

heritage park archaeology fact sheet

History

In July 1801, Governor King declared that a new Government Farm be established north of the Parramatta settlement. This was the third government-supported farm to be established outside of Sydney, the first being at Parramatta and the 2nd at Toongabbie. By May 1803, 474 convicts, mostly of Irish decent, had cleared 300 acres of land. Throughout 1803 a two-storey, stone barracks, was built to store the grain from the farm and house the convicts.

When the fungal disease known as rust reduced the productivity of the land, the barracks was used for the first mental institution in this country and in its later years it was the first Church of the Castle Hill District. By 1866 the building was demolished and the hard won stone was relocated to Castle Hill township for use in the parsonage of the local Anglican Church.

Research

Local historians, archaeologists and local enthusiasts have sought the position of the barracks at Castle Hill for many years. A number of archaeological surveys have previously been undertaken on the site of Castle Hill Heritage Park over the years with no certain success.

The most recent archaeological excavation in the Park in 2003 saw the exposure of a stone building, possibly a kitchen.

Recently, a 1943 aerial image revealed a rectangular anomaly on the site of a cottage at the southern edge of the Park. It was felt that this evidence finally indicated the site of the former Barracks. In the 1960's a cottage was built on this site and the land used as a small farm holding for mushrooms, chickens and market gardening.

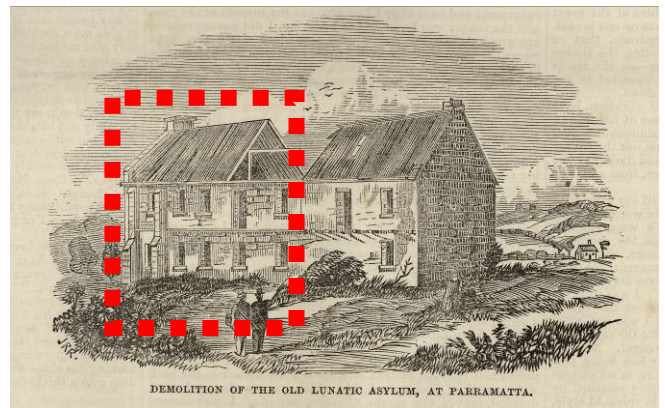
Discovery and excavation

With the evidence of the aerial photo and the supervised demolition of the cottage, archaeologists excavated the site in April 2006.

Careful work with small excavation machinery and hand tools revealed the south western corner of a sandstone footing. Further excavation exposed the remainder of the building footprint and additional features such as a fireplace, external buttress, a staircase support and an internal dividing wall.



Water colour from around 1803



Artists impression of barracks demolition

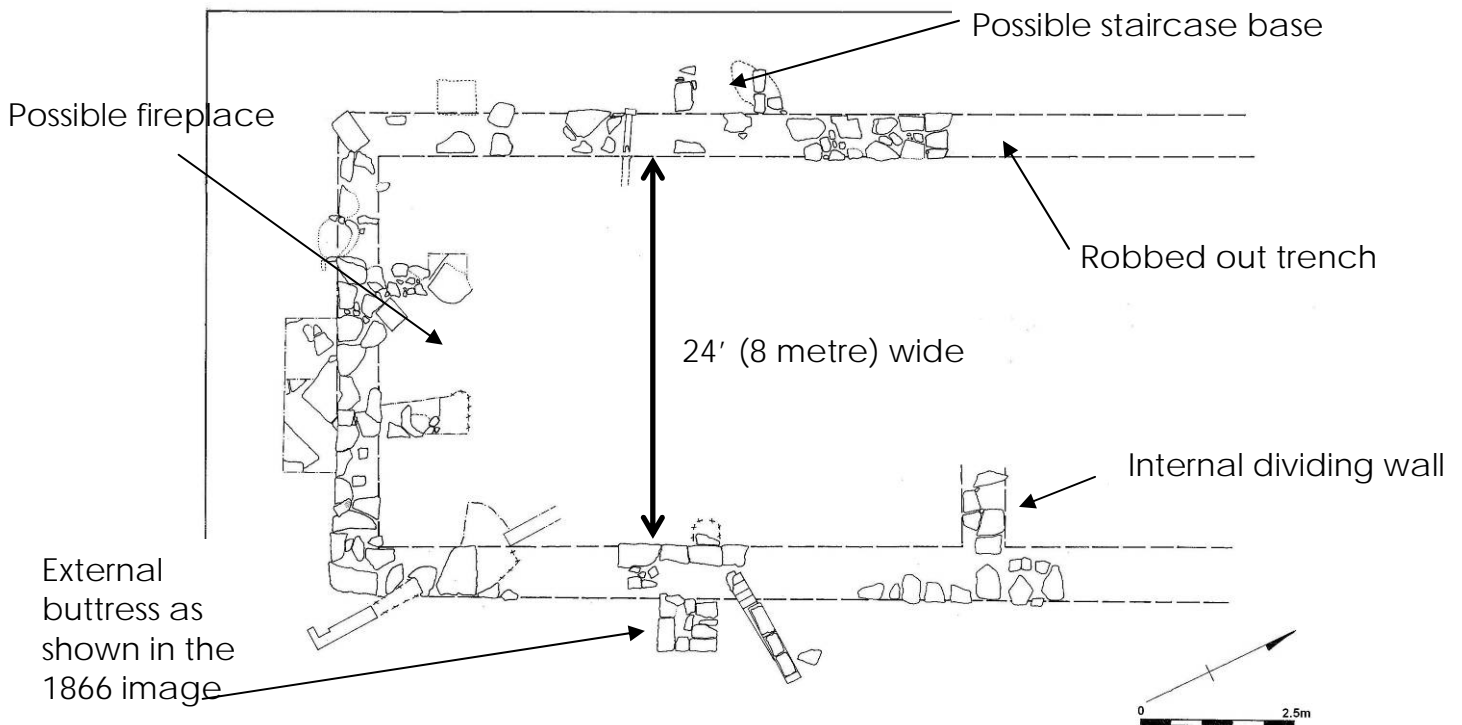


Archaeologist excavating foundations

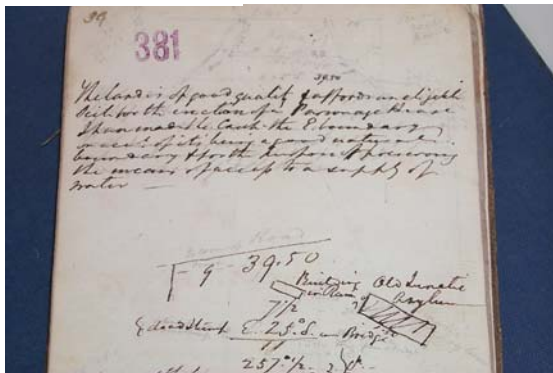
The work revealed that the building was 24 feet wide, matching descriptions of the early Barracks.

Approximately 2/3 of the building footprint has been removed, possibly in the 1866 demolition and removal of stone, leaving only the foundations of the southern part of the building, as shown above outlined in red.

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Archaeologist's drawing of barrack site



Felton Matthew's note book of 1832

Building in ruins

Initial investigations revolved around the survey note book of Surveyor Felton Matthew who was sent out to the district to establish the 200 acre Church Glebe in 1832. Other surveys by Surveyor Grimes completed the picture of the building shown in the water colour.

Matthews notes refer to a "building in ruins" and the "old lunatic asylum".

During the 2004 archaeological investigation, a small building with a fireplace was uncovered. With the confirmation of the barracks site to the north-east, this find displays a remarkable likeness to the "building in ruins" referred to in 1832.

For further information:

Visit the Local Studies Collection at the Castle Hill Library.



Excavation of "building in ruins" - fireplace