

Berrima

Heritage Matters



Berrima is a heritage village – a nationally significant heritage village. It is recognised and awarded as such.

Visitors come to Berrima to enjoy the heritage buildings and environment. Residents experience and appreciate the history and heritage every day.

Berrima's buildings, streetscapes and environment have, for various reasons, been frozen in time. The built heritage is obvious with the Gaol, Court House, Anglican and Catholic churches, Harper's Mansion, and dozens of heritage-listed cottages and inns. The heritage environment includes Market Place Park, the Pound, the riverbank and the vistas.

The Gaol, as the largest building in the village, is currently at risk with the owner, Sydney property developer Blue Sox, proposing 'adaptive re-use' as an exclusive hotel with 60 hotel units on the river embankment.

We believe that rather than luxury for the few, re-developing the Gaol for the many, and for the future, is more appropriate and that re-development should be heritage and history focussed, rather than profit focussed.

A development of this kind will change the village forever. The damage to our history and heritage will change Berrima and make it indistinguishable from other Highlands towns and villages.

Dunkley and Beech: A tale of lust, betrayal and murder

Henry and Lucretia Dunkley, both convicts who'd earned leave tickets, lived on a farm near Gunning, south of Berrima. Martin Beech worked for them.

The rum-loving Lucretia took a shine to swarthy good-looking Martin. One night, as her husband slept, Lucretia watch Beech batter him to death. Following the murder, they hid the body and other evidence, and set up an implausible tale to explain Dunkley's absence. Their tale unravelled and the two faced a jury in Berrima in September 1843. In a theatrical speech, the Solicitor-General addressed Beech and Dunkley:

"A servant—dipping his hand in the same dish with his master, drinking of the same cup, with Judas treachery stealing upon the sanctity of the marriage bed, and then extinguishing with Macbethian blood-thirstiness the life of that master, and looking to inherit his adulterous wife and his worldly goods as the reward of your murderous treason.

"A wife—the drunken polluter of the rites of Hymen, the violator of every tie by which the sacred institution of marriage can unite in holy wedlock, yielding to brutal lust, and with her paramour consummating her guilty passion in the blood of her husband!"

Dunkley and Beech were reportedly unrepentant when sentenced and were hanged on 10 (?) October 1843.





From brutal colonial gaol to luxury hotel complex!

Is it possible for five-star luxury hotel units with a 'signature restaurant' and 'high-end bars' to preserve, acknowledge, and respect the history and heritage of the Gaol as part of its adaptive reuse?

The property developer has said he doesn't intend the gaol to be a museum. How will this intention impact on its plans and the adaptive reuse requirements set by the NSW Government, or will important history and heritage be demolished in favour of profit?

The Gaol may still have some secrets to reveal. For example, the three isolation cells, the 'dark cells', are likely covered by the concrete slab of the 1945 rebuild. The dark cells were designed to break and remake intractable prisoners. Can we trust a profit-driven re-development to treat archaeological discoveries with the time and respect they require.

We believe the Gaol is as important to modern Berrima as it has been for nearly two centuries. The gaol and neighbouring Court House represent early efforts to impose justice and punishment to the often lawless life in colonial and convict Berrima. We must not lose this heritage and history.

Catherine Leary

The stories from Berrima Gaol's early days are an important but often little known part of the history of the establishment of Berrima.

There are the horrendous offenders such as Lucretia Dunkley and Martin Beech (page 2) but there are also cases of excessive punishment.

For example, the trial and imprisonment of **Catherine Leary** in 1848 is such a case. Twelve-year-old Leary stole some 'wearing apparel' (clothes) which she passed on to **Mary McCarthy**. Leary was sentenced to 14 days in gaol including a couple of days in solitary confinement in the basement cells. McCarthy's sentence was three months hard labour.

The Gaol's three basement cells had a reputation for being extremely harsh. The basement cells were part of the Gaol's punishment regime including solitary confinement, the 'dark cell' and the cell for holding prisoners prior to execution. The idea of punishing a 12yo girl with solitary confinement for nicking some clothes is inconceivable.

Catherine Leary and Mary M'Carthy was indicted—the former for stealing at Redbank, on the 10th November, sundry articles of wearing apparel, the property of one John Strange,—and the latter for receiving the said property. Catherine Leary pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to fourteen days' imprisonment in Berrima Gaol, the last day in each week in solitary confinement. The Jury found Mary M'Carthy guilty, and she was sentenced to three months' hard labour in Berrima Gaol. Catherine Leary is aged about twelve or thirteen years, and the CHAIRMAN in passing sentence, addressed to her some severe but excellent observations, pointing out to her the depravity of her conduct, which it is hoped she will hereafter benefit by.

Sydney Morning Herald, 2 Dec 1846, 'Berrima Quarter Sessions', p2

As said on page 3, these underground cells probably still exist under the foundations of the 1945 rebuild. They are a critical part of the history and heritage of the gaol, and the treatment of people such as Catherine Leary but also the intractable prisoners who spent in the basement cells as punishment.

Photos bought from the Berrima & District Historical and Family History Society. Information from trove.nla.gov.au. This newsletter is distributed by the Catherine Leary Project. We feel it's important to preserve the history and heritage of the Berrima Gaol and Berrima village. We think the Gaol should be re-developed as a museum, learning centre, plus other activities that benefit and inform the local community and visitors to Berrima. If you have any feedback send it to PO Box 1092 Berrima NSW 2577

THE PROPOSAL

The concept strategy for the SEARs request has been prepared by Turner Architects. It seeks to establish a strategy for the adaptive re-use of the former Berrima Gaol as a tourist facility comprising a boutique hotel, function centre, restaurant, bar and wellness facilities.

Key aspects of the proposal are outlined below.

- Construction of new hotel rooms outside the Gaol wall, to the western edge of the site (adjacent to the river escarpment).
- Adaptive reuse of Gaol structures (within the wall) for hotel amenities and support facilities (function centre, restaurant and other food and beverage, and wellness facilities), and limited hotel rooms.
- New carparking to the southern section of the site.

Urbis has been provided with concept strategy documentation, December 2023, prepared for the SEARs Request, and as prepared by Turner Architects. This outline HIS has relied on this document for the outline impact assessment included below.



Figure 5 – Proposed Concept Strategy

Source: Turner

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