

Scotland Island

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Scotland Island lies towards the southern end of Pittwater, in the lands of the Guringai, the original inhabitants of this area. In nearby Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, there are numerous rock engravings carved by the Guringai people.

Middens, containing remnants of shells and fish at places where generations of Guringai dined, have been found on the northern and western parts of Scotland Island. European settlers extracted shells from these middens on the Pittwater foreshore and shipped them to Sydney, to be used for lime to make mortar (although there is no record of this happening on the island).

Governor Phillip, when he first explored this area Broken Bay in March 1788, declared the southern arm of the bay ‘... the finest piece of Water I ever saw, and which I honored with the name of Pitt Water’; at the same time, he also named the island Pitt Island.

Scotland Island has the distinction of being the first land grant in the Pittwater local government area. Its 120 acres (52 hectares) was granted to a Scottish convict, Andrew Thompson, on 1 January 1810, as a reward for his flood rescue work on the Hawkesbury River. It is very likely that Thompson changed the island’s name to Scotland Island in memory of his homeland. His fortunes certainly changed in Australia: he became a chief constable and a superintendent of convict labour, and later, registrar of shipping on the Hawkesbury River; also a magistrate and ship builder.

Thompson manufactured salt by evaporating seawater, and the old stone walls which form part of the jetty on the north side of the island are probably remnants of the original salt works and ship building enterprises that Thompson established. Though the walls have been adapted and renovated, some original material remains. Thompson had attempted to set up a salt works on Dangar Island (formerly known as Mullet Island) in the Hawkesbury River, but moved it to Scotland Island in 1806. Salt was an essential product used for the preservation of food. The salt processed here was used to preserve Thompson’s beef and pork, and for the sealing trade.

During this period, the new settlement at Sydney relied heavily on food supplies grown on the Hawkesbury River and transported to the city (via Coaster’s Retreat, Pittwater). To cater for this demand, Thompson built some coastal trading vessels, including the *Geordy*, which was built on Scotland Island and launched in November 1810, shortly after his death.

The whole island was sold several times during the nineteenth century. Then in 1906 it was subdivided, and 121 lots were advertised for sale – and offered again in 1911. It was further subdivided into 361 lots in 1924, but probably because of the economic depression which came at

the end of the 1920s, hardly any blocks sold. Some weekenders and holiday homes were built, but there were few permanent residents until the 1960s.

Life on the island, even though it is close to the city of Sydney and its suburbs, presents some difficulties for the 644 inhabitants. Scotland Island's terrain is steep, rising to 100 metres in places, and most people walk: it takes about an hour to circle its 2.5-kilometre circumference. Since the only access is by water, the island is reached by ferry from Church Point. There has been a regular ferry service since the 1950s, but it stops at 6.50 pm, so most residents use a small runabout dinghy or 'tinny'. They are usually moored in a cluster at the wharves. There are four commuter wharves on the island (built during the 1980s), used by those who do not have their own jetties, or as set-down points for water taxis, ferries and visitors.

Also, there are problems with bringing in bulky goods. All large items – such as building materials, furniture, household appliances, and cars and motor bikes – have to be brought to or removed from the island via the Cargo Wharf, which was one of the first jetties to be built for the island, probably dating back to the early 1920s. A barge from Church Point brings these goods, and also removes rubbish after annual clean-ups, particularly wrecked cars. In fact there are few cars on the island, as the roads are challenging, and plans for car ferries and bridges to reach the mainland have not been supported by most residents.

Electricity came to the island in December 1962. Many of the original wooden poles were replaced during the 1990s, when helicopters lowered cement poles into position.

In 1967 residents voted against a levied permanent town water supply to houses on the island: everyone relies on collecting rainwater. There is no sewerage system. Excess water filtering into the ground is a problem, threatening the Spotted Gums (*Eucalyptus maculata*), which are a special feature of the Pittwater area.

The community hall is an important venue for a range of activities, including drama performances and residents' meetings. It was built entirely by volunteer labour and was completed in 1981 after 18 months of work. The local council provided assistance of \$28,000 for building materials. The island produces its own newsletter and maintains a strong sense of community into the twenty-first century.

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