

Barrenjoey

The Barrenjoey headland commands the entrance to Broken Bay, the Hawkesbury River and Pittwater. During the nineteenth century most access to Pittwater was by ship and Barrenjoey became a focal point during this period.

Ships travelling to or from Sydney could easily be pirated and goods smuggled. In 1807 The US ship Jenny landed 1200 gallons of spirits via Pittwater which were then taken overland to be illegally sold in Sydney. In 1843 to prevent smuggling and to control the port of Broken Bay a customs house was established at the base of the headland on the western (Pittwater) shore. Customs House had its own wharf and became a communication centre, with the establishment of a telegraph connection in 1869, Post Office in 1871 and a school a year later. In 1900 Customs House closed, the school had closed the previous year.

For the safety of shipping a signal lamp was first displayed on top of Barrenjoey headland in 1855. Beacons were displayed on the two Stewart Towers in 1868. The stone lighthouse, which stands today, was designed by James Barnett, colonial architect and began operating on 1 August 1881. The light was tended by keeper until 13 August 1932 when it commenced operating automatically.

The Barrenjoey isthmus was home to a few fishermen in the early part of the nineteenth century and probably the earliest recorded European settler in the area was Pat Flynn who was living here and growing vegetables in 1804.

In the twentieth century Barrenjoey became a popular camping area until it was closed in the 1970s. In 1924 the Palm Beach Golf Club was established here. Wild goats roamed here in 1920s and 30s and were hunted for milk or meat.

Barrenjoey means young kangaroo.

Memories

Don Woods remembers staying at Barrenjoey in a cottage next to the Customs House

"During that time I went to Newport school. There was daylight saving at that time and a launch used to come down from Newport pick up the lighthouse keepers' children and myself and then we tacked our way up Pittwater calling at all the various resorts, picking up other children, finally landing up in time for school. In the afternoon we wound our way down the bay again. This time not only school children, but the paper, the butter, the bread, the meat and the mail. So we had a pretty long day. We started very early from Barrenjoey and we arrived home very late. As a small child I can remember it was rather tedious.

...One incident I can clearly recall is when they held the land sale at Mackerel Beach. My father, Bob Oatley and myself and two Oatleys rowed over from Barrenjoey to attend the sale, which was held in a large marquee. In the latter half of the afternoon a southerly storm

came up, tore the marquee and we had a very perilous row back across the big sea that was coming down Pittwater, to get to Barrenjoey"

Don Woods, oral history, 1984

Reading

"But it is not in the Basin only that the beast of Pittwater is discerned. Let the sightseer beat down abreast of the heads, past the long sandspit coupling Barrenjoey to the mainland. Let him look well at the huge, grim wave-washed, time-worn crag that lacks but a round tower and a romance to fetter it to the hearts of a people. It bears a lighthouse useful to the mariner, but only vexatious to the dreamer. Wild and strong and stern it frowns with the sea foam at its base and the few sparse wind-tortured trees about its head. It should have memories other than those of lamp-trimmer's yarns and convicts' jeers and groans. And Elliott Island, lying almost in mid-channel, is also an artist's rock, so strangely shaped as to be capable of any comparison; a lion couchant, a headless sphinx a remnant of some giant's work of the world's strong youth worn down to vast undistinctness by wind and waves. Ah! may I not recall here one evening scene when moored off the West Head, we saw the island and the rock, with every distant point, and all the dome of Heaven and the spaces of the sea, transfigured and glorified by the outbreathed spirit of a dying day. A thundercloud had rolled over and lay upon the eastern bar and light from the clear inland western sky smote all its breast with fire. Some little shreds of cloud in midheaven let down a film of rain which beat the rays till they made bows upon the thundercloud, three separate trichord bands of light upon three points of distant land, an intense blackness below, and beyond a strange purple. Right out in the foreground Barrenjoey, his face as the face of an angry giant, every line, point, dent, and scar glowing as with the fire of an inward-born passion, and separated but by a silver band, the lovely Elliott Island cradled in blue water, fringed with the leaping foam, swathed in a silver haze that deepened to gold mist, and darkened too soon to a purple veil, all evanescent and beautiful as a dark proud woman's smile, and yet, thank God, in memory perpetual.

And in lovely contrast to the majestic face of nature in wild moods, about the Heads, is the Eden-like beauty of the still sleeping waters beyond Taylors Point and Scotland Harbour. There is another Narrabeen with ferns and palms and rock lilies crowned with bloom, with silver beaches and transparent waters all alive with the wise sea bred creatures who love silence and solitude and have not yet been taught to make out for safety. Room for a marvellous population of city people here, for many and many a score of picturesque chalets to rise amid gardens and trees and give fitting human interest to the scene. And around the West-head within Broken Bay proper beauty of a similar order almost infinitely extended."

Francis Myers, *A Traveller's Tale: From Manly to the Hawkesbury*, 1885.

"...The foundation stone was laid on Thursday, April 15, 1880, by Miss Rosa Barnet, daughter of the Colonial Architect [James Barnet], in the presence of several ladies and gentlemen.

...The visitors travelled from Sydney via Manly, where three vehicles were waiting to convey them to Bayview. There they boarded the steamer "Florrie" for Barrenjoey, a distance of about eight miles. The visitors assembled around the flag-staff, which was decorated with flags.

"The Sydney Morning Herald" of the time [17 April 1880] states that:- "After the preparations had been completed, and the bottles containing the scroll, papers, coins and a medallion of Queen Victoria had been placed in the receptacle prepared for them, Mr. Grenville said:-

Miss Barnet, - I have the pleasure of presenting to you, on behalf of the contractor, this mallet and silver trowel, for the purpose of laying the foundation stone of the Barrenjoey Lighthouse. They are implements small and delicate enough for such fragile hands, but yet in those hands they will be instruments for initiating a noble work. With a few light touches of this pretty piece of metal and a few taps of the mallet you will lay the first stone of a tower which will be the guide and safeguard of many future voyages. Above the spot on which you stand there will arise a noble beacon – the silent sentinel of the storm-tossed mariner, the shining monitor, warning those who brave the perils of the deep to shun the more obdurate dangers of these callous rocks. It will be a light looked for and longed for on many a darksome night. It will be the star of hope to many a weather-beaten crew, and the saviour of many a storm-pressed ship. It is for you, Miss Barnet, to place the first stone of that tower – a task easy in itself, but noble in its association, and fitted well for a fair hand and a benevolent heart. (Applause).

The mallet and trowel were then handed to Miss Barnet, who laid the Foundation Stone, and declared it well and truly laid. Three cheers were then given for Her Majesty the Queen, three for His Excellency the Governor, and three for Miss Barnet. On the face of the silver trowel was inscribed:- "Presented to Miss Rosa Barnet, upon the occasion of her laying the Foundation stone of the Lighthouse at Barrenjoey, New South Wales, 15th April, 1880."

As months went on, the work of erection progressed, and after fifteen months, the lighthouse was an accomplished fact, it being completed on the 20th July, 1881. The building was designed by Mr. James Barnet, and the work was carried out under the guidance of Mr. E. S. W. Spencer, Clerk of Works, and Mr. John Kelly as Foreman of Works.

During the erection of the Lighthouse, two workmen were killed; William Sparkes and George Cobb, both of whom were buried alongside the original St. John's Church of England, Pittwater."

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