



## Newcastle History- the short version

The Awabakal people lived in the Newcastle area for countless generations. To the Awabakal, Newcastle was known as Muloobinba, translated as Mu-lu-bin (edible sea fern) –ba (place of).

Lieutenant Shortland was the first white man to explore and name the place, and it his original landing at Signal Hill (Fort Scratchley) and Stockton on September 9, 1797, which Newcastle has chosen to mark as the founding of the city. Captain Cook had earlier marked on a map the rocky islet of Nobby's Head at its mouth as he sailed north on May 10, 1770.

Shortland reported on the abundance of coal in the area and in 1799 the first shipment of coal was sent to Bengal, making Newcastle, Australia's first commercial port.

The first settlement of Newcastle was short lived, ending with a mutiny and closing in early 1802, after sinking what is believed to be the first coal mine in the Southern Hemisphere at Colliers Point (now Fort Scratchley).

A new settlement of Newcastle was established in 1804 as a place of secondary punishment for unmanageable convicts and was re-named Newcastle, after England's famous coal port. The new settlement, comprising of convicts and a military guard, arrived at the Hunter River on the 10 March 1804, under the appointment of Superintendent Lieutenant Charles Menzies.

Captain James Wallis (commandant from 1815 to 1818) laid out the streets of Newcastle, built the first church (on the site of the present Christ Church Cathedral), erected the old gaol on the seashore, and began work on the breakwater, which now joins Nobby's to the mainland. The quality of these buildings was poor and only a much-reinforced breakwall survived. In 1816 a public school was built in East Newcastle for the children of soldiers and convicts, making Newcastle East Public School, Australia's oldest school.

The Bogey Hole was built in 1819 when Major James Morisset, the town commandant, ordered a swimming hole for his own personal use. Originally called the Commandant's Baths, it was made by convicts who cut into a tidal rock platform at the bottom of what is now King Edward Park. The current name is an aboriginal word meaning 'to bathe'.

Newcastle's time as a penal colony ended in 1823 and the town began to acquire the aspect of a typical Australian pioneer settlement, with a steady flow of free settlers pouring into the area.

In 1847 Newcastle was proclaimed a city and named as the centre of a new Anglican Bishopric, meaning the structurally questionable Christ Church became a Cathedral.

Construction of a lighthouse on Nobby's Headland was begun in 1856, replacing the original signal mast set up in 1804, and has been guiding ships into Newcastle Harbour since 1858.

1876 saw the construction of Customs House and in 1881 work on Fort Scratchley commenced because of fear of a Russian invasion.

BHP was opened in 1915 and so began the transformation of Newcastle from coal city to steel city.



Newcastle City Hall and Civic Theatre were both built in 1929.

The amalgamation of 11 independent Council areas (Adamstown, Carrington, Hamilton, Lambton, Merewether, New Lambton, Plattsburg, Stockton, Wallsend, Waratah and Wickham) in 1938 resulted in the City of Greater Newcastle. These separate municipalities or boroughs developed mostly through coal discoveries and all, with the exception of Carrington, were “private towns” which grew from land grants to different companies and individuals.

The outbreak of World War II saw the RAAF base established at Williamtown in 1941 and in 1942 Fort Scratchley fired its guns for the first time. At 2:15am on June 8th, Newcastle was attacked by a Japanese submarine, and subsequently returned fire, making it the first and only Australian fort to return fire on an enemy ship during a time of war.

In 1974, the Sygna became the largest ship ever to be washed up on the coast of Australia. A cyclone struck in the early hours of Sunday 26 May 1974, and on the following morning the 53,000 tonne Norwegian bulk carrier, which was anchored off the Newcastle Bight was found shipwrecked on the Stockton Beach. The bow section was salvaged but the stern remains as a popular fishing location and landmark.

Queen Elizabeth II visited Newcastle for the second time in 1988 and opened Queens Wharf as part of the Newcastle Foreshore redevelopment. This project was the vision of Joy Cummings, who became Lord Mayor of Newcastle in 1974, the first woman ever to hold the position in Australia.

At 10:27am, on Thursday 28 December 1989, Newcastle was devastated by a ML 5.6 (Richter magnitude) earthquake. At the time this was the most serious natural disaster in Australia’s history claiming 13 lives, injuring more than 160 people and damaging over 60 000 buildings.

The Newcastle Knights won their first Australian Rugby League premiership in 1997 resulting in unprecedented celebrations. And the 2001 grand final saw more celebrating for the Knights. More recently, in February 2008, the Newcastle United Jets Football Club won the soccer A-league competition for the first time.

BHP closed their Newcastle steelmaking plant on 30 September 1999 bringing the end of an era in Australia’s industrial history. At its peak it employed 11 558 and steel production reached 2 million tonnes.

In 2007 Newcastle made international headlines with the infamous Pasha Bulker shipwreck. The 77,000 tonne vessel was blown aground 20 metres off Nobbys Beach on June 8 2007, at the height of a storm that brought gale force winds, huge seas, torrential rains and flooding to Newcastle and the Hunter. The giant bulk carrier became a surprise tourist attraction while stranded, attracting thousands of visitors. The Pasha Bulker was successfully refloated nearly a month later on the 2nd July 2007, with salvage operations costing close to \$2 million.

Now, as Australia’s second oldest city and seventh largest city, with a population of around 137 000, Newcastle is a beautiful city with a unique and interesting history.