

THE STORY OF THE ALTAIR SITE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH KINGS CROSS ROAD AND THE KINGS CROSS TUNNEL

While current ownership of the land on which **Altair** is built is lodged with the titleholders of its 141 lots, the story of that ownership does not begin with these titleholders.

The original ownership of the Altair land was the Gadigal Clan of the Eora Aboriginal Nation. The Clan's territory at the time of the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 stretched from Sydney Cove to South Head, virtually covering much of today's Eastern Suburbs. As a consequence, the land on which **Altair** is built was Gadigal land for possibly more than 40,000 years prior to 22nd August, 1770 when Lieutenant James Cook RN claimed the entire east coast of Australia as British territory, dispossessing the Indigenous People of their land, and assigning ownership to King George 111 of Great Britain. It was then Crown Land until 1829 when Lieutenant General Ralph Darling, the seventh governor of New South Wales (1825-1832), made significant land grants on the Woolloomooloo Hill (later named Darlinghurst, Potts Point, Rushcutters Bay and Elizabeth Bay) to prominent merchants and government leaders. One of these grants of around nine acres was to Major Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor-General. Mitchell built his mansion **Craigend** on the grant and occupied it until the estate was divided into allotments and sold by James & Co at auction on Monday 2nd January, 1837.



Above Left: Craigend - the mansion on the estate of Sir Thomas Mitchell where **Altair** was completed in 2001. **Craigend** was located on the ridge above today's Surrey Lane off Craigend Street on the southern side of **The Altair** with views similar to those from the Altair's upper levels. **Above Right: Portrait of Sir Thomas Mitchell C1830's**. Mitchell was knighted in 1839 for his contribution to the surveying of Australia. (Photos from sydneyarchitecture)

The auctioneer's plan for the 1837 auction shows a walking track along the northern side of Mitchell's estate boundary with the High Sheriff of New South Wales, Thomas Macquoid's Estate, Goderich Lodge. It was proposed that this track become a public road as a way of dealing with the traffic problem at the top of William Street. This proposed road was to be ultimately named Kings Cross Road, although the name Glenelg Street was suggested originally.



Goderich Lodge, the estate of the High Sheriff of New South Wales, Thomas Macquoid. This splendid painting (artist unknown) shows clearly the post and railing fence separating Macquoid's estate with that of Sir Thomas Mitchell's estate, **Craigend**. It also shows the Gadigal dirt track on Mitchell's side of the boundary. This track was eventually named Kings Cross Road, although Glenelg Street was suggested originally. Today, the Hampton Court Hotel in Bayswater Road stands on the site where **Goderich Lodge** once stood. (Photo from collection.hht.net.au)

(Glenelg Street may not have been the original name of this dirt track. It may have had an earlier name, a Gadigal name, but that name has long been forgotten).

It is well accepted that the Aborigines had a name for every locality in their tribal area. There was a name for every bend in a river, every geographical entity, and every pathway. The Gadigal Clan, for instance, had an arrangement of walking tracks throughout the Eastern Suburbs. In fact, the early settlers often followed these tracks. Overtime, however, the tracks were covered by settlements and their names vanished. But there is still evidence of some of those tracks. One of significance was off what is today's Oxford Street, near the High Court, that ran along the Darlinghurst Ridge with a spur off it around Kings Cross that connected with another track up what is now William Street that went on to Rushcutters Bay where members of the Gadigal Clan camped, hunted and fished and where convicts and early settlers from Sydney Town cut rushes for thatching houses. This spur, this Gadigal pathway toward Rushcutters Bay, became Glenelg Street.

As a consequence, Glenelg Street, now Kings Cross Road, the road on which Altair is located, has been a pathway, not since the time when Glenelg Street was proposed, but for thousands of years before then.)



Above Left: A Gadigal man whose Clan was the original owners of the Altair Land. **Above Right:** A Gadigal woman fishing on Sydney Harbour C1805. (Photos from sydneybarani.com.au) City of Sydney.

KINGS CROSS ROAD – ITS VARIOUS NAMES, FEATURES AND ASSOCIATIONS

When formed, William Street ran up the hill to an impasse at Macquoid's Estate, creating a traffic problem. From around 1844, the initial way around this problem was the making of two public streets, Glenelg Street, or Upper William Street as it became known, and Upper William Street North (later Bayswater Road). However, the similarity in the names of these two streets caused confusion so Upper William Street was renamed Upper William Street South in 1862 and then, in the 1870s, Woolcott Street after Charles Woolcott. Woolcott was the Town Clerk of Sydney who had an ongoing brief to resolve the traffic congestion problem and the confusion with the street names. Later, following the demolition of Craighend and its final subdivision between 1921 and 1923, Woolcott Street was renamed Kings Cross Road.

This road since colonial times, whether named Glenelg Street, Upper William Street, Upper William Street South, Woolcott Street or Kings Cross Road, has generally provided for a narrow one-way flow of traffic, at times directing traffic toward the city via William Street or, as it does now, from William Street toward Rushcutters Bay. In its time this road has been a dirt track, gravel then a tarred road before being covered with bitumen. It has provided for pedestrians, livestock, horses and carts, bikes, cars, trams, and buses. It has been referred to as both 'sinister' and 'respectable'; as the 'Heart of the Cross'; as the 'Red Light District'; and as the 'Dirty Half Mile'. It has embraced open bush, rows of residential terraces, shops, brothels, boarding houses, units and apartment blocks. Since its formation the road has sometimes been part of the problem with traffic congestion to and from William Street. In the end though, with the construction of the Kings Cross Tunnel, it became part of the solution. Kings Cross Road, Bayswater Road and Craighend Street were realigned and improved as ongoing principal roadways with the tunnel. This solution resulted in the availability of a building site for Altair.



Left: Craighend St, Kings Cross Rd and Bayswater Rd (bottom three thoroughfares) linking with William St (centre of photo) c1950, showing the traffic flow problem at the top of William St that was eventually solved by the construction of the Kings Cross Tunnel. (Photo from greatsoutherncards.com.au)

KINGS CROSS TUNNEL- POINTS OF INTEREST AND SOME OF ITS EFFECTS

This was Sydney's first road tunnel, constructed using the 'cut and cover' method, requiring substantial re-development of the heart of Kings Cross.

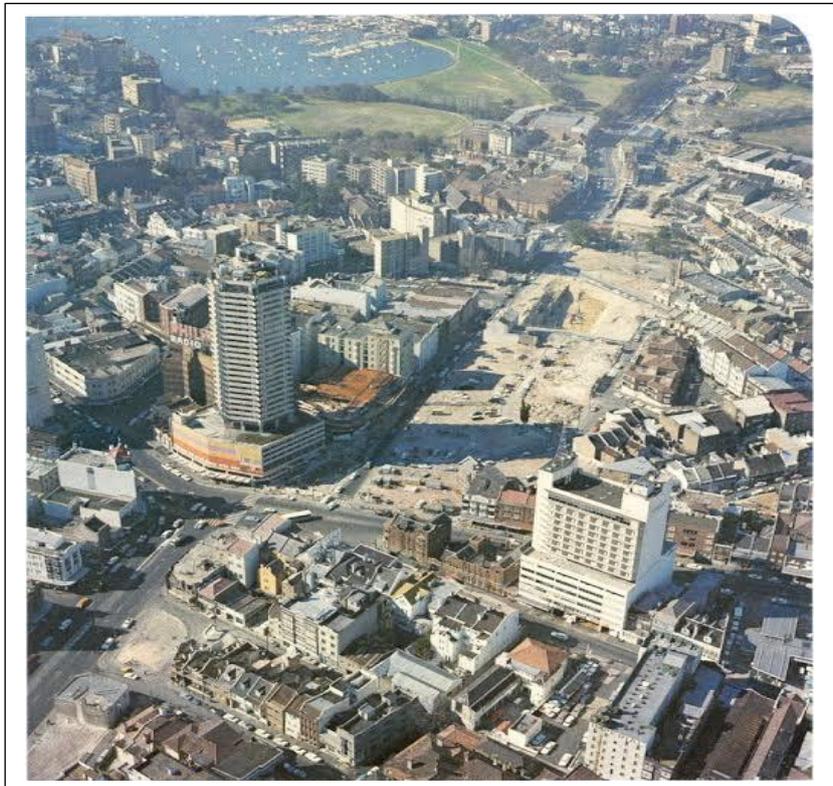
#118 properties were resumed by compulsory acquisition including shops, terrace homes, boarding houses, small unit blocks, apartments, night clubs, and a hotel. They were all demolished.

#Construction of the tunnel proper began in June 1973 and finally opened to traffic on 15th December, 1975.

In conjunction with the tunnel, a medium strip along William Street was constructed and associated walkways widened and beautified. Additional parking areas were provided, surrounding street traffic lanes improved, and major pedestrian bridges built off Craigend Place and above the tunnel along Victoria and Darlinghurst Roads.

For additional information about the tunnel go to:

<http://www.ozroads.com.au/NSW/RouteNumbering/Decommissioned%20Routes/SR76/kct.htm>



Above: View of the heart of Kings Cross at the top of William Street showing construction of the tunnel in progress, the extent of some of the demolition sites, and others yet to take place - especially in the central area of the photo between Kings Cross Road on the left and Craigend Street on the right of the central demolition area. Along Kings Cross Road are some terrace homes yet to be demolished. This area of the photo shows the land acquired above the tunnel on which **Altair** was built. As well, establishments opposite the fire station are yet to be demolished; the Kings Cross Centre is yet to be finally completed; the Coca Cola sign has so far not been erected; and the approaches to the tunnel not yet formed. (Photo from ozroads.com.au)

During the tunnel's construction, but especially after its opening, left over land above and around the project was sold to developers. This had four major effects on this area of Kings Cross.

1. The construction of Altair and The Elan, two luxurious apartment towers on land above the tunnel, with the transfer of the ownership of that land to their titleholders.

2. Re-development at the top of William Street, including the tunnel and its approaches, and the re-alignment of connecting roads and walkways that finally solved a traffic problem created almost a century and a half earlier.
3. Construction of the Kings Cross Centre comprising apartments, commercial space, retail and service outlets below, adjacent to, and behind the renowned Coca Cola Billboard Sign, erected in 1974, together with changes along Penny Lane.
4. A gradual social change at Kings Cross from an earlier reputation of sleaze, prostitution and crime to a measured return of 'gentrification' from its colonial past and the renewal of the 'care for the management of land' that reflected an aspect of the culture of the Eora People.



Above: Kings Cross, showing the Coca Cola sign on the corner of Darlinghurst Rd and Kings Cross Rd, the western side of the tunnel, and part of *Altair* at top right, built on land above the tunnel along Kings Cross Road. This road and William Street have been pathways, in various forms, for thousands of years. (Photo from www.fantech.com.au/images/Projects/kCross.jpg)

SUMMARY OF THE OWNERSHIP OF ALTAIR LAND AND ITS HISTORIC ASSOCIATIONS

Altair was an aftermath of the Kings Cross Tunnel. Part of the land above the tunnel on which the tower was built is now Altair land, but before then it was Gadigal Land, then Crown land, then part of a land grant to Sir Thomas Mitchell before being owned by the many titleholders of private terrace homes and establishments along Kings Cross Road and Craigend Street. Then it became Crown Land again before being acquired by developers. Whoever the various owners of this land were, it is land that links Altair with ancient history, with the colonial period, and with modern times. It is land that is not only ground for pride in the construction of Engelen Moore's stunning architectural success, but pride in its ownership and use by a range of titleholders since 1770 and by the Gadigal Clan of the Eora Nation for thousands of years before then.

HONOURS AND AWARDS FOR THE ALTAIR'S STUNNING ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

- 2001 State Housing Industry Association Award for the High Density Project of the Year.
- 2001 RAI NSW Chapter Architecture Award for Single and Multiple Housing.
- 2002 World Architecture Award for Best Building in Australasia.
- 2002 World Architecture Award for Best Housing Scheme in the World.
- 2002 National HIA Award for High Density Project of the Year.