

# Plans for the future

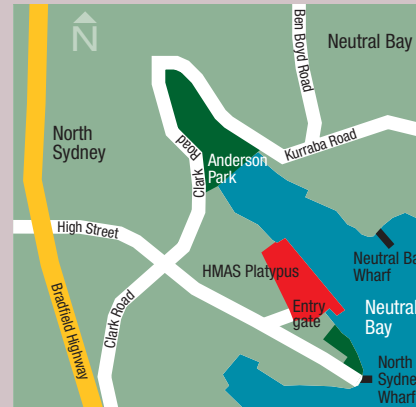


The Sydney Harbour Federation Trust has the task of returning unique harbour lands to the people.

The Harbour Trust manages North Head Artillery School, Middle Head-Georges Heights-Chowder Bay, Woolwich Dock and Parklands, Cockatoo Island, Snapper Island, Macquarie Lightstation, the former Marine Biological Station at Watsons Bay and the former HMAS Platypus site.

The Harbour Trust will prepare a comprehensive plan for the HMAS Platypus site and is encouraging community input. The plan will identify how public access can be maximised and suitable uses found for the site, while preserving its character and heritage.

Remediation activities will be carried out to remove contaminants from the site's industrial past. There are waste products from gas manufacture and residues from fuel tanks and an incinerator that were used in association with the torpedo workshops.

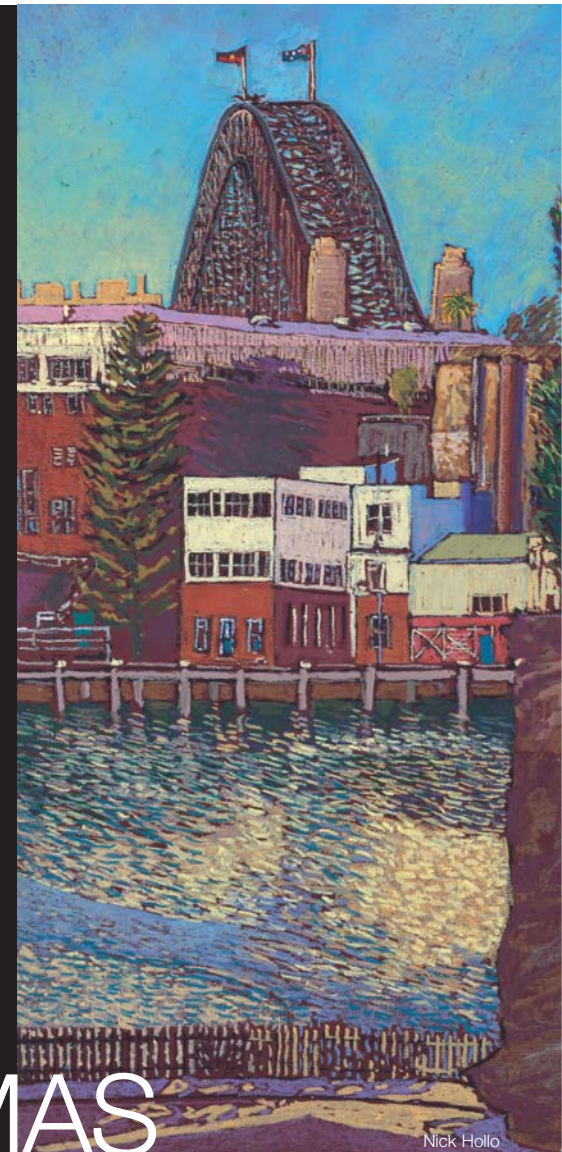


Want to know more?



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HMAS  
Platypus

Nick Hollo

# HMAS Platypus

The former HMAS Platypus site is nestled below the suburb of Neutral Bay on a quiet harbour inlet.



The Cammeraygal and Wallumedegal people inhabited the North Shore of Sydney, camping in sandstone caves and overhangs, and fishing in the harbour waters.

In 1830 whaling allotments were granted in the Neutral Bay area but it wasn't until the 1860s that the first permanent resident, Captain Josiah Miller, established a farm and cottage on the foreshore. From there, he sold fresh supplies to ships docked in Sydney Harbour. By this time, the local Aboriginal people were only occasional visitors to the area.

In the inner city, coal gas was being used to light the streets. The North Shore Gas Company purchased land fronting Neutral Bay in 1876 to build the first gasworks north of the harbour. Coal was delivered here by ship and transported around the site using a system of trolleys and overhead tramways. The coal was then burnt in 'retorts' to manufacture gas.

For the next 50 years, gasworks operated on the site, growing at several stages to meet increasing demand.

In 1882 the foreshore was extended by excavating into the sandstone cliffs behind. This created space for the retort houses and gas holding tanks required to manufacture and store large quantities of gas.



HMAS Oxley arriving at HMAS Platypus, 1967. Photo by C J Duff, State Library NSW.

A gasworks, a workshop for servicing torpedoes and a base for Australia's submarines have left an industrial site that is excavated out of the sandstone and spread over several levels.

The Sydney Harbour Federation Trust acquired HMAS Platypus in 2005 and will restore it for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Many new buildings were added between 1886 and 1888, including a boiler house, Smith's shop, condensers, purifiers and a residence.

In 1890 additional property to the south was purchased, and a new access road was built from High Street in Neutral Bay through a cutting to the waterfront.

Continued demand led to a new gasworks being established on a much larger site at Oyster Cove, Waverton in 1917. It gradually replaced the Neutral Bay gasworks which ceased manufacturing in the 1930s but continued to store and supply gas manufactured at Oyster Cove until the 1980s.

In 1942 the waterfront area was resumed for the Royal Australian Navy's Torpedo Maintenance Establishment (RANTME). Its workshops serviced Australian, US and British navies operating in the Pacific during World War II. Most of the old waterfront gasworks buildings were soon demolished and removed.

After the war ended, the torpedo workshops continued to support the British Navy's submarine fleet that was based at HMAS Penguin in Mosman and the Australian Navy's destroyer fleet.

In 1964 the Australian Government decided to establish its own submarine fleet that would be based at Neutral Bay. Buildings on the waterfront were adapted and a new wharf that would be suitable for berthing submarines was built.

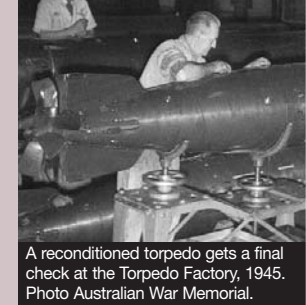
HMAS Platypus was officially commissioned in 1967 and became the base for six Royal Australian Navy submarines and many visiting submarines.

While the submarines operated from the waterfront, the Navy's torpedo workshops occupied the south of the site, and the gasworks on the upper level stored and supplied gas locally.

Natural gas soon began to replace coal gas and the Oyster Cove gasworks closed down. By the 1980s much of the equipment and machinery at Neutral Bay had been removed and the upper level was sold for the 'Iora' residential development.

In 1999 HMAS Platypus and the torpedo workshops closed down when the Commonwealth decided to relocate its submarine base to HMAS Stirling in Western Australia.

For the next six years, the Neutral Bay site lay idle while numerous proposals were debated for its future. In July 2005 the Australian Government transferred HMAS Platypus to the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust.



A reconditioned torpedo gets a final check at the Torpedo Factory, 1945. Photo Australian War Memorial.

North Shore Gas Works at Neutral Bay, 1902. Behind the collier are two retort houses built of cast iron columns with galvanised iron cladding. They are separated by a coal store. Photo courtesy of AGL.

