



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

March 2023

Meetings: Next meeting will be held at Merewether Bowling Club Caldwell St on **Tuesday 14** March, 10.30 for a 10.45 start. Hope to see you there.

Guest Speaker Nigel Kellner 'Three Families'

Birthday Wishes Many happy returns to Pamela Boyd and Rosemary Richards and other members who celebrate in March. Hope your birthdays are full of joy.



Bus Trip: Tuesday 21 March will see us travel to Dobell House Wangi Wangi for morning tea and a tour, and then to the Royal Motor Yacht Club in Toronto for lunch. Unfortunately, we have had to raise the cost to \$75 to cover increased bus hire and venue charges.

Amendments to the Constitution as detailed in January's Chronicle and discussed at previous meetings were passed by a large majority. The changes allow for the bestowal of Life Membership on deserving members and the removal of the requirement for our annual financial report to be audited.

Newcastle Post Office:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newcastle_Post_Office

The first Newcastle Post Office was opened on 1 March 1828, being one of the first seven opened outside Sydney. The original office was situated in the "Sessions House" on the corner of Watt and Church Streets, with Duncan Forbes Mackay, the Superintendent of Convicts, as the first Postmaster. One of the first postal services in Australia was established in April 1809 and Isaac Nicolas a Sydney merchant was appointed as the

Postmaster in the colony. Prior to his selection for the job, mail was distributed directly by a captain of a ship on which the mail arrived on, this system and process was neither secure nor was it consistently dependable. However, during the coming decades nearly 20 years later, post offices outside of Sydney were established and built for the outer areas of the settlement across New South Wales. Such areas included Bathurst, Campbelltown, Parramatta, Liverpool, Newcastle, Penrith and Windsor (NSW SHR).

On the 1st March 1828, the first Newcastle post office was one of the seven postal offices located outside of Sydney. The original office was built and located at the 'Sessions House' on the corner of George Street (known today as Watt Street) and Church Street, Newcastle. Mail was sent from Sydney on the 71 ton cutter from England the 'Lord Liverpool' and would be delivered once a week by the first postmaster at the time which was Duncan Forbes Mackay who was also the Superintendent of Convicts. In 1832 steam vessels (ships) were used to carry the mail from Sydney, which further extended and delivered to Maitland closer to the growing settlements in the Hunter Region. The post office in the Maitland soon surpassed the Newcastle office in terms of postal business, and was described as '*principal office of the area by 1844, making more than twice as much per year as Newcastle*' (NSW SHR).

In July 1851 it was reported that the postal office burnt down, however the building itself was saved. The post office was transferred to a government-owned cottage occupied by Major Russell. The cottage in which the post office was transferred was erected on Watt Street in 1818 as a Commissariat Store and

considered an important and prime location in the town at the time. Because of a period of substantial economic and social growth and development, particularly of the coal industry in the later part of the 19th century, Newcastle was again changing. During the 1880's the colonial government acknowledged the expansion of its second city by improving public buildings (NSW SHR).



Newcastle Post and Telegraph Office, Hunter and Watt Street

By 1899 the Government decided to build a new post office building on the site of the former Court House on the corner of Bolton and Hunter Streets. In March 1900 the cost of the office building was estimated to be 19,229 (Pounds) and this included the post and telegraph within the building, which was to be designed by government architect Walter Vernon Over the next few years there were financial issues related to the building's construction. Two of the contractors withdrew from the project. The total cost of the building was 33,500 (Pounds) (NSW SHR).



Newcastle Post Office, Hunter and Bolton Streets, Newcastle, NSW, 7 May 1904

The Post Office built in 1903 still stands to this day, however, in recent decades the building has been unoccupied because of there are many smaller post offices around the suburbs of Newcastle and at shopping centres. Changes in technology have also influenced the space required to house postal services. Post offices have undergone a series of changes to accommodate more retail requirements. The former Newcastle Post

Office was sold by the federal government in 2002 to Sydney developer, Sean Ngu for about \$2m. Mr Ngu released plans for an upmarket bar. After this plan was rejected, the state government purchased the building in 2010 for a rumoured \$5m.

In 2011, the state government rejected a claim on the site by the Awabakal Land Council, which appealed the ruling in the NSW Land & Environment Court. The Court ruled in the Awabakal Land councils favour in 2014 (NSW SHR). In 2017, the building remained unoccupied and disused, it was reported to have fallen into disrepair and in very poor condition. It was advertised for sale in late 2017, with 11 bidders reportedly vying for the property. One bidder, hotel magnate Jerry Schwartz, went public with a \$3.33 million bid to turn it into a conference centre and bar if successful. Schwartz' plans may begin in the New Year to create a function centre on the building's first floor. The ground floor will feature wedding retail outlets such as dress shops, florists and photographers. There has also been some mention that the basement may be converted into an Aboriginal cultural area.

Point to Ponder: Worry is misuse of the imagination! Mary Crowley



2022/23 Committee:

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