Colonial Rose Hill
A self-guided walking tour

In 1788, ten months after the First Fleet arrived and a European colony was established at Port Jackson (as Sydney Harbour was called), a second settlement was created at the head of the Parramatta River. It was initially named Rose Hill and later re-named Parramatta, from the Aboriginal word Burramatta.

This tour explores the colonial landscape of what was once Rose Hill. Despite the passage of time, signs of the settlement's four-year establishment are still visible in Parramatta Park today.

Legend:
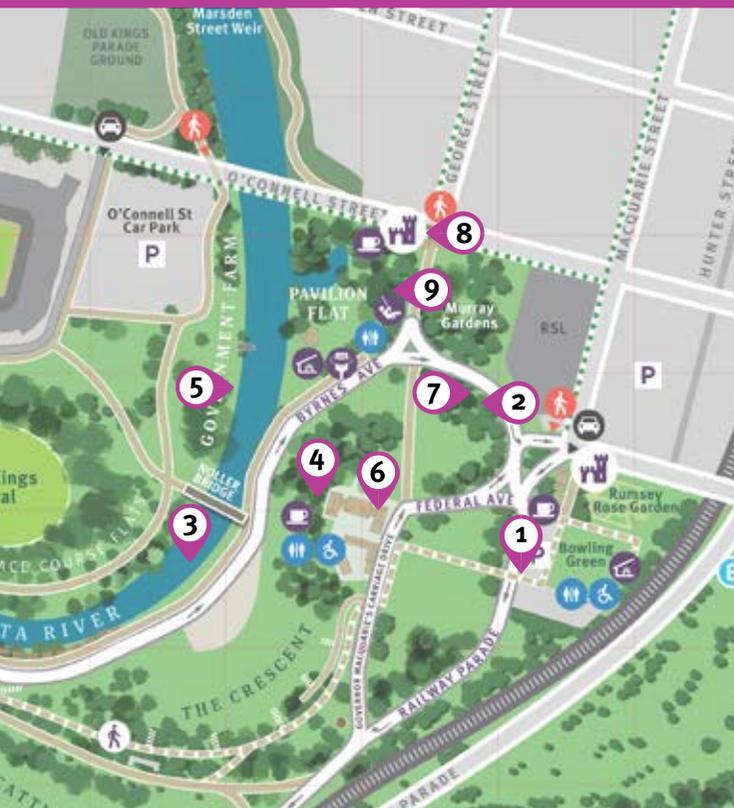
- Toilet
- Accessible toilet
- Gatehouse
- Cafe/restaurant
- Playground
- Picnic shelter
- BBQ
- Pedestrian entry
- Vehicle entry
- Paved path
- Unpaved path
- Track
- Cycleway
- Cycle route
- Loop road
- P Carpark
- Train line
- B Bus stop
- T Train station

A PICTURESQUE PARK

As the now-established colony flourished, the Rose Hill site evolved – agriculture moved further west and the commercial focus of Parramatta became the Queens Wharf area, where a new store and barracks were built.

Parramatta Park was extended and Governor Macquarie, who reigned from 1810 to 1820, commissioned extensive landscaping work. His vision of a 'picturesque parkland' still shapes the Park today.

Dairy and Ranger's Cottages

Parramatta Park is open to vehicles every day from 6am to 6pm (8pm during daylight saving). Pedestrian access is possible at any time.

PARRAMATTA PARK TRUST

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Duty Ranger
(8.30am – 4.30pm)
0419 122 763

After hours security
(5pm – 8.30am)
1300 133 456

PARRAMATTA PARK

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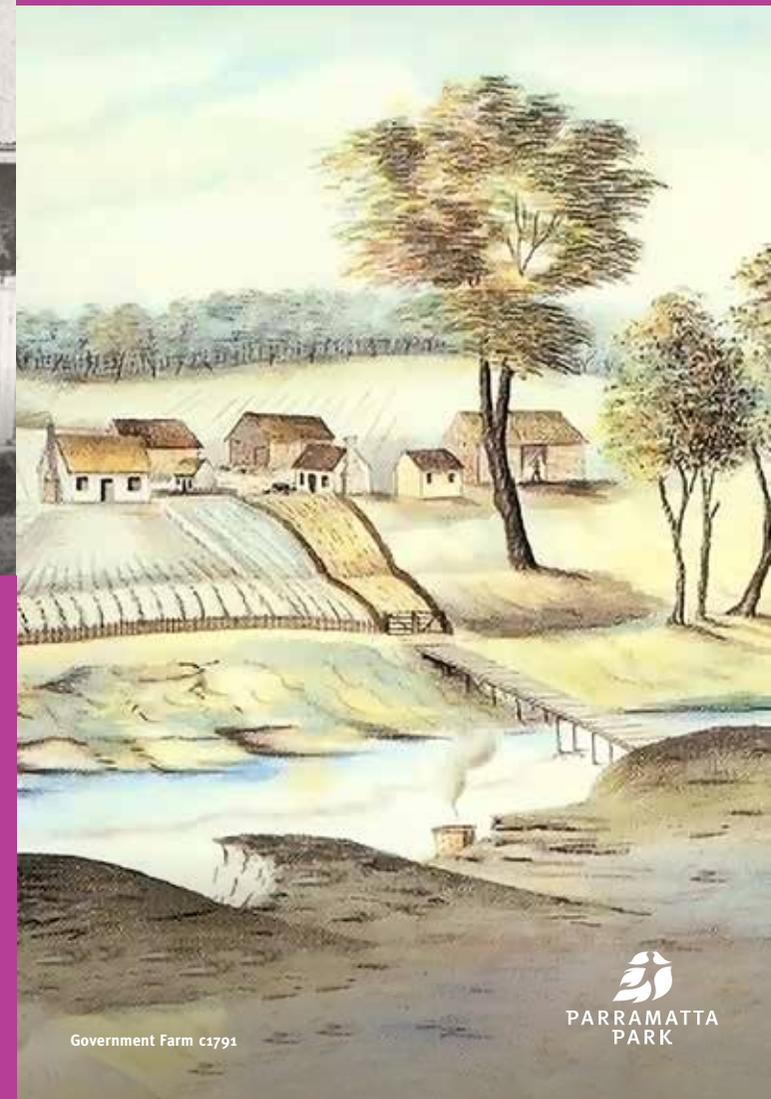
Government Farm c1791

PARRAMATTA PARK

1 THE ABORIGINAL LANDSCAPE

Before exploring the colonial features, let's acknowledge the original inhabitants of this area – the Burramatta clan of the Darug. What is now Parramatta Park was the core of their territory.

Aboriginal people occupied the area up to 40,000 years before European settlers arrived. The large, well-spaced trees, grassy understorey, fertile soil and natural landscape that attracted colonists to Rose Hill was the result of careful Aboriginal land management practices.

Walk along the ridgeline of The Crescent and around Domain Creek – this is where scarred trees, artefact scatters and pathways were located.

2 THE SETTLEMENT AT ROSE HILL

Rose Hill was settled after King George sent down orders from Britain to the colony's ruler, Governor Phillip, to find and cultivate farmland immediately. Farm Cove (now the Royal Botanic Gardens) was originally established to supply food to the colony. But it was failing because its soil was sandy, and its water supply was unreliable.

In April 1788, Governor Phillip arrived at the head of the Parramatta River. The lightly timbered, open country offered the prospect of easy cultivation. A settlement was established on 2nd November 1788, named in honour of George Rose, the English Secretary of the Treasury. The success of the colony depended on Rose Hill to become self-sufficient.

When the settlers arrived to prepare the land, they had to disembark near the site of the current Gasworks Bridge and carry everything up the River, as the water was too shallow for boats.

3 THE RIVER

The river was central to life. An important food source and transportation route for the Burramatta clan, it became equally vital to Phillip when establishing and maintaining the settlement of Rose Hill.

Although a track may have existed between Sydney Cove and Rose Hill, initially the settlement was only accessible via the river and all stores and equipment had to be transported by boat and then carried by hand.

A cleared road covering the sixteen miles to Sydney was finally established in May 1793 – it took six hours to march along it!

The Redoubt c1791

4 THE REDOUBT (FORTIFIED CAMP)

In November 1788, a group of marines and convicts were sent up the river to mark out the ground for a redoubt (a fort or fortified camp, designed to protect soldiers) and related facilities. A spot on high ground was chosen, and clearing began. Initially, both convicts and soldiers were housed in tents there, as clearing the timber was a slow process.

The Redoubt was completed by July 1789 – it was the very first structure at Rose Hill. Actually a cluster of buildings, it included a storehouse and barracks. It was located in front of where Government House was later built.

5 THE GOVERNMENT FARM

The Government Farm was the colony's first successful farm. In the spring and summer of 1788, Henry Edward Dodd, one of the few experienced farmers in the colony, oversaw the clearing of 70 acres of land to establish the farm. A barn, farmhouse and grain storehouse were also built.

In December 1789, the first season produced a "plentiful and luxuriant" vegetable crop as well as 200 bushels of wheat, 60 bushels of barley and a small quantity of flax, Indian corn and oats. Though described at the time as "plentiful and luxuriant" the first crop produced nowhere near enough to feed the colony, which was still dependent on supply ships.

The Government Farm site is on the north side of the Parramatta River, near the O'Connell Street carpark.

6 PHILLIPS' GOVERNMENT HOUSE AND CARRIAGE DRIVE

When visiting the settlement, Governor Phillip stayed with Henry Edward Dodd until 1790. When labour and materials became available he built a modest Government House at Rose Hill on the site of the current Old Government House.

A small, single storey cottage made of plaster and thin wood, it was not much bigger than a convict hut, being 44 feet long and 16 feet wide.

The driveway which took carriages to the original Government House – which Phillip built on the hill of The Crescent – was revealed in an excavation project in August 2003.

7 BRIDGE STREET

In 1789 Governor Phillip laid out a plan for Rose Hill with surveyor William Dawes. They proposed a symmetrical, well-ordered town, built on a generous scale. Bridge Street ran alongside the main roads of the town and, together with a small timber bridge, served to link the early settlement and the Government Farm.

Distinct traces of the old road may still be seen in front of Old Government House. The street marks the site of the earliest residential and industrial development in Parramatta – and some of it has survived since the late 18th century.

8 GEORGE STREET

As part of Phillip's vision for Rose Hill, George Street was to be a grand central avenue, 205 feet in width, running from the river to Government House. The layout of wide streets stood in marked contrast to the settlement at Sydney Cove.

British marine, Captain Watkin Tench, who published two books about his adventures with the First Fleet, recorded that: "This main street of the new town....is to be a mile long and of such breadth as will make Pall Mall and Portland Place [in London] hide their diminished heads."

The archaeological remains of road surfaces, pavements and footings from the 1790s convict settlement are preserved beneath the section of George Street that runs within the Park.

9 THE CONVICT HUTS

The road alignments and 32 original convict hut and garden allotments of the township of Rose Hill are recorded on maps and in early documents. Captain Watkin Tench wrote of the huts in his diary: "Each house is divided into two rooms, in one of which is a fire place and a brick chimney. These houses are designed for men only: and ten is the number of inhabitants allotted to each; but some of them now contain 12 or 14, for want of better accommodation."

More shared huts were built for unmarried women and several small huts were built for "convict families of good character".

The huts were demolished as part of landscaping works undertaken by Governor Macquarie in 1814–15. These first convict huts and gardens were located where the Murray Gardens are now, close to the George Street Gatehouse and Lady FitzRoy Memorial.

The convict huts