

# *Harrington Park House*

c.1817 - reborn 2012

By David Everett

**This magnificent two-storey Georgian homestead sits smack bang in the middle of its namesake suburb, Harrington Park. Her picturesque setting atop a gentle hill remains intact. A recent, meticulous renovation has brought all the romance of a bygone era back to life.**





This hallway was originally the north facing, front verandah before the building was extended and switched (c1830) to face south. The stairs in the left foreground are the 1820s entrance steps.

This pencil drawing of "Abraham Davy's Harrington Park in Camden NSW" dated 1854 shows the northern elevation of the Harrington Park Homestead. The separate kitchen building is clearly visible as is the bow fronted drawing room. Some fencelines and outbuildings are also discernable. Source: National Library of Australia, Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK2092/42 nla.pic-an4767735.



Actually, it is an unusual set of circumstances leading to the protection of the historic home's grand curtilage and the heart felt renovation. Unusual in that the owner of the home, Lady Fairfax, is also the developer. When Harrington Park was created in the 1990s, the home and the entire surrounding land was set as the centrepiece to the estate. It was also decided then that the home must be restored to her former glory.

Harrington Estate's Managing Director, Terry Goldacre recently gave me a tour of the home and discussed the two year renovation which was completed at the end of last year. Terry has been heavily involved with the restoration since the subject was raised when he was in charge of creating the suburb, Harrington Park.

"The home had not been occupied for some time and needed emergency work just to secure its future," Terry explained. "The cellar was flooded and the water had to be removed so the foundations could dry and settle."

After much research and consultation, the actual restoration started in 2010. Along the way, the history of the home unravelled before the restoration team.

The first, single room dwelling was built in 1817 by William Campbell. It faced north towards Liverpool. Being in the area so early it is assumed that Campbell decided that facing towards Sydney made sense. During the early 1820s he built the central, two storey part of the existing home. It was connected to the original building by a verandah. Still facing north, it included a basement and servants' quarters which was later used as a cellar.

It was only when cement render was removed from bricks lining the cellar that it became apparent the space had been inhabited at an earlier stage. Two fireplaces were exposed, revealing that this level had been a servants' quarters as well as a storage space for meat and fresh food.





The beautiful library with 1940s wallpaper, which was wonderfully restored by an artist - photograph by Kylie Lyons



The cellar was transformed from a flooded mess to a very usable space - photograph by Kylie Lyons



Looking down the staircase to the 1820s north facing entrance.  
The hallway you can see was the original verandah.

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The furniture and fittings are being returned to the home now.

The next extension was carried out by William's nephew Murdoch around 1830. By this stage, Camden had developed into a village and Camden Park was a major agriculture centre for the colony. Murdoch decided to reverse the aspect of the home to face south towards Camden. It is also a much prettier outlook so there were probably a number of reasons behind the decision.

This major change to the building was not known of until tell-tale evidence started to appear in the renovation. As newer building materials were stripped away, old flooring marks on original walls had the team scratching their heads. It became apparent that the hallway in the existing building had been the verandah of the original home. "The set of stairs in the middle of the house formed the entrance to the original home," Terry told me. "It was a fascinating find."

Murdoch also added a bow-front drawing room to the now rear of the house and "traveller's rooms" were built to the south facing verandah. The cellar was also extended. A further addition to the homestead was a separate kitchen building to the east of the house.

While on the cellar, Terry told me of the lengths the team went to in making this renovation as 'real' as possible. The concrete floor of the cellar was removed to find the old paved floor bleached white from the concrete which had been poured straight over them. "We took the decision to attempt to turn them all over," Terry said. "They were so fragile though that three of each four bricks would simply crumble."

The team was able to save enough pavers to use them as feature courses around the edge of the floor. Around the site many more handmade clay bricks were found discarded. There were enough of these to recover the floor with. A great result.



A similar story unravelled on the front verandah. A concrete surface covered in tiles was originally thought to be acceptable, but again there was an unwanted reality. "When we were attempting to ventilate the verandah we discovered that the concrete had been poured over the old wooden verandah without any other means of support," Terry explained. "It was deemed unsafe to even stand on let alone attempt and underpinning." Again the team had to start from scratch and demolish the surface.

Some extensions were carried out under the ownership of Arthur and Elaine Swan between 1934 and 1944. A sunroom was constructed to the rear of the house by infilling part of the verandah and the rear verandah to the homestead was likely removed during this time. In 1944 Harrington Park was sold John Fairfax & Sons Pty Ltd.



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1955 saw plans to refurbish the kitchen in the original single storey section of the homestead. The works carried out at this time included the western extension to the original building, internal refurbishment of the kitchen, and extension of the front verandah. An ensuite to the first floor was also built at this time.

The estate was transferred to Warwick Oswald Fairfax in 1956 and a great number of improvements and construction works were carried out throughout the estate including the study in the garden which was built in 1957.

Renovating heritage listed homes is an expensive process. Experienced and qualified heritage tradesmen need to be sourced at nearly every turn. The team found a builder who had worked on many heritage homes in Europe. His temporary joinery in the drawing room created perfect replicas where intricate woodwork was damaged or missing. "You can't just pop down to Bunnings," Terry laughed. The work is superb. I am no expert but I could see no sign of his repairs.

While restoring Harrington Park, archaeologists from Stedinger Associates excavated both inside and outside the homestead. From small things lost, discarded and long forgotten, these artefacts tell us about the people who lived at Harrington Park.

Most items were found beneath the windows. That tells us that without electricity, for many years women spent their days in this particular room making, mending or decorating linen, curtains, clothing, hats and other accessories and writing letters or diaries. In the privacy of upstairs, they placed their work tables in front of the windows making use of the natural light and enjoying views over the landscape.

Upstairs, the miniature portrait of a woman was found beneath the floorboards. Between 1750 and 1850 it was common for people to wear or carry such remembrances as pendants, brooches, small framed pictures or snuff box covers. Although an idealized portrait, the miniature found at Harrington Park has been painted on primed card. It shows the intricate details of a woman and her extravagant wardrobe. Her ornate regal style of dress, hairstyle and accessories were fashionable in Europe from 1750 to 1795. They would have been worn by wealthier women - perhaps the wife of Captain William Campbell or an ancestor of William and Emma Rudd.

The woman in the portrait is unlikely to be related to the Davey family, as they were Quakers and would have been less elaborate in their dress. Given that celluloid was used to protect the portrait sometime after c.1865, it is likely that her portrait was found by the Davey family or inherited by the Rudd family.

The original (c.1820) dwelling revealed a different set of artefacts including some rare coins. One penny found originates from a single consignment sent by George IV to the Colony of NSW in 1827. Packed in wooden crates, most coins in this consignment corroded on their journey in the salty sea air. Another coin is a shilling from 1844 showing a young Queen Victoria.

Harrington Park remains a privately owned family home and is not open to the public. It is however fantastic for our community to know that our heritage is being preserved with such care and attention to detail. There are three more heritage homes in this vicinity that will soon be subject to similar restorations. This is fantastic news for me... I hope it is for you too.

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