



The Newcastle Earthquake

At 10:27am on 28 December 1989, Newcastle was devastated by a ML 5.6 (Richter Scale) earthquake. At the time it was the most serious natural disaster in Australia's history, leaving a damages bill of \$4 billion; injuring more than 160 people and claiming 13 lives. The city was thrown into chaos immediately following the earthquake. Office workers poured out of buildings and onto the rubble-strewn footpaths as police cordoned off city roads and evacuated buildings in the central business district. Partially collapsed shops and homes lined the streets and major hospitals sustained serious damage causing disruption to medical services. Patients were evacuated from Royal Newcastle Hospital because of fears of the effect of aftershocks on already damaged buildings.

The City of Newcastle, long praised for its late 19th and early 20th century architecture, was shattered by the loss of so many historic buildings. The 'Century Theatre,' a grand picture palace from the 1930s and the scene of many concerts, was destroyed along with the 19th century theatre, 'King's Hall'. Also damaged beyond repair was the Newcastle Workers Club, the scene of nine of the thirteen deaths.

Many other heritage buildings were demolished in the weeks after the earthquake; their structural damage so severe that they could not be repaired. The historic Junction Demonstration School and the Railway Inn, George Hotel, built in 1904, were knocked down. Other landmarks such as the harbourfront Customs House (c1877), an iconic Newcastle building (now a restaurant) were extensively damaged. The suburb of Hamilton and its main street, Beaumont Street, suffered severely in the earthquake. Its two most significant heritage landmarks, the Donald and the Municipal Buildings were lost. In addition, Beaumont Street's 'Kent Hotel' was the scene of three deaths and there was widespread damage to businesses and homes in the area.

The impact on the Newcastle community was devastating as 40,000 homes were damaged resulting in over 1000 residents becoming homeless. Many Novocastrians, especially the elderly, were uninsured or underinsured which consequently caused much of the displacement. However, it was the timing of the earthquake that saved many more lives. The Workers Club was due to hold a concert that night with 2000 people expected to attend. Also, 147 schools were damaged during the quake and had it not been for the Christmas school holidays, the impact would have been far worse.



The Newcastle Workers Club was the scene of 9 deaths and many injuries when it collapsed.



Extensive damage occurred at Beaumont Street, Hamilton.