

Changing Perspectives in Australian Archaeology, Part III

Hidden in Plain View—the Sydney Aboriginal Historical Places Project

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ABSTRACT. Post-contact Aboriginal archaeology is a relatively new but growing discipline in Australia, though most work has been focussed on non-urban areas. A scoping study initiated in 2006 sought to determine the viability of an historical and archaeological research project in Sydney, Australia's oldest and largest urban centre. Such research has not been previously attempted in a systematic way, due to the assumed high impact of European settlement on the region's post contact Aboriginal archaeology. The study has shown this not to be the case, combining the records of previous archaeological and historical research to create a spatial database of 280 post-contact Aboriginal places within the Sydney region. Preliminary analysis of this data has shown some interesting trends in the location and nature of these places, which suggest further research could be of significant value to the interpretation of post-contact Aboriginal history and the nature of cross-cultural interactions in urban centres, as well as pre-contact archaeology and traditional Aboriginal life in the region. The Sydney Aboriginal Historical Places Project has been formed to progress this research in conjunction with local Aboriginal communities in the Sydney region.

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A number of post-contact Aboriginal places in Sydney are easily visible if you know what to look for. Some are remembered and still used by Aboriginal people today and a few are relatively well-known amongst the interested public (e.g., Hinkson, 2010). The vast majority, however, feature only as a brief historical reference or as an archaeological site record in a government archive. Growing interest in the post-contact Aboriginal history of Sydney reflects a realization that such research is essential to for a better understanding of the development of Sydney as a city and as the largest and oldest urban centre in Australia, and follows a more general trend to incorporate Aboriginal history into broader historical narratives (Curthoys, 2008). Although archaeological data can provide an important spatial and physical aspect to that history, they have largely been ignored. Historical Aboriginal places warrant further investigation on these grounds alone,

but can also answer questions about pre-contact archaeology and the nature of traditional Aboriginal culture in the region. They are also valued by Aboriginal people as tangible proof of the survival of Aboriginal people through several centuries of European occupation, and deserve the same protection as pre-contact Aboriginal archaeological "sites", which also require research.

Despite these things, most Aboriginal historical places have not been investigated due to the difficulty of collating the disparate source material as well as the nature of archaeological training and heritage management practice in Australia. More so than in more remote areas, post-contact archaeology in urban centres requires the disciplines of history and archaeology; however, most archaeologists are not trained or experienced in both disciplines. Hence, few have attempted, or been capable of, integrating the historical