

Archaeological Monitoring of the Vehicle Access & Pedestrian Safety Project

Sydney Opera House Forecourt

What's Happening Here?

Sydney Opera House is one of the busiest cultural and tourist precincts in Australia, with more than eight million visitors setting foot on site each year. The Vehicle Access & Pedestrian Safety Project (VAPS) will enhance tourist and visitor safety by diverting heavy vehicles from the Forecourt to a new underground loading dock.

Part of this project involves diverting the route of the Bennelong Drain which crosses beneath the Forecourt and the excavation and construction of a new section of stormwater drain leading from the Tarpean Wall to the seawall adjacent the Man O' War Jetty and Steps in Farm Cove.

The construction work is being monitored by archaeologists from Godden Mackay Logan to ensure that important evidence of site occupation, remnants of the Bennelong Drain & any former seawalls & harbour shorelines are fully documented.

Previous Site Occupation

The peninsula that was known to local Aboriginal people as 'Tyubow-gule' acquired its current name from Bennelong, an Aboriginal man, for whom Governor Phillip constructed a brick hut in 1790 on the Point. The early years of the colony were also marked by a period of anxiety for the settlers who constructed several defensive buildings. In 1817 work commenced on the construction of a fort at the northern tip of the peninsula (Fort Macquarie).

In 1902 a tram car house was built on the site of the Fort to service a public tram line. By the 1950s the shed had become redundant to Sydney's transport needs & in 1954 Bennelong Point was chosen as the site for Sydney's Opera House.

The Bennelong Drain

When the Bennelong Drain was built around 1857, it was one of five combined sewers that discharged the city's stormwater & sewage into Sydney Harbour. Introduction of sewage pumping stations around 1900 gradually reduced the volume of sewage until the drain predominantly transported stormwater. During the construction of the Sydney Opera House, the original oviform brick drain was diverted & then again modified when the adjacent underground car park was built. Once the VAPS Project is completed, some remaining sections of the Bennelong Drain will no longer be used, being functionally replaced by modern drainage facilities.

Sea Walls & Shorelines

Over the years, Bennelong Point has been progressively reclaimed with sea walls built & rebuilt as the foreshore has changed with development. Historical documents indicated that remnants of early seawalls are likely to be found under the Forecourt & at the seawall immediately to the south of the Man O' War Jetty (where the new stormwater outlet is being constructed). Works here are being archaeologically monitored to minimise any potential impacts & document findings.

Further Information

For more information or to leave a comment about the project, please visit sydneyoperahouse.com