

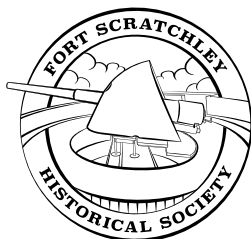
FORT SCRATCHLEY HISTORICAL NEWSLETTER

113

206

MUZZLE BLAST

JUNE 2024



Starting Signal

Start of a leg of the Australian Ocean Racing Championship with Ethan from Newcastle Cruising Yacht Club.

fortscratchley.org.au



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OUT OF THE SQUARE

President's Report

I am sitting here under pressure from our Vice President to put words to paper so he can finalize the June edition of Muzzle Blast. Sculptures at Scratchley is currently on, this being the last weekend. It appears to have been well received again, so hopefully, it will return next year. There has been a lot of activity around the Fort in the last few months. The major one being the ongoing work in the disappearing gun emplacement. The barrel has been sandblasted and painted, a new stand for the barrel manufactured and the highlight, the excavation of the original pit.

Congratulations to the team working on this project, and hopefully they will be in a position to publish an article in the next edition of Muzzle Blast. Our Willys Jeep has gone to Morpeth Men's Shed, who have volunteered to carry out the required overhaul for which the Society is very grateful. The People Mover, which was purchased several years ago, has reached the end of its useful service and a new one will be delivered in early June. The unit is still ok for light volume work, and we are attempting to sell it. Another piece of the Fort's history is now back and on display, two of the

original Mark VII cleaning rods were found by City of Newcastle RSL Sub-branch and graciously returned to the Society. We are planning for a number of activities; the King's Birthday; a major recruiting day for the Defence Forces; the Forging group is returning for another demonstration day in our workshop and of course Music of the Guns is scheduled for November.

A busy time ahead for our volunteers, which leads me to call out for anyone who can assist in one of our operational areas, even if it's only one day per week or fortnight. Recently, we have started to release a number of short video clips featuring some of our volunteers. These have been produced with the assistance of our good friends at Out of the Square Media. As always, until next time

PLEASE, STAY SAFE.

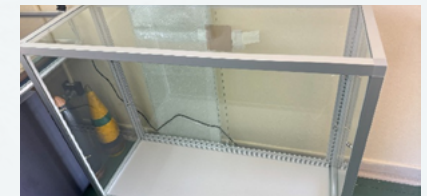
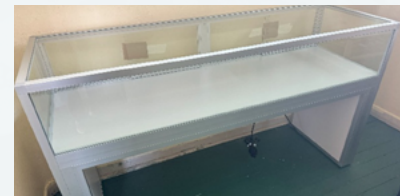
Frank Carter
President.



From the Curators Desk

Display Cabinets

Early in May, Showfront, the cabinet manufacturer delivered the 15 cabinets we ordered. They were purchased, using the first instalment of the grant we received from the Newcastle Port Corporation, via the State Department of Regional Affairs. Five are to display mannequins in Museum Room 5, including housing The Fort post WWII until the Army departed in 1972. Some will go into the new Guardhouse. Others are to display artefacts and documents in Museum Rooms 5 and 6 (the Fort since 1982) and the Medals display room.



Databases and Library

Data inputters in all three areas of our collection – Artefacts, Documents and Photos – are becoming more efficient working with the Axiel Collections Database – checking transfer and adding new records.

Terry has completed the entry of all the Military pamphlets, sub-scripted journals and is currently checking the excess/duplicated stock – 4-5 plastic storage boxes.

A special Artefact

A piece of railway line and sleeper from the notorious "Siam Burma Railway of Death".



This piece of line and sleeper was laid in 1943 by Australian prisoners of war near Kinsayok, not far from the cutting now known as "Hellfire Pass" where the Prisoners of War Memorial now stands.

Ron Barber, Curator, FSHS Inc.

Gun Shed / Workshop - Clay Campbell

With a very full on Cruise ship season now completed, we now look forward to the new season starting in November. The King's Birthday on the 10th of June was another big event, where we fired seven guns. All the guns were in working order, thanks to ongoing cleaning and maintenance. Our transport, thanks to the efforts of Keith, Ian, and Peter, are also working and in good shape. Our donated Jeep has been taken to Morpeth Men's Shed, where restoration work is underway.

Clay Campbell



On Sunday 26th of May, Andy McConnell of Antiques Roadshow fame visited Fort Scratchley. The photo with the Time Gun crew says it all. He even volunteered to assist them in cleaning it.



On Anzac Day Basil Russell (with his grandmother) visited Fort Scratchley, bringing along and sharing with Fort Scratchley volunteers, Anzac Biscuits that he and his grandmother had cooked. He is seen here with the Time Gun crew. Might I add that the Anzacs were delicious and very much appreciated. From all who you shared them with – A big thank you Basil.



Artist: Greg Salters - Sphinx Dog
Sphinx Dog is a representation of Greg Salters own personal dog Poppet, who passed away last year. He would sit in this odd pose a lot of the time, so Greg made this before Poppet left him.



Blast from the Past - James Russell

Transforming Captain Allan's Hill. 1880-1890

The initial contract for the Fortification of Newcastle (Fort Scratchley) was won by James Russell for a figure a little in excess of twenty-two thousand pounds. The total money allocated by government to Newcastle through the department of the colonial architect over the seventeen-year period from 1862 to 1880 was fifty-five thousand and sixty-seven pounds. Of this total, the military fortification contract accounted for 40%, and the Custom House accounted for 36%. The remaining 24% was spent on the post and telegraph office, pilots' facilities, water police, lunatic asylum, industrial school, and various repair jobs.

James Russell was initially allowed 18 months for the Fort contract. The signalman's houses on the hill were to be demolished, as the whole surface of the hill was to be enclosed and fortified; the whole to be completed with a ditch and palisading with the necessary loopholes for armament. Work started late in 1880 at a time when regional unemployment was high, and the works were seen as a means to provide jobs for many local workmen.

By October 1881 the battery and the various passages from it to the main magazine were completed. A gang of men were asphaltting the main magazine. The lift through which the shells

were received was ready. The look-out post was finished. Turfing and masonry were underway. The outer, or seaface, of the Fort was being escarped to render it unapproachable, while the inland face was receiving all the latest defence protection.

In March 1882 a company of about 40 men from No. 3 Battery of the Permanent Artillery Force under Captain Murray came to Newcastle especially to overhaul and install the ordnance. One by one the heavy guns were dragged up the steep incline to the summit: a 'very laborious task', and the men made 'solid progress'. The Fort stimulated heavy adjectives when journalists wrote about it! The task to haul the guns and emplace them took one month. There were three 12-ton guns, and four 80 pounders. Three of the 80 pounders were placed in casemate and one in barbette, while the 12 ton pieces were set in position in their respective chambers, commanding a tremendous range of ocean frontage, with a sweep of fully five or six miles from the shore.

During the next month – May 1882 – Colonel Scratchley and the Clerk of Works inspected the Fort and suggested a few improvements including placing a merlon around the back of the 80 pounder in barbette as a protection against shot

from an enemy in the rear, replacing the wooden platform with an iron one, and substituting a more powerful gun. Scratchley also proposed to erect a covered passage over the entrance to the emplacement. He was surprised that work had not yet commenced on constructing a concrete wall around the base of the hill and the formation of the slope from the edge of the cliff to the top of the proposed retaining wall. It seems that there was some uncertainty about who would pay as this work was to be shared between Council and Government.

The Clerk of Works from Sydney periodically inspected the progress which was under a local Foreman of Works, Mr Samuel Campbell. The work of James Russell as contractor was wholeheartedly praised as the contract proceeded. There were extras involved in the contract which delayed its completion considerably. These included filling in the old coal workings discovered under the site, an extra eighteen hundred pounds. Demolition and removal of the residences of the harbour master and pilots caused additional delay.

In late 1883, James Russell successfully contracted for the concrete retaining wall around the fortifications – about seven thousand pounds. The foot of the hill was riddled with broad drives which had been put in to allow examination of the old coal workings. Discoveries were made of a number of leg-irons,

manacles and other articles evocative of the horrors and tyrannies of Newcastle's early days. These underground dungeons and abodes of wretchedness, exposed during the construction of the wall were filled or roofed over, finally obliterated forever by a deep thick wall of solid concrete and masonry.

The next contract, for the construction of a carriage drive with a picket fence around the base of the Fort, was also undertaken by James Russell. These works accessed the shoreline area and its unsurpassed views of the city and the harbour to promenading visitors, and residents possessed of buggies, in a manner never before possible, after a decent road was made to connect it with Hunter Street. 'Captain Allan's Hill' originally stood in grand isolation from the town 'like an oasis in a desert of mud': the slightest shower of rain rendered any access impossible save through a slough of the stickiest grey marl which was thorough terror to butcher boys and milkmen!

Fort Scratchley was handed over to the military authorities in August 1889.

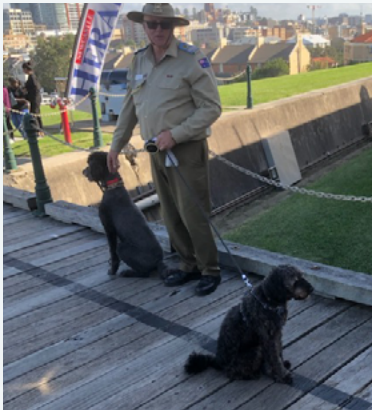
This Item is an extract from Part two of several articles written by Cynthia Hunter / Russell copied from the Muzzle Blast – Volume 9 No.1, Mar 1990

Trivia Quiz

1. What is an embrasure?
2. What is a merlon?
3. What is palisading?
4. In what year was the Newcastle Volunteer Artillery formed?
5. What does SMBL stand for?
6. In what year were the two 32 pounder SMBL's mounted on Signal Hill?
7. What replaced the two 32 pounder SMBL's in 1866?
8. Where can these two canons be found today?
9. In what year was Fort Scratchley completed to stage one?
10. In what year was Fort Scratchley completed to stage two?

Answers on last page! →

Some FORTunate visitors



Who is guarding what?

Guide Wayne Trowbridge in training standing guard with two of his friends.



Birds of a feather, Frank together

Sculptures at Scratchley - what a Blast!



Clay and the Gun Crews have come up with an alternate bang to be used in the event of a misfire. It will be out of site in the alcove behind the gun. It would be too obvious trying to put it down the barrel. Note: The art work included is by Lucy Glover and called "In Hot Water" Shown here during the recent Sculptres at Scratchley exhibition.



Ex NBN Newsreader Paul Lobb enjoying a peace of the action

Norm Bowes and Frank Williams nearing the end of a tiring day- replenishing their energy.



Trivia Quiz Answers

1. An opening wider on the inside than on the outside in a wall or parapet allowing for the firing of a gun
2. A solid part of embattled parapet between the embrasures
3. Defensive structure consisting of walls or mounds built around a stronghold to strengthen it
4. 1855
5. Smooth Bore Muzzle Loader
6. 1866
7. Two 64 Pounder SBML
8. Silo Hill, Stroud
9. 1882
10. 1886



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Editor's note:

If you have an interesting story or funny joke, please send it to the editor fortscratchley@bigpond.com or the Society Office.



No responsibility is accepted for any errors, omissions, or other shortcomings of this or other issues of this newsletter.

