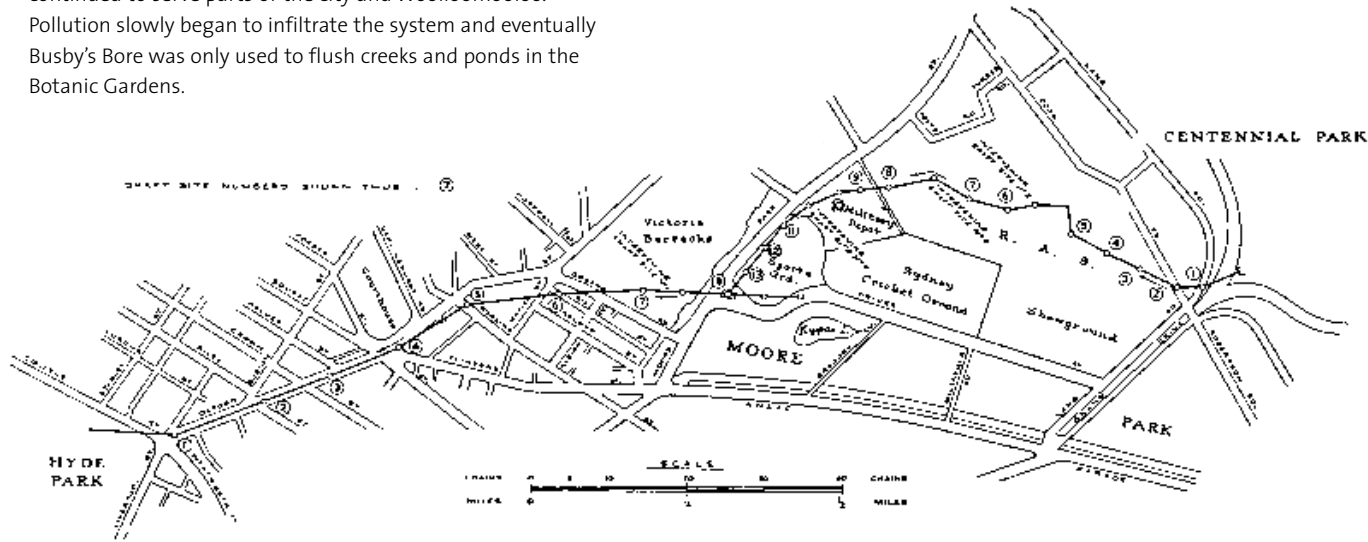


The entire area around Victoria Barracks was known as the Lachlan Swamps and it is believed that a prime consideration in choosing the site for the Barracks was the existence of Busby's Bore. The two shafts that extended to the surface provided an adequate and readily available supply of drinking water for the regiment.

As Sydney's population grew, the demand for water was augmented by the introduction of the Botany System in 1859. This took over as the primary source of supply but Busby's Bore continued to serve parts of the city and Woolloomooloo. Pollution slowly began to infiltrate the system and eventually Busby's Bore was only used to flush creeks and ponds in the Botanic Gardens.

Front cover photo: Interior of Bore under Oxford Street Darlinghurst, between Riley & Liverpool Streets.



Busby's Bore

Sydney's second water supply

The bore lay almost forgotten until 1934 when part of the tunnel from Hyde Park to Riley Street was under threat of collapse beneath Oxford Street. To rectify the situation, this section of the tunnel was filled with sand.

When work was completed on Busby's Bore back in 1837, it had the capacity to supply Sydney's population of 20,000 people with up to 1.5 million litres of water each day from the Lachlan Swamps. Today, the Sydney Water Corporation distributes an average of 1,700 million litres of water per day to about 4.2 million people.

In recognition of the importance of this early water supply system to the people of Sydney and New South Wales, Busby's Bore was entered on the NSW State Heritage Register in 1999. Although no longer a part of our water supply system, it is still owned and managed by Sydney Water.

For more information on Sydney Water
visit our website at www.sydneywater.com.au

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John Busby. Government Printing Office, State Library of New South Wales.

The initial source of fresh water for Sydney's first European settlers was from a small stream flowing into Sydney Cove. This stream, the Tank Stream, was the lifeline for these new colonists who were

unaccustomed to the new land and its unpredictable seasons and rainfall.

As the population of Sydney grew and the city was rapidly expanding to the west, the dwindling water supply could not meet the demand. The Tank Stream become so severely polluted from the city residents using it as a sewer, that by the 1820s an alternative water supply was needed.

In 1824, Governor Darling allocated the task to John Busby, an engineer who had arrived in the colony at the age of 59 to take up the position of Government Mineral Surveyor. Busby recommended the water in the Lachlan Swamps between Paddington and Randwick (now part of Centennial Park) as suitable to be the new source of supply.

Initially, Busby proposed that water be taken from the Lachlan Swamps and from there conveyed to the city through iron pipes, but he later determined the water could be conveyed to the city through an underground tunnel or 'bore' for distribution at the colony's racecourse (today's Hyde Park).

The Lachlan Swamps area was a low lying marsh containing a plentiful supply of fresh clean water, and was also a site of considerable significance to the indigenous people of the area. The swamp was part of a rough, sandy region known as Macquarie Reserve and included the areas now bounded by Moore Park, the former Agricultural Society Showground and the Sydney Sports Stadiums.

Work commenced on the Hyde Park end of what was Sydney's first piped water supply in 1827, using convict labour under Busby's direction.

The project began in a flurry of activity and day-by-day, excited townspeople and government officials awaited favourable reports as to the expected speedy progress by Busby and his team of convict labourers.

Estimations varied greatly as to the expected completion date but hopes were high for the colony to have its new clean water supply within a few years. However, this was not to be.

Difficulties with the rock strata and with the "unmanageable and unskilled" convict labourers delayed the project for 10 years.



Centennial Park Pond of 1969. Original water source of Busby's Bore.

The bore was finally completed in 1837.

Excavated by hand, the bore stretches over a distance of 3.6 kilometres under the city and varies from 1.2 to 1.8 metres wide and up to 3 metres high in places. It follows a somewhat erratic course and has several dead-end spurs.

The unpredictable nature of the tunnel is believed to be due to Busby's hesitation to go down into the tunnel. The convicts working on the project were considered to be 'disagreeable gentlemen' and Busby seems to have directed the tunnelling and excavation works from above ground. Busby's two sons William and Alexander who assisted their father also seem to have remained above ground.

Busby intended to construct a 65 million litre reservoir in Hyde Park to collect the water but this idea was abandoned. Instead, the water was piped across Hyde Park on trestles with a final distribution point near the corner of Elizabeth and Park Streets. From here it was distributed throughout the rapidly expanding city by the way of horse drawn carts.

In the 1840s, construction began on the city's first water reticulation pipes, laid from the bore to various parts of the township.

During construction, numerous shafts and wells tapped into the bore (28 have been located to date) including those in Victoria Barracks, Paddington. The shaft in the corner of the Barracks Museum was once used to supply the barracks with water. It is over 22 metres deep. Water was hauled to the top using two 55 litre buckets. Teams of military prisoners were used to raise the water. Another shaft, now covered by extensions to the Officers Mess, supplied water to the former hospital.

Busby's Bore in Hyde Park. Photograph: Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales.

