



Merewether Historical Society

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

Email: secretary@merewetherhistorical.com

Website: www.merewetherhistoricalsociety.com

The Chronicle

September 2026

The next Meeting will be held on Tuesday 13th October
Guest Speaker For October

Richard Jones OAM – “Westpac Helicopter”

November: Greg Graham – Caterpillar history/story

New Life Members for Merewether Historical Society



Denise Wright

Geoff Wright

Dennis Hinchliffe

Monica Jordan

Meeting: Next meeting, Merewether Bowling Club, Caldwell St. on Tuesday **13th October** at 10:45. Club opens at 10:30. Complimentary tea, coffee and nibbles are available.

NO Lunch - the restaurant is NOT open on Tuesdays any more.

A tour of the Newcastle Art Gallery will be discussed at our committee meeting – Dates, Times, Group size... The October meeting will hopefully provide more details.

The guest speakers at our September meeting were led by The Chief Digital Archivist from Newcastle Library and included two volunteers from the Library's DigiLab, Geoff Hindmarsh and Mark Rigby.

The chief started by outlining her time at Newcastle Library over the last 8 years and explained that she believes she has the best digitizing equipment in Australia. However

without the team of volunteers who contributed over 4000 hours of voluntary labour the digitizing process would be unbelievably slow.

Her job is to accurately, digitally, *record* in very fine detail old negatives, glass plates, photos and *preserve* these images for centuries. Her group does not embellish or colourise the images or use AI to enhance the images. She has at least 3 different backups of all the digitised images.

The Ralph Snowball images are held by two main institutions. Newcastle Library has more than 5500 images and Newcastle University has a much smaller set of images. Interestingly some of the volunteers work both at the Newcastle Library and at the Uni. Snowball images are still being found and sent in by the general public. The Digitizing team usually scans the glass plate negatives at 600-1200 dpi (dots per

inch). The glass plates themselves come in various sizes – 83mm to 400mm, all huge compared to ‘modern’ 35mm (1.4inch) film. These glass plates are very fragile if dropped, susceptible to damp but extremely resistant to fading.



Ralph Snowball, self-portrait, in one of his many “associations” uniform. - Hunter Photo Bank

After the chief introduction to the Snowball collection Mark took over and used some of the Snowball photos to illustrate in depth, a sad story about the drowning in the harbour at Stockton of two French sailors whilst painting their ships hull. Much previously forgotten information about the incident was uncovered by Mark when he enlarged one of Snowballs many photographs of gravestones. Mark finished off with another wonderful tale that led to the discovery of four photos that could be connected into a superb panorama of Newcastle looking West from the harbour to the AA Coy SEA pit.

The third speaker was Geoff Hindmarsh. Geoff took us on a much wider tour of Snowball’s – range of photos, both chronologically and subject matter. He explained that whilst Ralph did take staged portraits in his studio he was much keener to take photos of outside events. Picnics, Businesses, Graves and Gravestones, Portraits, Houses, Schools and School children, mines and mining, trains, shipping, landscapes.....



Originally Newcastle South Public School now known as “The Junction Public School” October 7th 1909
Hunter Photo Bank, Accession Number, 001 000521



Merewether beach, 16/Apr/1906,
Hunter Photo Bank, 001 001220.

How to access the Snowball images from the Library.

Google “Newcastle Collections Online”
Click on “Hunter Photobank”
Click on the “Snowball Collection”
Our librarian archivist recommends using
“Advanced search” -found in the options ‘V’ on the right of the search box.

How to access the Snowball images from the Newcastle Uni.

<https://livinghistories.newcastle.edu.au/>
Search “Snowball”.

Videos about Snowball -

@ lostnewcastle.com.au, search
“Ralph Snowball Collection Digitisation Project”

Newcastle 1890's Panorama By Ralph Snowball. YouTube

[RALPH SNOWBALL: Capturing Newcastle - YouTube](#)

Stephanie Hanf is looking to re-establish her Aussie heritage-currently living and working in Germany-with husband Pasquale & one year old son Titus from March next year. She is looking for someone with a granny flat or spare rooms to share. They would of course contribute financially, would also be very happy to help with everyday things such as shopping, household tasks or gardening, provide some company and perhaps share the occasional meal. If this interests you or could interest someone you know I can forward her complete email (including family photo) if you contact me (MHS secretary) via the email in the header above. OR
her direct email is Stephanie-hanf@t-online.de