

20 mile hollow + woodford academy



DRAFT

Interpretive Strategy for the Woodford Reserve + environs

prepared by Nature Tourism Services JANUARY 2019

Contents



Rock carving believed to be of Aboriginal origin, Woodford Reserve

preface	1
1. research and content	2
2. layers in time walk	3
3. web app content	4
4. signage	5
5. sign designs	6

preface

This report was produced by Nature Tourism Services for Blue Mountains City Council in January 2019.

The project brief was as follows:

The objects of this consultancy are to have;

- a contractor install interpretive information about Woodford Academy Reserve by April 2019, and,
- supporting additional information to be available on Council's website via QR codes at the same time.

The consultants are expected to;

- Review the background information provided.
- Confirm location and number of signs required and feasible within the budget available for construction (\$25,000).
- Work with the overarching themes provided. Draw on the report and other sources if necessary to provide suitable content and artwork for the signs.
- Provide construction details for the signs.

The material presented here sits as an extension of the thematic content prepared by Nature Tourism Services for this project – the Woodford Academy + Environs Story Distillation. It should be read and understood within the background and context information provided in this report.

This interpretive strategy project has two outputs to consider. The first is the key deliverable here of providing a new interpretive experience focussed around the Woodford Reserve that invites users to connect with the rich and many layered heritage of this place.

In this it must deliver a concrete experience that exists as a stand alone entity going forward with no need for any further elaboration or investment.

It must also however also consider the additional ongoing interpretive opportunities of the precinct and its surrounding heritage assets – especially that of the Woodford Academy.

Ongoing staged investments to both enhance the interpretive experience on offer in the reserve, improve its connections with the adjoining Woodford Academy and also to inform the potential interpretive options open for the Academy to explore within its own grounds are matters of consideration for this project.

In particular it is noted here that developing an enhanced formal access path leading from the carpark entry in the Woodford Reserve across the 150m of open lawn leading up to the northern “rear” entry to the Academy is a very high priority for Stage 2 action in relation to this precinct. This approach would link up with and provide enhanced context / meaning for the existing engraved concrete path section that exists in the last 50m of this access route.

A feature of the interpretive response proposed in this strategy is the integral development of a supporting web app to provide deeper narrative levels for users to explore as they journey around the precinct. In this way the signage acts as a portal to a deeper online narrative that can be translated on the fly into the users language of choice.

This supporting digital matrix plays a crucial role in “lightening the load” needing to be carried by the signage in terms of the amount of content and thematic diversity of the signage set.

These materials stand equally as points of engagement/connection for the user and as an information source in their own right. This dynamic also allows for simple ongoing expansion and further elaboration of the product to be provided via future staged interventions for both this precinct and for the adjoining Woodford Academy.

Ian Charles

Director, Nature Tourism Services, JANUARY 2019

1. research and content

The story narratives of Woodford Reserve needed to underpin the delivery of the interpretation response on site were compiled as part of a stage 1 process undertaken by Nature Tourism Services for this project.

The narratives are an essential statement of the interpretive themes and overall approach. In particular they identify 6 key stages in the transit of the Woodford Academy / reserve.

These are:

1. Crossroads on Country - pre 1813
2. Bush corridor wayside 1814 -1851
3. Highway centre 1851-1867
4. Railway bypass 1867 - 1930s
5. Highway centre again 1930s-2015
6. Highway bypass / crossroads on Country 2016 -

2. layersintime walk



The proposed interpretive experience comprises two elements.

The major component is the “layersintime walk” taking the visitor on a loop of the central estate grounds of Woodford House / Woodford Academy. The route of this 1.4km walk along the street verges is shown on the map opposite. In keeping with the residential / informal nature of the present day streetscapes being traversed, most detailed content along the route will be provided via the web app. Selective signage nodes as indicated will affirm a sense of ongoing connection along the route while also inviting casual passers by to opt in and connect with the deeper digital narrative on offer.

Given the lack of any formal path network across the Woodford Reserve interpretive interventions in this space are problematic. We strongly prefer to only install interpretive signage in places where the user nodes can be developed such as to invite the visitor to step aside from their transit along the path “corridor” and take in the material on offer.

Accordingly given the “ad hoc” nature of visitor traffic across the precinct, interpretation of this space is best vested in the web app where users can access content via the interactive locale map. Supporting connection at significant places as marked can be delivered via QR code postmarkers.

These postmarker interventions when allied to sandstone block seating are far more subtle and discrete than interpretive signs and as such can be nestled within the landscape setting such as to provide low key points of connection.

This postmarker approach also has direct utility for the future interpretation of the Woodford Academy precinct as it delivers minimal visual intervention while at the same time as turning the precinct into an interactive landscape for the user to explore.

3. web app content

The role of the web app in delivering the interpretive outcome for the Layers in Time Walk is pivotal. It provides the detailed narrative that people can access either via a chronological basis as per the research report or simply delve into the material on a site specific focus as they move around the walk.

By using the web app support, the interpretive signs are left much lighter in terms of the burden of essential material they may otherwise need to carry in terms of conveying the very significant body of “essential messaging”.

Being a web app people do not need to download any material to their phone and it also means that content can be translated on the fly into the language of the users choice.

The rationale behind the web app approach is explained in detail on the [Nature Tourism Services website](#) as per the link here.

To view the web app for the [Layers in Time walk](#) - simply click the link here. Alternatively snap the QR code. Both desktop/ tablet and phone versions of this adaptive web app are in place. Please note that content for the site locations is pending at this time. All other material is in place.

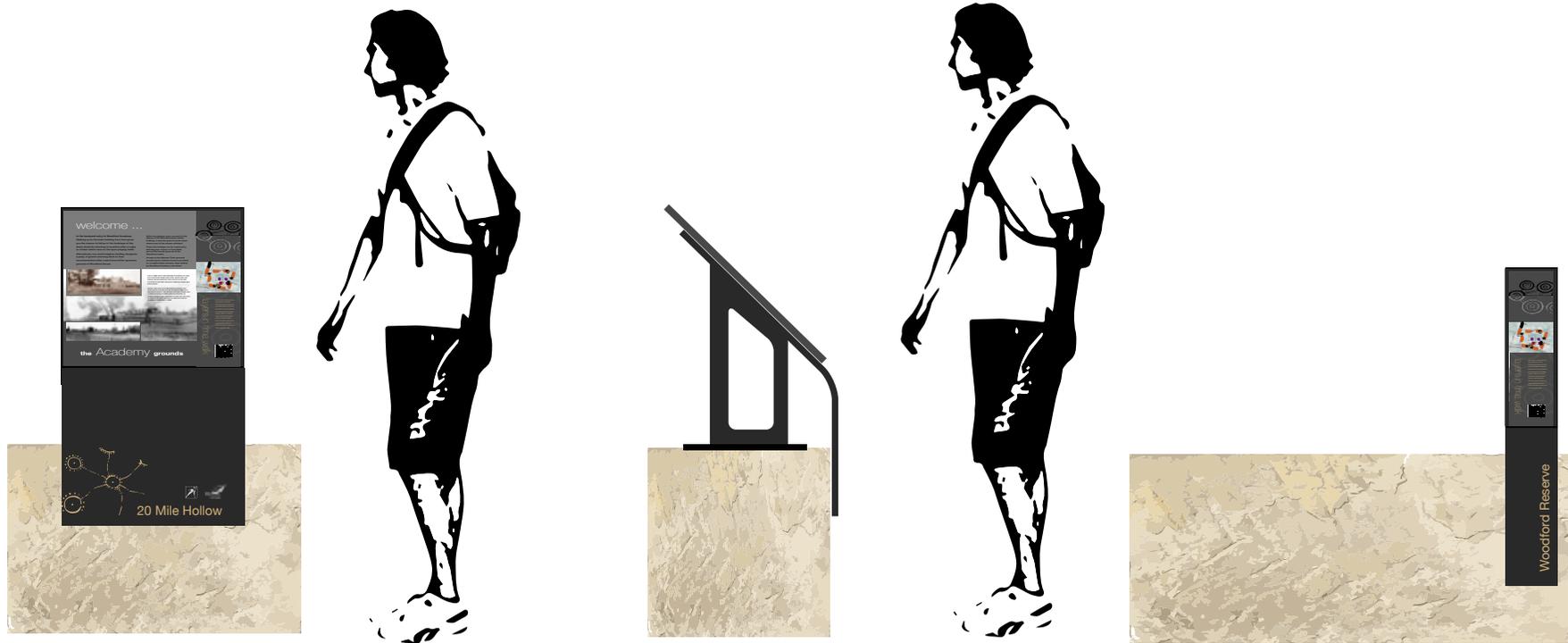


Substantially one page website format utilising simple out and back links

Interactive map menu leads to supporting content page specific to each location

Background narrative as per research report

4. signage



interpretive signage

marker signage

The Layers in Time Trail will have 8 interpretive signs of relatively modest proportions in keeping with the need for these to assimilate easily into the surrounding streetscape setting. The finished artwork panel is 500mm wide by 600mm high affixed to the painted signage frame as shown and mounted to a sandstone block 500*500*800mm free standing on compacted 100mm thick roadbase pad. Three of these will cluster at the entry to Woodford Reserve, the remaining five will extend across the walk as per the locations shown on the map. Within the reserve only marker signage will be used to link people in with the web app content page.

5. sign designs



welcome ...

to the backyard entry to Woodford Academy.

Walking up to the main building from here gives you the chance to follow in the footsteps of the dusty students returning to quarters after a rugby or cricket match here on the open playing fields.

Alternatively one could imagine strolling alongside a party of guests returning back to their accommodation after wandering around the spacious grounds of Woodford House.

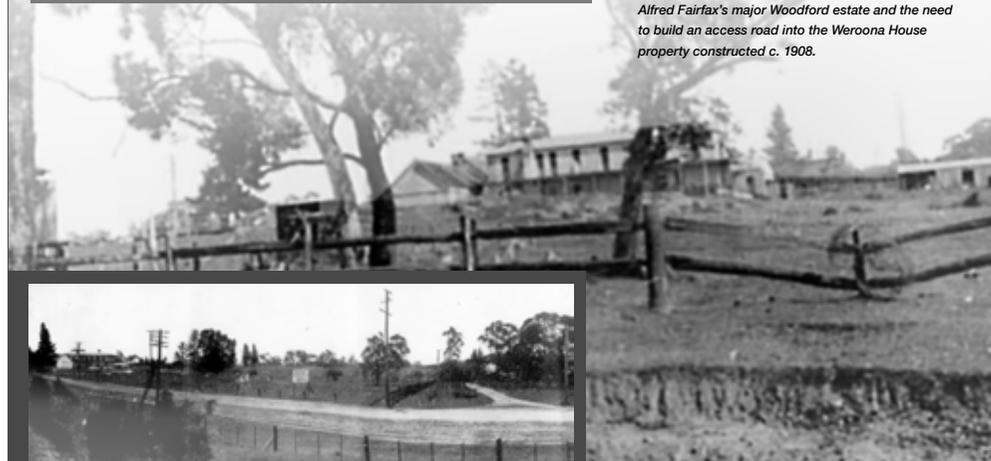
While the highway entry showed off the stature of the Blue Mountains' oldest building, it was the land out the back where most of the stories unfolded.

Today this heritage can be explored by following the 'Layers in Time Walk' around the former grounds of the Woodford estate.

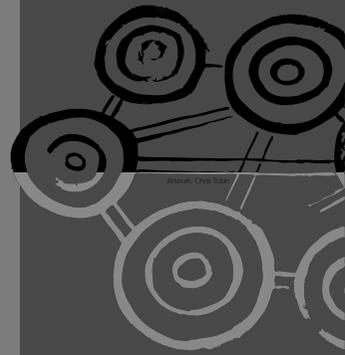
Access to the National Trust grounds containing the historic house is provided on a regular basis via open days staffed by Woodford Academy volunteers.



Left: A 1908 view of the Woodford Academy as seen from across the dusty main road. At this time, the railway still provided the main access across the mountains and traffic along the roadway would have been sparse.



Below: This view up to Woodford Academy was taken around the time of the First World War from Woodford Avenue. The avenue was then a fairly new creation that had resulted from the breakup of Alfred Fairfax's major Woodford estate and the need to build an access road into the Weroona House property constructed c. 1908.



layers in time walk

Follow the 1.4km Layers in Time walk on a stroll around the former grounds of the Woodford Academy. Discover how the presence of a spring here at 20 Mile Hollow made it a natural oasis for both Aboriginal people and Europeans. Use your phone camera to snap the QR codes for more information about the sites along the walk.

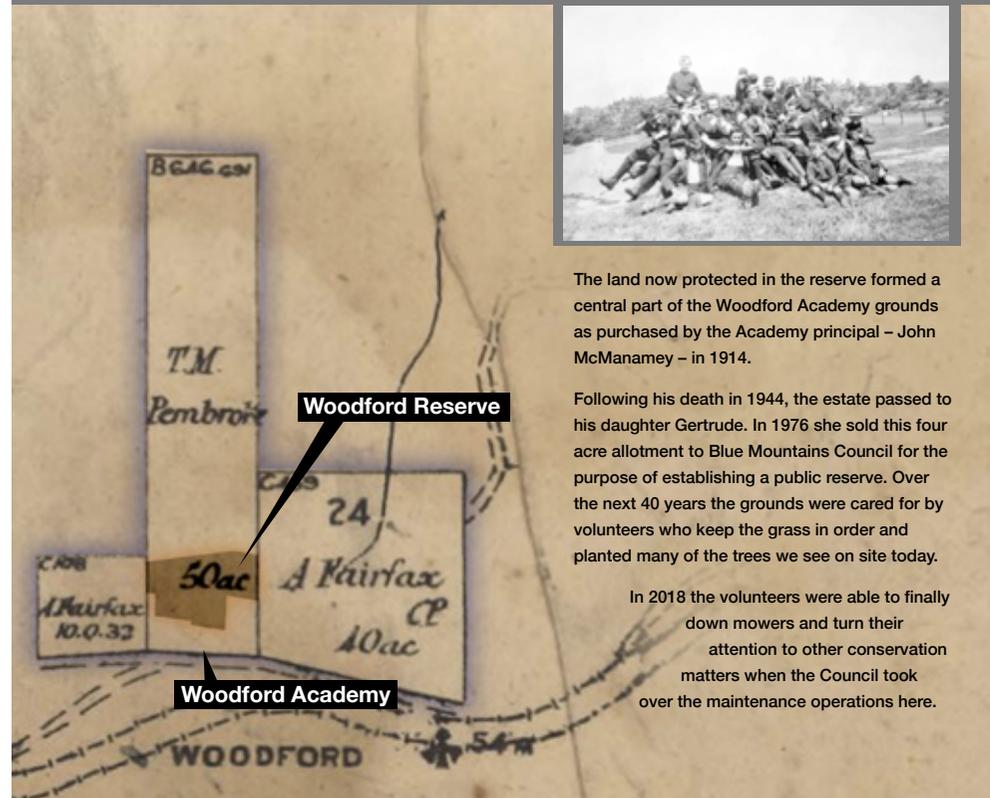


the Academy grounds

precious remnant

Woodford Reserve is a 4.5 acre (1.8 ha) remnant of the original 50 acre holding taken up here by Thomas Pembroke in the 1830s. This central pillar of land provided the core resource for inn keepers operating here through until the late 1860s.

In the 1870s, the then new owner – Alfred Fairfax – added adjoining blocks to the east and west of this 50 acre block to create an estate covering 100 acres of ground which he called Woodford. Fairfax’s sale of this property in 1897 paved the way for a series of subdivisions to occur leading to the present day town layout.



The land now protected in the reserve formed a central part of the Woodford Academy grounds as purchased by the Academy principal – John McManamey – in 1914.

Following his death in 1944, the estate passed to his daughter Gertrude. In 1976 she sold this four acre allotment to Blue Mountains Council for the purpose of establishing a public reserve. Over the next 40 years the grounds were cared for by volunteers who keep the grass in order and planted many of the trees we see on site today.

In 2018 the volunteers were able to finally down mowers and turn their attention to other conservation matters when the Council took over the maintenance operations here.

layers in time walk

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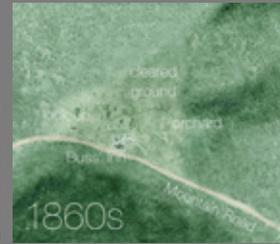
Woodford reserve



Even as late as 1872 when this atlas map was made, 20 Mile Hollow was recognised as one of the pivotal Blue Mountains' landmarks.

Its name was a literal recognition of the existence of a roadside hollow offering precious permanent water 20 miles on from the Nepean River. The enormous value of this resource to travellers was featured in one account of a mountains crossing published in 1827 ...

The road is now in this spot remarkably good ; and at a place called the 20 Mile Hollow the road is now made by the prisoner gangs as good as the most capricious taste could desire. The traveller here will find a pretty spring of excellent water ; and as it is the first handy place for twenty miles he should halt and take a drink.



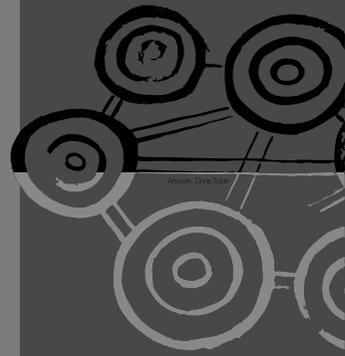
The changes which have unfolded here at 20 Mile Hollow over the course of the past 200 years can be traced out today by reimagining the bird's eye views of this landscape.

From its origins as a humble roadside stopover in the 1830s and through to the drama of the gold rush years, the hollow served the needs of travellers using the Mountains Road.

Together with the coming of the railway from 1867 onwards , the name of the hollow was changed to Woodford. Its focus shifted more from catering for overnight stopover travellers to providing extended stays for people seeking respite from the city.

As the early 1900s ushered in the closer urban development we see around us today, the hollow faded from view in the popular narrative of Woodford.

Today its pivotal place in the history of this iconic mountains town is being reassessed and appreciated from both its Aboriginal and European heritage standpoints.



layers in time walk

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20 Mile hollow

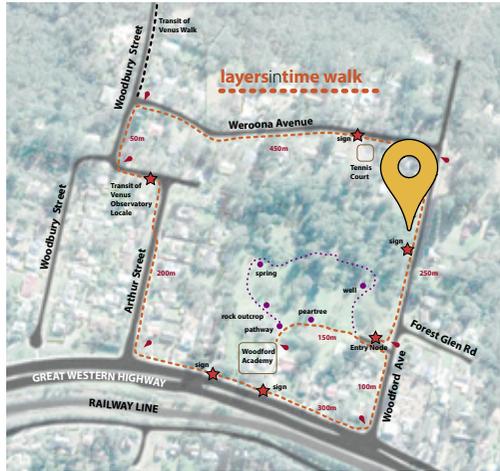
When the inn at 20 Mile Hollow was first put up for sale in June 1839, there was no doubting what its main feature was. An 'overflowing spring of PURE WATER' was a very precious asset on the traveller's path along the barren mountains' ridgeline.

**By Public Competition,
FIFTY ACRES OF LAND, Twenty**
of which are cleared and fit for cultivation, situated in the Twenty Mile Hollow, on the **Bathurst Mountain Road;** together with a well-built Stone and Wood House on the Road side, known by the sign of **"The Woodman,"** which is licensed, and comprises 9 excellent rooms, stabling for six horses, store, stock and sheep yards, &c. &c.; with a productive garden and an ever-flowing spring of **PURE WATER.**

Standing here you are amongst the swampy ground that soaked up the water delivered by the mountain spring draining the higher ground to the west. This made the ground ideal for both fruit trees and cultivation. Its produce underpinned both the inn and later on the Woodford Guesthouse's operations.

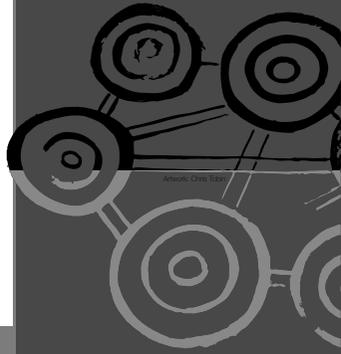


In the early years of the 20th century the fertile ground here provided the sports fields used by the Woodford Academy boys.



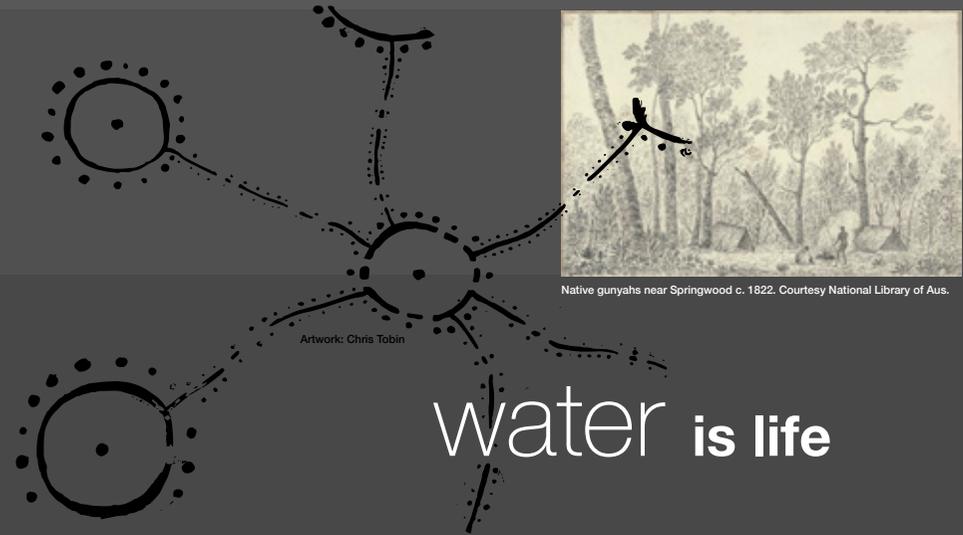
Today the Darug and Gundungurra Aboriginal people of the central Blue Mountains recognise the special significance that water has always played in caring for and nourishing their connections with Country.

The chain of mountain swamps arcing down from Blackheath and Wentworth Falls to 20 Mile Hollow and beyond to Springwood would have been vital centres of cultural life in the mountains.



layers in time walk

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Artwork: Chris Tobin

Native gunyahs near Springwood c. 1822. Courtesy National Library of Aus.



The Woodford tennis court dates back to around 1907 when the Waterhouse family built Weroona – their palatial residence – here in north Woodford.

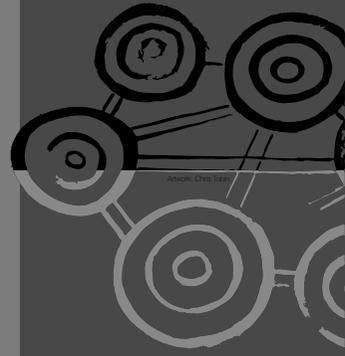
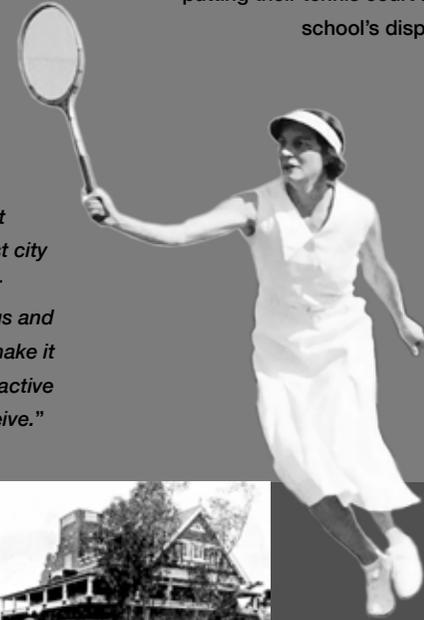
Having acquired the bulk of the former Fairfax estate, the Waterhouses took advantage of the location’s cultivated surrounds including the established gardens and orchards.

As the Blue Mountains Echo described it in 1909:

“The house contains every comfort and convenience known in the best city mansion, while its extensive flower gardens, fruit orchard and spacious and splendidly arranged tennis court make it one of the most charming and attractive homes the mind of man can conceive.”

From the outset, the Waterhouses were happy to share their new ‘splendidly arranged’ tennis centre.

At the inaugural Woodford Academy speech day in 1907, they were heartily thanked for putting their tennis court at the school’s disposal.



The Woodford tennis courts were prominently featured in the 1924 Woodford Academy Estate subdivision plans showing the main town buildings. Following Weroona House burning down in the bushfires of 1957, the courts were resumed by the Blue Mountains Council in the following year.

On court 1907. Courtesy National Library of Australia

Weroona - the Waterhouse residence. Blue Mountains Echo: 26 Dec 1909

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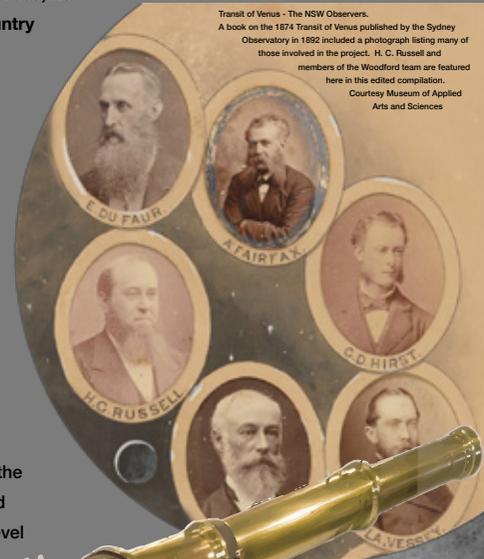
weroona's tennis legacy



Soon after Alfred Fairfax purchased Buss' Inn in 1869, he renamed it Woodford and converted it to his country residence. By 1872 he had commenced making astronomical observations in the mountain air.

When the Government Astronomer Henry Russell, selected Woodford as one of three regional observation posts to record the Transit of Venus on 9 December 1874, a bush observatory was set up here on the 10 acre block of land newly acquired by Fairfax immediately west of his main property.

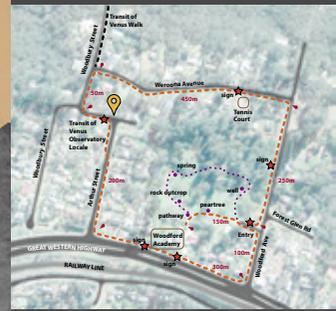
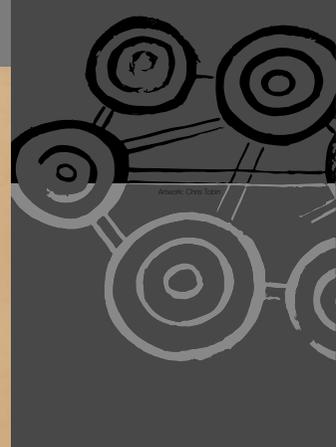
While the observations that day proved useful, it was a series of experiments made here in 1878 by Henry Russell that etched Woodford's place in the annals of astronomy. Using precision calibrated equipment, Russell was able to define the benefit of obtaining observations from an elevated location, rather than by making sightings at sea level as was then common practice.



Photolichograph telescope, made by J H Dallmeyer. This was purchased by Sydney Observatory and sent to Australia in 1874 along with attachments to photograph the Transit of Venus at the Woodford residence of Alfred Fairfax. It was among the first to be used for astronomical photography in Australia. Courtesy Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences



Transit of Venus Observation Camp at Woodford, 1874. Courtesy Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences

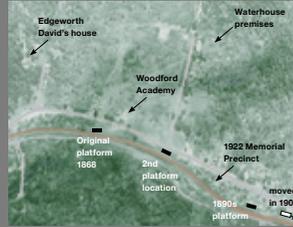


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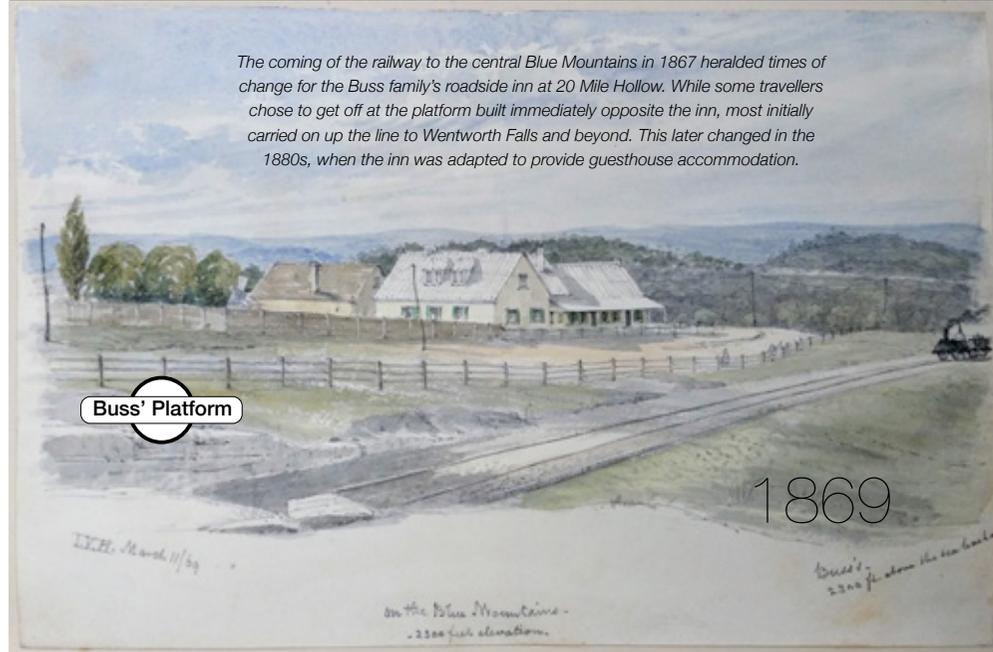
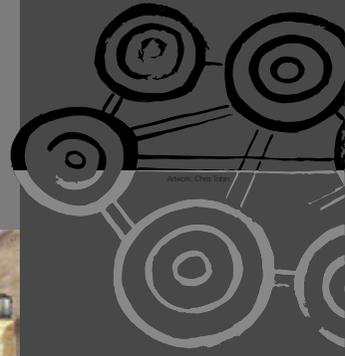


mountains' observatory



Following the station name being changed to Woodford in 1871, its location was steadily moved down the hill over the next 30 years.

The ladies seen here in 1881 would have been guests returning to Sydney after their stay here at the Woodford Guesthouse. Throughout the latter part of the 1800s, Woodford was a favourite destination for people seeking a mountains' break.



The coming of the railway to the central Blue Mountains in 1867 heralded times of change for the Buss family's roadside inn at 20 Mile Hollow. While some travellers chose to get off at the platform built immediately opposite the inn, most initially carried on up the line to Wentworth Falls and beyond. This later changed in the 1880s, when the inn was adapted to provide guesthouse accommodation.

Buss' Platform

1869

Buss' Inn + the railway

layers in time walk

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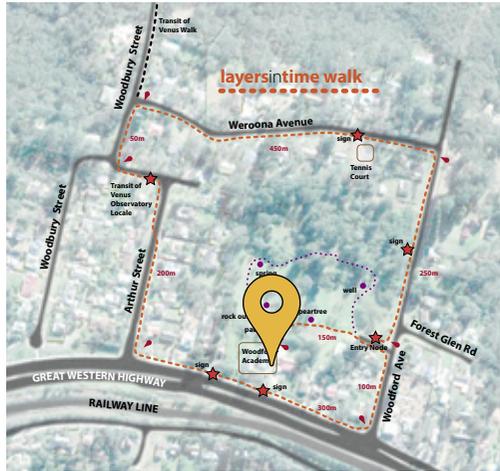


1834

We can't be sure what Woodford Academy – the Blue Mountains' oldest building – originally looked like in 1834. We can however get some idea from a detailed sketch made of the property eight years later in 1842.

Following Thomas Pembroke being granted a liquor licence to operate at Twenty Mile Hollow, the way was clear for him to construct a 'well built stone and wood house on the roadside known by the sign of The Woodman.'

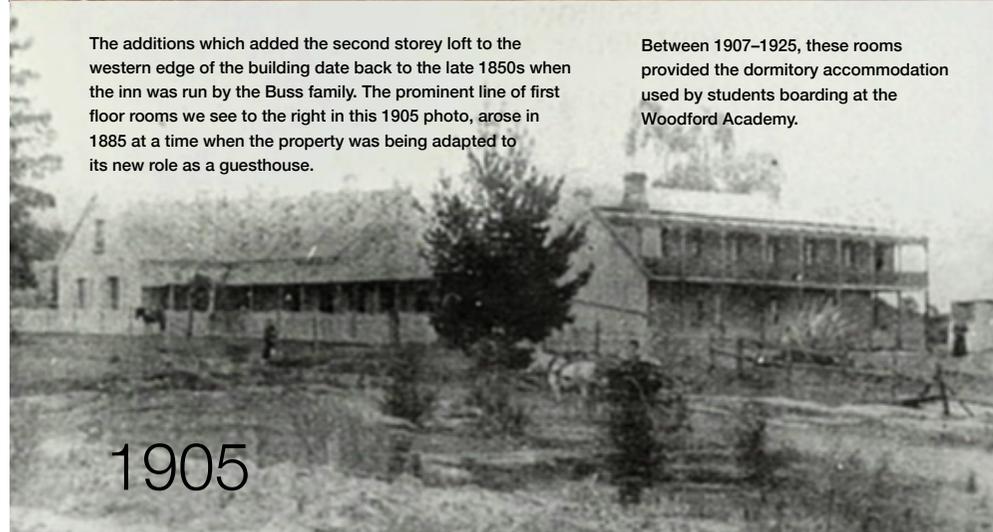
At the time that Pembroke sold the property in 1839 the inn comprised 'nine excellent rooms, stabling for six horses, store, stock and sheepyards with a productive garden and an overflowing spring of pure water.'



1842

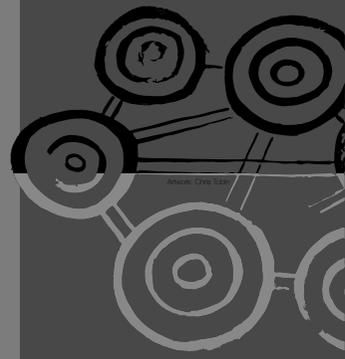
The additions which added the second storey loft to the western edge of the building date back to the late 1850s when the inn was run by the Buss family. The prominent line of first floor rooms we see to the right in this 1905 photo, arose in 1885 at a time when the property was being adapted to its new role as a guesthouse.

Between 1907–1925, these rooms provided the dormitory accommodation used by students boarding at the Woodford Academy.



1905

changing with the times



layers in time walk

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20 mile hollow

+ woodford academy

