



Upper Hunter Heritage Study

Thematic History
March 2017



Prepared by Mark Dunn for
the Upper Hunter Shire
Council

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Introduction

The following thematic history has been prepared for the Upper Hunter Shire Council as part of their Heritage Study review. It is the first to address the entire Local Government Area of the Upper Hunter Shire Council since its amalgamation in 2004, and has been undertaken in conjunction with Co-Associates who undertook the heritage study review. The history has been prepared by Mark Dunn, historian, using the NSW Historical Themes as set out by the Office of Environment and Heritage as endorsed by the NSW Heritage Council. The themes provide a guide to the major forces or processes that have contributed to the development of the Upper Hunter and assist in providing a context to assess the heritage significance of individual items within the region. Funding for the study was provided by the Department of Environment and Heritage, which included provision to review 30 items by Co-associates for further assessment and inclusion on the heritage inventory data base.¹

Heritage items already listed in the Upper Hunter Local Environmental Plan 2013 are underlined where mentioned in the text. Information on individual items can be obtained via the Upper Hunter Shire Council database by request through the Council.

Australian Historical Theme: Tracing the natural evolution of Australia NSW Historical Theme: Environment-naturally evolved

The Upper Hunter Valley is rugged, mountainous and crisscross with streams and rivers, heading west towards the alluvial flats at the valley's lower reaches. Ancient geological forces pushed the mountains up around Barrington Tops and the ridge line of the Dividing Range, Liverpool Ranges and Mount Royal Range that now define the edges of the Hunter Valley. The mountains are skirted by rolling hills and undulating countryside, all cut through by the upper reaches of the Hunter River, the Pages River, Kingdon Ponds and their tributaries.²

Nestled around these rivers and creeks at the base of the mountains are areas of rich soil and grasslands good for grazing native animals such as kangaroos, and later for introduced stock animals. These grasslands in turn were edged by open eucalypt forests, dense woodlands with thick scrubby undergrowth, wet sclerophyll forests and then pockets of remnant rainforest tucked back into the steep gullies and valleys. Areas of red cedar and other valuable timbers later attracted timber getters into these isolated pockets to cut and mill the trees.

Near Wingen, between Scone and Murrurundi, the Burning Mountain, a burning seam of coal is an indicator of the underlying coal seams that exist throughout the Hunter Valley. The burning seam is estimated to have been smouldering for at least 5,500 years. Thought by early European explorers and settlers to be a small volcano, the Burning Mountain plays an important role in Aboriginal storytelling about the valley as well as being a probable source of red ochre which was traded throughout the Hunter Valley and beyond.³



Figure 1: The rolling hills near Wingen in the Upper Hunter, with smoke rising from Burning Mountain in the middle distance, 1857 (Source: Scenes in NSW Mrs Allan McPherson, SLNSW, PXA 3819)



Figure 2: Burning Mountain and the view north by Conrad Martens in 1878 (Source: SLNSW, V/Sp Coll/Martens/19)

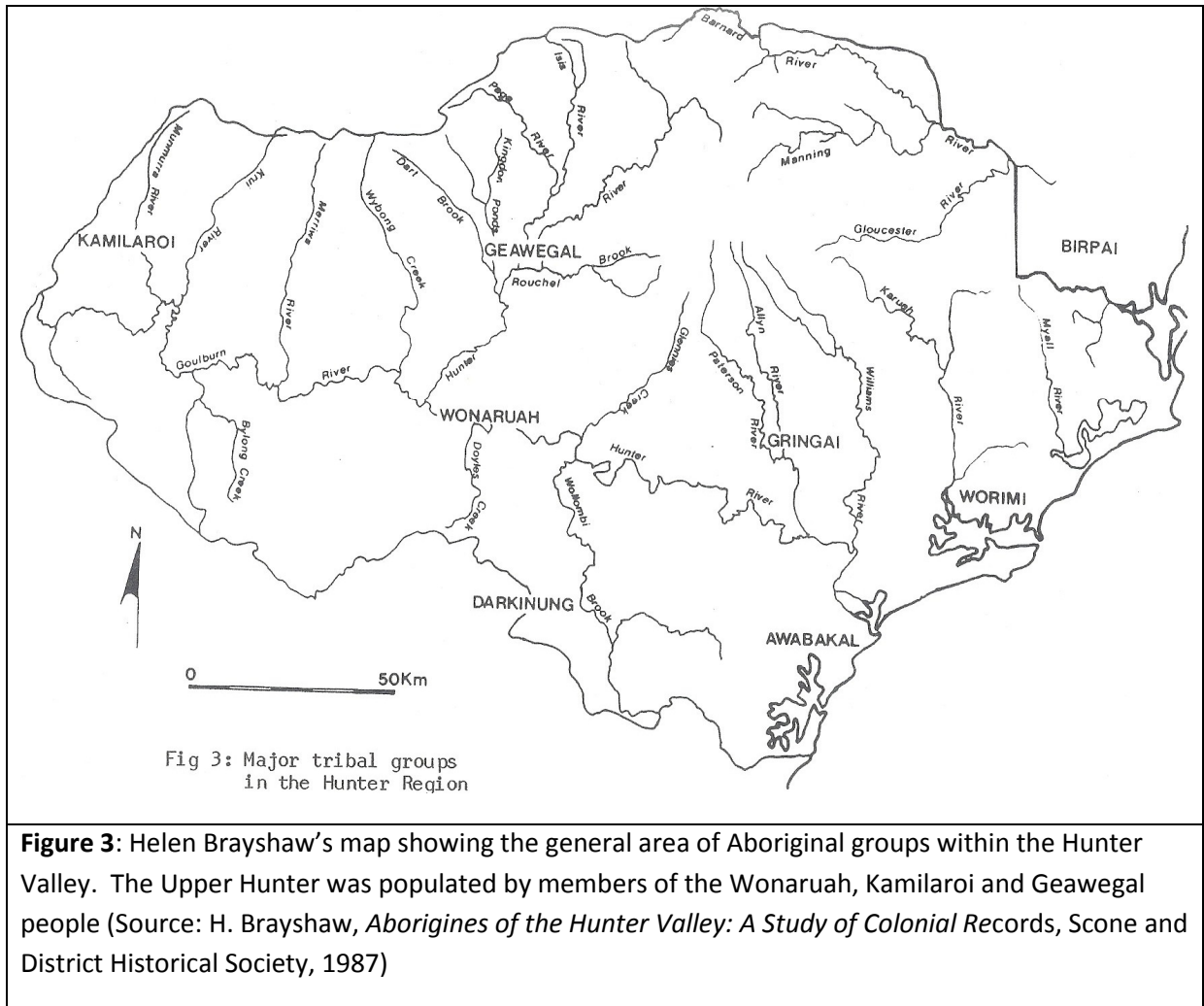
Australian Historical Theme: Peopling Australia

NSW Historical Theme: Aboriginal cultures and interactions with other cultures⁴

The Upper Hunter is the traditional country of the Wonnarua people, with areas that bound the southern edges of the Kamilaroi around Merriwa and the Goulburn River. The Wonnarua people occupied the Valley from Murrurundi, down to Scone, Muswellbrook and Singleton, with sub-clans the Geawagal in the north-west and Gringai in the south-west.⁵ Francis Little, who established the Invermein estate in 1825 identified two sub-groups of the Geawagal living around Dart Brook and the Pages River as the Tullong and Murrain people, equalling about 68 men, women and children.⁶ Burning Mountain and the Wingen Maid, a sandstone outcrop directly across from Burning Mountain, are both important places to the Wonnarua people. According to the traditional story, when a group of Wonnarua warriors set out to stop a raiding party of Kamilaroi coming into the valley, a young wife went out to wait for the return of her husband. When he did not return she asked Baiame to take her life as she could not live without her husband. Baiame turned her to stone, but not before her tears fell on the mountain and ignited the fire that continues to burn.⁷

The numbers of Aboriginal people living in the area prior to the arrival of Europeans is difficult to determine. Clans and groups moved throughout the Upper Hunter following well-worn pathways between hunting areas and to ceremonial sites. Trading occurred into and out of the region to the

west and east, as well as south through the Bulga Mountains towards the Central Coast. Archaeological evidence confirms camp sites and occupation to around 15,000 years and probably as long as 40,000 years, based on other sites nearby to the Hunter.⁸ Their long occupation and their careful management of their country altered the landscape with firestick farming techniques keeping undergrowth under control in the woodlands and allowing for open meadows to flourish. These in turn encouraged kangaroo and other animals to feed there, providing hunting grounds for the people. These open grasslands were noted by the first Europeans in the area in the mid-1820s and encouraged the rapid spread of grazing in the years after.



As European’s began to explore and then settle into the Upper Hunter, encounters with Aboriginal people were recorded. At first many of these were without serious incident and were characterised more by curiosity on both sides than with threat or violence. By the mid-1820s, a series of violent encounters had been recorded around the middle and upper Hunter as increasing numbers of settlers, convict servants and livestock began to enter the area. Pressure on Aboriginal food supplies, as cows and sheep trampled the grasslands and dispersed native animals, and more farms encroaching on traditional lands saw violent clashes erupt from 1825. In the Upper Hunter, violence was concentrated around the large estates of Invermein and Segenhoe, where Aboriginal raids on

their crops were reported in 1825-1826. Francis Little at Invermein and Peter McIntyre at Segenhoe were both involved in armed clashes on their estates during these raids.

Despite the violence, not all Aboriginal people were caught up in it and not all European's participated, and as the violence subsided, Europeans and Aboriginal people continued to live close to each other. Growing numbers of Aboriginal workers were incorporated into the European farming system. Their traditional skills such as tracking and working with bark and other materials, were useful for settlers, particularly for keeping sheep and cattle and using bark to make farm buildings. The rugged terrain also allowed for some forms of traditional life to continue. Ceremonial grounds, known as bora grounds, were still in place around Gundy and on Kelvinside into the 1880s. The Gundy site was reported as having 120 carved trees surrounding, the highest number of such markers recorded at any initiation site.⁹ A number of scar trees are still standing across the Upper Hunter.¹⁰

Australian Historical Theme: Peopling Australia

NSW Historical Theme: Exploration

Permanent European settlement in the Hunter Valley began in 1804 with the establishment of a penal station at Coal River, later renamed Newcastle. The penal station was a punishment work station for convicts who had reoffended after being originally transported to NSW. Convicts were sent there to work in the coal mines, the lime kilns or to cut timber in the surrounding hinterland. For twenty years free settlement was forbidden and the valley remained off limits, except for the convict camps that were established for the cutting of timber. These timber gangs, primarily in search of cedar along the river around Maitland and the valleys below Barrington, slowly advanced inland looking for new stands of the prized wood. By 1820 they had established semi-permanent sites around Maitland, Raymond Terrace and Morpeth. A few well behaved convicts were also given small acreages under lease at Patersons Plains in 1813 and Wallis Plains in 1817 to start farming, representing the beginnings of the agricultural industries in the valley.

In November 1819 a small exploratory party led by John Howe, emerged from the Bulga Mountains after ten days travel overland from Windsor. Howe and his group of eight men, including two Aboriginal guides, had entered the Hunter Valley close to the present site of Jerrys Plains. Despite only staying one day, retreating on the appearance of a small group of Aboriginal men, his route allowed for overland travel into the middle reaches of the Hunter. Howe repeated the journey in 1820, coming out further south closer to Singleton on 15 March 1820; close enough to St Patricks Day for the area to be christened St Patricks Plains. Howe followed the river east until he came into contact with an outlying convict timber gang who confirmed he was in the Hunter. Howe noted that his party travelled through "as fine a country as imagination can form...fit for cultivation and equally so for grazing".¹¹

Howe's discovery paved the way for the closure of the penal station (which had already been decided upon) and the opening of the valley to free settlement from 1822. The track he had passed along was soon clearly marked, making it easy for escaping convicts to get back to Windsor as well as some enterprising Hawkesbury settlers to drive the first herds of cattle towards the new grasslands. The first confirmed overland settler to arrive was the Reverend George Middleton who turned up at Patersons Plains in July 1821 with 174 cattle. By November 1821 there were eleven families along

the river at Wallis Plains. In March 1822, Governor Brisbane ordered the Surveyor General John Oxley to begin surveying land along the Hunter River for partition into grants, with his assistant surveyor Henry Dangar being allocated the job.¹² Dangar's survey hurried the arrival of settlers into the valley, with large farms granted to free emigrants around the lower and middle valley and smaller grants taken up by emancipists and Windsor based farmers as well.

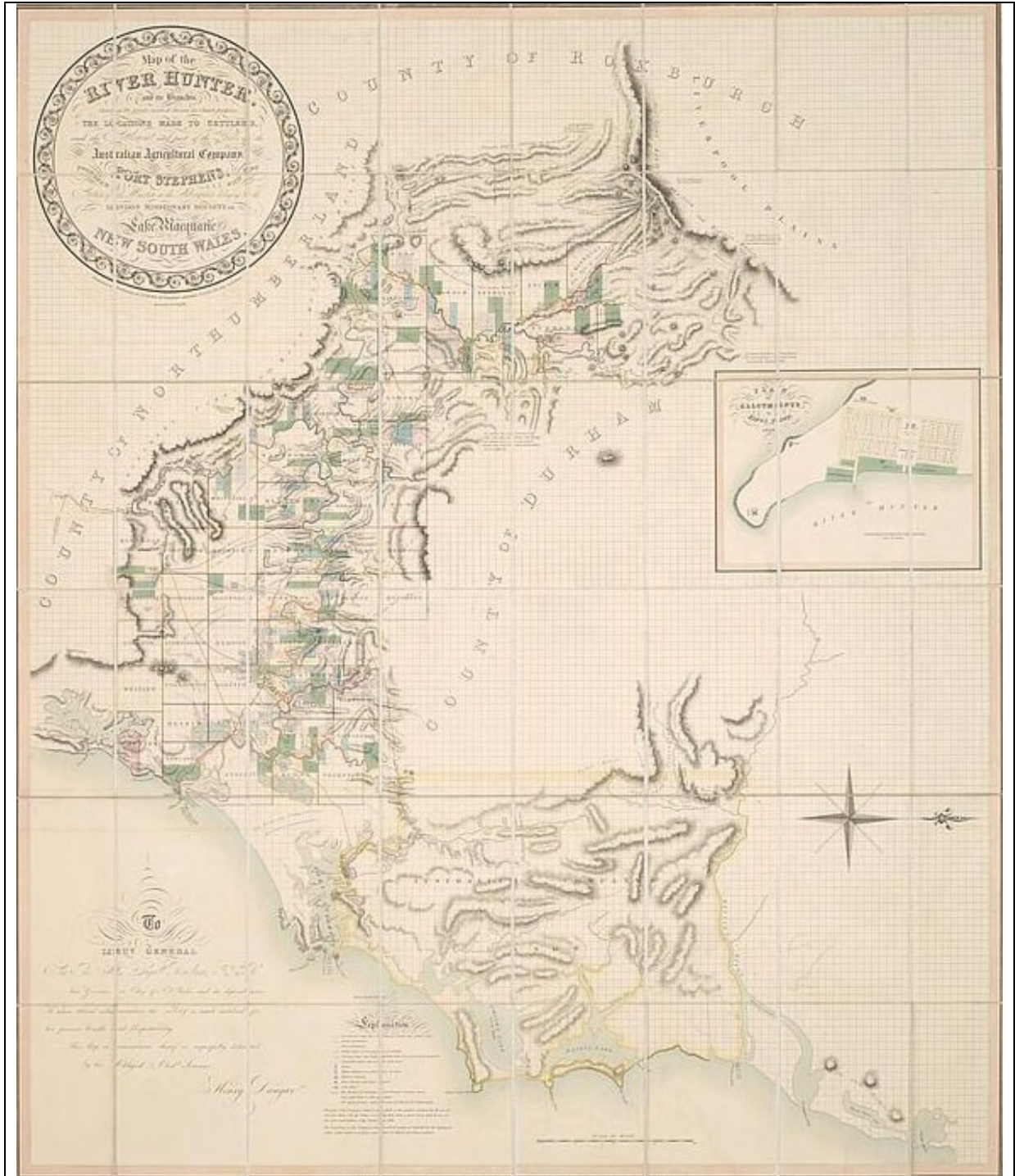


Figure 4: Henry Dangar's Map of the River Hunter, 1828. This map by Dangar opened up the upper valley to closer settlement in the late 1820s and 1830s (Source: National Library of Australia)

Australian Historical Theme: Building settlements, towns and cities

NSW Historical Theme: Land Tenure

Soon the first Europeans were also entering into the upper Hunter area. In January 1822 Lieutenant William Lawson had reached the area around the head of the Goulburn River near Cassilis from Bathurst and was followed in 1823 by Allan Cunningham who was trying to reach the Liverpool Plains, explored by John Oxley in 1818. Cunningham crossed Dart Brook, before doubling back towards the Goulburn River and finding a way up to the Liverpool Plains near present day Coolah, known as Pandora's Pass. In 1824 Henry Dangar had reached the Fal Brook and Foy Brook areas as part of his survey work. From early August until mid-October, Dangar and his survey party explored and charted the areas around Muswellbrook, Aberdeen, Scone, past Dart Brook and Kingdon Ponds until they reached the base of the Liverpool Ranges, which they crossed around the 14 October, confirming a route from the Hunter to the Liverpool Plains.¹³

The opening of the Upper Hunter via Dangar's survey saw the first grants also made from late 1824, with most of the river front land that was then known granted or reserved for purchase or other purposes. The establishment of these grants came at a period after the departure of Governor Macquarie and with the new policy of large grants being made to free immigrants arriving with large amounts of capital behind them. The result of this was that the estates of the Upper Hunter tended to be larger than those settled earlier in the middle and lower valley. Further, whereas the lower and middle valley was dominated by agriculture and smaller farms, the large estates of the Upper Valley were used more for grazing of sheep and cattle.

While the farm of Dr James Bowman at Ravensworth was the furthest inland in October 1824, by April 1825 the newly arrived William Ogilvie and Peter Cunningham had both selected adjacent land parcels near the confluence of the Hunter and Goulburn Rivers. Ogilvie's 2000 acre Merton Estate and Cunningham's 1200 acre Dalswinton Estate set the tone for the large estates that came to dominate the Upper Hunter. Both Ogilvie and Cunningham quickly added to their farms through subsequent grants and purchases with Merton increased to 6176 acres (2500ha) and Dalswinton to 2560 acres (1036ha). For many years, the Merton estate, near present day Denman in the Muswellbrook local government area, was the focal point for the area, being declared a township in 1835.

In April 1825 the ship *Hugh Crawford* arrived in Sydney. The ship had been purchased, fitted and sent by Thomas Potter Macqueen MP who had been promised a grant of 20,000 acres. Macqueen's aim was to establish a new estate in NSW for the unemployed workers on his English estate and to assist in the development of the colony in doing so. Aboard the ship was Peter McIntyre, Macqueen's agent, as well John McIntyre his brother, two overseers, a blacksmith, a carpenter, a millwright and their respective wives and children, eight horned cattle and 122 Saxon and Merino sheep. To facilitate Macqueen's grant, Dangar was instructed to go to the Hunter with McIntyre to survey the land, and by late May a selection was made fronting the Hunter River close to what would become the townships of Scone and Aberdeen. McIntyre named the new estate Segenhoe after the manor house Macqueen was born in.

Peter McIntyre and his brother John both selected grants of 2000 acres each, later increased to 4000 acres near the junction of Dart Brook and the Hunter.¹⁴ In September 1825 McIntyre made his way to the new estate with six convict workers to start the process of preparing the farm for the workers and their families. By April 1826 all the livestock was on the estate as were the first wave of settlers, with ten to twelve dwellings erected by 1828, as well as stables, outbuildings, sawpits and outstations.¹⁵ Macqueen, through his assistance for immigrant workers to come to NSW (one of the first landholders to pursue such a scheme) had created the nucleus of a small village at his estate.¹⁶ Two stock runs were also established from the estate along the Pages River upstream from the main estate. Macqueen himself did not arrive until 1834, by which time his political career was in turmoil, he had been gaoled and bailed and left England heavily in debt.

Upstream from Segenhoe, a few isolated stock runs were established by late 1828, including the 600 acres of John Stewart on the Pages River called Chundah Chundah, another 560 acres opposite belonging to Peter McIntyre and another run belonging to Donald McIntyre at Donalds Creek near Belltrees. Stewart's run was later renamed Gundy Gundy and it, as well as another 900 acres belonging to Stewart were purchased by Peter McIntyre around 1830, after Stewart was found dead in the bush (1830).¹⁷

Along with Segenhoe the other large estates of St Aubins (2560 acres granted 1829), owned by Captain William John Dumaresq and the Belltrees Estate (1831) made up of grants to Hamilton Collins Semphill, William Charles Wentworth and James White dominated the area around what would become Scone. The rugged landscape restricted most of the farm estates to the low lands along the rivers, especially in the upper reaches around what would become Murrurundi. The isolation of that part of the valley is illustrated by there being only two grants made prior to 1831 when the granting of land was stopped, with other landholders being squatters. Both grants were made late in relation to many of the other Hunter Valley estates, with William Warland taking up his 960 acre Harben Vale estate in 1829 and John Onge taking up a 640 acres estate in 1830.¹⁸ A plan of the County of Brisbane from c1843, within which the entire study area of the upper Hunter lies, shows clearly the distribution of the grants along the rivers and creek lines.



Figure 5: Tracing shewing the district of Scone and Murrurundi 1844 surveyed by J.H. Nutt. Note the large Belltrees, Macqueen's Segenhoe and Stewart's Gundy Gundy estates. (Source: SLNSW)

Australian Historical Theme: Peopling Australia

State Historical Theme: Convict

All of the large estates, and many of the smaller farms and stock runs, were populated by a workforce of convicts and later by former convicts or emancipists, employed as labourers and tradesmen or as domestic servants or milkmaids. Although in 1828 the European population was still relatively low with only 3,225 people recorded as living across the entire Valley area from

Newcastle to the Upper Hunter, of these 1,858 were convicts, with another 447 emancipists equalling 2,305 residents, compared to just 760 free men, women and children.¹⁹ This proportion remained high through the 1830s and even into the early 1840s after convict assignment was abolished in 1838 and assisted immigration was introduced to increase farm labourers. Most of the larger estates included a barracks building or separate dwellings for their convict workforce, creating a small village atmosphere on the large properties such as Segenhoe, Merton, Belltrees and St Aubin's.

Australian Historical Theme: Developing local, regional and national economies.

NSW Historical Themes: Health; Commerce; Communication.

Australian Historical Theme: Building settlements, towns and cities.

NSW Historical Theme: Towns, suburbs and villages; Education.

Australian Historical Theme: Governing.

NSW Historical Theme: Law and Order-Courthouses.

Australian Historical Theme: Developing Australia's cultural life.

NSW Historical Theme: Religion-Churches, convents; Creative endeavour-cinemas, Social institutions-School of Arts, public library.

Australian Historical Theme: Marking the phases of life.

NSW Historical Theme: Birth and Death-cemeteries

The towns and villages of the upper Hunter were all formed after the mid-1830s. A combination of the end of convict transportation, an increase in the number of free farm labourers and immigrants and then the economic downturn of the early 1840s saw some of the larger farms start to subdivide parcels off for other developments. Town and village reserves had been part of Dangar's surveying work in the 1820s. Following a standard practice of reserving areas of land for future public needs, Dangar had been marking out these reserves, as well as Church & School lands and general purpose government reserves at regular intervals in case the need for a town arose in the future. The idea being that there would be a reserve at least close to the area where a town was desired.

Scone

On 6 September 1837 part of the Crown reserve on the east bank of Kingdon Ponds, allocated in 1826 when the first grants were being set out, was gazetted as the Village of Scone. The remainder of the land was re-surveyed and was purchased by William Dumaresq as part of his St Aubin's estate, which enclosed the village reserve. Scone had supplanted an earlier attempt at a village called Redbank alongside Dart Brook. From 1826 a small, informal settlement had developed there, with a collection of houses, a slab hut that served as a courthouse and even a doctor. Despite a promising start, the development of a better road near Kingdon Ponds diverted traffic away from Redbank, and after the Scone site was gazetted, the small settlement was gradually abandoned. Within twelve months an inn had been built in the Village known as the St Aubin's Arms. Owned by Henry Dangar,

the inn contained seven rooms plus attics, had a small stockyard and paddock attached with a kitchen and stable in the course of erection.²⁰



Figure 6: Plan for the Village of Scone 1836. This plan shows the layout of streets, reserves and early buildings, as well as William Dumaesq's estate that enclosed it. (Source: SLNSW)

Town allotments were soon being advertised and a tender for a court house was called in May 1838, although none was built until 1846. Being on the main road heading towards the upper Hunter and beyond to the Liverpool Plains, the village developed as a convenient stopping place for those heading inland, and for those driving herds and flocks back towards the markets on the coast.

In 1853 Scone village took in the adjacent private town of St Aubin's and the former village of Redbank, with a total population of 180 residents. Land sales were regularly held in Scone through the second half of the nineteenth century as the village began to consolidate and into the first decades of the twentieth century as closer settlement and small farm allotments were created.



Figure 7: Scone in 1857 showing the Church and a scatter of small cottages tucked into the mountains behind (Source: Scenes in NSW Mrs Allan McPherson, SLNSW, PXA 3819)

In 1842 there were enough residents to justify the first races to be held at Scone, organised by the owner of the White Swan Inn. By 1840 St Luke's Church (consecrated 1845) and Parsonage had been erected. The Church land included the first cemetery for the Scone area, with St Luke's Churchyard cemetery being consecrated by the Lord High Bishop of Australia, the Right Reverend William Grant Broughton on 15 July 1843; although the first recorded burial had already taken place in December 1838.²¹ By 1864 there were over 200 burials of all denominations recorded at St Luke's. With the Church came a school, and in 1844, William Dumaresq donated a small cottage to serve as a school house while the new school was being constructed, with classes starting in December 1845. The new school was completed by 1847, and continues to teach students as Scone Grammar School. A School of Arts was formed in c1868 in Kingdon Street adjacent to the railway corridor, growing out of an earlier Reading Society from 1841, and once the building was completed in 1873 it became a focal point for the small community. A new façade was added to this building in 1888. In 1924, a new School of Arts Memorial Hall was built in Kelly Street to serve as a memorial for World War I, with the old hall being converted to a private residence. The old hall remains today as a gallery in Kingdon Street, while the 1924 hall was sold to Scone Council in the years after World War II, who in turn sold the building on, relocating the library in the process.

Tenders for a small hospital were called in early 1870, with the building completed in the second half of 1871. At the same time there were several stores, including a new brick shop building on Main

Street belonging to Mr Asser and another operated by a Chinese man. The town had by then two schools, St Luke's and a public school, three churches (Church of England, Catholic and Presbyterian), a large flour mill (Campbells Mill/Boorers Mill) , part of which survives and is incorporated into the RSL, a post and telegraph office attached to one of the stores and a population in town of around 150 people. Local brickfields also meant most of the houses and public buildings were constructed of brick.²²



Figure 8: Kelly Street Scone 1884 showing the Post Office on the corner of Liverpool Street on the right (Source: SLNSW)



Figure 9: Campbell's large four mill in Guernsey Street at Scone c1910. This mill building survives as part of the Scone RSL club. (Source: SLNSW)



Figure 10: Scone Courthouse 1884, which still stands in Kingdon Street and is now used as a theatre (Source: SLNSW)

Aberdeen

To the east of Scone, Thomas Potter Macqueen had also set aside a portion of his Segenhoe estate for a village estate which was gazetted in October 1838.²³ Macqueen insisted the village be named Aberdeen in honour of the Earl of Aberdeen. The establishment of a reserve, the erection of the Segenhoe Inn and the building of a mill gave some impetus to the early development of the village, but after Macqueen left NSW in late 1838 and the onset of an economic downturn in the early 1840s in NSW, the new village stagnated.

By 1871 Aberdeen had a population of 120 people in the village and the surrounding country, a small police lock-up, a Church of England (St Mark's-replaced with a new Church 1913), one larger hotel and one small inn, a butter factory, a cordial factory, a few stores along the main street and a collection of cottages. By 1879 a steam flour and timber mill had replaced the earlier mill building. The new mill also served as a local hall. There was also a post-office open and a telegraph office in planning. In July 1864 Aberdeen Public School was and thirty years later in July 1894 a School of Arts opened for adult education. In 1896, four Sisters of St Joseph arrived in Aberdeen to establish the St Joseph Catholic School and convent. St Joseph's operated as a boarding school until the early 1970s and from 1972 as a regional Catholic School.

A new Presbyterian Church was opened in 1889 and in 1891 the Australian Chilling and Freezing Co. opened a meat processing, chilling and freezing works, which by 1893 had an output of up 2500 sheep per week. A feature of the works was its electrical lighting which was the only site in town at this stage.²⁴ Despite a promising beginning, drought and falling prices meant the works closed in 1894, re-opened in 1896, closed again, re-opened for five months in 1904 and finally opened on a permanent basis in 1914. The meat works grew through the twentieth century, with a modernised chilling works added by then operators F.J Walker Meatworks in 1924 and a mutton slaughtering house added in 1939-40. With new owners, Elders IXL taking over in 1983, it traded as Aberdeen Beef Co as the main employer in the town until it closed in 1999.

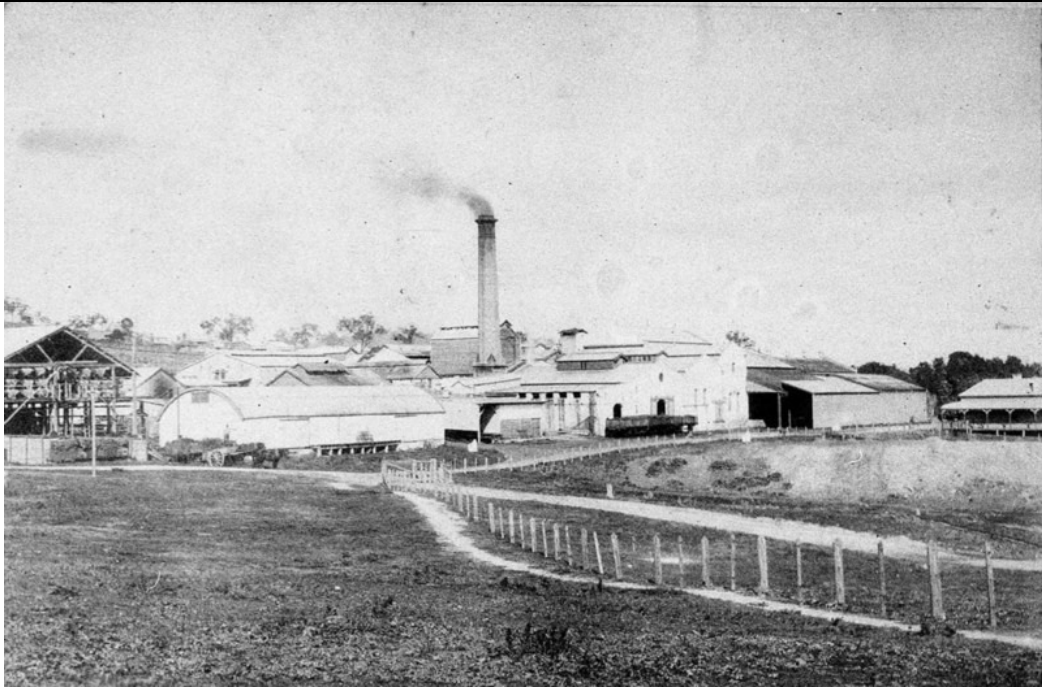


Figure 11: Aberdeen abattoir c1910, the main employer in Aberdeen for over 100 years (Source: SLNSW)



Figure 12: Aberdeen abattoir workers, 1910 (Source: SLNSW)

Murrurundi

The rudimentary foundations of a village in the area around Murrurundi began in c1831 with a small settlement developing on the estate of Lieutenant James Scott's 640 acre Stonehenge Estate. Scott sold the property to William Warden in 1834. Warden already had his 960 acre Harben Vale next to Stonehenge. When he purchased Stonehenge the estate already had an inn, with a blacksmith, shoemaker, wheelwright, sawyers, bullock drivers and labourers living around it. A small cloth factory was also built. In 1837 another small private village development appeared on the land owned by brothers Thomas and John Dangar and their relative John Button on his Mabyn Vale Estate. The trio built an inn and a store on the road heading west at Campbell's Creek. Button took up the role as the first postmaster in the district. However by 1838 the three were in financial difficulties and no further development took place.

The following year, in July 1839, the government decided on the surveying of a town at Murrurundi Rock, and a survey was made within a reserve set aside for a village. The decision of the Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Liverpool Plains to open his office there stimulated the development of the village.²⁵ As the small government village was being developed, a private town also began close by. Haydonton, on the 811 acre estate purchased by Peter and Thomas Haydon in 1838, developed in 1842 with the tenant farmers on Haydon's estate being offered town lots. One of the first blocks purchased was by Benjamin Hall snr, father of the bushranger of the same name. The town developed slowly, but had a post office, St Joseph's Church and convent school (c1841), a cemetery, Court House (1841), a National public school (1849) and regular race meeting by the early 1850s. The Woolpack Hotel and the White Hart Inn were both operational by 1843. In 1848 the towns of Murrurundi-Haydonton had 58 people and eleven houses, which had grown to a population of 579 people by 1861.²⁶ The twin towns, separated by the Page's River, developed in conjunction with each other until Haydonton was amalgamated into Murrurundi in 1913.

In the surrounding district a number of other small villages and hamlets also appeared in the 1850s as a mix of government reserves and private towns. Each was strung out along the road heading towards the Liverpool Plains. William Warden set out Blandford east of Murrurundi in 1854 with a government town of Murulla laid out adjacent to it in 1855. Unlike Murrurundi, it was the private town of Blandford instead of Murulla that survived. To the west of Murrurundi the small settlements of Willow Tree and Ardglen, in the Liverpool Plains Shire area, were also formed in 1853 and 1856 respectively.

While the smaller village sites grew slowly, Murrurundi was the centre that gained prominence in the district and increasingly attracted development. As wheat became a major crop in the district, the first mill was built in c1848 and by 1853 a second mill run with steam was operating under the ownership of Frederick Horder. When a mill was announced for Blandford in 1855, the old Horder mill was upgraded ensuring the prominence of Murrurundi. Horder himself had been killed in 1853 in a riding accident. A series of cordial makers also established themselves in Murrurundi as the town grew. James Wilson was making ginger beer between 1866 and 1867, followed by Thomas Swan (1875-1883), Charles Stairs (1882-1902) and Charles Satchell (1902-1910).²⁷

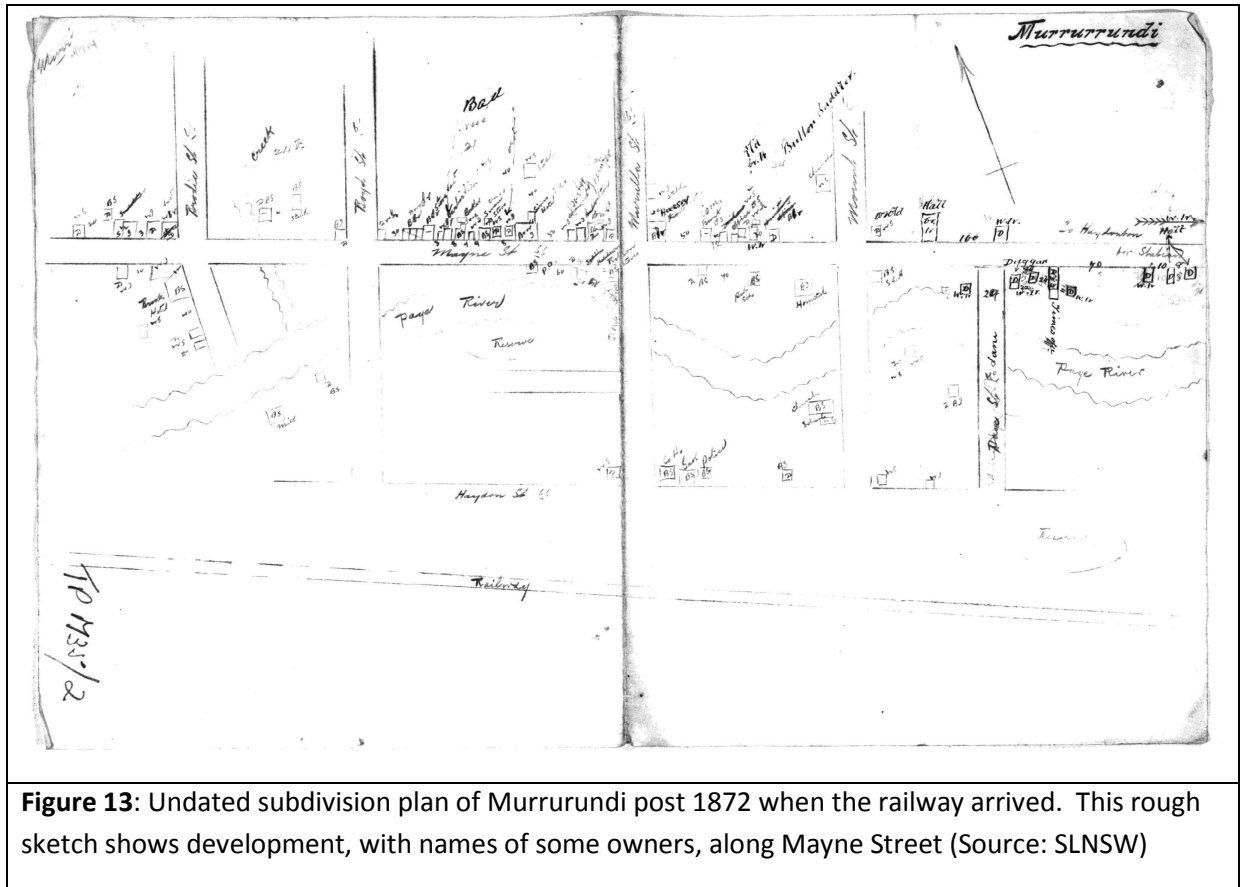


Figure 13: Undated subdivision plan of Murrurundi post 1872 when the railway arrived. This rough sketch shows development, with names of some owners, along Mayne Street (Source: SLNSW)

Merriwa

On the southern edges of the Upper Hunter the land was dominated by large grazing properties granted or sold through the late 1820s and into the 1830s. The first large grant was made in 1831 to John Blaxland, when he received 7680 acres close to the present township of Merriwa. Blaxland was joined in 1832 by William Charles Wentworth, who had crossed the Blue Mountains with Blaxland's brother Gregory in 1813. Wentworth purchased a 640 acre grant, adding to it over the next ten years through purchases until he was the largest landholder in the district with over 30,000 acres in the foothills of the Liverpool Ranges by 1848. To the west, James Bettington established his Brindley Park estate in 1834, developing it as a fine merino stud with over 9,500 sheep on it by 1837, rising to over 19,800 by 1850.²⁸ Other prominent settlers included George Hall who established Gundebri in 1835, George Wyndham with his 2560 acre Mahngarinda estate from 1839 and Henry Dutton's 2560 acre Terragong estate from 1840. Dutton's sandstone home is the oldest homestead still standing in this part of the upper Hunter.

The isolation of the Merriwa area, known as Gummun Plains, meant that development was slow and the homesteads acted as informal village settlements. Their need for self-sufficiency meant that they each had blacksmiths, saddlers, a station store, a collection of dwellings for workers and other tradesmen, which in turn encouraged passing traffic to stop there. In 1839 Blaxland, representing the settlers of the district petitioned the government for a town reserve to be gazetted and surveyed, which was undertaken in January 1840. The name of Merriwa was chosen, which was reported to be a local Aboriginal word for grass seeds or plenty of grass, likely a reference to the

open grassy plains that characterised the long tradition of land management by Aboriginal people in the area.²⁹ Land sales were held in the village in October and December 1840 with the Gummun Creek that marked the western boundary being renamed Merriwa Creek. However as sales began NSW was in the midst of a severe drought that ran into an economic downturn lasting until 1843, which curtailed the development of the new town.

Meanwhile, as with other areas in the upper Hunter, a series of smaller private town developments were also underway. The Dalkeith estate, originally granted to Donald McIntyre in 1834 but later sold to Robert Scott of Glendon, had a court house and watch-house built there in 1835, with a post office opened in 1836. Thirty years later the population had only grown to 70, but was served by three inns.³⁰

Back in Merriwa the village developed slowly. A post office was opened in January 1845 with mails arriving via Merton two days a week. At this time the town had only ten houses, with the first inn opening in 1848 and the first Anglican Church services beginning in the same year. A private school had opened in the new village in 1840 with a National public school opened in 1848, although it lapsed through lack of pupils between 1851 and 1853, re-opening in 1854 with 34 students. In 1855 The Holy Trinity Anglican Church was consecrated. By 1858 Merriwa had three inns, five stores, two blacksmiths, a Court House and a Catholic Church built that year.³¹ By 1866 the population had risen to around 200, with Merriwa being a stopping place for road traffic heading west towards the Bathurst Plains.

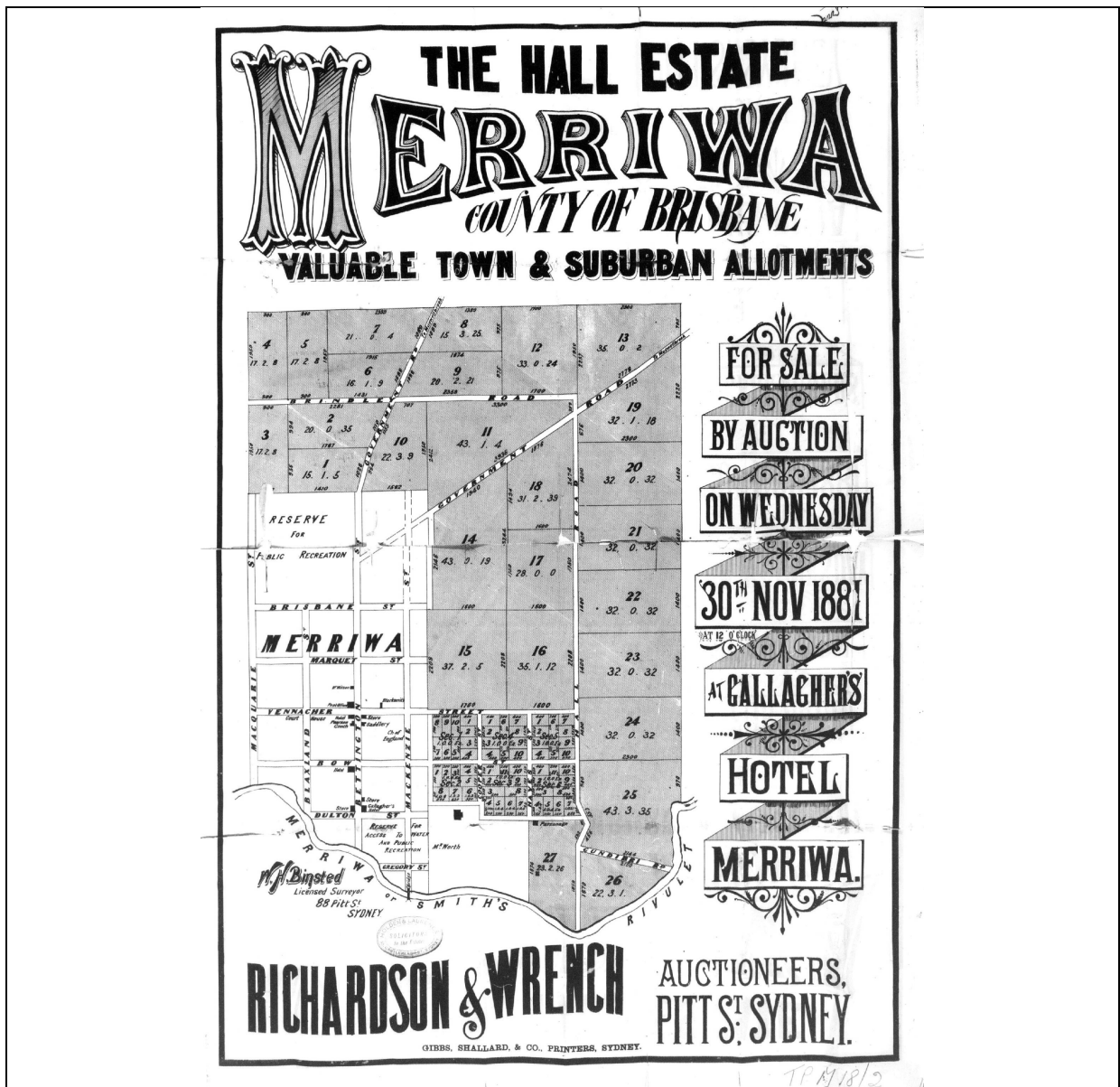


Figure 14: Merriwa subdivision 1881 showing the core of the small village with a court house, post office, saddlery and hotels (Source: SLNSW).

Villages, hamlets and settlements

Scattered between the major towns were a series of smaller villages and hamlets that developed primarily from the 1850s and 1860s. The village of Wingen was proclaimed in 1855, with village reserve set aside and plans drawn up for land sales. Approximately half way between Scone and Murrurundi, Wingen had started as a place for travellers to stop, with a hotel and yards but was slow to develop, despite a coal mine also opening close by. The arrival of the railway extension in 1869, with a camp for the navies who were building the line set up just north of the town reserve stimulated the village, with a few scattered houses, a hotel, a butcher and four stores trading by 1870.³² Closer to Scone Parkville had also started as a stopping place for travellers heading up or down the valley's main road in the late 1850s. Like Wingen, Parkville was stimulated by the arrival

of the railway and the workers camps that came with it. By 1879 when the first post office opened, Parkville already had a small church and school, an inn and a number of houses set back from the northern road.³³

To the west of Scone, the small settlement of Bunnan was proclaimed in 1886. The village had been established on the road between Scone and Merriwa, where it crossed the Wybong Creek in the early 1870s. By 1879 the community was large enough to have a church and post office and was applying to have a public school built there. East of Scone the discovery of gold at what was the Denison Diggings around Stewarts Brook and Moonan Brook in the late 1850s and early 1860s resulted in the establishment of both Gundy and Moonan Flat. Both small settlements grew as prospectors came into the area looking for gold and each had hotels, churches, a school, a post office and general stores until the gold rush ended and both Gundy and Moonan Flat stopped growing and declined. Both still serve as small service centres for the surrounding horse studs and farms.

Town Development in the Twentieth Century

Australian Historical Theme: Building settlements, towns and cities.

NSW Historical Theme: Towns, suburbs and villages; Utilities-Water, Sewerage, Electricity.

Australian Historical Theme: Governing.

NSW Historical Theme: Defence-World War I; World War II; War Memorials

The twentieth century development of the towns in the Upper Hunter was characterised by their steady growth and the consolidation of each in the roles that they would play in the region. In the census of 1911 the County of Brisbane, which covered the Upper Hunter, had a population of 9986 people.³⁴ Scone was beginning to emerge as the main centre and the other towns of Aberdeen, Murrurundi and Merriwa as service centres for their immediate surroundings. Murrurundi however, with only a few small villages and the town within its shire, grew the slowest particularly as motor transport began to replace the train for travel and transport of goods. The growing dominance of motor transport meant that the main shopping and business centre moved away from the railway station which had been in the Haydonton part of town and relocated along the New England Highway frontage during the 1920s.

The first decades of the twentieth century were relatively quiet for each of the towns. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 saw many local men volunteer and leave to fight. In December 1915 a recruitment march known as The Wallabies entered the Upper Hunter. This was one of a series of volunteer recruitment marches that occurred across NSW (and elsewhere) throughout 1915 and early 1916 in particular as patriotism and enlistments were at their peak in World War I. The march had begun at Narrabri on 8 December 1915 and arrived in Murrurundi on 22 December with 115 men.³⁵ By the time the march reached Scone on 24 December, the numbers had risen to 123, with others having committed to enlist. On arrival, the men camped at the Recreational Reserve (Scone Park) in St Aubins Street. Scone was one of the most active recruiting stations in the upper Hunter, with a total of 230 enlisted before the Wallaby March had arrived.³⁶ One such soldier was Douglas

Grant, an Aboriginal man who had been working as a wool classer at Belltrees since 1913. Although rejected prior to embarking due to his being Aboriginal, Grant re-applied and was accepted for active duty. Grant was wounded and captured by the Germans at Bullecourt in 1917, spending the remainder of the war in a prison camp. On returning to Australia, Grant lived first in Sydney, then Lithgow, before returning to Sydney.³⁷

As well as recruitment, the outbreak of war had an economic impact on the region as the need for wool for uniforms and beef for rations pushed up prices. In Merriwa a new canning and freezing works was opened in 1915, primarily to process rabbits. With the arrival of the railway in 1917, the canning factory production increased until it was handling over 1 million rabbits in 1918, with most being canned for export to the Western Front and Middle East to feed allied troops.³⁸

From late 1916 and in the years following the end of World War I soldier settlers were offered land around Merriwa, boosting the town's population. However, despite over 20,000 acres being set aside around Merriwa for the soldier settlers, none was offered to returned Aboriginal veterans, who were totally excluded from the program across Australia. The immediate impact of the Soldier Settlement around Merriwa was seen in it having the largest population of any of the towns in the area, with a total of 2507 people in 1922, compared to Scone with 1800, Murrurundi with 1301 and Aberdeen with 730.³⁹ The increasing population was reflected in the extension of the public school in 1920 and of the convent school in 1928, the opening of the Astros Theatre as a picture theatre in 1927 and later the extension of the School of Arts in 1938.⁴⁰ The School of Arts had relocated from its original building in Kingdon Street, to a new building in Kelly Street in 1924, opening as a memorial hall to those who had served in World War I. The front of the building included an honour board, set on two stone pillars with a rising sun badge at the top to act as a gateway to the hall, with the names of all who had fallen inscribed. As a further commemoration, all returned soldiers and the families of those who had fallen were admitted as members of the School.⁴¹

In 1928 a picture theatre was proposed for Scone. Although the first theatre, the Olympic had opened as early as 1911, in 1928 the Scone Theatres Pty Ltd was formed to build a modern theatre. However the onset of the Great Depression saw the project delayed, with the theatre not built until 1938. When opened the new Civic Theatre could seat 1000 people.⁴² In 1945 the Scone Races also moved to a permanent home in White Park, with a new racecourse being built and opened for racing in 1947 with the first Scone Cup. From 1953 the annual Scone Horse Sales were also relocated to White Park.

Soon after the outbreak of World War II, new recruitment drives in Scone and the Upper Hunter were begun, first for a proposed national militia, and then for volunteers for the Second AIF and RAAF, which was to serve overseas. Scone was again an enthusiastic centre, with 300 having volunteered for the AIF by July 1940.⁴³ In addition to the AIF recruitment, the Upper Hunter was also visited by the RAAF, who included flying demonstrations at the Scone airport as part of their drives. Recruiting continued throughout the period of the war years. In the years after World War II, a series of memorials were erected or built, including the Scone War Memorial Pool and the St Luke's memorial Carillon. As testimony to the areas commitment to service, a total of sixteen memorials to World War I and World War II have been erected in Scone.⁴⁴ Merriwa erected one, dedicated in October 1923 to World War I, later having those who served in World War II added,

while Murrurundi also had a combined memorial erected at the former Oddfellows Hall in 1946 and built a memorial pool for the community.

While new entertainment venues were being opened, each of the towns was also undergoing major civic upgrades with connections to water, sewerage and electricity. Scone lead the way in this modernisation with the town connected to reticulated water in 1930 and a full sewerage system by 1939. Water was supplied via a pumping station from a well near Kingdon Ponds and a reservoir on the eastern side of town. The system was upgraded in 1958 with a second well and a rising main added to the reservoir. By 1966 however, irrigation around Scone was threatening the permeant supply from Kingdon Ponds and a new scheme to pump water from the Hunter River at Aberdeen was connected. This was further enhanced with a new reservoir and associated works in 1984.⁴⁵ Aberdeen developed its water supply along the same lines and at the same time, with water mains being laid through the town from 1937.

Concurrently with the water and sewerage, Scone was connected to its own electricity supply in 1930, with the first streetlight being switched on by the manager of the Scone Electric Light and Power Company on 31 January 1930, although electricity for lighting had been supplied by private generators to the Scone Advocate, the Municipal Library and a few other businesses and residents prior to that. In 1947 the company was taken over by its major shareholder, the Muswellbrook Coal Company, and electricity was extended into the entire Shire as well as to Wingen and Parkville near Murrurundi. As with the water, Aberdeen followed Scone in the provision of electricity to its residents, also connecting to the Scone Electric Light and Power Company in 1930.

In Merriwa electricity and water infrastructure was slower to arrive. It was not until the 1950s that the town was fully connected to both water and power, with the electricity also connected to the Muswellbrook Coal Company plants and the water supplied via three reservoirs and a pump house in 1959.⁴⁶ In 1998-99 a chlorination disinfection unit was commissioned, with Merriwa by then having a treatment plant, three bores and two reservoirs supplying water to the town, with another two bores and four reservoirs at Cassilis.⁴⁷

By 1966 Scone had also emerged as the main urban centre in the Upper Hunter. Although for the first half of the century Merriwa had maintained the greatest population, with 2432 in 1947, compared to 2253 for Scone and 1039 for Murrurundi, by 1966 Scone had more than doubled to 5683 residents, with Merriwa slipping back to 2083 and Murrurundi also almost doubling to 1998 people. This trend continued in Scone as the other centres stagnated through the second half of the twentieth century. By 1976 Scone had a population of 7382, increasing to 8330 by 1981, while Merriwa's population was 2252 in 1976, increasing to just 2330 in 1981, which was still less than its 1922 total, and Murrurundi had gone from 2357 in 1976 back to 2228 in 1981. By 1991 Scone had grown further still with a population of 9379, while both Merriwa and Murrurundi stayed at 2352 each.⁴⁸

Australian Historical Theme: Developing local, regional and national economies.

State Historical Theme: Transport

Roads

The development of each of the towns and the villages in the Upper Hunter was determined both by the productivity of the surrounding land and the development of transport links between them, the markets towards the coast and the fertile grazing lands on the Liverpool Plains. The main road through the district was the northern branch of the Great North Road, which came through the mountains to the south from Windsor. At Wollombi the road split to continue to Maitland and the other going through to Singleton before heading towards the Upper Hunter as the Upper North Road. This road was surveyed to Scone by 1824 and all the way to Murrurundi and into the Liverpool Plains by 1829; however it was not until 1851 that the road was properly constructed that distance. The road, surveyed by Major Thomas Mitchell, was one of the main infrastructure projects undertaken by convicts in the Upper Hunter area.⁴⁹

The road was often difficult to travel on, with little work on its maintenance away from each of the developing towns. At each river crossing a ford was usually the only means to cross in the early years, with a punt sometimes in use if the river was high. Bridges however were still not in place across any of the main river crossings above Singleton before 1860. Captain Martindale, the engineer in charge of building the Hunter's roads in the 1850s, urged Government to build a bridge across the Hunter River at Aberdeen in 1860.⁵⁰ In 1858 the Department of Public Works was established, taking over the responsibility of main roads and bridges in NSW. By 1865 the road between Muswellbrook and Murrurundi had been metalled with a gravel cover to a width of 6.4m. A deviation between Blandford and Murrurundi to avoid the Pages River crossings and eliminate the need for two bridges however was deferred and never built and the Highway follows essentially the same route to the present day.

Railways

Although the road was often the catalyst for the development of towns and villages, as stopping places and inns were built to serve inland traffic, it was the building of the railway in the Upper Hunter from the 1860s that provided the main impetus for the consolidation of some towns and the decline of others. The first section of railway line was opened in 1857 between Newcastle and Hexham to serve the coal mines. Although started by the private Hunter River Railway Company, the financial burden of development of the railway saw the company cease trading in 1855 and the work taken over by the government. The intention of the Hunter River Railway Company had been to have the line built through to Singleton in the middle valley, which the government decided to proceed with. Under the direction of Engineer-in-Chief John Whitton, the survey of the line to Singleton was completed and the railway extended to this terminus by 1863.

Beyond Singleton, the development of the railway was made more difficult by the flood plain that had to be crossed and the diversion of resources to the lower valley to cope with the growing demand by the coal mines for transport. Despite this, planning for the extensions continued, with the line to Scone being in three sections: the first between Singleton and Muswellbrook, the second from Muswellbrook to Aberdeen and the third through to Scone. Each was put to tender, with the

first company not completing the job. A new contract to Messrs McNamara and Edwards completed the first section by 1869. The next two sections were awarded to George Blunt, which included a bridge at Aberdeen. The iron bridge, the line and Scone Railway Station were complete by 1871.



Figure 15: Scone railway station, 1910 (Source: SLNSW).

The last section to Murrurundi and then out of the Hunter was awarded to Messrs Macquarie and Company. This section was more difficult again as it navigated into the increasingly narrow valley of the Pages River. As with the first section, Macquarie fell short of the task and the job was reassigned to John Alger who finished the line to Murrurundi in 1872, with Murrurundi Station opening in March, although the winding nature of the Pages River Valley had made the job more difficult and had increased the costs to an undesirably high level.⁵¹ By 1877 the main line had been extended further to Quirindi beyond the Hunter Valley. A small branch line also operated at Murrurundi between 1910 and 1914 serving the Commonwealth Oil Corporation whose works were near the town. The line looped the town from Temples Court near Boyd Street and the Pages River Road.

While the main line brought with it development and access to markets, a branch line towards Merriwa was not started until the early years of the twentieth century. A line was first opened from Muswellbrook to Denman in 1915 and then extended to Merriwa in 1917.⁵²



Figure 16: The official party in Merriwa to turn the first sod for the railway in 1911 (Source: SLNSW)

As each section was completed the railheads in Aberdeen, then Scone and then Murrurundi/Haydonton brought with them a burst of progress and population growth, some of which remained in each town after the railhead moved on. Hundreds of workers were required to complete each section which in turn encouraged suppliers and businesses to establish themselves to sell to the camps. In the longer term, the establishment of each rail head meant that trade increased in the successive towns as farmers and graziers bought their produce and stock for market in to access the railway. They also brought employment for the local region, for example in 1883, 27 people were employed on the railways at Murrurundi, while at Scone the building of a trucking yard and sidings made this an important element of the system.⁵³

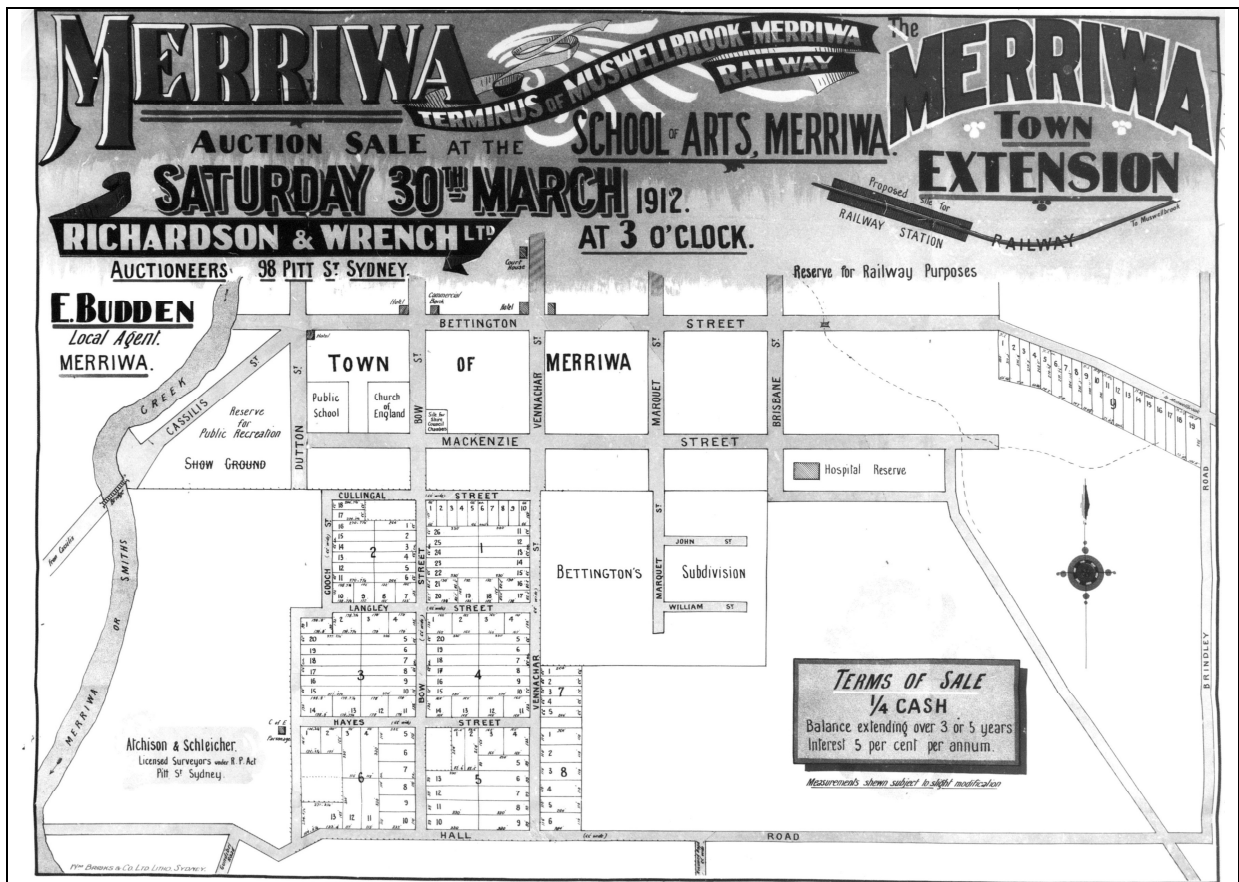


Figure 17: A plan of subdivision at Merriwa in 1912, with a special note that it is the terminus of the railway. The arrival of the railway in each town encouraged development and growth. Comparison of this plan to Figure 13 shows that the lots offered in this sale are the same as offered in 1881, illustrating the slow growth of Merriwa when it was isolated from the rest of the district (Source: SLNSW)

Airports

An aerodrome was proposed to be built on the outskirts of Scone by the then Council in 1935, although a lack of funds prevented any work starting until 1936 on the private property at Nandowra homestead. Tragically before the aerodrome was officially opened in December 1936, the local doctor, Dr H.K Houston was killed when his private aeroplane crashed while attempting to land. Despite this, the development went ahead, with a small hanger erected and the official opening on 12-13 December 1936 marked by a large pageant, with aerial races and acrobatic displays.⁵⁴ In 1937 the aerodrome was chosen by the RAAF as the site for their annual training camp, with men and machines from Richmond relocating to Nandowra and from mid-1938 a regular service between Sydney and Brisbane began stopping at the aerodrome.

With the outbreak of World War II, the aerodrome was used for cadet training and recruiting, returning to civilian use in the years after 1945, with regular pageants and air services. From the mid-1950s, the Scone Chamber of Commerce began to agitate the Municipal Council for a new airport, particularly as sites around Muswellbrook were also being investigated. In 1956 a concerted

campaign got underway to develop the airport, with the Chamber of Commerce asking the Shire and Municipal Councils to split the cost of investigations and surveys 50/50.

After the amalgamation of the two councils in 1957, a new campaign started with local V.C Bath donating £1000 with a promise to raise up to £14,000. The Council committed to raising a public loan if £10,000 in donations were collected. Land for the airport was resumed in c1958-59 and work began on the terminal building, the gravel runway and fencing the site in early 1960. The Minister for Public Works approved a grant to cover 50% of the cost and the Department of Civil Aviation added a further £20,750 towards construction at the end of 1960. Airlines of New South Wales were granted the licence to operate from Scone and the airport was officially opened in February 1961 by the Minister for Supply and Member for Paterson, Allen Fairhall MHR.⁵⁵

Australian Historical Theme: Developing local, regional and national economies.

NSW Historical Themes: Farming; Pastoralism.

From the arrival of Europeans, farming and grazing have been the dominant form of land use in the Upper Hunter. The first settlers had been attracted to the open grasslands and fertile alluvial river flats for their cattle and sheep. Large numbers of sheep and cattle entered the Upper Hunter as settlement spread. By 1828 there were an estimated 50,000 sheep in the Hunter and 11,000 cattle, most of which were in the upper Hunter districts.

The large amount of land in the ownership of a relatively small number of people dictated the type of land use in the region. Whereas smaller farmers had taken up land in the lower valley, allowing for the development of market garden style farms and mixed agriculture, the large estates were best suited to grazing and large scale cropping. While this was at first largely carried out by convicts, after 1840 when the convict system stopped, new tenant farmers, immigrants, Aboriginal and even some Chinese farmers were employed.⁵⁶

Wheat was one of the main crops for much of the Upper Hunter as it was still able to be grown well into the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the outbreak of rust had made it unviable in the areas further towards the coast. It continued to dominate the cropping in the areas around Merriwa and Cassilis. For other areas, maize was planted in abundance from the 1870s as the larger estates were split up to lease to tenant farmers. Leasing the land to others became a profitable option for estate owners.

The construction of the railway opened new markets for Hunter Valley producers. One of these was for dairying which became increasingly popular along the river fronts after the 1890s as improvements in production, storage and shipping saw profits grow. Dairying encouraged the subdivision of the big estates, as did a shift from sheep to beef, which was cheaper to produce, less labour intensive and fetched better prices by the turn of the twentieth century. Rising land costs further encouraged the estate owners to sell. Although the number of dairy farms decreased significantly in the later decades of the twentieth century, in 2005 there were still 199 dairy farms in the Hunter Valley, although only 27 of these were in the Upper Hunter Shire which were producing \$15 million worth of milk per year.⁵⁷

After World War I, soldier settlement schemes put more pressure on the remaining estates, especially those in the Merriwa region. Blocks for sheep-wheat farms were given to returning servicemen, with wool giving way to fat lambs as the main use for sheep. Beef cattle, dairy and wheat-sheep therefore came to dominate the land use for most of the twentieth century. Although wool is still a major industry in the Merriwa and Cassilis area in particular, with the Festival of the Fleeces held in Merriwa since 1990 celebrate the heritage of wool industry in the surrounding district, it has been in steady decline since the 1970s. Fluctuating wool prices, rising labour and shearing costs meant some of the flocks were replaced with beef cattle and some farms turned to broad acre cropping instead.

Overall however, the Upper Hunter Shire has the largest area under farming and the highest value of agricultural production across the entire Hunter Valley. In 2006 there were 717 farms in the Shire with a production value of \$156 million, almost twice as much as Singleton which had the second largest value of \$81 million.⁵⁸

Horses

Horses have been bred in the Hunter Valley since the first years of the European settlement. The first studs were in the lower Hunter, with Glendon near Singleton the most successful. The Scott brothers who owned Glendon were soon selling horses to those estate owners in the Upper Hunter and the seeds of the horse industry were planted. Their ownership of the Dalkeith estate, later renamed Cassilis, from the late 1830s also saw some of their breeding operations based from there, making it one of the earliest dedicated horse breeding areas in the upper Hunter.

Although horses were indispensable to the estates as work horses and for transport, it was in the later years of the nineteenth century when horse studs began to appear as a significant industry in the upper Hunter. However racing carnivals had been held since the first days with most of the estates putting horses forward from the 1830s. The racing was at first held on the farm estates, with race courses then being built in the towns. Scone was holding regular races from the early 1840s and both Murrurundi and Merriwa from the 1850s.

The changing land use in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, with larger estates being subdivided saw the emergence of large, dedicated horse studs. From the 1880s, Turanville, first started by William Dangar in 1837 near Scone, became increasingly known for its horses, with 400 being run on the estate by then owner Thomas Cook in 1882. Between 1893 and 1909 yearly horse sales were conducted at Turanville before being transferred to Muswellbrook sale yards from 1912.⁵⁹ In 1913 Segenhoe began operations as a horse stud, and from 1931 grew into an important thoroughbred stud. The industry expanded around Scone and Murrurundi in particular with the region gaining a reputation as one of the premier horse breeding areas in Australia. In 2006 there were 119 horse studs in the upper Hunter local government area, with a total of 6,617 horses.⁶⁰

Australian Historical Theme: Developing local, regional and national economies.

NSW Historical Themes: Mining.

While coal mining dominated the lower valley, in the Upper Hunter it was shale oil and gold that was mined in varying degrees, although neither lasted for very long. Deposits of shale oil had been

discovered around Murrurundi as early as the 1860s, but it was not until 1883 that any serious production occurred when Thomas Affleck mined it briefly for the Northern Shale Company. Although it only lasted a few months, Affleck reopened the mine in 1886 for his own mining operations. This too failed after six months due to the need for bullock trains to get the ore out to the railway for transport and his inability to secure a long term lease. He did manage to extract 650 tons before it was closed.



Figure 18: Shale works at Murrurundi in 1925 (Source: SLNSW)

In 1908 production recommenced. This time the Australian Oil Syndicate developed a mine at Mount Temi, retorting the ore at Murrurundi before rail shipment to Newcastle for further refining. In 1910 this operation was taken over by the British-Australian Oil Co. who proceeded to build the Murrurundi Oil Shale Refinery a large industrial complex including a brick works, retorts, condensers and tanks to refine the oil. To transport it to Murrurundi the company installed a Bleichert aerial ropeway over Page Mountain and then a spur rail line from the Northern Railway. At the end of 1911 the company reported producing benzene, naphthas, moor spirit, kerosene, lubricating oil, gas oils and liquid fuels for market. However the expense of the operation saw the mine and works closed temporarily in 1913, and despite a restructure and a new set of retorts, the mines closed in early 1914.⁶¹

Gold was discovered in the Hunter in the late 1850s, but it was not for another ten years in 1868 that the first goldfields were officially proclaimed around Stewarts Brook, in the mountains near Gundy. For the next thirty years a series of small mines and gold fields sprang up and faded throughout the mountains around Scone, known as either the Northern gold Fields or the Denison Diggings. Gold at Omadale Brook near Scone was reported 1871 with two crushing machines in

place, however returns of gold per tonne crushed were low and this site was abandoned.⁶² The rugged country meant mining was difficult and the seams hard to follow, with the gold confined to pockets and running out after a few years at best. Stewart's Brook however managed to operate into the first decade of the twentieth century. New finds were still being reported in 1906 at Tomalla, 70 miles east of Scone, but large scale operations had all but stopped by the outbreak of World War I. The small settlements of Gundy and Moonan Flat grew as service centres in the late nineteenth century due to the gold discovered in the district around them.



Figure 19: Gold Miner at Moonan Brook Field near Scone in 1933. The gold rushes of the late nineteenth century had long since passed (Source: SLNSW)

Australian Historical Theme: Governing.

NSW Historical Themes: Government and administration.

Each of the towns and villages that appeared in the 1830s through to the 1850s developed slowly for their first decades, with haphazard development and primitive services. From 1842 the first stirrings of a local administration were felt when local elective councils were established in each Police District that would be able to levy rates on property to pay for the cost of police and building roads for the area. Scone and Murrurundi were designated a combined district in August 1843, with Joseph Docker, a Justice of the Peace and magistrate, made first Warden and President of the District Council. However these councils did not last as locals were suspicious of any taxation and Governor Gipps was reluctant to lend any money to them.⁶³

Despite this, the need for local administrations became increasingly obvious as the towns began to grow. In 1853, the passing of Municipalities Act saw several of the towns in the lower Hunter become incorporated. It was under the Municipalities Act of 1867 that Scone was incorporated in April 1888, after four petitions to the government to do so. The first three petitions had all been met with counter-petitions against the incorporation, mainly arguing that the town was too small, was hemmed in by big estates especially that of the Bakewell Brothers at St Aubins, and that the majority of the population were labourers and would not be able to afford the rates required. Despite the prolonged opposition, the council was formed and elections held on 11 July 1888.⁶⁴

While Scone was the first of the Upper Hunter councils, Murrurundi followed soon after being incorporated in 1890 with Aberdeen proclaimed a Municipality in December 1894. Merriwa was the last of the councils to come into effect, being proclaimed in 1906.⁶⁵ Although small, each Council was soon underway with improvements to their respective towns and districts. At both Scone and Murrurundi the incorporation bought their twin town of St Aubins (Scone) and Haydonton under the Council control. One of Scone's first acts was to have the streets between Scone and St Aubins aligned and fences removed that blocked the streets in each. As the largest town, Scone's council revenue allowed it to undertake more public improvements than its regional neighbours. The new council was soon making by-laws regarding rubbish disposal, roads, kerbing and guttering, the making of public parks and even the introduction of gas, street lighting in 1893. In 1905 Scone Council built municipal saleyards to replace aging saleyards and to regulate the sale and movement of stock through the town. These were replaced in 1973.⁶⁶

In 1957 Scone Shire Council was formed via the amalgamation of the Upper Hunter Shire and Scone Municipality. The Aberdeen Municipal Council was also amalgamated into this new Shire. Murrurundi Shire Council was formed in 1948, also taking in the former Municipality. Merriwa on the other hand had always been a Shire.

Amalgamation

In mid-2003, representatives of the Merriwa Shire Council and other Hunter Valley councils met with the then Minister for Local Government to discuss the issue of structural reforms in local government. In a bid to improve efficiency and effectiveness in local government across NSW, the NSW State Government had begun a process of inquiry into possible amalgamations of smaller councils. The Minister, the Hon. Tony Kelly assured local representatives that he had no issue with the operation of any of the Hunter Councils, before announcing in August 2003 that all Council elections would be postponed from September 2003 until 27 March 2004, while the inquiry was underway.⁶⁷

One week before the election date, on the 17 March 2004, the NSW state Government announced the dissolution of Scone and Murrurundi Shires and the new Upper Hunter Shire Council. In May, Merriwa Shire Council was also included into the Upper Hunter, with a subsequent boundary inquiry also recommending the addition of Cassilis and its surrounds. New elections were set for March 2005 for the new Shire, which now equalled a total area of 8065 km² and a population of 14, 459 (based on the 2001 Census).⁶⁸ By 2011 the total population across the Upper Hunter shire council area had decreased to 13, 754.

¹ <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/heritagesearch.aspx>

² Browne, W.R., Notes on the Physiography and Geology of the Upper Hunter River, *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW*, Vol. LVIII, 1924, p. 133.

³ Gunson, N (ed), *Australian Reminiscences and papers of L.E. Threlkeld: Missionary to the Aborigines 1824-1859*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1974, p. 64.

⁴ Upper Hunter Shire Council intends to undertake a more detailed study of Aboriginal Places and Aboriginal heritage in the Upper Hunter in the future.

⁵ Veale, S, *Remembering Country: History & Memory of Towarri National Park*, Department of Environment, Climate Change & Water, Sydney 2001, p. 2.

⁶ <http://www.scone.com.au/history/aboriginal-history/>

⁷ Veale, p. 3.

⁸ ERM, Upper Hunter Valley Aboriginal Heritage Baseline Study, for Upper Hunter Aboriginal Heritage Trust, October 2004, p. 68.

⁹ <http://www.scone.com.au/history/aboriginal-history/>

¹⁰ <https://countrylifeanddeath.wordpress.com/2013/10/23/aboriginal-scarred-tree/>

¹¹ Macqueen, A, *Somewhat Perilous: the journeys of Singleton, Parr, Howe, Myles & Blaxland in the Northern Blue Mountains*, Andy Macqueen, Wentworth Falls, 2004, p. 110.

¹² Wood, W.A., *Dawn in the Valley: The Early History of the Hunter Valley Settlement*, Wentworth Books, Sydney, 1972, p. 42.

¹³ Wood, p. 45.

¹⁴ Wood, p. 88.

¹⁵ Gray, N, *The Promised Land: A Summary of early settlement in the Shire of Scone*, Scone and Upper Hunter Historical Society, 1975, p. 29.

¹⁶ Perumal, Wrathall & Murphy Pty Ltd Environmental Planners, Hunter Region Heritage Study: Historic Towns and Settlements for Department of Environment and Planning, April 1982, p. 13.

¹⁷ Gray, pp. 30-31.

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