

Newcastle Club

ESTABLISHED 1885

Our History

In 1884, eight leading citizens of Newcastle-on-Hunter met several times in the offices of Mr Brown's room at Messrs. Dalgety & Co's offices in Watt Street, Newcastle for the purpose of "talking over and considering the formation of a club for social intercourse."

On 4 August 1885 a meeting of promoters was called to which the response was most "satisfactory". Mr Alexander Brown (later the Hon Alexander Brown MLC) was voted into the chair and elected the first President. The minutes of that memorable meeting are still preserved. The printed rules of the "Sydney Club", believed to be a reference to the Union Club (for that is how Robert Louis Stevenson termed it when in Sydney), with alterations and additions, were unanimously adopted.

On the 15 September 1885, the Club was formally opened, renting five upstairs rooms and balcony over Messrs Dalgety & Co.'s offices at number 11 Watt Street in Newcastle. The members of the Committee were so enthusiastic as to meet twice in the one-day arranging the necessary details. Gas was fitted and the rooms were suitably furnished by Mr Neve. The Club began its life with some 46 gentlemen members, being the leading citizens of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley. They established a tradition as firmly held today as it was then.



In February 1892, larger premises at the corner of Watt and King Street were secured and a weekly rental of 4 pounds 10 shillings. The Club remained in occupation until February 1911 when it moved into its first freehold and rather grand Federation style premises in Pacific Street, Newcastle which were designed by FG Castleden (partner of the celebrated German architect, and Frederick Menkens).

The Clubhouse was across the road from Australia's second oldest hospital, the Newcastle Hospital (later known as Royal Newcastle Hospital). It is of interest to note that Australia, had only just become of age as a Federation of the States into one nation in 1901.

On 6 March 1911, the first evening function of the ladies was held in the new building. A further evening for ladies was held in honour of the Coronation of George V on 8 June 1911.

In 1916, during the Great War, due to accelerated demolition to enable construction of the North Wing of the Hospital, a shortage of accommodation existed for nurses. The Club unanimously decided to hand over its freehold Club premises to the State Government for hospital purposes "to meet its urgent necessities subject to the Club being reinstated in a building and upon a site to their approval, and upon such conditions as should mutually be arranged". The Club acquired premises with commanding views over the City then known as "Beresford House" (the temporary residence of the Lord Bishop of Newcastle, who readily agreed to vacate the premises). It also acquired an intervening property, and a further property still known as Claremont House, built about 1835, the second oldest standing building in Newcastle, and which still forms an important part of the Club fabric.



These properties thus provided in all a frontage of 300 feet to Newcomen Street and a lesser frontage to King Street which still form the curtilage of the Clubhouse today.



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In 1924 His Excellency Lord Forster, then Governor General of Australia, opened the magnificent new Clubhouse built on grand beaux artes lines. The then President of the Union Club, Sydney, Mr A Consett Stephen, also spoke on the occasion. It was the culmination of many years work by the Club's longest serving President Mr Archibald A Rankin CBE who ensured that the State Government substantially fulfilled their promises.

In 2002, the Club, entirely without rancour and almost unanimously, voted to admit ladies to membership. They now take their place on an equal footing with men in the life of the Club and provide a new vibrancy and richness to the camaraderie and life of the Club.

The Club has experienced and overcome many challenges in its 120 years including the Boer War, two World Wars, the Great Depression, the breathalyser, the advent of talking pictures, radio and television, a 5.6 Richter scale earthquake in 1989 and a significant change in the economic and social direction of the City with the closure of many heavy industries. The Club still aims to meet and adapt to the needs of its members, in many cases, the City and Valley's leading citizen members.

Long may it continue, independent, prosperous, and invigorating!



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