



Suburban land claim

The league star, a pile of shells and the house auction day farce

exclusive

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IT STARTED like any regular auction of a Sydney house in need of an update. It ended barely 30 minutes later in chaos.

A group of Aboriginal men and women turned up in a minibus and handed out documents to startled potential bidders claiming that the property could be a sacred indigenous heritage site.

All of this over a Sans Souci property the agent admits is about as far from a palace as it gets.

At the centre of one of the most bizarre auctions in memory — 12 days ago — was former Balmain, Gold Coast and South Sydney rugby league star Wes Patten.

Patten lodged a caveat on the property a day before the auction, claiming it contains potentially priceless Aboriginal artefacts.

The sale is now in limbo after the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal

Land Council sent letters backing Patten's claims. In one letter, the council's CEO Paul Morris said the site has "possible evidence of

significant Aboriginal midden" at the back of the property.

The council claims it has found "a number of older shells and other possible remnants of sharpened rocks which could be spear tips".

The letter asked a "buffer zone of at least 30m" be installed

around the potential artefacts. Patten's caveat claimed that he had an "equitable interest" in the property under the "Aboriginal objects" provisions of the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

Patten, a first cousin of Anthony Mundine, spoke up in front of those gathered for the auction.

"I just wanted to inform the people about the site's Aboriginal significance," he said.

His claim was lodged for the

Gadigal people, who occupied much of southern Sydney.

Patten said there could be Gadigal artefacts in other backyards around Botany Bay. "It's near the waters and it's near the settlement where Captain Cook invaded our land," he said.

Auctioneer Zac Imisides, the principal of Belgrave Properties, was furious with the actions of

Patten and his group.

"I believe a fair auction was

obstructed. There's no way a bidder would have felt comfortable to bid on that day," he said.

Patten claimed he simply wanted to have the house's Aboriginal heritage status examined before the property was sold. He said he would have no problem with the sale of the house ultimately proceeding, "as long as they protect the artefacts".

The claimed midden site is at the rear of the land under a lemon tree.

Mr Imisides said he believed the property was worth in excess of \$700,000 but it had attracted just two bids of \$150,000 and \$200,000, with the first from Patten's group.

The auctioneer said these bids were "ridiculous".

A group of other bidders, who he believes were willing to pay full market value, were "scared off".

Mr Imisides said the sale was now in limbo. The beneficial owner of the property, Perpetual Trustees, was keen to resume the sales process but would seek clarification on the Aboriginal heritage.



Caveat: The backyard of the Sans Souci home and shells and artefacts found in the yard Pictures: Cameron Richardson