

SUMMARY OF EXCAVATION  
RESULTS.  
TEST-EXCAVATION OF THE SITE OF  
THE "SMALL MISERABLE HUT",  
NEAR BELGENNY FARM,  
ELIZABETH MACARTHUR AVENUE,  
CAMDEN,  
N.S.W.



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*Archaeology • History • & Heritage*

A.B.N. 79 072 316 968

# SUMMARY OF EXCAVATION RESULTS.

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October 2008

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## **SUMMARY OF EXCAVATION RESULTS.**

The following summary report is required as Condition 11 of the excavation permit, approved on 11 February 2008.

An assessment report was completed in September 2006.<sup>1</sup> The research design and permit application was prepared in December 2007.<sup>2</sup> An excavation permit was approved on 11 February 2008, under s60 of the NSW Heritage Act.

### **Purpose of excavation.**

The purpose of the archaeological test-excavation was to locate the site of the “small miserable hut”, as described by Governor Lachlan Macquarie, when he visited Mrs. Elizabeth Macarthur in November 1810.

There are three principal pieces of historical documentation that provide evidence for this building, namely:

1. The reference to the “small miserable hut” in Macquarie’s Journal for November 1810.
2. A Conrad Martens watercolour of 1836, showing a hut and the background topography.
3. An 1840s estate plan showing three buildings at the presumed location of the early building.

Macarthur family tradition holds that the building shown in the 1836 Conrad Martens is the first building or residence occupied by Elizabeth Macarthur when she visited Belgenny (Belkennie). In other words, it is the “small miserable hut”, described by Macquarie.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Higginbotham & Associates Pty Ltd. Historical and archaeological assessment of the site of the "small miserable hut", near Belgenny Farm, Elizabeth Macarthur Avenue, Camden, NSW. Belgenny Farm Trust. September 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Higginbotham & Associates Pty Ltd. Excavation permit application and research design. The "small miserable hut", near Belgenny Farm, Elizabeth Macarthur Avenue, Camden, NSW. Belgenny Farm Trust. December 2007.

The goal of the archaeological excavation was therefore to locate the building shown in the painting. The watercolour accurately identifies the background topography, suggesting the site is in the vicinity of the 3 buildings shown on the 1840s estate plan. Site survey of the paddocks in 2006 also located evidence of occupation and a possible collapsed stone fireplace.

### **Location of Test-Trenches.**

A total of 5 test-trenches were excavated by hand during the week commencing 8 September 2008.

Trenches 1, 2 and 4 were located on the sites of the three buildings on the 1840s estate plan. Because of the differences in scale between the 1:100 site survey and the estate plan, the sites of the buildings could only be located approximately.

Trench 3 was located to allow for the investigation of the collapsed fireplace. Trench 5 enabled the investigation of an artifact scatter or potential rubbish dump.

### **Results of test-excavation.**

Test-Trenches 1 and 2 revealed remains of two out of the three buildings shown on the 1840s estate plan. The buildings were constructed with stone or brick footings, upon which there is evidence for horizontal wall plates for timber framed buildings. Scatters of plaster indicate that internal walls were clad in lath and plaster. Comparative evidence from the Camden Park Estate suggests that timber slabs formed the outer walls.

Trench 4 did not reveal any significant archaeological remains.

The location of the third or southern building of the three shown on the 1840s estate plan at this point remained unknown.

Test-Trench 3 confirmed the identification of a collapsed stone and brick fireplace. The trench also allowed for the identification of the end wall and part of the side walls of a building. The evidence points to the construction of a building using base wall plates, set in wall slots. In other words the building is a timber framed structure.

The end wall measured 4 metres in length (13 feet). Assuming the building was a standard two roomed structure, the side walls would measure 8 metres (26 feet). The full length of the building could not be confirmed within the boundaries of the test-trench.

Trench 5 revealed that the scatter of artifacts was indeed just a surface scatter of artifacts and not a rubbish dump.

All the buildings in Test-Trenches 1, 2 and 3 contained artifacts indicating occupation prior to the 1830s.

### **The identification of the building in Test-Trench 3.**

The identification of the building in Test-Trench 3 as the “small miserable hut” relies on several strands of evidence, as follows:

1. The background topography in the 1836 Conrad Martens watercolour is shown in a form that is only visible from the current site and not the more recent Belgenny Farm buildings to the south. Other aspects of the watercolour, including the site of the hut and the fenceline on the right conform not only with the current site, but also the fencelines shown on the 1840s estate plan.
2. The building shown in the watercolour conforms with the archaeological evidence for a slab building with a bark roof.
3. The fact that the hut was timber framed, rather than post built (as one might expect of a bark hut), indicates why the building could survive from as early as 1805-1810 into the 1830s and 1840s. Indeed the latest plan to show the three buildings is dated to 1859. A post built structure would collapse within 10-15 years, but a timber framed structure is permanent, providing it is kept waterproof.

The archaeology and the Conrad Martens 1836 watercolour therefore provide consistent evidence in terms of topography and construction of the building. The identification is further confirmed by the following evidence:

4. Artifacts recovered from all three buildings indicate occupation prior to the 1830s.
5. Only in Test-Trench 3 has Chinese porcelain been recovered, which is the earliest dated material. Chinese porcelain (Canton or Nanking wares) were imported into NSW from 1792 to c.1820s.

6. The construction of the building in Trench 3 differs from the two others, since it does not have stone footings. The more primitive building technique suggests an earlier date.

In conclusion, all the available evidence points to the building in Test-Trench 3 being the one shown in Conrad Martens 1836 watercolour.

The final link in the chain of evidence is the family tradition that the watercolour represents the first residence at Belgenny, or in other words, the “small miserable hut”.

The nature of historical and archaeological evidence is that it will never provide absolute proof, but nonetheless all the strands of evidence point to the one conclusion, that the building in Test-Trench 3 is the “small miserable hut”.

**Additional notes.**

Test-Trenches 1-5 were only excavated to the extent that was possible during 5 days. In accordance with the research design, excavation only extended to the top of significant archaeological deposits. Full excavation into occupation deposits has been left until such time as a larger extent of each structure can be investigated.

The collection of surface relics was not undertaken during the fieldwork, since most artifacts were no longer visible in the more lush vegetation.

**Education and community programme.**

To facilitate the development of education and community programmes, the following tasks were completed during the excavation:

1. Students and teachers (Paul Clement Brown) from Camden High School attended the site each day and conducted video recordings and interviews.
2. The Department of Primary Industry undertook professional video recording on Wednesday, 10 September 2008.

The web site developed by Camden High School is already available – [www.belgennydig.pbwiki.com](http://www.belgennydig.pbwiki.com)

The professional recording will be developed into an educational and promotional tool for Belgenny Farm.

Edward Higginbotham.

Edward Higginbotham & Associates Pty Ltd.

13 October 2008

**Photographs and plans**



*Test-Trench 1 with footings of building.*



*Test-Trench 2 with footings of building.*



*Test-Trench 3, showing collapsed fireplace and wall footings.*





