

# EXPLORE

## Wallsend

We acknowledge the Awabakal people, the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters, which are featured in this guide. We recognise their cultural heritage, beliefs and continuing connection to the land and waters, and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and emerging.



*Nelson Strett, Wallsend 1906,  
University of Newcastle,  
Norm Barney Collection*

FOR thousands of years, the Pambalong or Pambaland tribe of the Awabakal people occupied the area located on the southern side of the Hunter wetlands. Known as Burraghinhnihng, or Hexham Swamp, the area covered what is now Wallsend, Plattsburg and Maryland.

Men hunted a variety of animals, the main catch being possums which were abundant in the area. Wallabies and kangaroo rats were also staples whilst kangaroos and emus could be found further afield. Women collected vegetables, fruits and tubers and also were responsible for obtaining water and firewood.

A number of places have been identified as being of cultural significance to the Pambalong. Every six months ceremonies were held at a corroboree ground, said to be in the vicinity of Federal Park between Nelson and John streets, and there was a burial site near Hexham. Early European settlers recorded seeing a significant number of people in the area and in 1833 the district magistrate noted there were about 45 people from the Pambalong tribe in the locality.

The low-lying, swampy land did not attract much interest from early European settlers. The Pambalong had identified coal deposits and named the area Nikkinba – the place of coals. Early landowners included the Sparke family, whose property covered 2000 acres in the area north and west of the Great Swamp in 1824, and Joseph Brooks Weller who received a grant of 1200 acres in 1824.

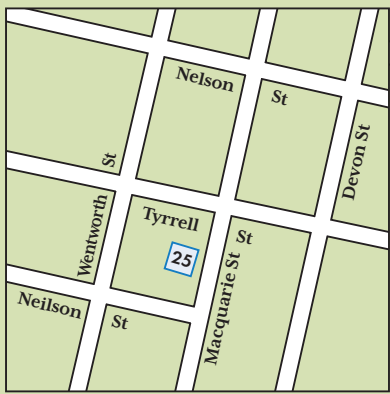
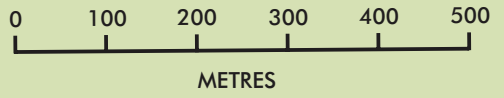
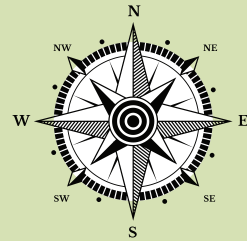
By 1838 all of Weller's land had been mortgaged to John Brown, who later established and named the mining settlement of Wallsend.

The land at Plattsburg and Maryland was owned by George Brooks and his wife Mary. Brooks was a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and in mid-1822 took up the position of Assistant Surgeon, in charge of the General Hospital at Newcastle.

It was not until Europeans realised the value of coal to domestic and overseas markets that larger numbers came to the area. In 1828, the Australian Agricultural Company was given a monopoly to mine coal in the area for a period of 31 years. This monopoly did not last for the granted period as there were others who wished to enter the coal trade.

One of these was Alexander Brown who gave the name Wallsend to his Newcastle estate. In 1858 he proposed a development on his property in the form of a coal-mining venture at Dark Creek, west of Newcastle. The Newcastle Wallsend Coal Co was incorporated and the first coal from the mine went to Newcastle on January 3, 1861. A covered wagon was added to the coal train for conveying passengers who joined the train at the Newcastle coal wharf sidings. This was made difficult for females whose mode of dress at the time included bustles and crinolines.

The Borough of Wallsend was incorporated in 1874 and the first Mayor was James Fletcher. The council consisted of two distinct groups and two colliery managers were aldermen. This resulted in much conflict and representations were made to have two separate municipalities. In 1876 the Boroughs of Wallsend and Plattsburg were declared, with the boundary being the coal railway running between Cowper and Kemp and Dan Rees streets.





## 1 Rotunda 1888

Situated on part of the former Lemon Grove Estate, the Rotunda's main feature is cast iron fluted columns. It was designed by Bennett & Yeomans, the contractor was George Froome, and it was used mainly as an entertainment venue, with the local brass band giving regular concerts. Public meetings, generally of a political or industrial nature, were also conducted and drew large crowds due to the proximity of the rail line.

Near the Rotunda is a bust of the first Mayor of Wallsend, James Fletcher. He was the Chairman of the Hunter River Miners' Association and worked tirelessly to improve working conditions for miners. He was elected to NSW Parliament between 1880-91 and the former Newcastle Mental Hospital was named after him in 1989. His former residence, Styles Grove, is now the site of Bishop Tyrrell College.

Adjacent is a concrete sculpture 'From the Coal Face', by Lyndall Beazley.

## 2 Police Barracks/Sergeants Quarters 1885

This building is in near original condition, except for the removal of two chimneys. Designed by Mortimer Lewis, Government Architect, it provided three bedrooms, a study and mess room. A separate building housed the kitchen and store room and stables were in another building at the rear.



*Lemongrove Hotel, rotunda and tramlines, Wallsend 1946*  
*Greg & Sylvia Ray's phototimetunnel.com*

## 3 Former Post Office 1882

Postal services commenced in 1861 and were conducted from premises in Cowper St. Twenty years later more substantial premises were built next to the Court House. Constructed in the same Italianate style as Lambton Post Office, the building is a two-storey brick structure on stone foundations. Postal services were provided here for more than one hundred years until the service was transferred in 1995 to premises in Wallsend Village.

## 4 Court House

Originally known as Plattsburg Court of Petty Sessions, the first court session was conducted in January 1879. When Tyrell and Nelson streets were widened to accommodate the tram terminal, part of the building was demolished. In 1929 a new building was constructed at the rear of the block facing Charles St. The remains of the original Court House later formed part of the Police Station.

## 5 Lemon Grove Hotel

This hotel is built on part of the former 320-acre Lemon Grove Estate. The estate, which had extensive gardens and a grove of lemon trees, was home to William Clarke, one of the original free settlers. The area was subdivided after the death of a later owner and much of Wallsend is built on it. The first hotel licence was granted in 1877 and the building had extensive renovations in the 1920s.



*Nelson St Wallsend with electric tram, 1935.*  
*Greg & Sylvia Ray's phototimetunnel.com*

## 6 St Andrews Church 1868

Presbyterian services were first held in workshops at A Pit and then in Temperance Hall, corner Macquarie and Boundary streets, until this building was completed. Designed in the Gothic style and constructed in stone, a feature was the four-foot-wide ventilator for keeping the church cool in summer. The former St Andrew's is now known as Grace Presbyterian Church.

## 7 Grapes Inn 1869

Built on land purchased from the Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company and made of sandstone in the Victorian style. The first billiard table in the town was installed here in 1874. The hotel was closed for some time during World War 1 and resumed trading until 1921. It was closed by the Licensing Reduction Board as it was deemed too small to provide adequate accommodation. For the last hundred years it has housed a variety of commercial ventures.

## 8 Site of Railway Station / Railway Gates

Constructed by Newcastle Wallsend Coal Co for NSW Railways, the station opened in 1877 and was replaced with a brick structure in 1889. Passenger services had to fit in with movement of coal from the Wallsend mine to the port of Newcastle, but this ceased when steam trams commenced operation in 1887. The building was demolished and reconstructed facing Minmi Rd, within the campus of Wallsend High School (now Callaghan College Wallsend Campus) in 1985. The original railway gates were installed around 1860. As the community grew a path, and later road, crossed the coal line, which ran between Cowper St and Kemp St and Dan Rees Close. A replica of the gates still exists today.

## 9 Site of Railway Hotel

The hotel traded between 1875 and 1908 and was ideally located for accommodating travellers. Built of stone, it was located at a major traffic junction and close to the railway station. However, it became a visual hazard for motorists, as its bulk restricted vision. To cope with increasing traffic, the surrounding roads were widened, a project which necessitated the demolition of the building in the 1967.



*Miss Clara Mayer's house, Cowper St 1966 (Formerly Railway Hotel)*  
*Greg & Sylvia Ray's phototimetunnel.com*

## 10 Former Wallsend Library

This was the second free library to be opened in Newcastle Council area. Established in 1948, the venture was largely funded by the Joint Coal Board. Library services were moved to a new building in Bunn Street in 2006.

## 11 Wallsend School of Arts

Further education opportunities for adults were provided by the School of Arts movement. In 1878, the first School of Arts building opened in Metcalf Street. The building soon became too small for its users and four years later this large two-storey structure opened in Cowper St.

Declining membership led to the School of Arts moving to smaller premises next door. They operated here between 1930 to 1946. Wallsend Council then purchased the building in 1929 and it was council's headquarters until 1938, when 11 suburban councils amalgamated to form Newcastle Council. The RSL acquired the building in 1948 and today it is classified by the National Trust.

## 12 Travellers Rest Hotel/Terminus Hotel

This hotel was named Travellers Rest as passengers would stay here and then take the Royal Mail Coach to the Waratah railway station. Opened in 1861, the hotel traded until 1885 when the wooden building was demolished. The current structure opened in 1896 and was named the Terminus Hotel. With the closing of the rail and tram networks located opposite, business declined and the hotel ceased trading. The structure was used for a variety of purposes and today is private rental accommodation.

## 13 Colliery Inn

One of three hotels in Newcastle that were licensed by 1865 and still trade today with their original names and sites (the others are the Burwood Inn at Merewether and the General Washington at Stockton). In 1940 the original, two-storey brick building was severely damaged by fire and was demolished. It was replaced with the current Art Deco structure which features an external clock.



*Watson's Hotel (Colliery Inn) 1897.  
University of Newcastle, Norm Barney Collection*

## 14 Masonic Hall

A branch of the Freemasons, Lodge St James, was originally formed in Muswellbrook and moved to Wallsend in 1874. For over 20 years the Lodge met in the former Plattsburg Protestant Hall and then in 1902 purchased this land. The former drapery shop on the site was renovated by the lodge for its meetings. Over time the building became too small and was demolished to make way for this meeting place, which opened in 1924.

## 15 Council Chambers 1875

This building housed the first School of Arts in Wallsend but four years after opening, the School of Arts moved to larger premises. The building was then used as Council Chambers for Wallsend Council until 1929. Deemed too small for its needs, council then moved to the School of Arts building in Cowper St. In later years the structure was used for various commercial purposes and since 1989 has housed the Newcastle Mosque.

## 16 Clarens House C1888

Residence in the Victorian style built for William Johnson, who owned a large general store in Cowper St. He could gain access to his shop from the rear of this home. Johnson also owned a timber business employing a large number of timber cutters. Most of the timber used in local coal mines was supplied by his business, which was a major contractor for the construction of the Wallsend to Newcastle tramway. The house was divided into flats for a period of time, was used as a boarding house and is now a private residence.

## 17 St Lukes Anglican Church

At first, Anglican services were conducted in the blacksmith's shop at A Pit. The Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company donated land in Metcalf St to the church in 1862 and two years later a school was built on the site. Constructed of upright slabs of sawn timber about two inches thick, the building sometimes served as a church. In the early 1880s stone, believed to be from a quarry in North Lambton, was used to construct the current church, which was consecrated in 1910 after the property became debt free. Major renovations were undertaken to the church in 1975 and again in 1996 after the Newcastle Earthquake.



*St Luke's Church of England 1906.  
Newcastle Region Library, Ralph Snowball Collection*

## 18 Railway Goods Shed

Built to provide a safe storage area for goods waiting to be transported. The original, weatherboard shed opened in 1868 and was replaced with the brick structure nine years later. It was threatened with demolition in 1989 but a State Heritage Order now protects the structure, which has housed a variety of public and private enterprises over the years.



## 19 Site of Commercial Hotel/ The Fig Tree Hotel

The Commercial Hotel traded for over one hundred years after it opened in 1874. Locally known as Figtrees, as it stood opposite a stand of fig trees on the former railway line, new owners renamed it Fig Tree Hotel in 1982. The structure sustained severe structural damage from the Newcastle Earthquake and was demolished.



*Tram at Wallsend near Fig Tree Hotel 1948.  
Greg & Sylvia Ray's phototimetunnel.com*

## 20 Site of Crystal Palace Soccer Ground

Wallsend Soccer Club was formed in 1887 and an area of swampy land was leased from Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company. The land was raised and levelled and in 1921 the Crystal Palace Ground was opened. Soccer was a popular pastime and the grounds were used to host a number of overseas teams. Modern club premises were opened in 1971, but in the early 1980s the club decided to sell the site for a shopping centre, which opened in 1985.

## 21 Site of Metropolitan Hotel/Workmens Club/Co-operative Store/Empire Cinema

Opened in 1886 the Metropolitan Hotel was the only three-storey building in the area at the time. The Wallsend and Plattsburg Co-operative Society opened a drapery and boot department in the former hotel in 1904. Twenty years later the building was substantially renovated and became the Empire Theatre, which operated between 1924 and 1970. It was demolished after sustaining fire damage and the site lay vacant for over 10 years. The Summaland Centre was built in 1980 and named after owner Mr Summa.

## 22 Fire Station

Residents formed their own fire brigade in 1888 after a fire in the town. Prior to this, residents relied on nearby brigades to come to their aid. The volunteers operated from a small wooden building which was replaced in 1921 with the current brick structure. After a new station was constructed in Summerhill Road in 2018, the building was sold and has been adapted for residential use.

## 23 Great Northern Hotel/Fire Station Tavern/ Fire Station Hotel

Opened in 1875, the Great Northern traded until 1980, and then reopened as the Fire Station Tavern. At this time extensive renovations were undertaken, including the removal of the upper floor verandah, modernising the upstairs living quarters and installing a more modern bar and lounge. The change of name was in recognition of its location opposite the Fire Station, a prominent feature in the community.

## 24 Site of Victoria Hotel

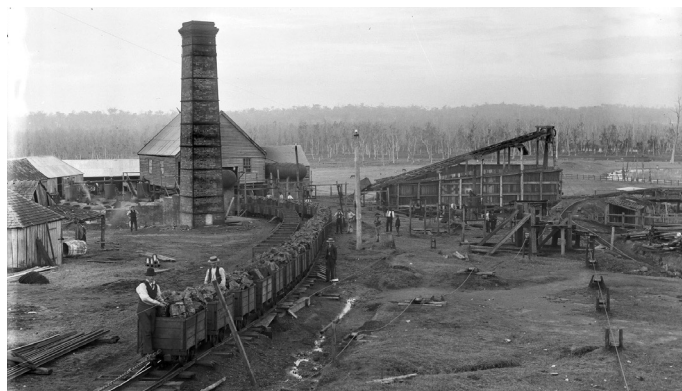
Located diagonally opposite the Fire Station Hotel, the Victoria Hotel started trading in 1884. The two-storey structure was frequented by workers from the nearby Co-operative Mine. The hotel closed in 1895 and the building still stands today, minus the original first floor verandah

## 25 St Patrick's Catholic Church & School

Early religious services were held in a small timber building which was used as a school during the week and a church on the weekend. Stones, thought to have been mined from a quarry in Nelson Street, were used to construct a larger church which opened in 1875. With the continued growth in population, a more substantial brick church, made with local bricks and twice the size of the old church, was completed in 1931. It was built across the road from the old church and is on the same site as the current school complex.

## 26 Co-operative Mine Site/ Wallsend High School

The first secondary school for Wallsend opened in one of the Co-operative Colliery buildings where the school now stands. The entrance to the mine tunnel was on the western side of the school buildings. In 1932 the site was purchased by R W Miller & Co, which also mined the site. Thirty years later the Education Department purchased the site and constructed Wallsend High School, now known as Callaghan College Wallsend Campus.



*Co-operative Colliery Wallsend, 1897.  
University of Newcastle, Ralph Snowball Collection*

## 27 Plattsburg School

Classes commenced for students at Plattsburg in 1865 and were held in the Temperance Hall at the corner of Macquarie and Boundary streets. By 1871 there were 157 pupils, but the hall and its playground were inadequate and two years later tenders were called for a school building and teacher's residence on the hill at Plattsburg. This area was extensively undermined by the workings of the Co-operative Mine and cracks started to appear in the buildings. A new school, constructed of brick, was built in 1884 on a site that did not have subsidence issues.

## 28 Federal Park

Dedicated and opened in 1901, the park covered fifteen acres, and was part of the Lemon Grove Estate. It was a low-lying marshy area which had been used previously for grazing and sometimes for recreational activities. A concrete speedway track was constructed in the 1930s and was built to such a high standard that it could host national and international events. With the advent of war, dwindling funds and lack of manpower to maintain the track, it deteriorated and was demolished. Today the park is used for cricket, soccer, football and there is a swimming pool at the northern end of the park.

## FURTHER AFIELD

### A Woodlands House

This was the Colliery Managers' house and was built in 1867 for John Young Neilson, the manager of Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company from 1861 to 1889. Extensive renovations were undertaken and it was then home to Alexander Ross, manager from 1889 until 1911. The property was sold after the mine closed in 1932, and again in 1944, when it became the property of The United Protestant Association. Woodlands House opened as a home for destitute children with boys remaining at the site until 1981. Girls were moved to Ellimatta at East Maitland in 1945. Today the property is part of the Woodlands Retirement Village.

### B Wallsend School

First established in 1862, classes were held in a calico tent and then a slab structure with a shingle roof. Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company donated land and the school was established in its current location in 1871. It was classified as a Superior Public School between 1881 and 1913, with both primary and secondary students on the site. The school closed for five months in 1919 to become a temporary hospital for those suffering from influenza.

### C Cemetery Site

Initially burials were held in Newcastle and this was a whole day affair as travel to and from the cemetery was time consuming due to the poor condition of the roads. In 1864 Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company granted this area of land for use as a cemetery. It became the general cemetery for the township and surrounding district with nearly 4000 burials taking place. A burial record was made and headstones were removed when the cemetery closed in 1896. The land is now used for recreational purposes.

### D Wallsend Brickworks

Located adjacent to the New Tunnel Colliery, these works supplied high quality bricks for industrial and house construction. The brickworks operated from 1891 until 1977 and used steam-powered machinery. At its peak the works made 400,000 bricks a week. Today the area is used for recreational purposes and is known as Brickworks Park.



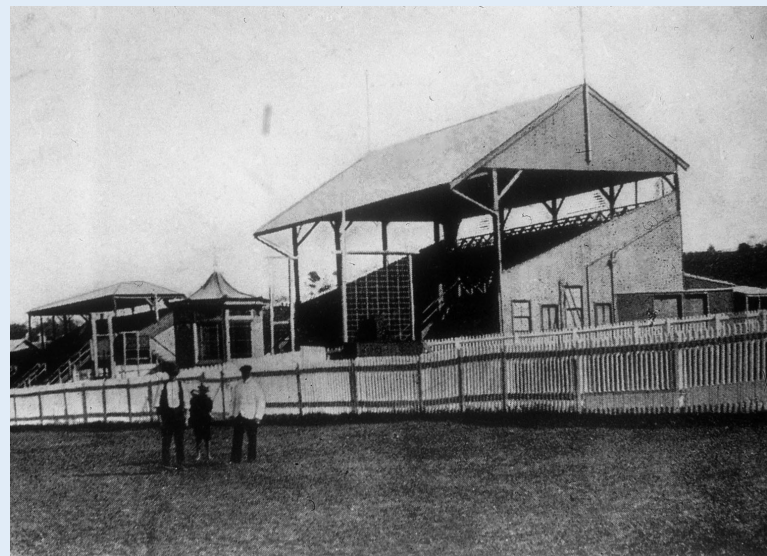
*Photo Wallsend Hospital 1906.  
University of Newcastle, Norm Barney Collection*

### E Former Wallsend Hospital

Opened in 1893, the Wallsend Mining District Hospital was built on three acres of land donated by Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company. It was funded by local collieries, friendly societies and lodges, trade unions, councils, individual donations and a government grant. When it opened the hospital could treat 22 patients and there were two private wards. Major extensions were carried out in the 1930s and the hospital was renamed the Wallsend District Hospital to reflect the services it provided to the wider community. The hospital closed in 1991 and today the buildings are used for ancillary health services and aged care.

### F Former Racecourse Site

The first Wallsend race meeting was held in 1866 and was attended by 1500 people. The location was a paddock belonging to Andrew Ricklow at Plattsburg. Horse racing was a popular sport and in 1877 the Wallsend Jockey Club opened a new facility opposite the Racecourse Hotel. The first meeting was attended by over 4000 people, who mostly arrived at Wallsend via rail. According to Chegvidden "Everyone who had a dray or sulky crammed punters into these usually, private use only vehicles and charged them a shilling for the short drive to the track". By the 1930s the club was in financial difficulties and together with the impacts of the depression, it decided to close the facility. In 1932 the grandstand was removed and rebuilt on land that became Crystal Palace Soccer Ground.



*Photo Wallsend, old racecourse early 1900s.  
University of Newcastle, Dr John Turner Collection*

### G Racecourse Hotel

This hotel was named because of the racecourse that once operated opposite it. The first licence was issued in 1884 and the hotel was a Cobb & Co stopover point. Even though patronage decreased after the racecourse moved, the hotel continues to trade today. The building suffered major damage in the Newcastle Earthquake and extensive repair work was undertaken. A feature of the building is its signage – on one side it is the Race Course Hotel and the other the Racecourse Hotel.

**Walk takes approximately 90 minutes and includes some hilly terrain.**

Major information sources: Chegvidden, Cath – *Wallsend Proud. Then and Now* and Murray, Peter – *The Early Years of Wallsend and Plattsburg*

Compiled by Julie Keating 2023 • Graphic Design kdDESIGN