



Sesquicentenary of Local Government

Message from:

Sonia Hornery MP,

State Member for Wallsend, Deputy Speaker

Next year, 2024, represents an anniversary of a significant action taken by the civic leaders in our town, Wallsend in 1874. It was a formal request to the NSW Government to incorporate the twin private mining townships of Wallsend and Plattsburg into a municipality that would be known as the Borough of Wallsend. The request was successful and announced in the NSW Government Gazette on 12 February 1874 (see Council Incorporation on Page 15).

Next year's 'Sesquicentenary' represents 150 years since that inauguration and it has, in the past, been celebrated on the anniversary of the first meeting of Wallsend Council. That meeting was held on Friday, 21 April, 1874, and Alderman James Fletcher was elected as Mayor for the ensuing year.

Anniversaries typically mean we reflect on the past, evaluate the present and consider what can be achieved in the future.

In 2024 we will recognise the town's history and reflect on the previous 150 years and ponder the thousands of years of First Australian history that preceded what we now know.

This document looks at a fraction of the events and the people that shaped the emerging town in the 19th Century. It provides 'seeds' for us all to look a little deeper into the history of our town.

Our Wallsend Library has an excellent local history section and, in the era of the Internet, much information can be accessed online by visiting the National Library of Australia's Trove collection of old records including newspapers and other documents.

In addition, there are online collections hosted by City of Newcastle Libraries and the University of Newcastle's Special Collections.

I commend this document as a means of looking at threads of the Town's journey towards incorporation in 1874 and through to 2024. Do keep an eye out for community events as we celebrate the 150-year Anniversary in April 2024.

***Towards 150
years of
Local
Government***

**From coal-miners' villages to a vibrant
residential suburb.**

Compiled by members of the Wallsend Heritage Group Inc. October 2023.

Visit the website:

Aspects of Wallsend History



<https://tinyurl.com/wh-aus>

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

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Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Introduction

A brief journey into our past

Like several other Newcastle suburbs, Wallsend is named after a place in England. The English Wallsend is a small town in Durham, Northumberland. It is situated at the end of Hadrian's Wall which stretched across England – hence the aptly named, Walls End.

Following the establishment of the Newcastle-Wallsend Coal Company's first coal mine in 1860, the town grew rapidly. Commercial buildings and shops were erected to service the needs of the influx of miners arriving from Scotland, England and Wales. The coal company subdivided elevated land in the area about 1.1 km (1200 yards) to the east of its 'A' Pit (Cowper, Campbell, Brown, Thomas, Whitton, Martindale, Brooks, Metcalfe, Murnin and Irving Streets) with the first blocks selling in 1860 for 120-160 pounds per acre. In the 1860s, following a period of protracted disputes with management, a group of disgruntled miners began the Co-operative Mine on the present site of Callaghan College-Wallsend Campus in Macquarie Street. That mine ceased production in 1934 and was the first and only attempt to work a coal mine on the co-operative principle.

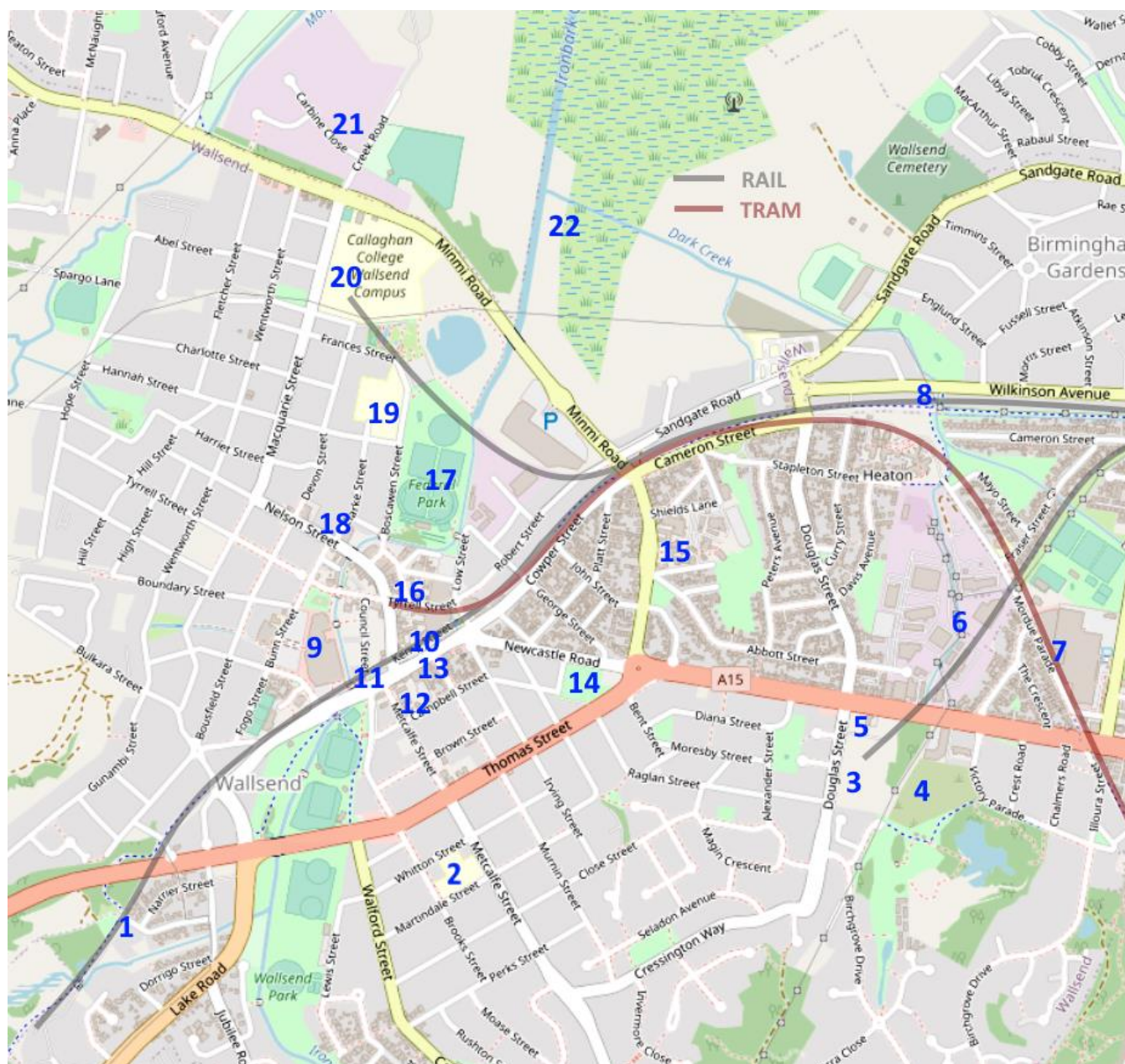
During the 1860s the village of Plattsburg, to the west of Wallsend, was settled although Wallsend was by far the more affluent community. In 1874 Wallsend, with Plattsburg, was incorporated and the first council formed with James Fletcher elected Mayor. Plattsburg Borough Council was formed in 1876 with James Birrell elected Mayor. The two councils re-amalgamated in 1915 with the new council being known as Wallsend Municipal Council. This continued until 1938 when Wallsend joined with Newcastle City Council. Cedric Thomas was the last Mayor of Wallsend. Steam trams from Newcastle to Plattsburg replaced regular rail services in 1887. When the tram-line was extended to West Wallsend and Speers Point, it was reputedly the longest suburban steam line in the world.

There were more than 300 enlistments from Wallsend during World War I with former residents Captain Clarence Smith Jeffries (KIA) and Private William Matthew Currey both being awarded the Victoria Cross.

The 1989 earthquake resulted in the demolition of many century-old buildings; however, Wallsend still retains much of the ambience of its 'coalmining village' years.

Although not a comprehensive history this document seeks to provide some context to the pathway of development that has led to the town we know.

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary



Points of Interest – Historic and Current

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Newcastle-Wallsend Coal Company | 12. First Council Chambers / Mosque |
| 2. Wallsend Public School | 13. Wallsend School of Arts |
| 3. New Tunnel Colliery | 14. Old Wallsend Cemetery |
| 4. Wallsend Brickworks | 15. Wallsend Hospital |
| 5. Leonora Glassworks | 16. Rotunda / Post Office / Tram-stop |
| 6. Purified Coke Works | 17. Federal Park, former Speedway |
| 7. Tramway Easement | 18. Plattsburg Mechanics Institute |
| 8. Railway Easement | 19. Plattsburg Public School |
| 9. Crystal Palace Soccer Ground | 20. Co-operative Colliery |
| 10. Railway Station | 21. Wallsend Racecourse |
| 11. Goods Shed | 22. Ironbark Creek |

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Timeline 1 - Prior to 1874

- 1804 – Coal River first convict settlement.
- 1822 – West Waratah land grant to John Laurio Platt.
- 1835 – Larry Styles discovered coal vicinity of Wallsend.
- 1859 – Newcastle Wallsend Coal Co. "A" pit opens.
- 1860 – Tenders let to survey and layout Wallsend
- 1861 – Plattsburg Incorporated
- 1861 – Railway line from Hanbury Junction to Wallsend
- 1861 – Wallsend first stores open
- 1861 – Cooperative Colliery requests railway junction to NWCC line
- 1862 – Cooperative Colliery first tunnel driven
- 1864 – Wallsend 'Old' Cemetery first official burial
- 1861 – NWCC "B" pit opens.
- 1861 – Miners' Union established with James Fletcher as President.
- 1868 – NWCC "C" pit opens, C connected to B.
- 1871 – Wallsend PS opens
- 1873 – Influx of ex-gold miners from Victoria

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Part 1 – Prior to 1874

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White settlement brings change

Archaeological evidence indicates that human beings have inhabited the area around Newcastle, NSW for at least 6,500 years. In 2009, archaeologists uncovered over 5,534 Aboriginal artefacts, representing three occupation periods.^[1] In the 1820s, the Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld worked with local Awabakal man Biraban to record the Awabakal language.

The first European to explore the area was Lieutenant John Shortland in September 1797. He had been sent in search of convicts who had seized HMS Cumberland sailing from Sydney Cove. On his return, Lt. Shortland entered "a very fine coal river", which he named after New South Wales Governor, John Hunter.

Efforts to mine coal were patchy with a settlement established

"in 1804 to provide hard labour for re-offending convicts following the Irish rebellion at Vinegar Hill, Toongabbie. Systematic extraction of coal continued in the Colliers Point area from 1804 to 1817, after which newer mines west of the nominated area were opened. The Australian Agricultural Company took over the government mines in 1831. Free labour eventually replaced convict workers from the 1840s."^[2]

The area we now call Wallsend was opened to free settlers for farming in 1822, along the banks of Ironbark Creek and by the mid-1850s Newcastle was already established as coal-town and rich deposits of coal were identified in the Wallsend area leading to establishment of the Newcastle-Wallsend Coal Company.

The increasing development literally pushed the Awabakal out of the area now known as Wallsend and its hinterland.

[1] [Aboriginal Archaeological Report for former Palais site released](#)

[2] [Coal River Heritage Park Newcastle, National Nomination, 2007](#)

Early Land Grants and Settlers

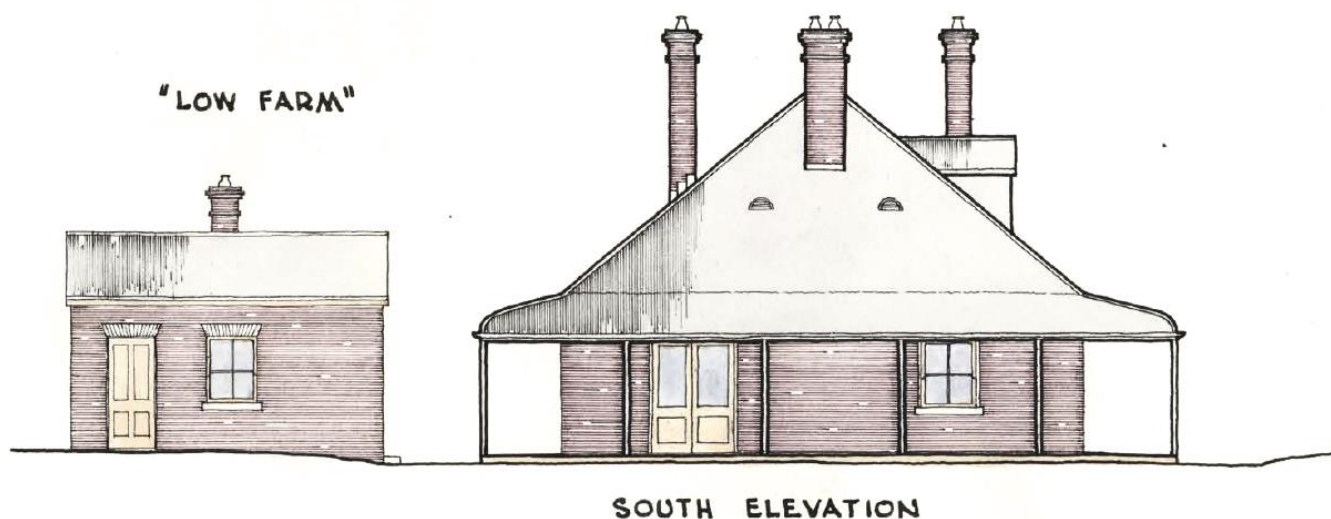
The NSW Government was keen to establish order as free settlers started to arrive in the state by around 1820. In 1822, Mr. Henry Dangar was appointed as the first official surveyor of the Newcastle District. The process of survey was critical to avoid chaos in the take-up of land. Dangar's surveying into what became known as Wallsend due to the large area of marshy swampland along Ironbark Creek to the south of Hexham.

The earliest grant in the immediate vicinity of Wallsend was that of 2000 acres, portion, 96, parish of Newcastle, to J. L. Platt, who was placed in possession in September, 1822, the grant for the land being made by Sir Thomas Brisbane on June 30, 1823.^[1]

The suburb Maryland has an interesting history as a land grant.

"The selection was approved by the Governor on January 31, 1829, and was granted as a result of the marriage on September 2, 1828, at St. Philip's Church, Sydney, of George Brooks, of Newcastle, and Mary Stephen Cowper, of Sydney, a marriage portion to be called Maryland. Granted by Sir George Gipps on April 20, 1833. Surveyed by G. B. White 1833. It was noted that - "For the encouragement of matrimony" his Excellency the Governor had bestowed grants of land as "marriage portions" from the Crown upon the occasion of marriage of free and respectable persons. The land was granted under a peppercorn quit rent, and entailed upon the wife and her children."^[2]

Dr. George Brooks was appointed the government surgeon in 1829.



Residence: Dr. G. Brooks^[3]

[1], [2] [FIRST LAND GRANTS](#)

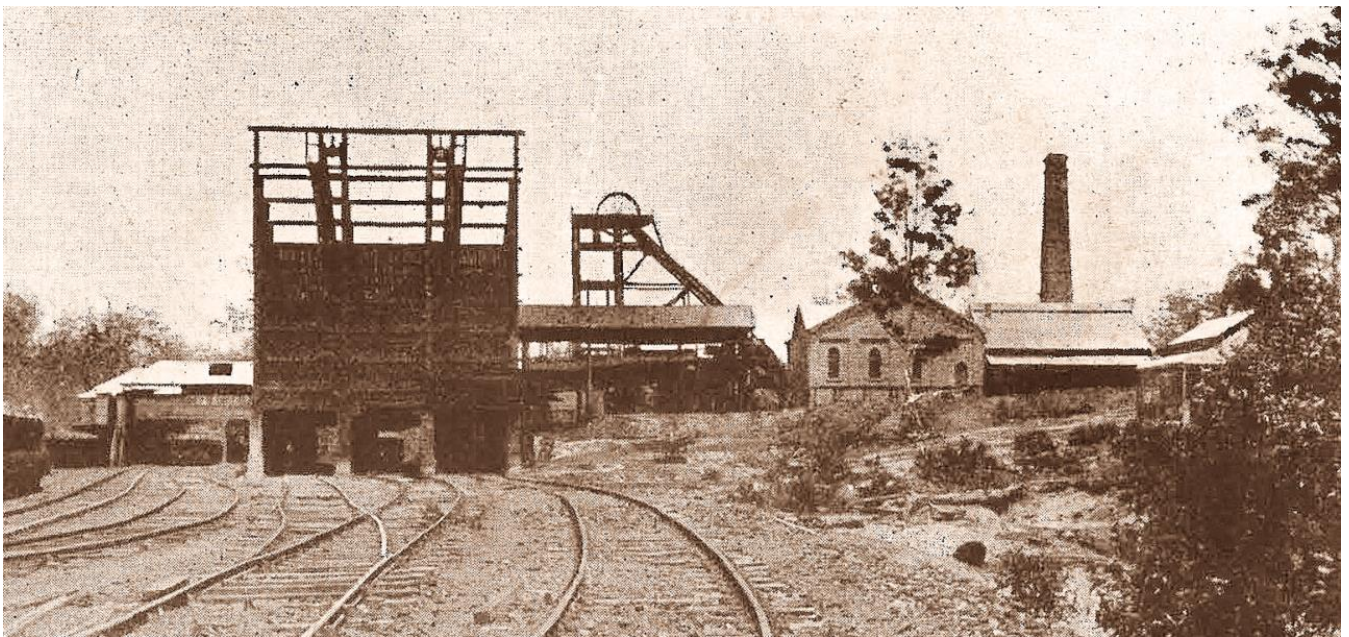
[3] Thesis 611

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Newcastle Wallsend Coal Co.

The NWCC after establishment as an incorporated company in November 1858 based upon the satisfactory results from a test shaft. The development of the mine structures and the application for and then building of the 'private' railway proceeded its first pit in Wallsend in 1861 – the 'A' pit, it operated until December 1867, then the 'B' pit took over production operations. 'C' pit came into production in 1868, and 'B' pit produced until 1884 and 'C' pit until 1889. Other pits continued to operate in the Wallsend area until last coal production from Elermore Colliery (formerly 'A' pit) in 1959 and the related coke works ceased production in 1962. ^[1]

One of the 'early' Wallsend pits, note the timber pit-props in the foreground.



NWCC "C" pit, looking South, c.1890

The Newcastle Chronicle reported optimistically on 26 November 1859.^[2]

"Thus, there is now an immediate prospect of this fine seam of coal finding its way, into the markets of the world; and, by provoking a healthy and legitimate rivalry among the coal owners of the Hunter, may, help to secure for our port a pre-eminence in the coal trade that may defy competition."

[1] [NEWCASTLE WALLSEND COAL COMPANY](#)

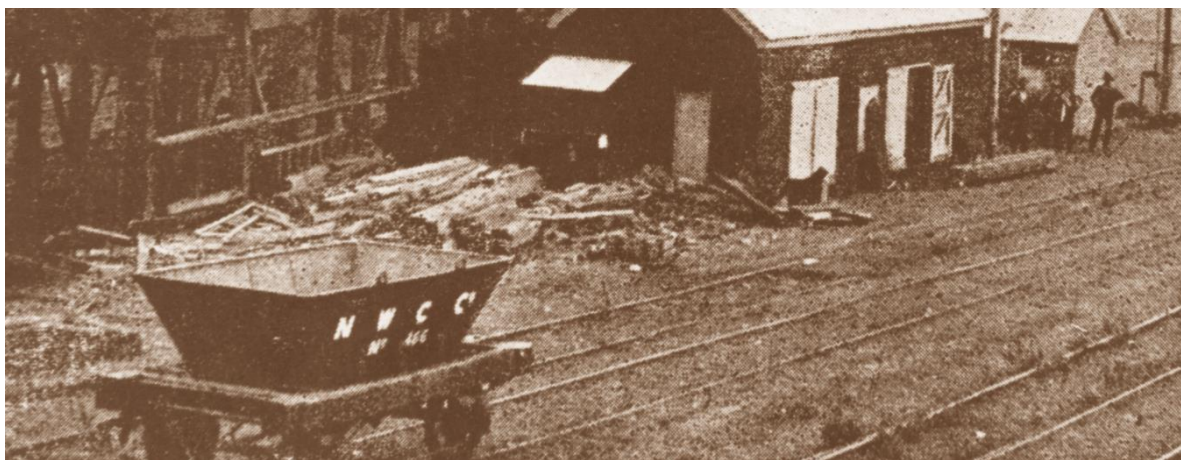
[2] [THE WALLSEND COLLIERIES](#)

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

NWCC Visitor's Impressions

In 1861 the NWCC hosted a visit to the mine for investors, MPs and other important citizens, many arriving in Newcastle after an overnight voyage on the *London* from Sydney. The Sydney Mail, Sat. 16 March 1861 provides a description from a visitor who travelled on the Company's line from Hanbury Junction to Wallsend for a visit to the NWCC's mine.

"At about eleven o'clock, the party left Newcastle by special train, for the purpose of inspecting the mine. This colliery is situated on a piece of ground known as Magieres grant, on the road to Brisbane Water from Newcastle. Its distance from Newcastle is about eight and a-half miles by the Great Northern Railway, and along the Company's line, which, branching off from the main trunk, extends for about three and a-half miles over a rough undulating country. The railway constructed by the Wallsend Coal Company facilitates communication with the Great Northern Railway, and, of course, affords a ready means of conveying coal to the place of shipment." [1]



NWCC coal waggon near the Coke Ovens at Jesmond c.1870s

Prior to the site visit the guests proceeded on an inspection of ship loading facilities.

"The number of miners employed is fifty-six, and, as a whole, they certainly are as fine a body of men as could be found engaged in the same calling in any part of the world. At present about 200 tons of coal per day are sent away from Newcastle, Wallsend; but in another two months they expect to deliver at least 300 tons per diem." [2]

[1] [Sydney Mail - 16 Mar 1861 - NEWCASTLE WALLSEND CC](#)

[2] [Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser - Sat 27 Oct 1900 - NEWCASTLE WALLSEND CC](#)

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Cooperative Colliery

The Colliery commenced in 1861 and closed in 1934. Dr. George Brooks originally owned this land and his home known as 'Maryland', was situated near the intersection of Minmi Rd and Macquarie Street. Many miners, led by James Fletcher held £5 shares in the colliery.

The Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company was opposed to the Cooperative's efforts to build a spur line to access the NWCC's railway to Hanbury Junction, Parliament saw otherwise. The Sydney Mail reported on Saturday 22 November 1862, that:

"The Cooperative Company has succeeded in getting its bill through both Houses of Parliament, the Council as well as the Assembly having compelled the Wallsend Company to allow the co-operative people to effect a junction with their railway line. This privilege is a great advantage to the working men's company, as it saves them a great preliminary expense — and capital is the thing of which they have least to spare." ^[1]



Boring a hole in the coal with a machine, Cooperative Colliery 1896^[2]

The train line diverted from the main line near what is now the intersection of Robert St. and Minmi Rd, over a timber trestle bridge across Ironbark Creek to the area now known as Callaghan College, Wallsend Campus.

The NMHMA (18 November 1929) reported in a mining history segment that the first coal won by the Cooperative Colliery was loaded on to barges and then transported to Newcastle. When the spur line was opened in 1863 the coal was able to be forwarded by rail.^[3]

[1] [Sydney Mail \(NSW: 1860 - 1871\) – Sat. 22 Nov 1862](#)

[2] [Australian Town and Country Journal 1896 SCENES IN THE NEWCASTLE COLLIERIES](#)

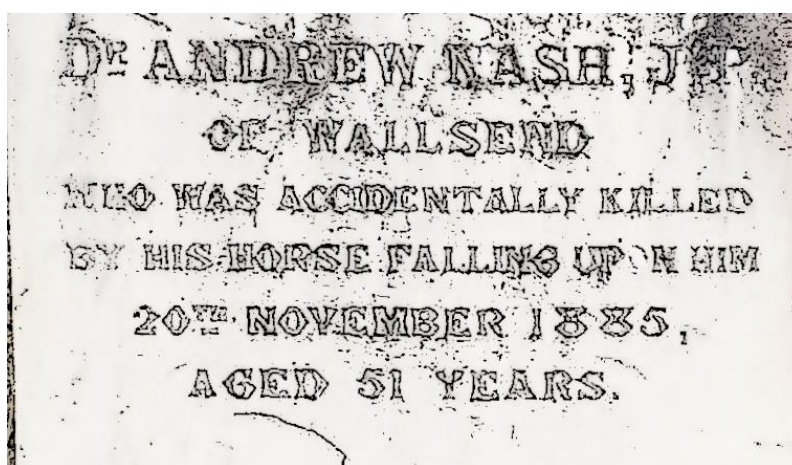
[3] [Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser 27 Oct 1900 - CO-OPERATIVE COLLIERY, WALLSEND.](#)

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Dr. Andrew Nash

The first doctor connected to Wallsend, was Colonial Surgeon Dr. George Brooks. Another who left a lasting impression on the town was Dr. Andrew Nash was employed as Medical Officer to the Plattsburg, Wallsend and Minmi collieries. His contribution to the town as a doctor is remembered as is his contribution as Chairman of Directors of the Wallsend and Plattsburg Gas Company, to the Wallsend Jockey Club and as well to the School of Arts and the Plattsburg Mechanics Institute.

He died at age 51 while jumping one of his favourite racehorses, 'Satellite', over training hurdles, where he was crushed when the horse caught its leg and fell.^[1] He was buried in Sandgate Cemetery on 22 November 1885.^[2]



Wallsend's **Andrew Nash Centre** (below) is a fine memorial to this pioneer doctor. Dr. Nash had two sons who also became doctors, John Brady Nash and Andrew W. Nash both of whom became associated with Wallsend Hospital.



[1] [FATAL ACCIDENT AT WALLSEND - Dr. A. Nash Killed](#)

[2] [The Funeral](#)

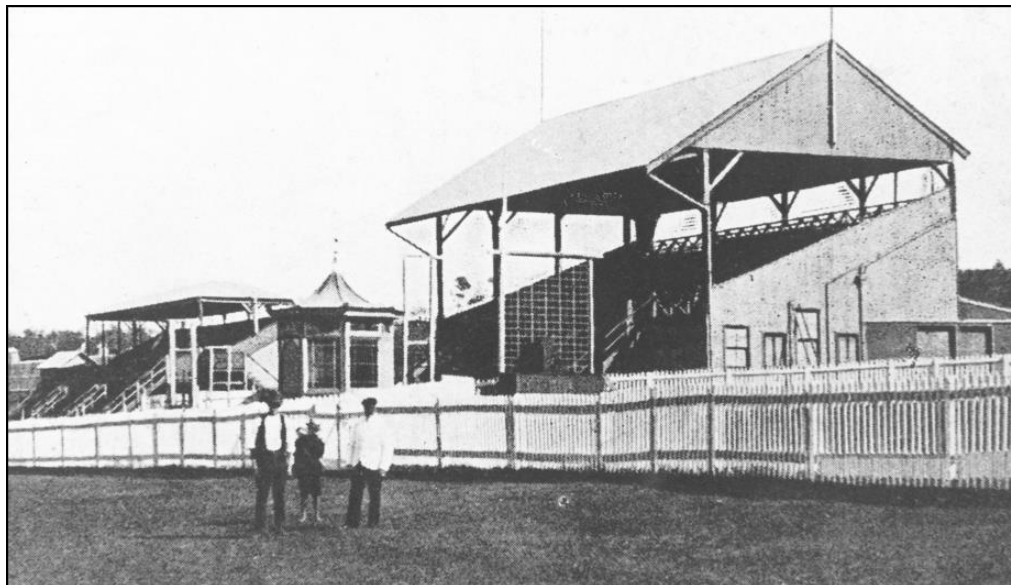
Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Wallsend Racecourse

The old racecourse was located in today's Industrial Estate opposite the Racecourse Hotel Minmi Rd.

The first race meeting on 26 Dec 1865 attracted a crowd of 15,000 people.

On land parallel to Ironbark Creek was a straight race track, dotted with tree stumps called Brooks Race Track, which indeed, certainly made for very interesting racing. An early abattoir was situated in the area of Maryland Drive behind the current industrial area.



The Sydney Mail and NSW Advertiser on the 19 August 1903 featured a well-attended Wallsend Cup meeting with a number of photos including the winning horse 'Sepia'.^[1]

The paper noted:

“The attendance on Cup Day showed that the club has the loyal support of the district, and the outlook for its future is bright indeed.”

The Club had survived the 1890s depression, the Great War and it was a casualty in the Great Depression with the last race meeting being held in June 1930. In 1932 the Grandstand was removed and re-erected on land that became known as the Crystal Palace Soccer Ground, now the location of the Wallsend Village Shopping Centre.^[2]

[1] [Wallsend Jockey Club - 1903](#)

[2] Chegwidden: Wallsend Proud, pp. 201-205

Miner's Union

Before unions began, workers had little leverage to negotiate with companies in matters such as pay and safety. The first union (or lodge) in the Hunter Valley was started in March 1856 at the Newcastle Coal and Copper Company. People were called to lodges by the Bellman. Unions were soon established at the AA Company, Minmi and Tomago sites. There was little cooperation between unions until the Coal Miners' Association of Newcastle was formed in 1860. James Fletcher, who founded one of the earliest unions, Borehole Lodge, became the first President of this Association. This organization charged a joining fee, which was saved for redistribution in times of strike. One of the first major issues addressed by the organization was ventilation. They pressed for government regulated working conditions. Wages were another point of contention, and low coal prices along with an oversupply of labour weakened unions in the late 1860's. [1]

The establishment of the Vend system, in 1872, renewed the involvement of unions. The first major strike in 1888 was due to a power struggle between the collieries and the unions, contributed to by the Vend system. Co-operation between the collieries made the unions unable to bargain for wages or better working conditions.

The Vend was a system of company agreed production quotas designed to give control of the 'price per ton' of coal. One of major companies refused to participate while those in the arrangement often sought to maximise their rewards by stretching the quotas when it suited them. The miners were hoping to achieve a consistent income that was 'cushioned' from market fluctuation.

The Vend finally collapsed because of the oversupply problem: far too many suppliers were struggling for a share of the market in a year when total northern output was 650,000 tons less than it had been in 1891. Thus, the Newcastle morning herald suggested that, with the exception of the Stockton Colliery, every mine in the district had the capacity to double its yearly output and so yield in excess of four million tons of coal per annum. James Curley made a similar prediction based on the number of miners employed in the district in 1890. [2]

[1] [PEOPLE AND PLACE | COAL AND COMMUNITY](#)

[2] TURNER, John William, Coal mining in Newcastle, 1801-1900. p. 63

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

The First Schools

Wallsend - On 16th. November, 1869, plans and specifications were put out for the erection of the Wallsend Public School. Tenders were called on the 20th. December and on the 3rd. February, 1870, a tender submitted by Messrs. Yeoman and Williams for £1100 was accepted. The designed was the Government Architect. It is of brick, the central and southern portions being original, and the northern wing a later addition. Mr. Matthew Willis was appointed first headmaster on the 1st. January, 1871. The school opened on 9th. January with 93 pupils. The date stone on the building is 1870, although the boys section bears the date, 1881. [Thesis 611]



Plattsburg - The old Protestant Hall in Mary Street was acquired in 1880, and this was soon afterwards used as the Plattsburg School, when cracks appeared in the old school in Hill Street. It remained as a school until the new structure was built in 1884. Another story was then added to the building. [Thesis 611]



Plattsburg School celebrated its Sesquicentenary in 2015

A Snake Story



The “Miners' Advocate and Northumberland Recorder (Newcastle, NSW: 1873 - 1876)” reports in the its Saturday 27 December 1873 edition a story about a snake bite and a medical intervention.

SNAKES. - Around Wallsend and district snakes have been unusually plentiful this year and several narrow escapes from boing bitten have been brought under our notice. The other day Mr. Millman, of Plattsburg, killed a large one of the carpet species which measured over twelve feet. Last Saturday as Mrs. Peattie, of Tickhole, near Wallsend, was giving a horse an armful of hay, she felt something bite her on the right arm, and quickly letting the hay fall she discovered that the bite was given by a black snake that had been curled up in the hay. She at once went into the house and her husband cut her arm open and put salt in the part, and she immediately started for Lambton and placed herself under the treatment of Dr. Hill, that gentleman poured ammonia over the wound, but as she complained of drowsiness, he and Dr. Gregson injected ammonia into the arm several times, and, also administered brandy and ammonia internally. Mrs. Peattie remained in the surgery about seven hours, when she left. About twelve hours afterwards fresh symptoms exhibited themselves, but through Dr. Hill's attention she was soon placed out of danger, and returned home on Sunday evening.

[1] [LOCAL INTELLIGENCE, WALLSEND AND PLATTSBURG](#)

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Timeline 2 - 1874 to 1924

- 1874 – Wallsend Borough Council Incorporated
- 1875 – Plattsburg PS, new school opens
- 1875 – Water problems come to a head, typhoid etc.
- 1876 – First road bridge over New Tunnel lines at Jesmond
- 1876 – Plattsburg Council incorporated.
- 1877 – NWCC New Tunnel (Jesmond).
- 1877 – Wallsend/Plattsburg to Newcastle horse bus service
- 1879 – Water reservoir opens
- 1879 – Land released for Wallsend Park
- 1881 – Wallsend PS declared 'superior' (junior secondary)
- 1881 – Plattsburg PS damaged by mine subsidence
- 1884 – NWCC New Tunnel No. 2 (Willis Tunnel).
- 1887 – Steam Tram Newcastle to Wallsend
- 1893 – Wallsend Mining District Hospital opens
- 1896 – Wallsend 'Old' Cemetery closes
- 1896 – New cemetery at Sandgate Rd Birmingham Gardens opens
- 1901 – Purified Coal and Coke Company opens
- 1901 – Federal Park proclaimed.
- 1906 – NWCC "C" pit refurbished
- 1914 – NWCC New Tunnel closes
- 1914 – World War 1 1914-18
- 1922 – Passenger train service re-commenced.

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

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Council Incorporation

In the 1870s obtaining recognition as a local government entity was an important step for the twin coal mining towns Wallsend and Plattsburg.

On February 27, 1874, the NSW Government Gazette recorded the establishment of the Borough of Wallsend. ^[1]

And whereas the substance and prayer of such Petition have been duly published in the Government Gazette and otherwise in accordance with the said Act: Now therefore I, Sir HERCULES GEORGE ROBERT ROBINSON, the Governor aforesaid, in pursuance of the provisions of the said Act, and with the advice of the Executive Council, do, by this my Proclamation, declare that the area hereinafter described shall be, and the same is hereby constituted a Municipality, under the name and style of the “Borough of Wallsend,” viz. :—

BOROUGH OF WALLSEND.

The Herald reports:

“The most important event in the municipal history of Wallsend was the election on Tuesday, April 21, 1874, of nine aldermen to constitute the first council. The Wallsend and Co-operative Collieries did not work on the day in order that the men might have every opportunity of voting.”

“The first meeting of the newly constituted council was held in Harris assembly rooms on Friday, April 21, 1874. Alderman Neilson moved, and Alderman Harris seconded, that Alderman James Fletcher be Mayor for the ensuing year, which was carried unanimously.”



The Council's first Offices and Meeting Place – now Wallsend Mosque

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary



First Council Chambers – Wallsend (Thesis 611)

The building above was the first Wallsend School of Arts and on the commission of the second and larger School of Arts in Cowper Street and the above was sold to and used by Wallsend Council as its first council chambers from 1879 to 1929.

The suburban area of Plattsburg left the joint Wallsend Council in February 1877^[2] with the first meeting of the separated council being held on Thursday 22 February 1877, with Mayor being James Birrell:

“Plattsburg Borough Council

The first fortnightly meeting of this Council was held on Thursday evening, in the Protestant Hall.” NMHMA 24 Feb 1877

[1] [Proclamation of the Borough of Wallsend](#)

[2] [Proclamation of the Borough of Plattsburg](#)

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Clarens House

Campbell St. Built 1887. Architect, G Sanders of Newcastle. This stately home was erected by William Walker Johnson who was born in 1840 Shincliffe, Durham, England, the eldest son of Thomas Johnson, Wallsend 's first postmaster. The Johnsons had first settled in Glebe, Newcastle, but with the opening of the coal mines, moved to the emerging township of Wallsend, Thomas opening a store and hotel.

This home was later owned by Joshua Jeffries who became the Managing Director of BHP Collieries. His only son, Captain Clarence Smith Jeffries was killed in France in WW1 and posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. This Medal is displayed in the 'Warriors' Chapel' in Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle. Clarens House was divided into flats for many years and briefly served as a hostel. Currently privately owned.



Detail - Clarens House

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Government Precinct and Post Office

The original **Police Station** (1885), cnr. Harris and Charles Streets, is in near original condition with the exception of the removal of two of the chimneys and the former **Post Office** (1882), cnr. Harris and Tyrrell Streets, was occupied for use 25 March 1882 and the former **Wallsend/Plattsburg Courthouse** (1878), facing Tyrrell Street, was completed in 1878.



Government Precinct, RSL Car Park - 2023

Ceremony was the order the formalities of laying of the Plattsburg Post Office foundation stone was well recorded, the NMHMA reported on 31 January 1881 of an event that took place 10 days before on Saturday 21 January:

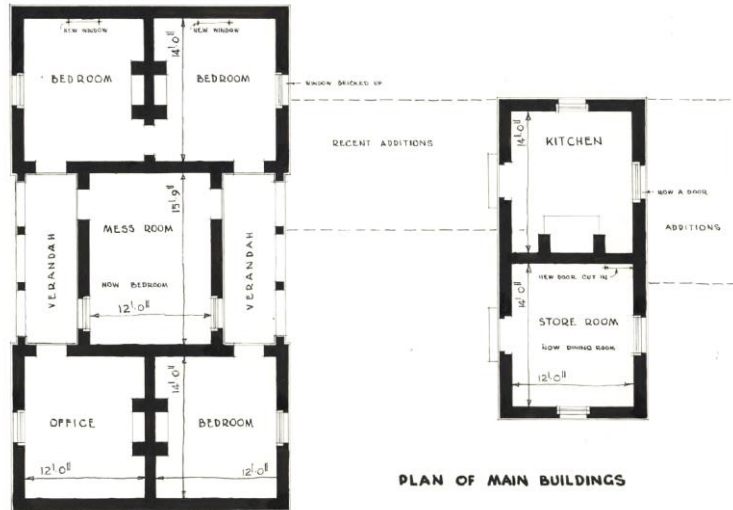
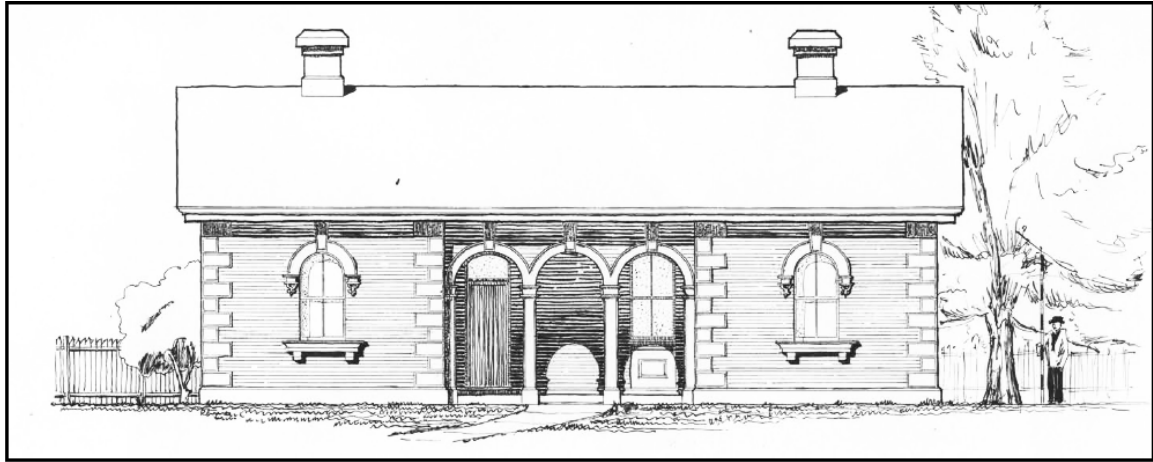
“THE ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone of the Plattsburg and Wallsend new Post and Telegraph Office was performed on Saturday last by Mr. James Richardson, the Mayor of Plattsburg, in the presence of upwards of two hundred of the residents.” ^[1]

1. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/137192000>

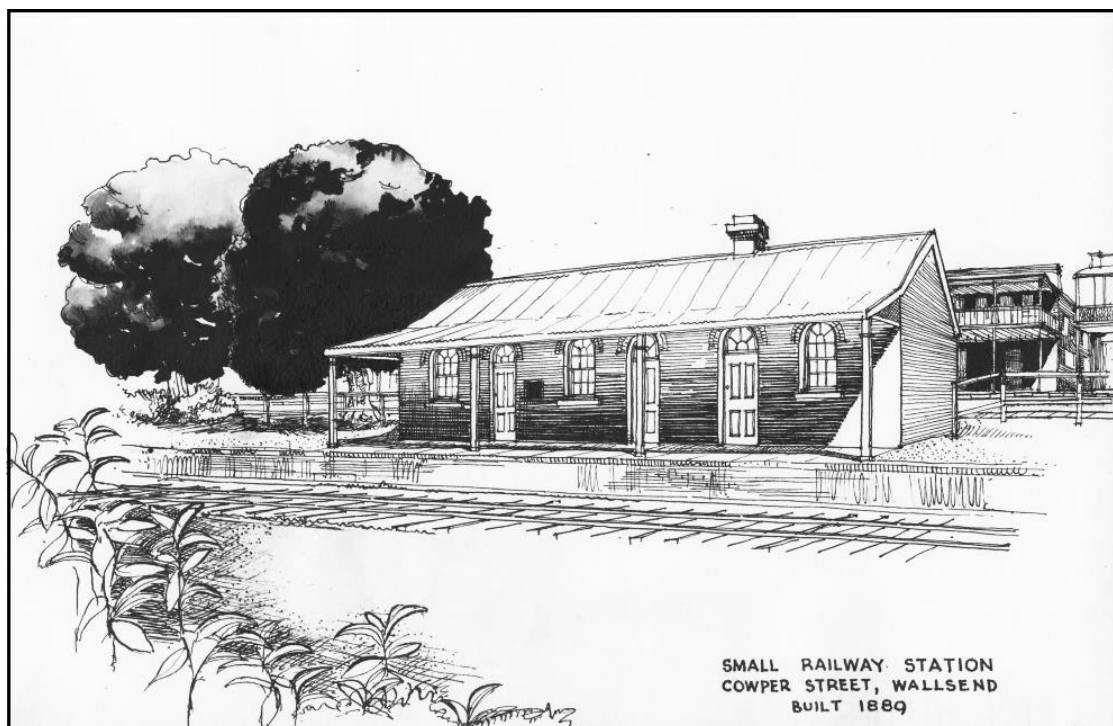
Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Police Station

The police station, designed by government architect Mortimer W. Lewis II was a 'barracks' building with three bedrooms with a separate Kitchen/Store Room block. Nearby was a Lockup and the Court House.



Railway Station



In 1876, the Newcastle-Wallsend Coal Co. built the small brick railway station in Cowper Street, for the N.S.W. Railways. The original iron roof still remains and it was not till June, 1955, that any alterations were made to it. [1]

The passenger services had to fit-in with the primary purpose of the railway, that is, moving coal from the Wallsend mine to the port of Newcastle.

The Borough of Plattsburg Council resolved to send a letter to the directors of the Wallsend Coal Company re the Sunday evening trains on March 9th, 1885 to J. Y. Neilson, Esq., Colliery Manager, Wallsend.

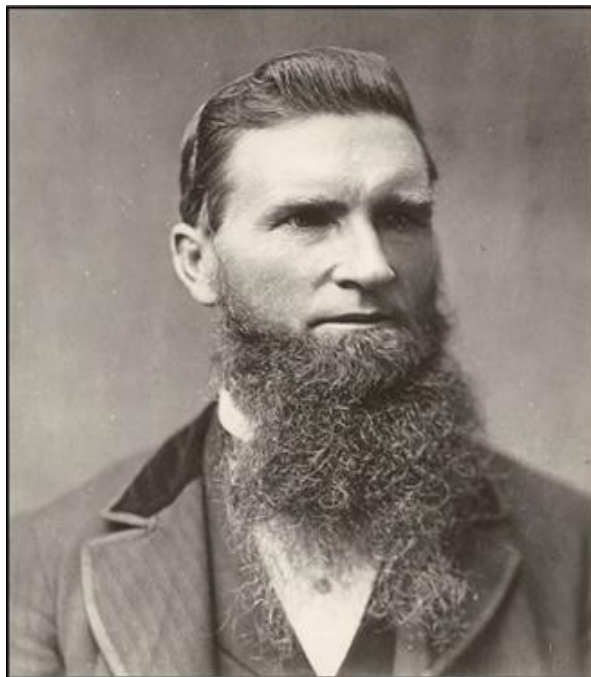
“This Council respectfully requests that the board of directors of your company will be pleased to grant permission for Sunday passenger trains to run on their railway from Wallsend to Newcastle three times per day, as on week days. Further, that an evening train be allowed to leave Wallsend station on week days, about 9 p.m. It is scarcely necessary to point out any reasons why my Council trust this request will be complied with, as it will be readily understood the great benefit to the inhabitants of Wallsend and Plattsburg etc.” [2]

The passenger rail service was superseded by the introduction of the steam tram in 1887.

[1] Thesis 611

[2] <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/139073233>

James Fletcher



James Fletcher

James Fletcher (1834-1891), coalminer and owner, newspaper proprietor and politician, was born in August 1834 at Dalkeith, East Lothian, Scotland, son of William Fletcher and his wife Ann, née Crawford. As a boy he worked as a coal-miner. He reached Australia in February 1851, went to the goldfields and then settled in Newcastle where he worked in the Burwood and Borehole collieries. He concentrated on helping the miners and was responsible for the Australian Agricultural Co.'s sick and accident fund. In 1860 he was elected chairman of the new Hunter River Miners' Association. Within a year the union was involved in the colony's first serious industrial dispute after the men refused to accept a 20 per cent reduction in hewing rates. Disunity amongst the proprietors gave victory to the union. On 25 November 1861 the union established the New South Wales Cooperative Coal Co. Fletcher was chairman and manager until it failed. He then managed J. & A. Brown's Minmi collieries but soon returned to manage the revived Cooperative mine until 1880.^[1]

James Fletcher was elected to the NSW (1880-91) and he served two periods as a minister. He was known for his generosity in caring for others and his passionate desire to help the miners and the wider community. He died in 1891. In 1897 a statue was erected by public subscription in Newcastle Lower Reserve 'to commemorate James Fletcher as a friend of the miners'.^[2]

[1] <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fletcher-james-3538>

[2] <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/136558358>

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

The Rotunda

Cnr Tyrell and Harris St, Built 1888

Constructed between April and August of 1888 and designed by Bennett and Yeomans, the land was formerly part of the Lemongrove Estate. Mr. Robert Snowden's tender was accepted and he and contractor Mr. George Froome began work which was hampered by a very wet June. Mr. Froome had problems casting the fluted columns, however on 24th August 1888 the Rotunda was opened.



The Rotunda – Interior roof detail



The Rotunda in 2023

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

The Steam Tram

The Wallsend line was the first tramway in Newcastle. It connected Newcastle with the main residential suburbs including Hamilton, Broadmeadow, Lambton, Jesmond, Plattsburg and Wallsend. The first steam service ran on 19 July 1887.^[1]



Wallsend Terminus (Postcard) c.1890

Note the above the above postcard image is stamped Seattle, Washington, the year is indiscernible.



Tram Terminus location – viewed from the East^[1]

[1] [Trove: The first tram arrives at Wallsend](#)

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Wallsend Brickworks

Located to the south of Newcastle Road, Wallsend Brickworks was a supplier of high-quality bricks for industrial and house construction. The works was adjacent to the New Tunnel colliery and it obtained clay for its brickmaking from an adjacent quarry. 'Wallsend Cream' were a sought-after brick in the 1960s. The area is now known as Brickworks Park.

The works operated from 1891 to 1977 and used steam-powered machinery to make bricks. At its peak, the operation had orders of 400,000 bricks a week. The park is dotted with remnants of the historic operations.



Wallsend Brickworks c.1950

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Timeline 3 - 1924 to 1974

1924 – Jubilee of Local Government

1924 – Electric tram replaces steam, City to Wallsend

1925 – Passenger train service terminates, too costly

1930 – The Great Depression affects many

1930 – Stream tram services to West Wallsend and Speers Pt close

1930 – Last meeting at Wallsend Racecourse

1934 – Cooperative Colliery closes

1935 – NWCC "C" pit closes

1935 – Council amalgamation Wallsend becomes 'part of' Newcastle

1937 – James Fletcher bust statuette to be placed in Rotunda Park

1939 – World War 2 – 1939-45

1959 – Electric tram service replaced by buses

1959 – Elmore (Tunnel) Colliery closes

1962 – Purified Coal and Coke Company closes

1962 – Wallsend High School opens on old site of Coop. Colliery

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The Jubilee of 1924

On Tuesday 22 April 1924 the Newcastle Morning Herald & Miners Advocate's feature for the Jubilee of Local Government certainly let the community know that the newspaper recognised the event.^[1] Below are a number of extracts from the feature.



“Wallsend will celebrate its fifty years of municipal government during the present week, and extensive arrangements have been made for the commemoration to be carried out on a fitting scale.

The incorporation of Wallsend in the year 1874 was an advance step in a town which had already made good progress, and only needed wise governing hands to guide its development. With the expansion of the coal-mining industry in the Newcastle district and the possession of large and important collieries in its own area, the growth of settlement had been so rapid that Wallsend became a populous self-contained town.

With the expansion of the coal-mining industry in the Newcastle district and the possession of large and important collieries in its own area, the growth of settlement had been so rapid that Wallsend became a populous self-contained town. In the period the Newcastle-Wallsend Coal Company Colliery and, the Co-operative Mine employed between them 900 men, and in 1875 the output of coal was over 300,000 tons. In that year the population of Wallsend and Plattsburg was 6000, and there had been established two public Schools, one denominational school, a cooperative society, several friendly societies, and a bank. The town had also its own brass band. With its incorporation it moved towards other town utilities, which ultimately became established.

Wallsend municipality embraces 5772 acres. The population is estimated at 6890. The unimproved capital value is £169,187, the improved capital value £582,007, and the assessed annual value £42,880.”

[1] [NMH&MA 22 April 1824 Wallsend's Municipal Jubilee](#)

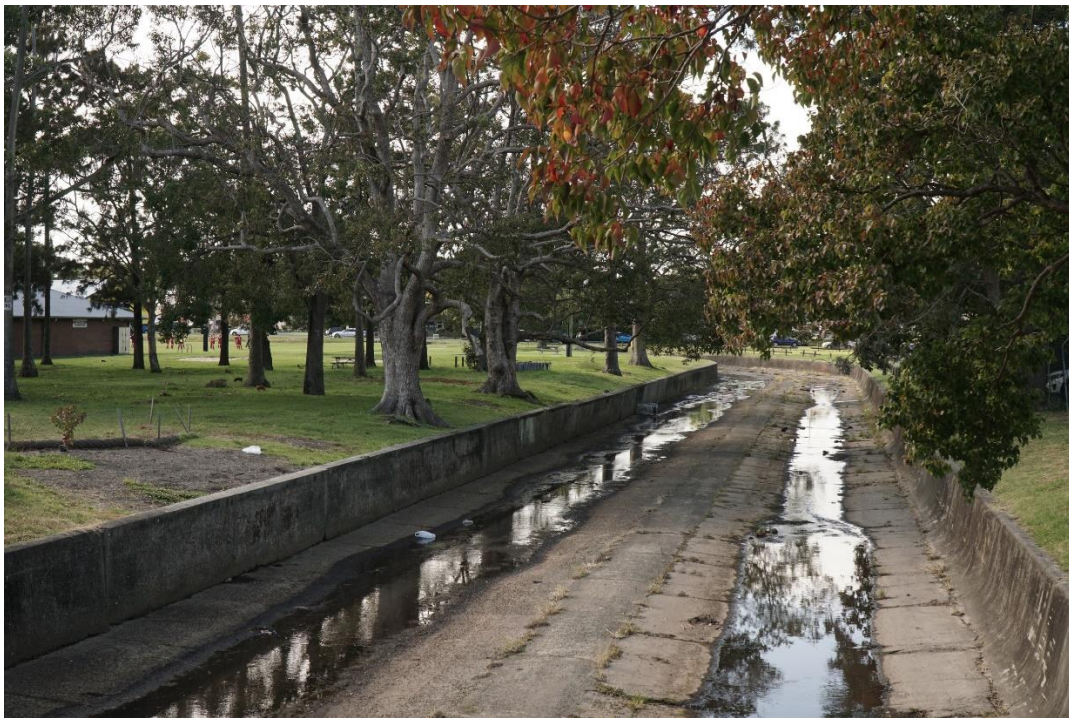
Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

The town of bridges

In the early days Plattsburg was known and the 'Big Swamp' and over the years there have been many bridges built and re-built. In the 21st it certainly lives up to the description 'town of bridges.'^[1] In the immediate town-area there are eight road bridges and a number of pedestrian bridges. Note the flood gauge in the image below.



Bridge across Ironbark Creek on Nelson Street near Boscawen Street



Ironbark Creek near Federal Park

[1] Chegwiddden Chapter 21

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

James Fletcher Bust

The NMHMA reported on Saturday, 16 October 1937^[1] that a “bust statuette of the late James Fletcher, Sen., will soon grace one of the lawn plots of the Rotunda Park, Wallsend, the area of which was dedicated to the people by Mr. Fletcher in the days when he was the chief citizen of Plattsburg, as distinct from Wallsend.”

The bust was a test piece for the life-sized statue that was placed at the corner of Watt St. and Church St. in 1897. It had been lost for around 40 years as it was a likeness of James Fletcher that had arrived from Italy where, after approval, the full statute was to be carved from Carrara marble. The Newcastle Sun reported **Historic Work of Art Found in Newcastle Stables** on Monday, 15 February 1937^[2].



The 'recovered' bust of James Fletcher

Forty years previously the unveiling of the life-sized statue of the late James Fletcher, M.P. was a big event and The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser reported enthusiastically on Saturday 17 April, 1897^[3] with photos by R. Snowball, New Lambton.

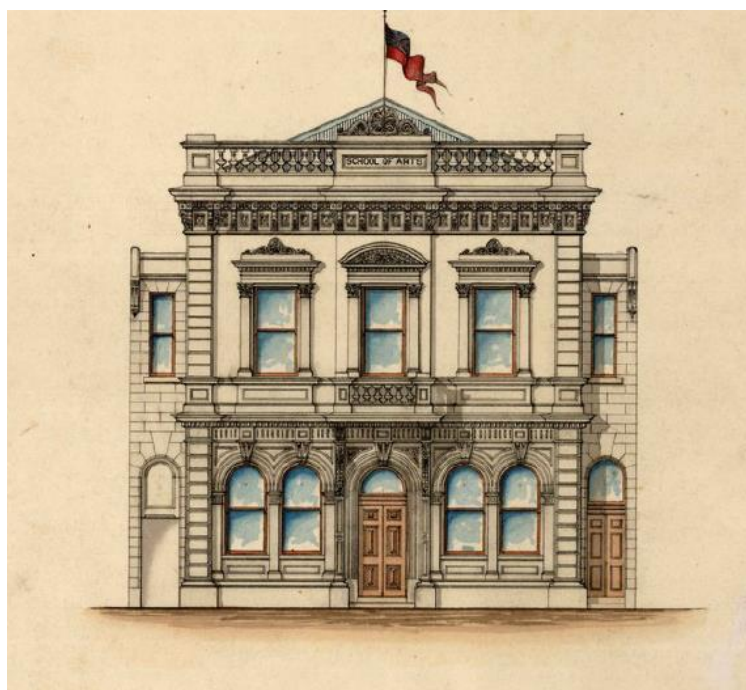
[1] [MR. JAMES FLETCHER - Statuette to be Erected at Wallsend](#)

[2] [Historic Work Of Art Found In Newcastle Stables](#)

[3] [Statue of the Late Mr. James Fletcher](#)

School of Arts

The Wallsend School of Arts was first established in 1870 with a building in Metcalfe Street that served their purposes for around ten years with Wallsend Council taking over the Metcalfe Street building in 1879 (see Council Incorporation)



Architect's sketch of the Cowper Street School of Arts

The Wallsend School of Arts flourished and was subject to membership downturns and in the late 1920s a much smaller group was not able to effectively operate and meet the expenses of the Cowper Street building. By this time the Plattsburg and Wallsend boroughs had re-amalgamated, in 1915, once again as an area known as Wallsend Municipality and on April 2, 1938 Wallsend and 10 other councils joined together to form the City of Greater Newcastle.

Meanwhile the Plattsburg Mechanics Institute was providing similar services in Mary (now Nelson Street), it too becoming unviable in the 1920s.

Wallsend Council purchased the Cowper St, building in 1929^[1] and it was the council's headquarters until 1938. Wallsend School of Arts now downsized into a small building next door to the above, where it operated from 1930 to 1946 when the School of Arts finally closed.

In December 1948 the Newcastle City Council opened the new Wallsend Branch Library next to the Cowper Street former School of Arts building.^[2]

[1] [Wallsend Council - Buys School of Arts](#)

[2] [Library Opened at Wallsend - 1948](#)

Leonora Glass Works

Leonora Glass Industries Pty Ltd was registered as a company on 11 August 1947 and it was initially based on the old Lambton Colliery site.

The founders were David Marr and three highly skilled Czechoslovakian glass workers, Joseph and Henry Vecera and Josef Tvrdik, who came to Australia from Europe in 1934 to teach glass making at a Sydney factory.

While the bulk of Leonora's output was utilitarian in nature, they also handcrafted fine glassware such as jugs, vases, and decorative ornaments. Museums across Australia hold examples of these works in their collections. In July 1957 glassmaking in Lambton came to an abrupt halt when a fire destroyed the Leonora works. The company quickly recovered, purchasing 14 acres of land on Douglas St Wallsend to set up a new factory. In 1960 the multinational firm Philips Industries took over the glassworks to focus on the manufacture of light fittings. Although business expanded in the 1960s, increasing pressure from low cost overseas competitors in the 1970s led to the eventual closure of the works in 1982.



Henry Vecera making a wine glass at Leonora Glassworks in Lambton.^[1]

The site is now occupied by the power distributor AUSGRID's administrative building.

[1] [NMHMA - 7 Oct. 1947 - Leonora Glassworks](#)

Old Wallsend Cemetery

What is now known as the Old Wallsend Cemetery was until 1896 ^[1] the main cemetery for the twin towns, Wallsend and Plattsburg. The cemetery was located in an elevated position between Newcastle Road and Thomas Street with a westerly aspect. Over the years the now unused burial place was neglected and vandalized. By the 1930s the community was agitating for better care and maintenance. With the amalgamation of the Councils in 1938 control of the site was vested in Newcastle City Council. Clearing the site required legislation and, the Old Wallsend Cemetery Act 1953 No. 5 was passed allowing the conversion of the cemetery to open space and a garden area. Before the headstones were cleared, a burial record was made and a survey plan of the layout of the surviving monuments was prepared.



The site of the Old Wallsend Cemetery

The NMH reports on 14 Oct 1954 that work would be completed, after fulfilling the requirements of the Old Wallsend Cemetery Act, to make the site into a park.^[2]

[1] [Wallsend - The Cemetery - Planned Closure](#)

[2] [Newcastle Council reports on requirements prior to creating a park.](#)

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Former Soccer Ground

After a 64-year history, the last race meeting at Wallsend Racecourse took place in 1930. Two years later, the grandstand was moved from the Maryland site to the Crystal Palace Soccer Ground (now the Wallsend Village Shopping Mall) ^[1].



Cath Chegwidden notes:

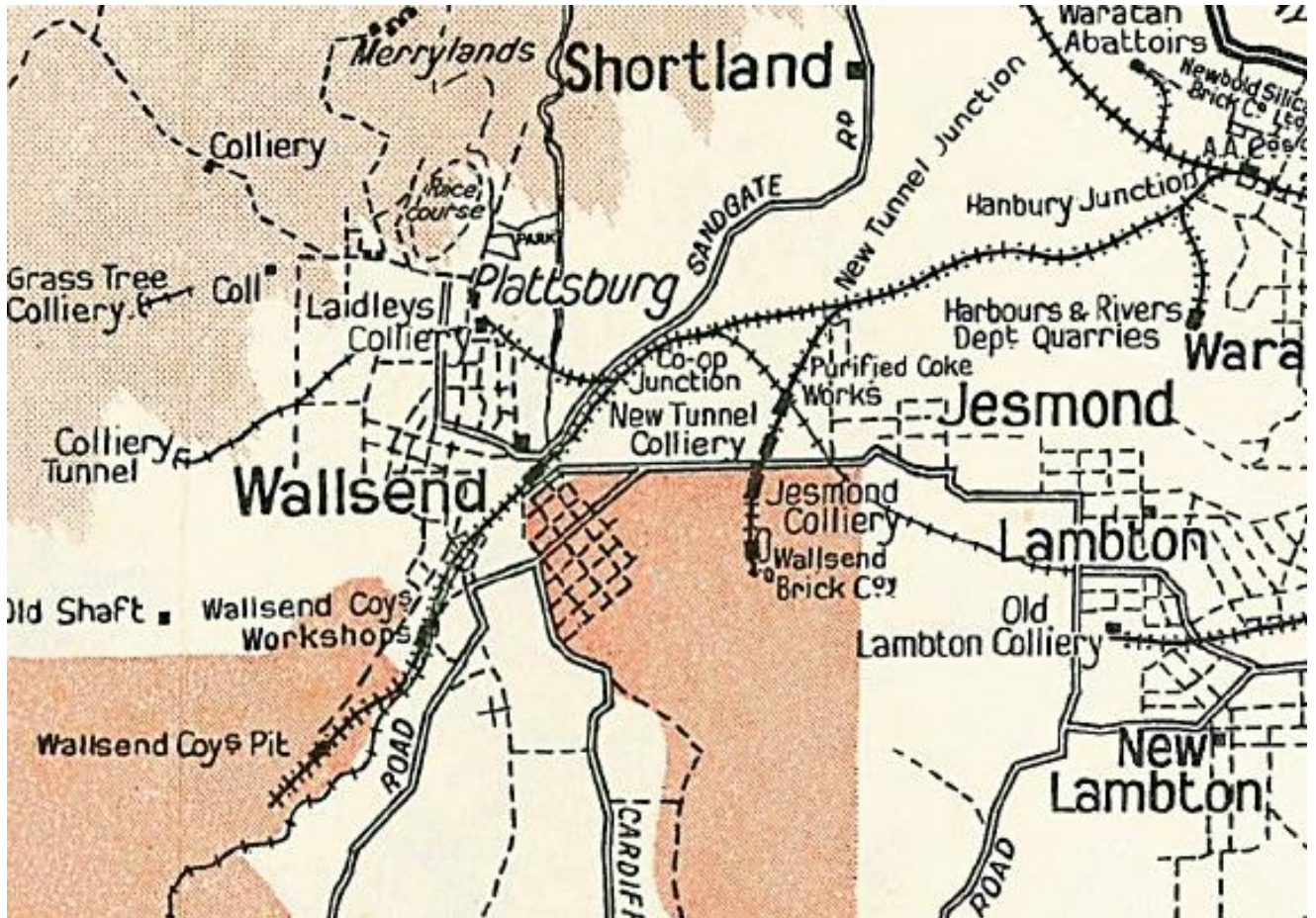
“While interviewing many of the older residents it was often recalled as the saddest day for Wallsend when soccer discontinued and the Crystal Palace Soccer Ground closed for the building of a car park and the Wallsend Plaza.”

[1] Chegwidden: Wallsend Proud, p. 204

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

A map tells a few stories

The map below was published just after World War 2, in 1947, by the Electric Supply Department of Newcastle City Council. It was in a document promoting the area for industrial development. Less than 80 years ago, note the line of the railway from Hanbury Junction to the Wallsend Coys. Pit. Spur lines connected the Jesmond Colliery and Laidley's Colliery, formerly the Cooperative Colliery, now the location of Callaghan College.



Portion of 1947 Map promoting industrial development

The map also shows the tram-line from Lambton, via Jesmond Park to the Co-op Junction and then into Wallsend. The electric tram service was discontinued in 1949.

The coal trains ceased operating in the mid-1930s while, in later years, the few smaller operations used road haulage to move their coal.

The map above suggests that the rail easements may have been able to be rehabilitated for new industries should they have desired to locate near Wallsend.

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Timeline 4 - 1974 to 2024

1974 – Centenary of Local Government

1978 – Wallsend Swimming Centre opens

1989 – The Earthquake, 5.5 on the Richter scale

1991 – Wallsend Mining District Hospital closes

1993 – Newcastle Link Road to the Pacific Motorway opens

1996 – Gretley Colliery closes after fatal accident

2000 – Callaghan College established – (includes former Wallsend High)

2002 – xStrata as final owner closed the former Gretley Colliery

2024 – Sesquicentenary of Local Government

Part 4 - 1974 to the Present

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Centenary of Local Government

There wasn't any special celebration planned for the town's **24 April 1974 Centenary**; the NMH&MA Herald observed on Tuesday 23 April, 1974, that...

Wallsend 100 but not yet to celebrate

Unless they can assemble a couple of brass bands, a fireworks display, some floats, marching girls and a commemorative plaque before midnight tomorrow, the good citizens of Wallsend will miss the only chance they'll have of celebrating their town's 100th birthday on time.

The Herald continued:

"... But yesterday the chances that some celebration would be mounted seemed dim."

"Arrangements are a bit up in the air at the moment" said the Secretary of the local chamber of commerce.

The above proved to be code for nothing was actually planned and there were some vague ideas for an event later in 1974.

The article concluded with praise for the 1924 Jubilee Celebrations:

"... the people were not slack in celebrating their 50th birthday in 1924. They held field days, attended a wireless reception demonstration and put an advertising supplement in the 'Herald'."

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Former Goods Shed and Coal Wagon

Due to efforts of the Wallsend Heritage Group and other community leaders the former Goods Shed, the NWCC coal wagon and the Nelson Street railway gates have been given prominence as reminders of the town's past.^[1]



The coal wagon with Goods Shed masked by trees.



Former rail crossing southern end of Nelson Street, note 'railway' gates.

[1] [The Wallsend branch railway line](#)

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Presbyterian Church

St Andrews Presbyterian Church 1868: First services 1862 Rev. Wm Bain, held in workshops of 'A' pit later in Temperance Hall, cnr. Macquarie and Boundary Streets.

First service in Nelson Street on Sunday, 19 January 1868, Mr. George Nairn was the preacher. The stone above the door shows the build date of 1867.

St Andrews Presbyterian Church is now known as Grace Presbyterian Church. It remains the only 'main street' church in Wallsend.



Presbyterian Church, Wallsend, 2023

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Woodlands Aged Care

Located on Lake Road, is a complex of aged care facilities that are provided by the United Protestant Association. The site features a faithfully restored Woodlands House was the home of John Young Neilson the manager of Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company from 1861 to 1889. ^[1]

After Mr. Neilson's untimely death at sea Alexander Ross, the new mine manager, and his family occupied the house until his retirement in 1911.



Woodlands House with the Ross family and housekeepers. Photo Ralph Snowball, 1902
Alexander, Jane, Vela and Bertha Ross

In 2023 the complex consists of Woodlands Lodge an aged-care facility and units for a self-care retirement living.

The last company manager to reside in the house was Henry David Hill who lived there until November 1934. The home's name "Woodlands" first appeared in electoral rolls for 1915. During the 1940s "Woodlands" was converted for use as a home for "destitute children". Beginning in 1989 through to 1990 the house was restored to something of its Victorian grandeur by the UPA (United Protestants Association) of NSW." [1] Ed Tonks. Wallsend and Pelton Collieries A Chronology of the Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company [Carrington, N.S.W.] - Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company, 1990 p. 311

[1] Chegvidden – Wallsend Proud

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Shopping Centre

The shopping center is now called **Wallsend Village** it is on the site of the former Crystal Palace Soccer Ground.



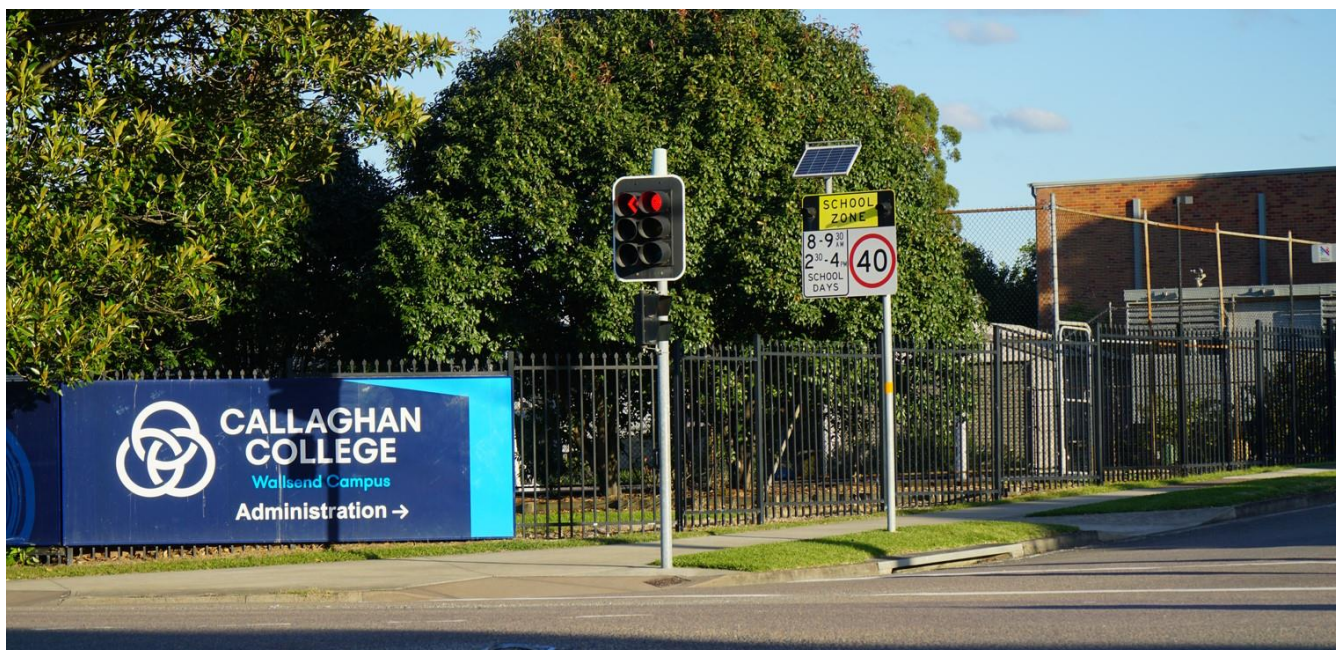
Wallsend Village viewed from the former railway alignment

Wallsend Library

Opposite the Wallsend Village is the library.



Callaghan College – Wallsend Campus



Callaghan College, Wallsend Campus – cnr. Macquarie St and Minmi Road

Callaghan College was established on 28 June 2000 by transitioning three local public high schools, Waratah Technology High School, Wallsend High School and Jesmond High School into a multi-campus collegiate, with a senior campus site for Year 11 and 12 education, and two junior campuses providing education from Years 7 - 10.

In 2023 the Senior Campus is located in Janet Street, Jesmond. The former Wallsend High School, located in Macquarie Street, Wallsend is now called Wallsend Campus and it is a, years 7 to 10, feeder campus. The second feeder campus, performing a similar role, is located on the site of the former Newcastle Boys' High School and is called the Waratah Campus.

Wallsend Campus is located on the site of the former Cooperative Colliery, an icon, of Wallsend's mining history.

Wallsend, NSW – towards the Sesquicentenary

Wallsend Hospital

The hospital closed as primary care facility in 1991 and is now used for ancillary health services and aged care.

The push for a hospital in Wallsend started around 1885 and was led by John Summers who organised many public meetings. Its construction was funded by the New South Wales State Government but the ongoing running was funded largely by the Wallsend and Plattsburg community who raised money from community days and also funding from the local mining industry.

Designed by renowned architect, Frederick Menkens and built by Mr. Charles Baker of Hamilton in 1892 constructed on land donated by Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company, Wallsend Hospital was opened in 1893 by the Postmaster General, Mr. J. Kidd.



Wallsend Hospital, Doctors and Nurses – Ralph Snowball - 1895

In 2023 the miner's hospital site is now the venue for a number of health-related care services.^[1]

[1] [Wallsend Hospital History](#)

Federal Park Opened

The NMH&MA reported, on Monday 9 December 1901, that “The Hon. T. Waddell, Colonial Treasurer, visited Plattsburg on Saturday afternoon and performed the ceremony of declaring open to the public the new ‘Federal Park’.” [1]

Prior to dedication the land had been controlled by the Trustee of the Lemongrove Estate. The former Member for Wallsend, Mr. D. Watkins, MHR relayed Plattsburg Council’s desire to create a new park to the NSW Premier. A grant was made to the Council allowing the purchase of the site at auction. The area was stated as 14 acres 3 roods and 3 perches, converted to metric units the area is 5.98 hectares.



Excellent amenities at Federal Park

In the period 1920 to 1950 the area was used for bicycle and motor cycle racing activities.

The Newcastle Sun, 5 April 1928 reported in its CYCLING feature: “Wallsend Club's track carnival is set down for tomorrow, at Federal Park at 2 p.m.” [2]

The Newcastle Sun, 15 January 1935 reported, “Wallsend Motor Cycle Club is planning to convert Federal Park into a first-class sports ground, including a speedway track.” A related motor-cycle activity was called a “scramble” – it was about a race through the bush on rough tracks. Below is a link to a list on Trove that lists scramble articles. [3]

In 2023 the park is used for cricket and soccer football and the Wallsend Swimming Pool at the northern of the park.

[1] [NSW Treasurer Opens Federal Park](#)

[2] <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/163759536>

[3] <https://trove.nla.gov.au/list/171755>

New Mural in the Town



In 2022 the Wallsend Town Business Association collaborated with local mural organization, **Up&Up Inspirations** and **It Stands Out** (Melbourne) under consultation with Wallsend's Heritage Group and the property owner to design a large-scale mural on the side of local MP Sonia Hornery's office in Nelson St Wallsend.

The mural highlights the coal railway, an initiative of the Newcastle-Wallsend Coal Company in 1861 and the steam tram, that commenced in 1887. The steam tram in its heyday stretched from Parnell Place in Newcastle to Wallsend and later extended to Speers Point and to West Wallsend. The railway was about moving coal and the tram was about a service for the people in the expanding coal towns.

Appendix 1 - Wallsend Heritage Group

About WHG

Wallsend Heritage Group Inc. was established in 1994. The group currently meets on the second Thursday of each month in the Heritage Room at Wallsend Library.

WHG has promoted the history of Wallsend to the local community, the City of Newcastle and the NSW Government. The Group has assisted the government and the private sector with historical information and helped to identify and mark places of significance for future generations.

A few of the many projects that WHG has actively led are:

- Heritage Plaques located around the town
- Design and conducting of heritage walks
- Improvements to the Nelson Street railway-crossing together with the featured white gates and the historic Goods Shed
- Grant monies for the original pathways in Blue Gum Hills Park
- Advocating, during the planning phase, for better amenities in the new Bunn Street library to benefit members of the community
- Improvements for visitors to the Cowper Street War Memorial, including funding of a surrounding Memorial Park Garden.

The Wallsend Heritage Group acknowledges the support over the years of its Patrons, being the State Members for Wallsend, formerly John Mills, MP and currently Sonia Hornery MP.

Appendix 2 - Sources and Acknowledgements

Some photographs have been sourced from the **Newcastle Photobank**, while others have been sourced from **The University of Newcastle Cultural Collections**. The collections are acknowledged as are the original photographers.

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