

# House history: Hyde Park Towers, 142–148 Elizabeth Street, Sydney

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**Question:** This apartment tower is fairly modern, but there is also an old section which was once part of a commercial property. Does that make it difficult to research its history?

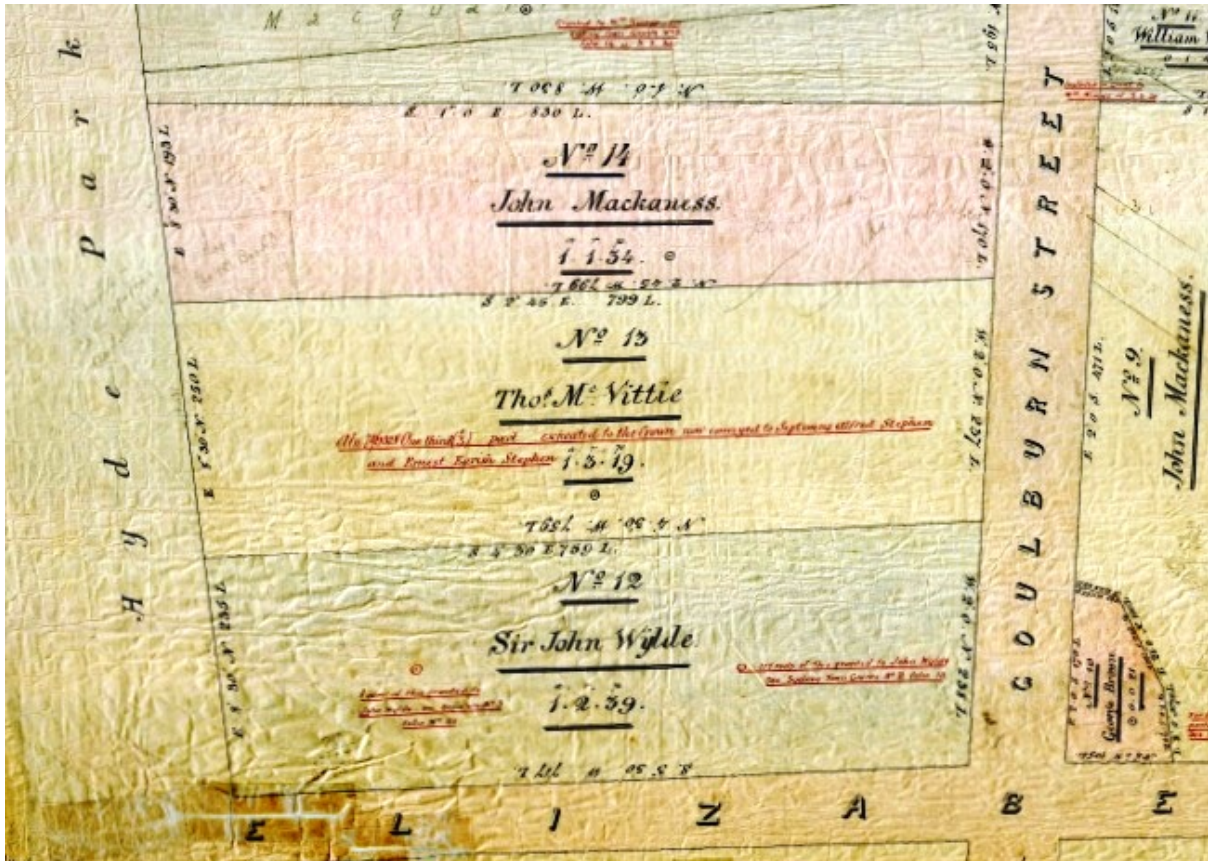
**Answer:** Not necessarily. It might require finding out about more than one parcel of land in the original title records, but this is quite common, especially where large buildings straddle consolidated titles.

## Early land history

This apartment block, known as 148 Elizabeth Street, occupies land between Elizabeth and Nithsdale streets. It contains the remnants of a four-storey 1913 building, including the Elizabeth Street façade, behind which is a 32-storey high rise tower backing onto Nithsdale Street.

All houses in Sydney stand on Aboriginal land, but it is not often that an owner gets an opportunity to experience this presence firsthand. In the early 20th century the natural slope of the land from east to west on this site was modified. This meant that there were few archaeological remains when an archaeological dig was done in the 1990s before the building of Hyde Park Towers. Despite this, pieces of European glass modified into scraping tools were found. These provided evidence that Aboriginal people were present on the site after Europeans arrived, adapting creatively to the new range of materials discarded by settlers.<sup>1</sup>

When land was granted by the Crown to European settlers, this property was part of two parcels of land granted to two men: John Wylde and Thomas Macvitie.<sup>2</sup> Wylde's land stretched from Liverpool Street /Hyde Park along Elizabeth Street to Goulburn Street. Macvitie's land adjoined Wylde's, stretching from Liverpool Street/Hyde Park to Goulburn Street and bounded on the east by what would become Nithsdale Street. So Hyde Park Towers and its Elizabeth Street entrance building stand on part of two land grants.



City Section Survey Plan of Section 5 shows the original grants to John Wylde and William Macvitie. These plans are online in the Historical Atlas of Sydney, City of Sydney Archives.

## A brief land title history

**9 January 1821** – Parts of Lot 12 of City Section 5 granted to Sir John Wylde - 1 acre 0 roods 0 perches (land area)

**30 June 1823** – Parts of Lot 12 of City Section 5 granted to Sir John Wylde - 0 acres 2 roods 37 perches

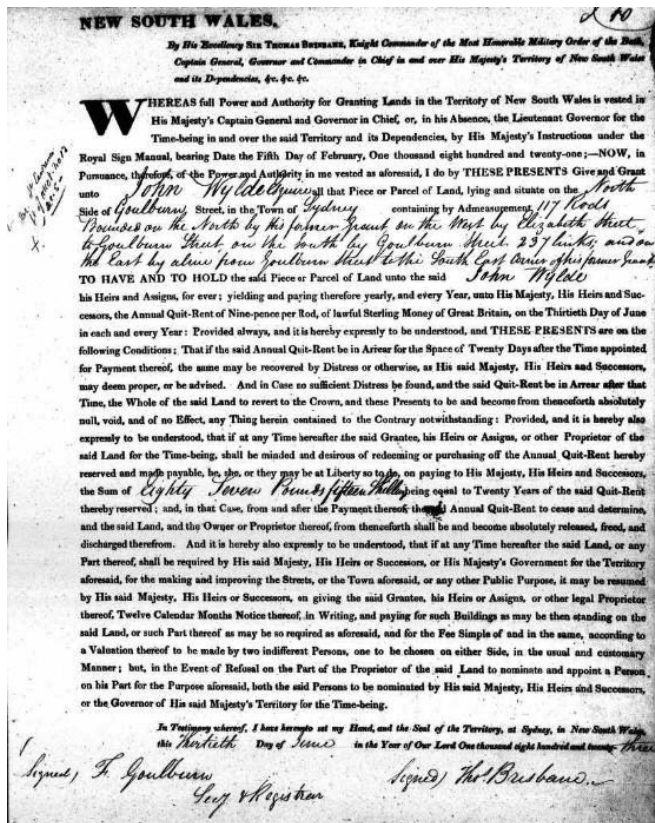
**19 October 1831** – Part of Lot 13 of City Section 5 granted to Thomas Macvitie - 1 acre 3 roods 19 perches

**1912** – the land was defined and registered as Lot 1/ DP 67709

**1995 and 1998** – the land was defined and registered as two separate Strata subdivided properties:

No. 148 – the high rise residential tower is SP 50530 - a strata subdivision of Lot 1/ DP 851778

No. 148A – is SP 58458, a low-rise commercial strata subdivision of the Hercules Motors building – a strata subdivision of Lot 2/ DP 851778.

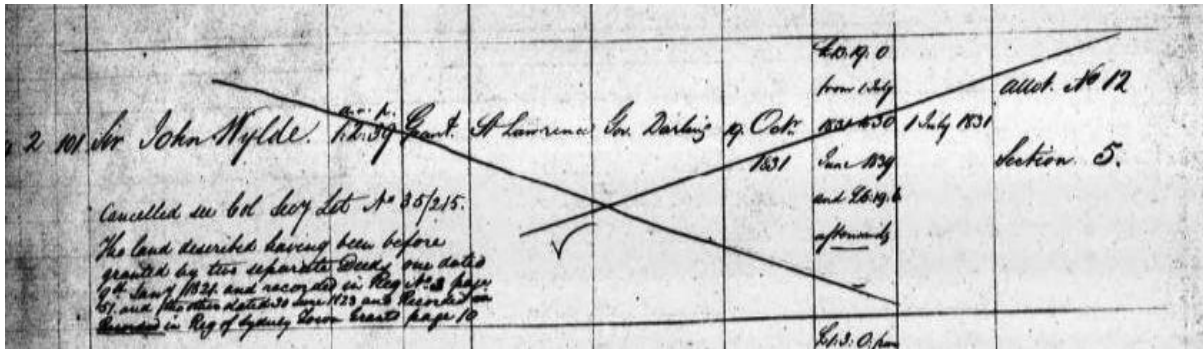


Land Grant to Wylde, dated 30 June 1823. Registers of Land Grants and Leases, State Records Authority of NSW, Series: NRS 13836; Item: 7/473; Reel: 2700.<sup>3</sup>

## The first houses

Wylde acquired his land in 1821 and 1823 and around 1823 he built a fine three-storey house facing Hyde Park (now Liverpool Street). The land behind this house, including the land which is today the Elizabeth Street frontage of Hyde Park Towers, remained undeveloped. Wylde did not take to Sydney and in 1825 he left the colony.<sup>4</sup>

Early grants were given haphazardly. In 1831 Wylde's grant was formalised, but as early as 1829 parts of his land fronting Elizabeth Street had been auctioned and purchased by five new owners. Two small houses were immediately built on Elizabeth Street, one of them on the site of the entrance to Hyde Park Towers. In 1835 Wylde's title to the land was cancelled and the people who had purchased in 1829 were granted titles.



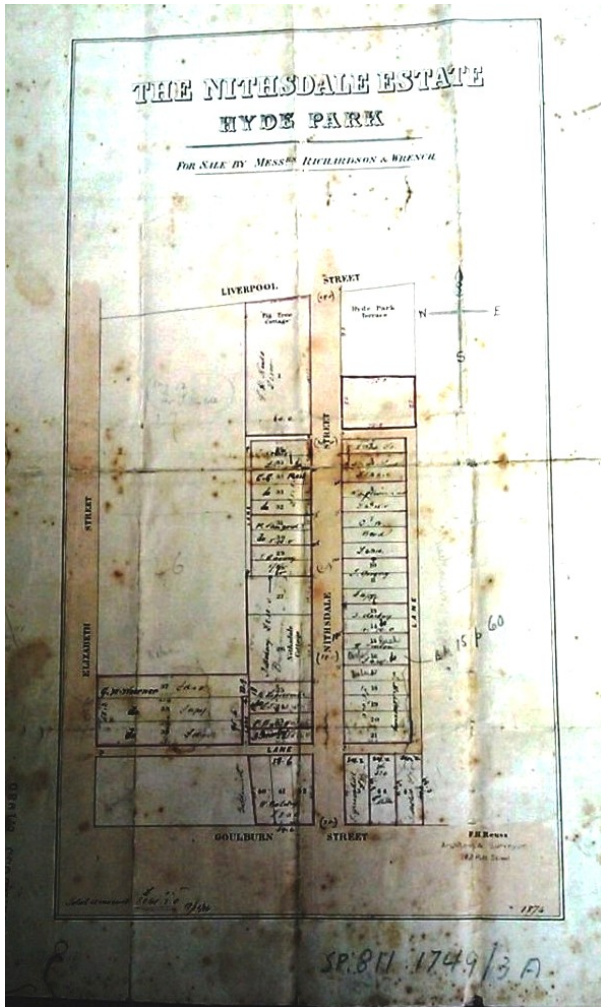
John Wylde's 1831 grant dated 19 October 1831 subsequently crossed out in 1835. Registers of Land Grants and Leases, State Records Authority of NSW; Series: NRS 13836; Item: 7/473; Reel: 2700.

The first cottage built on the property that is now Hyde Park Towers was constructed in about 1829. This single-storey six-roomed cottage was occupied at various times in the mid-19th century by a maths teacher who was a master at Sydney College and an accountant. It was possibly also run as a grocery store and as a small 'ladies school'. Various other structures were built behind this house in the following decades. By the mid-1860s the area was becoming unpleasant, with workshops and what were recorded as 'tenements' built in the rear of the house with 'a detached kitchen and room over.'<sup>5</sup>

## The Nithsdale estate

Macvitie's grant to the east of Wylde's was formalised in 1831. Like Wylde, he too built a house fronting Liverpool Street facing Hyde Park between 1831 and 1836. Between 1836 and 1843 another dwelling, a 12-roomed stone house named Nithsdale Cottage, was built towards the southern end of his grant. In the image above this is shown as a large building coloured grey fronting Nithsdale Street. However this street was not created until 1875 when Macvitie's grant was subdivided as the Nithsdale Estate. Before this, the address was variously given as Elizabeth Street or Goulburn Street, with the assessment books giving the owner as Mrs Macvitie.

In the mid-1860s two houses were listed on this site, Nithsdale Cottage and Midlothian Cottage. Both were recorded as two storeys, both built of stone and both owned by Mrs Macvitie [spelt McVitie].<sup>6</sup> As both were listed with eight rooms, this may have been the original 12-roomed Nithsdale Cottage, extended and divided into two dwellings. The outline given in the image above could be interpreted as being two adjoining dwellings. On the subdivision map below lots 26 and 27 which were probably straddled by this building(s) were acquired by a single purchaser, T Maloney.



Nithsdale Estate subdivision plan c 1875. SLNSW ML/SP 811.1749/3A

The Nithsdale subdivision was soon built over by terraces on the small blocks between Nithsdale Cottage and a laneway to the north now known as Clarke Street. Nithsdale Cottage went the same way soon after, as shown in the 1885 map below.



Following the 1875 subdivision, a row of small houses was built along Nithsdale Street. Detail, NSW Department of Lands Sydney Metropolitan Detail survey series, 1883-1920, ML ZM Series 4 811.17/1 City of Sydney, Sheet E1, 1885.

The terraces built along Nithsdale Street from the time of the 1875 subdivision, where the tower of Hyde Park Towers now stands, were occupied by a mix of long and short-term occupants. Some were used on occasions as cheap boarding houses or as small commercial workshops with a high turnover. Shergold, the owner of a double block at numbers 11 and 12, for many years operated as a grocer.

From 1871 the original 1829 cottage on Elizabeth Street and the 'tenements' behind it were occupied by a man called Pritchard who was described as a 'bus proprietor', with the buildings described as office and stables.<sup>7</sup> Next door, still on the current Hyde Park Towers site, a new iron building was used as a warehouse for Cobb and Co, and it is likely that this was the same business as Pritchard's.

Cobb and Co stayed for several years after which the complex of buildings was used by several cabinet makers and by 1889 Andrews Brothers, monumental masons. This suggests a co-use of the site by makers of headstones and possibly makers of coffins. The site was convenient to the Mortuary Station and next door to the Manchester Unity Oddfellows Hall which operated a funeral fund for its members.

# ANDREWS BROS., Monumental Masons and Designers . . .

140, 142, 144, 146 ELIZABETH-ST., SYDNEY (Only)  
(Between Liverpool and Goulburn Streets).

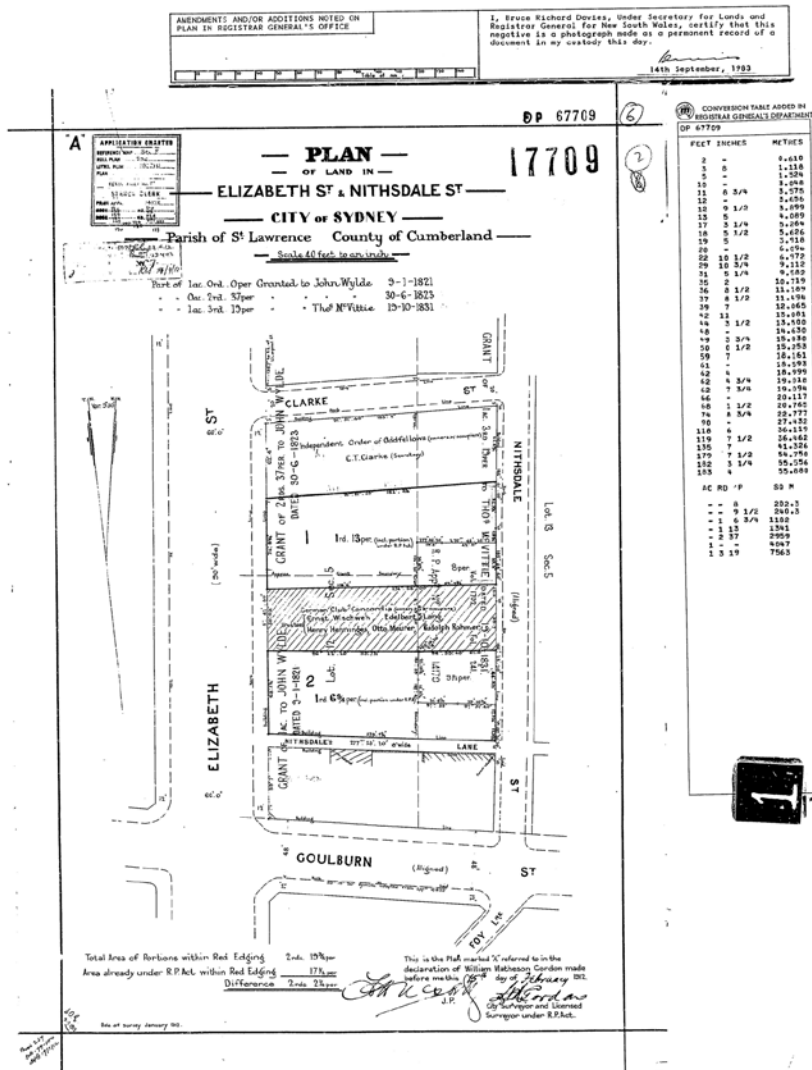
Every Description of Monumental Work Neatly Executed.

Telephone 544.

The Catholic Press, 11 August 1910, Trove, National Library of Australia.

## Twentieth century developments

In 1909 the City Council resumed all the relevant properties along Elizabeth Street, back to Nithsdale Street, in order to widen Elizabeth Street. After taking a slice of the land for the roadworks, the Council leased the rest to Mark Foy's Ltd.<sup>8</sup> Mark Foy's was already on the other side of Elizabeth Street where it had built a large department store between 1907 and 1909. Their newly acquired land remained on two titles divided by the line of the original grants to Wyld and Macvitie.



Deposited Plan 67709 of 1912, post-dates the land resumptions in the area and was only superseded by a new plan in 1995 when the present tower was developed. The Mark Foy's land was Lot 13, between the Oddfellows Hall and the Concordia Club, previously occupied by Cobb & Co.

Everything was cleared from the newly acquired site, including the terraces fronting Nithsdale Street, and a four-storey ironmongery was constructed. The frontage of this building is the current Elizabeth Street entrance to Hyde Park Towers.<sup>9</sup>



Fire Underwriters' Plan 2 BLOCK\_210-11-12 Elizabeth St c 1924 (detail). The next door neighbours remain the same as in the 1912 plan, with the German Club 'Concordia' now renamed as the Australian Hall. Historical Atlas of Sydney, City of Sydney Archives.

Just north of the ironmongery at the corner of Elizabeth and Liverpool Streets, on the site of John Wylde's old mansion, Mark Foy's erected a furniture store. In 1930 the main emporium on the other side of Elizabeth Street was extended, all of the store's activities were relocated to it, and the ironmongery was converted to a motor garage and car park for the main store. This involved installing petrol pumps and storage tank.<sup>10</sup> In 1963 the lease was transferred to Hercules Motors Pty Ltd.

In the early and mid-20th century this area of Sydney developed strong connections with the local German community. The Australian Hall, which stands next to 148 Elizabeth Street, housed the Concordia Club and there was a German Church around the corner in Goulburn Street. Gerald Hercules Robinson (1893-1972), the principal of Hercules Motors was a dealer in imported cars, and was the major agent for Daimler as well as for a number of other European brands. He was the first man to sell helicopters into the Australian market.



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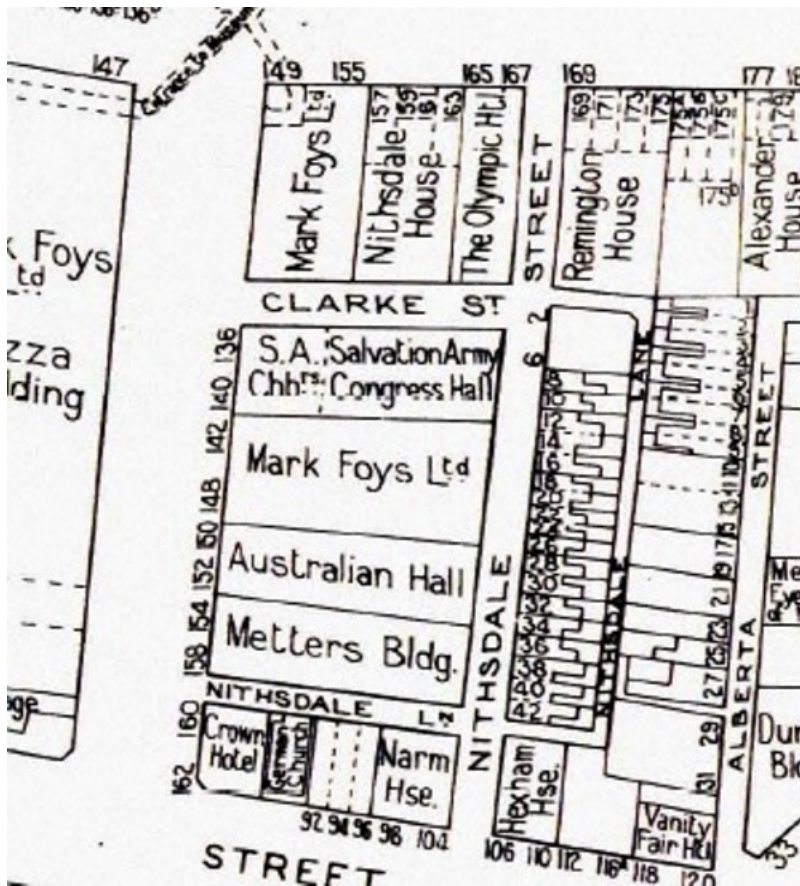
MARK  IF FOR SCHOOL PROJECT.

Sydney Morning Herald, 20 May 1986. Trove, National Library of Australia.

During its final years the building was used as a carpark until it was partially demolished in 1993 for the construction of Hyde Park Towers. The Elizabeth Street façade was retained along with aspects of the original 1913 building, and the ground floor became the foyer of the high rise tower, with other floors used as offices. This Elizabeth street building was identified as a heritage item by the City of Sydney’s Heritage Study, 1989. It is notable for its rarity because, along with its neighbours in the run of buildings to Goulburn Street, it forms ‘the only remaining group of Edwardian Buildings in the Sydney Central business district.’<sup>11</sup>

## How this history was found

We started by making a map survey and studying a good mid-20th century map. This helped anchor the locality and provided some clues when tracing the site backwards and forwards in time.



City Building Surveyor's Detail Sheets, c 1956 – Sheet 10 (detail). Historical Atlas of Sydney, City of Sydney Archives.

The [City of Sydney Library catalogue](#) indicated that there were several studies done on this land in the 1990s, prior to the building of Hyde Park Towers which were completed in 1995. These studies give the history of the site along with footnotes indicating how the history was compiled. They contain many more maps and diagrams than have been included here. An owner wanting to do the history of this place would save a lot of time by starting with this published material. Studies include:

Perumal Murphy, Hercules Motors Building, 142-48 Elizabeth Street, Sydney: conservation plan. For Crone & Associates, 1991.

Godden Mackay Pty Ltd, *Foy's Ironmongery Store, 142-148 Elizabeth Street*, Baseline Archaeological Assessment, prepared for Andes Holdings Pty Ltd, September 1993.

Damaris Bairstow, *142-8 Elizabeth Street, Historical Archaeological Excavation Report*, prepared for Concrete Constructions (NSW), April 1994.

The information on early and subsequent grants is based on a search of Land and Property Information files. The published reports did not undertake a full title search, but they list references to many of these records. Note that they are listed as LTO which means Land Titles Office, the previous name for the organisation.

[Ancestry.com.au](#) has a number of databases the house history researcher can use. For this history the NSW, Australia, *Registers of Land Grants and Leases, 1792-1867* database (a [searchable database](#) of State Records of NSW holdings) was searched for both John Wylde and Thomas Mcvitie

for the original documents from the 1820s and 1830s that are mentioned and reproduced in this house history.

Occupations of residents in buildings that pre-date the current building are from [assessment books](#) and [Sands Directories](#). The stables and offices of Pritchard do not appear on any known maps, but they are in the assessment books as 'off' – meaning down a lane behind the Elizabeth Street cottage.

Searching addresses in Trove uncovered advertisements for Andrews Bros, the monumental masons on the site and other activities in the area, including some quirky ones for Moore's Electric Baths, also next door to the site, which claimed to cure everything, including cancer.



*Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 January 1897. Trove, National Library of Australia.

## Other sources

[The Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection](#) is open to anyone with an interest in the history of house and garden design and interior furnishing in NSW. The library is open to the public and its catalogue can be searched online.

The outline history indicates that the block was resumed in 1909 by the city council. A search of the [City of Sydney Archives](#) would almost certainly yield records, including demolition photos, correspondence and possibly 'resumption packets', which hold legal material relating to parcels of resumed land and findings in cases where valuations of properties were disputed. A spot search for 'Nithsdale Street' in the City of Sydney's online catalogue of photographs [ArchivePix](#), with the search option *exact words* selected, gave a result of 34 photographs.



Shergold's shop at 13 Nithsdale Street c 1898-1900 was found on ArchivePix in the City of Sydney Archives, Ref. SRC16115.

Several of the maps and plans used in this study were sourced at the [State Library of NSW](#) which holds many map and plans relating to this part of the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Damaris Bairstow '142- 8 Elizabeth Street, Sydney: Historical Archaeological Excavation Report', for Concrete Constructions, 1994, pp. 25-6.

<sup>2</sup> R J McKay, Wylde, Sir John, (1781-1859) *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wylde-sir-john-2822/text4045> and R F Holder, Macvitie, William, (1781-1833) *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/macvitie-thomas-2421/text3215>. The name Macvitie appears in a variety of spellings including McVitie, MacVittie and so on.

<sup>3</sup> These records are available on Ancestry.com.au. This document granted Wylde 117 rods, which is the same as the '0 acres, 2 roods and 37 perches' provided in the title history. [A perch is the same thing as a rod. 2 roods= 80 rods + 37 = 117 rods. These old measurements can all be calculated readily using online Imperial unit converters. Further conversion will provide the area in current measurements such as hectares. In this case, approximately one third of a hectare.]

<sup>4</sup> Martin Carney, history section in Godden Mackay Pty Ltd, 'Foy's Ironmongery Store, 142-148 Elizabeth Street, Baseline Archaeological Assessment', for Andes Holdings Pty Ltd, 1993, pp. 17-19.

<sup>5</sup> Entries in City Assessment Books and Sands Directories from 1858 onwards. Further maps and details of structures and occupants provided in Martin Carney, history section in Godden Mackay Pty Ltd, 'Foy's Ironmongery Store, 142-148 Elizabeth Street etc, pp. 20-24.

<sup>6</sup> City Assessment Book for Cook Ward, 1867. The addresses were given as 336 and 340 Elizabeth Street.

<sup>7</sup> This occupant was recorded in both the Sand Directory and the Assessment Book for 1871.

<sup>8</sup> Plan of Residue Land, Elizabeth Street, City Council Leases, 50 years Term, for auction sale, 26 February 1912, ML, SP 811.1749/46

<sup>9</sup> There are various files in the City Archives relating to the ironmongery, including drawings submitted with a 1913 Building Application, NSCA 0199/13.

<sup>10</sup> Damaris Bairstow, 142-8 Elizabeth Street, Sydney: Historical Archaeological Excavation Report, for Concrete Constructions, April 1994, p.12.

<sup>11</sup> Perumal Murphy, 'Hercules Motors Building, 142-148 Elizabeth Street, Sydney', Conservation Plan, 1991, p.10