

NATIONAL TRUST REGISTER LISTING REPORT

CITY/SUBURB/TOWN	NAME OF IDENTIFICATION	ADDRESS OR LOCATION
MOONEY MOONEY	PEAT ISLAND LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AREA	Pacific Highway, Hawkesbury River

LGA:	CENTRAL COAST COUNCIL	ABORIGINAL NATION:	The Guringai
POSTCODE:	2250	LOT/DP:	Lot 1 DP 738183
COMMITTEE:	Landscape Heritage Conservation Committee	GRID:	Lat: -33.441828 Long: 151.35121
AUTHOR:	Graham Quint	LISTING DATE:	BM 276 - 29 March, 2017

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Peat Island, in the Hawkesbury River, on the Pacific Highway at Mooney Mooney, comprising the hospital facility buildings, the grounds and the wider surrounding context within the Hawkesbury River is of historic significance reflecting the changing development of institutional care for the mentally ill in Australia and of government institutions built for that purpose.

Peat Island's buildings have architectural significance and together with the landscaped grounds in their setting above the Hawkesbury River have aesthetic significance.

Peat Island contains evidence of various phases of significant site expansion which form a rare record of development of a place designed as a mental hospital from the 1900s to the 1980s. These buildings demonstrate the historical development of the institution over a century of use as a mental health facility.

The first building phase on the island (the main dormitory blocks - Sea Breeze, Denby, Pines and the Administration Building on the island) are examples of utilitarian early Federation architecture.

The works associated with Walter Liberty Vernon are specifically designed in response to their setting and retain the visual links and aesthetic relationship with the Hawkesbury River.

The establishment of the facility reflects the attitudes of social welfare and the responsibilities of the state government in the early 20th century. In its wider context, the subject site represents the development of health care for the mentally ill from the early 20th century, which has evolved with the changing views of society in terms of caring for the mentally ill.

The subject site's landscape setting and cultural plantings also relate to the historical development of the site, as they create a distinct aesthetic environment in relation to the site.

DESCRIPTION:

Peat Island is a small island of approximately 3.35 hectares in the Hawkesbury River in the suburb of Mooney Mooney, located just upstream from the Sydney – Newcastle Freeway Bridge.

Peat Island is a long elongated island that is linked to the mainland by a concrete causeway. The form of the island is dominated by a series of Norfolk Island Pines located on the southern end of the site and it contains numerous buildings dating from the early 20th century, mostly built alongside a central ridgeline.

The largest buildings on the island are the four dormitory buildings, which are all two storey constructed in face brick with corrugated iron roofs. These buildings are identified as Sea Breeze, Denby, Pines, and the Administration building and were constructed in 2 stages, with two being completed in 1905 and the other two by 1910. These buildings conform to the typical configuration of early 20th century dormitory buildings in health facilities, with two large spaces on the ground floor (usually used as a day room and dining room) divided by a central hallway with stair to two large dormitories on the first floor, often later divided into smaller spaces with a central door and shared bedrooms created by low partitions.

On the southern end of the island is an octagonal rotunda dating from 1904. The original structure was built for use as a sewing room for Females to the design of the Government Architect Walter Liberty Vernon. The original drawing indicates that it was a timber framed structure, clad in weatherboards with a bench seat wrapping around 7 of the buildings side and with timber framed casement windows(probably with shutters) topped with a gently curved shingle valance, and with a redwood shingle roof supported by large timber brackets.

The structure underwent major repairs in 2003, retaining the roof structure, which is now clad in a pale corrugated metal sheet. The refurbishment replaces the supporting structure with an open metal frame with a timber balustrade on a concrete slab.

There are also a number of utilitarian structures across the island including a concrete water tower at the northern section of the island, a swimming pool with associated amenities, a plumbers shed, a number of large metal sheds as well as a former patients' garden and associated shed on the southern end of the island.

There are significant areas of hard and soft landscaping across the islands, including large areas of lawn, mature trees (including Norfolk Island Pines, jacarandas, Casuarinas, Eucalypts, Palms, Conifers, assorted native shrubs and succulents, as well as unusual garden features, many of which seems to have been constructed by the patients. These include rockeries, garden beds, retaining walls, and seating constructed in sandstone.

HISTORY:

Originally known as Rabbit Island, presumably due to the fact that rabbits were being kept there, Peat Island has been Crown land since European settlement.

During the 1890s, the NSW government decided to establish an asylum for inebriates (alcoholics) where they could be treated in isolation from the general prison and hospital population. Relevant legislation was passed in 1890 and Dr J.M. Creed, a member of the NSW Legislative Council (1885-1930), selected Peat and the nearby Milson Island, as the sites for the female and male asylum respectively.

The institutions were developed under the provisions of the Inebriate Act of 1900 and administered by the Chief Secretary's Department.

Construction began in 1902, with Peat Island being cleared and levelled. Several buildings were erected, including the two storey brick edifices that still dominate the island, and a hexagonal sewing room.

To provide fresh water to both Peat and Milson Islands, a 24 feet (7.3 m) high concrete dam holding 7,000,000 gallons was constructed in a gully on the northern bank of the Hawkesbury River, a few kilometres upstream, and above the cliffs behind the wreck of HMAS Parramatta.

Rock and sand for the dam were obtained on site, but cement and other materials had to be hauled 275 feet (84 m) up the cliff face from the river using old Sydney tram cables. The only access to the reservoir was via a series of five, near vertical timber and iron ladders that were pinned into the face of the cliff

adjacent to the waterfall. A pipeline ran from the reservoir and serviced both islands via underwater mains.

At Peat Island the successful completion of the buildings was celebrated in 1904 with an official opening of more than 400 attendees. The new facility then sat idle for a few years, managed by a caretaker, and hosting various government officials and associates on picnics or social occasions.

The expense of establishing the facility in such an isolated location prompted much public criticism, and on completion in 1905, the Windsor and Richmond Gazette reported drily that: "*The Asylum for Inebriates at Rabbit Island, Hawkesbury River, has been completed, at a cost of £6500. A few of our dipsomaniacs in Parliament should be sent thither.*"

However, by 1907 the government had lost interest in the whole project, deciding instead to set aside space in Darlinghurst gaol for the treatment of inebriates, and the facility was handed over in 1908 to the Lunacy Department for use as a hospital for the insane.

Dr Eric Sinclair (Inspector General for the Insane) was reported to have taken over Rabbit Island towards 1908, and further construction took place for two more wards. In 1910 Peat Island was rededicated as a mental hospital for male patients. The change was a response to the chronic century which had been partly remedied in the construction of Callan Park Hospital (1880s), Rydalmere Hospital (1892), Kenmore Hospital (1897), Stockton (1910) and Morisset Hospital (1910).

The first superintendent of the mental hospital at Peat Island was Mr J. Dawson who was transferred from Gladesville Mental Hospital at the end of 1910. The first mental patients were admitted to the island in March 1911, with Mr J. Dawson being assisted from this time by Mr J. C. A. Cross.

By the end of 1911 there were 106 patients on the island. In keeping with the departmental policy shift of the day to provide separate accommodation for chronic and acute patients, Peat Island accommodated chronic and 'mentally defective' patients. The first intake of patients and some staff were transferred from Newcastle Mental Hospital.

The transfer of mental patients to Peat Island was initially viewed as an emergency response to the need for additional accommodation, but despite the opening of Morisset Hospital in 1910 increasing numbers of patients were placed at Peat Island over the 1910s with the number of patients at Peat Island totalling 153 by 1922.

To ease overcrowding on the island, Milson Island was developed from 1920, although patient numbers at Peat Island continued to increase over the 1930s. By 1935 the total number of patients at both islands numbered 523, with the staged development of Milson Island the mental hospital were managed as one institution known as Milson and Rabbit (Peat) Islands with considerable interaction occurring in the day-to-day operation for which a number of boats were maintained.

By the late 1940s mental patients of school age had begun to be sent to Peat Island with regular school instructions being provided from 1948. As social attitudes to mental illness and people with developmental disabilities changed over time, the facilities and amenities improved.

In 1951 a school was opened and a full-time teacher was supplied by the Department of Education. It was realised that the boys would benefit from schooling. Many of the patients were boys (girls weren't admitted until the 1970s), who were left in the care of the state, as their parents lacked the willingness or ability to deal with their condition.

A school magazine, *The Waratah*, was produced from this time. By 1967 there were about 600 boys at the institution. Subsequently over the 1950s and 1960s an active Ladies Auxiliary, Parents and Citizen Welfare Association, and Staff and Patients Welfare Committee collaboratively worked to improve on the facilities, conditions and well-being of the boys.

The hospital also operated a "canteen", built prior to 1967, on the Pacific Highway at Mooney Mooney, where fuel and takeaway food was available until 2010.

With changing community attitudes to the care of the mentally ill and advances in the treatment programs and medications, residential patient numbers throughout the state's mental hospitals declined from the 1970s onwards.

Milson Island was closed in 1970 as a mental institution, and at Peat Island while the school was closed at the end of 1973, the hospital continued to care for intellectually handicapped youths.

In 1983, the Richmond report on Mental Health Services in N.S.W. recommended that institutions such as Peat Island should be closed and the patients integrated into the general community where possible.

Various plans were announced for the facility over the next 27 years until it was finally decommissioned in October 2010, with the last remaining residents moved to new facilities on the Central Coast at Hamlyn Terrace and Wadalba.

In 1989 the hospital was transferred from the administrative control of the Department of Health to the Department of Community Services. With progressive organisational changes to the provision of care of disabled people in NSW, the administration of disability services was separated from child protection services within the Department of Community Services in 2000, and subsequently the Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care was formed in 2001.

The new department brought together the former Ageing and Disability Department, Disability Services from the Department of Community Services, and the Home Care Service of NSW.

In late 2010, local press reported rumours that the island was being considered as a detention centre for asylum seekers, a claim denied by the state and federal governments.

PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

The following historical information has been sourced from a 2006 Tanner Architects Report:

Phase 1 – 1788-1900

The available evidence indicates Peat Island has been Crown Land since European Settlement. There is no documentary evidence for development of the island prior to its dedication as an institution in 1901.

A contour survey was prepared in 1901 by the Lands Department for the Chief Secretary's Department as a preliminary to dedication of the island as a hospital for inebriates. Subsequently in December 1910 the Island was rededicated as a hospital for the Insane. The Island at the time of the survey had no built structures.

Phase 2 – 1901-1940

The original buildings and supporting services at Peat Island were developed over the period of 1901-1903 by the Government Architects Branch of the NSW Department of Public Works. The Government Architect at the time was Walter Liberty Vernon.

The initial phase of work comprised the provision of a water supply from a dam on the mainland and cut and fill to level the island and reclaim the western low lying area. By 1904 the main body of work had been completed with the construction of a pair of two-storey, brick dormitory blocks, a one storey brick kitchen block and neighbouring managers' cottages.

Recreation facilities were also developed as demonstrated by the pavilion. Over 1909, in anticipation of utilising the island as a mental hospital, an additional pair of dormitory wards was completed.

Landscaping of the grounds (Pine/Palm Trees) of Peat Island was undertaken from the earliest years when the island was used as a mental hospital under the direction of the superintendent (Dawson) and his assistant (Cross). Contemporary accounts of the island indicate Dawson was very active in promoting a landscaped setting for the enjoyment and recuperation of the patients and vegetable gardens for produce.

A main path network along the western side of the island was developed at this time. Later in the 1930s, improvements were occurring with some plantings.

The isolation of the island, thought so desirable for the well-being and recovery of the patients, necessitated construction of landing stages.

The development of Peat Island into a hospital was undertaken under the direction of the Government Architect's Branch of the Department of Public Works. The initial works undertaken over 1902, involved cut and fill to provide a level area suitable for development.

The four dormitory blocks, the single storey kitchen and laundry block, and an additional single storey building were all constructed in brick masonry to designs prepared under the direction of the Government Architect, Walter Liberty Vernon.

Even at this early stage in the development of the hospital there is extensive tree coverage which suggests selective tree clearance was practiced in the initial stages of the development.

A 1901 building plan shows the first pair of dormitory blocks and kitchen/laundry block and provision for an additional pair of dormitories for the female division on Rabbit (Peat) Island.

Phase 3 – 1940-1950

With the acquisition of property on the mainland directly opposite Peat Island around 1940, a dairy was developed to supply fresh milk to the patients and staff of both Peat and Milson Island. Improvement in the facilities on Peat Island continued during this phase including the the water reservoir construction. The mature trees and water tower are conspicuous landmarks on the river.

The area west of the Old Pacific Highway was developed from the 1950s to provide additional accommodation for the staff working on the hospitals on Peat and Milson Island. Building of the new freeway necessitated moving the vehicular entry to the north. The canteen was demolished and was rebuilt in 1967.

The area to the east of the Old Pacific Highway was also developed from the 1950s to provide additional accommodation for the staff of the two Island hospitals.

Phase 4 – 1950-1970

With the dedication of the island for male juvenile patients and an increasing community and government concern for the care of mental patients, the original accommodation blocks were upgraded and improvements were made in the accommodation for staff, education and vocational training for patients, and improvements in the general quality of the Island's amenities through the provision of shelters and sports facilities.

Within the old dairy area, the preference for education and vocational training over outmoded rural activities is demonstrated by the purpose built training facilities and the relocated school room.

The role and efforts of the Ladies Auxiliary, Parents and Citizen Welfare Association, and Staff and Patients Welfare Committee would seem to be particularly demonstrated by the use of decorative sandstone in the shelters, memorial gardens, the chapel, the entry gates and the public canteen.

General improvements in patient and staff recreational facilities in this period are demonstrated by the new staff accommodation and the opening of the causeway in 1960 demonstrates both the improvements in road based communication from the 1940s and the development of staff and patient facilities on the mainland.

On Peat Island the provision of new service buildings include the insertion of structures in the old airing/circulation yards, and new additions to older building stock.

With the closure of the Milson Island hospital in 1970, Peat Island became the main centre, and was being developed from the 1960s. The site plan of 1974 indicates a number of major changes were proposed in the 1970s, but none seem to have been implemented. It appears that development seemed to have stopped around 1970, with the major post 1970 change being the

demolition of the morgue (c1990).

With the transfer of Peat Island to the Department of Community Services in 1989, the role of the facility changed with a focus on care and provision of services for disabled people.

Several of the Vernon buildings were renovated in this period, with the installation of new services and institutional fit-outs. Former staff accommodation houses were converted to Group Houses for clients.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

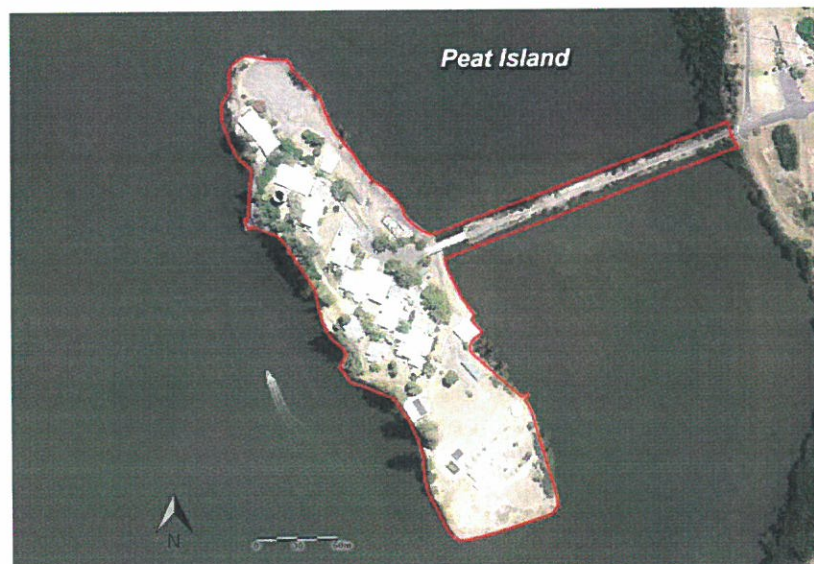
Gosford Heritage Inventory, Gosford City, 2015

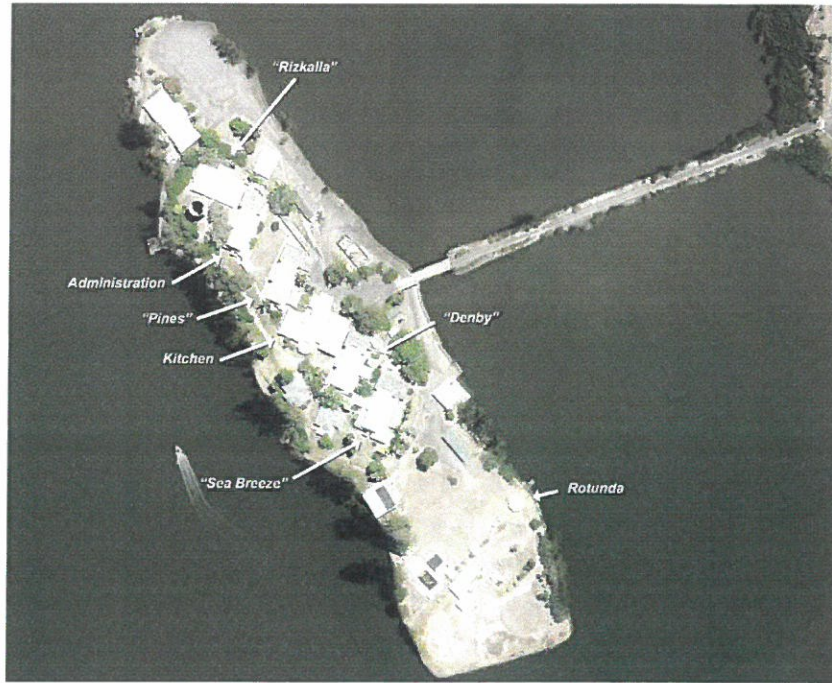
Heritage Report – Peat Island, Mooney Mooney, Urbis Pty Ltd, August, 2014

BOUNDARY OF LISTING

The boundary of the listing is indicated by the red line on the following site plan and is wholly within Lot 1 DP 738183

SITE PLANS:





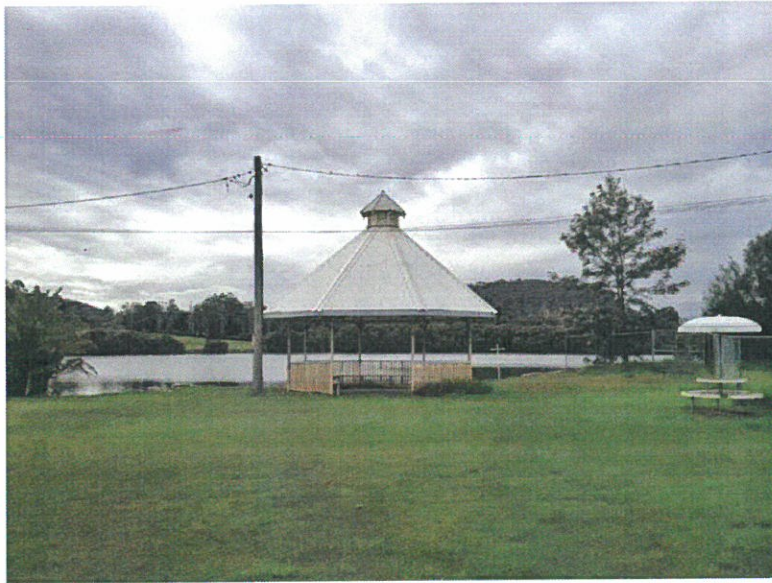
PHOTOGRAPHS:



Undated photograph showing buildings on Peat Island



Sewing room on Rabbit Island, now Peat Island in 1904



Rotunda, Image: Urbis, 2014



Western corner of Denby showing verandah, Image: Urbis, 2014



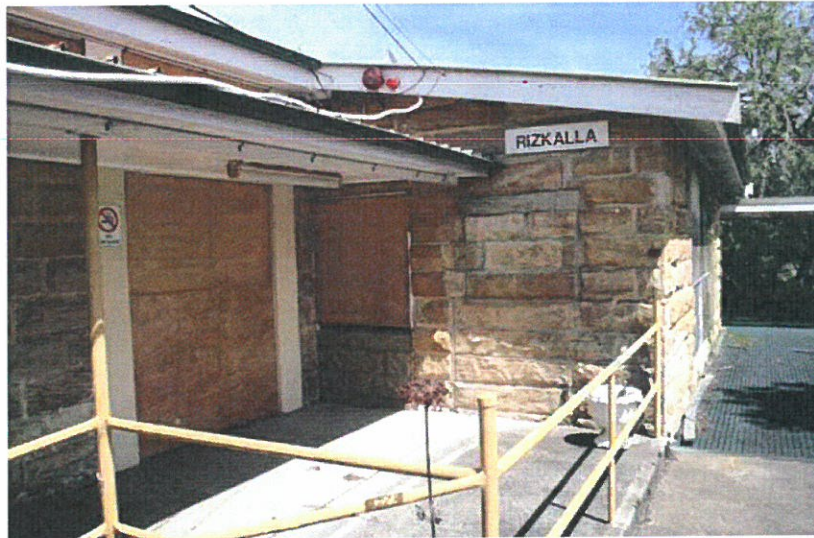
Northern elevation of Denby, Image: Urbis, 2014



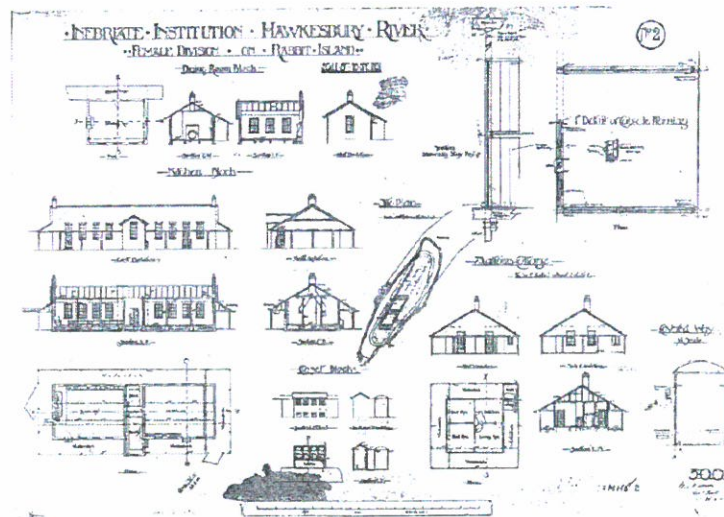
A highly valued place for reflection, and probably a memorial – all original detail Relocated, Image: David Scobie, Gosford Heritage Inventory



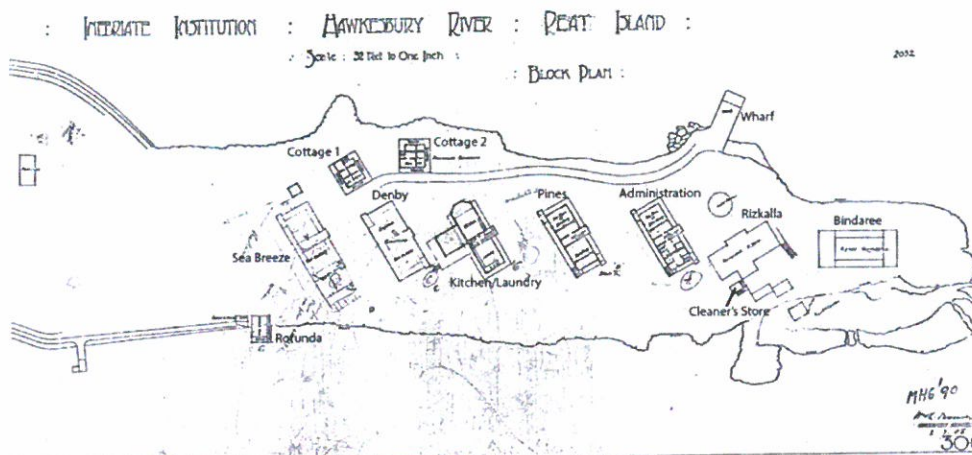
Norfolk Island Pines on the south west portion of the island, Image: David Scobie, Gosford Heritage Inventory



Eastern entrance to Rizkalla, Image: David Scobie, Gosford Heritage Inventory



1901 Plans showing building plans for Rabbit (Peat) Island, Image: Urbis



1906 Block plans showing building footprints on Peat Island, Image: Urbis