

A respected scientist

Russian scientist and explorer Nikolai Nikolaevich de Miklouho-Maclay came to Australia in 1878 and set about convincing the scientific community and government of the importance of building a research station at Camp Cove.



National Library of Australia

Maclay was considered an authority on marine animals, particularly sponges and sharks. He had carried out research in the Canary Islands, Malaya, Siam (Thailand), the East Indies and Micronesia. In 1871 he was the first European to live among natives of the north east coast of New Guinea at Astrolabe Bay.

During 1879 he was invited by naturalist, William Macleay, to live in Elizabeth Bay House and use a small laboratory there. He also spent considerable time at the Australian Museum.

The NSW Government provided 300 pounds to build the station and Maclay raised the remainder of the money through donations.

In 1884 Maclay married Margaret Clarke, the widowed daughter of five times Premier of NSW, Sir John Robertson, who lived nearby at the villa 'Clovelly' on Watsons Bay. Nikolai and Margeret lived in Birchgrove until the end of 1884 when they moved to reside at the Marine Biological Station.

Maclay travelled to Russia for three months in 1886, coming back to Sydney for just eight days before returning to Russia with Margaret and their two sons, Alexander and Vladimir. He became very ill and died in Russia in 1888 aged 41. He had worked at the Marine Biological Station at Camp Cove for just five years.



Plans for the future

The Sydney Harbour Federation Trust was set up to plan the future of unique lands on Sydney Harbour, including the Marine Biological Station, the School of Artillery on North Head, Middle Head-Georges Heights, Woolwich Dock and Parklands, Cockatoo Island, Snapper Island and Macquarie Lightstation.

Plans for these lands will conserve their heritage, protect the environment and provide maximum public access.

A Community Advisory Committee is assisting in planning for the Marine Biological Station and the other Harbour Trust lands. Public meetings, workshops, tours and exhibitions are held to encourage broad community input into the planning.

The Harbour Trust plans to conserve and use the simple dwelling as either a residence or for visitor accommodation. Regular public access would be provided through a range of activities that would interpret the building's defence heritage and association with the marine environment. The adjoining vacant land, that was once the outflow of a lagoon, could be landscaped and used for public space and to provide access to Camp Cove beach.

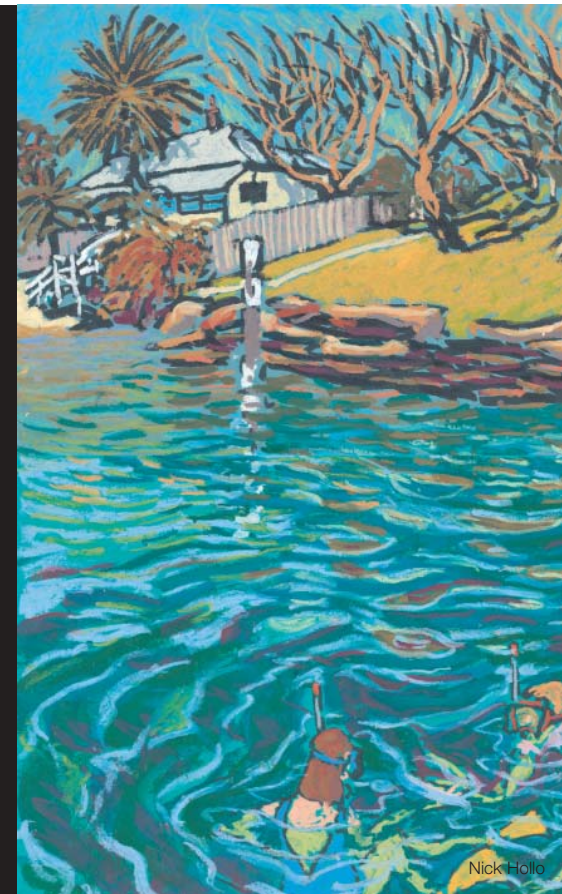
Want to know more?

To find out more about the Harbour Trust and planning for the Marine Biological Station, contact us at:

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Nick Hollo

Marine
Biological
Station
Camp Cove

Marine Biological Station



The Marine Biological Station and Camp Cove in the 1890s. State Library NSW

This colonial cottage was built on the foreshores of Sydney Harbour in 1881 for Russian scientist, Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay, to study Australia's marine environment. From the late 1880s until 2001 it was a residence for Army officers.

The Sydney Harbour Federation Trust is restoring the Marine Biological Station at 31 Pacific Street, Watsons Bay, and providing regular public access.

History

The Watsons Bay area provided abundant shellfish and other food for the local Aboriginal people, and rock engravings in the area depict fish and whales.

At Camp Cove in 1788, Governor Phillip and the First Fleet rested for a night before landing at Sydney Cove. They later established a fishery there to provide food for the new settlement.

Land in the area was granted to Edward Laing in 1793 (Laings Point) and to Robert Watson in 1801 (Watsons Bay). Subdivision in the 1850s saw the growth of a village of shanty structures, mostly home to fishermen, pilots, master mariners and merchants.

Before long Watsons Bay had become a popular place for recreation with its hotel, private zoo and The Gap nearby. By 1869 a horse drawn omnibus service was running from Circular Quay.

In 1879 land between the rocky headland and the sandy beach at Camp Cove in Watsons Bay was set aside for the Marine Biological Station. The peninsula was then bare with most of the

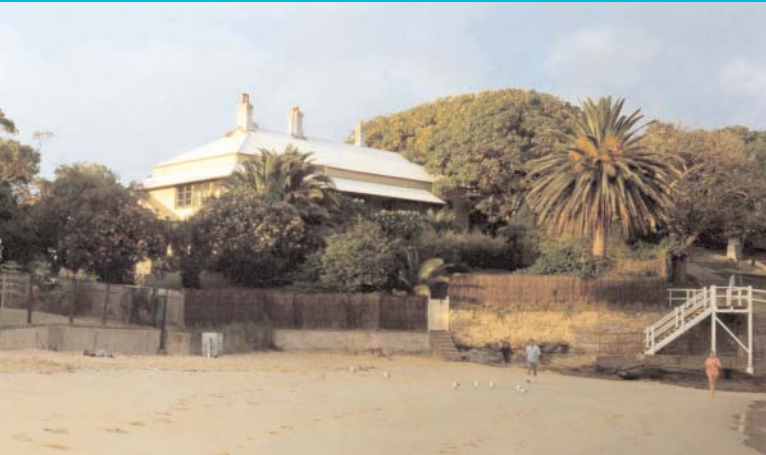
vegetation cleared by early settlers or eaten by goats that had been introduced to the area.

Prominent Sydney architect, John Kirkpatrick, designed the Marine Biological Station, essentially as a timber house with sandstone foundations. It was completed in 1881 and typical of practical colonial architecture of the time. The station, including its pressed metal walls and ornate fireplaces, remains today.

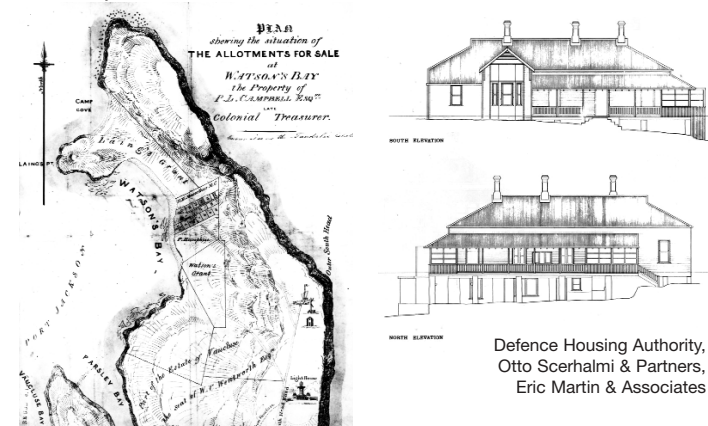
Four years after it was built, the station was acquired by the military and became known as the Green Point Quarters, associated with the School of Gunnery on South Head. Green Point (formerly Laings Point) was the site of a firing station for mines stretching across the harbour and the 1942 anti-submarine boom was anchored at this point.

Alterations were made to the station over time to suit changes in lifestyle and taste, including the addition of new bedrooms, a sitting room, bathroom, external stairway and garage. Plantings around the house reflect the tastes of various occupants and the coral trees on Green Point create a distinctive background.

The station served as Army officers' married quarters until 2001 when it was transferred to the Harbour Trust.



State Library NSW



Defence Housing Authority,
Otto Scerhalmi & Partners,
Eric Martin & Associates

The position of the station at Watsons Bay, upon the shallow basin of Port Jackson, and close to the deep water of the Pacific, with large fresh-water swamps and lagoons in the immediate neighbourhood, and a vast tract of forest country to the north which is incapable of cultivation, and must therefore remain until a far distant future in its primitive wilderness, and therefore retaining in their original condition and freedom the various forms of the Australian fauna which occupy such country, offer, when considered as a whole, a combination of opportunities for study such as can hardly be met with elsewhere.