

11 DECEMBER 2017

UNEARTHED
ARCHAEOLOGY & HERITAGE

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Attention: Tory Stening

Dear Ms Stening,

**Re: Mercantile Hotel, 25-27 George Street, The Rocks
Historic Archaeological Assessment of Ground Floor Works Area**

Thank you for asking us to assess the area of proposed works at the Mercantile Hotel (1914), The Rocks to determine whether they could disturb historic archaeological remains. The hotel is listed on the State Heritage Register (SHR 1560). The works are to be approved by the Department of Planning and Environment. Condition 3 (Heritage) of the Secretary's requirements identifies the need for analysis of the site's potential historic archaeological remains, their significance and any appropriate mitigation strategies.

The works which will involve excavation below the current ground-floor level are understood to be mainly associated with a new lift pit and new toilets and kitchen facilities at the rear of the hotel (Figure 1). These works will be assessed with reference to the use of the land since European settlement in 1788 and their impact on potential archaeological remains.

Based on area's assessed potential for historic-period archaeological remains, recommendations will be put forward to manage them in light of the impacts from the proposed works. Reference to previous analysis of the site in terms of its potential to retain remains will be examined.

The earliest plan (zoning plan) which assessed the various properties in the Rocks and Millers Point in terms of their potential to retain archaeological remains was *The Rocks and Millers Point Archaeological Management Plan*, Edward Higginbotham and Associates Pty Ltd, 1991. This assessed the ground floor of the Mercantile Hotel site as 'most disturbed or destroyed' (Figure 2). The plan also notes that 'Sandstone probably quarried out at rear' (Inventory Sheet R24, Inventory Page 220).

The SHR listing comments on the site's landscape and land-use:

It is the first major building to occupy this site, with its dramatic stone-walled excavation line along the west boundary providing a vivid reminder of the original physical character of both site and The Rocks as a whole.

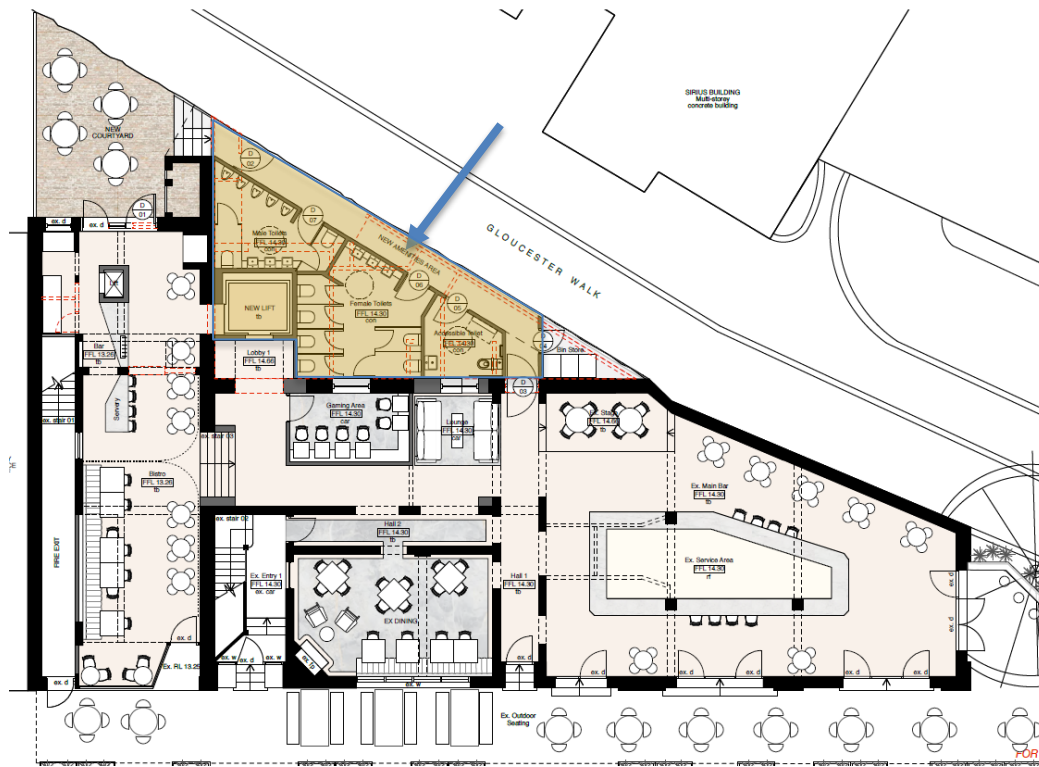


Figure 1: Ground floor plan with the works area highlighted.



Figure 2: Plan showing the Mercantile Hotel site (arrowed) as 'mostly disturbed to destroyed'.
Higginbotham, *The Rocks and Millers Point Archaeological Management Plan*, Appendix.

The Historical Notes included in the SHR listing includes:

In its pristine state the site had a sharply angled rock wall snaking through it which prevented its early development... in 1872 it was partially levelled and then used intermittently as a store for timber, coal, leather goods or marble (either in sheds of open air along with a series of small stables. Around 1900 the rough rock face was straightened and the present stone wall supporting Gloucester Street (nor Gloucester Walk) was built.

It also notes that sandstone was 'probably quarried the rear' to make way for the current building.

A 2007 CMP of the hotel by Graham Brooks and Associates contains several relevant plans and images.



Figure 3: The site in 1849 showing rocky nature. Brooks 2007, Figure 25.



Figure 4: Photograph of the site c1903, showing stables built on bedrock. Brooks 2007, Figure 31.

I undertook a site inspection of the proposed work area on 6 October 2017. The inspection of the rear yard of the hotel and the level of the adjacent Gloucester Walk serves to emphasise the abrupt landscape at the end of George Street (Figure 5, Figure 6).

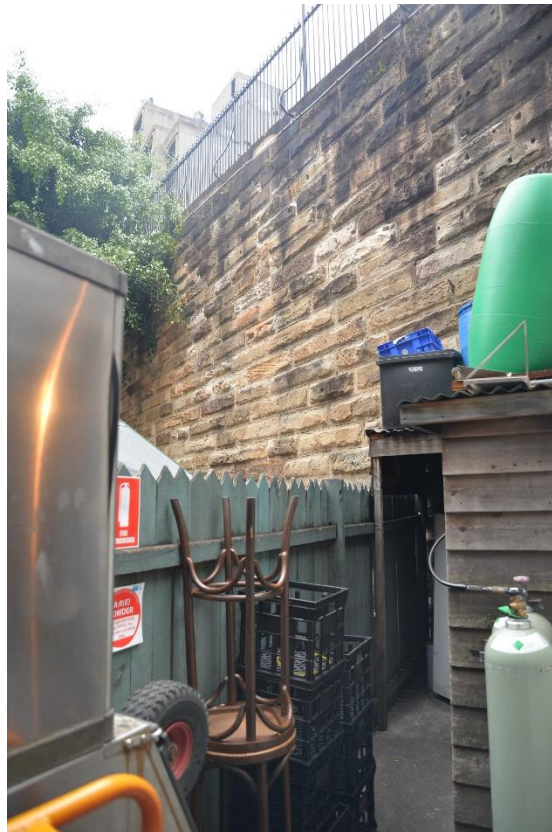


Figure 5: Height of Gloucester Walk above the rear yard area of the Mercantile Hotel. 6/10/17.



Figure 6: Comparison of height discrepancy between rising level of Gloucester Walk and the ground floor level (street level) of the hotel. 6/10/17.

Conclusions

The results of this review of the evidence agrees with the previous interpretations of the site, that the high rocky nature of the land made its use largely impracticable in the early occupation of the Rocks area until the second half of the nineteenth century when it was partially levelled and the rock at the rear of the site cut back and the wall supporting Gloucester Walk built. Once the area had been levelled, it was used as a yard, storage or stables area rather than for a permanent building.

The c1903 photograph of the stables on the site shows extensive exposed bedrock. The rising nature of the bedrock towards Gloucester Walk and the uniform height of the ground floor level through the hotel and into the rear yards would indicate that the bedrock level was cut down into the rear of the site to create a level building platform.

Nature of Archaeological Remains

This examination of the nature of the site's land use indicates that the site has been cut down in order to build the current hotel and there is unlikely to be any artefactual or other remains in the area to be impacted by the proposed works. Any remains that are present are likely to be related to the provision of services and would not fulfil the criteria for heritage significance.

Nature of Proposed Works

Works in the subject area requiring excavation below the current ground level include the installation of new toilets and their associated services, and a lift requiring the excavation of a lift pit.

Management

The SHR listing inventory sheet recommends monitoring of works. The lifting of the concrete ground slabs and tiling should be inspected by the archaeologist in order to check whether the findings for the site's archaeological potential are accurate. I will undertake the site inspections.

Provision for Interpretation

As with any development in the Rocks or Millers Point area, provision for interpretation should be made. The opportunity for interpretation will largely be triggered by what might be found, which have been assessed as being unlikely in this location due to past impacts. If significant remains were found that are evocative of the area, its modification in the early days of European settlement, and its subsequent use, they should be subject to interpretation. While interpretation opportunities will largely be incorporated into the works through architectural design solutions, we can provide ideas through analysis of the remains and from our involvement in interpretation at other sites, such as the Conservatorium of Music and Sydney Town Hall (Old Sydney Burial Ground). We also suggest that provision for interpretive panels be made. These panels could make use of some of the archival material contained in this report.

Please find my CV and our Company Profile attached.

Please contact me by email or on 0409 988 846 should you need anything further at this time.

Yours sincerely,




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