



The Cammeraygal People: The Cammeraygal people of the Guringai nation lived in the Willoughby area until the 1820s and are recorded as being in the northern parts of the Sydney region for approximately 5,800 years. By 1830 there were no Aboriginal people following a traditional lifestyle in the area.

Geography: Willoughby is a suburb on the lower North Shore of Sydney, in the state of New South Wales, Australia 8 kilometres north of the Sydney central business district, in the local government area of the City of Willoughby. The City of Willoughby takes its name from the suburb but its administrative centre is located in Chatswood, which is the local area's major commercial centre.

Demographics: Willoughby (suburb) has a population of 5,921 in 2011 of which 63.5% are Australian citizens. It has a population of England, UK born residents at 4.8 %, New Zealand 2.8% and China 2.4 % with 2,275 dwellings. Willoughby is known for a large Armenian community, who arrived in the area in the 1960s-1970s and in 2011 accounted for 2.7%.

Name: The suburb of Willoughby, including North Willoughby and Willoughby East, is part of the City of Willoughby. Sir Thomas Livingston Mitchell, Surveyor-General of NSW from 1828 to 1855, named the area after his former superior officer, Sir James Willoughby Gordon.

Early Years: The first land boom followed the Gold Rush of 1850. In 1854 William Lithgow subdivided 600 acres and sold it at auction. The subdivision was called "The Township of North Sydney" until 1890. The Municipality of North Willoughby was incorporated in 1865. The word "North" was dropped from the title in 1890. The first Chairman of Council (Mayor) was James William Bligh, pioneer landowner in the area though he did not actually reside in Willoughby. Throughout the 1800s and the early 1900s, a lot of the Willoughby area was still in its natural, rugged state but there were some cultivated areas developed as orchards, farms, dairies and Chinese market gardens.

Tanneries: In 1869 James Forsyth established the Rosewall tannery where the bus depot is today. This was the first of many tanneries in the area. Many were scattered around the beautiful and isolated valley of a tributary of Scotts Creek, where water and wattle trees were plentiful. These were used in the tanning process. The last tannery closed in 1992.

Houses: "Tyneside" (Robert Forsyth) and "Rosewall" (Thomas Forsyth) in High Street were built in the 1880s for the tannery sons of James Forsyth, the latter having its own bowling rink and football field. Other buildings of interest include "Laurelbank" (now a Masonic Lodge) built in 1890 on the corner of Laurel & Penshurst streets, and "Pommy Lodge" in Penshurst Street which was built in 1871 as a Congregational Church

Schools: Willoughby Public School was established in Oakville Road in 1863, as the North Sydney National Public School. In 1891 the name was changed from North Sydney to Willoughby. Willoughby Girls High School in Mowbray Road started in 1934 as Willoughby Home Science School and received its present name in 1957. St Thomas Church/School opened in 1928. From 1909 a private school "Rowfant" operated in Willoughby Road for about fifty years.

Churches: The suburb of Willoughby contains six churches. The Willoughby Congregational Church was originally established in 1871 and was in operation until the 1980s, but in 1993 it was demolished. The Uniting Church in Clanwilliam Street was established in 1901, while the one in Frenchs Road opened in 1906. The Frenchs Road building has since been demolished and an Armenian Evangelical Church has replaced it. Willoughby Presbyterian Church opened in 1923, to be replaced by a new church in 1925. St John's Anglican Church was completed in 1960. St Thomas's Catholic Church has been in operation since 1928. The present St Thomas' Catholic Church in High Street was built in 1961. Willoughby Gospel Chapel was built in 1928 and extended in 1972.



Post Office: The first post office in Willoughby opened in 1871 “adjoining the public school”. It was replaced by an official post office across the road in 1891. In 1922 a new Willoughby Post Office was installed in the new “Knight Smith Buildings” in Penshurst Street. In 1977 a new post office was built on the corner of Penshurst Street and Oakville Road.

Halls: By the late 1800s there were two public halls in Willoughby. A Temperance Hall, in Penshurst St was used by the Methodists for meetings before their church was built and an Assembly Hall, built in 1888 next to the Hotel Willoughby, renovated in 1920 and is now a commercial premise.

Transport: The first regular service from the Willoughby area to Milsons Point was George Leafe’s spring cart, which took six passengers at a time in the 1870s. In the 1880s William Thomas Muston ran a line of horse-buses along Willoughby Road. In 1897 an electric tram service ran from Milsons Point to Crows Nest and along Willoughby Road to French’s Road. The tram service was extended to the corner of Victoria Avenue in 1898 and to Chatswood Railway Station in 1908. Since 1958 when all north shore tram services ceased, the routes have been taken over by government buses to Sydney CBD and Chatswood.

In 1920, Telford Lane—between Fourth Avenue and Eastern Valley Way—was created and paved; the method used was the one pioneered by Thomas Telford in England in the nineteenth century. This involved cross bonding stone and topped with a layer of gravel and Telford Lane is one of the few surviving examples of the Telford method in Sydney and as a result is NSW State heritage listed.

Fire Service: In 1905 the East Willoughby Fire Station opened in a cottage in Laurel Street. A brick, single storey station opened in 1915 adjacent to the original cottage, and another floor was added in 1930. In 1917 the name was changed from East Willoughby to Willoughby.

Hotels: The Hotel Willoughby on Penshurst Street opened in 1899 and was described as one of the finest buildings on the North Shore. The hotel is now called “The Willoughby” and majorly restored in 1988 with its elegant verandahs reinstated. The Bridgeview Hotel in Willoughby Road opened in 1928 and was originally called the “Bridge View” Hotel.

Flat Rock Creek and Naremburn Waterfalls: Flat Rock Creek was named after the flat rock where it was once possible to cross the creek. In Flat Rock Gully there used to be the spectacular Naremburn Waterfalls which fell into a pool known as The Devil’s Hole. This area, now situated in the suburb of Willoughby, was a popular site for picnics and swimming. The site of the waterfall was designated as a land-fill site, or dump, for rubbish in the 1930s. Soon after the construction of the municipal incinerator in 1934, the waterfall and approximately half of Flat Rock Gully was filled with rubbish and other material that was considered appropriate.

The Municipal Incinerator: The Willoughby Incinerator, Small Street, is one of 12 designed by Walter Burley Griffin and Eric Milton Nicholls for REICo Pty Ltd. from 1930-38. The Incinerator operated from 1934-67 and the sewerage plant continued until 1974. The incinerator, itself, was closed in 1967 but the building was eventually restored and reopened in 1980 as the “Incinerator Restaurant”. The restaurant operated until 1988, after which the building was converted into offices. In 1996 the building was damaged by fire, but was refurbished as arts and function centre and reopened in April, 2011.

Parks: Hallstrom Park In 1946 Sir Edward Hallstrom, whose “Silent Knight” refrigerator factory was opposite the dump, donated funds to Willoughby Council for the construction of a football oval on part of the site so that his workers could exercise during their lunch hour. This small park is still called Hallstrom Park, although it is now a picnic area with a playground and barbecues. Bicentennial Reserve opened in 1988 and incorporates Flat Rock Reserve, Hallstrom Park and the restored incinerator. It also encompasses Willoughby Leisure Centre, with indoor swimming pools, sports hall and outdoor sporting facilities, and Willoughby Park, with two ovals, a community centre, play areas, pavilions and a bowling club.

Sanders Park is named after Edward Lloyd Sanders (1888-1943), Member of Parliament for Willoughby 1927-1943. Carlson Park is named after Erik Carlson, (1917-2001) resident of Middle Harbour Ward. His contribution to improving the living environment of Willoughby City will be long remembered; an example being this land acquired in 1989 to mitigate local flooding and to develop as public open space.

Further reading

WILLOUGHBY: THE SUBURB AND ITS PEOPLE by Esther Leslie 994.411WIL

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