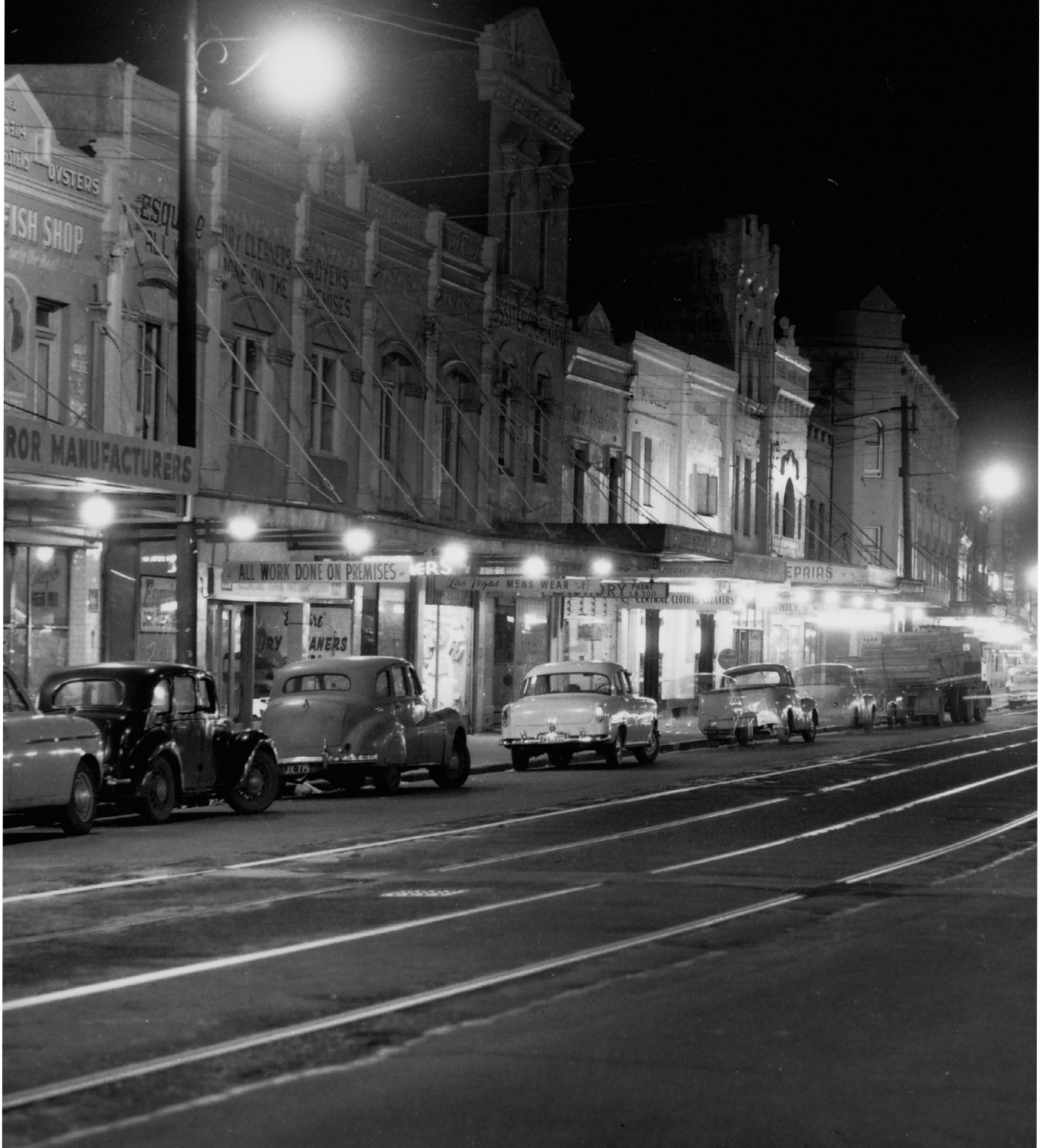# Gritty Newtown
History Walk

Gritty Newtown
History Walk

—

Although it began as a rural outpost scattered with 'gentleman's estates', Newtown became increasingly populous with the coming of the railway in 1855. The Municipality of Newtown was proclaimed in 1862. By the 1870s, it was one of the most densely populated municipalities in NSW.

"King-street Newtown is always more or less busy, but on Saturday night it is seen at its best and brightest. Fancy a double line, more than a mile long, of brilliantly lighted shops; and 'side-walks' so inconveniently crowded, that it is often a matter of some difficulty to push one's way through the throng of people on business and on pleasure bent."

(*Illustrated Sydney News*, 27 June 1889)

King Street still hums, and today, Newtown is one of Sydney's most vibrant and gritty inner-city suburbs.

Allow one to 2 hours for this tour.
This tour will guide you through the history of Newtown.
There are cafes and restaurants along the way. Your walking tour starts at Newtown railway station and progresses on the eastern side of King Street (station side).

King Street near the corner of Missenden Road, 1950
(Photograph: Inner West Council Library Services)

1
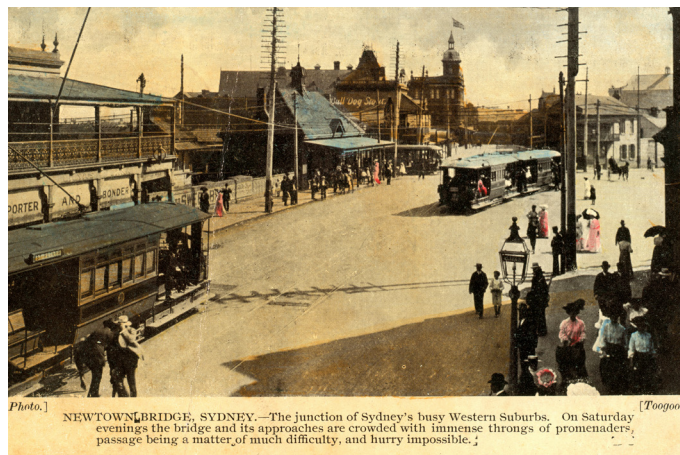## Newtown railway station

—

Inside the ticket office at Newtown railway station, 1932
(Photograph: Caroline Simpson Library, Museums of History NSW)

The Great Western Railway line from Sydney to Parramatta opened in 1855 with 4 stops along the way, including Newtown. The original train station was near Crago Flour Mills (now the Silos Apartments), hence the street name Station Street, but was moved to its present site in 1892 when the railway line was expanded. A ticket office was built at street level on the **Newtown Bridge (2)** and platforms were accessed by steep stairs.

2
Newtown Bridge

—

Crowds of 'promenaders' on Newtown Bridge, 1906 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives, *Jubilee Souvenir of the Municipality of Newtown*, 1912)

Newtown Bridge is much more than an elevated roadway over the railway line; 'The Bridge' is Newtown's civic and cultural heart. It was a popular open-air meeting site in the first half of the 20th century. It attracted political rallies, soapbox speakers and religious preachers, including socialists and communists, supporters of the Great Strike of 1917, and the Salvation Army. The late Bob Gould, a Newtown stalwart, remembered that communists addressing passers-by from soapboxes were regularly arrested in the 1950s.

Turn left and walk along the eastern side of King Street to the corner of Newman Street.

3
Site of Newtown Markets

—

Newtown Markets rebuilt in 1906 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives, *Jubilee Souvenir of the Municipality of Newtown*, 1912)

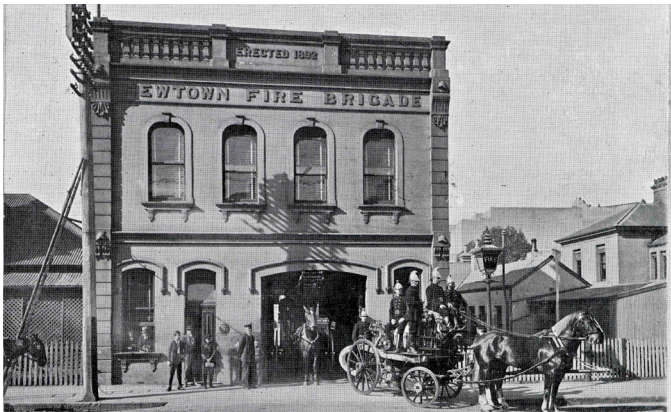There were markets on this corner from 1885. They originally occupied the former office, waiting room and stables of the Sydney Omnibus Company. Markets were held regularly between the 1880s and the 1950s, but Friday and Saturday nights were the most popular times. Newtown's markets were crowded and noisy. Stallholders sold everything from fruit, vegetables, meat and tobacco to second-hand books, furniture and clothes.

4

St Georges Hall

—

Aldermanic reception at St Georges Hall, 1932
(Photograph courtesy of Powerhouse Museum)

NSW Premier Sir Henry Parkes laid the foundation stone for St Georges Hall in June 1887. It was designed by architect, David Ross, as a venue for concerts, theatre, dances and public meetings, entertaining up to 1,200 people. With its prominent position on King Street, it provided serious competition to the civic amenity of the nearby town hall.

5

Hub Theatre

—

Newtown locals may remember the Hub's spicy reputation. The former cinema started life as Clay's Bridge Theatre in 1913. Theatre impresario, Harry Clay, provided Newtown's only live vaudeville venue in the early 20th century. Clay's theatre was taken over by Hoyts in the 1930s and converted into a cinema. In the 1950s and 1960s, it screened non-English-language films to cater to Newtown's large migrant population, and was briefly the home of the Sydney Film Festival. With the relaxation of Australia's censorship laws, The Hub became an insalubrious and infamous 'blue movie house'. It closed in the mid-1990s.

6

Former Newtown Town Hall

—

Newtown Town Hall in 1869
(Image: Inner West Council Library Services)

The former town hall was originally Newtown's controversial first School of Arts. The building's original architect, Frederick Holland, was Newtown's first mayor. Holland designed the building but after concerns it was structurally unsound, rival architect, John Bibb, stepped in to oversee the demolition and reconstruction of the second storey. Holland became mayor in 1863 but nursed a grievance toward his fellow councillors, which tainted council meetings until he was voted out 2 years later. The council leased a number of rooms within the School of Arts before purchasing the building outright for its town hall in 1868. Within the year, the building was extended and renamed Newtown Municipal Council Chambers. It was refurbished and given a new façade in the 1920s. Newtown Neighbourhood Centre ran its services from this building from the late 1970s to 2022. The building is now home to the Pride Centre.

7

Newtown Courthouse

—

Funeral procession passing in front of Newtown Courthouse, late 19th century
(Photograph: Inner West Council Library Services)

Newtown Courthouse has been in continuous use since 1885. Although the courthouse appears monumental when viewed from Australia Street, police and court officers thought it was poky and didn't want to move in. Offices were crammed underneath the courtroom because the site was small and restricted. Colonial Architect, James Barnet, was later censured by the government for the choice of building site and for going over budget.

Newtown Fire Station

—

The Newtown Fire Station on Australia Street, c1912
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Newtown Volunteer Fire Company was established in the early 1870s with just 9 volunteers, a hand pump, a small reel of hose and a ladder. When Newtown's first fire station on Australia Street opened in June 1892, volunteer firemen were replaced by paid staff. The existing Newtown No.5 Fire Station was designed by Spain, Cosh and Minnett in 1913. By 1922 all the horse-drawn fire engines had been replaced with motor-driven ones, including one that could 'throw 600 gallons of water on to a fire every single minute it is working'.

→

Continue along Australia Street until you reach the Courthouse Hotel, earlier called the Kingston Lodge Hotel, then turn right on to Lennox Street. To your right is Eliza Street. On the left is **Camperdown Memorial Rest Park (9)**, previously Camperdown Cemetery. St Stephen's Anglican Church is behind the brick wall. The entrance is on Church Street.

9

Camperdown Memorial Rest Park

—

Camperdown Cemetery in 1951. The spire of St Stephen's Anglican Church is to the right (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Camperdown Cemetery was established in 1848 and was the Church of England's principal burial ground until 1867. The cemetery covered 13 acres between Lennox Street and Federation Road. Both the Cemetery Lodge and fig tree near the entrance gates date from 1848. Up to 18,000 people were buried during the cemetery's 18 years of operation. Many could not afford headstones so were buried in unmarked graves. After Camperdown Cemetery closed, part of it was taken over for

St Stephen's Anglican Church. Designed in the Gothic Revival architectural style by Edmund Blacket, it was officially opened in April 1874. After complaints about its neglected state, Camperdown Cemetery was converted to a public park in 1951. Gravestones north of St Stephen's were removed and a large wall was built to enclose the church grounds and the remaining gravesites.

→

Retrace your steps to Eliza Street. Follow the street along until you reach the **School of Arts (10)** and **Oxford Hotel (11)**.

10

Newtown School of Arts

—

The Newtown Workman's Institute was formed in 1899, later becoming Newtown's second School of Arts. Originally housed in rooms in St Georges Hall, the institute rented a small cottage at 5 Eliza Street from 1902, which was replaced with a new building in 1916. It featured a library, lecture hall, billiards hall, and small rooms for reading, retiring, smoking, games, meeting and classrooms.

11

Former Oxford Hotel

—

Plan and elevation drawn by architect NF Nurzey in 1913 for the Oxford Hotel (Image: State Archives of NSW)

There has been a pub on this corner since the early 1860s. Originally called the Daniel Webster Hotel, it was renamed the Oxford Hotel in 1875. It was refurbished in the Art Deco style in 1913. In the 1980s, the Oxford Tavern was a popular live music venue, and was open late most nights. The hotel was refurbished in 2002 with an African theme and renamed Zanzibar. In 2016 the hotel was again refurbished and renamed Websters Bar.

i

King Street
King Street is Newtown's 'spine'. The first major transport route through Newtown followed the same alignment of today's King Street. It is likely this 'bullock route' followed an Aboriginal track across the ridges to the Cooks River. Originally known as Bullanaming Road and later as the Cooks River or Newtown Road, it was officially named King Street in 1877. Its retail strip developed from the 1880s, and soon it became one of Sydney's busiest suburban commercial centres.

12

Former Newtown Post Office

—

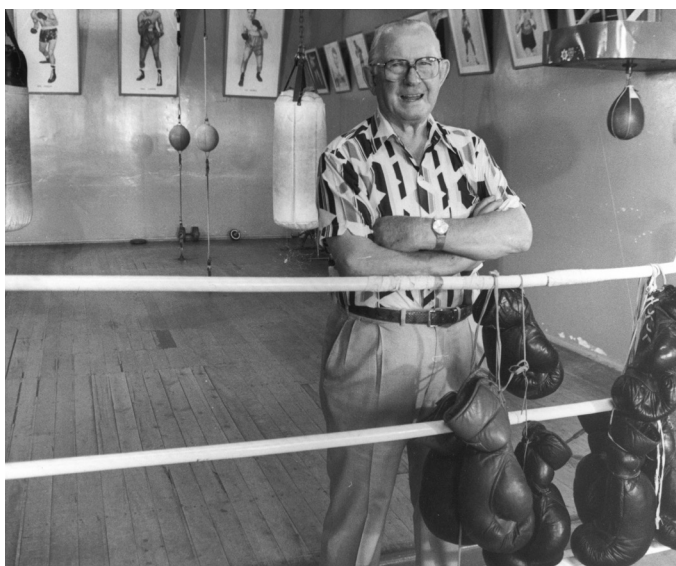**Newtown Post Office, 1890s** (Photograph: State Archives of NSW)

Designed by NSW Government Architect Walter Liberty Vernon, Newtown Post Office was officially opened in August 1893 by the Governor of NSW, Sir Robert Duff. A clock was installed in 1900. The post office had 70 staff working across post, telegraph and telephone services in 1912, 50 years after the thriving municipality was formed.

13

Former Oddfellows Hall

—

Ern McQuillan at his Newtown gym in 1979 (Photograph: National Library of Australia)

The Loyal William Lane Lodge (No. 5) of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was established at Newtown in 1878 and the lodge on Wilson Street opened 10 years later. It was one of many friendly society lodges established in Sydney during the 19th century, providing mutual support for working men. The hall was converted to a boxing gym by Ern McQuillan in the 1970s. Aboriginal boxing greats trained by McQuillan include Tony Mundine, father of Anthony 'The Man' Mundine, Harry Grogan, Wally Carr and Alfie Clay. Oddfellows Hall was redeveloped as residential units in the 1980s.

14

Hollis Park

—

View showing women and children standing outside terrace houses, opposite Hollis Park, 1910 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Hollis Park was Newtown's first public park, established in 1913. The park was named for English-born Robert Hollis, engine driver, unionist and parliamentarian. Hollis lived in Newtown from 1884, when he migrated to Australia. He was a foundation member of the Newtown Labor League in 1891 and Member of the Legislative Assembly for Newtown in 1901-17. He was also a founder of the Newtown Literary and Debating Society and served as a director of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

15

Newtown Synagogue

—

Newtown had a sizable Jewish population from the 1880s. Organised Jewish life began at this time. Land was acquired on Georgina Street for a purpose-built synagogue in 1912, which was officially opened with a consecration ceremony in September 1919. Newtown was the second suburban Jewish congregation in Sydney to build its own synagogue.

16

Trocadero

—

Roller skating was a popular pastime in the late 19th century. One of the most ornate rinks in Sydney was Newtown's 'Trocadero and Acadamie de Musique', which opened in 1889. The Trocadero boasted hairdressing saloons for men and women, a billiards room with 2 tables, a French cafe, and oyster saloons. The roller-skating rink was in the main hall. It had a fountain as its centrepiece and a corrugated iron clerestory roof that could be opened to the elements.

17

Former NSW Railway and Tramway Recreation Club

—

Newtown Railway and Tramway Institute's third annual road race, August 1926
(Photograph courtesy Clyde Ellem, City of Sydney Archives)

The NSW Railway and Tramway Recreation Club was built in 1911. It had recreational facilities including a gymnasium, billiards room and a library, as well as a miniature rifle range on the roof. By 1949 the building was converted into a factory for the Indiana Hosiery Company, and was later home to Champion Textiles. The building is now converted into apartments.

18

Former Burland Hall

—

Although the former Burland Hall has an Art Deco façade, it was originally built in 1888 as Her Majesty's Skating Rink. The ice rink was famed for its skating surface 'as smooth as polished glass'. In summer, it was converted into 'monster' swimming baths. The grand pleasure palace lasted less than a decade and became part of Marcus Clark's department store emporium at 216-226 King Street. It later became a cinema and received an Art Deco facelift in the 1930s.

19

Marcus Clark and Co Ltd

—

Marcus Clark and Co emporium on the corner of King and Brown streets
(Image: City of Sydney Archives / Salvation Army Archives)

In 1883 Henry Marcus Clark established his drapery store on King Street on the site of Dendy Cinemas. It expanded to become one of Sydney's largest department stores by the early 20th century. Marcus Clark's 'Millinery, Clothing, Boot and Fancy Goods Warehouse' moved to its new location further north along King Street on the corner of Brown Street in the 1890s. The emporium covered 10 acres; only this modest warehouse survives.

20

Newtown Library

—

The Salvation Army's brass band played at the Newtown Bridge every week
(Image: Salvation Army Archives)

The Newtown Corps of the Salvation Army was formed in April 1883 and its barracks on Brown Street were built a year later. The building was renovated in 1922 and renamed the Newtown Citadel. It has been home to Newtown Library since 1995.

Map of walking tour

N 100m / 200ft

NEWTOWN

ERSKINEVILLE

Macdonaldtown

Erskineville

Camperdown Memorial Rest Park

St Stephen's Anglican Church

Cemetery

Newtown Baptist Church

Chris O'Brien Lifehouse

St Andrew's College

St Andrew's Oval

The Women's College

Newtown North Public School

Moore Theological College

Hollis Park

Newtown High School of Performing Arts

St George's Hall

Newtown Public School

St Constantine and Helen

Salmon Park

Lillian Fowler Reserve

Mrs Isabella Hill Rest Area

Gowrie Street Reserve

New Theatre

Green Bans Park

Turkish Islamic Culture and Mosque Association

Erskineville Town Hall

Joseph Sargeant Community Centre

Erskineville Public School

St Mary's Primary School

St Mary's Church

PACT Centre for Emerging Artists

Newtown Library / Street Community Hall

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CITY OF SYDNEY

Cover image: King Street near the corner of Missenden Road, 1950
(Photograph: Inner West Council Library Services)