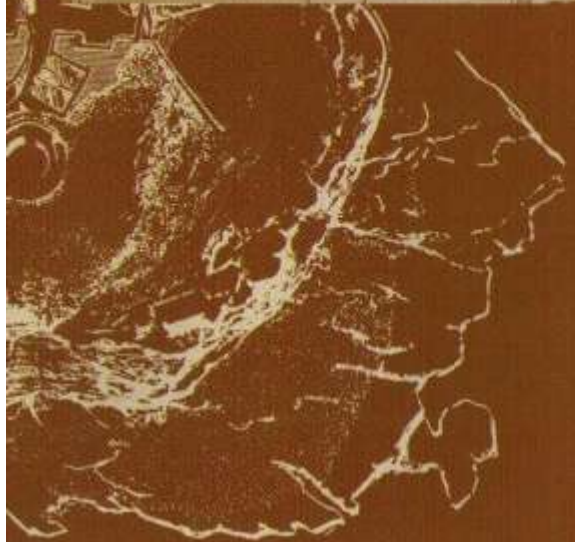


Aboriginal use of Bare Island

At the time of European contact the many clans of the northern Dharawal were associated with Bare Island and La Perouse. Evidence of Aboriginal occupation including engravings and shell middens in the area reveal that it is an important place for the local Aboriginal community.

The island in the 1870s appeared anything but 'bare', with a considerable cover of coastal grasses and heath. Acknowledgement: Hood Collection, State Library of New South Wales



How to get there

La Perouse is situated 14 kilometres south of Sydney on the shores of Botany Bay. Regular buses can take you to La Perouse from Circular Quay with stops along Anzac Parade.

Combine your trip with a visit to these other nearby places:

- Visit the Laperouse Museum, which features displays on the French explorer and local history and is open Wed to Sun.
- Visit the nearby Macquarie Watchtower, the oldest building on Botany Bay and the monuments to Laperouse and his ships and Pere Receveur, who died there in 1788.
- The Henry Head Walking Tracks provides excellent views of Bare Island and Botany Bay with walks from 30 minutes to two hours.

For information on tours:

Sydney Region Information Centre

Cadmans Cottage, 110 George St, The Rocks, SYDNEY NSW 2000
Ph: (02) 9247 5033
Fax: (02) 9241 3303

Cadmans Cottage is open every day except Good Friday, Christmas Day and New Years Day

Weekdays 9.30am – 4.30pm
Weekends 10am – 4.30pm

Other enquiries about Bare Island Fort:

National Parks and Wildlife Service, PO Box 461, ROSE BAY NSW 2029
Ph: (02) 9337 5511
Fax: (02) 9337 1303

or visit our web site on:
www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

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Website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au
DECC 2006/625

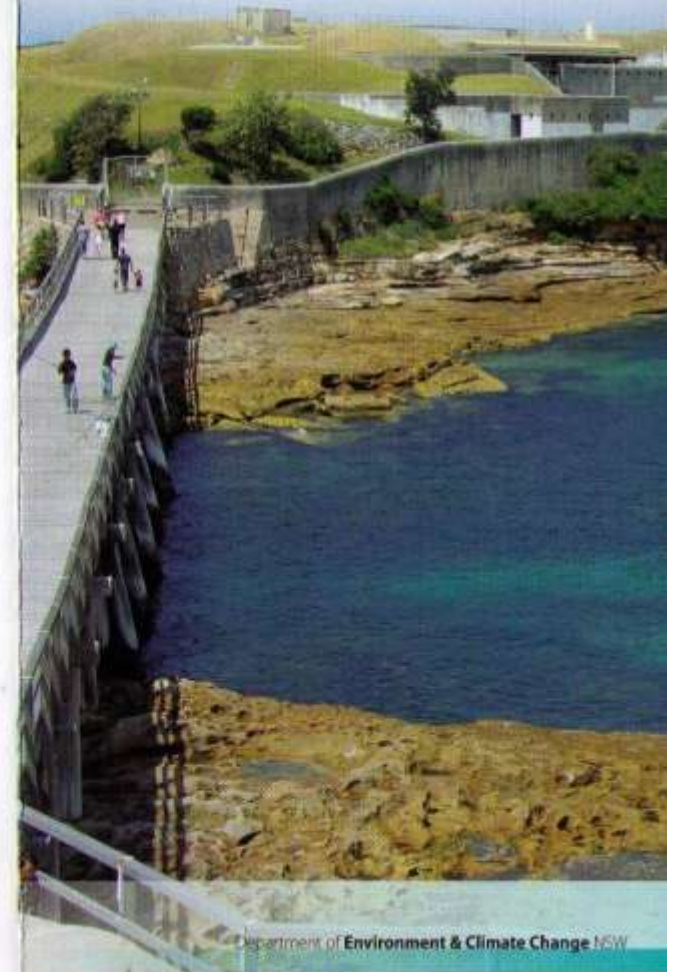
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NSW National Parks
and Wildlife Service

Bare Island Fort

Botany Bay National Park



Department of Environment & Climate Change NSW

The first Europeans

Captain James Cook, naturalist Joseph Banks and the crew of the *Endeavour* entered Botany Bay in April 1770, on a three-year voyage of discovery. Their landing on the southern side of the Bay represents the first landing of Europeans on the east coast of Australia. On 30th April Banks collected shell specimens from the bay's only island. A week later Cook identified that the 'small bare island' lying close to the northern shore provided a convenient navigational marker for entering Botany Bay. The name Bare Island stuck and is one of the first European names for a part of the east coast. Cook and Banks' reports were used in England's decision to colonise Australia.

On the 18th January 1788, the *Supply* entered Botany Bay, followed by the remaining ships of the First Fleet. Captain Arthur Phillip and his landing party came ashore at Congwong Beach and carried out a reconnaissance of the area but eventually selected Port Jackson as a better place to start a colony.

Shortly after Phillip's arrival, the Comte de Laperouse with his two ships, the *Astrolabe* and the *Boussole* arrived in Botany Bay on a journey of scientific discovery and established a stockade and garden on the nearby headland. It is unknown if any of Laperouse's men visited Bare Island, before the expedition departed and was lost in the South Pacific.

For the next 100 years, as the colony grew and industry and settlements appeared in the La Perouse area, Bare Island remained undeveloped.



Bare Island Fort ca. 1900-1910. By the mid-1890s the Fort had reached the height of its development. Within the next ten years the Fort would be obsolete.
Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

Fortifying Botany Bay

For the first 80 years of the colony, the defence of Sydney relied on a number of fortifications protecting the inner harbour. With the withdrawal of the last British garrison troops in 1870, the NSW Colonial Architect James Barnet was charged with the job of designing a new system of fortifications. Fortifications and barracks were constructed on most of the headlands in Sydney Harbour but Botany Bay was overlooked as a priority.

In 1877, in response to a lack of strategic planning between the colonies and inadequate design, the British Government sent two experienced military Royal Engineers, William Jervois and Peter Scratchley, to Australia to advise the colonies on the development of fortifications. Jervois' recommendation for the fortification of 'Bear Island' with five guns and barracks to accommodate 80 men was accepted by the NSW Government. Scratchley, with the assistance of civil engineer Gustavus Morell, prepared a design and construction drawings and then Barnet, in consultation with the two engineers, prepared the specifications.

The semi-circular Fort was to consist of a main 18-tonne 10-inch rifled muzzle-loading gun centrally located in an armoured casemate (a vault with an embrasure through which to fire) supported by two smaller 9-inch guns in open emplacements firing over parapets. The flanks were protected by two 80-pounder guns. The Fort was to be constructed from the relatively new technology of steel-reinforced mass concrete. Armoured plate was specially ordered from Britain in June 1880.

Approval to release the construction tenders was given by the Colonial Secretary Henry Parkes in August 1880 although tenders were not called until March 1881. The lowest tender of £25,020, by builder John McLeod, was accepted in April and the works commenced in May, supervised by Barnet, his Clerk of Works Mr Edwin Colley and Henry Purkis, the clerk of works on site.

By August 1883 the open emplacements and magazines had been completed. The 9-inch guns were mounted in September and the 80-pounders in November. The armour plate shields, each weighing 25 tons, also arrived in November, which took several months to be transported and installed. The 10-inch gun was mounted and the final major concrete pour covered the iron casemate roof plates in May 1884.

In late 1886 the timber bridge was completed, however work had still not commenced on the barracks with the garrison still

living in tents on the headland. Planning did commence though on the Henry Head Battery, to be located about one kilometre to the east of Bare Island, and designed to accommodate two of the recently arrived 6-inch breech-loading hydro-pneumatic 'disappearing' guns. Bare Island Fort, still not completed, was already destined to take a support role.

Changing technology


In the hundred years up until 1850, the development of warships and artillery technology had progressed slowly. In the 1850's, when Jervois first started working on fortifications, the most powerful piece of artillery was the smooth bore 68-pounder which could fire a 30kg ball up to only 2,900 metres.

In 1858, France hung iron plates around a half-built wooden sailing ship and launched the *Gloire*. Britain replied by constructing a ship made entirely of iron. When it was launched in 1860, *HMS Warrior* instantly made all other warships obsolete. By 1885 warships were steam-driven, protected by iron armour up to 18-inches thick and carried powerful 12-inch rifled breech-loading guns. At the same time, at the extreme close range of 100 yards, Bare Island Fort's main gun could hope to penetrate only 9-inches of armour.

Bare Island Fort was designed and constructed during the midst of an arms race which began with *HMS Warrior* and would not end until after World War Two.

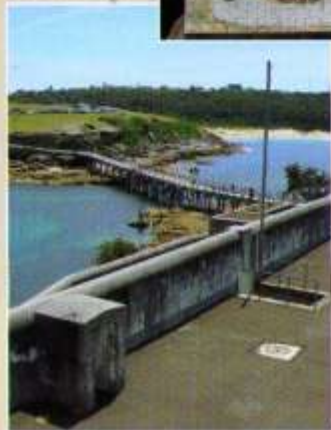
Not long afterwards, officers began complaining of rainwater entering the casemate and into the magazines. The builder McLeod spent three months carrying out repairs to cracked walls and faulty drainage.

In 1889, Lieutenant-Colonel de Wolski, an expert on coastal defences, was seconded to New South Wales as Director of Military Works. He quickly investigated the claims of poor workmanship and was outraged that Barnet had recently re-engaged McLeod to build the barracks. De Wolski appealed to the Colonial Secretary who cancelled McLeod's agreement in June 1889 and approved De Wolski's revised design, which incorporated bomb-proof reinforced ceilings and floors. In July, the Military Works Branch of Public Works was established with de Wolski in charge.



9-inch 12-ton rifled muzzle loading cannon guarding the entrance to Botany Bay
Image: Rob Newton

Connection to the mainland was complete in 1886.
Image: Rob Newton



The Royal Commission


Formal complaints by de Wolski prompted the NSW Parliament to establish a Board of Enquiry into the poor workmanship at both Bare Island and the Georges Head casemates, both constructed

by McLeod. The findings were so damning that a Royal Commission was subsequently established.

Investigations revealed that the large aggregate concrete was not settled and tamped out to prevent the formation of voids and that an inadequate proportion of cement was used. It was estimated that only a half to one third of the specified amount of cement was actually used and in many cases there was insufficient cement to allow the aggregate to adhere together.

The Royal Commission found that Barnet was responsible for mismanagement and insubordination, that Colley should be retired immediately on a pension and that Purkis should show reason as to why he should not be dismissed. McLeod was required to refund over £6,000 and was barred from any further government contracts. Barnet was officially censured and subsequently retired on 30 June 1890.

A War Veterans Home



By the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a growing need to provide accommodation and care for both Australian military veterans who had served in overseas conflicts and for veterans of British garrisons who had decided to remain in Australia when their units returned home. Dame Emma Dixon and other members of the British Empire League Women's Auxiliary and senior military officers successfully lobbied for the Bare Island Fort to become the first war veterans home in Australia, officially opening on 2 July 1912. The first seven occupants were veterans of the Maori Wars, the Indian Mutiny (1856) and the Abyssinian Campaign. These were joined by veterans from other wars including the Crimea War (1854-55), Zulu War (1879), Egypt (1882-84) and Sudanese Campaigns (1885), North-west Frontier of India (1897-98) and the Boer War (1899-1902). They were issued a navy blue uniform with a peaked cap and each paid 7 shillings sixpence of their pension per week as a contribution to their board. The veterans were provided with dormitory style accommodation with curtains for privacy, a younger ex-serviceman acted as the cook and they utilised the large hall for concerts.

During the 1930s, Bare Island was home to up to twelve veterans of several wars, whose average age was around 70 years. In 1935, the Commonwealth first proposed that Bare Island should be reserved for its historical values. In 1939, Bare Island was used as a Moorish citadel in the iconic Australian film, 40,000 Horsemen. In that same year operation of the home passed to the Returned Services League and in 1942 was still only one of three homes for ex-servicemen.

Prepared for War

Japan's entry into the Second World War in December 1941 rapidly altered the balance of power in the Pacific. Within several months, Japan had crippled the American and British fleets, conquered Singapore and was threatening the Australian mainland. Immediate action was taken to strengthen the coastal defences of Sydney and Botany Bay.

The Army occupied Bare Island in February 1942 and rapidly constructed new concrete defences to accommodate two rapid-firing 3-pounder Hotchkiss guns and two searchlights as a defence against high-speed vessels and to support the



Boer War veterans laying wreaths on Anzac Day at the Bare Island War Veterans Home, 1941. Image: Australian War Memorial

electronic minefield in the Bay. The veterans were required to vacate the Fort to make way for 'Bare Section', consisting of one lieutenant, two sergeants, one corporal and 21 privates.

As quickly as the threat from Japan arose, it diminished. By late 1943, the 3-pounder guns had been removed and the Fort resumed its role as a War Veterans Home by 1946.

An Historic Site

In 1962, the Army, having decided that the Fort was surplus to requirements, offered the whole island to the War Veterans Home for the fee of £1. The offer was declined and the Board of the War Veterans Home also decided to vacate the remaining residents to Narrabeen, concluding their occupancy on 24th August 1963.

The NSW Government acquired the island for the cost of £100 and the Randwick Historical Society occupied the Fort in September 1963, installed a caretaker, established a museum and carried out conservation works. The Fort Artillery Society performed cannon and musket firings. The island was gazetted a reserve for public recreation in March 1965.

On 1st October 1967 Bare Island became one of the first historic sites in NSW under the management of the newly created National Parks and Wildlife Service and was incorporated into Botany Bay National Park in 1984.

Completion and Decline of the Fort

Despite the obvious flaws of the Fort, the barracks building was completed providing a two-storey barracks and mess of shatterproof brick.

With the arrival of the hydro-pneumatic mounts and guns by 1894, one of the 9-inch guns were removed and in its place a 'disappearing' gun emplacement and gun crew shelter constructed. A new Battery Command Post was also built behind the other remaining 9-inch gun.

Officer's Quarters, consisting of four bedrooms, a dining room and a drawing room, were provided on the mainland, north of Bare Island.

The Island was transferred to the new Commonwealth in 1903, by which time only the 6-inch gun was still operational. The Fort was gradually reduced to a training depot with limited personnel and by 1908 the Fort ceased to serve any defence purpose.

	Range of the guns	Weight of shell
80-pounder 5-ton RML:	3730m	36 kg
9-inch 12-ton RML:	2743m	113 kg
10-inch 18-ton RML:	2743m	186 kg
BL 6-inch Mk 5:	7315m	45 kg



Bare Island played an important military role due to its location at the entrance to Botany Bay.

The Men Behind Bare Island Fort

Felician Rola de Wolski was born in 1846 to a Polish-refugee father and Scottish mother. A major in the Royal Engineers, he was seconded for 3 years to the position of Commander of the Submarine Mining Forces in New South Wales in April 1889 and promoted to the local rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He clashed with the civilian Colonial Architect Barnet and lobbied to have military works removed from his control. De Wolski was subsequently appointed Director of the newly created Military Works Branch of the Public Works Department, but his appointment was marked with controversy and various commissions of inquiry. He returned to England six months early and retired with the rank of Colonel.

James Johnstone Barnet was born in Scotland in 1827 and after studying architecture, emigrated to Sydney in 1854. He joined the Colonial Architect's Office in 1860, within two years was acting head and in 1865 he was appointed Colonial Architect. Barnet designed a number of outstanding government buildings, including the General Post Office, the Australian Museum, Customs House and the State Library. In the 1870s, although he had no military background, Barnet was required to build fortifications and barracks across Sydney Harbour, which on later inspection were highly praised by Jervois and Scratchley. The works at Bare Island, however, were not so well executed. The 1890 Royal Commission found Barnet guilty of gross indifference towards his duties and of

insubordination for deliberately delaying the hand-over of defence plans and documents. During his appointment, over 1500 projects across NSW were carried out under Barnet's direction. His censure and premature retirement clouded an otherwise distinguished career. Barnet died in 1904 and was buried in Rookwood Cemetery.



The poor workmanship on Bare Island was to contribute to the downfall of distinguished Colonial Architect James Barnet.

Image: Portrait of James Barnet, National Library of Australia

Sir Peter Henry Scratchley was born in 1835 and was commissioned in the Royal Engineers in April 1854. He was decorated for his service in both the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. From 1859 to 1863 he designed and constructed fortifications in Melbourne and was involved in the development of the Victorian Artillery and Volunteer Engineers. In 1877, after ten years in the War Office, Scratchley was selected to accompany Jervois and was appointed Commissioner of Defences following Jervois's premature departure. His plans for defences, including Bare Island, were largely implemented.

He retired from military service in 1882 a major-general but continued to act as a defence adviser to Australia. In 1885 he arrived in Port Morseby to take up his appointment as special commissioner for the Protectorate of New Guinea. Scratchley established humanitarian policies for the hitherto exploited indigenous people but died of malaria less than four months after his arrival. He was buried in Victoria but later re-interred in England.



Military engineer Major-General Sir Peter Scratchley designed the Fort. Image: Courtesy of La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

Sir William Francis Drummond Jervois, born in 1821, was commissioned in the Royal Engineers in 1839 and became a highly experienced and decorated authority on fortifications. In 1877, while Governor of the Malaysian Straits Settlements, Jervois was asked to report on the defences of Australia and New Zealand. Following his inspection of NSW, Jervois was appointed Governor of South Australia. Jervois was a popular governor but departed Adelaide in 1882 to take up the Governorship of New Zealand. In 1889 he returned to England and ended his career as Colonel-Commandant of the Royal Engineers. He died in 1897 following a carriage accident.