



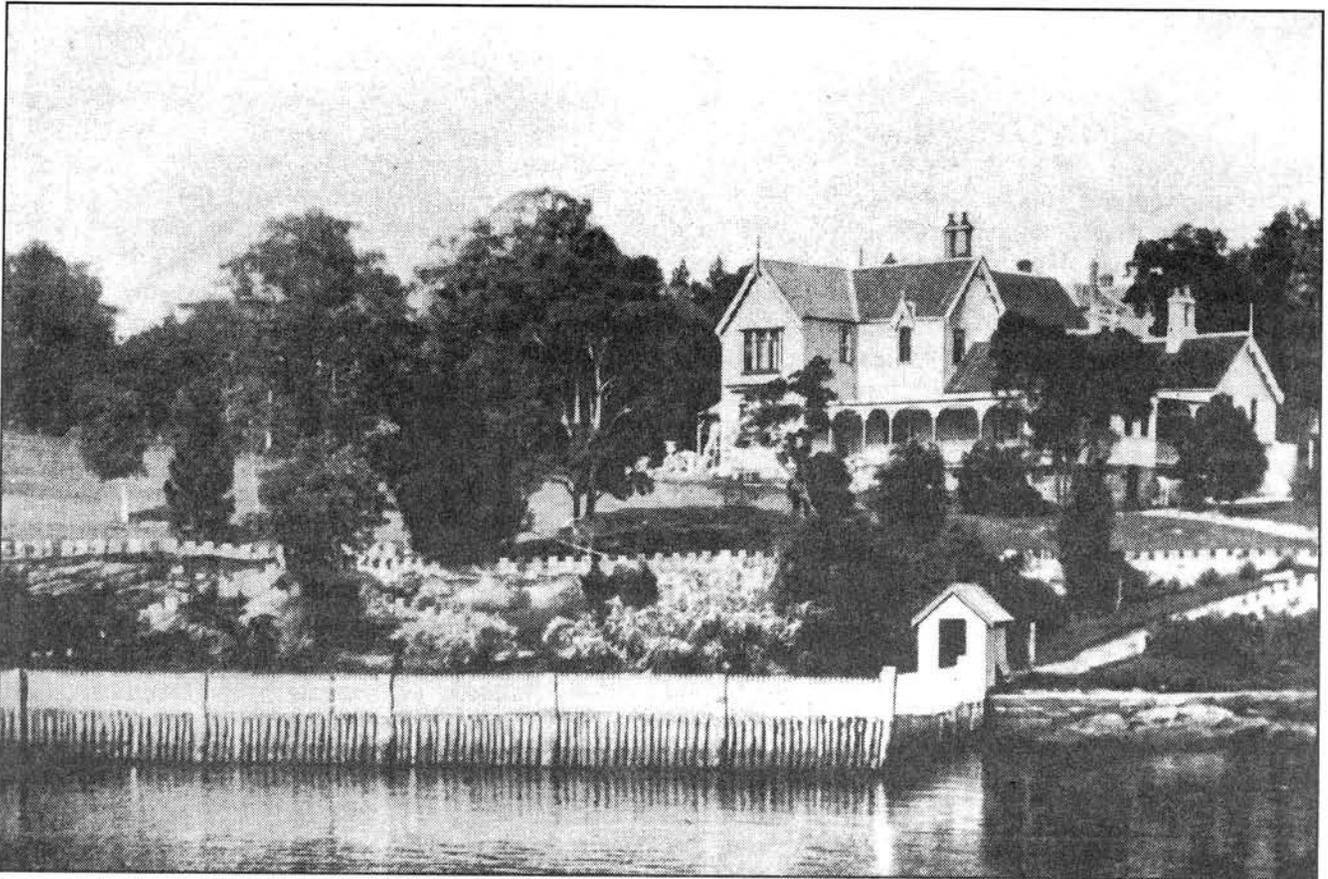
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PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST GARDEN SUBURB

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Wandella, 18 Gale Street, as illustrated in *Our Beautiful Homes*, and Mitchell Library

'THE MAGNIFICENT VILLA AND HUMBLE COTTAGE' Timber building traditions of Woolwich

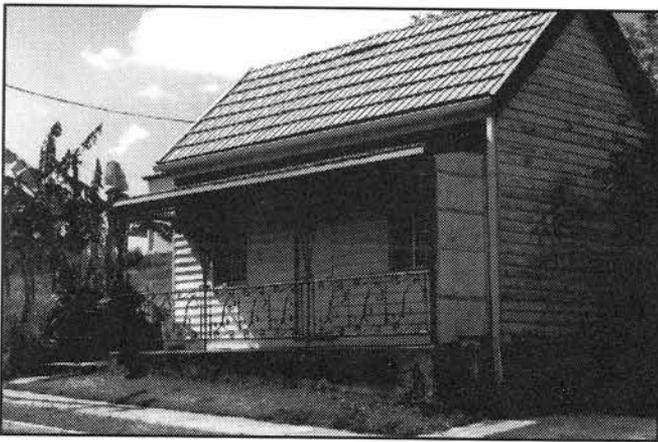
Roslyn Maguire & Diana Drake

Within the last year or so, Woolwich has lost two of its earliest timber cottages and another has been altered without correct conservation considerations. Although stricter than ever local conservation guidelines are supposedly in force, why does such obvious disregard for old timber buildings prevail? They are as essential a part of the historic fabric and cultural landscape of Hunters Hill and Woolwich as sandstone.

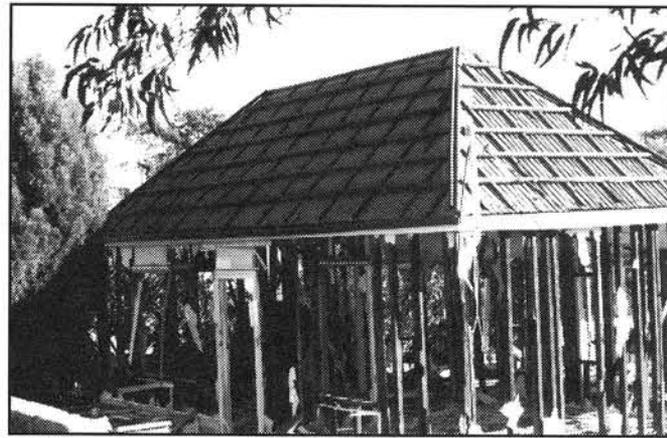
The surviving 19th century timber buildings of

Woolwich recall early local traditions of cabinetmaking, carpentry and boating, and help to provide a distinctive character of place. This tiny, narrow eastern extension of Hunters Hill peninsula attracted real estate attention as early as 1841 —

Scarcely two miles from the heart and bustle of Sydney, so delightfully situated as to command the finest views of any known spot in the Colony, first in panoramic form on one side, the Sydney



Demolished 1992, the Collingwood Street cottage of the Edwards family who settled at Woolwich by 1843



Demolished 1991, the old iron roof exposed of 102 Woolwich Road during a Sunday demolition

Harbour, with numerous ships, boats and vessels of all kinds, reclining upon its broad waters, or sailing over its ruffled surface on the other side; the pretty appearance of the Lane Cove River in another direction... The Australian, March 6, 1841

This rather lyrical passage attempted to attract public attention to the Township of Woolwich Subdivision, comprising 74 allotments 'suitable for either the magnificent villa or the humble cottage'. An accurately surveyed plan of 1884 (Dept of Lands Plan 12-440), specifying building shapes and materials reveals a definite local preference for timber: of the total of 50 Woolwich buildings 33 or two-thirds were built of timber with 13 of stone and 4 of brick.

It could be said that the Woolwich timber tradition commenced with the settlement of land grantees John Clarke snr, a Sydney shipwright, and John Clarke jnr who along with his brothers James and William, declared their occupations, in 1839, as cabinetmakers. Another brother Edward became a mast and block maker.

In addition to the five stone residences built on the 26 acres of Clarke land opposite Cockatoo Island, at least three of their 1884 buildings were built of timber, with another large timber building close to the shoreline of Parramatta River marked 'carpenters shop'. One timber house with Clarke family associations still survives at 4 Alfred Street, a small cottage (enlarged with extensions) built on high stone foundations opposite Woodstock and thought to date from the 1890s.

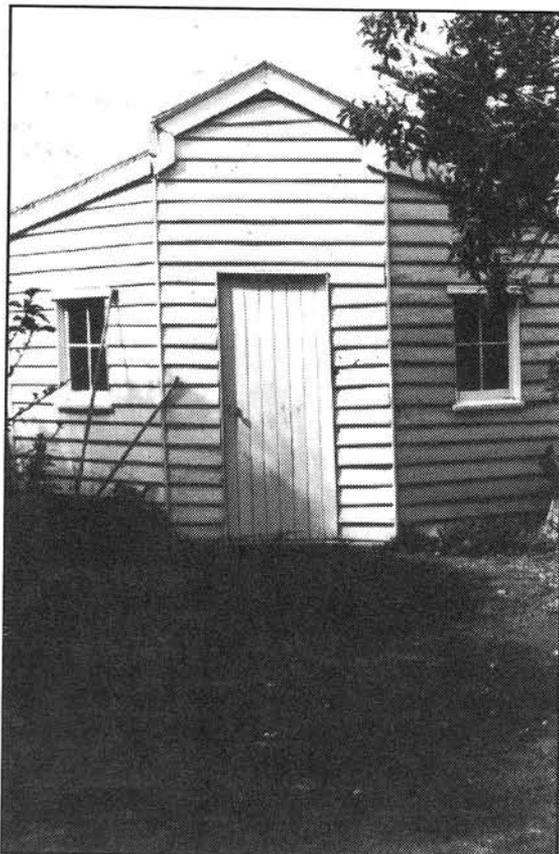
By 1837 another land grantee, Samuel Onions, had leased his 19 acre Woolwich

farm and five years later an advertisement for Primrose Hill as it was called, boasted costly improvements including a two-storey stone and brick house, detached stone kitchen, bakehouse and

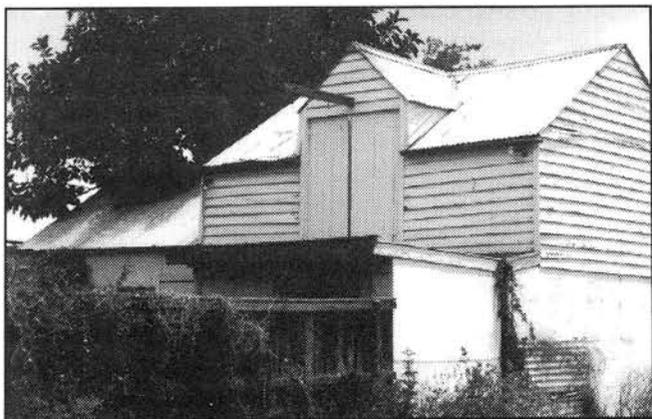
a large shed 30 feet wide by 17 depth, shingled and weather-boarded, used as a blacksmith and wheelwright's shop ... piggeries and fowlhouse ... some 1500 pounds has been expended in the outbuildings alone ... Supplement to The Sydney Morning Herald, February 28, 1842

This first mention of industrial use of Onions' land was repeated in 1849 when Rosemorrin Copper Smelting Works occupied the site for treatment of South Australian ore; see Sydney Morning Herald, April 21, 1849. Advertisements often emphasise the suitability of Woolwich for the working classes as well as those likely to erect magnificent villas; for instance 'shipwrights and boatbuilders', 'the capitalist, man of family or industrious mechanic' are identified in The Australian, January 26, 1841.

It would seem that, during the early period at least, capitalists were less attracted to Woolwich's residential qualities than men like John Edwards, a labourer/ fisherman, or William Burge, a carpenter / cabinetmaker, who both settled there from 1842-3.¹ Small timber cottages in Woolwich Road and Collingwood Street were built for, and occupied by, them and their descendants, two of which have been recently demolished. Other cottages and allotments in that part of Woolwich have associations, according to assorted registers and records, with men like George Colebrook, a shipwright there as early as 1843, James Frost and Joseph Waldron, both boatmen, Leonard Don, a



Tennis shed with classical manners, 58 The Point Road



Old 'stables' building, Woolwich Pier Hotel

carpenter and sailmaker, and a quarryman named John Monks. All formed part of the small but stable Woolwich population and many lived in small timber cottages some of which might be accurately dated with careful inspection of both internal and external fabric, notwithstanding their on-going repairs and maintenance.

Relative to a small land area of about 100 acres, Woolwich has extensive foreshores and improvements accompanying housing development invariably including wharves, jetties, bath houses and boatsheds. Photographs, plans and maps also indicate timber outbuildings like sheds, servants' rooms, stables and coach houses.

In neighbouring Hunters Hill, from 1855, speculative subdivisions followed closely on the heels of each other, with uneven success. Very little building occurred at Woolwich in the 1850s and when Samuel Onions' property was offered for re-lease in February 1860, an attempted alteration in the character of Woolwich is suggested in its specified suitability, no longer for industrial use, but as 'a school or place of amusement' — Sydney Morning Herald, February 25, 1860.

Not until almost forty years after the announcement of the Village subdivision on part of T.D. Edwards grant, was another attempted, when new owners of Onions' land began selling allotments.

Of the five or six Woolwich timber houses of the 1878-1883 period which survive, two clearly fit 'the magnificent villa' category creating something of a social gulf between them and nearby workers' cottages. Well into this century, the closely crowded cottages of Collingwood Street earned it the epithet of 'dunny lane', and the saying 'ladies of Hunters Hill, women of Woolwich' made no bones about local distinctions and divisions.

During the 1878-1883 pre-industrial period of Woolwich development its growth seems to have equalled Hunters Hill, at least in terms of enthusiasm. While not attempting to neatly separate the two suburbs, construction of five or six timber foreshore villas, particularly on the sunny northern Lane Cove River side at Woolwich established a building type that could be seen to hark back to those early timber traditions and skills of the local population.²

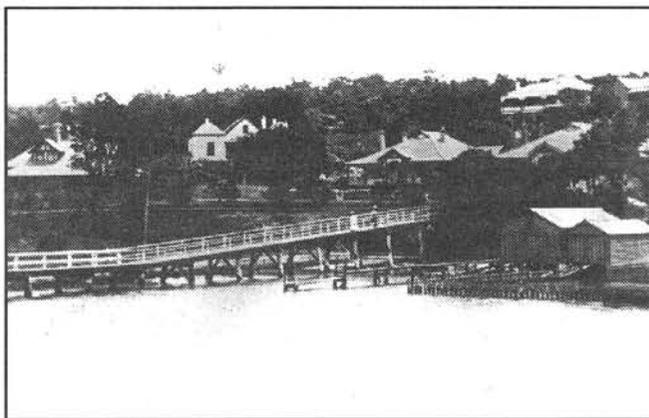
By 1880, there had been little or no industrial activity for 25 or so years and the scenic location appealed to draftsman Charles Ireland, first owner of Mortimer Villa, later Wandella, and to engineer Harold Watt who first owned Eldsetta Villa. Both selected a Gothic design. Wandella underwent extensions and alterations with the second owner and its strikingly pitched gables, decorative bargeboards and timber detailing met with such design approval it was to be featured, along with many other examples of what were regarded as Sydney's finest houses, in *Our Beautiful Homes* (nd Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales). Eldsetta, built of wide grooved (or rusticated) boards, is virtually unaltered apart from the apparent loss of a rear room, probably a kitchen or laundry. Ground floor ceiling timber linings, and walls and ceilings of the stairway and upstairs rooms have been so thoroughly preserved the house appears to be in original condition.

Four other weatherboard villas, all constructed c 1882 and demolished earlier this century, leave us without a full appreciation of their architectural styles; the 1884 Survey Plan (12-440, Dept of Lands) offers building outlines, walls and verandahs drawn to scale and local rate books may stipulate the number of rooms in each.

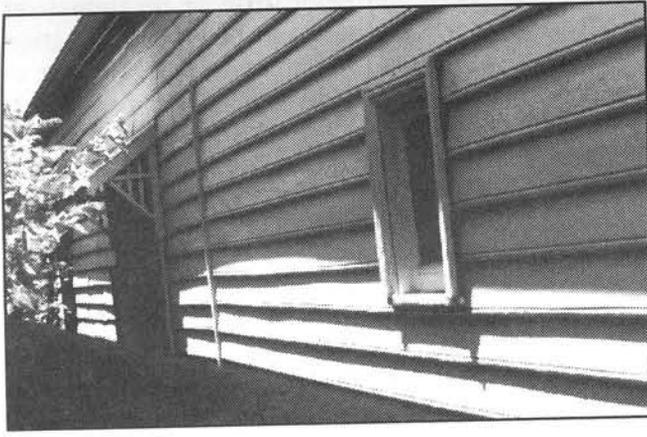
Four weatherboard examples of the same period remain, all within a distance of a few hundred metres. The seven room Kettlewell family house (1879, 16



Timber boats with naval cadets, Parramatta River, 1902



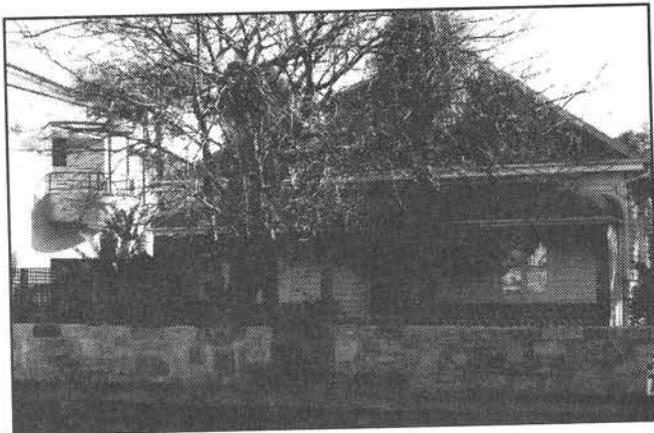
Timber wharves, jetties, bath houses and boatsheds along part of the Woolwich foreshore, c 1900



88 Woolwich Road, a wall of Regency beaded edge boards

The Point Road) and Wybarra (c 1890, 8 The Point Road) are sited away from the street to address the River with wide verandahs. The former has a southern side extension. A constant need for maintenance and the malleable character of timber houses must account for frequent additions and alterations. Numbers 24 and 26 The Point Road (both 1881) are positioned close to the street, appropriate to a commercial purpose as indicated in Sands directories. With French doors either side of a central front door, they are of a simple, vernacular style, popular in urban and rural areas and also found close by St Joseph's College. The Regency patterned (beaded edge) boards are on all exterior walls of 24 The Point Road which sits on a sandstone base and has a slate roof. Number 26 has plain boards with iron roof and an eastern wing of later date; it also has what is probably its original timber boatshed.

A significant change in the character of Woolwich occurred in 1884 when the Clarke family sold ten acres to Atlas Engineering Works, so that housing styles were to alter quite dramatically over the next fifteen years with terraces and semi-detached dwellings crowding closely together near the Village area. Larger elevated sites overlooking the Rivers were still to be favoured for villas. In 1886 two timber merchants became residents, a hotel was completed by 1887, a grocery store opened and more timber or brick cottages squeezed onto vacant quarter-sized village allotments. By 1892 a small brick and stone schoolhouse and a



24 The Point Road, 1881,
one of Woolwich's most visible timber houses

grandly proportioned Woolwich Pier Hotel served the growing population; the Hotel's timber stable is one of Woolwich's most unusual outbuildings.

But the timber building of this industrial, or post 1884, period which most persuasively expresses the continuation of a Woolwich timber tradition is St. John's Church hall, completed in 1892 as the Congregational Church. Built on Clarke land, by a descendant named Ernest Henry Clarke, it is Gothic in style and cost 218 pounds.³ He also built 5 Werambie Street, a Regency patterned weatherboard villa on Lane Cove River, designed by local architect William Martin, in 1891.

Timber continued to be popular into the 20th century, although examples are fewer. Otranto, 58 The Point Road (c 1903) incorporates many Federation design features, shingled gables, turned verandah posts and ridgecapped tile roof. With boards of Californian redwood, it was oiled rather than painted by its first owner, analytical chemist Basil Turner. He owned and operated the Woolwich Chemical Company, manufacturing ether and collodion there during the 1914-18 War. A collection of weatherboard outbuildings along the rear boundary, one a mere roofed box, another a tennis 'shed' with perfect classical pediment, are important reminders of this domestic-industrial enterprise.



Eldsetta, 42 The Point Road, 1882

A cottage of similar date and built of rusticated boards is 69 Woolwich Road, close to Kelly's Tin Smelting Works (1895-1967) where one of its workers lived from at least 1907. Other timber cottages at 5 Elgin Street and 6 Alfred Street appear to have been built after the 1898 acquisition of Clarke's Point by Morts Dock company. Construction of a massive 850 foot long dry dock, a foundry, joinery and sawmills brought employment to Woolwich on a large scale.

Perhaps as a fulfilment of the first promoter's 'magnificent villas and humble cottages' prediction, the timber buildings of Woolwich combine as a rich (though diminishing!) assortment of architectural types. Boards of cyprus, hardwood, Californian redwood, New Zealand kauri, hoop pine, sassafras, Australian cedar and Baltic pine are found on houses of Woolwich. Foreshore jetties, baths and boatsheds have decreased in number and many of the thirty or so