



## Merewether Historical Society

*"A society aimed at recording memories of the past for the benefit of the next generation."*

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# The Chronicle

May 2023

**Meetings:** Next meeting will be held at Merewether Bowling Club Caldwell St on **Tuesday** 9 May 10.30 for a 10.45 start. Hope to see you there.

**Anzac Day Tribute:** Alison Chapman, a volunteer at Hunter Childrens Hospital, presenting Ronald McDonald House with the Merewether Historical Society tribute after the Anzac Day Service at Merewether.



**Guest Speaker** Mike Scanlon will join us to talk about railways and pits around Merewether - as well as other topics. Should be an interesting morning.

**Birthday Wishes** Many happy returns to John Jenkins, Margaret Carlin and Margaret Gathercole. Also any other members celebrating during May

**Bus Trip:** All systems are go for our 16 May Bus Trip to The Alpaca Farm, Broke. A bargain at \$70 per head with a good day out guaranteed.

**STOP PRESS!** Due to the success of the Cowra trip last year it has been decided to have another 4 day/3 night tour. This time we will be based in Batemans Bay with proposed visits to Berry, Fleet Arm Air Museum, Nowra, Tilba Tilba, Old Cheese Factory and many more places of interest. Although details at

this stage are tentative, obviously depending on numbers interested, the date is locked in. **Monday 23 to Thursday 26 October** so mark your diaries and invite friends and family too.

### **MAY DAY:**

[May Day | History, Meaning, Traditions, & Facts | Britannica](#)

In 1889 an international federation of socialist groups and trade unions designated May 1 as a day in support of workers, in commemoration of the Haymarket Riot in Chicago (1886). May Day is the international celebration of organised labour. Bonds of trade unionism spread world-wide with the demand for May Day to be recognised as a celebration of workers' rights. This led to bitter struggles which cost workers lives.

In Australia The Sydney Morning Herald in 1890 reported that in Vienna the wealthy were so unnerved by the support for May Day that they were 'placing their valuables in the custody of banks'.

Two years earlier Australian workers rallied to the cause of British dockers during the famous 'Dockers and Tanner' strike of 1888. Of £48,000 contributed from overseas, more than £30,000 was sent by Australian workers. In 1891 squatters in Queensland, determined to break the Shearers' Union, employed scab labour. Shearers struck and the Queensland Government sent in police and armed troops to arrest strikers and put them in jail. Shearers at Barcardine staged a May Day march which demonstrated widespread support from overseas, with marchers representing workers of a number of European nations who had backed them.

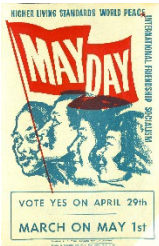
In modern times support for the third world, anti-fascist movements and world peace have been central demands of May Day marches.

In Europe May 1 was historically associated with rural pagan festivals, but the original meaning of the day was gradually replaced by the modern association with the labour movement. In the Soviet Union, leaders embraced the new holiday, believing it would encourage workers in Europe and the United States to unite against capitalism.

[Hunter Workers call mayday on working conditions - Novo News](#)

May 12, 1993 was the 100th Newcastle May Day and in Newcastle the largest march the city had seen for years took place. Around 600 people celebrated May Day. The larger than usual turnout was probably due to the fact that this day marked the 100th May Day celebration in Newcastle.

The march was one of the brightest and most colourful ever, with many new banners and floats prepared with the assistance of funds and expertise from the Workers' Cultural Action Committee.



Sadly, lost in the hype of colour and spectacle was any significant political content in the rally after the march. Amid the stalls and banner dances were two very brief speeches. Denis Nichols, the president of the Newcastle Trades Hall Council, spoke on the centenary, and Phil Dunne, from the Newvale coal mine, described the struggle between the mining workers and Pacific Power over closure of the mine.

A decision had been made by Trades Hall Council to keep the political content minimal and to concentrate on the cultural aspects of the day.

The major union councils of Sydney and Melbourne held their 8-hour 'Labour Day' demonstrations in April, showing little inclination to transfer their celebrations to May Day, and until the 1920s, the international May Day call was only partly heeded, due to ideological splits in the trade union movement.

May Day has since gathered in strength in Australia and is now part of the world-wide

celebration. The 1914-18 war and subsequent wars against fascism have developed the movement's sense of internationalism. Themes since the 1950s have embraced peace, nuclear disarmament, anti-conscription and the Vietnam War, opposition to Apartheid in South Africa, support for the Women's Movement and the Aboriginal Land Rights struggle.

May Day is a long established tradition for union members, but members of the general public might wonder what is going on. They might be interested to discover that what unionists celebrate is something that many workers take for granted, namely the 8 hour day.

The general misconception is that May Day has communist origins, but that is not the case.

Australia's May Day activities officially began in 1890, although some workers had achieved the eight hour day as early as 1856. As more and more workers won the reduction in hours by solidarity and industrial action, the day was proclaimed as a holiday in all the states and became known as Labour Day.

**May Day** is organised locally by Hunter Workers, formerly known as the **Newcastle Trades Hall Council** which was established in 1869 and is the longest operating regional trades labour council in Australia.

**Point to Ponder:** Why do people who know the least know it the loudest?

#### **2022/23 Committee:**

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