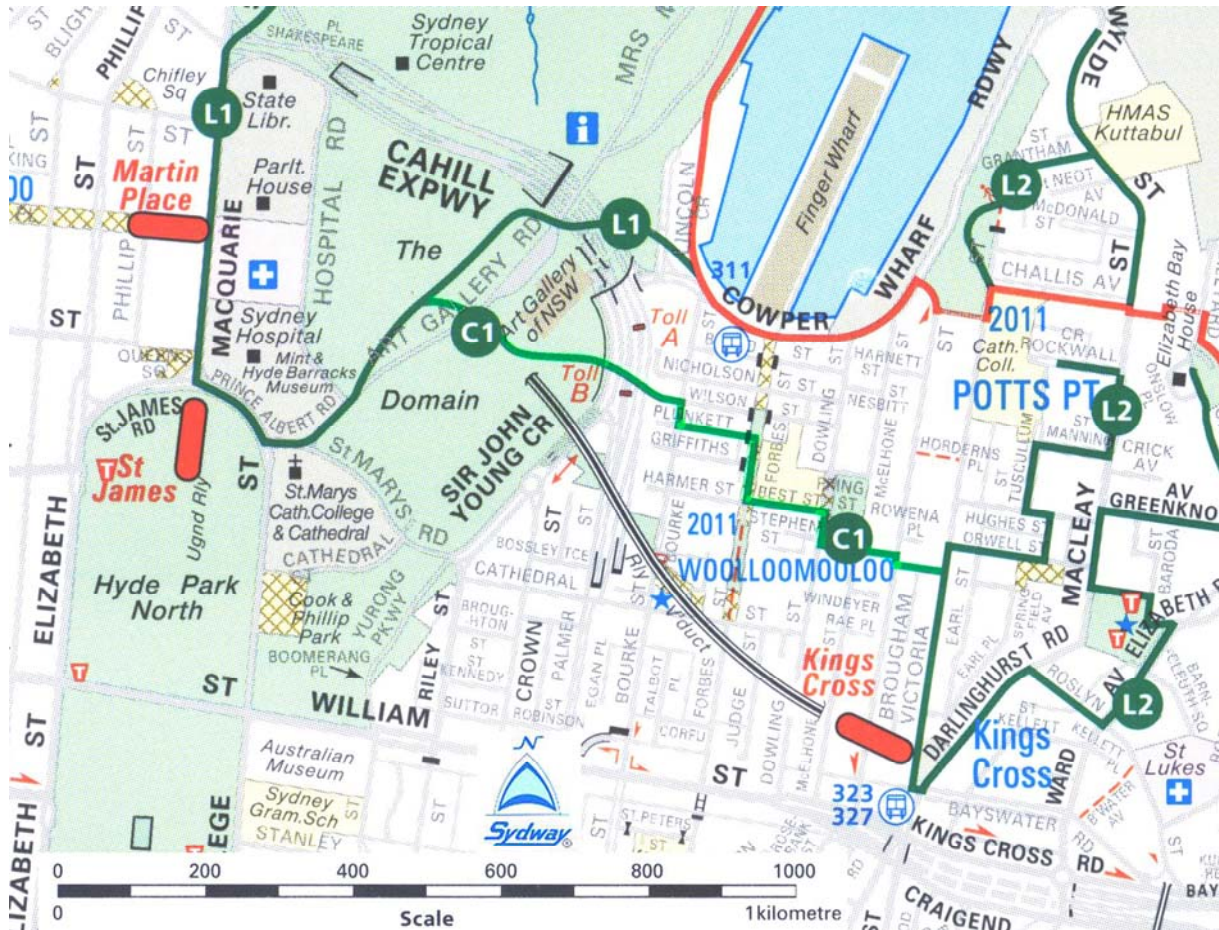


# CIRCULAR QUAY TO SOUTH HEAD AND CLOVELLY

## CONNECTING WALK C1: WOOLLOOMOOLOO

### THE DOMAIN TO KINGS CROSS



- Main Walk:** —      **Loop and Connecting Walks:** —
- Distance:** 1km.
- Time:** 30 mins.
- Level:** Easy-moderate; some steps.
- Transport:** Martin Place, Museum and Kings Cross Stations; William St buses.
- Connects with:** Loops L1 (Macquarie St) and L2 (Kings Cross).
- Facilities:**  
*Toilets:* Domain;  
*Picnic spots:* Domain;  
*Shops or hotels:* Domain, Woolloomooloo, Kings Cross.

Connection walk C1 drops from the plateau of The Domain to cross the Woolloomooloo valley and climb up to Kings Cross, linking Loops L1 (Macquarie Street) and L2 (Kings Cross). It is an inland alternative to part of the Main Walk, offering an experience of the 'Loo far closer to its complex urban history than its increasingly trendy waterfront. Quite apart from its spelling, Woolloomooloo is also remarkable for the mix of Georgian and Victorian cottages and terraces and recycled industrial buildings which remain staunchly intermingled with contemporary public housing despite the predations of transport corridors and high rise.

*Depart from Loop L1 and cross Art Gallery Road on the southeast (right) side of the NSW Art Gallery.*

*Continue downhill towards the motorway tollgates but take the walkway over the roads and step down into Wilson Street. Turn right up Bourke and then immediately left into Plunkett Street through to Forbes Street in front of Plunkett Street School.*

The walk down hill passes a number of outdoor artworks of interest – including the white bas relief *Mobius Sea* (Richard Goodwin, 1985) with what seems to be souls struggling beneath shrouds, and Brett Whiteley's very big matchsticks, *Almost Once*. To the right, the Eastern Suburbs railway emerges from its tunnel onto its Woolloomooloo viaduct. The Domain tunnel to this point had been completed by the 1940s. For decades politicians made regular election promises for its completion, but 'the Ghost Train' was just as regularly shelved after each election. This perpetual source of cartoonists' humour dried up, however, in 1979 when Premier Neville Wran actually did complete it – albeit in a somewhat abbreviated version from most earlier plans.

While crossing the pedestrian bridge over and the c2000 Eastern Distributor, look right to the lovely rounded frontage of the former Merryfield Hotel occupying the wedge formed by Sir John Young Crescent and Palmer Street. The hotel had other names (such as the Royal Domain Hotel) and other uses but since 2003 it has been a privately owned house and museum /art gallery, the gallery featuring the work and memorabilia of Sydney abstract painter, John Passmore (1904-84).

Beyond the gates which herald the pedestrian precinct at the end of Plunkett Street is Plunkett Street Public School, part of which now also houses the Sydney Distance Education Secondary School. The school was relocated here from its original nearby site as part of the Commonwealth-funded urban renewal program which brought an end to the cycles of redevelopment projects, neglect and destruction which had bullied and belted this oldest of working class inner city suburbs almost into oblivion. It was the sort of rough treatment, the suburb itself had a reputation for but today much of the 'Loo remains what it has mostly been, a place of real character and a place of working class residents and people doing it tough.

Names here tell some of the story and doing it tough was a consistent theme. So was staying away from the place. The suburb's name comes from its indigenous owners, a European approximation of either a word for a male kangaroo or a place with plenty of fish. Governor Macquarie set aside part of the area for Aboriginal people but they demonstrated no enthusiasm for the farmers' life. Palmer and Riley Streets recall, firstly, Commissary-General, merchant and ship-owner, John Palmer (1760-1833) who began a farm here as early as 1793. Palmer's fortunes declined and the estate was sold up in 1822, purchased by merchant, Edward Riley (1784-25), who, in turn, overwhelmed by cycles of depression, shot himself here three years later.

Names matter. The residents of Woolloomooloo Street were so anxious to rid themselves of association with the name (or possibly just the tedium of spelling it twice) they opted for the more genteel associations of 'Cathedral Street' in 1905. Other street names – 'Dowling' (whose house was named 'Brougham'), 'Forbes', 'Windeyer' and 'Judge',) do recall more successful men – judges - but they did not quite live here. They and other establishment figures like politician McElhone (see Main Walk, Section 1), Sir Charles Nicholson and Dr William Bland, built their elegant Victorian villas instead on the ridge above Woolloomooloo (now Victoria Street). Other streets are named for royalty ('William', 'Victoria', 'Crown') and vice-royalty ('Bourke' - who was NSW Governor 1831-37 - and 'Sir John Young Crescent' -Governor, 1861-67). None of them lived here, either.

The area was subdivided from the 1840s and with its low lying land and proximity to the waterfront, it quickly developed a character similar to The Rocks. From the 1860s to the 1940s it kept a reputation for poverty, gang violence (the 'Pushes'), prostitution and crime which stuck to the suburb despite the thousands of ordinary, hard-working lives that were passed within its streets and tenements. A poor, mostly rental area on the edge of an expanding city, it became an easy target for urban redevelopment, or just plain urban degradation, from the early twentieth century on. Commercial and industrial intrusions, clearings, and plans for wholesale destruction and redevelopment left many houses boarded up, and most run down. Cheaper rent bought industry – motor garages, shipping companies, bakeries, hotels. Roads and railways were planned to slash through it – which in the 1970s happened when the Eastern Suburbs Railway slashed its way across the suburb. One of the positive legacies of that project is that the viaduct's pylons have become a mural gallery of the suburb's history. The Eastern Distributor had a similar impact, though less than it would have had if earlier, less tunnelled options been completed.

The main danger emerged at the end of the 1950s, 60s and 70s when government planning bodies and private developers were hard at work buying up properties and demolishing them or letting them rot, while developing plans for a high rise suburb of up to 40,000 workers and residents. Local residents – rarely owners themselves and never consulted – began to resist, but they were up against a powerful combination. By 1976, 40% of the houses that had been there 10 years before had been demolished, half the rest were empty and the population was down to a fraction of its former levels.

However, by then, the Green Bans and resident action resistance had had a critical (if short-lived) ally, the Whitlam Government of 1972-75. Saving the Loo had been an election promise and Urban and Regional Development Minister Tom Uren delivered. In June 1975 a three-part agreement came into effect with the Commonwealth funding land acquisition and the State and Local Governments planning and managing the low density urban renewal Woolloomooloo Project. The project covered 13 hectares, included 750 or more dwellings and other facilities – about 75% of it public housing – made up of a mixture of restored or recycled older dwellings and compatible new buildings.

So back to Plunkett Street School, which characterizes the Woolloomooloo Project – a recycled industrial building and terraces mixed with new construction to create a primary school, after-school centre and, now, Distance Education Centre. The first Plunkett Street School had opened in 1878, moving to its proper premises in the early 1880s – in Plunkett Street! It was an apt location as the street had been named after John Hubert Plunkett, President of the Board of National Education, 1848-58. The new school's first headmaster was Peter Dodds McCormick, the composer of the national anthem, *Advance Australia Fair* (see Connecting Walk C8). However, the school stood pretty much where the motorway was to go and so in the 1970s, it moved to this site. The row of 1886 terraces which form part of it in Bourke Street (Numbers 52-68) were known as *Bottomleys Terrace*. This area of Bourke Street was pedestrianised in the 1970s and has interesting refurbished Victorian Gothic Revival and Italianate terraces blended in with modern housing.

*Turn left at the end of the school terraces into Best Street, right at Dowling Street and then past the end of the playground to McElhone Street. Sydney Place leads to Hills Stairs and Brougham Street. Across the road, a few doors uphill to the right, climb Butler Stairs to **meet the Kings Cross Loop L2** in Victoria Street.*

Little Best Street has a feel of the old lanes about it (on one side, at least) greatly assisted by Numbers 10-16, semi-detached sandstone cottages and terraces from the mid-1860s, now public facilities. Woolloomooloo had the right feel for some of the few early Australian films about urban life. The cartoon character, Fatty Finn, billycarts, billygoats and all, came to life here in this street in the 1929 film, *Kid Stakes*; while Raymond Longford's superb 1919 silent film of *The Sentimental Bloke*, was shot around here even though the C.J. Dennis poems on which it was based were originally set in Melbourne.

Part of Dowling Street has been closed as an adjunct to a playground area. On the harbour side are the converted industrial buildings of Plunkett School, while diagonally across the playground stands the unlovely but interesting St Columbkilles Church (usually called 'St Comicals' for short), the only church in Woolloomooloo. Named after a sixth century Irish monk and built in 1885 for the large Irish Catholic population the suburb once had.

Uphill, Number 71 on a corner on the city side of the road, is one of the earliest surviving houses in Woolloomooloo, originally an 1850s stone, one-room cottage belonging to a dairy. Its neighbours are boom era terraces (1890s) followed by new townhouses. Across the street are brick and stone terraces of a similar age range.

Newer apartments in McElhone Street lead to the very modest, considering its name, Sydney Place and up the 1870s Hills Stairs to Brougham Street, across which, a little to the right, begin the slightly intimidating Butler Stairs, built up the quarried escarpment in the 1870s. About half-way up, notice the grand brick arches holding up the dunnies and backsides of Victoria Street housing. At the top of the stairs, Loop Walk L2, King Cross, is joined.