

NEWCASTLE EAST TOUR

For our bimonthly outing on Monday 21st July 2008 it was decided to explore our own Novocastrian history. Barbara Turner kindly forwarded a report.

We all met at Newcastle Cathedral and Beth and John became our tour guides.

Christ Church Cathedral is the Cathedral Church for the Anglican Community in the Diocese of Newcastle and it is the site of the first place of worship in the City. Beth and John gave us a very informed tour which leaves us in no doubt as to the beauty of this great building. Graves in the graveyard of the Cathedral date back to 1802. James Hannel's grave (1813-1876) is the most prominent. He was the son of convict parents, became a wealthy landowner and a passionate advocate of education in Newcastle. As we came out of the main doors it really showed our first fleet stamina as the wind was so wild it felt we may be blown from the side of the Cathedral

Barbara Turner became our tour guide from this point and we continued along Church Street into Bolton Street to view the David Cohen and Company's warehouse which is now the Bolton Street Car Park. Opposite the car park is one of Newcastle's best kept secrets: The Toll House also known as Rose Cottage, dating back to 1828-1830 is believed to be Newcastle's oldest building. It was sold to Simon Kemp, a former Mayor of Newcastle. In 1974 Rose Cottage was the subject of a heated debate about the buildings future. It is now used as private offices.

ROSE COTTAGE



Judy Pepper's granddaughter Kaitlyn Munro (FF's: Thomas Acres/John Gowan) was the photographer

The Soldiers' Memorial was our next station and stands in front of the former Newcastle Post Office in Hunter Street and is one of the Australia's oldest monuments to soldiers of

war. Commander Frank Gardner presented the memorial to the City "In memory of the officers and men of Newcastle who gave their lives to uphold the honour of the British Empire". We then looked across at one of the City's disgraces, the Newcastle Post Office which was built on the site of the old Court House demolished in 1900; the Post Office was opened in 1903 and closed in 2001. The Post Office building designed by the Government architect Walter Liberty Vernon was sold to a private company in 2002. Subject to vandalism and graffiti, it is now a decaying relic of its original grandeur.

Alongside the Post Office is the beautifully kept buildings of the former Newcastle Police Station which was a major police centre for over 100 years. This grand old building was handed over the National Trust and forms part of the collection of three buildings. These are now controlled by the Newcastle Historic Reserve Trust.

It was a trip down 'memory lane' for all of us as we could remember Electric trams running along Hunter Street which were discontinued in 1950 and then double decker buses dominating the scene. We wandered up Watt Street viewing the remains of our great hospital, Royal Newcastle Hospital erected on the site of Newcastle's first hospital built in 1817. In the 1960's it was the second biggest hospital in NSW. The hospital was damaged in 1989 and some buildings were not rebuilt. Apartments have been constructed on the site of former hospital buildings. At last we reached our destination, lunch. Lunch today was at 'Monets' situated in the Commandant's Cottage in the grounds of the James Fletcher Hospital and is the second oldest building in Newcastle. This Georgian-style sandstone building stands on the Hunter's most historic site.

This site was possibly used for the first penal settlement in 1801; however there is little or no evidence. The second penal settlement (1804-1822) is a lot better documented. This grand site has owned much of Newcastle's History from The Government Farm and Glebe of 1804-1838 The Military Barracks of 1838-1853, (the Commandants Cottage was built in 1842 and the Barracks next door completed in 1847), The Civil Servants Accommodation 1854-1867, Girls Reformatory 1867-1871 to the present day Mental Hospital from 1871.

It was really a great feeling actually being in some of these buildings and knowing that most of them are being respected as part of our Novocastrian Heritage. Except for the exceptionally strong winds it was a great day enjoyed by all with a luscious lunch served in the Commandants cosy rooms.