



View of the Mirvac development site at 200 George Street on 14 November 2013 soon after commencement of quarrying operations by Gosford Quarries. Extracted blocks are in the foreground. (Photo: Peter McKenzie).

Discovering Sandstone — in the Sydney CBD —

Stonemasonry consultant, Jasper Swann, and Peter McKenzie, Director of Heritage Conservation at Jackson Teece Architecture, report on the City of Sydney Council's initiative requiring developers to salvage-quarry sandstone for building conservation projects, and highlight one of the most significant sandstone extractions for years recently undertaken in the Sydney CBD.

Historical Quarrying

Within a few short decades of Governor Philip's arrival in Sydney Cove in 1788, the development of the fledgling colony was much characterised by the use of the abundant local sandstone. Public buildings, churches, schools, institutions and stately residences were constructed from this mostly excellent building material. Local quarries were established in and around the town, each feeding Sydney's urban development, each eventually consumed by the city's rapid expansion. Over time, Sydney's quarries were necessarily pushed further from the city, with the majority since the 1930s operating outside the city, mostly on the Central Coast of NSW. However, recent developments suggest that quarrying of sandstone is potentially returning to the heart of the city.

Recent Salvage Quarrying

Occasional extractions from CBD development sites in the 1980s led to limited supplies of sandstone for use in conservation works, but the material was not

always a tolerable match for the buildings in which it was installed. In 2000, a large and excellent supply of oxidising sandstone was extracted from a development site at McCaffrey's Hill in Pyrmont, supplying a large number of public building conservation projects for the following 13 years across the city as part of the NSW Public Works Minister's Stonework Program. Smaller extractions from other Pyrmont and CBD sites followed. These supplies, and the McCaffrey's, are now largely exhausted.

Other significant quantities of good quality sandstone have been extracted more recently by Sarkis Brothers and Gosford Quarries, now amalgamated, from development sites in Camperdown, Lindfield and Bondi, to name a few. A development, currently in progress in central Wollongong, has even yielded a black sandstone, an uncommon material, but one that has caught the attention of architects and is destined for internal flooring in the new retail centre. All of these supplies have been welcomed, but their availability has hinged on the vagaries and irregularities of striking commercial agreements with developers.