be managed to avoid causing further damage to the archaeological remains.

If the development proceeds, the majority of the dockyard remains in this section of the dockyard site will remain undisturbed and will be available to be exposed at some future time. The proposed impacts will affect a small portion of the archaeological remains.

The erection of a building above the docks will present challenges to the appreciation of the docks' remains and their connection with Sydney Cove. In the existing situation, however, the docks are not accessible which prevents the appreciation of the docks' remains and their connection with Sydney Cove. The erection of a new building will provide benefits in this area through opportunities for interpretation and education. The provision for adequate interpretation of the site will go some way to balancing the impact on the archaeological remains.