

DRAFT SHR Listing Nomination

**A. Nominated place**

**1. Name**

**ELIZABETH BAY HOUSE and LANDSCAPE SETTING (ARTHUR MCELHONE RESERVE)**

*Name:*

Elizabeth Bay House and Landscape Setting (Arthur McElhone Reserve),

*Other or former name(s):*

Aboriginal: No name recorded in the historical records.

*European:*

Elizabeth Bay House and Landscape Setting (Arthur McElhone Reserve).

**2. Location**

**a. ELIZABETH BAY HOUSE**

*Street address:*

7-9 Onslow venue, Elizabeth Bay

*Alternate street address:*

none

*Local government area:*

Sydney Council

*Land parcel(s):*

On State Heritage Inventory (SHI)  
Sydney LEP Lots 16 DP 15713.

**b. ARTHUR MCELHONE RESERVE**

*Street address:*

1A Billyard Avenue, Elizabeth Bay

*Alternate street address:*

none

*Local government area:*

Sydney Council

*Land parcel(s):*

On State Heritage Inventory (SHI)  
Sydney LEP Lots 1 DP 1080048; Lot 4 and 5, DP 15713  
NSW planning portal listed as *Lots 1 DP 1080048; Lot 4 and 5, DP 15713.*  
PLANNING PORTAL  
Lot 1 DP 1080048 *Parcel size: 937.737 sq m*  
Lot 4 DP 15713. *Parcel size: 709.287 sq m*  
Lot 4 DP 15713. *Parcel size: 631.163 sq m*

*Co-ordinates:*

Lat: -33.8701073702 Long: 151.2264304

*Zoning*

RE1- Public Recreation

### 3. Extent of Nomination

*Curtilage map of nominated area:*

*Planning Portal Heritage layer map Source of map or plan:*

(01) legal boundary plan, as per figure 1

(02) Sydney Harbour LCA visual catchment diagram, **dwg no: XXXX**



**Figure 1.** Aerial photo from *SixMaps* showing the *Elizabeth Bay House and Landscape Setting (Arthur McElhone Reserve)*. The site is outlined in red and comprises several land parcels. The existing SHR curtilage for Elizabeth Bay House (SHR 00006) is shown as a dashed white line. [Accessed October, 2017].

Source of map or plan:

(01) Six Maps NSW Government Spatial Services, <https://maps.six.nsw.gov.au>, accessed 22 October 2017

*Boundary description (in words):*

- a. legal boundary description: Arthur McElhone Reserve : L Lots 1 DP 1080048; Lot 4 and 5, DP 15713 - *Parcel size 2,314.187 sq m.*

The boundary extends the existing SHR curtilage of Elizabeth Bay house to include the Arthur McElhone Reserve across Onslow Avenue to the north east of Elizabeth Bay House, and follows the lot boundaries for the Reserve.

Note: there is potential to include the *Elizabeth Bay House Grotto Site and Works* (SHR 00116) to form a composite heritage curtilage.

### Ownership

#### **ELIZABETH BAY HOUSE**

*Name of owner(s):*

Historic Houses Trust of NSW (t/as Sydney Living Museums)

*Contact person:* Ian Innes

*Contact position:* Director of Heritage and Collections

*Postal address:* c/- The Mint, 10 Macquarie Street, Sydney, 2000

Phone number: 8239 2288

*Owner explanation:*

#### **ARTHUR MCELHONE RESERVE AND ELIZABETH BAY HOUSE GROOT SITE AND WORKS**

*Name of owner(s):*

Sydney Council

*Contact person:*

*Contact position:* Landscape Architect

*Postal address:* c/- Sydney Council

*Phone number:* 9265 2500

*Owner explanation:*

## **B. Significance**

### **4. Why is it important in NSW**

*Statement of state significance*

The Arthur McElhone Reserve is of State significance in the course of the State's natural and cultural history as a vestige from the once large and significant colonial estate of the first colonial secretary, Alexander Macleay and as one of the first public parks designed and constructed by Sydney City Council after World War II as part of its policy to enhance the environment of the city and its environs adopted in 1948

The Reserve is significant for its association with the work of Ilmar Berzins, the first qualified landscape architect in Sydney in 1950/51 and the first to be appointed to any Local Council in Australia. It is one of the early park designs of Berzins, who over a career of 35 years designed many of the best-known parks in Sydney and rose to the position of Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation at Sydney City Council.

The composition of *Elizabeth Bay House and its Landscape Setting* has aesthetic significance for demonstrating the best characteristics of 'the picturesque', a landscape style much valued in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The grassed forecourt was designed to set off the House and enable it to be viewed from the Harbour as an imposing marine villa in a picturesque setting. The lawn and adjacent shrubbery and garden terraces formed the core of the Elizabeth Bay garden. The forecourt has aesthetic value for facilitating the enjoyment of views to the north-east, down the Harbour past Clark Island to the Heads.

The Reserve has significance for demonstrating a high degree of creative and technical achievement in its design and construction in this early period of settlement. The creation of generous platforms through skillful earthworks and terracing, the clever insertion of stairways, and the elegant design of these and the retaining walls were notable achievements at the time, and were much admired. Recent research demonstrates that Elizabeth Bay House is perfectly oriented and aligned to the position of the sunrise at the winter solstice or shortest day of the year.

The Reserve demonstrates a high degree of creative achievement in the early 1950s, recognizing its original forecourt role while creating a self-sufficient, sociable space of several grassed rooms, furnished with ponds, rich perimeter plantings, and sandstone stairways, paths and bridges. Over the years, with maturing vegetation, these have melded into a particularly satisfying aesthetic composition.

The Reserve has significance for demonstrating the principal characteristics of municipal park design in Sydney in the early post War period, and the influence, through Berzins, of some aspects of the modernist movement in landscape design, as distinct from the traditional Victorian/Beaux Arts designs.

The continued existence of the grassed forecourt of such an important early colonial mansion so close to the city is now rare and constitutes an important aspect of NSW's cultural history. It and the House retain the integrity of their key attributes, although only fragments of the famous gardens that once surrounded them still exist.

The Reserve possesses a rare combination of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape styles and elements that – as the recent destruction of several parks designed by Berzins demonstrates – are rare and have become endangered.

### *Comparisons:*

#### **Fitzroy Gardens**

Established in 1939, Fitzroy Gardens is at 60-64 Macleay Street, Potts Point. The gardens are historically significant as the first example of a public park in Sydney being created by removing existing private housing. The gardens represent the aspirations of the Sydney community to add green space in a densely urban area; and it is evidence of moves by the Sydney community to provide for public parks in Sydney in response to the public demand.

The gardens are part of the 1841 subdivision of Colonial Secretary Alexander Macleay's 54 acre Elizabeth Bay Estate.

It was originally to be named after Civic Reform Alderman Ernest Tresidder, but political considerations intervened and the name was changed to Fitzroy Gardens after Fitzroy Ward of the City of Sydney, originally from NSW Governor Sir Charles FitzRoy (1846-1855).

In 1959 the Florence Bartley Library, a Sulman Award winning building, was built on the site of 'Tenilba' and demolished in 1997. In 1961 the El Alamein Fountain was added to the park, and its distinctive dandelion shape soon became a symbol of Kings Cross.

The existing 1970 design of the garden by the landscape architect Ilmar Berzins is aesthetically significant and demonstrates creative innovation as an example of an early progression from modernism to postmodernism in Sydney landscape architecture. Examples of gardens of this period and style are increasingly rare.

### **Sandringham Gardens, Hyde Park**

Sandringham Gardens was opened by Queen Elizabeth II during her first visit to Australia in 1954. It is a memorial to King George V and George VI. It is named after the Royal family's residence in Norfolk, England.

It is a symmetrical sunk garden with a series of terraces and garden beds for the display of annual bedding plants framed by a stone and timber pergola draped in wisteria and has the fig walk through Hyde Park as its backdrop. It is generated by a series of concentric circles emanating from a circular gravelled court and has St Marys Cathedral as its focus. It was designed by Ilmar Berzins, who was the first qualified landscape architect to practise in Sydney and the first to be employed by any local government authority in Australia<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Aitken, R. and Looker, M. *The Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens*: Ilmar Berzins by Allan Correy, p.87

## 5. Existing place or object

Description:

The Reserve has the character of a self-contained municipal park, with its own combination of 'garden rooms' and internal visual 'scenes', although still providing the site's original role as a viewing platform for expansive views out to the Harbour.

The essential layout and character of the Reserve as designed by Ilmar Berzins in 1950-53 has been maintained. This included the sets of access stairways; the terracing, stone bridge and central ponds which helped create the separate garden rooms; the internal pathways; the park benches just below the Onslow Street sandstone retaining wall; and the pattern of planting. In addition, the views out to the Harbour had been retained, as well as the two-way views between *Elizabeth Bay House* and the Harbour.

The maturing of the vegetation and lawns has provided a softening, rich texture that contrasts against the built sandstone elements and the natural rock benches, as well as providing a framing to the above views. The sinuous ponds, with their goldfish and the perpetual sound of (reticulated) running water, have also enriched the sensory experience of the place. All of these elements have combined to create a satisfying perceptual and aesthetic experience for park users. As these are essentially subjective experiences, their intensity and significance varies from person to person.

### ***Condition of Fabric and/or archaeological potential***

Archaeological potential is low

### ***Integrity / intactness***

High

### ***Modifications Dates***

From 1826 onwards

### ***Dates you inspected the place for this description***

November 2017, February 2018

### ***Current use***

Harbourside recreational park in front of House museum

### ***Original or former use***

Front lawn and viewing platform of Elizabeth Bay House (SHR 00006)

## C. Historical outline:

### 6. Origins and historical evolution

#### **Formation:**

Sandstone geology laid down in the Triassic Period, 220 million years ago.

Sydney Harbour's drowned river valley formed 8500-2500 years ago.<sup>2</sup>

1826 - land granted to Alexander Macleay.

1827 - the landscaping of the garden and grounds of Elizabeth Bay House commences.

1835-39 - construction of Elizabeth Bay House.

1841 - Subdivision of some of the Elizabeth Bay land.

1865, 1875, 1882 - Further subdivisions.

1892 - Balcony added to the house.

1927 - Final subdivision (three lots in front of Elizabeth Bay House were not sold).

1935 - Elizabeth Bay House renovated and refurbished.

1941 - Elizabeth Bay House altered to accommodate fifteen flats.

1948 - 50 - Lots 4, 5 and 6 are purchased by the City of Sydney and Arthur McElhone Reserve is constructed.

1961 - Elizabeth Bay House listed by the National Trust of Australia (NSW)

1963 - Essential repairs carried out to Elizabeth Bay House.

1972-76- Restoration of Elizabeth Bay House.

1978 - Elizabeth Bay House listed on the Register of the National Estate.

1979 - A permanent Conservation Order is placed on Elizabeth Bay House.

1999 - Elizabeth Bay House is listed on the State heritage Register.

#### **Maker / builder:**

John Verge (1782 – 1861)

James Hume (1804 – 1868)

Ilmar Berzins (1921 – 1993)

#### **Historical outline of place or object:**

Arthur McElhone Reserve was formed by the same forces that shaped Sydney Harbour.<sup>3</sup> In recent geological history, between 18,000-6,000 years ago the sea level rose to form the drowned river valleys of the region including that of Port Jackson and Sydney Harbour inclusive of the foreshores of Elizabeth Bay.<sup>4</sup>

The site is located on Gympie soil landscape characterised by undulating to rolling rises and low hills on Hawkesbury Sandstone (Figure 3), its geology and soil type are

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<sup>2</sup> Hoskins, p3

<sup>3</sup> Burton, 'Sydney: 'Nature, place and landscape', p 184.

<sup>4</sup> NSW NPWS, The Bioregions of New South Wales, 2003, p 186.

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/nature/sydneyBasin.pdf> accessed 08/04/ 2015.

common along Port Jackson's foreshores. With minor changes including the reclaiming land that was a sandy beach, the sites' original form remains discernible and intact and typically one of wide benches and localised rock outcrops on low broken scarps. Extensively cleared open-forest (dry sclerophyll forest) and eucalypt woodland. Its soils would have been shallow, less than 0.5m deep and discontinuous, sometimes deeper and more developed in pockets, or when influenced by clay lenses to form podzols. There are localised steep slopes, high soil erosion hazard, rock outcrops, shallow highly permeable soil and very low soil fertility.

This soil landscape supported on exposed ridges open woodland-forests of red bloodwood *Eucalyptus gummifera*, narrow-leaved stringybark *E.oblonga*, scribbly gum *E.Haemastoma*, brown stringybark *E.capitellata* and old man banksia *Banksia serrata*. Sheltered side slopes supported dry sclerophyll forest, consisting of black ash, *E.sieberi*, Sydney peppermint *E.piperita*, Sydney Red Gum, *Angophora costata* and black she-oak *Allocasuarina littoralis*.<sup>5</sup>

The south shore of Sydney harbour from South Head to Darling Harbour was occupied by Aboriginal people of the Gadigal group. There appear to have been several different Aboriginal settlements at different times, on either side of a small creek winding through the mudflats of what is now Rushcutters Bay Park, and on the higher ground at Edgecliff.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1890s, the settlement at Rushcutters Bay consisted of several gunyahs made of slabs of wood leaning against a fence and covered with iron, sheets and other materials, around a central campfire. By this time the settlement had a few permanent residents who survived by fishing and shell fishing, and by selling boomerangs and shell ornaments in the city.<sup>7</sup>

In the mid-1810s, at the same time as Governor Lachlan Macquarie was waging war on the Aboriginal people of south-western Sydney, he tried to encourage Aboriginal people along the coast to adopt a more settled existence.

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<sup>5</sup> G.A Chapman and C.L Murphy, *Soil Landscapes of the Sydney 1:100 000 Sheet*, Soil Conservation Service of N.S.W., Sydney, 1989, pp.44-45.

<sup>6</sup> Gelding, A, '[The Reminiscences of Alfred Gelding](#),' ed. C Silas-Smith (1937), in *The Reflective Gardener*.

<sup>7</sup> Irish, P, *Hidden In Plain View: The Aboriginal people of coastal Sydney*, Sydney: New South Publishing, 2017

In 1815, Macquarie established a [farm and village at Middle Head](#) on the north side of the harbour to encourage [Bungaree](#)'s group to become settled fisher-farmers. Five years later Macquarie decided to establish a similar village for several dozen Aboriginal people of the 'Sydney tribe' at Elizabeth Bay / Gurrain, which became known as Elizabeth Town. Some writers at the time conflated the Elizabeth Town and Middle Head settlements, but they were two distinct places for two different groups of people.

Aboriginal people were already living at Elizabeth Bay / Gurrain before Macquarie established the village. Writers at the time acknowledged that it was 'a place much frequented and delighted in by the Sydney blacks, to a family of whom indeed it belonged', as a number of historically documented burials in the area also shows. The Aboriginal people using the Gurrain area were probably part of the same group that were known to frequent the nearby [Woolloomooloo](#) area in the early 19th century.

The area used for the Elizabeth Town settlement was said to have been granted to a convict named Patrick Welsh years before in 1809, who had apparently lived there until selling the land to Assistant Commissary, Frederick Drennan, in 1819. Drennan later claimed that Macquarie had unfairly appropriated the land to establish the Elizabeth Town Aboriginal village, though his claim lacked proof of Welsh's original ownership, and was also made in the midst of a dispute with the colonial administration over fraud charges that had seen Drennan lose his job. At any rate, the claim was never accepted and did not impact the use of the area by Aboriginal people.

On 28 of March 1820, Macquarie and his family and 'three boats full of the natives' rowed to Elizabeth Bay / Gurrain to select the location of the village. The site they chose was behind the sandy beach of the bay, in present-day Beare Park, Elizabeth Bay. As local resident Obed West later described, 'bark huts were erected about the bay for their use, and two assigned men appointed to look after the settlement.' Residents were also given a fishing boat and tackle and salt and casks to preserve their catch.

After Macquarie returned to England in 1822, Aboriginal people used the village less and less, and by late 1824 it had been completely abandoned and in 1826, the land was granted to the Macleay family, who set about building Elizabeth Bay House. The remains of the Elizabeth Town village were located downslope from the house, near where the kitchen garden was established. There was no Aboriginal settlement at Elizabeth Bay / Gurrain after the house was built, but Aboriginal people visited

occasionally, such as in 1838 when a tribal contest between Aboriginal people from the Shoalhaven and Wollongong was held there.<sup>8</sup>

### *Evidence of European history Arthur McElhone Reserve*

A great deal has been written about Macleay and his Elizabeth Bay property<sup>9</sup> and it does not need to be reproduced here. However, certain salient points need to be made.

1. Alexander Macleay began shaping the landscape of his property in 1827, eight years before the building of Elizabeth Bay House commenced. He spent a great deal of money and time in having the landscape fashioned according to the principles of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century British landscape movement and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century precepts of the Picturesque. In particular, he created a large forecourt of gently sloping ground in front of the platform he created for his future house. He had two terrace walls built to create this forecourt, which he planted with lawn and a range of bulbs, many from South Africa.
2. Macleay envisaged the forecourt serving both to provide clear views out to the Harbour, while at the same time enabling it to be viewed as an elegant marine villa in a wild, picturesque setting from the Harbour. The general effect is illustrated in several paintings property in the 1804s by Conrad Martens (Figure 5). It became perhaps the most celebrated landscape in the Colony at the time, and elegant outdoor entertainments were held there from 1829 onwards, well before the house itself was built.<sup>10</sup> The cost of the landscaping works was so heavy that it served as a constraint on the completion of the House.
3. Macleay, and subsequently his son, William Sharp Macleay, were keen horticulturalists and entomologists, and planted the garden with a very wide range of trees and shrubs, mostly exotics that were collected or donated to them from all over the world. (Quite a number of these were planted even before they were acclimatised and propagated in the nurseries and conservatories in Kew). An indication of the size and scope of the garden is described in a plan of the Macleay property produced ca.1875 by surveyor F.H.Reuss (Figure 6).

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/elizabeth-town/> accessed 22 October 2017

<sup>9</sup> The most authoritative account to date was written by the present Curator of *Elizabeth Bay House*, Scott Carlin. This appears both in his Conservation Plan and his Guide to the House.

<sup>10</sup> Carlin, op. cit. p.82

Apart from some bulbs, however, few of these plants were planted within the forecourt, and the Macleays retained as many of the native trees and shrubs on its (north-western) perimeter as possible (Figure 7).

The forecourt was deliberately maintained as a spacious open lawn with the green turf sweeping right up to *Elizabeth Bay House* in the best 18<sup>th</sup> century British manor house tradition. This is clearly depicted in a photograph taken in 1902 (Figure 8).

Some trees were planted on the south-east and north-west edges of this space, in order to frame the views between the House and the Harbour. At different times these comprised eucalypts, figs, palms and pines. Remnant Eucalypts are seen in the ca.1865 photograph (Figure 5) taken of the natural rock shelter at the base of the forecourt (now bordered by Billyard Ave.).

4. Although the land on which the elaborate gardens were laid out and planted have long since been built over, and very few of the original trees remain, quite detailed and extensive lists were kept of all the plants collected from many sources.<sup>11</sup> While it would not be possible to attempt to re-create Macleay's garden today, it would be possible to provide some link between Macleay and his surviving forecourt lawn by judiciously selecting from among those plants some which would be included in the present Arthur McElhone Reserve. s

The third period covers the period between the final subdivision of the Elizabeth Bay estate in 1927 and the acquisition of lots 4, 5 and 6 containing the original forecourt by Sydney City Council in 1948. Despite the enticements in the advertisement of the 1927 subdivision (Figure 9) - these lots had miraculously not been purchased in 1927, and were not sold in 1934 when they were re-offered for sale.

However, the lawns were increasingly neglected, and various self-sown shrubs and other weeds accumulated there during this period. Local residents used to tip their rubbish there, and the northern retaining wall fell into disrepair. A decision was taken by Sydney City Council to clear the site before it could be developed into a municipal park. The early part of this period coincides with the neglect of the mansion and its use as an artists' squat until 1935.

The fourth period – that of the actual purchase of land and the design and construction of the Reserve – actually began during the third period, when Sydney City Council Town Clerk Roy Hendy wrote to the alderman of the Fitzroy Ward, Mr. W. J. Bradley on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1938, informing him that Council agreed to the need for the immediate provision of more garden spaces in Kings Cross and to support a

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<sup>11</sup> A paper compiled by the Historic Houses Trust for an exhibition at Elizabeth Bay House, June – August 1981. See also the appendix to Dr Lionel Gilbert's publication entitled *Mr Macleay's Elizabeth Bay Garden*. Canberra. 2000

public movement which sought to raise funds for the acquisition of *Elizabeth Bay House* and the grounds fronting it. Prior to this correspondence, a petition signed by residents, ratepayers and property owners of the area had been submitted to Council urging this action. However, World War II intervened, and such action was put on hold for its duration.

Then, on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1946, Sydney City Council approved in principle the concept of securing a strip of land that would extend all the way along the waterfront of Elizabeth Bay for 'park purposes'. (Poignantly, this harked back to the public open space reservation there during Governor Macquarie's time.) It was proposed that this foreshore band of public open space would be approximately twenty to forty metres wide. A plan dated 1<sup>st</sup> April 1948, prepared by Sydney City Council, indicated this intent, identifying lots 4, 5, and 6 east of Elizabeth Bay House and the above mentioned linear park along the foreshore as spaces intended for public reserves (Figure 10). Of additional interest in the 1948 plan is the demarcation of five lots of land between Billyard Avenue and the foreshore, outlined as the area which would need to be retained as open space east of those lots upon which the new reserve was to be built, should uninterrupted views from it to the harbour be required.

Following a note by the Town Clerk on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1948 regarding the possible purchase of the property known as *Elizabeth Bay House*, together with the land it stands upon and lots 4, 5 and 6 across Onslow Street, Council's Valuation Branch outlined details of the residence on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1948. The House was described as being an apartment residential house containing fifteen separate unit flatettes (into which it had been divided by its new owner, Mrs. Evangeline Murray, after her purchase of it in 1940). The dimensions of the land upon which the house stood was approximately 106 feet 9 ½ inches x 108 feet and was expressed as a 'complete island block'. The gross rentals received at the property were £1,904 per annum at that time and the estimate of the land and improvements in its use at the time was given as £16,000.

It would appear that by the time of Council's resolution of 9<sup>th</sup> August 1948, by which initial formal approval was given for the creation of the reserve, the proposals for creating a linear public park along the foreshore, of retaining the five lots below lots 4, 5 and 6 along the harbour, and of purchasing *Elizabeth Bay House* itself, had been abandoned.

Council's 1948 resolution expressed approval to:

- (a) *the acceptance of the offer of Elizabeth Bay Estates Pty. Ltd. to dispose of land situated at the corner of Onslow Avenue and Billyard Avenue and known as Lots 4, 5 and 6 Onslow Avenue to the Council for park purposes for the sum of £16,720, and*
- (b) *application being made for the approval of the Governor to the raising of a loan in the amount of £20,720 (representing £16,720 as the cost of the acquisition of the*

*land and £4,000 as the estimated cost of the treatment of the area) for the purpose of financing the proposal.*

A plan dated 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1948 (fig. 11) was produced by Sydney City Council showing the extent of the land - lots 4, 5 and 6 - purchased by them for the establishment of the public reserve.

### **Site Development**

An early sketch design for the layout of the Arthur McElhone Reserve (Figure 12) was prepared on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1950. It included very limited planting in the central lawn area, a proposed pool with statuary in the north-west sector, a suggested stair configuration, and the location of the main plantings around the north-western and south-eastern edges of the site. These plantings were kept to the extremities of the reserve so as not to disturb the viewing cone from the House. At the same time, a schematic bird's eye view of this design was produced (Figure 13). It is not known who produced this initial design proposal, but it would have been prepared in the newly-established Parks and Gardens Section of Sydney City Council.

The first stage of design development for the reserve was prepared by Sydney City Council in September 1950. It included a somewhat altered layout of the reserve's paths, ponds, stepping stones and plantings from that which had been earlier suggested, and included a small circular seating zone at the south-eastern end of the Reserve. From both of the designs prepared during 1950 it is evident that the edging treatment for the ponds was intended to be lawn or informally positioned small bush rocks.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1950 Council authorised the amount of £5,700 for the completion and construction of "The Arthur McElhone Reserve". (Arthur McElhone was a former alderman of the Council who had served it well for a period of 44 years and whose dedicated service the Council wished to honour.) Through the naming of the park after a long-serving alderman, and the absence of any reference in its signage to its original creator, Alexander Macleay, it would seem that Council aldermen saw it as simply another municipal park to adorn their city.

Stage two in the Reserve's design development comprised a series of plans including detailed water reticulation drawings (Figure 14) which appear to have been produced immediately following the second 1950 design. The pool alignments and stair configurations shown in these drawings were manipulated slightly from how they appeared in the coloured master plan drawing prepared in September 1950. The idea of having a circular seating area at the south-eastern end of the reserve was carried through into these documentation drawings. However, ultimately it was never adopted, as tall screen planting was more appropriate in that zone, given the close proximity of the tall neighbouring apartment buildings that would have directly overlooked it.

The third stage in the master plan development for the McElhone Reserve occurred with the production of the final plan prepared by Council on 19<sup>th</sup> January 1953 (Figure 15). By this stage, the detailing of the pools, the layout of the paths and stepping stones, and the location of planted areas had become better articulated. In this scheme, more planting was introduced to the central area, and that proposed originally around the park's north-western edge was much reduced.

Following a report by the Director of Parks on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1953, an additional £4,500 was approved by Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1953 for a continuation of works on the reserve, due to the full expenditure of the original allocation of funds on work to that date.

### **The early role of Sydney City Council in Park Design**

The decision to undertake the design and construction of this reserve was made in the context of an intention by the Council, actively fostered by its Town Clerk, to improve the parkland and public reserves in the city after the long period of austerity during World War II. The first expressions of the need to improve environmental quality were being made, and the Town Clerk and a few senior officials made an overseas tour to ascertain how other cities were managing their public parks. On their return, it was decided to set up a Parks and Gardens Section within the Council, and that it should be headed by a qualified landscape architect or designer.<sup>12</sup> According to Lynch, the title of 'landscape architect' was not actually used at that time, but the intention to engage a professional landscape designer was there.

In the event, the new Parks and Gardens Section was headed by Architect Clary Garth. Several draftsmen, horticulturalists and technicians were engaged between 1949 and 1951. None of the original senior officers were landscape architects, but some had had architectural training.

### **The role of Ilmar Berzins**

One of the first draftsmen engaged by the Parks and Gardens Section was Ilmar Berzins (Figure 16) a formally trained landscape architect who had migrated to Australia from Latvia in 1948<sup>13</sup>. Berzins had trained first as a horticulturalist and subsequently as a landscape architect at Riga, in Latvia, followed by further training at Hanover in Germany. As Australia had no university courses in Landscape Architecture until the early 1970s, there were no Landscape Architects available locally for the Council to recruit. Consequently, their decision to engage Berzins is said by Lynch to have been the first employment of a formally trained landscape

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<sup>12</sup> Leonard Lynch, Director of Clouston and a former officer of that Division in the early 1980s. Personal communication with Warwick Mayne-Wilson

<sup>13</sup> According to his widow, Berzins paid off his two year bond (for his fares) by working in an **Email** factory in the town of Orange. While in Orange, Berzins already began to design gardens and public places in the district, including the golf course at Orange. On completion of his service, Berzins moved to Sydney in 1950. Sylvia Berzins, personal communication with Warwick Mayne-Wilson, Jan. 2001.

architect in Sydney and the first to be engaged by a local council in Australia, making Sydney City Council the trail-blazer in this field.

It is not known precisely when Berzins joined them as a senior draftsman, but it is clear that he was working there in 1951. According to John Sweaney, who joined the Council in 1950 and transferred to the Parks Division in 1952, Berzins was already working on the detail of the Reserve in 1951 and that he “had a major hand in it”.<sup>14</sup> There is also little doubt, given the explicit recognition within the Council and the community generally about the importance of the views between Elizabeth Bay House and the Harbour, and the increasing community regard for the House itself, that Berzins and his team would have been conscious of the history and significance of the site.

If Berzins did not explicitly seek to relate his design to Alexander Macleay’s 19<sup>th</sup> century elegant house and garden, he certainly understood the need to retain the generous lawn forecourt as a platform for the enjoyment of the important two-way views between the Harbour and the House. This is exemplified in the retention of flowing lawns on much of the site, the small-scale, limited plantings in the centre of it, and the larger shrubs and trees around the perimeter.<sup>15</sup> He also, by specifying bush sandstone rocks for the rockeries and some for the edging for the ponds was recognising the underlying Hawkesbury sandstone benching of the site, and seeking to integrate his new park with this inherent topography as sympathetically as possible.

However, it is less clear that Berzins perceived a need to relate his new park in any more specific way to *Elizabeth Bay House*. His proposed plantings between the seating along the original retaining wall below Onslow Avenue, and on the road verge above it – neither of which were carried through - suggest this was not an intention. This is supported by the absence of steps leading down into the park from the House’s portico opposite.<sup>16</sup> The presence of the substantial roadway of Onslow Avenue between the park and the House no doubt discouraged such a linkage, and there was no proposal to remove it. This formal, physical disconnection remains today, and has served to foster both a psychological disassociation and a complete separation of management responsibilities for House and Reserve.

There is possibly a Japanese influence in the small arched sandstone bridge, the use of natural rock, the addition of small ponds in irregular shapes, and controlled, small-scale plantings – all of which symbolically reproduce in the reserve, in a miniaturized

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<sup>14</sup> John Sweaney, personal communication with Warwick Mayne-Wilson, Jan. 2001

<sup>15</sup> Sweaney confirms that apart from the Azeleas used for hedge effects, and tall plants on the south-eastern end, only low plants (such as *Cotoneaster horizontalis*) and groundcovers were used in the rockery areas and around the ponds.

<sup>16</sup> However, both Berzins and Sweaney were involved in selecting and designing the planting around the House itself in the early 1980s, based on research done on the species of plants which Macleay used and how the garden had been laid out.

scale, the essential natural elements present in the broader landscape in which the site is set.

### **An appreciation of Berzins**

In a short appreciation of his work, Tempe McGowan considered that “Berzins’ socially responsive designs provide an alternative model for [in favour of] small-scale interventions in the public domain”<sup>17</sup>.

‘He held the passionate belief that all people need to enjoy nature and that nature, in turn, can ameliorate the human temperament. His strategy was to create gardens and introduce tree-planting programmes defining council boundaries with poplar trees and trying out diverse species of trees – all of this long before the ecological/environmental movement got into full swing in the 1960s/70s.

His garden designs may appear “un-Australian” for that period. In post-World War II Australia, while public swimming pools and ovals were being built into Victorian era parks, Berzins was crafting nature into clear, articulated places. His designs were socially responsive and typical of trends in international, modernist design culture in the way he created little arcadian retreats in the city wilderness.’

McGowan wrote that Berzins’ drawings of “outdoor rooms” appear as “virtual gardens”.... His public gardens are experienced as lyric retreats with layers of subtlety that contrast with the austerity of the architecture of the time”. Referring specifically to the McElhone Reserve, McGowan commented that

‘against the high density massing of tall apartment buildings . . . the design provides a quiet, green refuge and an opportunity to feel and touch grass, watch carp in the pools, and look out across the most beautiful harbour in the world . . . These creations are enclosures with overlays of contemplative or reflective elements – water, diverse plant species, flowers, intricate walling or paving – woven together’. (p.58)

Leonard Lynch has provided another perspective. According to Lynch, Berzins was influenced by the landscape style of Christopher Tunnard<sup>18</sup>, a Canadian-born landscape architect who lectured at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design in the late 1930s and 1940s and was author of the seminal work *Gardens in the Modern Landscape*, published in 1938. According to Peter Walker<sup>19</sup>

‘Tunnard was sympathetic to many of the ideals of Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and other European modernists . . . but what distinguished him from his modernist colleagues was a pragmatic, unsentimental interest in historic gardens and landscapes and his appreciation of the qualities of order, unified composition, and artistic expression in great gardens of any era and culture. He also believed in the sort of progress – artistic, scientific, technological, and social – that was based on an understanding of both past

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.56

<sup>18</sup> Tunnard was Canadian-born and lectured at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design in the late 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>19</sup> Walker, P. & Simo, M. 1994. *Invisible Gardens – the Search for Modernism in the American Landscape*. MIT Press, Cambridge.

achievements and present opportunities. Even centuries-old historic landscapes could be preserved nearly intact and intensively developed.’ ( Pp.149-150)

Coming from Riga, a city which will be celebrating its 800 year anniversary in 2001, Berzins would have been particularly attuned to Tunnard’s approach. It was certainly one which he applied to the Reserve in front of *Elizabeth Bay House*.

While agreeing that Berzins had introduced a new style, Lynch described its trademark characteristics as “whimsical gardenesque”, with “amoebic shapes” and “bookleaf sandstone walls” to protect vegetative edges. Prof. Weirick has remarked on the influence of Luytens and Jekyll in Berzins’ reliance on an underlying architectural layout (also a strong modernist approach), with the use of raised beds, built of bookleaf sandstone, but with soft planting overspilling them.<sup>20</sup> Both Lynch and Weirick noted that during the 1950s, Sydney City Council had a lot of highly qualified stone masons, who had a high involvement in the actual execution of landscape works and were given a fairly free hand to decide on finishes.<sup>21</sup>

Berzins was also one of the founding members of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, and had a long and distinguished career in Sydney City Council, rising to head of the Parks and Recreation Division, from which he finally retired in 1986<sup>22</sup>. During his 35 years of service, he designed or directly supervised the design of a large number of public parks within the Sydney city area, the most notable of which are the Sandringham Gardens within Hyde Park, the Fitzroy Gardens in Kings Cross, the Fragrance Garden (beside the former Blind Institute), the Chessboard garden in Hyde Park, Macquarie Place, and the grounds for Commonwealth Steel at Unanderra.

### **Early site management**

According to Sweaney, the Reserve was given no.1 priority within the Parks and Gardens Department, to be maintained at the highest level. Only their top gardeners, who were dedicated to their work, were permitted to work on it. During the period of the Waratah Festival in the early 1970s, the Reserve won several gardening awards, sponsored by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, for the excellence of its design and plantings, augmented by showy displays of annuals in the front of some of its beds. That, combined with the launching by Lord Mayor Leo Port of the “Greening of Sydney” campaign in 1972, encouraged more extensive and larger plantings in the Reserve. This lush, more exuberant planting was much loved by many, partly because it gave an increased sense of comfort and privacy, but it also largely obscured views to Elizabeth Bay House from the central garden room of the Reserve.

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<sup>20</sup> James Weirick, Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of New South Wales, personal communication with Warwick Mayne Wilson.

<sup>21</sup> Lynch, personal communication to Warwick Mayne Wilson, Jan. 2001.

<sup>22</sup> McGowan, Tempe. 1998 (Ilmar Berzins) HUMANISING THE CITY in MONUMENT 25, published in Sydney.

Berzins' design has been incrementally altered, with much of the vegetation pruned back, and some of it replaced with smaller species. While the reduction in plant size and volume is consistent with Berzins' original design intentions, there has also been some loss of shade, screening and privacy. This has led to public criticism, to the point where Council recognized the need for a study to assess its essential character, and advise on how that should be maintained into the future. Mayne-Wilson and Associates were commissioned by the City to prepare a study in 2001.

#### **D. Criteria**

##### **7. Assessment under heritage Council criteria of state significance**

###### *A. It is important in the course or pattern of the cultural or natural history of NSW*

Although the site gains much of its historical significance from its 19<sup>th</sup> century use, it also has historical significance as one of the first public parks designed and constructed by Sydney City Council after World War II as part of its policy to enhance the environment of the city and its environs adopted in 1948.

###### *B. It has a strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons of importance in the cultural or natural history of NSW.*

The terraced platforms of the McElhone Reserve have a high degree of historical significance as the centrepiece of a landscape composition created between 1827 and 1835 above Elizabeth Bay as a forecourt to the elegant House of that name by Alexander Macleay, who as Colonial Secretary of NSW, was one of the most senior officials in the colonial administration at that time.

Having been used for social events by the Macleay family even before the House was built, and as the centerpiece of the famous landscaped garden, the forecourt to *Elizabeth Bay House* had social significance for its special association with the colonial elite.

The Reserve has significance through its association with the work of Ilmar Berzins, the first qualified landscape architect to be appointed to the Council (and in Sydney) in 1950/51. It is one of the early park designs of Berzins, who over a career of 35 years designed many of the best-known parks in Sydney and rose to the position of Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation that Council.

The Reserve has a strong and special association with the resident community of Elizabeth Bay for whom it is their principal local park and haven for passive recreation and reflection. It is also held in esteem by the wider community, reflected for example in its use as a setting for wedding photos and as a stopping point for tourist buses.

*C. It is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW.*

The composition of *Elizabeth Bay House* and its forecourt has aesthetic significance for demonstrating the best characteristics of 'the picturesque', a landscape style much valued by the upper classes and landed gentry of Britain in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The grassed forecourt was designed to set off the House and enable it to be viewed from the Harbour as an imposing marine villa in a picturesque setting. The forecourt also has aesthetic value for facilitating the enjoyment of views to the north-east, down the Harbour past Clark Island to the Heads.

The forecourt also has significance for demonstrating a high degree of creative and technical achievement in its design and construction in this early period of settlement. The creation of generous platforms through skilful earthworks and terracing, the clever insertion of stairways, and the elegant design of these and the retaining walls were notable achievements at the time, and were much admired.

The Reserve demonstrates a high degree of creative achievement in the early 1950s, recognizing its original forecourt role while creating a self-sufficient, sociable space of several grassed rooms, furnished with ponds, rich perimeter plantings, and sandstone stairways, paths and bridges. Over the years, with maturing vegetation, these have melded into a particularly satisfying aesthetic composition.

The Reserve also has value through demonstrating the principal characteristics of municipal park design in Sydney in the early post War period, and the influence, through Berzins, of some aspects of the modernist movement in landscape design, as distinct from the traditional Victorian/Beaux Arts designs.

Recent research demonstrates that the house is perfectly oriented and aligned to the position of the sunrise at the winter solstice or shortest day of the year - so that the rising sun bisects the house, running through the front door, out the rear door and hitting the sandstone cliff face at the rear of the house. (Malone, in "Insites", Winter 2008).

*D. It has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.*

The Reserve represents the aspirations of the Sydney community to add green space in a densely urban area; and it is evidence of moves by the local community to provide for public parks in Sydney in response to the public demand. The Elizabeth Bay community have strong connections to the Reserve.

*E. It has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the cultural or natural history of NSW.*

There is low archaeological potential as the site has been reshaped and changed since European occupation.

*F. It possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the cultural or natural history of NSW.*

The Reserve possesses a rare combination of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape styles and elements that – as the recent destruction of several parks designed by Berzins demonstrates - have become endangered.

The continued existence of the grassed forecourt of such an important early colonial mansion so close to the city is now rare and constitutes an important aspect of NSW's cultural history. It and the House retain the integrity of their key attributes, although only fragments of the famous gardens that once surrounded them still exist.

*G. It is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places / environments in NSW*

The Reserve possesses characteristics of a class of public park / reserve that was made in the context of a desire by the Sydney Council to improve the parkland and public reserves in the city after the long period of austerity during World War II. The first expressions of the need to improve environmental quality were being made, and the Town Clerk and a few senior official made an overseas tour to ascertain how other cities were managing their public parks. On their return, it was decided to set up a Parks and Gardens Section within the Council, and that it should be led by a qualified landscape architect or designer.

## **F Listings**

### **8. Existing heritage listings**

- Yes Sydney Local environment plan (LEP)
- No Sydney Regional environmental plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005
- No LEP- Conservation area
- No Draft LEP – Draft heritage item
- No Draft LEP Draft Conservation area
- No State heritage register
- Yes National Trust Register
- No Aboriginal heritage information management system Department of Environment and Conservation)
- No Royal Australian Institute of Architects Register of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture
- No National shipwreck database
- No Engineers Australia list
- No National Heritage List
- No Commonwealth Heritage List
- No Register of the national Estate
- No NSW agency heritage and conservation section 170 register

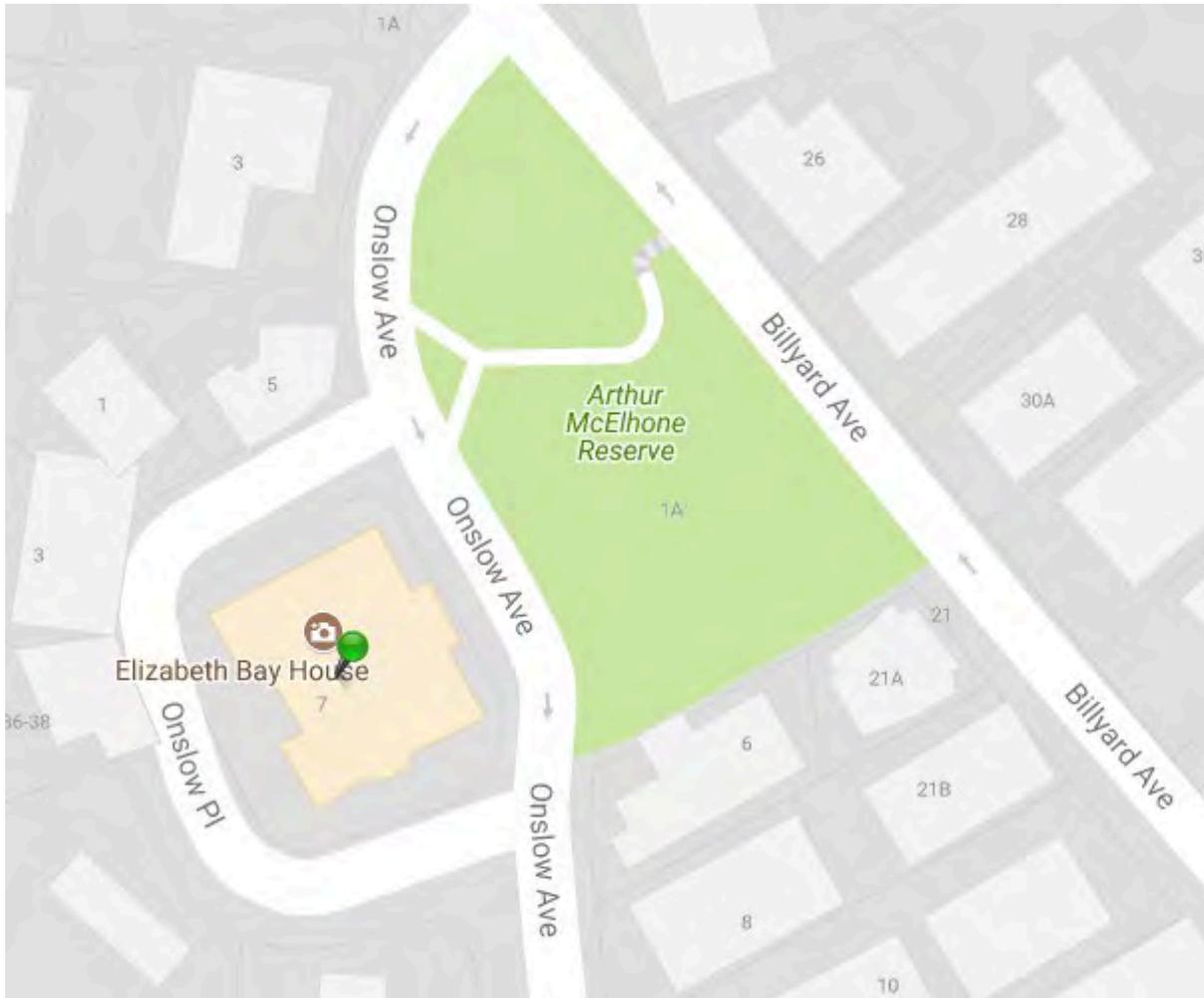
#### Other:

- Yes Australian Institute of Landscape Architects NSW Non-statutory Significant Landscapes List (ANNSLL).

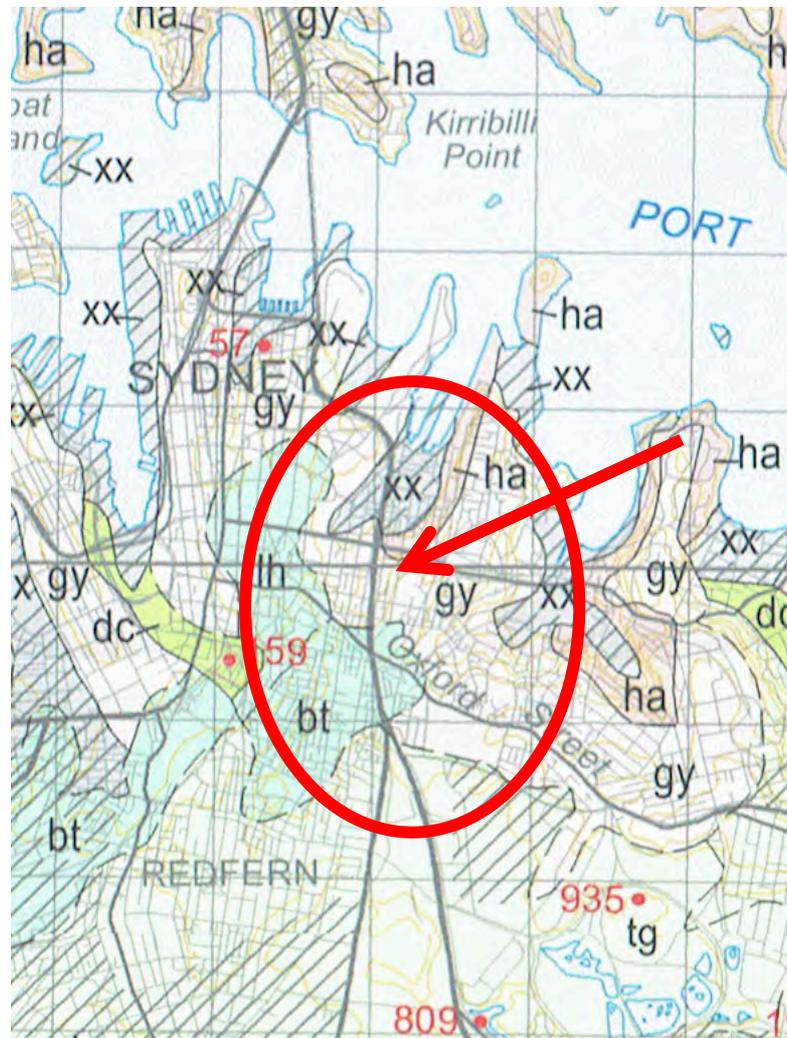
## G. Images / Photographs



Aerial photo from *SixMaps* showing the Elizabeth Bay House + landscape setting (including Arthur McElhone Reserve). The group is outlined in red and comprises several land parcel. The existing SHR curtilage for Elizabeth Bay House is outlined in a white dashed line. [Accessed October, 2017].



Plan of Arthur McElhone Reserve. Source: SixMaps accessed October 2017.



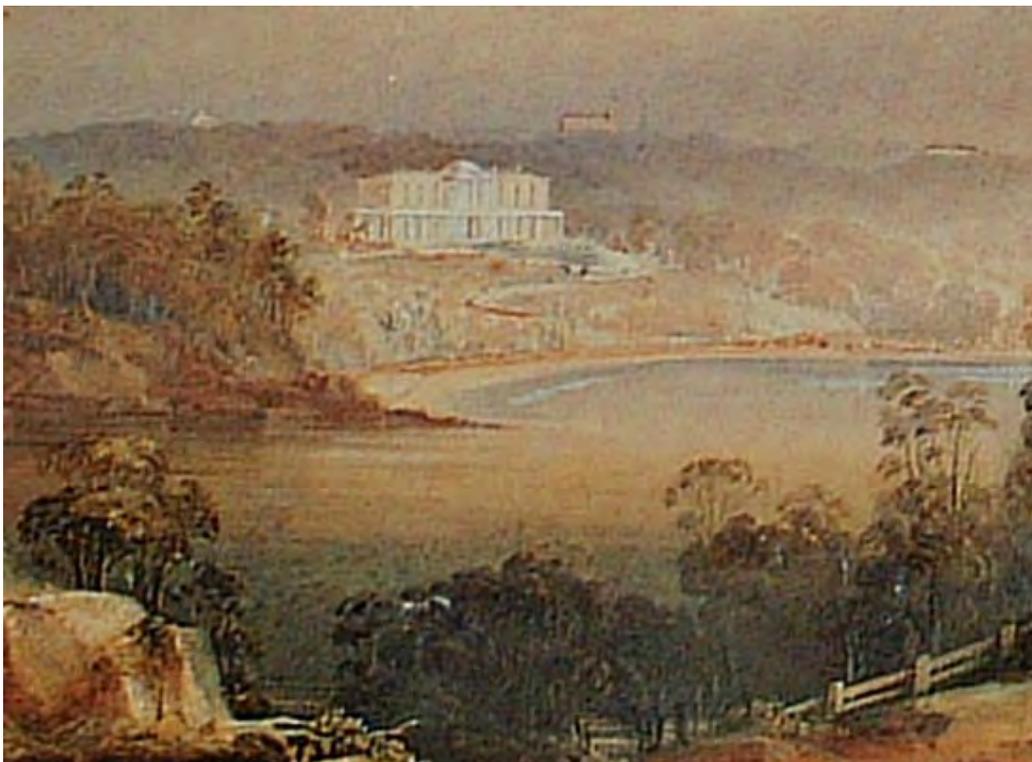
A portion of Soils Identification Map of Sydney, showing detail of Arthur McElhone Reserve (circled in red) and environs. Note 'gy' denotes Gynea and xx disturbed soil land – much of the foreshore to the north east of Arthur McElhone Reserve is noted as 'xx' where the foreshore has been reclaimed.

Source: G.A Chapman and C.L Murphy, *Soil Landscapes of the Sydney 1:100 000 Sheet*, Soil Conservation Service of N.S.W., Sydney, 1989.



The huts of Elizabeth Town on the shore of Elizabeth Bay / Gurrain, 1821-23. Source: Mitchell Library, SLNSW – PXC 459, image 42). <http://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/elizabeth-town/>

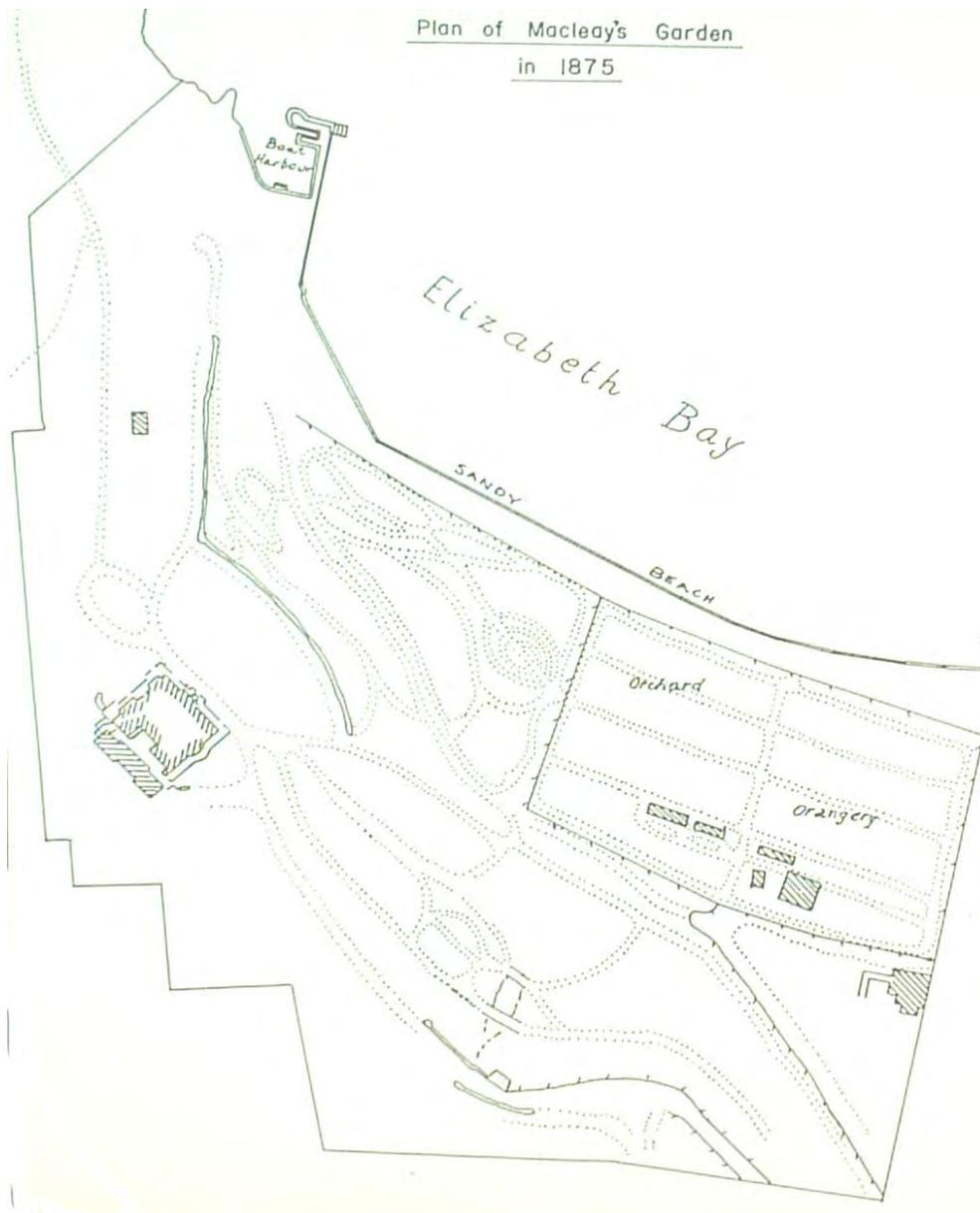
22 October 2017



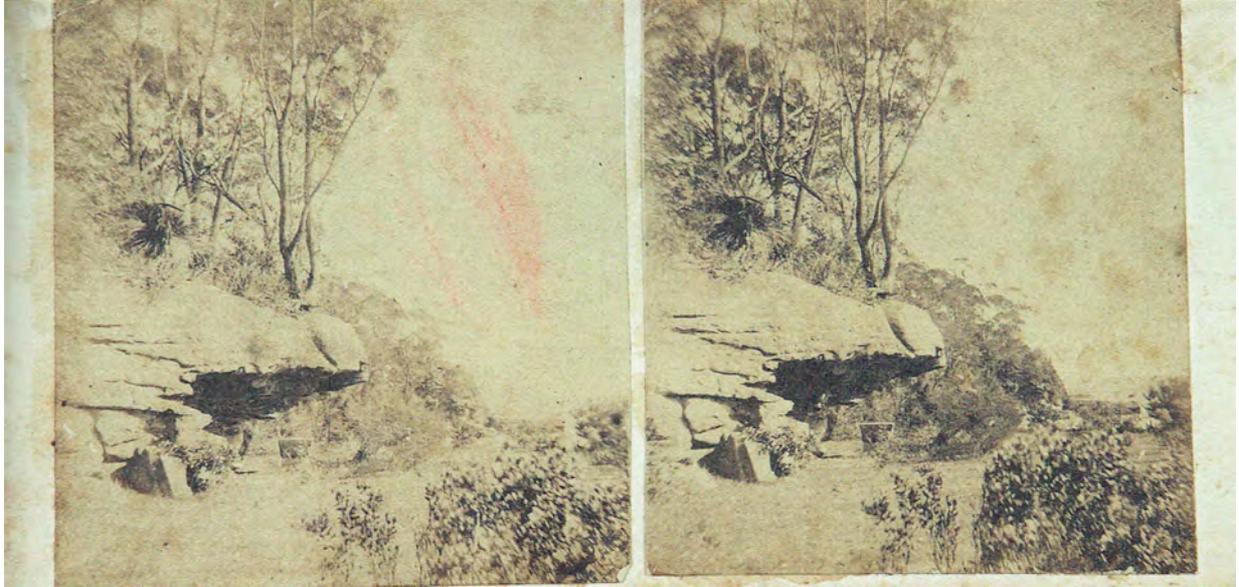
All of the early paintings of Elizabeth Bay House from the late 1830s indicate that the immediate foreground to the mansion was always maintained as an open expanse of lawn, kept clear of any plantings that would interrupt its presentation as a marine villa or obscure key views to and from the Harbour. The many paintings of the property produced by Conrad Martens – such as this view – show the picturesque setting, where the house sits grandly on a platform at the summit of a sweeping lawn, as did so many 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century mansions in Britain.



Pjot from Darling Point Wharf. An attempt to illustrate the 1830s view. The street wall of development to the west of Yarranabbe Road makes it impossible to source an accurate viewpoint. (



A plan of the Macleay property produced ca. 1875 by surveyor F.H.Reuss indicates that the area immediately in front of the mansion was not crisscrossed by paths and did not support elaborate garden bed designs. It is evident that the patterning of the remainder of Macleay's grounds and from the accounts of visitors to the property, that most of Macleay's horticultural pursuits were carried out in zones beyond the mansion's immediate environs. The 'botanical' gardens, orchard and orangery were located to the north and east, on the alluvial flats near the edge of the bay, while the woodland walks were mostly in bushland north-west of the mansion. Source: 2001 Heritage Study



Photograph, attributed to Sir William Macarthur ca.1865, shows that some of the native trees were retained close to the natural cave below the lawn forecourt wall and along the walks to the west. Macleay, in accordance with the precepts of the picturesque, retained a portion of the native vegetation to frame his residence, both when viewed from the Harbour and as a framing, foreground element in the broad northerly view down to the Harbour from *Elizabeth Bay House*. This Source: 2001 Heritage Study.



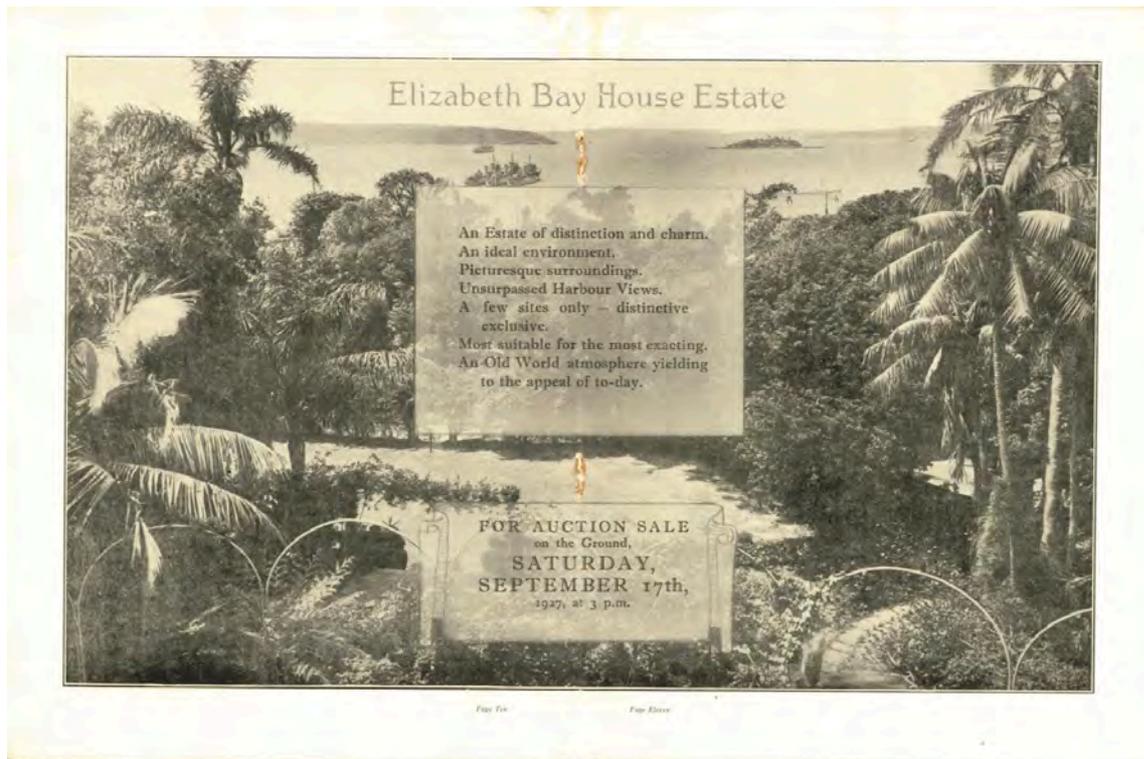
The shelter on Billyard Avenue is a rare survivor of the Elizabeth Bay garden. The natural grotto was sketched by Martens and photographed by Alexander Macleay Onslow in 1858. It has since been given a pillar and decorative stonework as part of the Ilmar Berzins design of the Arthur McElhone Reserve.



Image of Elizabeth Bay House, Sydney, New South Wales, ca.1902 photographer unknown.  
<http://collection.hht.net.au/firsthhtpictures/fullRecordPicture.jsp?recnoListAttr=recnoList&recno=34392>  
- accessed October 2017

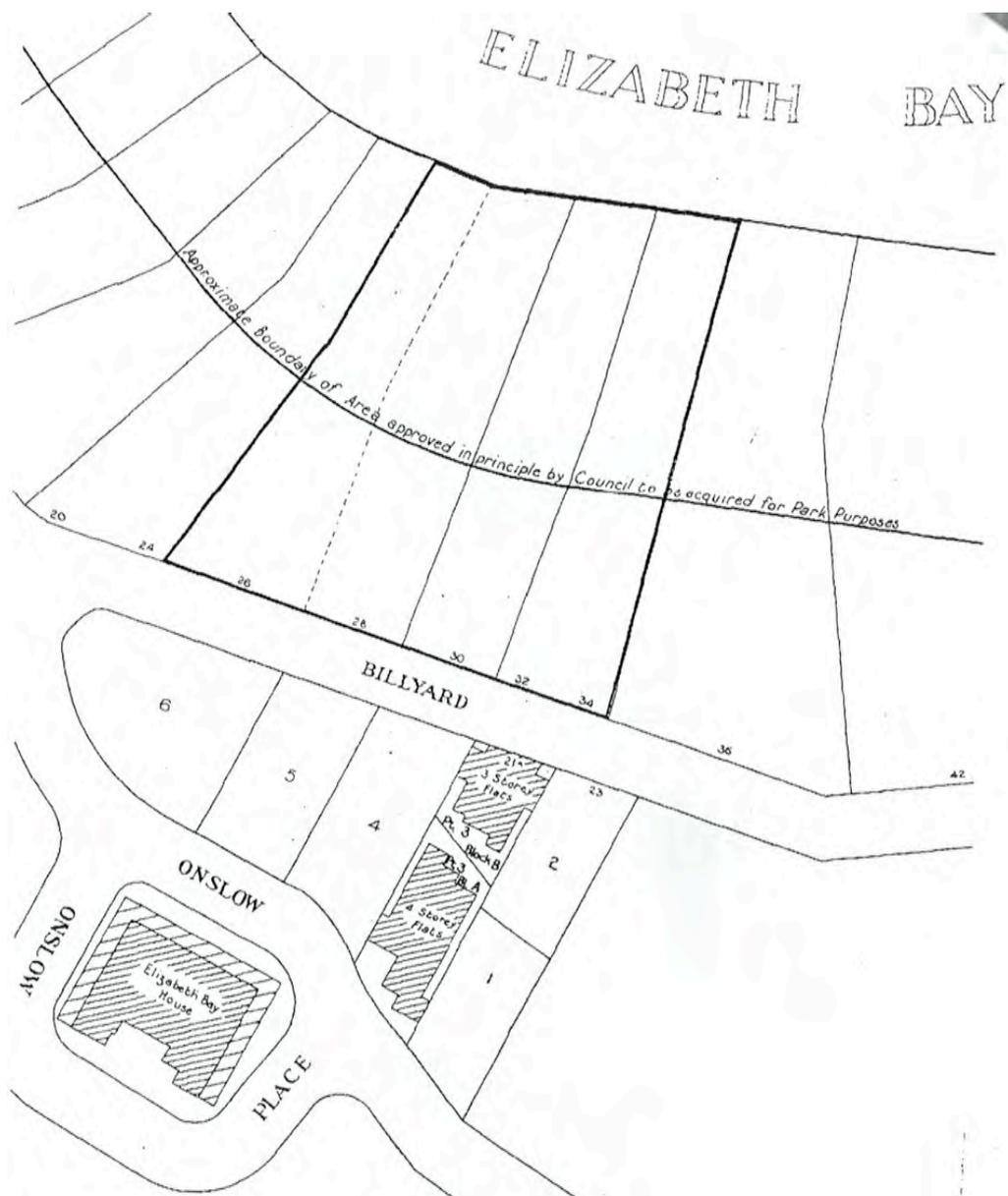


Image of Elizabeth Bay House, Sydney, New South Wales, 18 February 2018 (J Quoye)



Flyer advertising the sale of the Elizabeth Bay House Estate: presenting the residence and 15 allotments of Sydney's greatest residential subdivision by Public Auction sale on the ground, Saturday, 17 Sept., 1927 at 3 p.m. [http://collection.hht.net.au/images\\_linked/47801.jpg](http://collection.hht.net.au/images_linked/47801.jpg) accessed October 2017.





Plan dated 1 April 1948, indicating blocks of land (lots 4,5 & 6) that were used for the establishment of Arthur McElhone Reserve. Note the lots closer to the water were identified as being important for purchase if comprehensive views and access to the Harbour from the Reserve were considered to be vital in the Park's creation. In the end, they were not purchased, although it is significant that the importance of retaining the two-way views was recognised. Source: 2001 Draft Heritage Study.

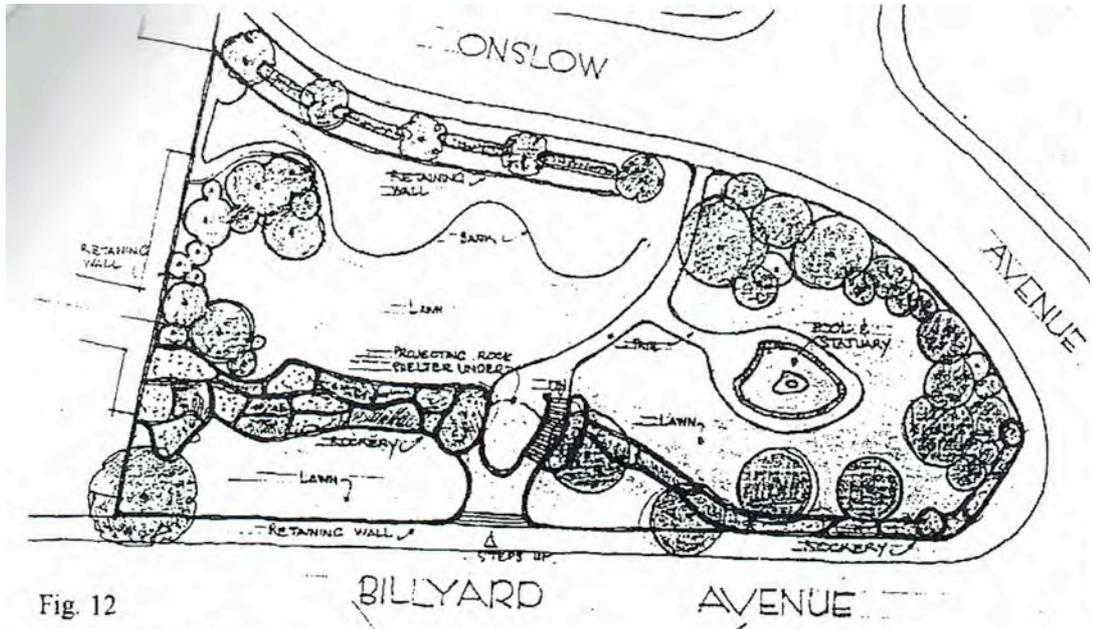
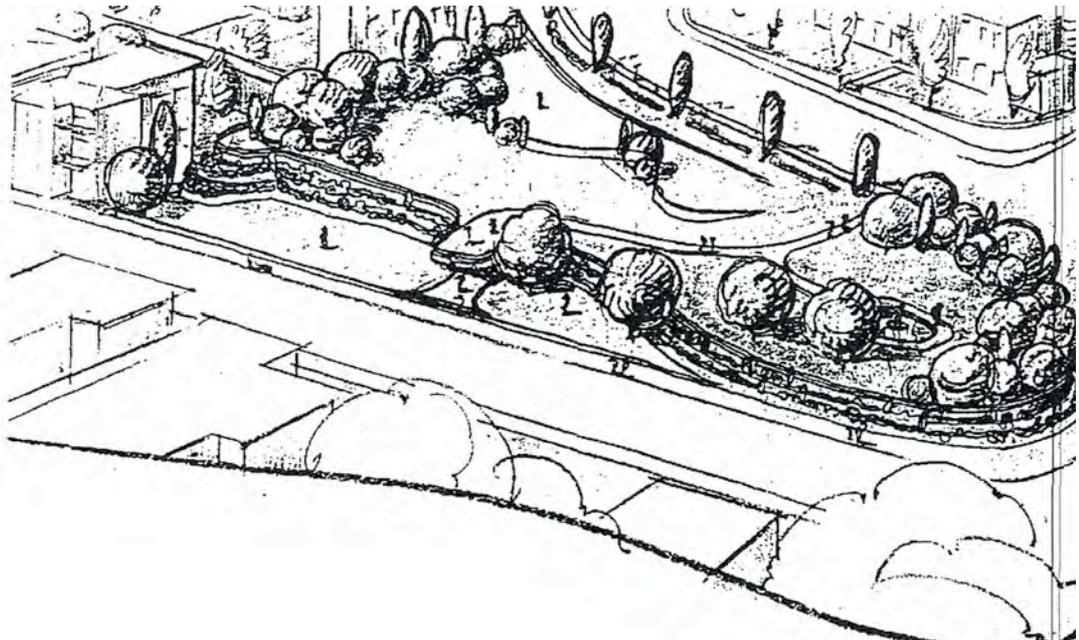
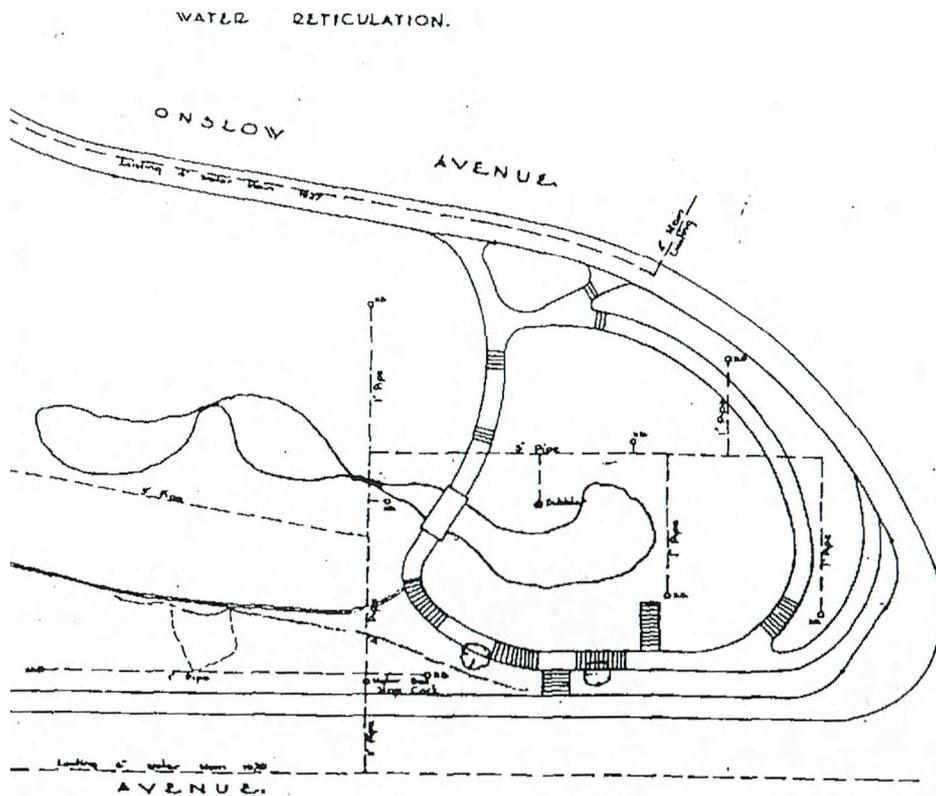


Fig. 12

Plan of the first sketch for the layout of the Reserve, named in honour of former long-serving Councillor, Arthur McElhone, drawn on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1950. Note the very limited planting in the central lawn area, the linear rockery along the rock bench, the proposed pool & statuary, the stair configuration, and the proposed heavy plantings around the north-western and south-eastern edges of the site, well to the edges of the viewing cones from and to the House. Source: 2001 Heritage Study Mayne-Wilson and Associates.



Schematic bird's-eye view of the McElhone Reserve based on the plan produced in February 1950 for its layout. In this original design for the reserve, it is clear that limited planting only was suggested within the main lawn area, so as to preserve a broad, uninterrupted cone of vision out to the Harbour. The rockery was intended to mediate the steep rockbench slope. Source: 2001 Heritage Study Mayne-Wilson and Associates.



Plan of water reticulation appears to have immediately followed the second 1950 design. The pool alignments shown here were manipulated slightly from the coloured master plan drawing, as were stair locations. Note that the idea of having the circular seating area at the south-eastern end of the Reserve was carried through into these documentation drawings. However, it was not adopted ultimately - probably as tall screen planting was more appropriate here, given the close proximity of the tall apartment buildings. Source: 2001 Heritage Study Mayne-Wilson and Associates.



Ilmar Berzins, Sydney City Council's Landscape Architect and Designer of the Reserve seen on site ca.1953: Source Mrs Sylvia Berzins 2001 Heritage Study

## F. Author

Primary author of this form

James Quoyle

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Signed by Author

James Quoyle

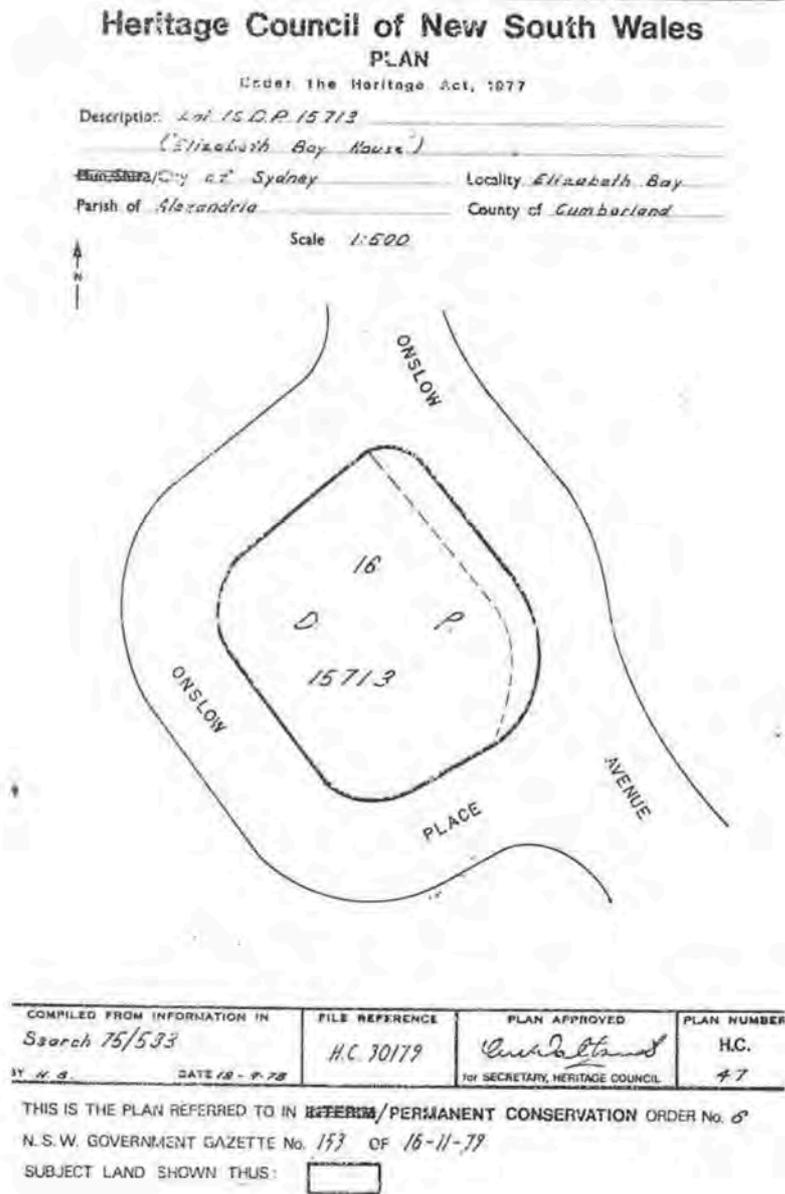
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E. Additional photographs, maps or other images

# Elizabeth Bay House

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State Heritage Curtilage map for Elizabeth Bay House SHR item 00006



State Heritage Curtilage map for Elizabeth Bay House Grotto site and works SHR item 00116



Image of Elizabeth Bay House Grotto site and works SHR item 00116. (J Quoye 2018)



Image of Interior rear wall of Elizabeth Bay House Grotto site and works SHR item 00116, 1835 engraved into the stone at the top, designed by John Verge. (J Quoye 2018)



Image of Sandringham Gardens, Hyde Park, Sydney, by Ilmar Berzins. (James Quoyle 16 December 2017)