

CIRCULAR QUAY TO SOUTH HEAD AND CLOVELLY

LOOP WALK L9: ST PETERS



- Main Walk:** — **Loop and Connecting Walks:** —
- Distance:** 0.9km.
- Time:** 25 mins.
- Level:** Easy, some steps.
- Transport:** Watsons Bay Ferry, Watsons Bay buses.
- Connects with:** Main Walk.
- Facilities:** None.

This short loop from the Main Walk is an opportunity to look more closely at several interesting buildings and return on part of the old Watsons Bay tramway route.

Loop L9 begins by turning left (downhill) at the point where Section 4 of the Main Walk meets Old South Head Road. Follow the footpath down to St Peter's Church gates and enter the grounds.

Old South Head Road has a mixture of houses on its southern side, many of which enjoy the extraordinary view. Almost opposite St Peter's gates on the Russell Street corner, is No. 272, a fine high-set sandstone house with a semi-circular bay window. The house was designed by Edmund Blacket, architect of St Peters.

Edmund Blacket designed many Anglican churches in an era of great church building. Gothic Revival style St Peters Church was completed in 1864 in warm stonework and with wooden shingles, and stands wonderfully in its scenic harbour and bushland setting. Named after the 'pilot of the Lake of Galilee' it has long been associated with the Harbour pilots. The church gates commemorate the *Greycliffe* ferry disaster of 1927 (see Main Walk Part 3) where 40 passengers, many of them schoolchildren, died.

This fine little church is beautifully set with its harbour views. Rarely open unless a service is in progress, but if it is, don't miss the stained windows and the organ with an extraordinary history. The organ loft was added in 1939 to house this organ, which had been built in London in 1796 for Spencer Perceval. While Perceval was Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1812, he was unfortunate enough to be assassinated. Soon after his organ was loaned to Napoleon Bonaparte as part of the comforts provided for his exile to the island of Elba after his first downfall in 1814. However, in 1815, he escaped back to France, raised his army again, and marched north, his short triumphal progress coming to an end at Waterloo. Napoleon's organ did not accompany him to his final exile on St Helena but was returned to England, going to an English church before coming to Sydney's Conservatorium of Music early in the twentieth century. It had a short subsequent spell in private ownership before finally coming to St Peters just before WWII.

Locate the path immediately beyond the church porch which leads through the bushes and turns downhill to emerge on Old South Head Road. Continue downhill to the next church, Our Lady Star of the Sea, roughly opposite Salisbury Street.

The path through the bush down from St Peters, emerges just uphill of Number 333, a fine two-storey stone Victorian villa adorned with lovely iron lace. Originally built in 1876 as the Watsons Bay schoolmaster's residence, it and the schoolhouse (which can be visited shortly) were both designed by George Allen Mansfield. Restored in the late 1960s, it has some brick additions at the rear as well as an old sandstone, slate-roofed toilet.

Immediately downhill again is Our Lady Star of the Sea Church, also constructed in locally quarried sandstone with a slate roof, and completed in various stages between 1910 and the 1960s in a somewhat Romanesque design. The church glass is pretty modern, as is the arresting window feature behind the altar. *Our Lady's* origins were with an earlier chapel, St Anthony's, constructed by Portuguese-speaking fishermen and pilot boat crews between the 1840s and 1868 in a time when Watsons Bay had a small but significant Azorean and other Portuguese-speaking seafaring community. Across the road, the area's interesting mix of domestic architecture continues.

Return up Old South Head Road towards Number 333 and turn left down the driveway towards the stone scout hall.

The building ahead (renamed 'The Gunyah') as a Scout Centre, is the former single-storey, double-gabled Watsons Bay School. Another fine piece of local sandstone work, it was, like the residence, designed by G. A. Mansfield. Time has removed some of its original features such as the slate roof, but it still sits in its old grounds behind the former teacher's residence on the edge of a small quarried escarpment. The school was originally opened in 1858 in the old pilot station before moving to these new premises designed for 100 pupils in 1876. In 1925 the school was relocated to a site in Vaucluse as Vaucluse Public School.

A path and steps to the left (north-west) of the old school building lead down into Dunbar Street. Turn right and where the street turns sharply left, take the footpath directly ahead leading up into the reserve and follow the paths upwards and right until Old South Head Road is reached again.

Little Dunbar Street, tucked behind rising bushland has more of the classic little cottages of the area – notably Number 2, *Dunbar*. The path and steps lead up through semi-rainforest to run just below and then meet the old cutting and permanent way of the former Watsons Bay tramline. Ballast can still be seen on the tramway which terminated downhill next to The Gap. The path emerges in a grassy area below Old South Head Road with the Main Walk to the left.

Loop 9 rejoins the Main Walk at approximately the same point where it left it. Continue on the Main Walk southwards (uphill) along Old South Head Road.