At the Library, we answer almost 5,000 information requests each year, helping people find information on
Dear Librarian... Which street is this?

Often, the nature of the questions requires detective work.

Rarely does the question require a Librarian to walk the streets of Sydney to find the answer!

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**The Question**

Are you able to please identify in what street in Sydney was the attached photo taken?

The request came to us from the archives of the ANZ bank in Melbourne, regarding a printed image that arrived at their archive without any explanatory note.

They needed to determine whether it was important enough to keep, given its huge size. They asked the Library for help, knowing that we would have access to different resources, particularly for identifying businesses.

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**The Research Process**

We started by looking for clues in the picture that might help with the location and the age of the photograph.

**Age**

- The dress style, especially of the girls in white and the just visible horse and cart, helped place it around 1900.
- The presence of a gasfitter placed it after 1886, when gas was connected in Sydney.

**Location**
The slope and feel of the street led us to then consider the Rocks as a possible location.

The Library has collection of photographs of the Rocks during the rat cleansing operation in 1900 ([PXE 90-95] [2]), but a quick look showed the types of buildings didn’t match.

The next clues were the signs on the buildings:

- On the first we were unable to read a company name.
- The next was a billboard, not a business in this location.
- The final sign was distinguishable as “JW Crichton & sons’ plumbers and gasfitters”, which appeared to be a premises name.

It seemed to be a straightforward process from here using postal directories to locate the business, however, JW Crichton moved premises many times.

Using the SANDS Post Office directories [3] and TROVE searches [4] of newspaper and government gazette articles we were able to find evidence of JW Crichton or James Crichton, Plumber based in, living in, buying land in or working in at least eight Sydney sites including:

- Castlereagh St,
- Hunter St,
- Jamieson St,
- corner Margaret & Clarence St,
- Queen St Ashfield,
- Point Piper Rd, Paddington,
- Gloucester St, Balmain and
- Ultimo technical college

We quickly ruled out Ashfield, Paddington and Ultimo by looking at the current sites on Google Maps [5] using Street View.

The remainder we checked during our walk to work each morning!

**The Answer!**

Next, we looked through ArchivePix [6], the City of Sydney Archives digital photograph bank, concentrating on the remaining streets and the distinctive tower.

**Eureka!**

There was the bell tower in a photo (left) from the corner of Hunter and Pitt Streets.
Looking S along Pitt Street from near the corner of Hunter Street. c1890

(File: 036/036558 ArchivePix [6] - City of Sydney Archives digital photograph bank)

A quick walk confirmed we had the right location, but it looks very different today!

From a 1910 map of central Sydney from the Historical Atlas of Sydney [7], we were then able to work out that the building was the Union Bank of Australia Head Office, that we discovered merged with the Bank of Australasia [8] to form the Australia and New Zealand Bank Limited (ANZ) in 1951.
View looking E. along Hunter St from Pitt St cnr with Union Bank of Australia, now ANZ Bank on R, Equitable Life and Norwich Chambers on L. c1889

(File No: 054/054143 ArchivePix City of Sydney Archives digital photograph bank [6])

We were then able to find a second photo (right) looking up Hunter Street, with the right-hand side being the section of the street in the original image.

The Impact

Since we provided the information to the archives of the ANZ bank, they have investigated other images in their collection and have discovered that this image is from a unique angle.

As they now understand the value of this image to their collection, they have decided to retain it, despite the challenges of its size.
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