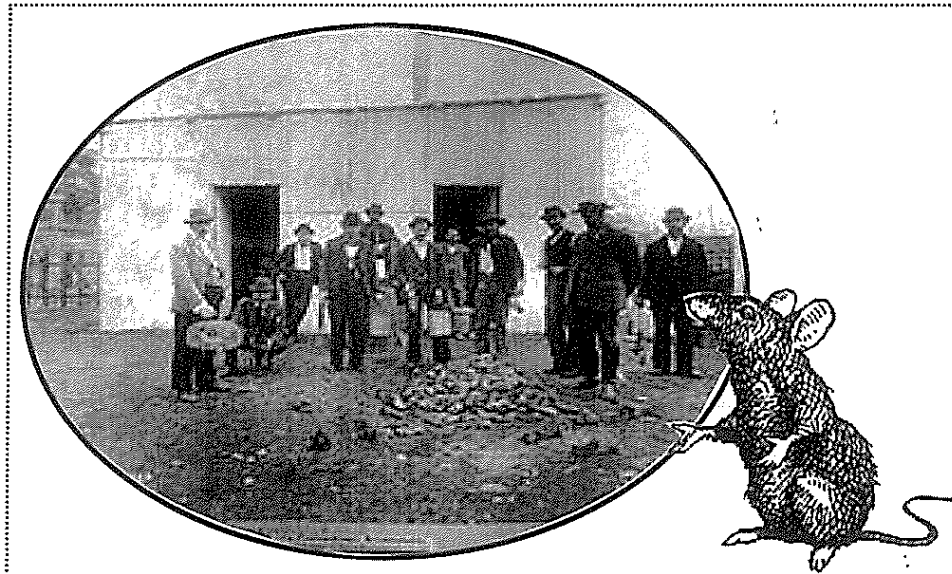


BUBONIC PLAGUE OUTBREAK IN SYDNEY IN THE 1900'S HELPS POLITIANS TO CLEAR THE WAY FOR TRANSPORT PROGRESS & LANDMARK



By the end of August 1900, the outbreak had concluded, and whilst there was only a reported 103 deaths (significantly low when compared to mortality rates from other infectious diseases of the time), the effect that it had on the reputation of The Rocks and Millers Point, as well as its inhabitants, was damaging.

The state resumption and its demolition programs left behind a series of questions regarding the motives behind the government's orchestration of this movement.

The geographical structure of The Rocks, as well as Sydney's unique historical beginnings as a penal colony credited the often rugged housing conditions.

Eleven decades of unregulated building development, as well as uneven and irregular land surfaces meant that often housing was unstructured and haphazardly built. Dwellings sprouted from rocks and other buildings in an "oyster-like" fashion, and the practice of "land sweating"

(the construction of multiple structures on one piece of land) was commonplace. The City of Sydney Improvement Act of 1879 highlighted these issues and encouraged demolition of any existing substandard housing.

This set the precedent for the destruction programs that were to follow after the bubonic plague outbreak.



Out There



"Two rats would have been nice...but John and I always wanted to create a plague"

HEALTH BOARD ACTS

On the afternoon of 20th January 1900, van-driver Arthur Payne, a resident of 10 Ferry Lane, The Rocks, became Sydney's first reported victim of bubonic plague. This was somewhat unremarkably in itself, the arrival of the plague had been duly anticipated by authorities for months prior as it raced through Hong Kong and New Caledonia. What was notably, however, was the wave of public panic that the outbreak prompted, and how it was responsible for community disruption and mass demolition of one of Sydney's oldest precincts, The Rocks and Millers Point. The outbreak bred panic and brought emphasized authoritative attention to the living conditions of the area, and much time and effort was devoted to surveying conditions and proposing subsequent remedies of improvement. State resumption of the precinct followed swiftly after the outbreak, coming into effect on 3rd May 1900, and forced quarantining of the site swiftly followed, with areas surrounding the wharves being sectioned off, and mass disinfection and demolition processes commencing soon thereafter.

Over the next decade, more than 3,800 properties were inspected, hundreds were pulled down, and hundreds of families and individuals were dispossessed.

Land Resumption

Another motivating factor for the resumption of the area was to lay the groundwork of the proposed bridge link between Sydney city and the North Shore. Plans were underway even at these early stages and a good 23 years before construction of the bridge commenced. Even at the turn of the nineteenth century, it was clear that there would need to be a widened thoroughfare to accommodate traffic entering and exiting the bridge, and many buildings would need to be sacrificed to achieve this. The bubonic plague outbreak offered the ideal opportunity to highlight the inadequacies in a lot of buildings, and the chance to condemn the area as slum, whose only chance of redemption was through mass demolition.

The middle class mentality and its effect on The Rocks inhabitants

From the 1860s to the early 1900s the middle and upper classes began deserting the area and relocating to the suburbs, divorcing themselves physically from the working and lower classes, who tended to remain in the city and close to the waterfront areas and their place of employment.

Naturally as a point of import and export, and a site that saw a high exchange of people, livestock and products on a global level, the harbour foreshore was more susceptible to the outbreak of disease.

When bubonic plague erupted along the waterfront precinct, the area became heavily associated with disease and unsanitary conditions, and consequently its inhabitants were assumed to be unwashed and living in a state of constant filth. This has helped to create an historical consensus that waterside housing and urban living conditions were universally appalling.

The middle and upper classes were able to dissociate themselves with the presence of the plague, given their geographical distance from the harbour foreshore and the point of outbreak.

The resulting effect was a longstanding assumption that The Rocks was in such dire state that there was no alternative option but for mass slum clearance.

Whilst there is no doubt that many properties were definitely substandard, and many families lived in abject poverty and poor conditions, not all the buildings that were demolished were of such a shocking standard, and many were in fact still of a solid and serviceable condition.

The 'Slum Debate'

The recent 'slum debate' which has evolved over the past decade as a result of archaeological drives in The Rocks, places a new emphasis on excavation discoveries. Due to the presence of what appears to be some luxury objects discovered during the excavation, it is now believed that not all residents of The Rocks lived in extreme poverty and slums.

Some experts, such as Alan Mayne and Tim Murray in *The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes*, have gone so far as to claim that the slum is a construction of the imagination, that it was a stereotype created by the bourgeois and the social reformers.



Cumberland Street, Sydney 1831, oil painting by Charles Rodius

So if this is the case, why then was the area subjected to such architectural upheaval and community disruption? What is not often emphasized or known is the political ulterior motives at play that heavily influenced the site resumption and demolition.

One such motive was the improvement of the wharf facilities. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Sydney's wharf conditions were lagging behind those of the rest of the world, and it was becoming an increasing source of embarrassment for the government authorities, who wanted to be seen as an advanced port city, and a colonial expansion success story, particularly for one with such sordid beginnings.

We have already seen that another motivating factor for the resumption of the area was to lay the groundwork of the proposed bridge link between Sydney city and the North Shore.

The outbreak of the bubonic plague provided a convenient spring board to initiate political motivations for large scale metropolitan improvement achievable only through land resumption and mass demolition.

The march for progress at the turn of the century was zealous, and in its stride it took with it hundreds of Sydney's oldest buildings, many of which were still in a solid and sound condition, at the cost of a piece of the young nation's past.

Following the plague outbreak the NSW Government carried out cleansing and disinfecting operations on the waterfront, and quarantined the residential suburbs of The Rocks and Millers Point. Under the *Darling Harbour Resumption Act 1900*, the newly created Sydney Harbour Trust oversaw the compulsory resumption of wharves, houses, shops, laneways and pubs in these harbour-side suburbs. The plan was to demolish the existing structures and rebuild to a grand design. The need to keep Dawes Point free for the construction of a possible bridge across the harbour was factored into the design.

Between 1900 and 1910, wharfage was acquired and demolished, along with buildings associated with the Dawes Point Battery. The c1870 public bathhouse on the west of Dawes Point was demolished in c1910 Works by the Public Works Department and Sydney Harbour Trust, under the presidency of R R P Hickson, included Pier 1 on the bathhouse site (1910-14), Hickson Road and the widening of Lower Fort Street (1906-22), and the four Walsh Bay finger wharves (1912-21).

Works by the Housing Board in The Rocks were also part of the resumption and rebuilding program, and included the realignment of George and Cumberland Streets and the construction of an associated retaining wall between 1913 and 1916. A fountain and garden, and public toilet facilities completed the structure, built in 1916-20.

These works also anticipated the construction of the approaches for the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Development and revitalisation

Dawes Point has had a range of uses in the past, including for the military, navigation and astronomy, and more recently, for leisure.

Compared to the rest of The Rocks and Millers Point, it was kept relatively free of development due to these uses, and as the site of the support towers for the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

A Development Application for the revitalisation of Dawes Point Park was approved by the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning in May 2000. The works are described in the Statement of Environmental Effects prepared in October 1999.

The majority of this work has been completed.

In 2004-05 further conservation work was planned in three stages for the area including the Hickson Road Reserve; the seawall; and the Hickson Road retaining wall.

SYDNEY HARBOUR BRIDGE

Since Federation there was a well recognised need for a bridge crossing Sydney Harbour from South to North, in 1815 Francis Greenway then again in 1887 by John Whitton designs were submitted, with submissions being invited in 1900, while the demolition of the Rocks were taking place.

However all were deemed inappropriate or unsatisfactory for one reason or another and the momentum lapsed. Dr J J C Bradfield, Chief Engineer for the Metropolitan Railway Construction 1913-30, reviewed various schemes for a harbour crossing between 1900 and 1911. Bradfield, in collaboration with Public Works Architect R C G Coulter, produced his own design for a cantilever suspension and cantilever arched bridges.

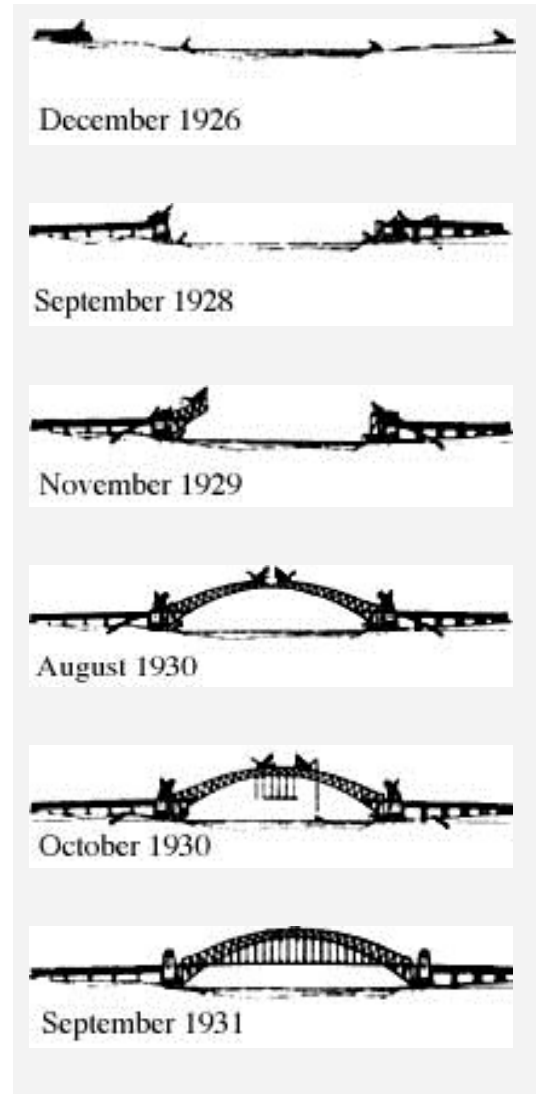
Then in 1922 the New South Wales Government got serious and asked for design submissions, with tenders being called for either an arch or a cantilever bridge that would meet the growing populations requirements.

In 1923, the tender of Dorman Long and Co. Ltd., of Middlesborough England for a two-hinged arch incorporating rail and tramways and six lanes of traffic arch bridge was accepted. Work first began on the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1924, with construction of the bridge approaches and the approach spans. With work starting on the bridge itself in 1925. During the initial building stage the foundations on either side of the harbour were prepared to take four steel thrust bearings. As mentioned as many as 800 families living in its path were displaced without compensation.

The construction of Sydney Harbour Bridge resulted in the demolition of Dawes Point Battery and Greenway's guardhouse.

On completion of works in 1932, the ground levels were built over the foundations of the Battery.

When the Greenway guardhouse was demolished in the second half of 1925, the site became an important part of the bridge construction. In order to support each half of the bridge arch until the construction met in the centre, 'U' shaped anchoring tunnels were excavated to depths of some 40 metres on either side of the harbour. The inlet for the southern shaft was situated on the site of the former guardhouse.



The foundations, which are 12 metres deep, are set in sandstone. Anchoring tunnels are 36 metres long and dug into the bedrock at each end. Large bolts and nuts are used to tie the thrust bearings onto their supports.

It is interesting to note that the four pylons are actually placed mainly for aesthetic reasons on each corner of the bridge. The pylons are about 90 metres above the average water level. The pylons are made of concrete that is covered by grey granite from Moruya on the south coast of New South Wales.

About eighty percent of the steel came from England while the remaining twenty percent was manufactured here in Australia. The construction of the arch was begun from both sides of the harbour with cable support for the arches. In 1930 the two arches met. The construction of the deck then proceeded from the middle outwards towards each shore as this was easier than moving the construction cranes back to the Pylons.

Today the Harbour Bridge ranks second or third in the world in terms of span but it is still considered to be the greatest of its type in the world because of its load bearing capacity and width of nearly 50 metres.

When the Sydney Harbour Bridge was opened by the Premier of New South Wales, Mr Jack Lang on the 19th March 1932, the Harbour Bridge was one of the greatest engineering masterpieces of its time. Sydney Harbour had an impressive and instantly famous landmark made in a style that reflects the end of an industrial era.

The bridge joined the city of Sydney to the North Shore obviating the need to travel by ferry or make a substantial trip around the harbour foreshores towards Parramatta and back.

The main span is 503 meters across it consumed more than 52,800 tonnes of silicon based steel trusses. The plates of steel are held together by around 6 million steel rivets.

Today it carries eight traffic lanes and two railroad lines. One of the eastern lanes is now a dedicated bus lane. The bridge is often crowded, and in 1992 the Harbour Tunnel was opened to help carry the traffic load. The traffic levels were substantially reduced compared to the period before the tunnel opened.

In 1932, the original cost of the Bridge was several million Australian pounds. This debt was eventually paid off in 1988 but the toll was then used for maintenance.

The initial toll charged for a car was 6 pence while a horse and rider was charged 3 pence. You could also take your horse and cattle across for 2p a head while sheep and pigs for some reason only would cost 1p a head, so next time you get caught in a traffic jam going home, imagine what it would have been like following a herd of sheep. Today the toll costs \$3.00 but is only charged when travelling to the South as an efficiency measure to speed up traffic flow. More than 160,000 vehicles cross the bridge each day, before the Harbour Tunnel was opened this figure was as high as 182,000 vehicles per day.

Today it carries eight traffic lanes and two railroad lines. There is a pedestrian pathway on the eastern side of the bridge and a cycleway on the western side of the bridge.

The two eastern lanes were originally tram tracks . They were converted when Sydney abolished its trams in the 1950s.

So from the devastation and fears generated by the plague outbreak, through political conspiracies grew an icon that is world recognized and assorted forever with Sydney.

