The History of McElhone Place, Surry Hills

John Walter Ross

“We are very proud of our oasis. It's a secret garden where the street is our backyard and the flowers bring everyone together.”

Claudette Roy, 2006.

Cover photographs:

Top: McElhone Place in the 1930s.
Bottom: McElhone Place in 2013.

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Foreword

Terence McElhone came to the colony of New South Wales in 1819 in a convict ship, having escaped the noose in Ireland, but facing life imprisonment for larceny. When his wife Catherine stepped off an immigrant ship to reunite with Terence in 1828, the colony of New South Wales was growing rapidly, driven by a thriving wool industry. There were many opportunities for enterprising settlers, and even people of modest means were acquiring land and becoming wealthy. Within a few years, the McElhones had accumulated many assets: a dairy business, houses and a hotel in the city, and blocks of land in Surry Hills and Waverley.

By the early 1840s, the McElhones had constructed 14 small sandstone cottages on their Surry Hills land, and rented them to locally-employed workers. This was typical of the pattern of absentee ownership that lasted until the 1960s, and saw most inner-city housing slowly fall into disrepair. It was more profitable to rent out deteriorating buildings than to spend money upgrading them, as long as there was a ready supply of tenants. In the 1870s, 16 two-storey workers' houses in McElhone Place and the four larger houses in Dowling Street had been built as an investment by John McElhone, the son of Terence and Catherine.

By the 1870s there was widespread concern in Sydney that the rapid unregulated expansion of cheap housing and neglect by landlords had resulted in slum areas that would be better used for something more lucrative, such as commerce and industry. The belief at the time was that by eradicating slums, the inhabitants would somehow make better lives for themselves. Not much happened until 1900, when a minor outbreak of bubonic plague in the Darling Harbour docks accelerated the process. After this, the State and Municipal governments showed amazing enthusiasm and energy in sweeping away the most squalid of the slum neighbourhoods. This lasted until the late 1920s, when the Council found it harder to attract industry to take up the cleared areas.

On the death in 1916 of Mary Jane McElhone, the daughter of Terence and Catherine McElhone, the houses were inherited by her nephew William Percy McElhone, who was not interested in keeping the properties in the family, and sold them all during the 1920s. The McElhone Place and Marshall Street houses were purchased by Teresa Alice Taylor, probably Sydney's most famous pickpocket, who managed to accumulate some 48 houses by the time she died. The Public Trustee sold her McElhone Place properties to two buyers in the late 1920s, thus ending the single ownership of the street that had lasted almost 90 years.

After World War II, severe housing shortages caused by the post-war baby boom and a wave of immigration from Europe heralded a renewed interest in redeveloping the old areas of Sydney. The State government once again set their minds to demolishing historic suburbs like Woolloomooloo, The Rocks, Redfern and Surry Hills. But the priority was to build freeways and high-density housing, not factories. McElhone Place was seriously threatened by a Housing Commission plan in 1968 to demolish every house in the street and replace them with blocks of eight-storey flats.

A number of factors contributed to saving the street from this destruction. The Green Bans movement of the 1970s prevented much of the planned demolition of old areas and incoming Labor governments, federally in 1972 and in New South Wales in 1976, were more interested in restoring

historic areas than previous Liberal governments. Also, by the 1960s, most houses in McElhone Place were individually owned, and dealing with so many owners took years of negotiations. Finally, there was a lack of funds for inner-city redevelopment as the State Housing Commission focused more on outer Sydney projects such as the massive Green Valley Housing Estate near Liverpool.

While the government failed to refurbish the deteriorating inner-city houses in the post-war era, the new generation of owner-occupiers achieved it themselves through a pride in home ownership that had not been shown by over a century of absentee landlords. In the case of McElhone Place, this meant the addition of a bedroom, bathroom and kitchen to the stone cottages in the 1960s and 1970s.

But the greatest contribution to the life of the street has been the beautification of the streetscape with tubs, pots, trellises and window boxes filled with brilliantly-colourful flowers and shrubs that have transformed a dismal concrete jungle into the beautiful oasis it is today. This was an initiative of the residents, encouraged by the Sydney Council. A swag of Council gardening awards is testimony to the success of their efforts to make the living environment the best it can be.

This document has been researched and written as an exercise, and is not intended for commercial publication. Its audience is anyone with an interest in the history of the inner areas of Sydney from the early days of the colony to the present. It traces the changes in attitudes, government policies, and community involvement that have led to historic neighbourhoods being viewed in the modern era as valuable and worth preserving.

Thanks to residents Claudette Roy and Peter Wilson for information on the recent history of the street. Also thanks to Keith Johnson and Lesley Mellor for their encouragement and support in reviewing this history – to Keith for guiding it towards a higher standard of accuracy and consistency, and to Lesley for providing valuable feedback on behalf of the general reading audience.

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Historical Time Line

1794: John Palmer is granted 70 acres in Surry Hills.

1814: James Chisholm purchases 8 acres of Palmer's land at auction.

1819: Terence McElhone arrives in Sydney from Ireland on the convict ship *Mary*.

1828-9: Catherine McElhone migrates to Sydney from Ireland.

1833: Arthur Little purchases part of Chisholm's land and sells it to Terence McElhone.

c1840: Terence McElhone and James Regan construct 2–20 McElhone Place and 8–14 Marshall Street.

c1871: John McElhone constructs 1-23 McElhone Place.

c1871: 497-499 Dowling Street are constructed.

c1876: 493-495 Dowling Street are constructed.

1877-1880 - 22-28 McElhone Place are constructed.

c1924: Percy and Sarah Heath purchase 499 Dowling Street and stables behind the house.

c1925: Teresa Alice Taylor purchases 1-23 and 2-28 McElhone Place, 8-18 Marshall Street.

1928: Emanuel Myerson purchases 2-20 McElhone Place and 12-18 Marshall Street.

c1929: A garage is constructed within the former stables site behind 499 Dowling Street.

1929: Neredah Rudovsky purchases 1-23 McElhone Place and 8-10 Marshall Street.

1941: Cumberland Farm Pty. Ltd. purchases 2-28 McElhone Place and 12-18 Marshall Street.

1945: Arthur Chartres purchases 1-23 McElhone Place and 8-10 Marshall Street.

1962: Olive Batty and John Costello purchase 28 McElhone Place.

1978: Peter Wilson constructs 25 McElhone Place.

c1978: The greening of McElhone Place begins.

1982: McElhone Place wins Best Street Display for the first time at the Greening of Sydney awards.

1987: Margaret Grafton converts 30 McElhone Place to a weaving studio and residence.

Part One – the Nineteenth Century

Surry Hills until the 1840s

John Palmer's land grant

In 1794, Commissary-General John Palmer was granted 70 aces in the Surry Hills area, calling it George farm. Palmer acquired 25 acres more, and then bought Joseph Foveaux's land grant to the west of his when Foveaux left for Norfolk Island. By 1800, Palmer had accumulated about 200 acres in Surry Hills. In January 1808, the Rum Rebellion by the New South Wales Corps overthrew Governor William Bligh. Palmer had supported the Governor, and for this he was sacked by the rebel administration.

Following this, John Palmer spent six years in England at various enquiries into the rebellion, and his businesses in New South Wales went into debt. He finally returned to New South Wales in 1814 with his affairs in a very bad financial state. The Sheriff, William Gore, ordered that his Surry Hills estate be sold to pay off his debts. The government surveyor James Meehan subdivided the estate into 27 allotments, while at the same time trying to lay out the future streets of Surry Hills in an orderly way. In October 1814, the allotments were sold by public auction.

McElhone Place land

At the 1814 auction, James Chisholm, a former Corporal in the New South Wales Corps, acquired about eight acres. The sandstone cottages in McElhone Place and Marshall Street stand on part of allotment 21 purchased by James Chisholm at the sale of Palmer's land, adjacent to Robert Cooper's land. From 1819 to 1821, Chisholm was the publican and landlord of the *Thistle Hotel* in George Street, and Robert Cooper was landlord of the *Beehive Inn*, also in George Street. Cooper subsequently built Juniper Hall in Paddington in about 1825.

Land values increased through the 1830s, driven by financial prosperity from wool exports. In 1830, Chisholm was one of the first people to subdivide Surry Hills after the 1814 sale. In May 1833, he sold part of his land to Arthur Little, who sold the same land in June 1833 to Terence McElhone, a dairyman and milk vendor who had arrived in the colony in 1819, and whose wife Catherine had arrived in 1828[1].

Nineteenth century construction of McElhone Place

McElhone Place and Marshall Street stone cottages built in c1840

Figure 1: 2 - 20 McElhone Place

Between the purchase of the land in 1833 and the first appearance of the properties in the Sydney Council Rate Assessment Books in 1845, Terence McElhone and James Regan constructed ten workers' cottages in McElhone Place (numbers 2 to 20) and four in Marshall Street (numbers 8 to 14), then called Maiden Lane. The McElhone Place cottages are a single storey sandstone Colonial Georgian style group, constructed of ashlar sandstone walls, and originally had shingled roofs. Each one is symmetrical with a central four-panel timber door flanked by double-hung timber windows.

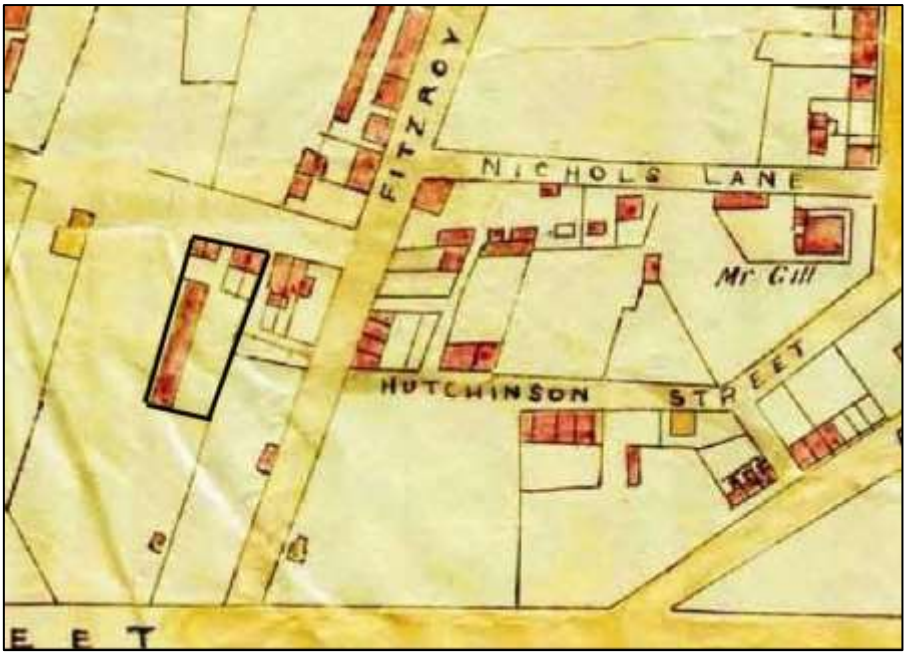

Figure 2: Shields 1845 map – McElhone's cottages are highlighted in black

Each cottage originally consisted of two rooms, with a toilet block at the back, serviced by a narrow lane running behind the cottages. They are still in good condition with a high degree of intact original fabric. McElhone Place was originally a private estate, and was not listed in *Sands Directory* until the north side houses were built in c1871[2].

The cottages at 8-14 Marshall Street are two pairs of attached houses, separated by McElhone Place. Number 10 has a carved street sign on the southern wall at eaves level for McElhone Place, and the painted words "SIMPSON GROCER" over the door. John Simpson was the occupant between 1845 and 1852[3].

It is not known why McElhone and Regan chose to build the cottages in sandstone rather than brick, which was much cheaper and in plentiful supply by then. There may be a connection with the Victoria Barracks in Paddington which were also being constructed in sandstone at this time (1841-1846). It has been suggested that either the cottages were built from leftover stone from the Barracks, or the cottages were intended to house the Army officers.

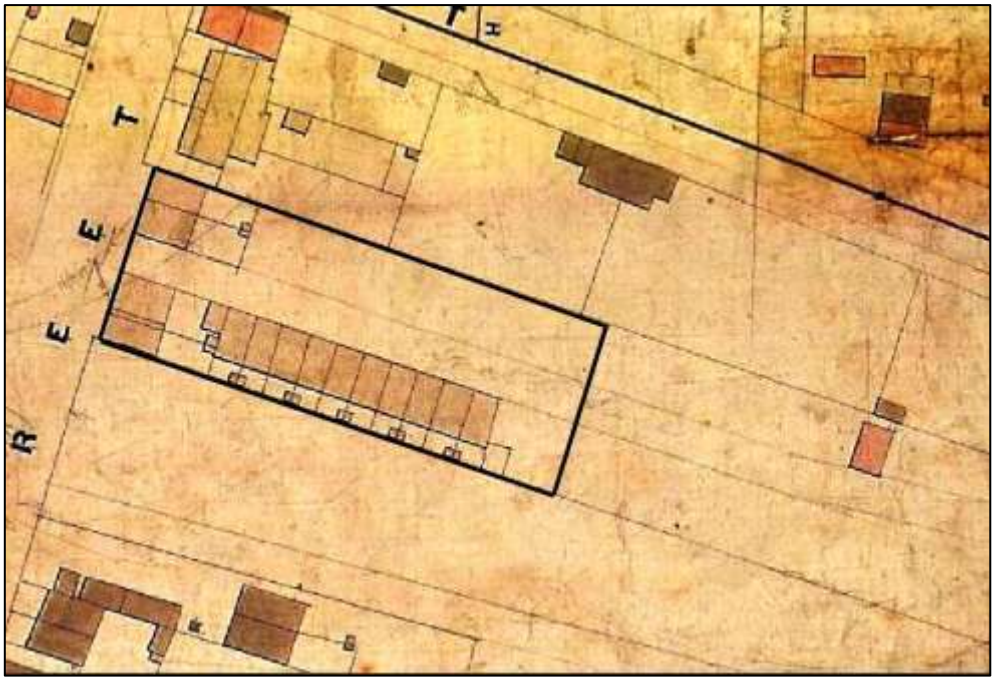

Figure 3: 1865 Trigonometric Survey - the cottages are shown in more detail

In May 1869, the Sydney Council's Water Committee recommended the laying of a three-inch water main in McElhone Place, at the cost of £23[4]. Then in June 1870, the Council's Lighting Committee recommended that a public lamp be erected in McElhone Place[5].

McElhone Place north side houses built in c1871

Figure 4: 1 - 23 McElhone Place

The nine two-storey houses on the north side of McElhone Place (numbers 1 to 23) were erected by John McElhone, the son of Terence and Catherine, in c1871, while he was living in Potts Point. They are constructed of rendered brickwork with simple detailing of timber-framed double-hung windows and timber panelled doors. Each house consisted of three rooms, with a toilet block out the back[6].

The group is a good example of the mid-Victorian Georgian style terrace. The houses are in good condition with a high degree of original fabric intact. The ratepayer of these houses and the land next to number 23 from 1871 until his death in 1880 was John Walter Smart, the third husband of Mary Jane McElhone.

Dowling Street houses built in 1871-6

Figure 5: 493 - 495 South Dowling Street

493-495 Dowling Street is a pair of three-storey Victorian Filigree terrace houses, constructed in about 1876. Across McElhone Place, 497-499 Dowling Street is also a pair of three-storey terrace houses, constructed in 1871. An advertisement to rent Tyrone House (number 497) submitted by Mrs. J. W. Smart of Surry House (number 499) appeared in June 1871[7]. In 1877, the Council recorded the four houses as brick construction, slated roof, three stories with six rooms each. Then in 1880 they were recorded as having eight rooms each[8]. The four houses were built by John McElhone.

Figure 6: 497 - 499 South Dowling Street

These properties are quite large, and were designed to be middle-class housing. They were used either as boarding houses or rented by professional families. Numbering from 493 to 499, they were named Omagh, Bowen, Tyrone and Surry (or Surrey) Houses. An advertisement submitted by J. W. Smart to let Omagh House (number 493) in October 1876, soon after it was built, mentioned a dining room, drawing room, five large bedrooms, kitchen, laundry, bathroom, pantry, gas and water to all rooms in the house, a large yard, at a rent of £110 (per annum)[9]. There were advertisements for servants for the well-off families renting the houses: housemaids, cooks, laundresses and nursemaids.

Figure 7: 497-499 Dowling Street in 1875

An advertisement for Tyrone House (number 497) submitted by Mrs. J. W. Smart in September 1874 mentioned a drawing room, dining room, five bedrooms, kitchen, laundry, copper, bathroom, gas,

large yard, at a rent of £84 (per annum)[10]. John and Mary Jane Smart were living in Surry House (number 499).

In these advertisements, they were always referred to as Moore Park, not Surry Hills, and the views of the Park were emphasised. A number of auction sales of luxurious goods and furniture were held in the houses, often as the middle-class families who rented them sold their belongings and moved interstate or overseas.

An example of this was the advertised sale of Mrs. C. J. Reuben's household effects in Omagh House in September 1891, prior to her departure from Sydney[11]. The items to be sold included the following:

- Magnificent complete service of Elkington's table plate of the very best quality, very richly engraved, and contained in a handsome oak case
- Oak dining room suite, upholstered in morocco leather
- Very superior cedar sideboard and handsome ebonised and gold and walnut overmantels (Note: panels or ornaments placed above a mantelpiece)
- Best quality Brussels carpets, almost new and in perfect order
- Magnificent upright grand pianoforte in highly-finished ebonised case, by Emil Ascherberg, Dresden.
- Oak hall furniture, walnut and inlaid tables.
- The contents of several bedrooms including large mahogany wardrobes with plate glass doors, and very superior chests of drawers.

This opulence was in stark contrast to the very simple lives of the workers in the two-roomed cottages just around the corner in McElhone Place and Marshall Street.

McElhone Place south side brick houses built in 1877-1880

Figure 8: 22 - 28 McElhone Place

The four houses at 22-28 McElhone Place were built between 1877 and 1880. These are two-storey brick houses with three rooms each, and a separate toilet block out the back.

The land at the present number 30 was recorded in the 1880 Rate Assessment Book as single-storey wooden stables with an iron roof and three rooms. Then in 1891, it was recorded as a single-storey workshop of brick and stone construction with two rooms[12].

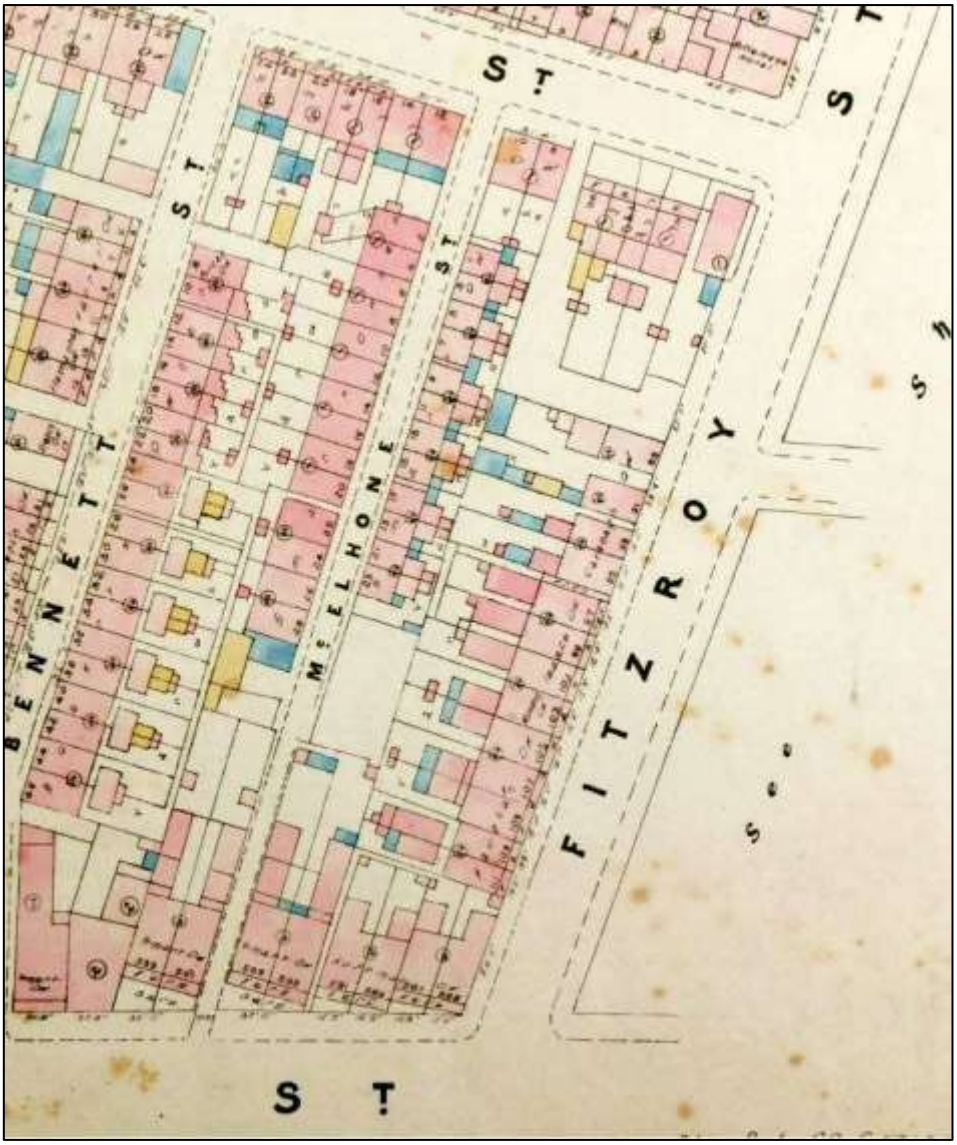

Figure 9: 1887 Rygate & West's *Plan of Sydney*

Nineteenth century ownership of the properties

The properties that were built between c1840 and 1877 remained in the McElhone family until they were sold in the 1920s. Catherine McElhone was the ratepayer from c1840 until her death in 1863. After this, her son John McElhone inherited the properties. But her daughter Mary Jane, who married Richard Cullen in 1846, was listed as the ratepayer after her mother's death. Mary Jane was widowed in 1859, then married Thomas Hubbard in 1865, but was again widowed in 1866. She then married the magistrate John Walter Smart in 1870, and he was listed as the ratepayer.

After John Smart's death in 1880, Mary Jane (Smart) was the ratepayer of all the properties. Then, after the death of her brother John in 1898, she became the owner until her death in 1916.

The McElhone Family in the Nineteenth Century

Terence McElhone (1791-1843)

Terence McElhone was born in Ireland in 1791 and married Catherine Mallon in 1816 in County Tyrone. In the summer of 1817, he was convicted of housebreaking in Tyrone, and sentenced to death, but commuted to life imprisonment. He was transported to Australia in the *Mary*, arriving in August 1819[13], and was assigned to work for Captain John Piper. In April 1823, he petitioned for mitigation of his sentence on the grounds of good behaviour[14]. In October 1824, he submitted a petition to Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane for a free passage for his family to New South Wales, and the Governor agreed to solicit a passage[15], although it was not obtained for another four years.

In 1826, he applied for permission to marry Lucy Fox, a convict from Dublin who had arrived in the *Mariner* in July 1825 (He is listed as Terence M. Hone, aged 31, per *Mary*, arrived 1819). The request was refused in August 1826, because Lucy was already married to a potato factor (a dealer or trader in potatoes) in Dublin[16]. The fact that he too was already married was not mentioned in the records!

He was granted a Ticket of Leave in September 1827[17], which meant that he could work for wages, instead of being assigned to a master. However, this Ticket of Leave was cancelled in February 1828 after he was convicted by the Sydney Bench of Magistrates for being "found in bed with Lucy Fox, per *Mariner*, the assigned servant of Mr. Bellamy of Pennant Hills, in a disorderly house", according to a Police Report on 18 February 1828[18].

In October 1828, his wife Catherine finally arrived from Ireland in the *Sir Joseph Banks*, along with 108 other wives of Irish convicts and their children (although Catherine did not bring any children with her)[19]. In November 1828, he was listed in the Census (under the name T. McSlone, per *Mary*) and was residing in the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney[20]. Between 1828 and 1832 he was issued annual Tickets of Exemption from Government Labour.

Their daughter Mary Jane was born in September 1829 and baptised in St Mary's Chapel (on the site of the present St Mary's Cathedral) which was started in 1821 but not finished until 1833[21]. Another Ticket of Leave was issued to Terence in October 1833[22], and in September 1834 he was granted a Conditional Pardon[23], and was then a free man. He was described in some of the convict records referenced above as being 5 feet 7¾ inches tall, with a dark sallow complexion, black or dark brown hair, and dark hazel eyes.

Land Titles Office records show that Terence purchased property in and around Sydney during the land boom of the 1830s. He could not write his own name, which would account for various spellings of his name in the old documents: McElhone, Macklehone, Machahone, MacHillone, Micklehone, and even Michael Owen. The properties he purchased were:

- 19th January, 1831: a property in Clarence Street, Sydney (Book 92, No. 712)
- 2nd March, 1832: a property on the north-west corner of Kent and Bathurst Streets, Sydney (Book H, No. 646)
- 3rd June, 1833: 23 ¼ acres of land and a dwelling in Botany Road, adjoining Robert Cooper's land and the Sydney Common, purchased for £150 (Book H, No. 648)

- 19th February, 1836: The property called Dungate House and the adjoining property called Kelso House in Castlereagh Street, Sydney (on the east side), starting 72' north of Liverpool Street (Book M, No. 608, and Book 3 No. 761, and Book 11, No. 7)
- 11th February, 1837: A property on the north-west corner of Castlereagh and Liverpool Streets, Sydney, purchased for £400 (Book L, No. 671 and Book W No. 599). The hotel that was later called Dungate Inn was on this site (now the National Bank of Australia).
- 25th July, 1837: A property in Liverpool Street, Sydney, adjoining the Dungate Inn, purchased for £112/10/0 (Book L, No. 566b).
- 2nd February, 1841: Land at Waverley near the South Head Road (now Oxford Street) (Book V, No. 492).

The McElhones were notable in being able to purchase so much land and property within a few years of Terence's pardon and Catherine's arrival. He was referred to *The Australian* in 1840 as "Mr. Terence Macklehone, the wealthy cowkeeper of Castlereagh Street"[24]. The McElhone Place, Marshall Street and Dowling Street properties were constructed on part of the land purchased in 1833.

Terence McElhone died on 29 November 1843, aged 52 years, after falling out of an upstairs window of Dungate House in the middle of the night, landing on the footpath 14 feet below. An inquest was held into his death which concluded that he was intoxicated[25], had a row with his family who fled from the house, leaving him without a light in the bedroom. The coroner concluded that he fell out of the dark window, thinking he was stepping into the street. Doctors William Bland and Thomas Duigan gave evidence that his death was caused by a fractured pelvis. The coroner concluded that death was accidental[26].

The newspaper report on the inquest mentioned that McElhone was a well known character in Sydney who was worth thousands, and implied he was a toper (a heavy drinker or chronic drunkard). They even claimed that at one time had three wives, two of them living at his house at the time of his death. They concluded that his death was worthy of such a life! The family clearly took offence at this article and must have threatened legal action, as the paper issued an apology a month later, regretting any injury to the feelings of the relatives[27]. His death is registered under the name "Terence Mc Shone", died in 1843, aged 52[28].

Catherine McElhone (c1792-1863)

She was born Catherine Mallon in the townland[29] or hamlet of Dungate in the parish of Kildress, County Tyrone, Ireland in about 1792. She married Terence McElhone in County Tyrone in 1816, and arrived in New South Wales in October 1828 to join him. Their daughter Mary Jane was born in Sydney on 15 September 1829 and son John was born on 16 June 1833. She died in Sydney on 1 February 1863, aged 70 years, while living at the Dungate Inn, 124 Liverpool Street.

The Dungate Inn was located on the north-west corner of Castlereagh and Liverpool Streets, Sydney. From 1842, it was called the Builders' Arms, when the licensee was Charles Doyle. It was advertised for sale in June 1847, and the McElhone family bought it. In July 1847 Charles Doyle moved the licence of the Builders' Arms to another hotel on the corner of Sussex and Liverpool Streets. The McElhone family renamed it the Dungate Inn, after Catherine' native place in Tyrone, Ireland, and she became the licensee from 1847 to 1848[30].

Dungate House was located in Castlereagh Street on the east side, 72 feet north of Liverpool Street. Terence McElhone purchased this and the adjacent Kelso House in February 1836. Presumably he named it Dungate House after his wife's birthplace in County Tyrone in Ireland. A newspaper advertisement in January 1841 described the property as two houses situated in Castlereagh Street South, one containing eleven rooms and the other ten rooms, with good stabling, and a never-failing well of water, fitted for any gentleman and their families[31]. Terence McElhone was living in the house at this time.

Mary Jane McElhone (1829-1916)

She was the older sister of John McElhone, and inherited the family properties after his death in 1898. She was married three times, each time to a man younger than the one before. She outlived them all, the last one by 26 years: Richard Cullen (1811-1859) was 18 years older, Thomas Hubbard (c1833-1866) was about three years younger, and John Walter Smart (c1843-1880) was about 14 years younger.

While she was single, she lived with her mother at the 124 Liverpool Street house (next door to the Dungate Inn), which they owned from about 1848. She married Richard Cullen, the licensee of the Union Inn in Kent Street, in June 1846 in St Mary's Cathedral[32]. Presumably, Mary lived with him in his hotel while he was the licensee, which was from 1843 to 1846. He was the stepbrother of John Browne, grazier of Liverpool Plains, born in 1803, whose daughter Mary Jane Browne married John McElhone (Mary Jane's younger brother) in 1862.

Richard Cullen was the Clerk of the Course at Petersham Municipal Races in 1847. He was confined in Darlinghurst Gaol as an insolvent in January 1850, with debts of £364[33]. In the insolvency court in February 1850, claims against him were proven for J. Brown of £73, T. Cullen of £75, and T. Smidmore of £91[34]. He was mentioned in the news as living in Sydney between 1851 and 1856, and possibly in May 1858. He applied for the licence of the Dungate Inn in April 1855, but withdrew his application soon afterwards[35].

Richard Cullen died in February 1859 in Tambaroora, near Hill End, by accidentally falling down a precipice at night[36]. Gold had been discovered in Tambaroora in 1851, and by 1855 there were nearly 6,000 people living there. He is buried in Hill End Catholic Cemetery with his older brother James, who died in 1870, aged 60 years. He may have been visiting his relatives in Tambaroora at the time, in particular James, who was a licensed auctioneer and the Honorable Secretary of the Tambaroora Annual Races[37]. There were a few Cullen family members in the Hill End area in the 1850s, according to the local history website.

Mary must have moved back with her mother Catherine at 124 Liverpool Street after Richard died, because she was living there when she married Thomas Hubbard in February 1865[38]. He was a ship owner and commission agent. She then lived in his house, Kegsworth Villa, in Parramatta Road, Petersham. He died at home in September 1866, aged 32 years[39]. By September 1867, Mary was living at 499 Bourke Street, Surry Hills[40], and also in 1868[41]. She lived there until 1871, when 499 Dowling Street was built and she was married to John Walter Smart.

She had married the magistrate John Walter Smart, in January 1870. He was born in about 1844 and arrived in New South Wales in 1852 with his family. He was living at Arlington House, Five Dock when he was appointed magistrate in August, 1871[42]. He and Mary Jane moved to Surry House, 499

Dowling Street when it was built in about 1872[43]. He campaigned twice for election to the Sydney Municipal Council between 1871 and 1873, but was unsuccessful. In 1874, he campaigned for the State seat of Upper Hunter, but was also unsuccessful. He died of heart disease at home in Downing Street in May 1880, aged 36[44].

After burying three husbands, Mary Jane lived at Surry House, where she died in January 1916 at age 85. The net value of her estate was £14,481[45]. She had no children, and the properties were inherited by her nephew William Percy McElhone, the fourth son of John McElhone. Her will stated that her long-time servant, Sarah Wells, was allowed to live in Surry House. She lived there until the house was sold to Percy and Sarah Heath in 1924.

John McElhone (1833-1898)

Figure 10: John McElhone

He was born in Sydney in June 1833, and had a rough and ready upbringing, joining the Cabbage Tree mob of inner city larrikins in his youth. By 1859 he was working as a commission agent in Sydney. In February 1862, he married Mary Jane, daughter of John Browne of Albion House, Miller's Point. John Browne was a wealthy squatter with a property on the Liverpool Plains. When John's mother died in 1863, he inherited the McElhone Place and adjacent properties. By 1867, he was a broker and produce merchant in partnership with Richard Binnie, saddler and brother-in-law of George Hill[46].

John built the brick two-storey houses on the north side of McElhone Place, numbers 1 to 23, in about 1871. He also built the two pairs of houses in Dowling Street, numbers 497 and 499 in 1871-2 and numbers 493 and 495 in about 1876. Finally, he built the two-storey brick houses on the south side of McElhone Place, numbers 22 to 28 (plus stables in the adjacent land that would later become number 30) between 1877 and 1880.

In 1875, he contested the Legislative Assembly seat of Upper Hunter, championing the free selectors' cause against the wealthy squatters. He won the seat after a controversial election and a bitter fight in a second ballot. In November 1882, he was elected for East Sydney ahead of Henry Parkes with the help of the Catholic vote. He only served for two months in East Sydney, then was re-elected in the Upper Hunter in December 1882, where he served until January 1889, apart from a period in 1885 to 1887 after losing his seat in the 1885 election.

From 1878 to 1882 he also represented Fitzroy Ward in the Sydney Municipal Council[47]. This ward ran from Oxford Street to the harbour, covering parts of Paddington, Kings Cross, Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay, including his home in Potts Point. He had a great determination to expose official

incompetence, and in 1880 he used his penknife to expose defective work in the foundations of the Town Hall. The government architect resigned in the ensuing scandal. In 1881, his father-in-law died, having excluded three of his daughters from an estate valued at over £110,000. McElhone challenged the will in court, but his claim was not upheld. In pressing this claim, he was criticised for exposing scandals in the Browne family, and making his young daughter give evidence in court.

John McElhone was impetuous and abusive, and good with his fists – reputedly a useful skill in those days, even in parliament, and was repeatedly forced by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly to apologise to the House. He was honest, hot-tempered and at times scurrilous, but he was more than just a roughneck. His endless questions in parliament exposed many public wrongs, and his energy and purpose were respected. He was a fiery and litigious politician who favoured land reform but not Federation. In about 1881, he built a four-storied house at 26 Rockwell Crescent, Potts Point, on the corner of Macleay Street. It was described as 75 Macleay Street in the 1921 Rate Assessment Books. It is near the sandstone steps in Woolloomooloo that are named after him.

He died in May 1898 from heart disease at his residence in Rockwall Crescent, Potts Point. His wife Mary Jane died before him in December 1894. He was survived by six sons and three daughters, leaving an estate valued at over £42,000. Ownership of the McElhone Place and nearby properties passed to his sister Mary Jane Smart on his death, although Sydney Council records show that she and her husband had been paying rates on the premises from the 1870s[48].

William Percy McElhone (1871-1932)

Figure 11: William Percy McElhone, Lord Mayor of Sydney

He was the fourth son of John and Mary Jane McElhone, and was born in Sydney in 1871. He began practising as a solicitor in August 1898. He was later joined as partner by Mr. A Barnes, and his nephew Frank Eric McElhone. He was senior partner in the firm he established in 1904, Messrs W P McElhone and Company. He married Donalda MacInnes in 1906.

He served as an alderman in the Sydney City Council 1908-1915, and 1918-1927 and was Lord Mayor in 1922. He was a founding member of the Australian Board of Cricket Control, and served as President of the New South Wales Cricket Association from 1921 to 1931. He was created a Member of the British Empire in 1920[49].

William inherited the McElhone Place properties when his aunt Mary Jane Smart passed away in 1916. He died on 20 April 1932, survived by his wife. There were no children.

Part Two – the Early Twentieth Century

Out with old houses, in with new factories

Slum clearances – who has the authority?

By the 1870s, widespread concern over the state of the city's poorer housing coincided with pressure on urban land to create a significant movement in favour of such housing being "swept away" (a favourite expression at the time). For many businessmen, the land was needed for more lucrative purposes than cheap housing, and they thought the authorities had a duty to facilitate this development[50].

The Victorian belief that cleanliness was next to godliness led to the assumption that people who were thus swept away would somehow, somewhere, make a better life for themselves. The more complex argument, that the poverty highlighted by such housing was a part of the current economic organisation of society, was hardly considered. Such an argument would have admitted that poverty was endemic to the system, and that demolishing a slum in one place would only encourage another slum somewhere else.

But the question of which level of government should wield the broom was a difficult one. The State Government had the power and the required funds, but showed little interest in legislating to facilitate slum clearance. The Sydney Council certainly thought of itself as the proper authority to deal with the question, but had already experienced decades of frustration since its formation in 1842 trying to deal with unsound buildings under existing legislation. The State Government passed the City Improvement Act in 1879, giving partial powers to both the Legislative Council and City Council, so pleasing neither. There followed nearly two decades of angry squabbling between the City Council and the new Improvement Board, each claiming that the other was obstructing its legitimate role as remover of slums.

The result was a limited number of demolitions by the City Council, often acting beyond the power given to them by the 1879 Act. However, in the 1880s economic boom there was some voluntary demolition of decrepit housing by landlords who could profit in the newly buoyant economy by rebuilding decayed houses and selling the replacements at a good price. But when the economy faltered badly in the Depression of the 1890s, voluntary demolition dried up, and areas already resumed by the City Council stood empty. By 1900, the Improvement Board was effectively defunct.

Action begins on clearing the slums

Slum clearances were dramatically kick-started by fleas, in particular fleas infected with bubonic plague arriving in the fur of rats on ships from Europe in 1900. The authorities almost knew to the day when the plague would arrive in Sydney, because it had arrived at the Adelaide docks a few days earlier, and the news was frantically telegraphed around the country.

Figure 12: Rat catchers during the plague, 1900

In the long period from the outbreak of bubonic plague in 1900 to the start of the Great Depression in 1930, there was great activity by the City Council to demolish overcrowded and squalid parts of the inner city, mostly for industrial use. Resumptions by State government started around The Rocks and Millers Point in 1901, with the two levels of government still squabbling over authority and intentions. The Council accused the State government of commandeering Council land in order to prepare the way for a future Harbour Bridge, and at the other end of town for a future Central Railway Station.

Figure 13: Exeter Place, demolished during the plague, 1900

But in 1905, new legislation finally authorised the Sydney Council to resume land for slum clearance. The Council went into this with great gusto, at a rate that would astonish modern planners. There was little attempt to define a slum area (either in health or building structural terms), or to provide for any objections from affected parties. There was almost no recognition at all of the residents' rights.

In the first twelve years of the operation of the 1905 Act, Council made 83 resumptions. Some were small, involving a house or two, but others were much grander, like the widening of major business thoroughfares such as Wentworth Avenue, William Street, Oxford Street and Elizabeth Street. The first resumption in a swampy area of Ultimo involved the demolition of 435 houses, making 1,779 people homeless.

Before the Council had the right to resume, many reformers and planners had argued that the city badly needed this kind of shake up. But when it started to happen, there were howls of protest, often from earlier supporters. Many had assumed that demolitions would be followed by new workers' housing to replace what had been pulled down, and council's original recommendations to parliament did include obligatory replacement dwellings. The model to be used was London, where demolished buildings had been replaced, and additional housing schemes were undertaken by County and Borough Councils.

However, the 1905 legislation permitting resumptions did not insist on replacing workers' housing, and in fact did not permit it. In reality, the majority of City Councillors just wanted to encourage commercial development and to facilitate traffic flows. Mayor Allen Taylor (1905-6, 1909-12) expressed this fairly clearly when he said that the land value at the "deplorable slum" in Ultimo would increase enormously for commercial use. He also wanted Wexford Street cleared away, partly

because it was full of Chinese opium dens, but also because it would open up access to the new Central Station. In Surry Hills, Council resumers had a field day trying to make sense of the maze of lanes intersecting each other at crazy angles, the result of competing ground plans and unregulated development in the nineteenth century[51].

By 1912, City Council had unhoused about 7,000 people, while State government resumptions for railways had dislocated many more. Council employees serving eviction notices were met with angry confrontations with residents, and concern was expressed in the press. Contrary to official expectations, most people did not move away to more "salubrious" areas, but simply moved to a nearby area which soon got into the same condition. Before 1916, evicted tenants were not compensated, and most people were renters, not home owners.

The winding down of resumptions

Some of the benefits of resumptions were obvious, like improved access to the city from the eastern suburbs by the widening of Oxford and William Streets. But many of the commercial developments were less than expected, especially as the buoyant 1920s gave way to the depressed 1930s.

In Surry Hills, it proved to be easier to wipe out areas of housing than to attract industry afterwards, leaving the City Council with a big financial loss. The massive Brisbane Street resumption was an example of this. It was begun in 1912, but was still empty in 1930. It was a spectacular failure, as the seven acres cleared of housing by the Council could not be sold as the Depression gripped the economy. There were no takers in 1929 when the Council offered the area on 50-year leases, and still none when the Council tried to auction it in 1936. It remained a wasteland for many years until the 1980s, when the Sydney Police Centre was built on the land.

Figure 14: Brisbane Street resumption site, 1929

By 1927, there had been a total of 109 resumptions, but there were few after this. During the 1930s and 1940s, there was a reaction against resumptions, partly because economic hardship and then wartime restrictions put more pressure on urban housing.

A change of attitude to land use

An amendment to the City of Sydney Act in 1935 gave the Council the right to declare "residential districts", which had the effect of freezing land use at the current point of development, making it difficult to change the zoning to other uses. When the Council gazetted parts of Surry Hills as residential, it showed that they had changed their view from the all-industrial approach in the past.

This represented a remarkable about face in official attitudes – by this time, Councillors realised that their dream of filling the municipal coffers with the rates of newly established industries on slum-cleared land was fading away, they had unhoused many thousands of families in the meantime, and little replacement housing had been built. The large area of Surry Hills bounded by Riley, Fitzroy, Dowling and Cleveland Streets was typical of the trends in the inner city in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1921 this area contained 21 factories, but by 1938 there were 80 industrial premises operating. Few houses had been built in this time and the existing ones were mostly old and run down. The Council declared this area to be Residential District No. 9 in 1938[52].

McElhone Place - the end of family ownership

William McElhone offers the street to the Council in 1916

After the death of Mary Jane Smart in 1916, her nephew William Percy McElhone inherited all the properties in the street, plus the Dowling Street and Marshall Street houses owned by the family. In June 1916 he wrote to the Town Clerk, offering to sell to the Sydney Council the four houses in Dowling Street, 26 houses in McElhone Place and six houses in Marshall Street (this included numbers 16 and 18). He wrote that while the houses in McElhone Place and Marshall Street were very old, they had been kept in good condition and repair[53].

He suggested that if the Council bought his land, as well as the land on the north side of Bennett Street, "did away with the slum area", and after widening the streets, they would be left with a site which could be used for "factory purposes or workmen's dwellings", with little or no cost to Council. The Council considered this offer, and the City Assessor, Mr. W. M. Wiley, wrote to the Town Clerk with an estimate of the purchase price of £9,000, plus £2,500 to demolish the McElhone Place houses[54].

However, the Council had bigger plans for the area, and asked the City Assessor for a cost estimate to remodel the whole of the congested area from Fitzroy Street to Arthur Street. The Council wrote a final letter to McElhone with their recommendation that no action would be taken on his offer to sell, citing the tight money market, the wish by Council not to embark on further resumption schemes under present conditions, and because the properties are part of a larger scheme of resumption that was being considered[55].

William McElhone was clearly not interested in keeping the properties in the family much longer. He notified the Council in September 1916 that he had already turned down two offers to buy them at higher than the Council's estimated price. However, despite his keenness to sell, and the buyer interest at the time, none of them were sold for almost a decade. In December 1922, he advertised all the properties for sale by auction. They were promoted as investment properties, to be sold in one or two lots: 493-9 Dowling Street (and the stables behind 499), 1-23 McElhone Place (12 brick cottages), 2-20 McElhone Place (ten brick cottages), 22-28 McElhone Place (four brick houses), and 8-18 Marshall Street[56].

The *Sydney Morning Herald's* real estate column on the Saturday after the auction[57] reported only that the Dowling Street houses were sold by private treaty during the week: 493-495 for £2,000 and 497-499 for £1,600. It seems that the other houses were not sold at this time.

Land title records show that 493 and 495 were purchased by Dominick Francis Murray, wood and coal merchant of Surry Hills, and 497 and 499 (including the land behind number 499 at 30 McElhone Place) were purchased by Louisa Cherry, wife of Walter Henry Cherry, dentist of Sydney[58].

The McElhone Place and Marshall Street houses were later sold to Teresa Alice Taylor, probably in early 1925. This included numbers 1-23 and adjacent land, numbers 2-26, and 8-18 Marshall Street. It is assumed that 1925 was the year of the sale, as William Percy McElhone was still listed as the ratepayer the 1925 Rate Assessment Books, and Teresa Taylor died in May 1925. This ended the long period of single ownership of the street by the McElhone family, extending from the original land purchase in 1833.

Dowling Street houses sold in 1923

As mentioned earlier, the four Dowling Street houses were sold at a public auction in January 1923. In April 1923, ownership of 493 and 495 Dowling Street was transferred to Dominick Francis Murray, coal and wood merchant of Surry Hills. They were then sold to the plumber Frederick Richards in 1926. Both houses were sold to Sterling Securities Pty Ltd in 1968[59].

In April 1923, ownership of number 497 was transferred to Louisa Cherry. In the same month, it was sold to Frederick Richards. Then in December 1926 it was sold to Andrew See, hotel keeper, and his wife Irene Alma Iris See. Andrew See, who was the licensee of the London Tavern in Paddington, lived in the house until 1948 when they moved to Bronte and leased the house for some years. Andrew See died in 1954 and his widow sold the house in 1959 to Boleslaw Krzymowski and his wife Erica[60 61].

In April 1923, ownership of 499 Dowling Street and the former stables behind it was transferred to Louisa Cherry. Later in the same month, the house and stables were sold to Percy and Sarah Heath[62].

Teresa Taylor buys the street in c1925

The 32 McElhone Place and Marshall Street properties were all sold to Teresa Alice Taylor. It is not known exactly when, but it was probably in early 1925. She owned them for only a short time until her death in May 1925. In 1927, the properties are still recorded as being owned by the "Estate of T. A. Taylor"[63].

Teresa Taylor was born in Braidwood in 1885, and moved to Sydney in about 1900 to work in domestic service with an older sister who was already there. The two sisters bought small blocks of land in the suburbs from their savings and sold them at a profit. In time, she acquired a great deal of housing property in the slums of Sydney, and held them in the name of Amy Wilson or Alice Rose Payten[64]. She claimed she was married to Reginald John Wilson, a ship's fireman, although there is no record of this marriage in New South Wales[65] and the Public Trustee was not able to locate a husband after her death.

From about 1910, Teresa embarked on a life of crime as a thief and a pickpocket. Her first conviction was in October 1910, and the last was in March 1924. She was convicted 13 times, with a total sentence of seven years, four of which were spent in gaol. She had just completed a sentence of about nine months in the Women's Reformatory at Long Bay a few months before her death, after robbing a ferry engineer of his wallet containing £105. She used many other aliases in her short career, such as Amy Wilson, Amy Rose Wilson, Alice Rose Payten, Rose Whatton, Rose Lewis, Rose Walsh, Ira Bray, Annie Smith, Myra Bray. But she was mainly known to the police as Rose Walsh.

Figure 15: Teresa Taylor as Rose Walsh, 1924

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on one of her trials in 1920 as follows: "When Rose Walsh, a well-dressed woman, 30 years of age, appeared in Central Police Court, Sydney on a charge of picking pockets, the magistrate was informed that although she possessed considerable means, including house property, she had a frightful criminal record. She was sent to prison for six months"[66].

A newspaper report at the time of her last trial in March 1924 gave some details of how she operated. She was cunning enough to be more than a match for judges, police and Crown law officials for a number of years. Drunken sailors were her specialty for a time – she knew they did not stay long in port, and that by opting for trial by jury, the only witness had gone back to sea by the time her case was called and the Crown had to abandon the proceedings. A method she devised for picking pockets was to replace a roll of bank notes with a roll of brown paper in the victim's pocket, so the theft wasn't known until she had left the scene.

Eventually, this modus operandi was her undoing, because when the ferry engineer reported the theft and the method to police, they knew it was her, and tracked her down collecting rents in Surry Hills. She was identified in a police lineup and convicted in court. Her final ploy was to offer to reinstate the victim his money, and the judge said she may be free by Christmas if she did so[67]. The report on the trial in March 1924 mentioned that she had recently sold some of her properties for

£8,000, and this sale was probably used to finance the purchase of the 32 houses in McElhone Place and Marshall Street.

A detective once asked her why she took the risk of imprisonment when she had enough money to live comfortably for the rest of her life. She told him her ambition was to own a hundred houses, and then she would be satisfied and go straight. She earned the name "Timber May" from the police in the early days of her career, when they suspected that she stole enough timber from houses under construction to supply the building material needed for her own cottage in North Sydney while it was being built[68].

She died of natural causes at her home at 33 Mackey Street, Surry Hills, in May 1925 without leaving a will. But because her fortune was valued at £23,329, and there was a possible husband as well as three brothers, a sister, a nephew and a niece, the Public Trustee delayed the sale and distribution of her assets for two years in order to locate all the relations with valid claims on the estate. The *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote a story about the case in 1928 stating that Teresa Taylor was "the greatest, shrewdest and most businesslike pickpocket Australia has produced". At one point, her property holdings consisted of 97 slum dwellings in Woolloomooloo, Redfern and Surry Hills, yielding a weekly rental of £40[69].

In January 1927, the Public Trustee placed newspaper advertisements for the sale of the McElhone Place and Marshall Street houses, as administrators of the Estate of T. A. Taylor, so it is clear that Teresa Alice Taylor was the T. A. Taylor listed in the Council Assessment Book of 1927. Other properties she owned in the area were 143-153 Crown Street, 6-8 Burnell Place (near Chapel Street), 1-3 Mackey Street, and Wilson's Terrace, off Hart Street near Cooper Street (six brick houses of three rooms each)[70]. This was total of 48 houses bringing in rent of about £42 per week.

The north side houses were sold in June 1927 to David Barclay Mellis Clark of Wahroonga, then in December 1928 to Frederick Foster Hall, retired civil servant from Strathfield, then in August 1929 to Neredah Rudovsky[71]. The south side houses were sold in July 1927 to Archie Alefontos, café proprietor of Murwillumbah, then in April 1928 to Emanuel Myerson[72]. The Public Trustee's sale of these houses marked the end of single ownership of McElhone Place.

Once the houses owned by Teresa Taylor had been sold, the Public Trustee announced a court inquiry to locate all claimants to the estate, prior to the distribution of the assets. The mysterious husband, Reginald John Wilson, was never found, and the estate was distributed to the other known family members[73].

Emanuel Myerson buys the south side in 1928

From April 1928 to 1941, Emanuel Myerson (or his wife Elsie after his death in 1938) owned 2-28 McElhone Place and 12-18 Marshall Street. He was born in about 1869 in the village of Galatz, Romania, and came to Australia in 1898. He entered the tailoring business with his father in George Street, Sydney, and later became interested in real estate[74].

In 1920, he sued the tabloid newspaper *Smith's Weekly*[75] for libel, following an article in which he was referred to as the Monarch of the Slums, a modern Shylock and maker of enormous profits from tenanted properties he owned in poorer suburbs such as Waterloo, Newtown and Erskineville. One report mentioned that he owned some 700 properties in working class suburbs[76]. In the first trial of

Myerson v. *Smith's Weekly*, the jury found for Myerson, but only awarded him one farthing damages[77].

Myerson was clearly not happy with this outcome, and began another court action which was heard in March 1923, this time before a special jury. In this trial, the jury sat for so long (more than 30 days), that they were paid a record fee of five guineas per day. The verdict this time was even worse for Myerson, as the jury returned a majority verdict of 10 to 2 in favour of *Smith's Weekly*[78]. The 1923 trial became something of a legal landmark, as it has been cited in later defamation cases because of its distinction between fact and fair comment. The judge summed up by saying that Myerson was entitled to fair comment on his activities as a landlord, but to be called "dishonourable" was a statement of fact, not comment, and there was no evidence he had broken the law.

The first rental advertisement in Myerson's name for a McElhone Place house (number 22) was in June 1929[79]. He died in May 1938, aged 69 years, and was buried in the Jewish Cemetery at Rookwood. Emanuel Myerson was a liberal supporter of Jewish charities and a life governor of St Margaret's Hospital. He donated the Emanuel Myerson wing of the Dalwood Children's Home at Balgowlah[80].

The houses were formally transferred to Emanuel Myerson's widow Elsie in May 1941, just prior to being sold to the Cumberland Farm Pty Ltd in the same month[81].

Neredah Rudovsky buys the north side in 1929

From 1929 to 1945, Neredah Victoria Rudovsky was the owner of 1-23 McElhone Place, the land next to number 23, and 8-10 Marshall Street[82]. She was born Neredah Victoria Withers, and in May 1925 married Joseph Mikulicic-Rodd, a businessman who became the Yugoslavian Consul in Sydney in 1937. She died in Mosman in June 1944[83].

Joseph Rudovsky was born in 1894 or 1895 in Odessa, Ukraine, the son of Frank Rabich, an ethnic Croatian from Susak in Yugoslavia. Joseph migrated to Australia in August 1909, arriving in Port Pirie in South Australia, where he worked as a mining engineer and barman. He enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force in 1915, serving on the Western Front from 1915 until 1918, when he was wounded in action during a poisonous gas shelling in Mar 1918. After World War 1, he lived in Sydney, where he became the first president of the Sydney Yugoslav Club. By 1937 he was using his original surname Mikulicic-Rodd. Neredah died in 1944, and Joseph died in Sydney in 1980[84].

In August 1945, 1-23 McElhone Place and 8-10 Marshall Street were sold to Arthur H. Chartres[85].

Percy Heath constructs a garage in c1929

In 1930, 499 Dowling Street was listed in the Rate Books as a house and brick garage (the garage site would later become 30 McElhone Place). A news report in July 1929 mentioned a robbery from the garage of Harden & Johnson Limited in McElhone Place[86]. This firm also had a garage at 117-131 Flinders Street, and one of the owners was Mr. R. S. Harden. The company advertised cars for sale from the Flinders Street site throughout the 1930s. It appears that the sales department was in Flinders Street, and service department was in McElhone Place.

The McElhone Place garage, built in about 1929, operated until the 1980s, when the building was converted to residential use. A Development Application to the Sydney Council in February 1982

requested approval to use the garage as a studio and residential premises[87]. Percy Heath served in the Australian Army from June 1941 to January 1946 as a Sapper in the 23 Field Company, Australian Engineers[88]. He died in 1955, aged 48.

499 Dowling Street and 30 McElhone Place were advertised for sale, either together or separately, in February 1984, so presumably the same person owned both properties until then[89]. The advertisement mentioned that a Development Application had been approved for residential development of the rear garage at 30 McElhone Place.

Fitzroy Street to be the Hume Highway of the inner suburbs

A plan of the Surry Hills Remodelling Scheme of 1940, drawn up by E W Coulson, City Engineer and Surveyor, showed that the southern side of Fitzroy Street was to be widened between Crown and South Dowling Streets. This was to improve the traffic flows from Centennial Park to Central Station. A Minute Paper from the Town Clerk[90] stated that the plan was for three traffic lanes in each direction, with an 8 foot wide central garden, and two 10 foot wide footways. It was likened to the Hume Highway!

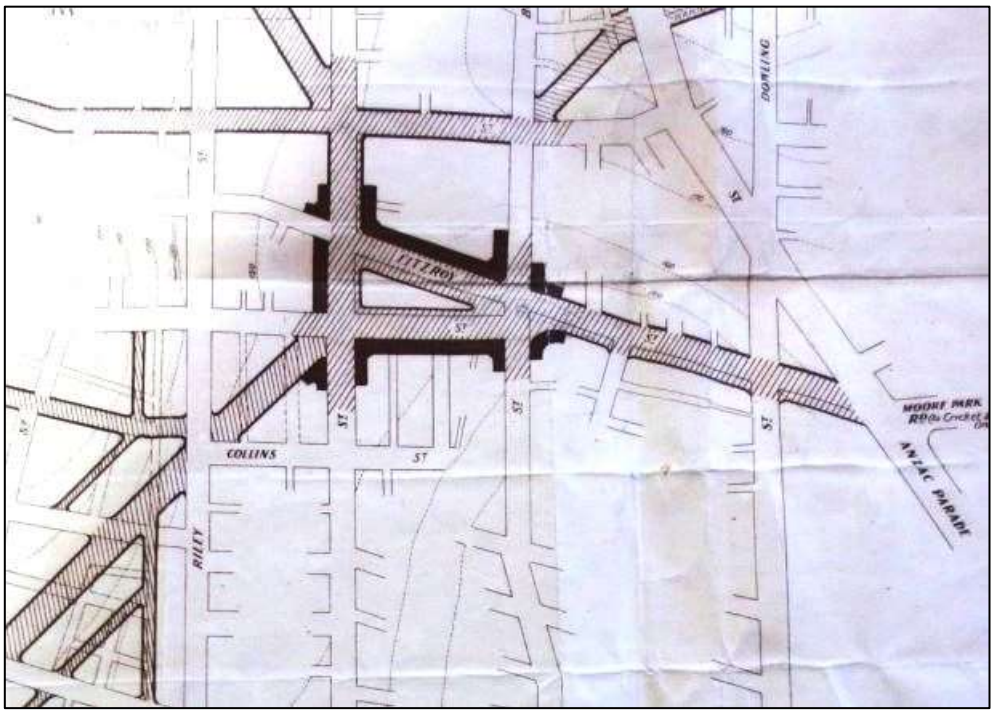

Figure 16: Part of the Surry Hills Remodelling Scheme, 1940

In August 1940, the Council passed a resolution that: "The proposal of 8 May, 1940 for the widening of Fitzroy Street between Bourke and Dowling Streets, the widening of McElhone Place, the widening of Bennett Place…….be approved as amended for the acquisition of the properties necessary for the consummation of the proposal."[91] So, while the widening of McElhone Place was not shown in the plan itself, it was mentioned in Council discussions, so the houses must have been in danger of demolition as part of the project.

But only a few days later, the City Treasurer pointed out in a Minute Paper that the scheme to widen Fitzroy Street was not included in Council's proposed borrowing for the financial year 1940/1941[92]. In the end, only the delicensed Austral Hotel and adjacent shop at 475/477 Bourke Street (between Fitzroy and Foveaux Streets, opposite the Hopetoun Hotel) were demolished in order to straighten out the two right-angled turns required to travel between Fitzroy and Foveaux Streets.

The likely reason that the scheme was shelved was hinted at in a Memo from the City Solicitor M. W. D. McIntyre on 19 December 1941, when referring to the delay in the project and the affect on businesses in the path of the roadworks. He stated that "nothing more can be given them other than the expression of a proposal to refrain from action during the present crisis"[93]. The "present crisis" was almost certainly the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 which put Australia

on a war footing for the next four years, and all public works had to approved by the National Security (Building Control) Regulations.

Part Three - after World War II

Renewed pressure to redevelop old areas

Housing shortages

Australian State governments faced severe housing shortages after World War II, caused by the postwar baby boom and immigration from Europe. There was a renewed enthusiasm for slum clearances, but the driving force was to provide housing. The long-held idea that old-established inner city suburbs were only good for industry was replaced by the greater need to accommodate the burgeoning population.

In an effort to address this on a Sydney-wide basis, the Cumberland County Council was formed in 1945 to amalgamate the 47 local Sydney councils into a federation, reflecting the tide of idealism for postwar reconstruction. But town planners were inexperienced, the State and municipal governments largely operated separately and in parallel. The Local Government (Areas) Act of 1948 directed every Council in Sydney to prepare its own planning scheme by 1950. But most of the suburban Councils simply failed to produce the required local plans. The City of Sydney did produce a grand plan for a revamped suburb called Sunny Hills, representing a complete transformation of the suburb[94].

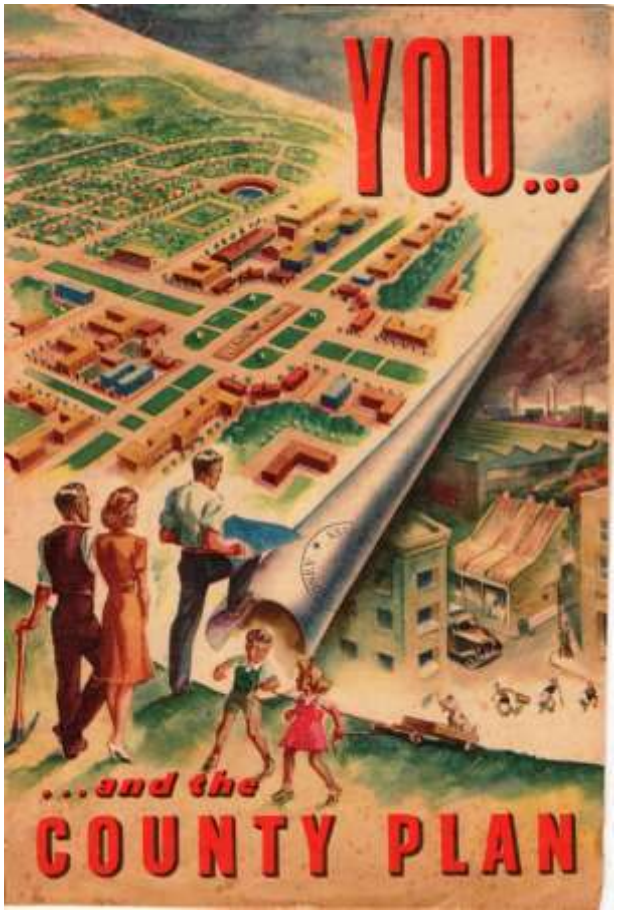

Figure 17: Cumberland County Council's brave new plan, c1950

In the end, both levels of government produced many grand plans but not much to show for them until the County Council was finally abandoned in 1963[95]. The enduring legacy of the Cumberland

County Council project is the Development Application, required whenever there is a change of use of a building[96].

The redevelopment of inner city areas

Rent increases in residential premises were controlled during World War II, and the Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act 1948 in New South Wales continued this after the War. But the Act was tough on landlords, making it hard to raise rents in protected dwellings when incomes and costs started to rise rapidly after the War. Landlords had difficulty maintaining houses on limited rental income, and many property holders in poorer suburbs like Surry Hills found that large portfolios of tenements that were protected from rent increases were becoming uneconomic. This was a major factor in the strong increase in the rate of owner-occupation through the 1950s and 1960s. Rent control laws brought about a revolution in home ownership in many areas[97].

Figure 18: McElhone Place in the late 1940s

One effect of this trend to owner-occupiers was that councils planning a major resumption of housing had to laboriously arrange compensation with a large number of owners in the affected area, so demolition of the old houses took years to get under way. Through this period, the houses in McElhone Place became individually owned in most cases, and the new owner-occupiers steadily improved them. They were renovated to modern standards, values increased, and the threat of demolition eventually disappeared. This was development by stealth, as it occurred without official planning or involvement.

Builders' Labourers Federation Green Bans and resident action groups stopped much of the massive redevelopment of Woolloomooloo and Darlinghurst in the period 1971-1974[98]. From this time, there was a gradual change of attitude at all levels of government towards the future of inner city areas: the Whitlam government of 1972-1975 encouraged renovation of heritage suburbs and restricted new housing to low or medium density.

Figure 19: Saving the Rocks - Green Ban, 1971

In 1976, in a Development Application for number 25 McElhone Place, The Sydney Council's Chief Strategic Planner, K. R. Nash, wrote in an Environmental and Planning Comment: "McElhone Place, with its quaint array of one and two storey brick and stone houses, is worthy of preservation"[99]. This was a sentiment rarely expressed by government officials before this time.

McElhone Place faces demolition threats

In 1950, the south side houses of McElhone Place were advertised for sale, offering them as a potential industrial site[100]. But in the postwar period there was more interest in providing housing for the expanding population than in building more factories.

A Development Application from the Vacuum Oil Company in August 1959 proposed to erect a service station at the Marshall Street end of McElhone Place. This would have meant the demolition of 1-5 McElhone Place, 1-10 Marshall Street and 77-87 Fitzroy Street[101]. Fortunately for the residents, this did not go ahead, but there was a later proposal in October 1964 to erect a block of 16 bachelor flats on the site. In the end, the houses at 77-85 Fitzroy Street and 1-6 Marshall Street were replaced by a block of 16 flats, known as Fitzroy Apartments, thus saving this part of McElhone Place from demolition.

But the most serious threat to the street came in December 1968, when the New South Wales Housing Commission and the Sydney Council released a plan to demolish the entire street and the north side of Bennett Street to erect blocks of flats. This was during the era of the Robert Askin Liberal government (1965-1975) which was notable for controversial schemes to build massive freeways through the hearts of inner-city suburbs and grand plans for slum clearance that would have brought wholesale destruction of historic areas like Woolloomooloo and The Rocks.

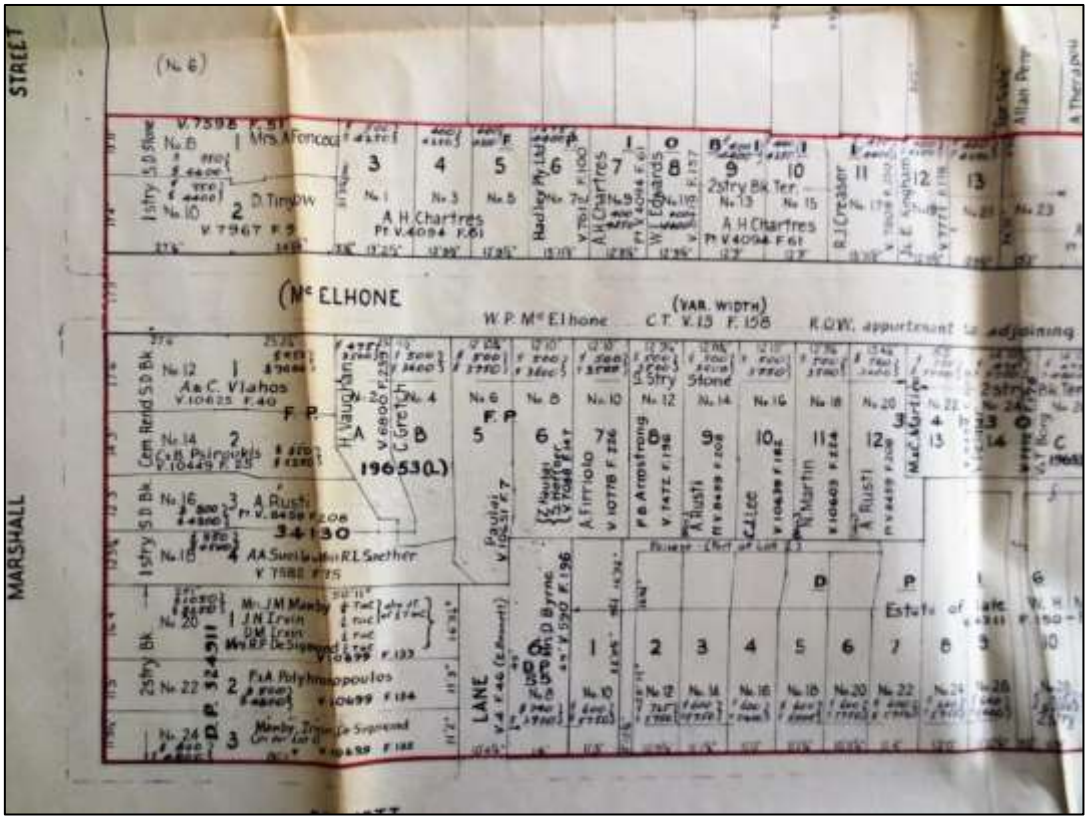

Figure 20: 1968 Redevelopment Scheme - Marshall St end

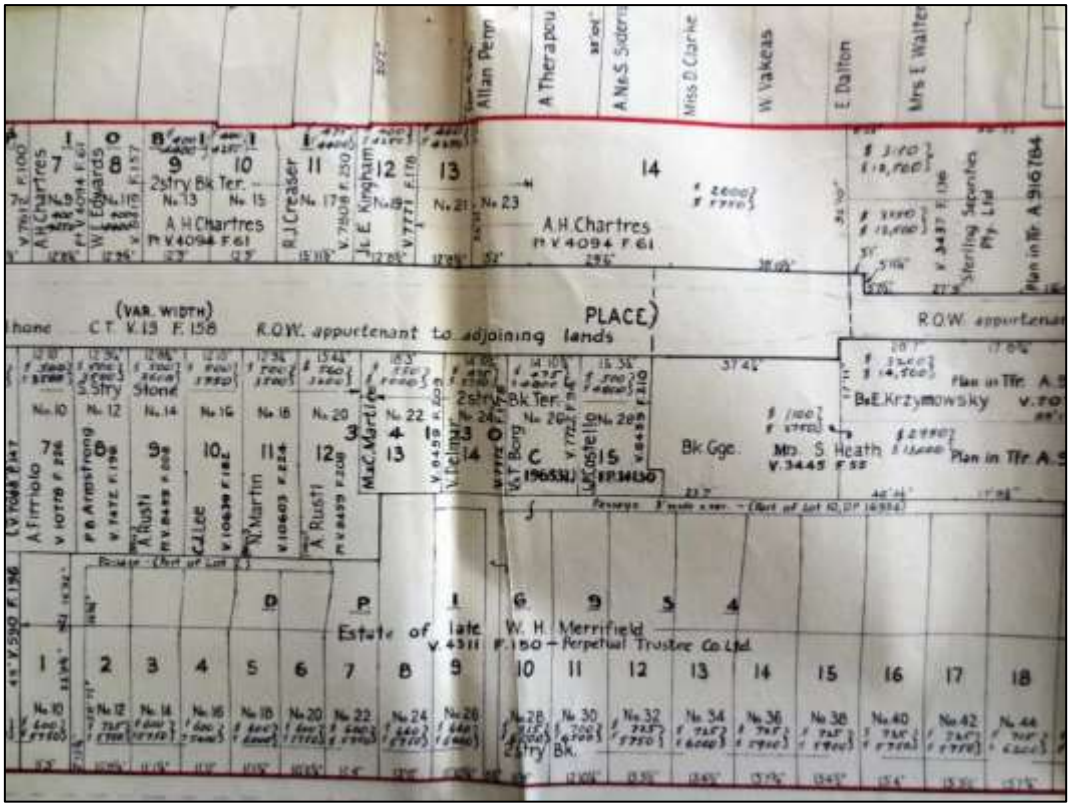

Figure 21: 1968 Redevelopment plan - central part of street

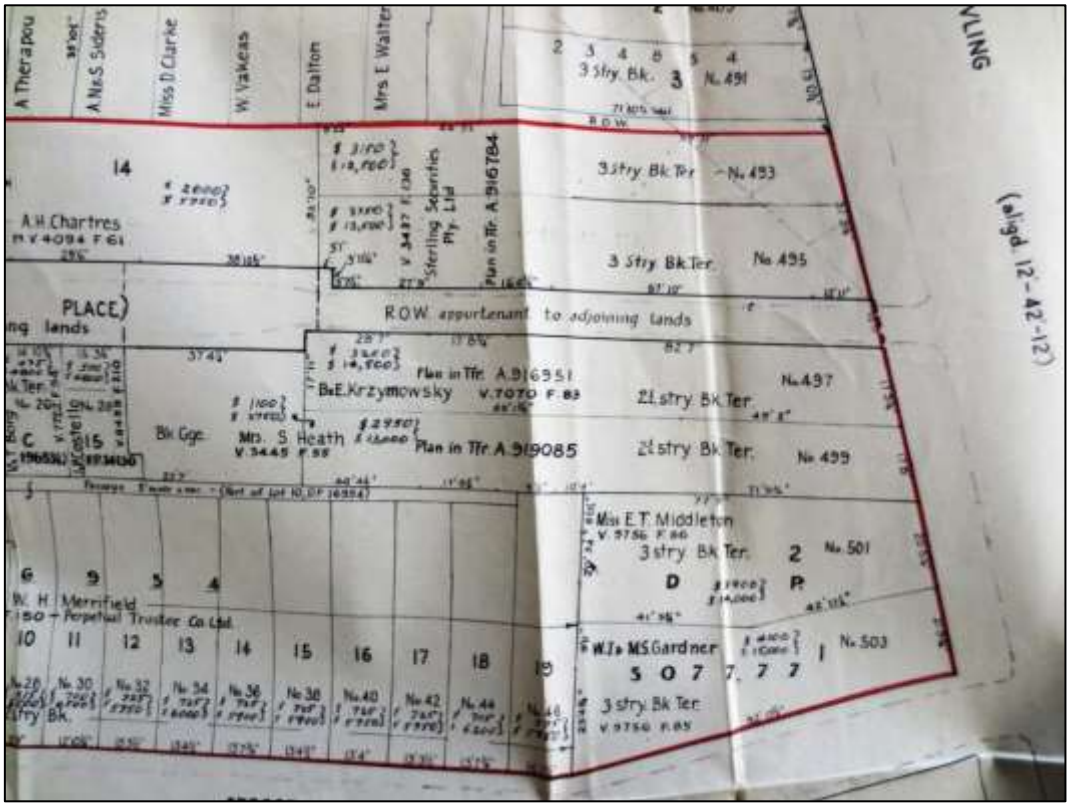

Figure 22: 1968 Redevelopment scheme - Dowling St end

A letter from the J. T. Purcell, the Chairman of the Housing Commission, to Vernon Treatt, the Chief Commissioner of the Sydney Council in December 1968 summed up the government's intentions[102]:

“An attractive redevelopment scheme is envisaged for the whole area, a tentative design for which indicates the possibility of the construction of eight-storey flat buildings containing approximately 128 flats to a density of the order of 95 units per acre”.

It is not clear from Sydney Council records why this scheme did not go ahead, but a few factors probably contributed to its abandonment. Housing Commission documents stated that the 61 dwellings to be demolished involved 33 separate holdings (including the north-side houses in Bennett Street), which meant that there were 33 different owners for the government to negotiate compensation with[103]. Nigel Ashton, a town planner from this era, remembers that for Councils to acquire all these houses individually was almost impossible, financially, organisationally and politically. The result was that most historic areas remained as they were, and only Redfern saw changes (notably with the erection of the Northcott Place Flats in 1960)[104].

Figure 23: Northcott Place flats

The demolition of large areas of slums and replacement by public housing tower blocks was not a success, either here or in London. It displaced residents and destroyed communities and networks of support, the intangible qualities that gave a neighbourhood its meaning. Of 238 families resident in the area where Northcott Place was built, only 43 were rehoused in the same area[105].

Also, by the 1960s the government didn’t really have the money for slum clearance, as the Housing Commission was more concerned with building houses on the outskirts of Sydney, such as the massive Green Valley Housing Estate near Liverpool, completed in 1965 and creating 1,200 new houses at a cost of £20 million[106]. Another factor after the election of the Whitlam Labor government in 1972 was that the new government became involved in the restoration of inner city areas, especially Glebe and Woolloomooloo, where it was feared they could be destroyed by developers encouraged by earlier pro-development governments[107].

By 1969, the Sydney Council thought that the area was ready for redevelopment, but did not expect the owners to do it, as expressed by City Building Surveyor in a Minute Paper in December 1969:

“It is considered that redevelopment of the area is highly desirable, and in view of the bulk of the dwellings being owner occupied, their acquisition and redevelopment by private developers is unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future. It is recommended that the Housing Commission of NSW be advised that the Council is still most desirous that the Commission proceed with a redevelopment of the area”[108].

But, as outlined in more detail below, the new generation of owner-occupiers in McElhone Place took it upon themselves to do what absentee landlords failed to do for over a century, which is to bring a sense of pride in home ownership to the old houses, restoring and upgrading them to modern standards and beautifying the streetscape. After this, there was no more talk of demolition and the street was saved.

Ownership changes in McElhone Place

Arthur Chartres buys the north side in 1945

In 1945, Arthur Harold Chartres (1883-1973) bought 1-23 McElhone Place and 8-10 Marshall Street[109]. He was one of the directors of Chartres Pty Ltd in Sydney, the Remington typewriter agents. Six Chartres brothers ran the company and Arthur resided in Wiston Gardens, Darling Point[110].

From the late 1950s, Arthur Chartres sold some of the houses to individual owners. A few of these were:

- Number 7, sold to Antaas Merkys, machinist of Moore Park and his wife Jill Jeanette Marice Merkys on 4 December 1958[111].
- Number 19, sold to Norman John Thompson, clerk of Surry Hills, on 28 September 1959[112].
- Number 17, sold to Richard James Lean, mechanic of Surry Hills, on 2 December 1959[113].
- Number 11, sold to William R Bradley Pty Ltd on 13 December 1962[114].

However, the New South Wales Housing Commission plan of the street in December 1968 shows that at that time he still owned numbers 1- 9, 13, 15, 21 and 23[115]. He died in 1973 at Point Piper, aged 90.

Cumberland Farm Pty Ltd buys the south side in 1941

The Cumberland Farm Pty Ltd purchased 2-28 McElhone Place and 12-18 Marshall Street in May 1941[116]. Little is known about this company, apart from a notice in the newspaper *The Land* in August 1940[117] in which the Pig Stud Breeders' Society applied to register new studs for the Cumberland Farm Pty Ltd of Badgery's Creek. In addition, the New South Wales State Archives has documents lodged in its name under the Companies Act for the years 1939-1967[118]. Presumably the McElhone Place houses were purchased by this company as an investment.

The company made several attempts to sell the McElhone Place and Marshall Street properties in the 1940s:

- March, 1943: Sale of 22-28 McElhone Place[119].
- November, 1945: Sale of 2-28 McElhone Place and 12-18 Marshall Street[120].
- August, 1948: Sale of 2-28 McElhone Place and 12-18 Marshall Street[121].
- In April 1950, 2-28 McElhone Place and 12-18 Marshall Street were advertised for sale as a potential industrial site[122].

The houses were eventually sold, mostly to individual owners, through the 1950s and 1960s. Some of these were:

- Number 2, sold to Harold Vaughan, clerk, on 21 April 1954[123].
- Number 8, sold to Emanuel Spiteri, bootmaker of Sydney, on 6 Mar 1956[124].
- Number 12, sold to Jonas Statkevicius, hairdresser, on 8 April 1958[125].
- Number 26, sold to Joseph Brincat, labourer of Moore Park, on 10 July 1959[126].
- Number 28, sold to John Costello, panel beater and Olive Costello on 22 October 1962[127].
- Number 22, sold to Mary Nagy on 16 November 1962[128].

- 4 Marshall Street, 6 and 10 McElhone Place, sold to Mary Nagy on 16 November 1962[129].
- 16 Marshall Street, 14 and 20 McElhone Place, sold to Amadia Rusti on 22 December 1962[130].
- Number 18, sold to Nina Martin on 25 May 1967[131].
- Number 16, sold to Colin John Lee, dated 25 May 1967[132].

The street is rescued from redevelopment

Improvements to the houses

The original sandstone cottages had only two rooms: the early residents ate and lived in the front room, and slept in the second room. Cooking and ablutions took place in the tiny yard, and night soil was taken away via a narrow lane behind the houses[133].

When the cottages changed to individual ownership in the 1960s and 1970s, the new owners set about improving them. Like most of the houses in Surry Hills, McElhone Place had remained largely unrenovated while absentee landlords were happy to simply collect rent on the gradually deteriorating properties while there was a ready supply of tenants. But by the 1960s, owner-occupiers had a different attitude to the absentee landlords, and proceeded to turn their properties into attractive and comfortable homes.

The usual renovation to the cottages was to put an upstairs bedroom in the attic and add a kitchen and bathroom behind the second room. So the front room became the living room and the second room the dining room. The first Development Applications for the sandstone cottages were for $1,000 worth of alterations and additions to number 10 in 1971, followed by additions to number 4 in 1977[134].

The two-storey brick buildings in the street were also renovated during the 1960s and 1970s. From 1963 to 1979, there were 17 applications for alterations and additions to 1-23 and 22-28 McElhone Place, 8-14 Marshall Street and 493-499 Dowling Street. Renovations during the 1960s tended to be for amounts of $600-800, but those in the 1970s were more substantial renovations, mostly for amounts of $3,500-6,000[135].

Originally, cars used to drive right through McElhone Place, but the residents fought the Sydney Council for ten years to get the street closed off to through traffic. Some residents still bring in cars for short periods, but the days when it felt like a Grand Prix track are over.

Figure 24: McElhone Place in 1977

The beautification of McElhone Place

While the interiors of the houses were being upgraded for modern living, they still lacked gardens. The rear courtyards were largely taken up by the new kitchens and bathrooms, and there was only a narrow footpath with no area for a garden on the street. A photograph taken in the 1930s shows a gloomy concrete jungle, with the only tree in sight a long way off in Moore Park. Later photographs up to 1977 show a similar scene, but with the addition of cars and motorbikes parked up on the north side footpath. This was about to change, following the efforts of a few residents who wanted their homes to be pleasant places to live, and to try and rid the street of parked vehicles.

Figure 25: John Costello and Olive Batty

Olive Batty and her partner John Costello became residents of the street in 1962, and Claudette Roy has been a resident since 1977. In the late 1970s, they started planting flowers and shrubs in old washing tubs and pots on the footpaths, on trellises around the doors and in window boxes. Soon other residents were doing the same. A photograph taken a few years later in September 1982 shows that the greening of the street was not yet complete, and that cars were still parked on the footpaths. But now the entire street is ablaze with flowers, there are no more cars parked on the footpaths, and everyone takes a great pride in the gardens and contributes something to them.

In October 1978, Alderman Robert Tickner, the chairman of the Council's Community Services committee, prompted the Sydney Council to pass a motion to encourage owners and tenants to plant creeping vines, pot plants and small trees throughout the city with a view to having an Annual Award[136].

Before long, it came to the Sydney Council's attention that the residents of McElhone Place were undertaking a beautification program, and decided to help them. The minutes of its Community Services Committee in April 1979[137] state that, following Robert Tickner's successful lobbying of Council in October 1978, and a report by the Controller of Parks in March 1979, that:

> "Approval is granted for soil and a suitable selection of plants to be provided to residents of McElhone Place, Surry Hills, for use in window boxes on the street frontage, involving an estimated expenditure of $250".

In 1981, the Council initiated an annual Greening of Sydney competition. The first winners were gardens built by professional landscapers. But McElhone Place received a special mention as an example of the kind of spirit of civic beautification the Council was trying to encourage with the competition[138]. McElhone Place won the Best Street Display section for the first time in 1982[139], then on and off for several years afterwards. The prize money was used to buy more plants for the garden.

Figure 26: McElhone Place looking west, 1982

Figure 27: McElhone Place looking east, 1982

The gardening awards were first known as the Greening of Sydney awards from their initiation in 1981 until 1987, when the Sydney City Council was dismissed by the State government. After the reorganisation of council boundaries in 1989, Surry Hills became part of the reinstated South Sydney Council until 2004. During this time, the awards were called the South Sydney Council Gardening Competition. Then in 2004, South Sydney Council was merged with the Sydney City Council, and the awards became known as the Sydney City Council Gardening Competition[140], running until 2007.

The 2004 awards were presented by Lord Mayor Clover Moore and TV gardener Jamie Durie. Each category winner received a double pass to Sydney in Bloom and a $300 voucher to be spent in any local nursery. McElhone Place has won every award since 2004, and the competition became so keen that from 2005, the two sides of the street entered separately. The even-numbered side was the winner from 2005 to 2007[141]. By 2007, the prize had increased to $2,000.

Figure 28: 1983 Best Streetscape award

Claudette Roy asked the Sydney Council in 2013 to restart the gardening competition. Lord Mayor Clover Moore replied that the Council's gardening efforts were by then focused on establishing community gardens and on a program of installing sidewalk shrubbery throughout the area.

The residents are keen to retain the heritage flavour of their street, despite the Sydney Council's plans to upgrade the facilities now and then. Claudette remembers that a few years ago a Council work gang arrived and announced that they were replacing the original sandstone kerbing with concrete, much to the dismay of the residents. They set to work and had replaced the south side kerbing when one of them looked more closely at their instructions and realised they should have been in McElhone Street in Woolloomooloo, not McElhone Place in Surry Hills! So they immediately packed up and drove off to the correct street, leaving the residents with half of the original 1870s kerbing in place. Fortunately, the new kerbing blends in well with the original kerbing on the other side.

Recent changes to the houses

In 1978, a 2-storey brick house was built on the long-vacant land between Number 23 and the rear of 493-495 South Dowling Street. This became number 25, and was the last house to be built in McElhone Place.

Figure 29: 25 McElhone Place

In 1987, the garage at number 30 was converted for use as a hand-weaving studio on the ground floor and a residence on the first floor[142]. The tapestry weaver Margaret Grafton used it as her studio until her death in 2005.

Figure 30: 30 McElhone Place

Olive Batty

Olive Muriel Batty was born in 1905 at Braidwood, New South Wales, to Andrew and Mary McCarron[143]. Olive was stricken with poliomyelitis at age 12, and spent several months away from school. She eventually recovered, although it affected her health for the rest of her life. In 1925, she married Arthur Batty, a young cheese maker at Braidwood, and a daughter Joyce was born there. Later a son Barry was born. When the cheese factory closed, her husband went to Gundagai looking for work, but Olive decided to stay with her family in Braidwood.

Her father introduced her to a feisty Mexican-American ex-serviceman who had been gold prospecting near Braidwood in between panel-beating jobs, and she went to Sydney with him. He was John Jimenez Costello, and their partnership lasted 42 years. His work took him all around NSW, and Olive went along with him. After a lot of travelling around, she decided they needed a permanent home, and on one trip to Sydney in 1960, they put a deposit on 28 McElhone Place, paying off the price of £1,800 in two years. For some years, they rented the yard behind number 23 across the road, where John worked on cars and trailers at the weekend.

She always walked in to town when she had to go there, and in this way she was known by sight to many people in Surry Hills. Her health deteriorated, and she had to spend more time at home. In the late 1970s, she decided she wanted a break from the concrete and asphalt of her neighbourhood. She asked Johnny to make a window box, and this was the start of the greening of the street. First there was a window box and some tins with plants on the footpath outside number 28. Then the neighbours started growing plants as well.

Figure 31: Olive Batty at age 90

Soon there was an award-winning street garden of tubs, trellises and window boxes. Don Bourke called in to the street with television cameras to see the unusual street garden, and it was featured as a segment on his program. Olive was a very determined woman, and didn't want any fuss made over her 90th birthday in 1995. For once, she didn't get her way, and a big celebration was held, attracting friends and family from four states, taking up three houses and filling the street with the overflow of people[144].

Olive became an accomplished needlewoman, and was always knitting. Over the years, she gave jumpers to several people in McElhone Place. She died in December 1996[145], and a plaque to recognise her contribution to the neighbourhood was opened by South Sydney Mayor Vic Smith in May 1997.

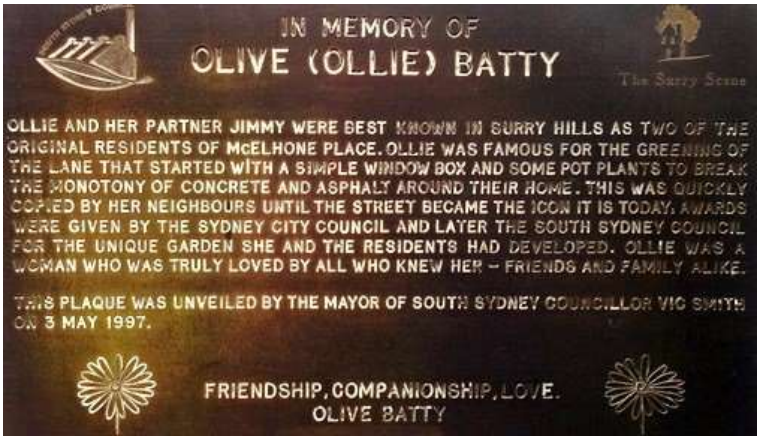

Figure 32: Olive Batty Memorial plaque, 1997

John (Jimmy) Costello

John Costello was born John Jimenez Castillo in Chihuahua, Mexico in March 1905. His father, Nicola Juan Castillo, was an engineer, and his mother was Maria Isabella Mendez. John was the youngest of a family of 16. At a young ago, he learned to use his fists and to play the guitar. Though small, he was a good fighter, and he claimed he was once the bantam weight champion of Mexico.

At the end of World War I, his family moved to Chicago, living in a melting pot suburb that he said was a bit like Surry Hills. His father had a motor car business, including a motor body building section, and John learned some of this trade at his father's workshop. He married young to a doctor who was killed in a car accident, leaving him with children to support.

In the 1920s, John took his guitar and looked for work on the music trail. It was an exciting time in the early development of jazz. He went to New Orleans in 1928, and in between playing in bands, he was employed driving trucks filled with beer from Al Capone's brewery in Chicago during the prohibition era. He later told Ollie's son Barry that he occasionally made good money as a hit man. He joined the Paul Whiteman band as a guitarist, and Whiteman encouraged him to switch to the clarinet and saxophone. He later toured with the Benny Goodman's big band, and joined the original Glenn Miller Orchestra.

Figure 33: John Costello in retirement

John joined the US Marine Corps in 1938. After World War II broke out, he was sent to Canada to learn to fly, then served in the American Eagle squadron, flying Hurricane fighters out of northern Scotland on bomber escort towards Germany. He lost his second wife in the

blitz in London, when she was killed by a bomb just across the road from him when he was going to meet her. After Pearl Harbour, he was assigned to fly Liberator bombers from New Zealand for a year. On a mission to Japan, his plane was shot down and he was wounded by a grenade after bailing out. He woke up 16 weeks later in the US Army Hospital at Herne Bay in south-west Sydney.

After a long convalescence, he made a fresh start by starting work at a smash repair shop in Darlinghurst. He travelled and worked in different places, exploring the country. He turned up at Braidwood looking for gold at one point, and met Olive's father, who invited him over for a drink and he met Olive. They travelled around the state with his work for a while, and eventually settled at 28 McElhone Place when Olive decided she had had enough of travel.

With Olive's prompting, John started building the street garden. When he built a trellis for climbers around the doorway, several neighbours asked him to build trellises for them too. After the street started winning gardening awards and reporters came to interview him about the greening of the neighbourhood, he was dubbed "Jungle Jim" at his local pub[146].

Margaret Grafton

Margaret Grafton was born in England in 1930 and trained there as an artist before migrating to Sydney in 1955. She established her Darlinghurst studio (in the manse of the Palmer Street Uniting Church) in 1963 and worked there until the 1980s, when she moved to McElhone Place. She purchased number 30 McElhone Place in 1986 and it became her studio and residence.

Using a high-warp loom, she worked on major public works commissions until the late 1980s. Many of her works can be seen in law courts, hospitals, city councils and the New South Wales Parliament. Her tapestries are in the collections of the National Gallery, State galleries, the Jewish Museum, and individuals here and overseas. She chose a highly successful path of public commissioned artwork and helped pioneer today's public art field.

Figure 34: Tocal Chapel tapestry

Her first commission, and perhaps most important work, was a large tapestry depicting Isaiah's biblical vision of wolves and sheep living together in peace, hangs behind the altar at the Tocal Chapel in rural New South Wales. Since then, in 1980 she has woven the State Coat of Arms for the New South Wales Parliament building and in 1977 a heraldic tapestry for the Federal Ceremonial Court in Queen's Square. She experimented with metal weaving, but her first foray, a silver and wool tapestry in the State Banco Court, proved to be too radical for the conservative Justice Street and it

was hung only briefly. She returned to metal weaving after a long break to complete several successful works[147].

Robert Tickner

Robert Edward Tickner was born in Sydney in 1951 and became a co-founder of the Darlinghurst Resident Action Group with Margaret Grafton and architect Colin James in 1973, to preserve the area's heritage and socio-economic diversity.

Figure 35: Robert Tickner

He was a councillor on the Sydney City Council from 1977 to 1984, and during that time he initiated the Greening of Sydney awards to encourage residents to beautify their environment.

After this, he entered Federal Parliament in 1984 in the Hughes by-election held in south-west Sydney. He was Minister for Aboriginal Affairs from 1990 to 1996, but lost his seat when Labor lost power in 1996[148]. He has been a lecturer at the University of NSW, and a solicitor for the NSW Aboriginal Legal Service. Since February 2005, he has been Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Red Cross.

Claudette Roy

Claudette Roy is a French Canadian from Montreal who arrived as a traveller in about 1969. She was intending to travel on to Mauritius and then London, but once in Sydney she decided to stay. She worked in retail and office work, learning English on the job. She bought a sandstone cottage in McElhone Place in 1977, after having difficulty obtaining finance as a single woman. She liked the old lived-in look of the inner city suburbs, but Balmain and Paddington were too expensive so she settled in Surry Hills.

Her house has a richly decorated interior, with many books and paintings on the walls, many of them old miniatures. She has a great interest in architecture, interior decoration and reading. The house was originally a two-room stone cottage, but a kitchen and bathroom were added to the ground floor, and a bedroom was built in the attic.

When she moved in, there were no plants on the street at all. She remembers putting up a window box, and then the person across the street did the same. She put out a pot plant but it was stolen. Undaunted, she bought another pot and bolted it to the footpath, and then gradually some people obtained washing tubs and filled them with flowers. More and more of these tubs were gradually added to the street and gardens were planted in them[149].

After the street won the Sydney Council's gardening competition again in 2006, Claudette told a journalist "We are very proud of our oasis. It's a secret garden where the street is our backyard and the flowers bring everyone together."[150].

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