

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number
4671013

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: **Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group**

Location: **29-31-33-35-37-39 and 2 Morehead Street and Li**

Address: 29-31-33-35-37-39 and 2 Morehead Street and Little Young Street

Corner:

Suburb / Nearest Town: Redfern 2016

State: NSW

Local Govt Area: Local Government Area:
South Sydney City

DUAP Region:
Sydney South

Historic region:
Sydney

Property Identifier: Lots 18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25, Section 4, DP 8751

Boundary:

Item Type: Area/Complex/Group Group: Residential buildings (Category: Townscape

Owner: Multiple Owners

Owner Codes:

Code 2:

Code 3:

Current Use: Residential

Former Uses: Residential

Assessed Significance:

Endorsed Significance:

Statement of Significance: The Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group is rare and significant at the State level as the only identified, surviving group of late 19th century timber, ridge line, working class rental houses built on small lots within a subdivision pattern that reflects the land management practises of the late 19th century 'urban manor' in a colonial environment. This significance is enhanced by the mid 20th century destruction of other comparable combinations of topographically responsive, urban, vernacular built forms using predominantly timber fabric; late colonial adaptations of English methods for providing cheap working class housing; clear links to the spread of industrialisation beyond the city boundaries in the 1870s and 1880s; and links to the pre-urban and pre-industrial rural land use of dairying. The Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group illustrates in its layers of fabric and meanings a continuum from rural to industrial to post-industrial cultural environments in the form of domestic housing unequalled elsewhere in the State.

Historical Notes or Provenance: State historic theme: Environment
Upper Morehead Street runs along a ridge line, with the land falling sharply to the south east. When the builders in the street, who all seem to have been small scale operators, began construction they adapted to the landform. A brick understorey or basement level was constructed first, then a weatherboard cottage was built atop the understorey. Steep, narrow internal timber staircases connected the upper and lower levels. The approximately 45 degree angle of the blocks to the streets meant that the designers and builders also angled the houses to the street, so that the timber terrace at 29 to 35 exhibits a concertina front to the street. By making these accommodations to the natural topography the vernacular builders created a group of houses that can still demonstrate that natural lie of the land. This stands in strong contrast to many of the more recent developments in the area where earth moving technology has allowed the topography to be modified to accommodate building plans. The construction of the houses occurred in two close periods: number 37 and 39 were built c1873, and number 2 dates from about this time, while the terrace at number 29 to 35 was built c1884. Construction techniques remained much the same in each case, with the most notable difference being that the later terrace houses are

Professional Historians Association (NSW) Inc

Date: 18/08/2001

Full Report

Page 1

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number
4671013

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: **Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group**

Location: **29-31-33-35-37-39 and 2 Morehead Street and Li**

half the width of the earlier cottages, indicating the rapid growth of residential development in Redfern/Waterloo and the increasing scarcity of land at the time.

Ability to demonstrate theme: The form and layout of the Upper Morehead Group still have the ability to demonstrate the natural topography of East Redfern.

State historic theme: Land Tenure

Native title to the land was extinguished when the Crown made a 74.5 hectare grant, which included this site, to Edward Smith Hall in 1822. In 1833 the land became part of the Cooper Estate. The Cooper baronets acquired large tracts of land in eastern Sydney and the lower north shore during the 19th century. They rarely sold any of this land, instead subdividing and leasing land for development. By this means they created an 'urban manor' controlled from Woollahra House. In 1856 a 2.4 hectare parcel of land was leased to James Ewart of Sydney for 99 years at £90/year. Ewart could subdivide and sub-lease the land and was required to erect buildings of brick, stone or wood. Ewart quickly subdivided around the Cleveland and Elizabeth Street margins of the lease, but it was not until the early 1870s that he began to subdivide the interior of the land and built Cooper Street along the southern boundary. By 1879 Morehead Street has been built, and almost all of the lots had been built on and were occupied, mainly by builders (carpenters, joiners, stonemasons). Hookers Dairy operated east of Morehead Street, and in 1883 when street numbers were introduced to the Ewart's streets the track that ran from Cooper Street to the dairy was renamed Little Young Street. The brick cottage at 2 Little Young Street was built by this time, and may have some connection to the dairy, but this has yet to be definitively established. In the same year the timber terrace at 29-35 was built. All of these houses were built on the sub-leases. Early in the 20th century changes began within the Cooper dynasty and their vast estate began to be broken up. In 1913 ownership of Ewarts lease was transferred to Tom Raine and Percy Rabett, real estate agents. Raine and Rabett in turn sold the lots, mainly to investors who continued to rent the houses. This 'breaking-up' of the Cooper Estate did not extend south of Cooper Street, and when the NSW Housing Commission began its 'slum clearance' programs in Redfern following World War 2 they quickly acquired the remaining southern Cooper Estate lands and demolished the timber and brick cottages to make way for multi-storey public housing. The mosaic of small, private ownerships north of Cooper Street deterred the wholesale resumption that was experienced in areas still part of the Cooper Estate.

Ability to demonstrate theme: the surviving subdivision pattern and building stock of the Upper Morehead Group demonstrate the small lot sizes and cheaply built structures made necessary by the leasing and sub-leasing form of land tenure that characterised the 19th century 'urban manor' of the Cooper Estate.

State historic theme: Housing The development of East Redfern for residential use during the 1870s and 80s was stimulated by industrial development in the Botany catchment.

There were few factories or other places of employment in East Redfern and particularly the Cooper Estate lands in this area. Instead, the area provided the residential accommodation for factory workers in Surry Hills, Waterloo and Alexandria, and to a lesser extent the railway yards at Eveleigh. Extensive housing estates were built in the area, with timber a predominant building material. The Upper Morehead Group is located in an area where the earliest such housing development occurred. It seems to have functioned as a 'base' from which its male residents, invariably involved in building trades during the 1870s and 80s, spent much of the next decade involved in house building throughout south eastern Redfern and Waterloo. This arose as industrial developments gathered pace in anticipation of the opening of the Nepean water supply scheme to Sydney, and the consequent freeing of the

Professional Historians Association (NSW) Inc

Date: 18/08/2001

Full Report

Page 2

Item Name: Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group**Location:** 29-31-33-35-37-39 and 2 Morehead Street and Li

Botany catchment area from Sydney water supply uses, allowing its water resources to be used for manufacturing and other industrial purposes. The housing that was provided on Cooper Estate leaseholds was invariably quickly built, of one or two stories, generally with timber frames, weatherboard cladding and iron roofing. The Upper Morehead Group thus contains some of the earliest such housing provided for working class rental accommodation as industrialisation spread beyond the city boundaries. As noted in the previous thematic discussion, the discourse of 'slum clearance' that prevailed for much of the first half of the 20th century in inner city Sydney had a dramatic impact through much of East Redfern and Waterloo. As the Cooper Estate lands were resumed, their streets of 1880s and 90s timber houses were emptied and demolished, to be replaced by multi-storey public housing blocks. The period from c1948 to c1970 witnessed this substantial change in the urban environment, leaving the Upper Morehead Group as not only some of the oldest working class housing in the area, but one of the few surviving remnants of that housing. Extensive field survey and documentary research has established that the Upper Morehead Group is the only such group of intact, ridgeline timber houses that survive from this period anywhere in the inner city (Pyrmont, Ultimo, Glebe, Chippendale, Newtown, Redfern, Waterloo, Alexandria, Surry Hills, Darlinghurst, Woolloomooloo and Paddington) and also in inner city Newcastle (Hamilton, Islington, Wickham, Carrington). The two roomed brick cottage at No 2 with a skillion addition appears to be associated with Hookers Dairy that operated from the eastern end of Ewatts lease during then 1860s and 70s. It was located at the beginning of the track that ran off from what became Cooper Street, and housed a dairy worker. The dairy closed once the land became more valuable for residential leaseholds, and the cottage incorporated into the developing urban fabric and used for working class housing.

Ability to demonstrate theme: the Upper Morehead Group is a very rare, surviving, intact example of late 19th century, timber, ridgeline, working class rental housing that was once prevalent through the Redfern and Waterloo areas associated with the industrialisation of the Botany catchment at the time of the connection of Sydney to the Nepean water supply scheme.

State historic theme: Labour

The inhabitants of the Upper Morehead Group, between 1873 and the mid-1890s, were primarily involved in buildings trades such as carpenters, joiners, stonemasons, plumbers and glaziers. However, from the early 1890s the occupations of householders began to change to include engineers, printers, bootmakers, cooks, tobaccomakers and a constable, indicating the change from building the new industrial suburbs to working in them. During the 1950s as the Housing Commission developments began to change the local landscape, property prices north of Cooper Street began to deteriorate. The investor-owners began selling their properties, and the occupations of the new buyer/occupiers – labourers, moulders assistants, storemen – clearly indicate the continuing employment of local residents in the nearby industrial concerns. The fabric of the Upper Morehead Group houses changed remarkably little between the 1870s and 1950s. The main change appears to have been the demolition of a timber house at the back of No 39 in about 1950, although no reason for this has been determined. Photographs of the group from 1978 and 1995 indicate some changes, such as repainting, replacement of front fences, and enclosure with lattice or aluminium frame windows of some verandahs. Internal alterations have included upgrades to services, such as electricity, and installation of hot water systems. Apart from these changes, the houses are all still in essentially much the same condition and fabric as when built, even allowing for neglect in recent years.

Ability to demonstrate theme: the small sizes of the houses, the materials they are built of, and the materials used to maintain and replace earlier fabric, as well as their continual

Item Name: Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group**Location:** 29-31-33-35-37-39 and 2 Morehead Street and Li

occupancy by tenants, demonstrates their function in providing accommodation for working class families associated with nearby industrial workplaces.

State historic theme: Townships

The design of urban subdivisions in the late 19th century was essentially a matter for each property developer to pursue, often with little regard for links to neighbouring subdivisions or the provision of open spaces and public facilities. This is evident in the street pattern that defines the edges of the Upper Morehead Group. Ewart's lease was a parallelogram shape, bounded by Cleveland and Elizabeth streets to the north and west. Cooper Street was laid out along the southern boundary of the lease, parallel to Cleveland Street, with the main north-south streets simply extensions of the existing Morehead and Walker streets. Young Street was formed along the eastern boundary of the leasehold, while Little Young Street simply formalised the existing track that led to Hooker's Dairy. The other smaller lanes (Centre, Victoria and Arthur streets) provided access to back yard toilets for nightsoil disposal. The original subdivision provided lots the size of No 39, but in the mid-1880s the remaining lots were further subdivided by being halved lengthwise, creating the very narrow lots of numbers 29 to 35. There was also some ad-hoc subdivision crosswise to create lots facing Little Young Street, of which No 2 is the smallest example. The initial alignment of the boundaries of Ewart's lease to the diagonal section of Cleveland Street meant that all of the subsequent latitudinal streets in the subdivision also followed this alignment, as did the lot boundaries. This, in turn, meant that houses aligned to the side boundaries of the lots did not face the street directly, but at an angle. This pattern was not repeated in the surrounding areas, and the more regular pattern that was created there has to a large extent been destroyed by the consolidations effected by the Housing Commission developments. This pattern of subdivision created by extending existing subdivision patterns in an ad-hoc manner, and then by further subdividing vacant lots to provide for greater density of housing, was not unusual at the time, but with subsequent consolidations of lots and realignment of streets the street and lot pattern that defines the Upper Morehead Group illustrates a pattern of urban development no longer practised and which is becoming increasingly rare as rational planning processes and urban redevelopment rearrange these patterns to conform to present requirements. Today, the group forms part of a cohesive 19th century enclave among mid 20th century tower blocks.

Ability to demonstrate theme: the diagonal lot boundaries and street alignments, the first and second phases of leasehold subdivision evident in the different lots sizes in the group, and the angular placement of the houses relative to the streets demonstrate urban subdivision practises of the late 19th century for providing dense working class housing with little regard for open space or retail uses that are no longer practised and which are becoming increasingly rare.

State historic theme: Ethnic Influences

There are two clear phases of 'ethnic influence' evident in the Upper Morehead Group. The first relates to the 'urban manor' method of estate management practised by the Cooper baronets. A baronetcy is an inheritable knighthood, and the several Sir Daniel Coopers ruled their estates from their manor, 'Woollahra House'. Their lands were leased and sub-leased in a quasi-feudal manner to provide much of the working class housing of south eastern Sydney by the beginning of the 20th century. The 'ethnicity' inherent in the Cooper Estate lies in it expressing a form of land management and social control developed in medieval Europe, including England, and still practised by the English gentry in much of the new suburban development of London and other English cities during the 19th century. It is salient to note that a distinct 'Syrian Quarter' also developed on Cooper Estate land a little to

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number
4671013

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: **Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group**

Location: **29-31-33-35-37-39 and 2 Morehead Street and Li**

the south of the group that was almost completely obliterated by Housing Commission redevelopment. The second period of 'ethnic influence' is perhaps more obvious. When the owner-investors of the group sold their properties in the 1950s and 60s, the buyers were largely their tenants who, by that time, included a substantial proportion of post war migrants, especially Greeks. Greek migrants were attracted to the area by the availability of cheap housing, nearby factory work, and the presence of an older Greek community centred upon the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Bourke Street, Surry Hills. The surnames of purchasers in this immediate area between 1957 and 1975 include Yiangou, Papadopoulos, Nanitsos and Kehegiadis (the latter two still retaining control of the whole Upper Morehead Group). Further research is needed to establish whether particular paint schemes and internal fittings can be claimed to illustrate the Greek influence in the group during the last quarter of the 20th century. However, the survival of the group, and several other adjacent houses to this time reflects their ownership by lower income migrant workers who subsequently tenanted the houses with other low income or working class residents rather than demolishing and replacing them with blocks of flats.

Ability to demonstrate theme: The Upper Morehead Group demonstrates ethnic influences in its construction as part of an English manorial system transplanted to urban colonial New South Wales, and its survival today as part of the process of integrating post war migrant groups, particularly Greeks, into the urban and social fabric of Inner city Sydney.

National historic theme: Building settlements, towns and cities; sub-theme: Remembering significant phases in the development of towns and suburbs

The diverse range of themes that have influenced the historical development of the Upper Morehead Group have been remembered by the local residential community in a variety of ways, especially during the 1990s, that have ensured the continuing survival of the group. The residential community has expressed its remembrance in several ways: an irregular tradition continues of holding a street party at Christmas, usually in Morehead Street in front of the Group; older residents have made it a practise to tell newer residents their stories of life in the area, thus ensuring a continuation of knowledge about its past; and the residents have held many street meetings over the past 6-7 years concerning proposals for change in the area, and presented resolutions to South Sydney Council and other authorities setting out their view on such proposals. These have included nomination of 22/24 Morehead Street to the Heritage Council for a conservation order in 1995 (nomination apparently rejected – residents never officially informed – 22/24 has since been demolished), nomination of the Upper Morehead Group to the South Sydney Heritage Study consultants for listing on the proposed LEP (nomination accepted), nomination of the proposed Cooper Street Conservation Area as a pilot project for the development of a DCP for other proposed conservation areas in South Sydney (accepted, project completed), nomination of the Upper Morehead Group to the Historic Houses Trust for acquisition and management as a house museum of inner city working class culture (nomination not accepted – unofficial response that acquisition not a function of HHT), several petitions to South Sydney Council opposing demolitions in the street, one large petition to South Sydney Council with over 500 signatures demanding adequate heritage conservation controls in the proposed Cooper Street Conservation Area, discussions between South Sydney Council officers and residents delegation of acceptable development for the Upper Morehead Group, and conducting a Residents Rally for heritage conservation measures to be introduced, attending by some 50 residents and addressed by Clover Moore MP, Steven Davies (National Trust NSW) and Cr John Fowler (South Sydney Council). There have been several press articles concerning the area and the Group during this time, the most notable being in the Sydney Morning Herald in 1996 with the Mayor of South Sydney claiming that the Group would now be

Professional Historians Association (NSW) Inc

Date: 18/08/2001

Full Report

Page 5

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number
4671013

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: **Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group**

Location: **29-31-33-35-37-39 and 2 Morehead Street and Li**

protected by South Sydney Council. By these diverse methods local residents have sought to ensure that the Upper Morehead Group, illustrative of a significant phase in the development of Redfern and Sydney generally, can be remembered by retaining and conserving the physical fabric of the Group.

Ability to demonstrate theme: the whole Upper Morehead Group, and the whole proposed Cooper Street Conservation Area, can by their very survival over the past ten years, demonstrate the remembering of the local residents and their abilities to fight for its survival so as to retain a sense of place and identity.

National Themes: Building settlements, towns and cities

State Themes: Environment

Housing

Land tenure

Labour

Ethnic influences

Townships

Study Themes:

Designer: Not known

Maker / Builder: Various local builders – identities not known

Year Started: 1873 **Year Completed:** 1884 **Circa:** No

Physical Description: The group consists of four timber, concertina fronted, ridge-line form terrace houses (Nos 29,31,33,35); one timber, ridge-line form cottage (no 39); one archaeological site containing basement level and other non-timber elements of former timber, ridge-line form cottage (No 37) – all in Morehead Street; and one brick and corrugated iron cottage (2 Little Young Street). The Morehead Street structures consist of weatherboard external walls, and corrugated iron gable roofs, with a brick understorey or basement level, brick fireplaces and chimneys and timber floors. The front doors are 4-panelled, and the windows to Morehead Street have two sashes, each of two panes. The Little Young Street cottage consists of sandstock bricks rendered over, with a gabled corrugated iron roof, windows to the street of have two sashes, each of two panes, and a 1960s(?) flush door. The Morehead Street houses present to the street as single storied, but because of the steep south-easterly fall of the land away from the street, the back presents as two storied. The understorey level has rendered or painted brick walls, and is the same size footprint as the street level. Numbers 29 to 35 are only 3.35 metres (11 feet) wide, while numbers 37, 39 and 2 are 6.7 metres (22 feet) wide. The yards of numbers 29 to 35 and 39 are long and narrow, running through to Little Young Street, while the yard of 37 is divided in half, with the Little Young Street frontage occupied by No. 2. Various early plantings, some outbuildings and fencing are evident in these yards. Number 37 (partially destroyed by fire) retains the brick understorey and chimneys, garden elements and fencing.

Physical Condition: Physical condition of the all the buildings is fair, but neglected, with some timber problems mainly associated with falling damp. Number 2 has some rising damp in the rear brick walls. Number 37 has archaeological potential, and the back yard of No 39, adjacent to No 2,

Professional Historians Association (NSW) Inc

Date: 18/08/2001

Full Report

Page 6

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number
4671013

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: **Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group**

Location: **29-31-33-35-37-39 and 2 Morehead Street and Li**

is the site of a demolished timber house presumably with some archaeological evidence beneath ground surface.

Note: nos. 29-35 have been demolished.

Modification Dates: The main modifications have been the destruction by fire of the street level of number 37 (early 1990s), and the demolition of the house at the back of number 39 (c1950). Minor modifications to the fabric of all of the houses has been made over time, mainly repainting and general maintenance, although little or no maintenance has been carried out in recent years. Many of the internal finishes and service lines appear to be original, as does almost all of the external walls and roofs, doors and windows. Most of the front fences appear to have been replaced in the 1950s/60s, but back and side fences of corrugated iron appear to be older.

Recommended Management: (a) list as items in LEP Schedule; (b) list as individual items in a heritage schedule; (c) acquire and operate as a house museum

Further Comments: These buildings have been used as residential rental accommodation since they were built. Problems with the fabric appear to all result from lack of maintenance over past 15-20 years by the owners. Nos. 29-35 demolished.

Historical Significance: The Upper Morehead Group is historically significant at the State level for its ability to demonstrate the once typical provision of small sized, quickly built working class timber housing to accommodate the workforce for the new factories and industrial activities in the Botany catchment during the 1870s and 80s. This phase of industrialisation is significant for being the first beyond the city boundaries and inner harbour, and was facilitated by the first major water supply scheme in NSW, the Nepean Scheme. The Upper Morehead Group is associated with the significant, and now scarce, activity of providing cheap rental accommodation for urban industrial workers that characterised the 'urban manor' of the 19th century Cooper Estate, and the mid 20th century 'slum clearance' phase of that Estate when it was largely resumed and the building stock demolished to provide multi-story public housing. The survival of the Upper Morehead Group to this day demonstrates the continuity of the historical processes of private construction and management of working class accommodation to provide an accessible pool of industrial labour close to places of private employment. This is becoming increasingly rare in the inner city. The brick cottage provides evidence of urban fringe dairying of the 1870s, and is a scarce reminder of an activity that had ended in the inner city by the early 20th century.

Aesthetic Significance: The Upper Morehead Group is aesthetically significant at the State and regional levels for its ability to show creative vernacular built forms that respond to the local topography of ridges and valleys that is increasingly rare; for its aesthetic distinctiveness as a group of low scale, 19th century timber houses that form an enclave in a landscape now dominated by high rise tower blocks; for the landmark quality of the 'Australian cottage' form of No 39 that forms a gateway to the Cooper Street Conservation Area, and of No 29-35 as the only concertina fronted timber terrace in the region, and of No 2 as the only small, detached cottage form in the locality; and collectively as the only surviving example of such a group in NSW.

Social Significance: The Upper Morehead Group is socially significant at the regional and local level for the crucial role it plays in the local community's sense of place. This is demonstrated by nearly a decade of community lobbying to prevent the loss of the group through neglect or demolition, including proposals to make the group into a living regional museum of inner city

Professional Historians Association (NSW) Inc

Date: 18/08/2001

Full Report

Page 7

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number

4671013

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group**Location:** 29-31-33-35-37-39 and 2 Morehead Street and Li

working class cultures. The local community has developed significant emotional and cultural attachments to the group, and an understanding of the group as the 'emblem' of their communal identity and a signifier of communal memories.

Technical / Research: The Upper Morehead Group is significant at the regional and local level for technical and research values for its ability to yield information on late 19th century to mid 20th century working class accommodation and lifestyles not available from documentary resources. This ability takes the form of vernacular building techniques in the surviving structures and the potential of the below ground relics of the destroyed structures to provide evidence of late 19th century timber and ridge line housing construction techniques and processes. The Upper Morehead Group collectively demonstrates late 19th century design techniques for responding to varying natural topography in a rapidly urbanising environment.

Representativeness: The Upper Morehead Group retains the ability to demonstrate the characteristics of late 19th century working class housing associated with the spread of industrialisation. These characteristics are the use of cheap, lightweight materials (timber framing, flooring and weatherboards, corrugated iron roofing, mass produced doors and windows), the use of cheap forms of land tenure (leasing and sub-leasing in the 'urban manor' form of land management), rapid construction (all built in 1873 or 1884), and location in subdivisions developed for closeness to industry rather than suitability to topography (ridge-line houses, timber terrace on 3.35 metre wide lots, lots diagonal to the street alignment, close vicinity to factories and former tram lines).

Rare Assessment: The Upper Morehead Group, as the only surviving group of late 19th century, timber, ridge-line, working class, rental houses in NSW, demonstrates a period in NSW history when industrialisation first spread beyond the city boundaries and the consequent need to provide cheap housing for industrial workers and their families. The group is endangered by ongoing neglect of its physical fabric, and its rarity is evidenced by the demolition of all similar groups of houses from the same period and phase.

Integrity / Intactness: The Upper Morehead Group retains its integrity in the form of the original subdivision pattern of small lots, the original form and fabric of the timber, ridge-line houses and the sandstock brick cottage associated with Hookers Dairy, and the original and continuing use of the houses for rental accommodation.

References:	Author:	Title:	Year:
		Sands Directory	
		Land title documents and records: Bk 42, No 398, 1/1/1856Vol CVI, Folio 90, 5/9/1870Vol CXXXVIII, Folio 59, 25/8/1873Vol 974, Folio 176, 12/7/1890Vol 2737, Folio 15, 19/2/1916Vol 2868, Folio 59, 15/8/1918Vol 3056, Folio 90, 27/5/1920	
		Australian Dictionary of Biography entry: 'Cooper, Sir Daniel'	
	Baskerville, Bruce	Interviews with various residents of the area	1996
	Godden Mackay	Cooper Street Precinct Study Vol. 1, and South Sydney Heritage Conservation DCP, Vol. 2	1997
	MWSS&DB	Water Board Detail Plans	
	Shiple, Glen	'Redfern Cottages to be preserved' in Sydney Morning Herald, 6 July 1996: 16	1996

Professional Historians Association (NSW) Inc

Date: 18/08/2001

Full Report

Page 8

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number

4671013

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: Upper Morehead Timber Houses Group**Location:** 29-31-33-35-37-39 and 2 Morehead Street and Li

South Sydney Heritage Society	Proposal for a Redfern People's Museum in Morehead Street, Redfern	1995
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Tropman & Tropman	South Sydney Heritage Study	1995
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Studies: **Author:** **Title:** **Number:** **Year:**

Tropman & Tropman	South Sydney Heritage Study	1997
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Godden Mackay	Cooper St. Precinct Study Vol. 1 & Sth Syd. Heritage Conservation DCP Vol. 2	1997
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Godden Mackay	Cooper St. Precinct Study Vol. 1 & Sth Syd. Heritage Conservation DCP Vol. 2	1997
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South Sydney Heritage Society	Proposal for a Redfern People's Museum in Morehead Street, Redfern	1995
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Listings: **Name:** **Title:** **Number:** **Date:**

Heritage Act - Interim Conservation Order		13	12/11/99
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Heritage Act - s.130 Order - Lapsed			19/12/98
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Local Environmental Plan	Draft endorsed by Heritag		
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Custom Field One:**Custom Field Two:** Bruce Baskerville**Custom Field Three:** April 2000**Custom Field Four:****Custom Field Five:****Custom Field Six:****Data Entry:** **Date First Entered:** 04/07/2001 **Date Updated:** 18/08/2001 **Status:** Completed