

Attachment I

**TKD Heritage Assessment – 1A Billyard
Avenue, Elizabeth Bay**



Arthur McElhone Reserve
1A Billyard Avenue
Elizabeth Bay

Heritage assessment

Prepared for City of Sydney

January 2026



TKD Architects acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and create, recognising their continuing and unbroken connection to the land, water and sky.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and express our gratitude for their sharing of knowledge and cultures.

Cover

Matthew Taylor photograph

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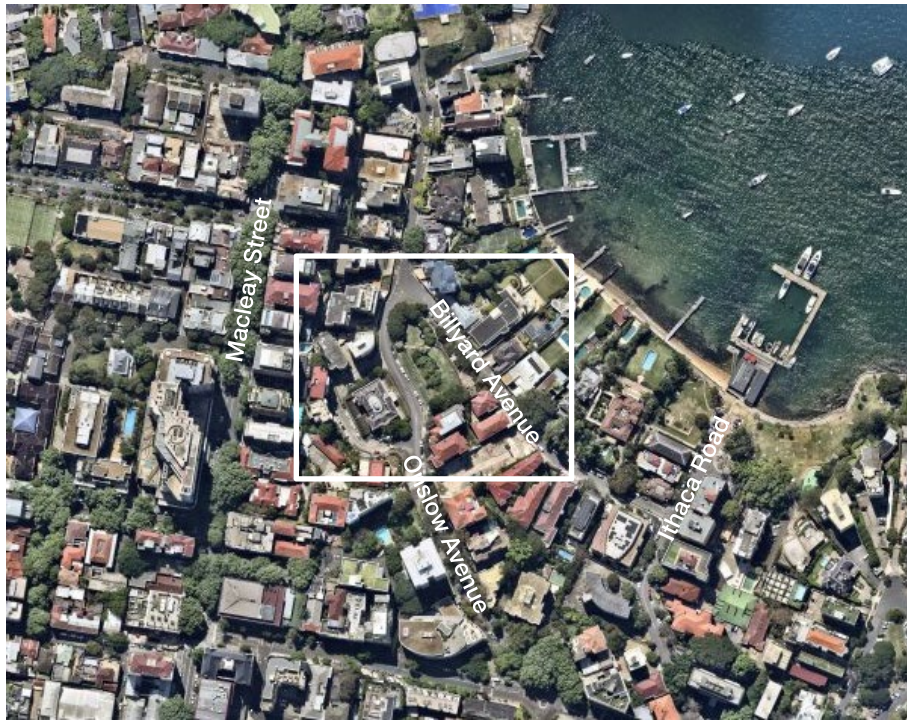
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- 1 Aerial location image (top) and aerial detail image of McElhone Reserve Elizabeth Bay. Source: Nearmap with TKD Architects overlay.



1 Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose of report

This report has been prepared on behalf of the City of Sydney to assess the heritage significance of the Arthur McElhone Reserve, 1A Billyard Avenue, Elizabeth Bay. The Reserve was identified as a potential heritage item in the Albert Smillie and Ilmar Berzins City Architect and City Landscape Architect Heritage Study (TKD Architects and Taylor Brammer, October 2023). The reserve is included in Schedule 5 of Sydney LEP 2012 as part of the listing for the house and grounds, Elizabeth Bay House, 7-9 Onslow Avenue, Elizabeth Bay (Item I594). The Reserve is also located within the Elizabeth and Rushcutters Bay Urban Conservation Area (Item C20).

The assessment of heritage significance has been undertaken using the heritage assessment criteria contained in the New South Wales Heritage Office Guidelines, *Assessing Heritage Significance* (2023),

1.2 Site description

The Arthur McElhone Reserve is located at the intersection of Billyard and Onslow Avenues, between the western side of Billyard Avenue and the eastern side of Onslow Avenue. Elizabeth Bay House is located opposite the Reserve, on the western side of Onslow Avenue. Small apartment blocks constructed during the late 1930s are located to the south of the Reserve and overlook it.

The site is identified as Lot 1 Deposited Plan 15713.



2 View north within the reserve, 2023.

2 Historical overview

2.1 Early site history

The history of Elizabeth Bay House has been extracted and condensed from the history included in the State Heritage Register inventory for Elizabeth Bay House.

In 1815 Governor Macquarie established a fishing village known as Elizabeth Town for a composite group of Gadigal people under the leadership of Bungaree (died 1830). It was a well-meaning but misguided attempt to encourage Aboriginal people to learn about and adopt a more sedentary way of life. The site of Elizabeth Town was behind the sandy beach below what would later become Elizabeth Bay House, in the vicinity of its owner Alexander Macleay's kitchen garden (now Beare Park). The settlement had been abandoned by 1824.

The site of the Arthur McElhone Reserve is on part of 21.85 hectares (54 acres) of land formally granted to Colonial Secretary Alexander Macleay on 19 October 1831. The land had been promised to Macleay by Governor Darling in 1826. In 1828 Darling ordered the subdivision of Woolloomooloo Hill into allotments that could accommodate large residences and extensive grounds and deeds of grant were issued to select members of society, which included senior public servants. Formal grants were issued in 1828 and 1831.

Alexander Macleay (1767-1848) was well known in British and European natural history circles. He was elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London in 1794 and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1809. A civil servant in England, Macleay was forced to retire from 1817 when his department was abolished and his finances were stretched to support a large family, town and country residences, and his obsessive collecting of insects. He accepted the position of Colonial Secretary of NSW, arriving in 1826, and promptly set about improving his grant at Elizabeth Bay using assigned convict labour. He employed his horticultural expertise, assisted from the late 1820s by gardener Robert Henderson, to establish a private botanic garden with picturesque features of dwarf stone walls, rustic bridges, and winding gravel walks interspersed amongst indigenous trees and rare species. The garden became known internationally through the letters and published accounts of local naturalists and visiting scientific expeditions.

Plans for Elizabeth Bay House were in hand from 1832, but construction did not commence until 1835. It was completed by 1839 to the design of prominent architect John Verge. The siting of the house on an axis with Clark Island and the (Sydney Harbour) Heads was a significant aspect of the carefully stage-managed landscape and is recognisable today.

In 1835 prominent local nurseryman Thomas Shepherd wrote: "A splendid open lawn is placed in the main centre front of the house, leaving to view from the adjoining grounds and windows one of the most interesting prospects of the harbour". The site of the lawn is now the Arthur McElhone Reserve. The lawn was famous from the 1840s onwards for its massed bulbs imported from the Cape of Good Hope.

Macleay was ousted from public office in 1837 and by the early 1840s was in serious financial difficulty. An attempt was made to subdivide the land in 1841, but the blocks did not sell. Macleay was saved by his eldest son, William Sharp Macleay (1792-1865), who was a public servant, scholar and naturalist. Alexander Macleay was elected Speaker of the Legislative Council (1843-46) and died at Rose Bay in 1848. William Sharp Macleay lived alone at Elizabeth Bay House until his death in 1865.



3 Alexander Macleay – engraving by Charles Fox after Sir Thomas Lawrence
Source:
<https://www.portrait.gov.au/portraits/2009.131/alexander-macleay-item-2009.131>



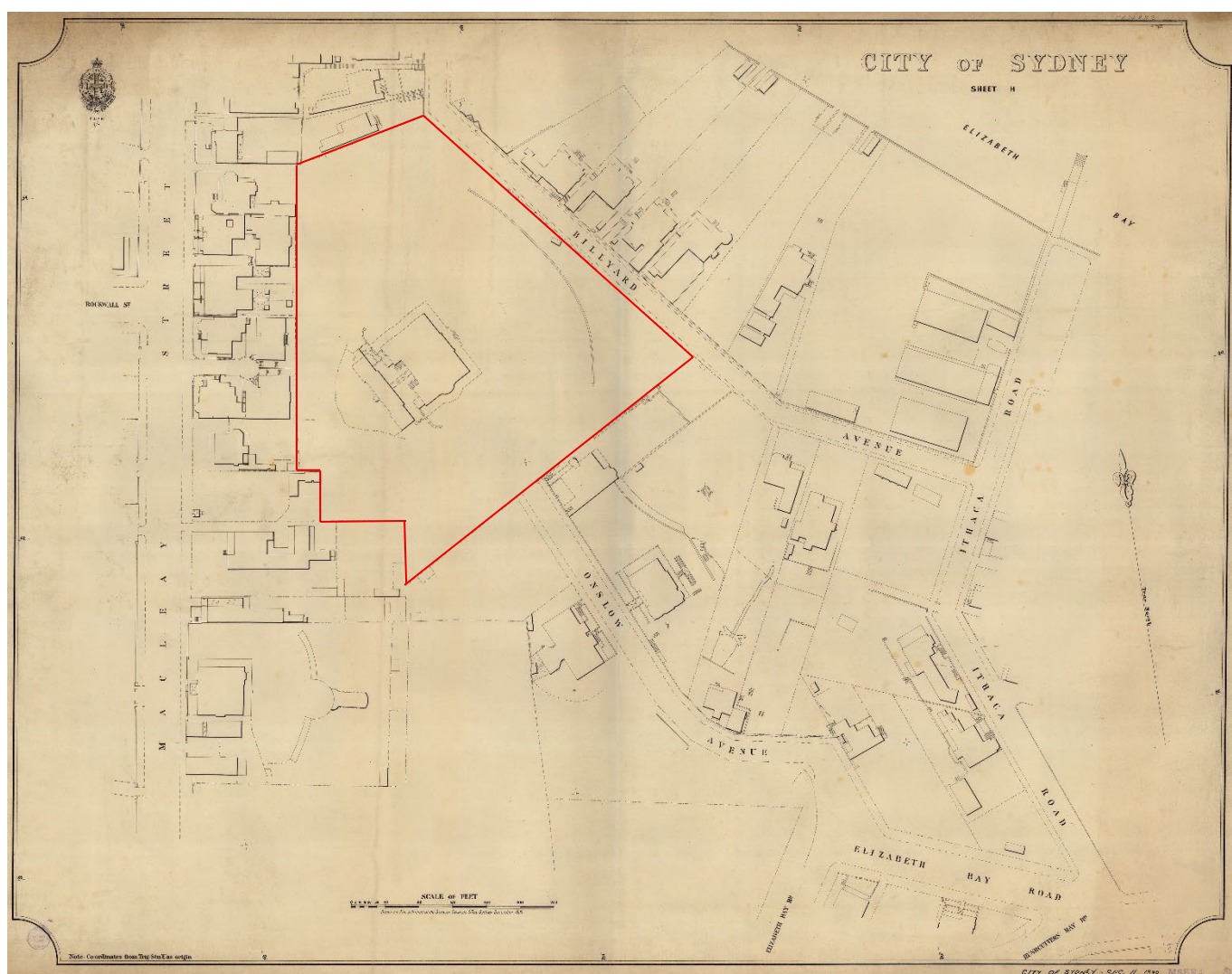
4 Detail of an 1839 watercolour by Conrad Martens showing Elizabeth Bay House and the expansive lawn in front of the building.
Source: National Gallery Victoria
Accession Number 2231-4 at
<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/27443/>

After William Macleay died the estate passed to his brother George, who progressively subdivided the estate and sold leaseholds of a substantial portion of it. Elizabeth Bay House was leased to his cousin William John Macleay and his wife Susan. Following the death of George Macleay in 1891, under the terms of William Sharp Macleay's will the house was passed from their nephew, the late Arthur Alexander Walton Onslow, to his eldest son James Macarthur Onslow of Camden Park. The connection with the Macarthur Onslow family was established by the marriage of Alexander Macleay's daughter Rosa Roberta, who married Arthur Pooley Onslow in 1832. By this time the grounds of Elizabeth Bay House had contracted sharply.

Alexander Macleay's nephew, Sir William John Macleay, occupied the house from around 1865 until his death in December 1891. Lady Macleay remained in occupation until her death in 1903. Late that year George Isaac Michaelis, a prominent businessman and member of Sydney's Jewish community, moved into the house. Michaelis' father-in-law and uncle, Moritz Gottheif, also a significant member of Sydney's Jewish community and a prominent merchant, also resided there.



5 Portion of a circa 1865 survey by Ferdinand Reuss of the Elizabeth Bay House Estate showing the house and the lawn to its north.
Source: State Library of NSW Z/M2 811.18112/1865/1



6 This 1890 survey indicates the extent of subdivision and development around Elizabeth Bay House at the end of the nineteenth century. The boundaries of remaining grounds are indicated.
Source: State Library of NSW Department of Lands Metropolitan Detail Series City of Sydney Sheet H, 1890.





- 7 View of Elizabeth Bay House circa 1895.
Note the broad lawn and mature trees in the location of McElhone Reserve.
Source: Museums of History NSW
Caroline Simpson Collection, record number:34391 Freeman & Co photograph.

2.2 Subdivision and sale

In March 1911 the remaining area of land, including Elizabeth Bay House, was conveyed by James William McArthur Onslow to tenant George Michaelis, who with his family remained in occupation. However, in December 1926 Michaelis mortgaged the property to Gordon Snow Limited, which on the same day transferred the title to a company called Elizabeth Bay Estates Limited. The company was formed to acquire the land on which Elizabeth Bay House stood and was registered in December 1926.¹ Its directors were Leslie James O'Brien Bray (who was noted for his extensive real estate holdings), John Hartley Cook and Barclay Thomson Wright.

The following year the remainder of the land around the house was sold. In this final subdivision the kitchen wing at the rear of the house was demolished to allow an access road for allotments behind it. Elizabeth Bay House was isolated on a minimal sized allotment surrounded by the extension to Onslow Avenue, divorced from its remaining grounds and the famous lawn planted with massed bulbs: "... now it forms an island block within a branching concrete road that fronts the 15 building allotments which the old gardens and tennis courts have become."²

The initial sale of the Elizabeth Bay House Estate took place on 17 September 1927.

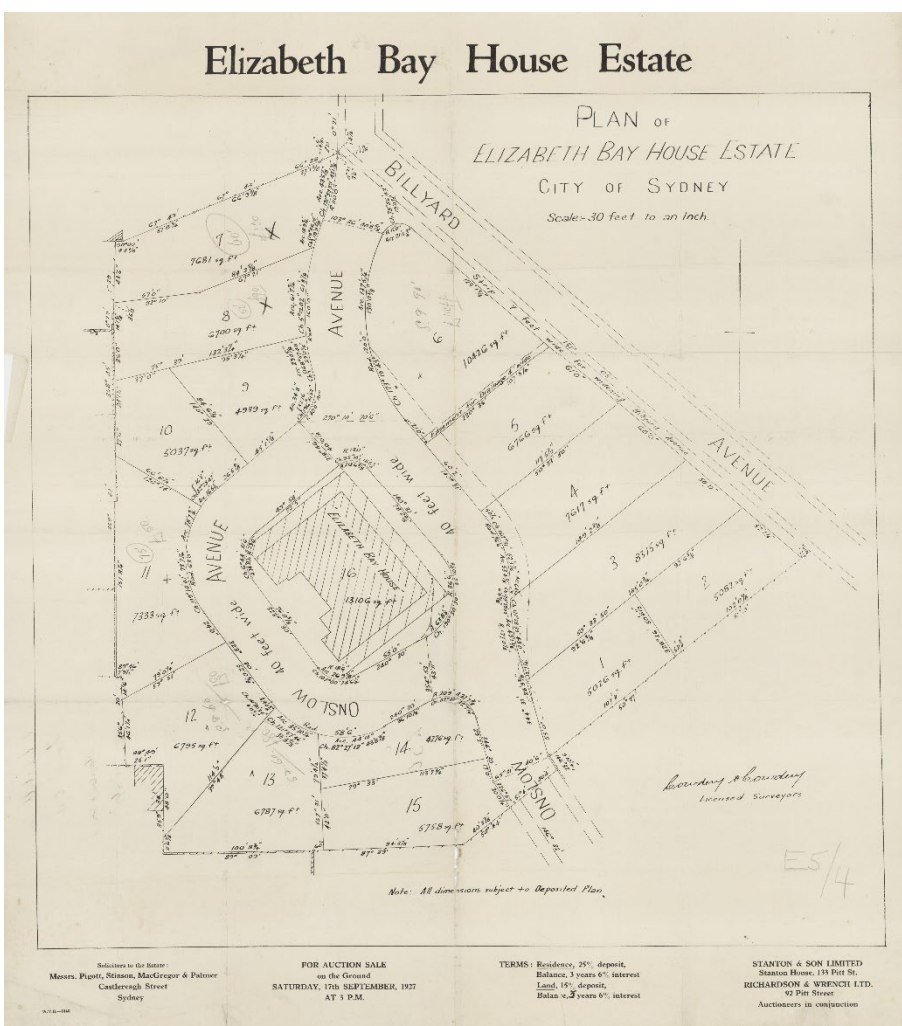
¹ HLRV NSW Old Systems Title Book 1454 Number 200; "Company News", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 December 1926, p.13.

² "Real Estate. Cut Up Historical Estate. Elizabeth Bay House", *The Sun*, 31 August 1927, p.19.



- 8 Portion of a circa 1923 aerial photograph of Elizabeth Bay/Potts Point during its occupation by the Michaelis family, showing Elizabeth Bay House and grounds, and what appears to be a tennis court to its east.

Source: State Library of NSW ON 447/Box 092, Milton Kent photograph.



- 9 Above: people gathered outside Elizabeth Bay House on the day of the sale of the Elizabeth Bay House Estate in September 1927.

Left: Subdivision of the Elizabeth Bay House Estate.

Sources: MHNSW Caroline Simpson Library Record number: 34456, Broughton, Ward & Chaseling photographers; State Library of NSW Z/SP/E5/4.

Although it was reported that Elizabeth Bay House, was purchased for £14,000, apparently by lawyer, property developer and arts patron Arthur Wigram Allen,³ there is no evidence on title documents to establish this. Instead, it remained unsold, along with most of the other allotments, and a caretaker was installed. Evidently a number of artists took up residence in the house. Amongst them was Melbourne based artist Sir John Longstaff, who travelled to other cities as his work dictated.⁴ In September 1935 the house was leased and functioned as a reception house, then in 1940 sold and converted to flats. Lots 4, 5 and 6, the site of the famous Macleay bulb garden, remained unsold.



- 10 Portion of a circa 1935 aerial photograph showing the area of the McElhone Reserve as unformed ground and the dramatically reduced curtilage of Elizabeth Bay House.

Source: State Library of NSW ON 447/Box 019, Milton Kent photograph.

2.3 The Arthur McElhone Reserve

The construction of the Arthur McElhone Reserve was in part the result of local demands for open space and parkland in the locality. In September 1938 a petition signed by 288 "residents, rate payers and property-owners, and claiming to represent 1,450 residents" was submitted to Council requesting it to turn the open land in front of Elizabeth Bay House into a park. The request to acquire the land was declined but the principle of the residents acquiring the land themselves or by public subscription was supported.⁵ This was followed by correspondence from the Town Clerk to the alderman of Fitzroy Ward the following month "informing him that Council agreed to the need for the immediate provision of more garden spaces in Kings Cross and to support a public movement which sought to raise funds for the acquisition of Elizabeth Bay House and the grounds fronting it."⁶



- 11 Circa 1938 photograph looking east along Billyard Avenue. The site of the Arthur McElhone Reserve can be seen at right. Source: City of Sydney Archives UID A-00010413.

³ <https://mhnsw.au/stories/general/kings-cross-bohemian-life-sydney/>; "Elizabeth Bay Property. Historic House Sold", Sydney Morning Herald, 19 September 1927, p.12. The purchaser is not named in this article or others reporting on the sale at this time.

⁴ Scott Carlin, *Elizabeth Bay House: a history and guide* (Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 2000), pp.52-54; *Sands Sydney and suburban directory* 1931 and 1932-33 editions.

⁵ "Ratepayers Ask to be Taxed", *Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 1938, p.9.

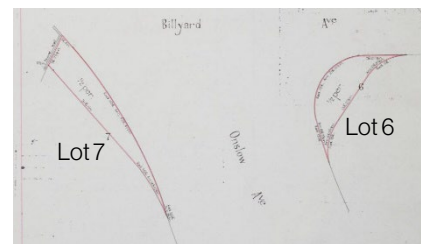
⁶ James Quoyale, Draft SHR listing nomination for Elizabeth Bay House and Landscape Setting (Arthur McElhone Reserve), pp.11-12.

The site of the Arthur McElhone Reserve was the last of several purchases of land in the Elizabeth Bay House Estate made by the Council of the City of Sydney. The first, acquired in June 1929, was for a narrow strip of land 2.1 metres wide along Billyard Avenue⁷ The second acquisition, made in January 1940, was for small portions of Lots 6 and 7 of the Elizabeth Bay House Estate, which was similar to the third purchase made in June 1941 and possibly an adjustment of it.⁸ The land was likely acquired to facilitate street realignment. The land required for the Reserve was not purchased until the end of the decade.

The creation of the Arthur McElhone Reserve was accompanied by significant events within the City Council. After the conclusion of World War II City Engineer Arnold Garnsey expressed his concerns about the inadequacies of Sydney's parks and playgrounds. He submitted a master plan for the improvement of Sydney's parks and playing fields and the acquisition of new parkland to the Council's Health and Recreation Committee on 11 June 1946, which was accepted shortly afterwards. The following month Garnsey and another Council engineer, Ken Andrews, departed on an extensive eight-month tour of cities in North America, Europe and Great Britain. Amongst the numerous recommendations in Garnsey's subsequent report were those for bringing the standard of parks in Sydney up to match those he had seen in cities overseas. He suggested that qualified professionals were critical to the successful implementation of park design and management.

Following the release of Garnsey's report to Council in 1947, its adoption led to the creation of a dedicated Parks and Recreation Department in 1948. Architect Clarence (Clarrie) Garth was appointed to head up the new parks department in 1948, and he oversaw the appointment of several draftsmen, horticulturalists and technicians between 1949 and 1951. None of the original senior officers were landscape architects, but some had had architectural training. However, qualified landscape architect Ilmar Berzins started working at Sydney Municipal Council in June 1951 as a first-grade draftsman (refer to Section 4.1).

Against this background, in July 1946 the Council approved in principle the concept of securing a strip of land that would extend all the way along the waterfront of Elizabeth Bay for 'park purposes'.⁹ In January 1948 Lord Mayor Reg Bartley suggested there would be no difficulty financing this and he would request a report advising on its purchase.¹⁰ A plan dated 1 April 1948, prepared by Sydney City Council staff, indicated this intent. It identified lots 4, 5, and 6 of the Elizabeth Bay House Estate as well as land along the harbour foreshore. However, when a formal resolution was passed for the creation of the reserve, the notion of the foreshore parkland lots had been abandoned.¹¹ The Council of the City of Sydney then acquired Lots 4 and 5 and Lot 6. The transfer of title took place on 20 May 1949.¹²



12 Land acquired by the Municipal Council of Sydney in January 1940 (outlined in red). Source: HLRV NSW Certificate of Title Volume 5142 Folio 152 with TKD overlay.

⁷ HLRV NSW Certificate of Title Volume 4075 folio 199.

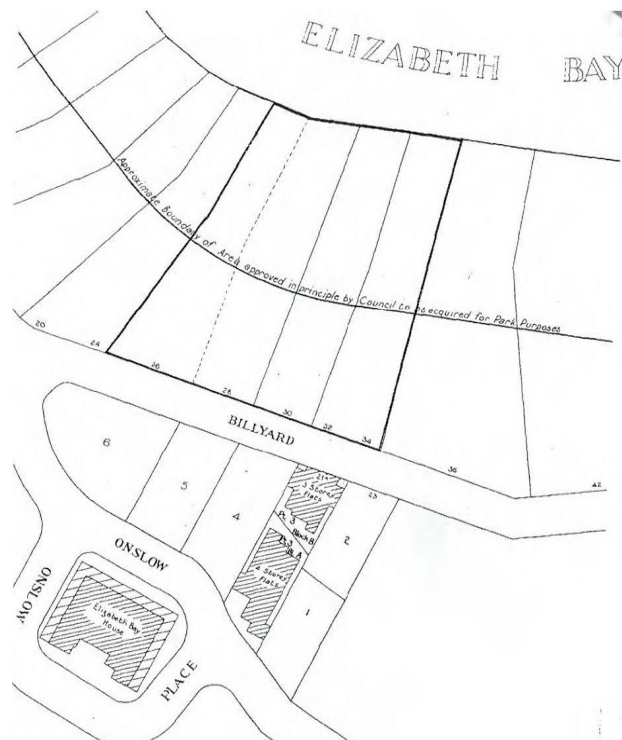
⁸ HLRV NSW Certificate of Title Volume 4731 Folio 163.

⁹ Quoye, p.12.

¹⁰ "Elizabeth Bay Park Move", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 January 1948, p.2.

¹¹ Quoye, p.12.

¹² HLRV NSW Certificate of Title Volume 5386 Folio 202.



13 Left: 1949 aerial photograph from 1949 showing the development of flats constructed around 1938 on the eastern side of the future McElhone Reserve and flat development to the west of Elizabeth Bay House. The Reserve remains unformed.

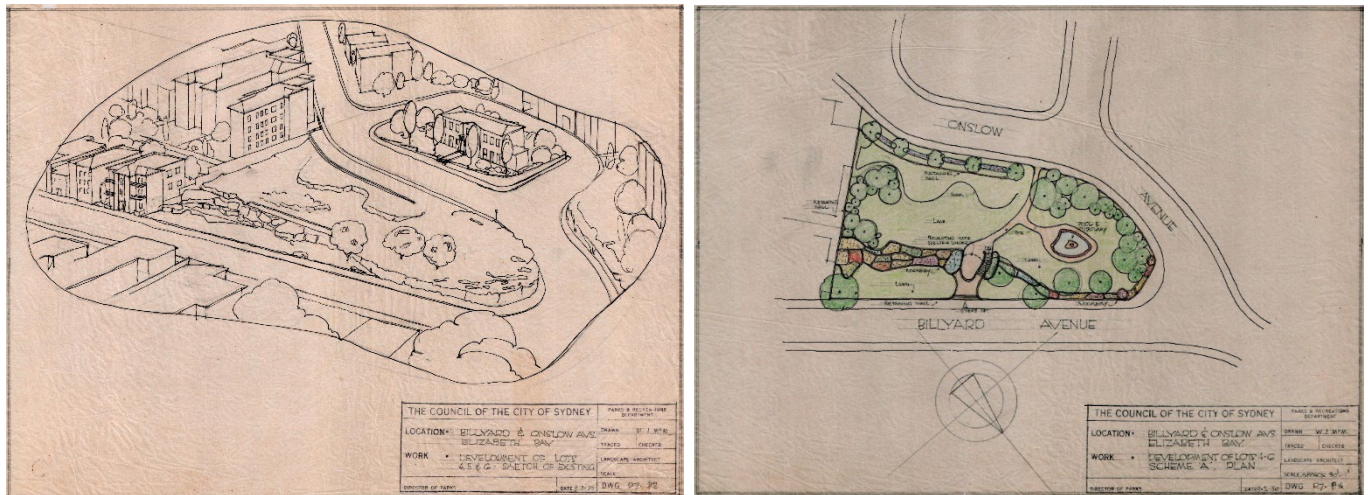
Right: plan showing the Municipal Council of Sydney's proposed acquisition of allotments extending to Elizabeth Bay, 1948.

Sources: City of Sydney Archives Aerial Photographic Survey 1949, Image 26; reproduced in Mayne-Wilson & Associates, Draft Heritage Study and Review of Proposed Landscape Master Plan of the McElhone Reserve.

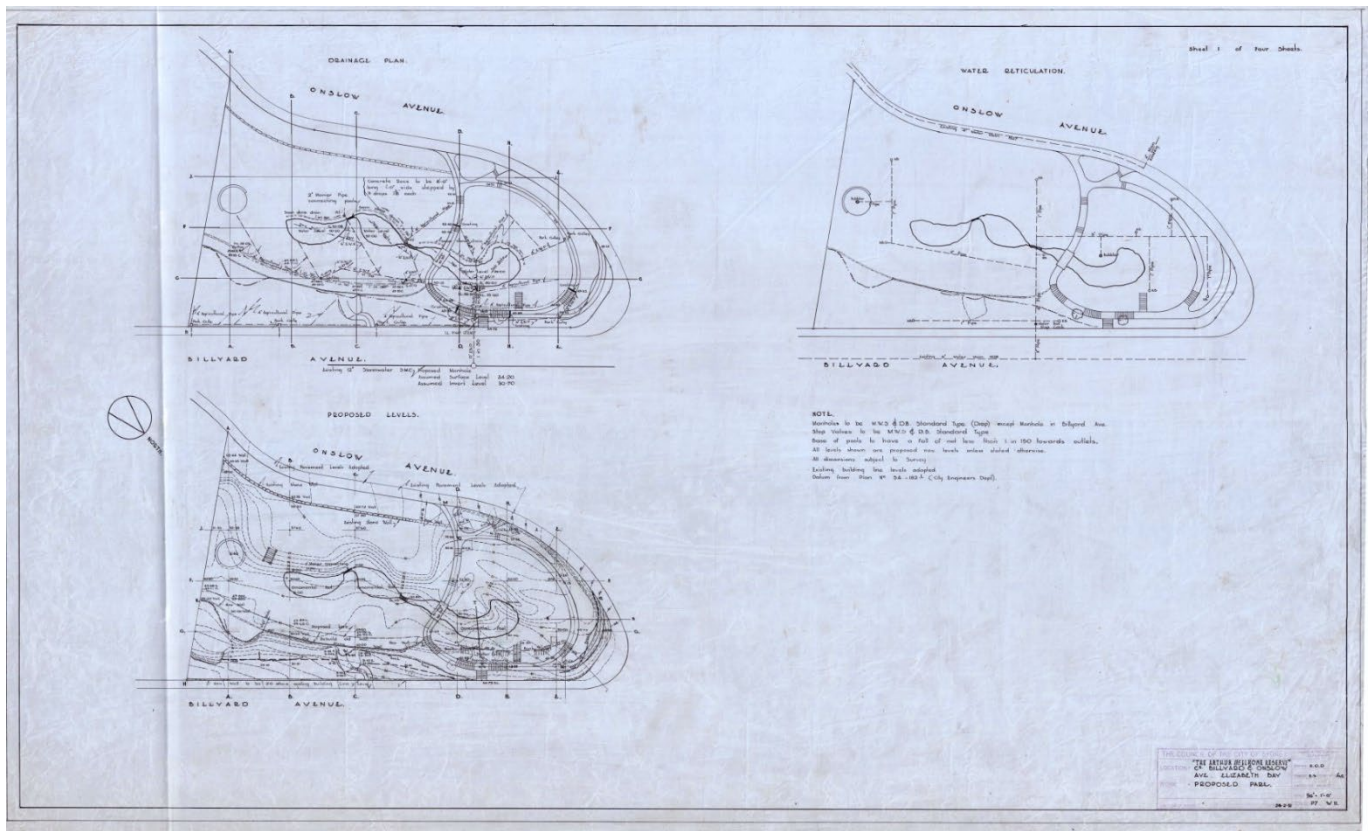
An early sketch layout of the proposed park is dated 9 February 1950, as is an aerial perspective showing existing site conditions. The sketch investigating the park layout included expanses of lawn traversed by a path between Onslow and Billyard Avenues and partially enclosed by perimeter planting. A rockery mediated the slope in the north-eastern section and a pool with a statue in its centre was located in the north-western section of the park.¹³ The design of the park continued to evolve and in October 1950 Council approved the sum of £5,700 for its construction and completion. The new park was named in honour of Arthur McElhone during the year. The final plan was completed in January 1953.¹⁴ By this time Ilmar Berzins had been working on the project for up to eighteen months, although the exact time that his involvement commenced has not been ascertained.

¹³ City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-01200449 and Unique ID A-01200448

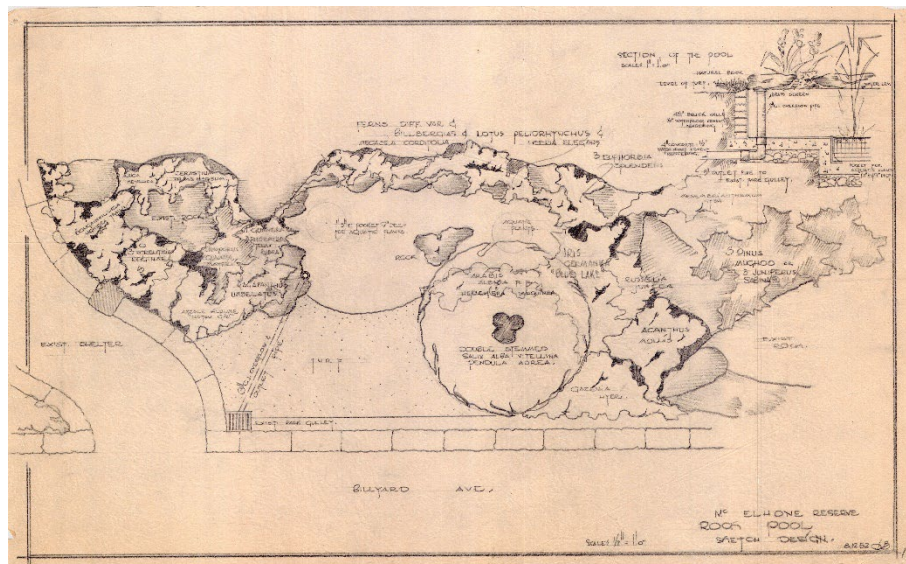
¹⁴ Mayne-Wilson & Associates, Draft Heritage Study and Review of Proposed Landscape Master Plan of the McElhone Reserve, February 2001, no pagination.



- 14 Left: aerial render of the site of the Arthur McElhone Reserve showing existing conditions in 1950.
 Right: early conceptual sketch of the proposed Reserve, February 1950.
 Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A- -01200448 and Unique ID A-01200449.



- 15 Drawing dated 28 February 1951 describing drainage, water reticulation and levels at the McElhone Reserve.
 Source: City of Sydney Archives UID A- 00006416.



- 16 Sketch design for the rock pool at the McElhone Reserve. The drawing is dated 8 December 1952 and initialled by Ilmar Berzins.

Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-01200447



- 17 View to Elizabeth Bay House from the site of the McElhone Reserve, January 1954. Structural works associated with the Reserve are very evident. Source: Museums of History NSW Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection PIC 1999/1, Barry Wollaston photograph.



- 18 Selected views of the Arthur McElhone Reserve taken in 1954 showing some of the features designed by Ilmar Berzins. Source: City of Sydney Archives UID A-00013997 and Unique ID A-00013998.

2.4 Arthur McElhone (1868-1946)

Arthur Joseph McElhone (1868-1946) was the son of politician John McElhone and his wife Mary Jane, née Browne. He married Eva Catherine Walshe in 1897 and had two sons and two daughters; his son John Fitzroy McElhone also served on Council. McElhone was Alderman for Fitzroy Ward from December 1899 to December 1927 and was subsequently re-elected, serving from June 1930 to June 1946. When the incumbent Lord Mayor, Alfred Livingstone Parker, died in October 1935, McElhone briefly fulfilled the role from late October to December 1935. At various times he served as a member of the Board of Water Supply and the Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board. He established a record as an Alderman, serving for 44 years other than a short period when the City of Sydney was controlled by a Commission. When the Sydney County Council was formed to take over the control and administration of the City Council's electricity undertaking, McElhone became one of its first chairmen. He was Councillor of the Sydney County Council between 1935 and 1937 and between 1942 and 1946, Chairman in 1937 and 1945, and Deputy Chairman between 1943 and 1944 and again in 1946.

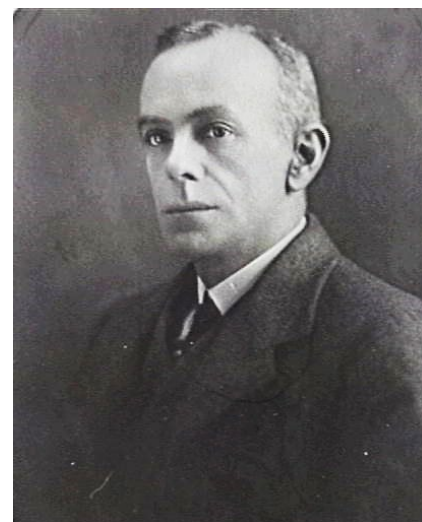
At the time of his death, Arthur McElhone was the managing director of Nicholson's Pty Ltd. and the chairman of directors of the North Coast Steamship Company and the Eagle and Star Insurance Company Ltd. He was a director of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital for 27 years and gave service to several other hospitals.¹⁵

2.5 Later history of the Arthur McElhone Reserve

The maintenance of the Arthur McElhone Reserve was given high priority by the Council's Parks & Gardens Department and evidently only the best of the Department's gardeners were permitted to work there. This was reflected by gardening awards sponsored by *The Sydney Morning Herald* it received during the period when Sydney's Waratah Festival was staged, between 1956 and 1973:

... for the excellence of its design and plantings, augmented by showy displays of annuals in the front of some of its beds. That, combined with the launching by Lord Mayor Leo Port of the "Greening of Sydney" campaign in 1972, encouraged more extensive and larger plantings in the Reserve ... This lush, more exuberant planting was much loved by many, partly because it gave an increased sense of comfort and privacy ... but it also largely obscured views to Elizabeth Bay House from the central garden room of the Reserve.¹⁶

The title to the Reserve was transferred to the Council of the City of South Sydney around 1995. It has since returned to the City of Sydney.



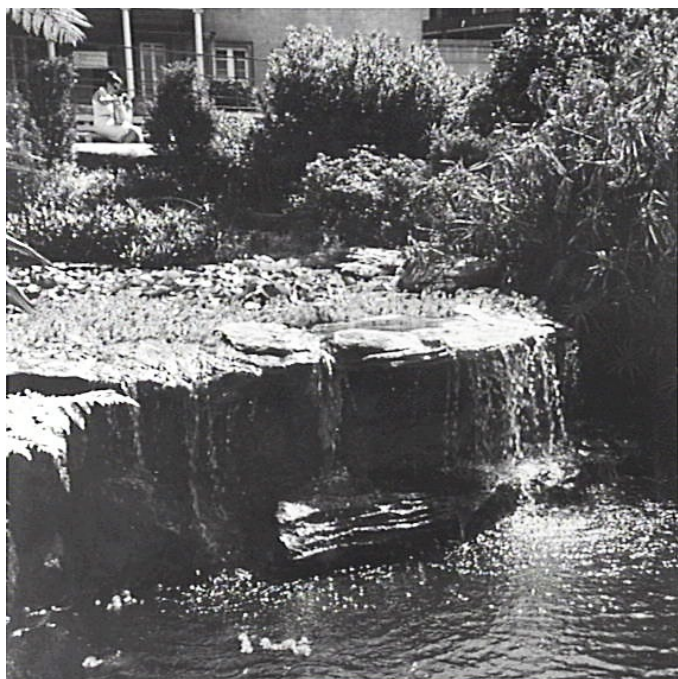
19 Arthur Joseph McElhone, circa 1923.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A- 00006416.

¹⁵ <https://www.sydneyaldermen.com.au/alderman/arthur-mcelhone/>

¹⁶ Mayne-Wilson & Associates, no pagination.



20 1960s photograph of the water feature located to the northwestern end of the park. This has similarities to the 1962 Fragrance Garden in Phillip Park designed by Berzins in Phillip Park. The water feature has since been removed. The detailed planting around the water feature is typical of horticultural expression of the 1950s. Use of detail planting of this type declined in the latter part of the 20th century. Arthur Joseph McElhone, circa 1923. Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00013999.



21 Photographs taken during 1965 showing details of the cascade water feature that forms part of the original park design by Berzins (left) and looking south to the stone bridge and stone edging to the pond that was added after the Reserve was initially completed. Note the maturity of the landscape that provides a sense of place screening adjacent residential flats. Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID



- 22 Photograph of the Arthur McElhone Reserve looking south from Billyard Avenue taken during the 1980s. The Reserve reflects changes to the original concept undertaken by South Sydney Council. Note the open character of the Reserve.

Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00019663.

Landscape consultant Warwick Maye Wilson, writing in 2001, noted that

In the past few years, Berzins' design has been incrementally altered, with much of the vegetation pruned back, and some of it replaced with smaller species. While the reduction in plant size and volume is consistent with Berzins' original design intentions, there has also been some loss of shade, screening and privacy. This has led to public criticism, to the point where Council recognised the need for a study to assess its essential character, and advise on how that should be maintained into the future.¹⁷

The reserve has indeed experienced some changes over time, particularly in relation to the ongoing changes to the vegetation where plantings, azaleas to the northern end and tree planting to the southern end that formed part of the Berzins plan were removed in the late 20th century. The effect of this removal was the reduction in the amenity of the Reserve where formerly a sense of enclosure was enjoyed from the surrounding apartments; the park was more exposed. The result was a number of complaints to South Sydney Council and a revised master plan was prepared by Warwick Mayne-Wilson around 2001 on behalf of Council and these and other concerns were addressed. The horticultural diversity that was a feature of the Berzins plan was retained and unsympathetic details such a sandstone edge to the pond was removed.



- 23 Photograph taken in the first half of 2003 showing the view across Sydney Harbour available from the Reserve. Seating appears to be a standard design.

Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00064250, Paul Green photograph.

¹⁷ Mayne-Wilson & Associates, no pagination.



24 photograph taken in the first half of 2003 showing modest screen planting that superseded the earlier poplars planted along the southern boundary. New hedge planting above Billyard Avenue. Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00064221,



26 photograph taken in May 1965 showing established poplars along the southern boundary. The lighting fixture remained in place in 2003. Source: Paul Green photograph; Unique ID A-00014002



25 Photograph of the Reserve taken in October 2004. Railings have been introduced for public safety, while user amenity is facilitated by the installation of a bin and signage. Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00065404, Sharon Hickey photograph.

3 Physical evidence

The Arthur McElhone Reserve occupies an area in front of Elizabeth Bay House and is separated by Onslow Avenue from the house. The majority of the park occupies a level area that has been formed through the erection of stone retaining walls at the top and bottom of the park, the walls at the bottom incorporating the naturally occurring sandstone outcrops. The design ensures that the views from Elizabeth Bay house to the harbour are retained and that its setting, while much modified since colonial times, can still be appreciated. The park has a number of built features including a stone bridge, pond, stairs and seating that encourage its use and enjoyment as a place of respite.

The Arthur McElhone Reserve is distinguished by a sequence of grassed areas that are arranged as small interlocking spaces that are framed by shrub planting with taller trees to the periphery of the park. Berzins built on the formal elliptical grassed form that was implemented by Alexander Macleay in the form of a 'carriage round', a typical colonial garden feature, but due to the physical restrictions of the site it was not used as such.

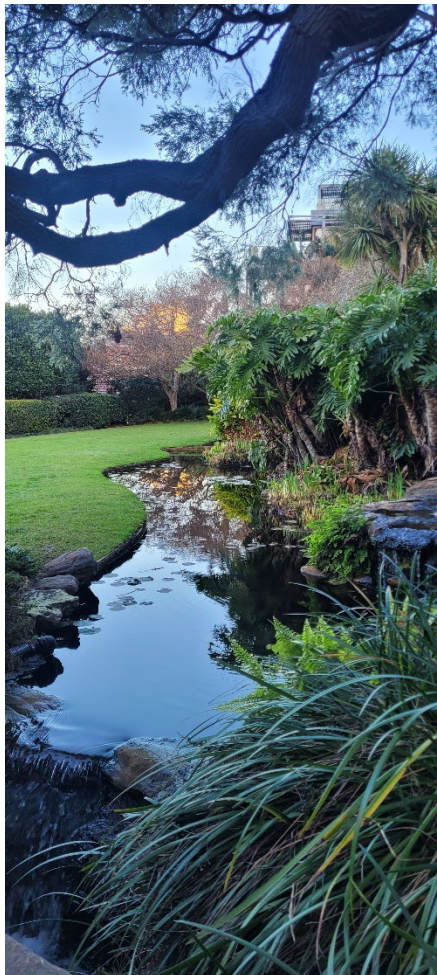
The stonework is of a sandstone bookleaf style that was typical of both residential and civic works at the time and also used by Berzins in the contemporary Sandringham Gardens in Hyde Park. Minor modifications have occurred over time, focused on the evolving planting types that have been used. In general, the layout and character of the Reserve designed by Berzins has been maintained. The hard landscape features of access stairs, terracing, stone bridge and paths have remained intact and with this, the overall setting to Elizabeth Bay House and its relationship with the harbour.



27 View from Billyard Avenue indicating the extensive stonework that was constructed as part of the Berzins plan.
Source: Matthew Taylor.



28 General view of reserve looking north. Note the established trees to the periphery of the reserve that forms a sense of enclosure.
Source: Matthew Taylor.



29 Detail views of the reserve noting the intact stonework and paving and grass edge to water feature.
Source: Matthew Taylor.



30 Contemporary photographs of the park showing the water feature and bubbler on the corner of Onslow Avenue and Billyard Avenue.

Source: Matthew Taylor.

4 Comparative analysis

4.1 Ilmar Berzins

Ilmar Berzins (1921-1993) was born in Latvia.¹⁸ He studied horticulture at the State Horticultural College in Riga, Latvia and landscape architecture at the State Horticultural College and University of Technology in Hanover, Germany. He, along with his wife Lucija and son Alnis arrived in Melbourne on 23 February 1949. Migration records indicate the family's destination as a property called "Hazelhome" in Orange, the home of members of the Sampson family.¹⁹ While in Orange Berzins worked in the Email Ltd whitegoods factory to pay off the bond for the fares to Australia. During this time Berzins prepared a master plan and nominated plantings for the Orange Golf Course:

Something between two and three thousand trees and shrubs have been planted since 1949 – pines, elms, magnolias, chestnuts, crab-apples, flowering cherries and prunuses, rhododendrons, berry-bushes, viburnums, azaleas and a multitude of others. The plantings have been carried out under the supervision of Elmar [sic] Berzins, who has had wide European experience in landscape-planning.²⁰

Ilmar Berzins and his family moved to Sydney in 1951. Berzins started working at Sydney Municipal Council on 13 June as a first-grade draftsman. His recruitment by the Council is widely said to be the first employment by local government of a formally trained landscape architect in Australia. According to pioneering landscape architect Allan Corry,

... he brought Modernist European design styles to a city desperately seeking innovative civic design ideas. Berzins was given many opportunities to create new community spaces and redesign existing parks. He developed a distinctive style that incorporated free-form shapes. Sandstone book-leaf walling, naturally sculpted boulders, water-worn pebbles, and strongly contrasting plant forms and textures, all artistically arranged to form pleasing compositions, a marked contrast to the traditional council designs of that time. His most important designs were completed during the 1950s and 1960s ...²¹

In 1953 Ilmar Berzins was promoted to senior draftsman. He and Lucija became naturalised citizens in April 1958.²² His abilities were recognised by the City Council and he was promoted to supervising draftsman in 1964, followed by assistant landscape architect in 1966. He was then promoted to chief technical officer in 1971, followed in 1984 by promotion to Director of Parks and Gardens. In this role he would advise external consultants on major urban projects. Berzins retired in 1986.

Ilmar Berzins was described by his colleague John Sweaney as "very flamboyant, probably one of the best draughtsmen and most knowledgeable person associated with horticulture that I'd encountered".²³ According to landscape architect and urban designer Tempe McGowan,



31 Ilmar Berzins, 1949.
Source: National Archives of Australia Series A2571, ID 203663834.

18 His name appears as Ilmars Berzins on immigration records held at the National Archives of Australia.

19 National Archives of Australia Series A2571, ID 203663834

20 "Golf and Blossom", *The Bulletin*, 21 October 1953, p.4.

21 Allan Correy, "Berzins, Ilmars" in Richard Aitken and Michael Looker (editors), *Oxford Companion to Australia Gardens* (Oxford University Press in association with the Australian Garden History Society, 2002), p.87.

22 Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, 'Certificates of Naturalization,' Thursday 24 Apr 1958 [Issue No.23], Page 1261.

23 John Sweaney, Interviewed by Jo Kijas on 8 May 2012 (City of Sydney oral history collection), quoted in biography of Ilmars Berzins provided by the City of Sydney.

"[Berzins] held the passionate belief that all people need to enjoy nature and that nature in turn can ameliorate the human temperament. ... His designs were socially responsive and typical of trends in international, modernist design culture in the way he created little arcadian retreats in the city wilderness."²⁴

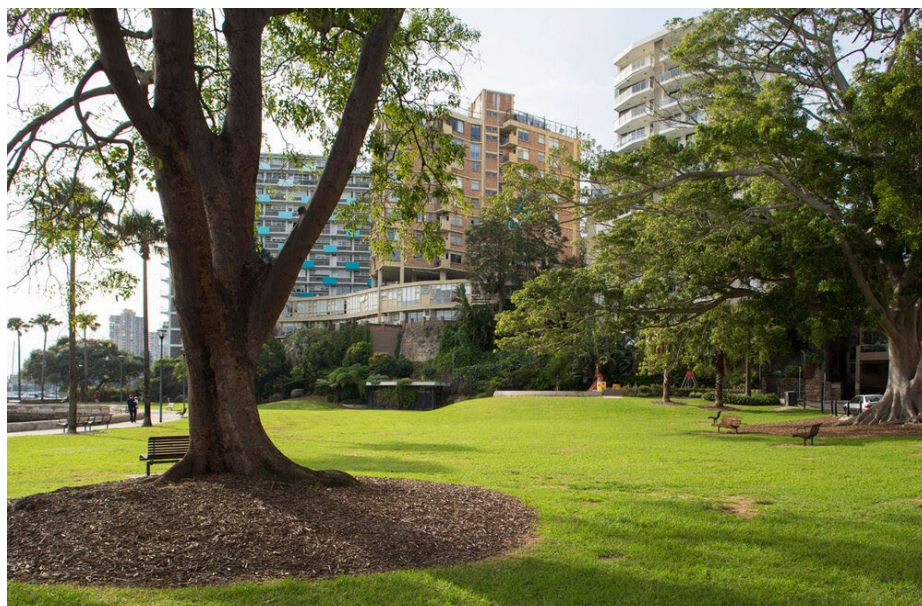
Berzins' abilities were suited to the task, for he had the unwavering aim of introducing nature into the city and he instigated very liberal planting programs. His aesthetic was not related to Australian indigenous landscapes, instead introducing a European sensibility to the thoughtful design of public open spaces in Sydney, detailing his landscape designs in a way that was unprecedented in public works. Over his long career, Berzins gradually utilised more Australian natives and applied the principles of the Sydney Bush School of landscape architecture.

4.2 Other parks and reserves

This section of the report discusses other parks and reserves undertaken by the City of Sydney during the periods in which Ilmar Berzins worked there.

Beare Park

Beare Park is a harbourside park that also formed part of the original Elizabeth Bay House grounds. It is characterised by a broad grassed area to the waterfront that is in part the result of land reclamation when the seawall to the park was constructed in 1901. The detailed changes of level and stonework that are a feature of McElhone Reserve are not evident in this park. However, there are a number of features such as the ornamental drinking fountain of 1870 and a group of mature Washington Palms that are thought to be remnants from Elizabeth Bay House. The fountain and birdbath inserted into the existing octagonal pool were apparently designed by Ilmar Berzins, installed circa 1955. More recent works completed in 2008 included upgrades by Landscape Architect Jane Irwin, refurbishment of the c1960 toilet block (overseen by Council Architect Albert Smillie) by Sam Crawford Architects, and installation of a playground.²⁵



32 Looking east across Beare Park and the fountain and birdbath associated with Ilmar Berzins (right).
Source: <https://www.regalinnovations.com.au/completed-projects/beare-park-nsw>

²⁴ Tempe McGowan, 'Humanising the City', *Monument*, Issue No. 25, 1998, p.58.

²⁵ <https://www.regalinnovations.com.au/completed-projects/beare-park-nsw>

John Armstrong Reserve

Named after one-time Lord Mayor of Sydney and former NSW senator John Armstrong, the Reserve was formed after the extension of Greenknowe Avenue to Elizabeth Bay Road. It has not been ascertained if Ilmar Berzins was involved in its design. The Reserve formed a portion of the garden to Greenknowe, a colonial era house that was demolished in the early 20th century. The design of the Reserve has a grassed area with seating on the more level top portion and garden beds to the periphery that make up the slope from Elizabeth Bay Road to Onslow Avenue. A pre-existing sandstone retaining wall to a portion of the Onslow Avenue frontage takes up a section of this level change. Originally conceived as a park to appreciate views of the harbour, plantings of trees have since obscured this view. The drawings for the Reserve, dated 1965, indicate a number of exotic species planted as shrubs, informal rockeries making up much of the grades, and an existing Camphor Laurel tree. The open lawn area to the top of the reserve has been retained with a supplementary path inserted to the toe of the bank at the corner of Onslow Avenue.



33 The John Armstrong Reserve, July 1967.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique
ID A-00012628.

Fitzroy Gardens, Potts Point

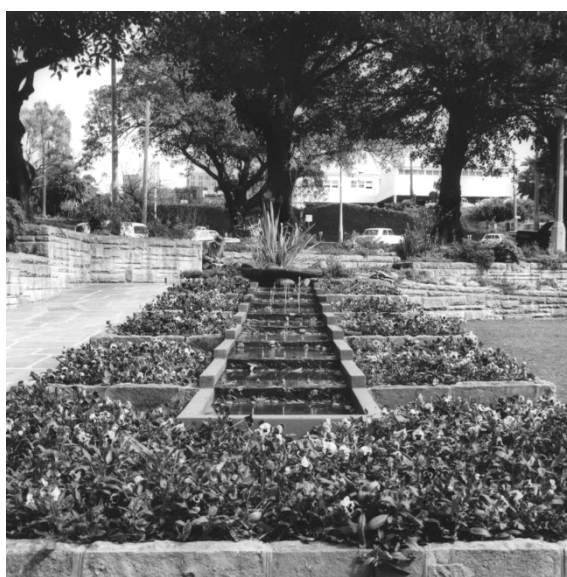
The area that the gardens occupy originally formed part of the grounds of the Elizabeth Bay Estate. The gardens have gone through a number of iterations, these including the demolition of the colonial house Osterley in 1927 and enlargement with the demolition of Maramanah and the resumption of Tanilba on Macleay Street in 1954. In 1959 the Florence Bartley Library was constructed on the site of Tanilba followed by the construction of the El Alamein Fountain in 1961. The park was considerably extended in 1975 with a portion of Elizabeth Bay Road closed to traffic. Prior to the road closure in 1975, the park was substantially upgraded in 1971 with extensive paving, raised planters, planting and sitting areas. These works were undertaken under the direction of Berzins and indicate an evolving style of landscape design that reflected contemporary needs for a park in an urban setting. Details included elements of the so-called Sydney School, which preferred direct use of materials left in their natural state, in the selection of brickwork, along with Berzins' interest in broader horticultural trends in the use of Bird of Paradise plants and other exotic species. These changes changed the character of the park to a substantially urban form with extensive areas of paving that recognised the importance and high use of the park in a dense urban setting.



- 34 Looking across Fitzroy Gardens towards the Florence Bartley Library during the 1980s. The library has since been demolished.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00012065.

Sandringham Gardens and the Fragrance Garden

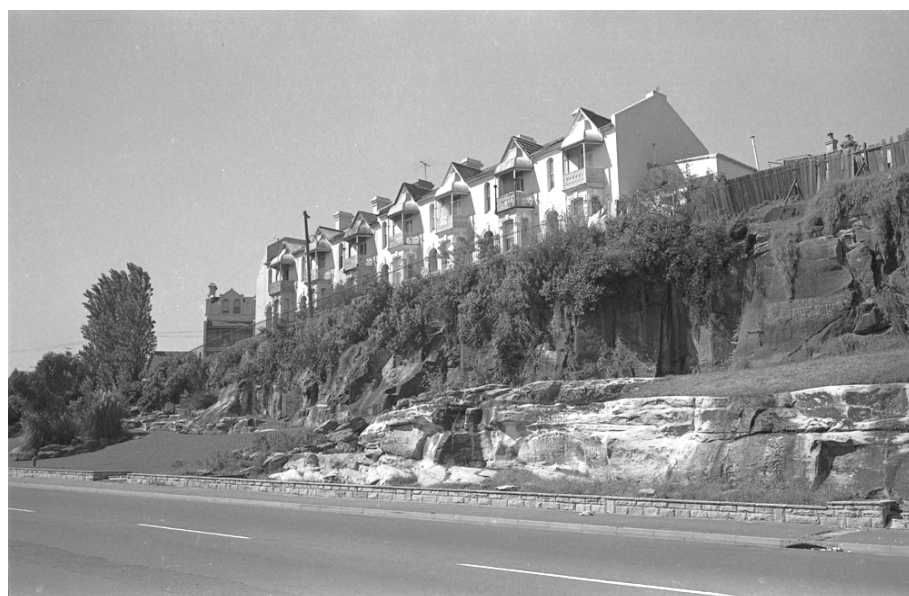
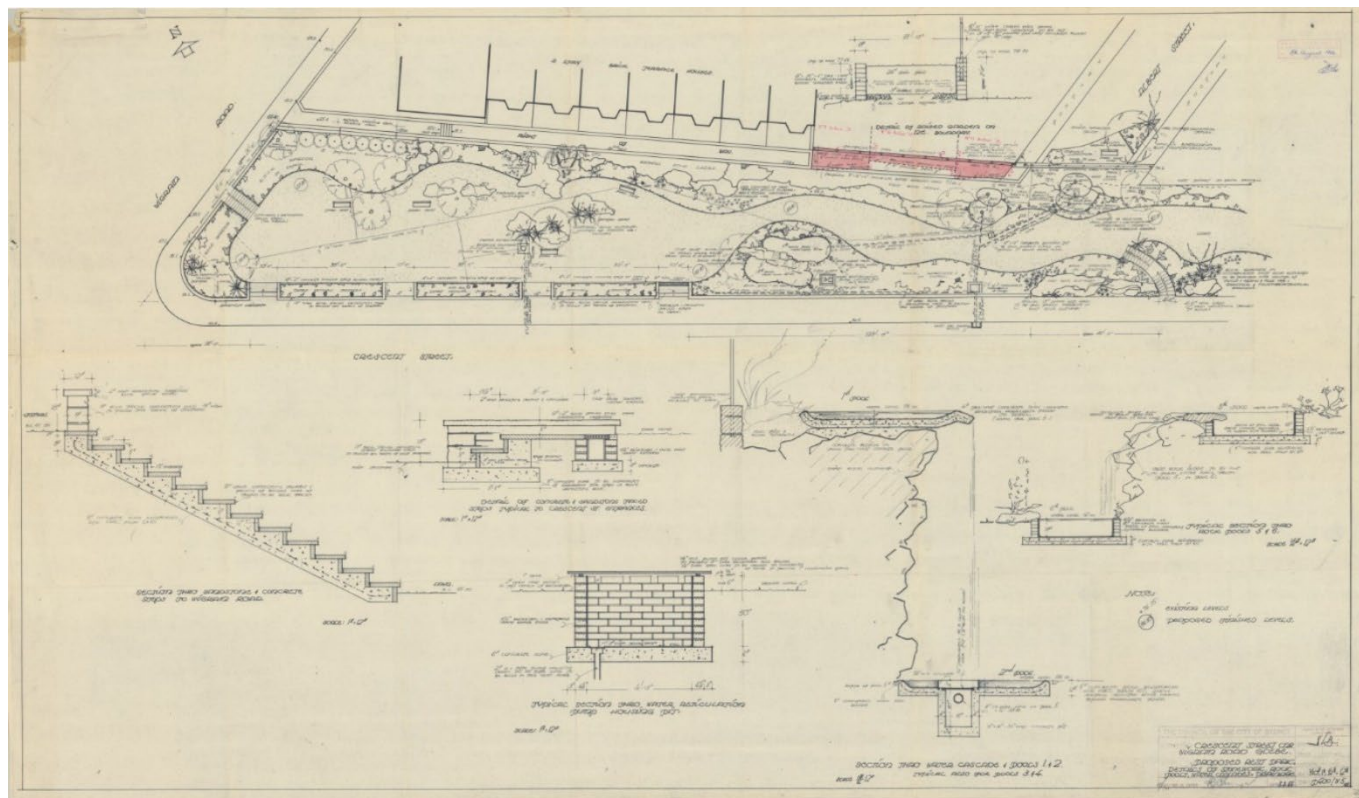
Other notable gardens in the City of Sydney that are associated with Ilmar Berzins include Sandringham Gardens in Hyde Park (1954) and the Fragrance Garden constructed for the Industrial Blind Institute in Phillip Park (1962; both the Institute and Garden have since been demolished). These formal gardens shared similar characteristics in the use of materials, retaining walls and detailed planting. Water, including fountains, was also integral to both these gardens as an integral part of the design.



- 35 Left: Sandringham Gardens, 1952.
Right: looking along the fountain cascade at the Fragrance Garden, 1964.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00014658 and Unique ID A-00014864.

Lewis Hoad Reserve

Ilmar Berzins was also associated with the landscaping for the Lewis Hoad Reserve, named after the champion tennis player, on Minogue Crescent at Forest Lodge. It was sited on a residue of land associated with road widening. A drawing describing the layout of the "rest park" and details of its construction is dated 5 March 1965 and initialled by Berzins. Like the Arthur McElhone Reserve its design incorporated an open if narrow expanse of lawn enclosed by planting, stone retaining walls and pools of water linked by gentle cascades. A natural rock outcrop was retained. It has not been determined how much of the original design was constructed, but sections of low stone wall and steps along Minogue Crescent still remain in place.



- 36 Above: drawing prepared in the first quarter of 1965 describing the layout and detailing of the Lewis Hoad Reserve. Left: looking south-east along Minogue Crescent to the Lewis Hoad Reserve, 1970. Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00088259 and Unique ID A-00032730, Albert Renshaw photograph.

Other public spaces

Ilmar Berzins' time with the City of Sydney coincided with a later twentieth century movement toward pedestrianizing public spaces or closing sections of road to expand public space. According to Andrew Briger, former Deputy Lord Mayor and an important figure in the formulation of the 1971 City of Sydney Strategic Plan,

In December 1971 a new Floor Space Ratio Code and a Parking Code were approved and the long-term process of implementing the integrated city-wide pedestrian network commenced following the closure of the first section of Martin Place to vehicular traffic. This led to numerous streetscape improvements in what was referred to as the "greening" of the city. Most notable amongst these were Sydney Square, the Circular Quay and Dixon Street (Chinatown) malls, Railway Square, Wynyard Place and the street closures of South Paddington, Surry Hills, Chippendale, Pyrmont, Elizabeth Bay and the Fitzroy Gardens extensions at Potts Point.²⁶

Berzins designed the layout and landscape treatment of a number of such pedestrianising schemes. Some notable streetscape upgrades designed by or under Berzins include landscaping to public space in Ulster Street, Paddington (1974), the street closure and landscaping for Springfield Avenue, Kings Cross (1983) and streetscape treatment of Macquarie Place and Macquarie Place Park (1975). The Arthur McElhone Reserve is not the result of a street closure and is not part of this body of work.

26 Andrew Briger, "The Politics of Planning" in Peter Webber (editor), *The Design of Sydney: Three Decades of Change in the City Centre* (Law Book Company, 1988), p.52.

5 Assessment of heritage significance

5.1 Assessment

Historical significance

Criterion A An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

The Arthur McElhone Reserve is significant for its location within the visual curtilage of Elizabeth Bay House and the sensitive demonstration of modernist landscape design principles within that curtilage, which reflect a respect and understanding of historic landscapes. The site was extensively developed to meet contemporary recreation needs.

It is significant as a seminal park development initiated, designed and executed by the City of Sydney in the immediate Post World War II period in the City of Sydney.

The Arthur McElhone Reserve fulfils this criterion at a Local level.

Historical associations

Criterion B An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance to NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

The site of the Arthur McElhone Reserve is associated with Alexander Macleay, being part of the grounds of Elizabeth Bay House. It was subsequently formed as a public park that in its name commemorates Arthur McElhone, a long serving alderman of the City of Sydney.

The Reserve is associated with the landscape architect Berzins, reputedly the first professional landscape architect to be engaged by a municipal council in Australia. It is amongst the earliest works by Berzins while employed by the City of Sydney, demonstrating at a high level of sensitivity to the broader setting of Elizabeth Bay House and the creation of a park that incorporates modernist concepts of landscape design.

The Reserve meets this criterion at a State and Local level.

Aesthetic significance

Criterion C An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the local area).

The Arthur McElhone Reserve is a rare intact landscape design of Ilmar Berzins that encompasses a number of significant features. It incorporates topographic changes of level, and its detailed design features a water feature and stone bridge and varied planting. The landscape design has a reliance on the underlying architectural layout of the Reserve that provides an integrity and structure to the modulation of the park as a whole. The park design respects the original setting of Elizabeth Bay House by ensuring that the relationship of the house and broader setting to the harbour is respected and enhanced while providing a high level of detailed landscape design and amenity to the park itself. International design ideas of the time by leading landscape architects such as Christopher Tunnard and others were applied by Berzins.

The Reserve's location to the formal axis of Elizabeth Bay House forms an important interpretative tool in the understanding of the setting of the house and its relationship to its harbour setting. The Reserve demonstrates a sensitivity to this significant colonial setting by reinforcing Elizabeth Bay House's views to and from the harbour while recognising the park's role as an important public amenity in the provision of much needed open green space.

The park demonstrates important landscape concepts of park design taking in modernist ideas of providing an internal setting of green spaces for the use and enjoyment for the public, the formation of access pathways, water feature and a pedestrian bridge over this water feature. The hard landscape elements are carefully detailed and constructed in sandstone, resulting in a long-lasting legacy for the form and shapes designed by Berzins. It is considered his most significant work for the City of Sydney.

The planting character reflects a broad diversity and horticultural interest, consistent both with Alexander Macleay's broad and diverse interests in horticultural specimens, both Australian and exotic and Berzins intent of a horticulturally diverse planting scheme.

The Reserve meets this criterion at a Local level.

Social significance

Criterion D An item has strong or special associations with a particular community or cultural group in NSW (or the local area) for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

The Arthur McElhone Reserve is understood to have great significance to residents and visitors to the locality because of its high level of visual amenity and as a valuable landscaped open recreational area.

The Reserve meets this criterion at a local level.

Research potential

Criterion E An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

The Arthur McElhone Reserve demonstrates the evolving landscape design in post-World War II Sydney that fused international design movements to a significant location within the visual curtilage of Elizabeth Bay House. The design demonstrates the intellectual approach of Berzins as a post-World War II immigrant and his training as a landscape designer that reflected international design trends of the day.

The Reserve meets the criterion at a Local level.

Rarity

Criterion F An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

The Arthur McElhone Reserve is a rare intact design of the significant landscape architect Ilmar Berzins and a rare intact example of advanced mid twentieth century landscape design in the City of Sydney.

The Reserve meets this criterion at a Local level.

Representativeness

Criterion G An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's (or local area's) cultural or natural places, or cultural or natural environment.

The Arthur McElhone Reserve is representative of mid twentieth century landscape design expressed in the use of detailed sandstone walling and plant types. The design responds to the immediate visual curtilage of a significant colonial house by maintaining the prospect and views to the harbour from the house.

The Reserve meets this criterion at a Local level.

5.2 Statement of significance

The Arthur McElhone Reserve is significant at State and local levels for several reasons.

Historically its site is associated with historically significant Colonial Secretary Alexander Macleay, being part of the grounds of Elizabeth Bay House. It commemorates Arthur McElhone, a long serving alderman of the City of Sydney. Importantly, it is associated with the significant landscape architect Ilmar Berzins, notable as the first professionally trained landscape architect employed by a local government instrumentality in Australia. It is a rare and intact early work of Berzins and significant as a seminal park development initiated, designed and executed by the City of Sydney in the immediate Post World War II.

The Arthur McElhone Reserve demonstrates a highly sensitive response to the curtilage and setting of Elizabeth Bay House. It incorporates modernist concepts of landscape design and encompasses a number of significant features, respecting the original setting of Elizabeth Bay House by ensuring that the relationship of the house and its Sydney Harbour setting is and enhanced while providing a high level of detailed landscape design and amenity to the Reserve itself. It demonstrates the evolution of landscape design in post-World War II Sydney, fusing international design movements to a significant location within the visual curtilage of Elizabeth Bay House. Its planting character reflects a broad diversity and horticultural interest, consistent both with Alexander Macleay's broad interests in horticultural specimens and Berzins' intent of a horticulturally diverse planting scheme. It is considered Berzins' most significant work for the City of Sydney.

The Arthur McElhone Reserve is understood to have great significance to residents and visitors because of its high level of visual amenity and as a valuable landscaped open recreational area. It is a rare intact example of advanced mid twentieth century landscape design in the City of Sydney.

6 Conclusions

The Arthur McElhone Reserve fulfils the NSW Heritage Council's criteria for historical association, historical significance, aesthetic significance, social significance, research significance, rarity and representativeness at a local level. Because of this it warrants listing as a heritage item in the City of Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012.