

Exploring links with the past

SITE HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

As part of 200 George Street's planning phase, a team of experts was assembled by Mirvac to record the rich history and archaeology of the site. Specialist firm, GML Heritage was appointed to undertake an archaeological investigation as part of the redevelopment, which began during the demolition of the preceding buildings, before the excavation of the carpark.

During the 12-week excavation, the archaeologists uncovered 23,715 artefacts that related to Sydney's colonial and Victorian-era history. Excavation in the basement of the 200 George Street site uncovered the original topography of the bedrock, stepping down to the Tank Stream.

Many features had been hand cut into the sandstone bedrock, including two wells, the larger being 2.5 metre deep and 1.6 metre wide, that was brimming with interesting artefacts. Among the artefacts were leather shoes and off-cuts, buttons, pins, candle-wick scissors, coins, clay pipes and jewellery. Unusual tobacco pipes found at 200 George Street have commemorative images, such as the Crystal Palace and portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

The most significant and interesting artefacts have been integrated within the public domain of the new precinct, including:

- › Archaeological artefacts are displayed in illuminated boxes beside the Crane Place Stairs with QR codes linking to more information about the items online. The website also presents a series of fictional stories commissioned by Mirvac inspired by the artefacts
- › Historical images presented on panels of the adjacent Underwood Street façade of 4 Dalley Street, which trace the history of the site from Aboriginal history through to modern times
- › A bronze inlay has been cast into the floor weaving through the ground floor lobby and public domain, representing the location of the harbour foreshore line in the late 18th Century.

History

The 200 George Street site was located at the heart of one of the first areas settled by Europeans following colonisation in 1788, forming the heartland of the City since the 1800s. It also has a rich Aboriginal history.

During the 1800s, the eastern side of George Street, where 200 George Street now exists, was home to a large community of Chinese family homes and businesses. Accusations of poor living standards, gambling and immorality culminated in a mob trying to set fire to a well-known cabinet factory on this site.

In 1873, Ah Toy expanded his cabinet factory, following a fire at the Underwood Stores next door. He was one of many Chinese businessmen who lived in the area during the 19th Century. His cabinetmaking factory and store was one of the oldest in Sydney. Ah Toy filled the well on this property with rubbish that had accumulated at his factory to assist in the construction of new sheds. Archaeologists found that the well contained an unusually high number of bowls produced in both China and Britain.