

House history: 36 Caroline Street, Redfern

Question: There is what seems to be a remnant of a house on the corner of our community park at the Redfern Community Centre. It has been painted with the colours of the Aboriginal flag. Why is it there?

Answer: Some buildings acquire a meaning beyond their original use. The history of this house is partly about its life as a house and partly about its life as a symbol for Redfern's Aboriginal people.



36 Caroline St., Redfern. The house has been transformed into an artwork 'Welcome to Redfern' by Reko Rennie, Nahdia Noter, Trae Campbell, Ji Duncan-Weatherby, Tyrrelle McGrath, Brandon Phillips, Isaac Phillips, Josh Addo and Josh Nolan. Photo: City of Sydney.

Early land history

As in all house histories, but here especially, acknowledgment must be made to the original owners of the land. As this history will show, European occupation was very short. From at least the 1920s Aboriginal people returned to Redfern, and Caroline Street along with the surrounding Hugo, Louis and Eveleigh streets, were the heartland of their re-occupation of their land.

During the mid-19th century the area was only lightly populated, with the location of what would later become Caroline Street completely undeveloped.



The black square marks future location of 36 Caroline St. Detail: 1850 Wells plan of the City of Sydney. SLNSW Call No. ZM4 811.17gbbd/1850/1

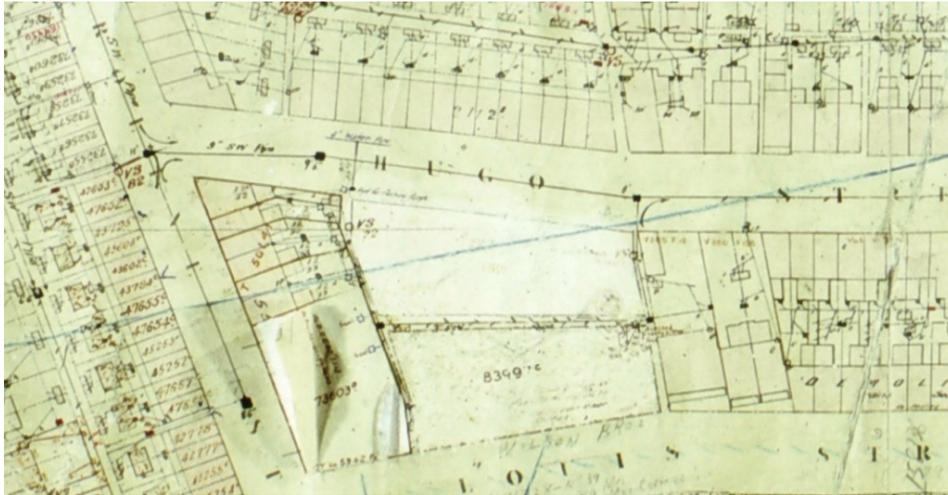
William, Thomas and John Bakewell arrived in Sydney in the late 1860s and worked in the building trade. In 1880 they purchased, as ‘tenants in common’, over four acres of land between Eveleigh Street and Abercrombie Street, just north of Wells Street. This parcel of land straddled parts of two original crown land grants made to William Hutchinson in 1817 and William Chippendale in 1819.¹ It appears to have been a canny purchase, as by this time suburban housing was advancing towards this still largely uninhabited acreage and its value would have been rising.



This detail from an 1864 map shows the area was still undeveloped. Wells Street, lower right, (later renamed Lawson Street) has not yet been extended west of the railway to the area purchased by the Bakewells, here ringed in red. Detail from 'Plan of Redfern Municipality', George Renwick Esqre Chairman 1864 SLNSW a6850001

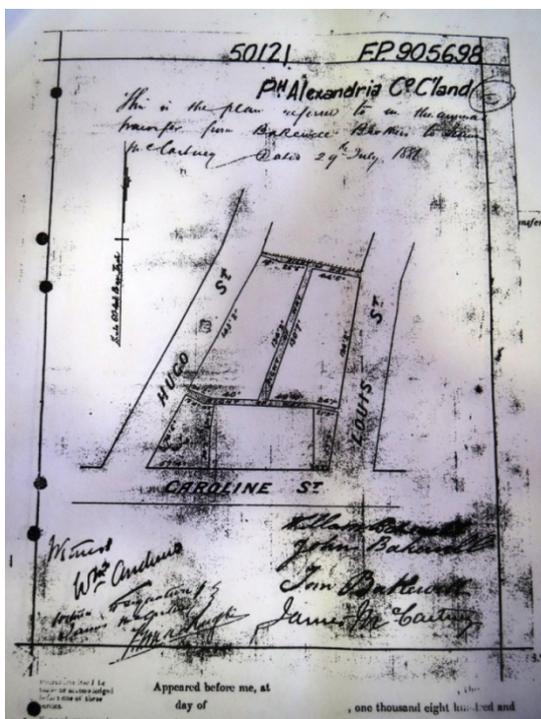
The Bakewells immediately subdivided the land and sold it on. William Bakewell was described as a bricklayer on the certificate of title, but he and his brothers eventually became large builders and contractors. In 1884 they established Bakewell Bros brickworks in Macdonaldtown, later known as Erskineville. They started with bricks and moved into glazed industrial pottery and a range of domestic household products. The firm operated until 1955.² They probably financed their initial plant from several parcels of land which they subdivided in 1880, including this Redfern land.

This subdivision created Caroline Street, and extended Hugo and Louis Streets southwards to intersect with it. Further discussion in this house history will be confined to this smaller area contained by Caroline, Hugo and Louis streets which is currently bounded to the north by the Redfern Community Centre. It is claimed that Caroline Street was named for the early philanthropist Caroline Chisholm who had lived nearby to the present Redfern Railway at Calder House.³ Another possibility is that in 1881 William Bakewell respectfully invited friends to attend the funeral of his 'beloved mother-in-law, Caroline Jagehman'.⁴



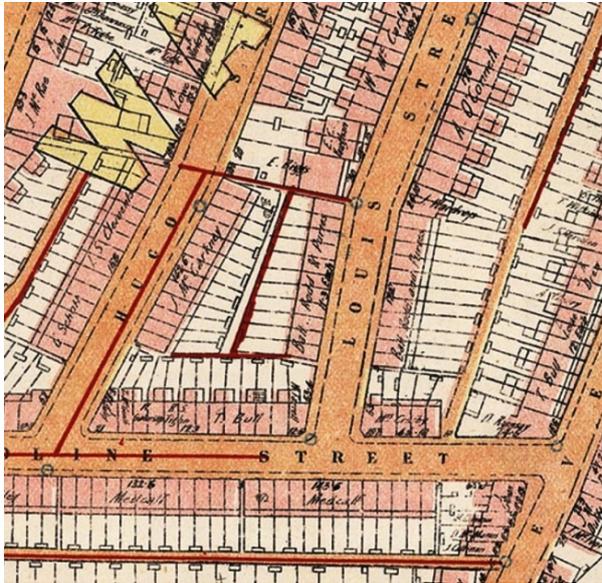
This map shows that the first development on the land was along part of Caroline Street, including No 36 on the corner of Hugo Street. It is undated but is probably made soon after the subdivision. Source: Sydney Water, series labelled as the 'Blackwattle maps'.

The earliest sales on the subdivision were of land fronting Caroline Street, including No 36 which was a small oddly shaped block at the corner of Caroline and Hugo Streets. It was transferred to James Daley for £470 in July 1880.⁵ Just before this, in June, the Bakewells petitioned the City Council to have the sewer extended from Caroline Street to their property in Hugo Street. Without sewerage these blocks would not have been so attractive for housing and did not sell as readily as the blocks on Caroline Street.⁶ In 1881 the land apart from the Caroline Street frontages appeared to be still unsold. In March of that year, for a mere 10/- the Bakewells granted James McCarthy rights of way across the land as illustrated in the below sketch.



This plan is from Bakewell's Transfer Document of Right of Way 29 7 1881 which created three large sections which remain legible on future maps and plans. City Archives: LDR/00101-01 and -02.

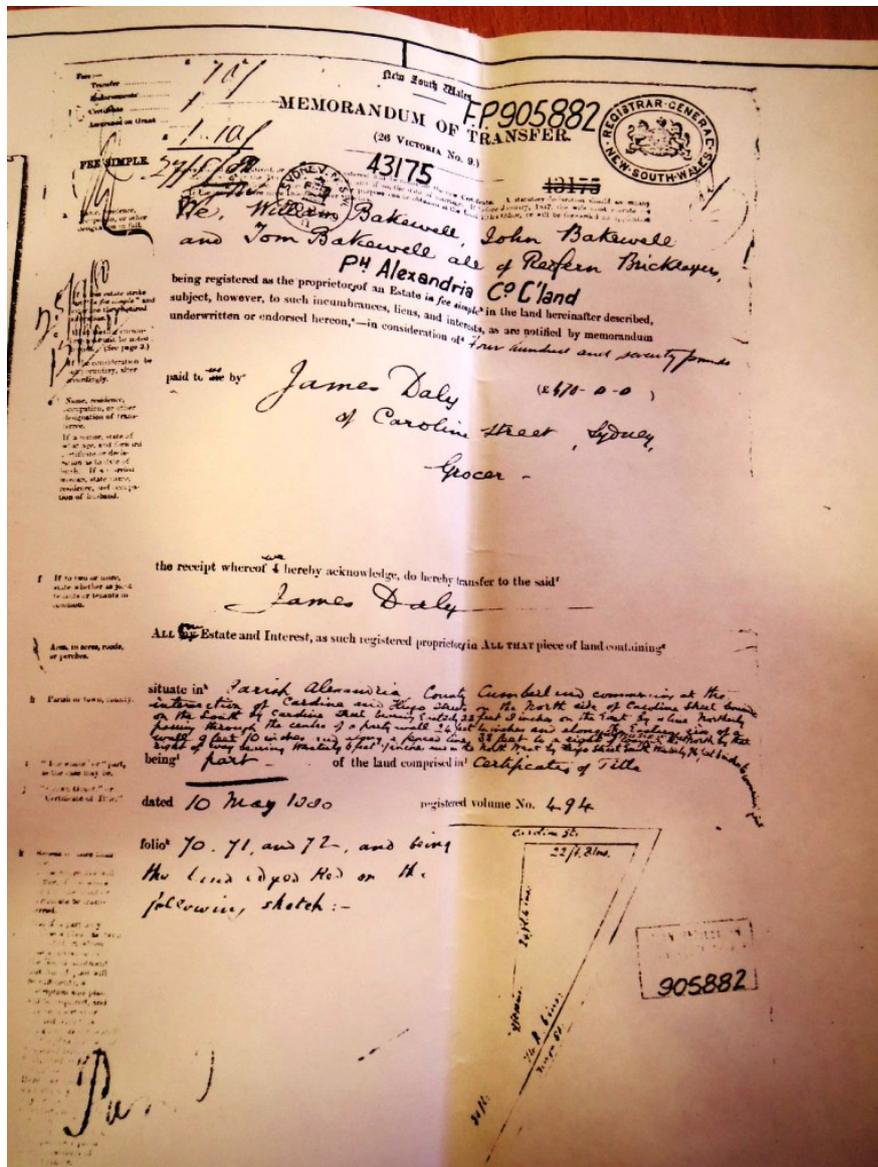
Subsequent developments were on parcels of land that retained the original dimensions of the two large areas fronting Hugo and Louis streets. Various maps, including the one below indicate rows of integrated terrace houses, developed by a single landholder, probably McCarthy. Blocks on Caroline Street were owned by several smaller landholders.



This 1889 map shows McCarthy as the owner of all houses along Hugo Street. Louis Street was in the hands of real estate agents Batt, Rodd & Purves, and there were several owners on Caroline Street, with No 36 in single ownership. Source: detail from NSW Map Publishing Company, Map of Redfern compiled from the latest official records, July 1889.

The house

James Daley paid £470 for an oddly shaped block at the corner of Caroline and Hugo streets. The memorandum of transfer of the land dated 10 May 1880 described him as a grocer and on his land he built a corner shop.⁷



The Bakewells sell to Daley. Memorandum of Transfer, 1880.

Daley appears to have built his place immediately. There was no Sands Directory for 1881, but by 1882 he was listed at the corner of Hugo and Caroline Streets as a grocer and by 1883 this property had acquired the Number 36 which has never since changed. By 1888 the grocer was John Colley, while in 1891 the house was recorded as occupied by a milk vendor, with Robert Neale as grocer in the following year. From then on until the 1930s this house-shop continued to sell groceries, with occasional listings as a provision shop and after 1929 as a greengrocery.

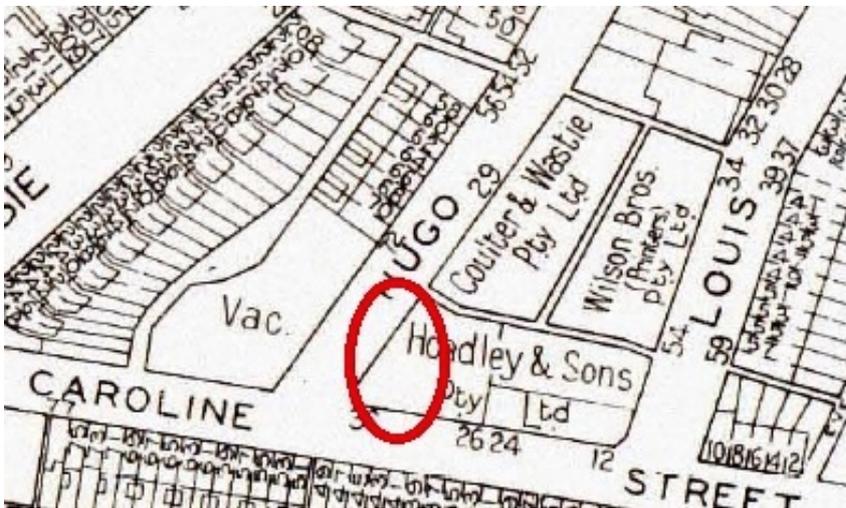
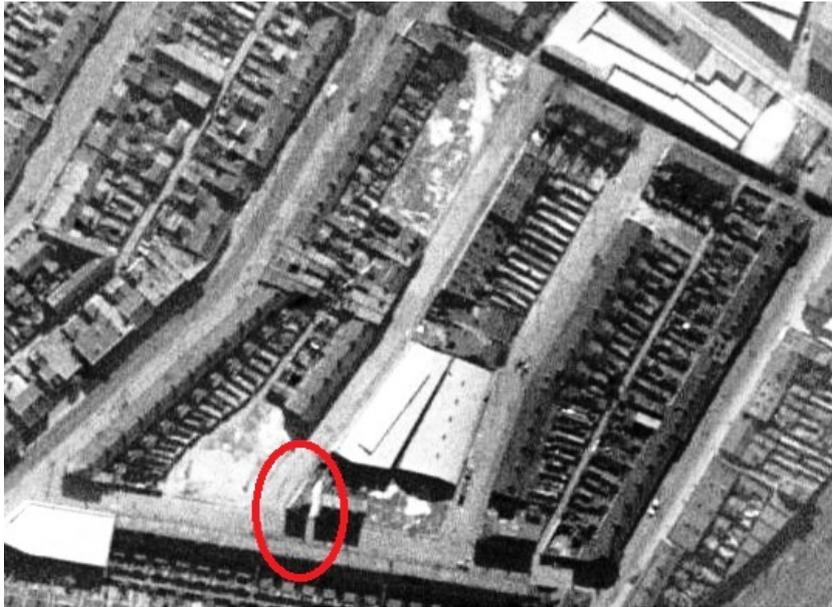
There was a store across Hugo Street at No 38 Caroline Street which also sold groceries, or occasionally confectionary. From 1895 until 1900 John Seymour operated from No 36 and then moved across to No 38 taking his grocery business with him while the new shopkeeper at No 36 ran

a 'provision shop'. Both shops would have sold everyday staples to the local population and with not one but two corner shops, this section of Caroline Street would have been a gathering place for the local community. This resonates with the later development of this corner as an important meeting place for Redfern's Aboriginal population.

The life of a shopkeeper was not always a quiet one. One Sunday afternoon just before Christmas in 1920 a young boy named Gilbert Bishop fell from the balcony of the house and was rushed to the Royal Prince Alfred hospital with brain and internal injuries.⁸ This story is not a pleasant one, but it does inform the house historian that the house once had a balcony. On Easter Monday in 1932 the shopkeeper David Abraham was assaulted by a couple of males who jumped the counter brandishing a butcher's knife. Despite this the grocer assured police that no money had been taken and he had not been hurt.⁹

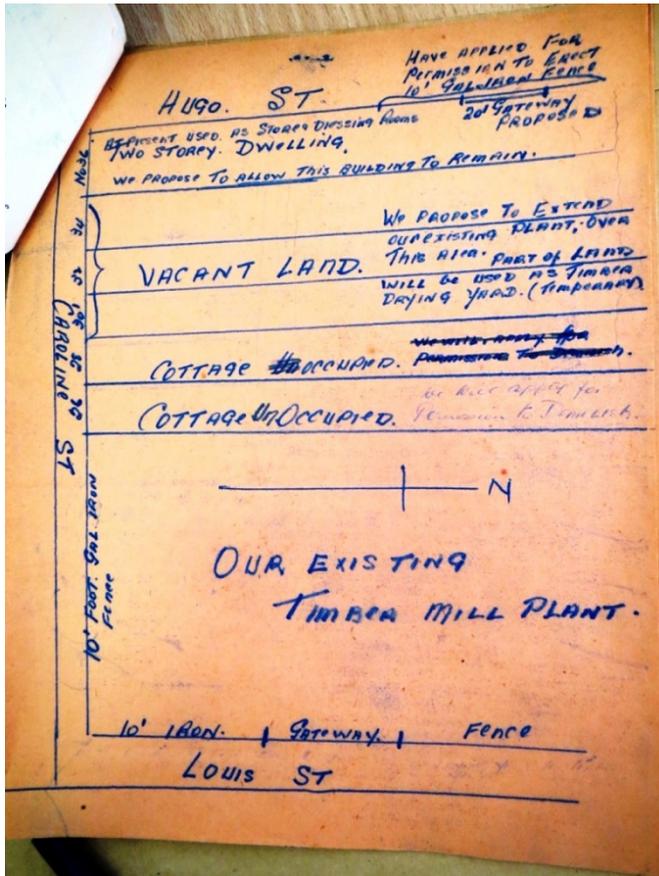
Houses for factories

By the 1930s, a mere 50 years after they had been built, the writing was on the wall for the houses in the block bounded by Louis, Caroline and Hugo streets. By 1936 the houses along Louis Street had gone and in 1939 Wilson Brothers submitted plans to the Redfern Council for a printery on the site.¹⁰ A 1943 aerial photograph showed two large factories along Hugo and Louis streets with a yard in front along Caroline Street. The Louis Street one was Wilson's printery, the one on Hugo Street was Coulter & Wastie's leathersgoods factory. This firm advertised, usually for young apprentices to learn how to make handbags 'two minutes from Redfern Railway station'.¹¹



Wilson Bros, printers and bookbinders, on Louis Street, Coulter & Wastie, leathergoods factory on Hugo Street, yards on Caroline Street. Several houses remain, including No 36 on the corner (ringed). Detail from City of Sydney's 1943 aerial photograph series, and detail from City Surveyor Detail Sheets c 1956 Sheet 14. Historical Atlas of Sydney, City Archives.

There were still houses along part of Caroline Street in the 1943 photograph, but they were being bought up and demolished by the firm of H Hoadley & Sons which established a saw milling operation on the western half of Caroline Street in 1946. By 1951 Hoadley & Sons owned the whole run of houses and were just waiting on getting vacant possession of No 28 in order to demolish it and 26 next door. This firm got permission to extend their operations to include a joinery and to use this land as a drying and storage yard for their timber. Only No 36 on the corner was spared. Hoadley used it for storage and as dressing rooms for their employees and they indicated to the Council that they intended to keep it for these uses.¹²



This 1951 document which sits in a Council file has the notation at 36 Caroline Street: 'We propose to allow this building to remain.' City Archives: NSCA CRS290/51

Wilsons the printers were the most dynamic of these three factories, and over the years they made several extensions to their plant, including the three-storey building in 1954 which was eventually transformed into the Redfern Community Centre. By 1970 they were negotiating to buy out Hoadleys timberworks in order to build a paper store facing Caroline Street. Had this gone ahead the old terrace house would probably have been demolished. However, there were impediments to the proposal. The land on both sides of Hugo Street was earmarked by the Department of Main Roads (DMR) for a major road development of a proposed Southern Expressway. This made all plans uncertain, and by 1974 Wilsons decided that the proposal could not go ahead at that time due to financial constraints.¹³ They had secured the whole site between Louis, Caroline and Hugo streets, but the photograph contained in the file dated 1978 does not contain a two-storey building and gives little evidence that the plant was thriving.



All the signs of approaching dereliction. In this 1978 photograph the balcony has gone and the house has been blocked up on the street approaches. The whole area is surrounded by a forbiddingly high wall. Source City Archives, NSCA CRS 82/12.

The decade of the 1970s was a turning point for the whole area which witnessed a blossoming of organisations in Redfern to support the rapidly growing Indigenous population which trebled in numbers between 1976 and 1981. A business named IBK (Ian Kiernan) wished to redevelop houses in Louis Street opposite the Wilson Bros site and this resulted in evictions of residents. Then with the support of a Builders Labourers Federation green ban, the residents returned and waited out the time until some resolution arrived in the form of government support for the continued use of these places as residences. In 1972 the Whitlam Federal Government set up a fund to assist in purchasing houses in Redfern for the Aboriginal community and in the following year the Aboriginal Housing Company was formed to undertake this work. It progressively purchased houses in the block between Louis and Eveleigh streets, from Vine Street in the north to Caroline Street. By 1994 the process of buying up this area, now known as 'The Block', was complete.

Factories for the community

Wilson Bros made general repairs to their Caroline Street property in 1882¹⁴ but by now the plant was fairly run-down and in around 1990 the South Sydney City Council took the decision to work towards redevelopment of the whole site as a recreation/community centre. The land was rezoned from industrial to recreational in 1991 and in 1993 the Council purchased the land from Wilson Bros for over \$2 million.¹⁵

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Contract for the sale of land - 1992 Edition

(comprising this page, the following cooling off notice, the following provisions, Schedule 1 and anything attached)
(a choice printed in BLOCK CAPITALS applies unless a different choice is marked)

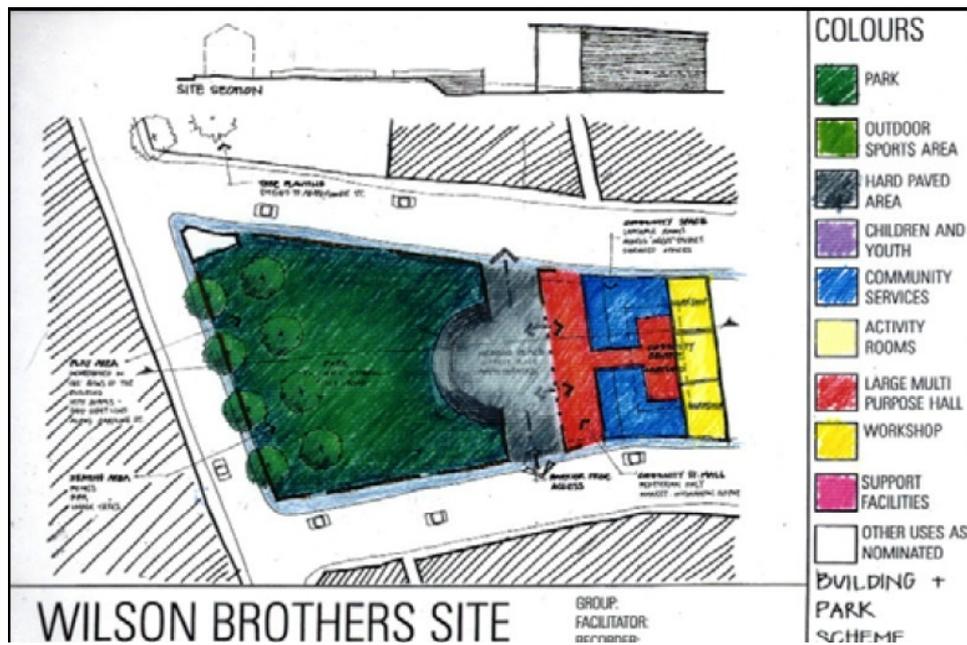
TERM		MEANING OF TERM	
Vendor's agent (if more than one the first named)	Name Address	Phone Fax Ref	
Vendor	Full name A.C.N./A.R.B.N. Address	DX	
Vendor's Solicitor	Name Address	Phone Fax Ref	
Depositholder	Vendor's agent Solicitor	Invest deposit	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes (clause 3)
Completion date	The date which is <u>8</u> weeks after the date of this contract (clause 15)		
Property	The following land and the following furnishings and chattels		
Land	Address See Annexure "A"		
Improvements	e.g. factory, flats, garage, home unit, house, none Industrial Property		
Plan	Registered plan: Lot Section Plan "A" (copy attached) Unregistered plan: Lot in an unregistered plan (copy attached) (clause A6) which is part of Lot Section Plan (copy attached) (the plan registration time is <u>6</u> months after the date of this contract)		
Title	<input type="checkbox"/> REAL PROPERTY ACT 1900 (Torrens title) <input type="checkbox"/> strata title (clause A1) <input type="checkbox"/> community (clause A1) <input type="checkbox"/> qualified (clause A3) <input type="checkbox"/> limited (clause A3) <input type="checkbox"/> old system (clause A3)	Folio identifier See Annexure "A" (attached is a copy of a computer folio certificate or manual folio of the Register) Book No (copy of document attached)	<input type="checkbox"/> FEE SIMPLE - ownership <input type="checkbox"/> leasehold <input type="checkbox"/> purchase from Crown - purchaser liable for up to \$ of Crown purchase money (if not stated, nil) (clause 20.2, A4) <input type="checkbox"/> perpetual lease from Crown (clause 20.2)
Furnishings and chattels	(all inspected by the purchaser)		
Purchaser	Full name A.C.N./A.R.B.N. Address		
	THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SOUTH SYDNEY 140 Joynton Avenue ZETLAND NSW 2017		
	if more than one: <input type="checkbox"/> JOINT TENANTS <input type="checkbox"/> tenants in common (in equal shares unless otherwise stated)		
Purchaser's solicitor	Name Address	Phone Fax Ref	
	PIKE PIKE & FENWICK 3/50 King Street SYDNEY NSW 2000	262 6188 262 6175 D Baxter	DX 521 Sydney
Price	Price in words: <u>Two Million Ten Thousand Dollars</u> Price \$ <u>2,010,000.00</u> Deposit \$ <u>201,000.00</u> (10% of the price, unless otherwise stated) Balance \$ <u>1,809,000.00</u>		

Sale contract from Wilson Brothers to South Sydney Council for over \$2m. City Archives: NSCA CRS LRD/00101-02.

In 1998 South Sydney Council submitted a Development Application (DA) to itself to demolish all the buildings which at this stage still covered the entire site, including the old terrace house at 36 Caroline Street. The DA met with stiff opposition from the community, and it was decided to defer demolition until there had been extensive community consultation and a Plan of Management drawn up.¹⁶ At the end of this process the proposal was to refurbish Wilson's three-storey warehouse at the northern edge of the area as a community centre and to make the remainder into a park. Although the discussions had included the idea of keeping the old house, the Plan recommended demolition so that the park could be connected across Hugo Street to Yellowmunde Reserve on the opposite corner.

Again there was loud opposition. This reserve had been created in 1961 from land that had been 'DMR affected' by the proposed Southern Expressway that never happened. Along with the house on the opposite corner it had acquired a strong connection with Indigenous occupation of the land as it became a meeting place for the local community, and this place included the house. Finally, in

recognition that this was a genuine community wish, plans to demolish it were scrapped and by 2002 the building was being shored up to make it safe.



This early sketch based on community discussions still showed the house, marked as 'other uses', and this possibly indicates that from the start there were voices agitating for its retention. Plan of Management: The Wilson Bros Site and Yellowmunde Reserve, Caroline St. Redfern Sept 1999, p. 24.

There were various suggestions as to how the house could be used, including as a caretaker's house. As the Community Centre approached completion there was concern that 'a derelict property on site is not only an eyesore but a security risk', but there was no budget to restore it and so it remained bricked up and uninhabitable. The Redfern Community Centre was opened in 2004 without any use having been resolved for the old house.

However, during community open days connected with the development of the Plan of Management, the building had been decoratively painted by locals and this had helped to elevate the status of the building. During 2012–13 a Welcome to Redfern street art program created murals and art installations in significant places, including at the house. Reko Rennie, a Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay artist, guided locals to turn the remnants of the house into a striking artwork.¹⁷



This first painting of the building occurred during a community day on the site while the Plan of Management was being developed in 1998. Plan of Management, 'The Wilson Bros Site and Yellowmunde Reserve, Caroline St. Redfern', Sept 1999, p. 40.



The building in December 2007. Google Street View

According to the City's promotion of this house in 2013, it will be reinvented as a small museum that will become 'a starting point for the Redfern Tour and provide opportunities for projects that tell the ongoing Aboriginal history and stories of the area.'¹⁸

How was this history found?

This history used a number of sources including legal documents, maps and official City Council records. Several published works helped to set the scene, including:

Gary Foley, 'Black power in Redfern 1968-1972' on The Koori History Website http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/essays/essays_page.html

Zoe Pollock, 'Aboriginal Housing Company', Dictionary of Sydney, 2008, http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/entry/aboriginal_housing_company

A title search provided the Certificate of Title showing all the subsequent purchasers of blocks of the Bakewell's subdivision of 1880, including James Daley who bought what became 36 Caroline Street. It also gave details of the original grantees. Other documents that were sourced in the title search included the Memorandum of Transfer to Daley which provided a diagram of the land.

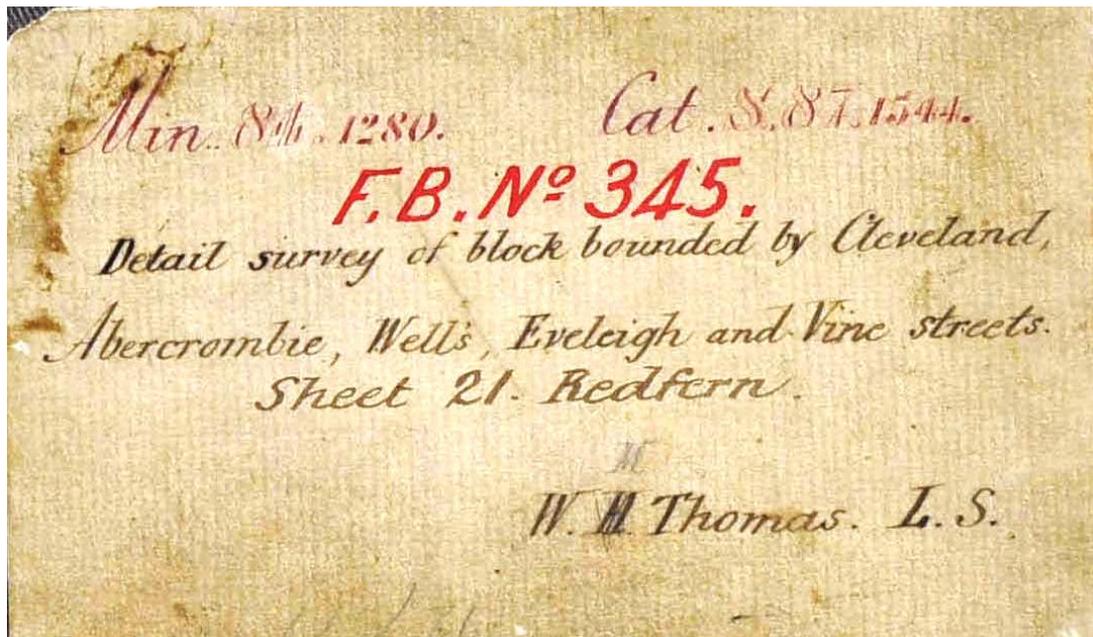
A [Sands Directory](#) search gave the names of the occupants of the house/shop until 1932 and provided information about the precinct.

Because this house was known to be 'of interest' official files were created by the former South Sydney City Council and the current City of Sydney. The [City of Sydney Archives](#) hold files related to the former factories on the land, including an early letter from the Bakewells asking for the water to be laid on. Why did the Bakewells petition the City of Sydney to get the sewer put on? The land was not part of the City, but until 1888 when the Water Board was established, the City provided water and sewerage to areas outside its own boundaries and so its records contain this kind of material.

Files held by the City of Sydney relating to the sale of the land from the printers Wilson Bros to the South Sydney Council in 1993 also included legal documents including one that provided a diagram of the rights of way granted to McCarthy in 1881. This sketch established the durability of the three parcels of land fronting Hugo, Caroline and Louis streets which recurred in many other records and images. Files on the property upgrade during 2003-4 provided a little information. When searching South Sydney files held at the City Archives, or indeed any files that are relatively recent it is best to talk to the archivists as they are not always readily located in [Archives Investigator](#).

Maps proved most helpful for this house history and there are more on the Trove list created for this history: [36 Caroline St Redfern \(House History\)](#). The Civic Survey map found in the [Historical Atlas of Sydney](#) gave the names of the three factories on the site of the current Redfern Community Centre and park at the mid-20th century, and these names turned up in *Archives Investigator* when these firms wrote to the Council or submitted Development Applications to alter or extend their factories.

Several maps sourced from Sydney Water have been included in this history, selected from a larger group of maps and diagrams provided. This collection is not online, but the authority will supply copies of maps for your address for a fee. As it happened the detail survey maps for this area did not provide very much information for No 36 but they do contain a great amount of detail for the whole block. These exist for many areas of the city and some are colour coded to show building materials.



Cover of detail survey of the area made in 1882. Sydney Water.

Other sources

The names of the grocers who lived and worked at 36 Caroline Street which are listed in Sands Directories could be searched through [Trove](#), [Google](#), [Ancestry.com.au](#) and similar resources.

Aboriginal people were moving back into this area in the 1920s and 1930s and it may be possible to establish Indigenous family names through oral or written sources. For this exercise the names of people living along the street and across the road would also be relevant. They are all in the Sands Directories and local knowledge would provide information as to which ones were Aboriginal.

There are many official Council records relating to the development of the Community Centre and park, and the Aboriginal Housing Company's records would yield information about the area. Number 36 was not one of the houses bought by the company but information concerning its occupation and community uses are best sourced from local sources and local knowledge.

¹ LPI, CT, Vol 494 Folio 70. This provides a sketch of the original land parcel purchased by the Bakewells, as well as listing subsequent purchasers of parcels of this land.

² The Powerhouse Museum online catalogues Bakewell objects held in its collection. Newspaper articles retrieved through a Trove search indicate the pottery experienced various temporary closures from 1913 until its final demise in the 1950s.

³ 'Streets', City of Sydney, last updated 4 December 2012
<<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/learn/history/urban-history/streets>>

⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1881.

⁵ Memorandum of Transfer 43175, CT, Vol 494 Folio 70. DP 905882.

⁶ NSCA CRS 26/166/1135

⁷ LPI, Memorandum of Transfer, Bakewells to Daley, DP 905882, also held in City Archives, LRD/00101-02.

⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 December 1920.

⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 April 1932.

¹⁰ NSCA CRS 1073/0853/39.

¹¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, various, from 18 October 1941 to 24 September 1961.

¹² NSCA CRS 290/51

¹³ NSCA CRS 82/12. This is a deed packet from the prior South Sydney records and contains a DA from Wilsons for land they were negotiating to buy from H Hoadley & Sons and subsequent South Sydney Council's deliberations and information concerning the projected Southern Expressway which was never built.

¹⁴ NSCA CRS 116/45/82/5249

¹⁵ NSCA CRS LDR/00101-02

¹⁶ Pittendrigh Shinkfield & Bruce et al., 'The Wilson Brothers Site and Yellowmunde Reserve, Caroline Street, Redfern', Plan of Management for South Sydney City Council, September 1999.

¹⁷ Eora Journey – the People' Journey, City of Sydney, brochure, n.d. (2013).

<http://www.cityartsydney.com.au/cityart/projects/redfernterrace.asp>

¹⁸ 'Welcome to Redfern', City Art <<http://www.cityartsydney.com.au/artwork/welcome-redfern/>>