Lithgow Migration History

A scoping study outlining journeys to the birthplace of steelmaking and modern manufacturing in Australia

An impression of the Lithgow Valley – from the River Project panorama by celebrated Chinese artist Hu Tao, 2003. (Hu Tao & The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc. – used with permission.)

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Introduction

In the 2011 Australian Census, 9% of the 20,140 residents of the Lithgow Local Government Area [LGA] reported they had been born overseas.\(^1\) This figure is low compared to other towns in regional New South Wales but a deeper story of migration is revealed by tracing the cultural heritage of the Lithgow Community. More than a quarter of the area’s residents – 5,563 – reported they were second-generation migrants, with one or both of their parents born overseas. This is higher than the national average.\(^2\) Around 12,000, or 60%, of the residents of the LGA identified with an ancestry that lies outside Australia: English, Irish, Scottish, German, Italian, Dutch, Chinese, Welsh, New Zealander and Maori, and at least 40 other countries.\(^3\) This is also higher than the national average, and speaks to a long history of migration in the Lithgow area, and the cherishing of cultural heritage by Lithgow families.

The migration history of Lithgow begins just over two centuries ago, when the crossing of the Blue Mountains by Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson allowed a wave of pastoral settlers to wash into what had been the shared lands of the Wiradjuri and Gundungurra and begin a process of displacement. While the 2011 Census, quoted above, recorded that 855 people in the LGA (4.24% of the population) identified as Australian Aboriginal, a little above the Australian average, it does not record whether those people identify as Wiradjuri or Gundungurra.\(^4\) In that sense, the vast majority of Lithgow’s people are migrants.

This is a scoping study about migration history in the Lithgow Local Government Area. It aims to establish themes and issues and make some general observations about the nature of migration to Lithgow. It relies on secondary sources and newspaper articles, supplemented with preliminary interviews with Lithgow residents, including first-generation migrants.

As a colonial nation, Australia is filled with migration stories and many of them play out in Lithgow. The purpose of this study is not to trace the movement of native-born Australians into the Lithgow area, but to focus on new arrivals and the cultures and beliefs, both religious and political, they brought with them. This study also offers some thoughts on the ways the new arrivals shaped the local area.

It is not easy to capture migration history. The first arrivals, the Anglo-Celtic convicts, military personnel and free settlers who came to populate the Colony of New South Wales, were subjects of the British Empire. Early statisticians of the

towns in the Lithgow LGA saw no need to differentiate between native-born subjects – ‘currency lads and lasses’ - and the ‘new chums’ who were fresh off the boats, or even to record where they hailed from. People from non-English speaking countries, often called ‘aliens’, attracted considerably more attention, and so do appear in the records, especially after 1901. Federation was a key moment in the development of a sense of Australian citizenship conferred by birth, and with it came the exclusionary White Australia Policy. The concept of a White Australia was built on the sense of Australia being a British nation, in which non-white, and even non-English speaking Europeans, were ‘alien’. The sense that Anglo-Celtic migrants were also ‘others’, and were not Australian, did not begin to form until the decolonisation of the British Empire in the aftermath of World War II, and the development of the British Commonwealth.

Lithgow’s migration history has a particular character, shaped by its geography and pulled by its geology. The Lithgow local government area straddles the Great Dividing Range and sits across the place at which the Sydney Coal Basin meets the mineral-bearing granite country of the Central Tablelands. The valleys and ridges are places where the lands of the Gundungurra people meet those of the Wiradjuri. Lithgow is a place of junctions and meetings.

The Anglo-Celtic settlers who arrived after 1813 created permanent crossings through this country. The first two were Coxs Road, which developed into the Great Western Highway, and the Bells Line of Road. They join in the Lithgow Valley. The convicts and soldiers who cut the roads were the first arrivals, providing a source of labour for free settlers of means, who followed seeking land and riches and squatted on vast acres which they filled with sheep and cattle. When the Gold Rushes began nearby, in Bathurst, Hill End and Sofala, thousands poured into the interior, diluting the convict stock, attracting non-European migrants, and forcing closer settlement and the creation of towns.

Lithgow’s geography yielded more prosaic and reliable minerals than gold, and it was these that transformed Lithgow from a way-station and service centre to a major industrial centre. The presence of iron, copper and coal spurred early investment by entrepreneurs, who in turn influenced the government to bring the Great Western Railway through the valley. Diggers who had found only disappointment in the goldfields found ready work labouring to lay rails and hew coal. As word spread, thousands of English, Scottish and Welsh men of coal, iron and steel brought their families here, turning an antipodean valley into a pocket of the English Black Country, in both economic and cultural terms. By 1901, Lithgow was the fourth largest city in Australia and its only inland industrial centre.

Twentieth century industry in Lithgow perpetuated Anglo-Celtic migration but also brought more Italians, Maltese and Eastern Europeans. These groups found it hard to settle into the union culture, and suffered worst when the city’s economy slid into Depression. But as the city’s economic base began to shift to complex manufacturing, via the Small Arms Factory, Berlei and the power industry, migrant workers found a more permanent place.
Census figures show that Lithgow’s population has remained relatively stable over time, peaking in World War II. This indicates the likelihood that a relatively small proportion of migrants remain in Lithgow after the work moves on.

This study charts the growth and transformation of Lithgow and movements of its people over time. People come to Lithgow to work. Those who stay manage to make connections that hold them. This study outlines some of those connections.
Methodology

Ray Christison and Naomi Parry undertook this study over a period of four months. Initial work involved analysis of the project scope provided by Lithgow City Council and identification of sources of information. Gaps in the existing narrative of Lithgow’s history were also identified at this stage. These gaps were:

- The stories of the textiles and garment manufacturing industries
- The role of these industries in supporting migration
- The story of Lithgow’s migration hostels
  - Littleton Hostel
  - Outer Recreation Reserve Hostel
  - Joint Coal Board Hostel, Wallerawang
  - Workers’ hostels associated with the construction of the region’s thermal power stations
- General social history
- Accounts of the experience of women and migration. The experience of women has generally been a neglected aspect of histories researched to date and is sorely needed.

Published accounts of the history of Lithgow and its industries were reviewed to construct a general account of the development of Lithgow. The researchers also drew on their own unpublished research and reviewed heritage studies and other reports. Some comparative assessment was also undertaken through reference to studies of comparable coalmining communities in New South Wales, including Newcastle and Cessnock.

The focus of most local history work in Lithgow to date has been on the development of industry, transport and built heritage. A comprehensive social history of Lithgow has not yet been written, and there are, as yet, no published resources to help interpret Lithgow’s migration history. This project offers pioneering insights and establishes directions for further research.

Research for this scoping study was supplemented by extensive searches of newspaper accounts relevant to the migration story. This media search included specific searches undertaken through the National Library of Australia’s Trove search facility and targeted review of microfilmed copies of the Lithgow Mercury held by Lithgow City Council. Social media was used to obtain additional information on some subjects from current residents. This proved particularly helpful when gathering stories from the Littleton Migrant Hostel and of Chinese migrant Chu Shao Hung. The analysis of Lithgow’s migration story was supplemented by reference to population statistics held by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and interpreted by .Id.

As an account was developed Ray Christison began a series of interviews with people who arrived in Lithgow as migrants. The interview subjects included post World War II migrants and their children, and migrants who have arrived in Lithgow since the 1980s. Notes were taken at each interview and an account sent to the interviewees for review and approval. Where necessary supplementary interviews were conducted to clarify information subsequently gathered from other sources. Interview subjects have so far been recruited from contacts of the
researchers. It is hoped that later stages of this project would allow the casting of a wider net into the community of Lithgow and a formal oral history project.

Liaison with Lithgow’s collecting institutions was undertaken through the Lithgow Museums Networking Group. The researchers also used their personal associations with Eskbank House Museum and The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Incorporated to identify collection items with direct connections to Lithgow’s migration story.
Lithgow Migration History Timeline

1813  Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson crossed the Blue Mountains.
1815  Coxs Road constructed across the Blue Mountains.
      Irish Catholic Ticket-of-Leave man John Grant & his wife Jane O’Brien
      established Moyne Farm in the Hartley Valley.
1823  Scot James Walker established his Wallerowang run on the Coxs River.
1824  Robert Venour Dulhunty granted land at Cullen Bullen and Ben Bullen.
1824  Major Morisset’s military expedition against the Wiradjuri of the Great
      Dividing Range.

1830  Andrew Brown employed Chinese shepherds and hut keepers on his
      properties around Lithgow and the Castlereagh River.
1837  Andrew Brown erected a flour mill at ‘Cooerwull’ at Bowenfels. Hartley
      Courthouse established at Hartley.
1838  Coalmining commenced on Andrew Brown’s property ‘Cooerwull’.

1840  Thomas and Mary Brown acquire property in the Lithgow Valley and
      build the first house, ‘Eskbank’.

1851  Ophir Goldfields open at Bathurst
1854  Gold mining commenced around Mitchells Creek (Sunny Corner).
1857  Woollen mills erected at Cooerwull by Scottish weavers Houston and
      Cormick.

1865  Oil shale mining ventures commenced at Hartley Vale and Sawyers
      Swamp.
1868  Commercial coalmining commenced in the Lithgow Valley. Construction
      of the Zig Zag Railway commences, with some stonemasons brought from
      Italy.
1869  The Great Western Railway completed to Bowenfels.

1872  Copper smelting commenced in the Lithgow Valley.
1876  Brickmaking commenced by the Lithgow Valley Colliery Company.
1878  Lithgow’s population estimated to be ‘1,000 souls’.
1878  Lily of the Vale Lodge formed by Vale of Clwydd Colliery miners.
1878  Coal Miners’ Mutual Protective Association of the Western District
      formed.
1879  Staffordshire potter James Silcock commenced industrial and domestic
      pottery production at the Lithgow Valley Colliery pottery works.

1882  Railway line completed between Wallerawang and Capertee.
1884  ‘Silver rush’ drew families to the Sunny Corner silver mines.
1886  Hartley District Miners’ Mutual Protective Association formed with lodges
      in the Eskbank & Ironworks Tunnel, Lithgow Valley & Hermitage, and
      Vale of Clwydd Collieries.
1888  Population of Lithgow Valley estimated at 4,000.
1889  First Eight Hour Day Demonstration held on 25 February.
Timeline

1895  New South Wales Shale & Oil Company established shale mines and oil retorts at New Hartley & Torbene.
1895  Zig Zag Colliery miners prosecuted for working on the Sabbath.

1900  First steel produced at William Sandford’s Eskbank Iron Works.
1900  Eight Hour Day Parade first held in October.
1902  Commonwealth Portland Cement Limited began development of a modern cement works at Portland.
1905  Staffordshire potter William Brownfield revived the Lithgow Pottery works.
1906  Commonwealth Oil Corporation commenced development of its oil works at Newnes.
1907  Sandford’s Blast Furnace completed.
1908  Ten Tunnels Deviation works commenced.

1911  Population of the Borough of Lithgow reaches 8,196.
1911  Lithgow’s Chinese market gardeners refused to supply vegetables to scab workers during the Ironworks Colliery strike.
1913  Hoskins Bros. erect a second blast furnace in Lithgow.
1916  Local hysteria over a ‘Maltese invasion’ of 20 workers.

1926  140 Italian workers employed at the Hoskins Iron & Steel Works.
1926  Italian Club formed in Lithgow.
1927  Italians (erroneously) reported to comprise 75% of the annual May Day parade.
1928  Iron smelting at the Lithgow Blast Furnaces ceased. Italian ironworkers reported to be leaving in large numbers.

1932  Hoskins Iron and Steel Works closed and The Great Depression results in much hardship
1939  Outbreak of war leads to rapid expansion of the Lithgow Small Arms Factory.

1940  Men’s Hostel constructed on Lithgow Showground for Small Arms Factory workers.
1942  Hostel for female Small Arms Factory Workers constructed in Enfield Avenue, Lithgow.
1943  Lithgow’s population reached 34,967.
1945  Men’s Hostel transferred to the Australian Red Cross to accommodate British subjects released from Japanese internment camps.
1946  Davidson Royal Commission into the coal industry recommends improvements in living conditions within mining towns. Small Arms Factory Men’s Hostel converted to Commercial Centre.
1946  Hostel accommodation for migrant workers employed by Lithgow Woollen Mills established within the Commercial Centre.
1947  Population of the City of Lithgow and Blaxland Shire totalled 23,741.
1948  Joint Coal Board Hostel established at Wallerawang.
1948  Commonwealth Government allocated 52 Polish ex-servicemen to work at Glen Davis. Miners’ Federation and Federated Ironworkers Union imposed a ban on the employment of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

High Ground Consulting
9 July 2014
European companies engaged to build prefabricated housed in Wallerawang. Dutch and German workers migrated to construct these homes.

Commonwealth Government announced that the former Female Hostel would be allocated for migrant workers and their families.

Commonwealth Hostels Commission established.

Construction of Wallerawang Power Station commenced. Prefabricated homes sourced from Europe constructed at Wallerawang with tradespeople imported from the Netherlands and other European countries.

Five former Kuomintang soldiers arrested at Wallerawang and charged with being prohibited immigrants.

Joint Coal Board Wallerawang Hostel closed and sold off.

Industrial chemist Ervin Toeroek disappeared from the Littleton Hostel.

Littleton Hostel transferred to private management.

The community of Portland lobbied for former Kuomintang soldier Chu Shao Hung to stay in Australia.

Management of Littleton Hostel transferred to private enterprise.

Completion of Wallerawang Power Station ‘A’ and ‘B’ Sections.

Littleton Hostel closed.

Amalgamation of The City of Lithgow and Blaxland Shire.

Completion of Wallerawang Power Station Section ‘C’.

Workers’ hostels established to service the construction of Mount Piper Power Station.

Portland Cement Works closed.

Mount Piper Power Station opened.

Berlei relocated production to Indonesia, ending the clothing industry era.
The first people

This John Lewin portrait is often said to represent Windradyne, who is credited with leading Wiradjuri resistance to European settlement in the Bathurst region and was one of the Wiradjuri leaders who travelled to Sydney to sue for peace after the military expeditions of September 1824. A native chief of Bathurst [i.e. Bathurst] [picture] / drawn by J.W. Lewin; engraved by R. Havell & Son, London, 1820, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia, nla.pic-an7674776
The Wiradjuri and the Gundungurra

Aboriginal culture has survived in the Lithgow area despite two centuries of continuous occupation. Today Lithgow is predominately recognised as falling within Wiradjuri country, but historian Jim Smith and the late anthropologist Dianne Johnson have concluded that much of the Greater Lithgow region was part of the lands used by the Gundungurra people, after close reading of primary sources and early anthropological accounts, including the work of RH Matthews and Norman Tindale.

According to Jim Smith, the Therabulat band of the Gundungurra lived around Hartley and the Wywandy were the band who lived at Pipers Flat, near Wallerawang. Another notable band was the Capiti, who lived in what is now known as the Capertee Valley.

The Aboriginal word for Lithgow, named by the British after Auditor-General William Lithgow, is not known, but the English settlers laid their words over many Aboriginal names. Moyne, the first land grant in Hartley, had been Tunumberee, a place of hunting and ceremony. According to Mr Cullen of Cullenbenbong, who listed Aboriginal place names for The Lithgow Mercury in November 1931, River Lett was a rhyming replacement for Tarrapalatt (Therabulat); Tuiwon became the Vale of Clwydd and Gnallwarra became Brown’s Gap, after Thomas Brown, who used it to get from ‘Eskbank’ to the courthouse at Hartley. Archaeological investigations undertaken during the 1990s identified large ceremonial grounds located along the valley of the Coxs River in the location of Lake Lyell.

The Aboriginal people of the region actively resisted the European occupation of their country. A group of Gundungurra warriors from the Wingecarribee River (Southern Highlands) attacked the government post at Glenroy in 1816. The military force at this stockade was subsequently reinforced by a detachment of troops from the 46th Regiment of Foot and travellers between Springwood and Bathurst were provided with a military escort.

By the 1820s the Wiradjuri people had begun to actively resist European occupation of their lands around Bathurst. The leader of these campaigns was the legendary Windradyne, warrior and friend of the Suttor family of ‘Brucedale’. These insurrections, and particularly the killing of seven stockmen in May 1824, near Bells Falls Gorge above Sofala, led Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane to proclaim martial law west of the Blue Mountains on 14 August 1824. Major James Morissonet, the Commandant of Bathurst, planned a major punitive expedition against the Wiradjuri in the lands north of the established European settlements during September 1824. Infantry and mounted troops, led by local magistrates Lawson and Rankin from Bathurst, and James Walker, who had recently taken up a giant run he called ‘Waller-o-wang’, moved north from...
Bathurst to Mudgee, where they swept the countryside for ten days. The exact numbers of Aboriginal deaths are difficult to ascertain, but Wiradjuri leaders sued for peace within the following two months. This expedition appears to have marked the beginning of a series of massacres of Aboriginal people along the Great Dividing Range. As historian David Andrew Roberts has written, the exact events of this period are difficult to trace, because of a lack of documentary evidence, although oral history traditions about it, and about what is known as the Bells Falls Massacre, have a long history amongst settler communities.

James Walker’s ‘Waller-o-wang’ was, according to Jim Smith, in the country of the Wywandy, and as his vast runs extended over the Wolgan Valley and into the Lachlan, Walker and his staff undoubtedly met Aboriginal people, but little remains on the record about these interactions. Smith has studied the diaries of Walker’s overseer, Andrew Brown, and says Brown was ‘oddly silent’ about Aboriginal people, though his diaries show smallpox, which was devastating to Aboriginal communities, hit the area in the 1830s. Smith also records rumours that the water supply at the ‘Cooerwull’, the property Brown later obtained, was poisoned, to kill Aboriginal people. We can know that Walker’s cousin Thomas Archer came to know and respect Myles (‘King’ Miles or My-ill) in 1838, and a headstone for a man known as ‘Bobby’ was erected by Archibald James Walker on ‘Waller-o-wang’ in 1856.

The effect of the loss of land and antagonism by settlers was felt across the vast lands of the Wiradjuri. Peter Read notes that, despite efforts from the Church Missionary Society and others to minister to Aboriginal people and protect them, the Wiradjuri deserted large parts of their country in the period 1813-1850. Aboriginal people did remain an enduring presence in Lithgow, although we can assume their numbers were much diminished. From 1838 until the 1880s the magistrates at Hartley Courthouse gave out around 50 blankets a year to Aboriginal people. New arrivals at Lithgow also reported their presence. In 1880 James Silcock, master potter, visited an Aboriginal camp and ‘had a long chat with them, as they can speak English tolerably well.’ In 1886-1887 the Aborigines Protection Board’s Returns of Aboriginal People lists a ‘full-blood’ woman living at Hartley and two men, a woman and four children, all described as ‘half-caste’. Three of the children were at school but none of the adults was aged younger than 45, and four Aboriginal people had died at Lithgow in the previous year. It is not clear how these people identified themselves. Historian Jim Smith contends that most Gundungurra people moved to the Megalong by 1887 while others moved further west in search of work. However, the Protection Board Minutes show two old women receiving rations at Hartley Vale.

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7 Smith, Wywandy and Therabulat.
8 Peter Read, A Hundred Years War: the Wiradjuri People and the State, (Canberra: ANU Press, 1988).
9 State Records NSW, Board for Protection of Aborigines Returns of Aboriginal People 1886-1887, 5/18423.2, NRS 17323/1
10 Smith, Wywandy and Therabulat.

We can know when Aboriginal people stopped collecting blankets from the Hartley Courthouse, from a June 1888 report by The Town and Country Journal:

GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT.- A bale of blankets supplied by the Government for the aboriginals of Hartley district is now lying at the courthouse, Lithgow, waiting to be claimed by the original inhabitants of New South Wales. These blankets will possibly remain there a good while, as only a very few aboriginals are now in this district; and those who are here, I think, are too proud to take Government assistance in any way. A little while ago the Hartley district had a tribe of blacks; but they are all gone. When they departed the blankets came.\footnote{‘Lithgow’, Town and Country Journal, 30 June 1888, http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/71099360, accessed 23 May 2014}

By the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century the best known elders in the Valley were Gundungurra man William Davis ‘King Billy’ Lynch and ‘Queen’ Caroline, of Cooerwull. Queen Caroline was belittled by a game played by Lithgow Primary School pupils, who would draw the short straw to kiss her.\footnote{The story of Lithgow / written by the pupils of the Lithgow Public School in collaboration with the executive officers of the Lithgow District Historical Society, 1947. Lithgow District Historical Society. Cited Smith, Wywandy and Tharabulat.}

Aborigines Protection Board records show requests for assistance and attempts to secure land title in the Megalong Valley from 1890 to 1895.\footnote{Naomi Parry, 2007. ‘Such a longing’: black and white children in welfare in New South Wales and Tasmania, 1880-1940, PhD Thesis, Department of History, University of New South Wales, p. 319.} Billy Lynch moved from the Megalong Valley in the 1890s and settled in The Gully on the western edge of Katoomba, although when he died his body was returned to the Megalong Valley.\footnote{Dianne Johnson, 2007. Sacred Waters: the story of the Blue Mountains Gully Aboriginal people, Sydney: Halstead.} The Gully was a place of refuge for people forced from their traditional lands and pushed out of the towns of western Sydney and the Central West. It was a community of mostly Darug and Gundungurra people, with some non-Aboriginal members and Wiradjuri and Ngunnawal people from the Yass area. Although never officially recognised as an Aboriginal community, its members endured a high degree of official and unofficial oversight, including from child welfare agencies.\footnote{Johnson, Sacred Waters; Parry, ‘Such a longing’.} Despite this surveillance, the people of the Gully survived with minimal government support, until the 1950s, when they were dispersed so a car racing track could be built.

There was no such place of safety in Lithgow. In 1934, The Sydney Morning Herald reported that the police census of Lithgow and the Blaxland Shire had not identified a single Aboriginal person in the Lithgow district.\footnote{‘Police Census: Lithgow’, The Sydney Morning Herald, 11 January 1934, http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/29890988, accessed 3 May 2014} When reading such statements it is wise to reflect on the fact that, in the 1930s, the powers of the Aborigines Protection Board, as conferred by the **Aborigines Protection Act 1909**
and a raft of Amendments, were at their height. By 1934, police and the staff of the Aborigines Protection Board had the right to decide if someone was Aboriginal by looking at them, and made judgments according to skin tone and whether the person lived with Aboriginal people, on a reserve or in a camp. The Board considered that people who were less than ‘half-caste’ and could ‘pass as white’ were not Aboriginal and did not qualify for government support, or have the right to live amongst people who did. It was hardly in the interests of an Aboriginal person to argue the case, because people who came under the Act could be forced to move anywhere in New South Wales, send their children to official Aboriginal Schools that were far inferior to ordinary public schools, or face losing their children altogether. At this time in New South Wales history, and until the 1960s, many Aboriginal families hid their identity, moved away from official oversight, stopped speaking their language and suppressed their stories.

![Young Dulcie Green](image-url)

Young Dulcie Green photographed during 1941 in front of the small building that served as a doctor’s surgery and protestant church at Tyldesley Village near Cullen Bullen. Despite Police Census reports that no Aboriginal people lived in the district in 1934, Aboriginal families such as the Greens were valued members of coalmining communities. (Personal communication with Stan Green)
Fortunately, in recent decades Aboriginal families in the Lithgow area, the Blue Mountains and the Central West have gained the strength to tell their stories and reclaim their history. The late Dianne Johnson worked extensively with Aboriginal people in the region, and recorded a number of moving stories about the process of reconciliation and the reclaiming of identity.\(^\text{18}\) Myles’ descendants remain in Wallerawang, and Wiradjuri and Gundungurra people live throughout the towns of the area today. The Aboriginal rock art at Blackfellows’ Hand Aboriginal Place (Maiyingu Marragu), located on Lithgow Council-controlled Crown Land in the Wolgan Valley, is recognised by the NSW Government as an Aboriginal Place.\(^\text{19}\) Lithgow City Council also protects the Aboriginal heritage of Hyde Park Reserve, a series of stunning pink granite rock pools that are part of the River Lett in Hartley Valley.

Almost 900 people in Lithgow claim Aboriginal ancestry, although the numbers identifying as Wiradjuri and Gundungurra are unclear.\(^\text{20}\) Since the late 1990s, different groups of Wiradjuri people and the Gundungurra Tribal Aboriginal Council have lodged Native Title Claims over the Greater Lithgow Area.\(^\text{21}\) Although these claims often compete, they show a strong sense of Aboriginal identity in the Greater Lithgow Area has survived.


\(^\text{21}\) Johnson, Report to the Gundungurra Tribal Council concerning Gundungurra Native Title Claim.
The pastoral economy
1813 to 1850

The Winters' family home at Blackmans Flat. Illustrated Sydney News, 27 September 1873
Early settlement in the new country

When British settlers began to cross the Blue Mountains they brought with them sheep, cattle and a class system that mirrored the social structures of the British Isles. This enabled wealthy free settlers to carve out huge pastoral runs on the back of convict labour, but the new society that formed around these runs was fluid and emancipists and free settlers of more modest means found niches within which to prosper.

Coxs Great Western Road was cut across the Blue Mountains in 1815 and the lesser Bells Line of Road was cut in 1823. The present City of Lithgow is set at their junction, capturing almost all west-bound traffic and making it a logical location for the stockades that housed the convict road gangs, inns and way stations.

The Convicts

Access to the 'New Country' west of the Blue Mountains was initially heavily restricted and people wishing to travel west needed to make written application to the Governor, and carry written passes. Joan Kent has written that the military guards stationed at the first depot on the mountains had instructions to 'prevent the progress of any persons, who have not obtained regular passes'.'

Roads constructed through the district were maintained by gangs of convicts working in chains under military supervision. These convicts and their guards were housed in stockades erected at Hassans Walls, Bowenfels, Coxs River and Mount Walker.²

Sue Rosen, who has studied the No 2 Coxs River Stockade, notes that substantial changes were made to the organisation of convict road labour in the 1820s. These changes were an attempt to address criticisms from Britain regarding the cost of the colony, and the deterrence and reform capacity of the transportation system. From 1826 male convicts who re-offended were banished to remote road gang work, in irons, on roads and bridges. An Assistant Surveyor was appointed to supervise and administer work on each of the three major roads west and a convict overseer was allocated to each gang.³

Further refinements were made in 1828 when the new Surveyor of Roads and Bridges, Major Edmund Lockyer, directed that each iron gang should consist of up to sixty men and be supervised by a principal overseer and three assistants. A ‘Road Party’ on the other hand was to consist of fifty un-ironed men supervised by a principal overseer and two assistants. Bridge parties were to consist of twenty-five well-behaved and skilled men under the supervision of a single overseer. The convicts who worked on the roads in the Lithgow district were employed under this system, moving from the harshness of a life in irons under

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the lash to the relative freedom of working without chains or the privileged status of messengers, watchmen and cooks.4

Convicts employed outside the brutal system of road gangs worked as assigned labourers. As the legendary historian A.G.L. Shaw observed:

The normal fate of the well-behaved convict was assignment to private service ... the British government encouraged it, for it saved money by taking the prisoner off the government's hands ... It scattered men throughout the colony, which broke up their 'evil associations', it taught the convicts those 'habits of labour' whose absence had so often started them on their criminal career, and it gave them experience, which would make it easier for them to gain useful employment when their sentence expired.5

Many of the early landholders in the district were assigned convicts to work their properties, although the work was far from voluntary. Robert Dulhunty, who took up 'Cullen Bullen' in 1829, and whose runs stretched to Dubbo, was esteemed as an employer and considered remarkable because he never installed or used a flogging post on his stations.6

At the conclusion of a convict's sentence, or upon the award of a conditional pardon and a ticket-of-leave, convicts became emancipists and were free to establish businesses and take up land, although the grants were rather more modest than those given to wealthy settlers. George Lee worked in various parts of New South Wales before settling in the area. He ran various hostleries on the Western Road at Bowenfels between 1853 and 1870.7 The Sutton family, who ran a butcher's shop in the Lithgow Main Street until well into the 20th century, was descended from a convict who had been stationed in the Hartley Stockade.8

Some convicts did not wait to serve their sentences but rebelled and eked out a perilous living robbing settlers and transports as bushrangers. Joseph Gownlock, who ran away from the Hassans Walls stockade, was said to have committed upwards of a hundred robberies before he was caught in July 1838. Edward Hall ran away from Hartley in 1838 with James Mayne, and was caught and executed in 1839.9

The life of the Welsh convict recidivist Thomas Maddox shows how uneven the path to respectability could be. Thomas was initially assigned to work for James Walker of Wallerowang. In 1828 he was convicted of harbouring bushrangers and sent to a penal settlement. After serving three years for this offence he was re-assigned to Walker. In 1836 he was sentenced to 12 months in a penal settlement for 'habitually neglecting his duty'. When he finally received a ticket-of-leave he established the Carriers Arms Inn near where the Mudgee Road crossed the Coxs River. He held the licence to this inn until 1868.10 His sons

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7 Jenkins, Bowenfels. People, Places, Past and Present. p.113
8 Personal communication, Mrs Lorraine Spice, 2010.
forged a different path for themselves, becoming native-born colliery operators. Thomas opened Folly Colliery, a small mine serving the domestic market, in the hillside opposite the Carriers Arms in 1893. Thomas' other son, Lawrence, opened Queensland Colliery, near Blackmans Flat.

Pierce Collitts was an emancipt who acquired wealth by establishing inns. He was an English convict who had been transported to New South Wales for receiving stolen goods. His wife Mary, née Hardwick, chose to accompany him. On their arrival in the Colony Mary was granted 70 acres and Pierce was assigned to her. Collitts was pardoned in 1811 and obtained a number of government positions in the Nepean District. Having investigated the land around the upper reaches of the Fish River, he sought a grant of land on which to build an inn. His first inn, The Golden Fleece, was built at the base of Coxs Pass. He was subsequently granted additional tracts of land and built further inns: The Rising Sun (1835). The Bridge Inn (also known as Kings Arms, 1836-1837) and Billesden Grange. His son Joseph opened The Rose Inn (Ambermere) in 1846.

As Beverley Kingston has pointed out, over a third of all convicts were Irish and the majority of those were Catholic. The Colonial Government strongly desired to serve their religious needs, and for this reason St Bernard’s Roman Catholic Church at Hartley was the first church in the region. The decision was heavily influenced by the religion and origins of the recipient of the first land grant in the Lithgow area, John Grant. Grant was an Irishman, and a convict, whose rapidly rising fortunes demonstrated the opportunities possible in Colonial life.

Grant had been transported to New South Wales on the Providence in 1811, after attempting to shoot his landlord’s son. Grant was assigned to Dr William Redfern, rising to the position of overseer. He married another convict, Jane O’Brien, and Redfern helped them obtain a grant of land west of the Blue Mountains. They selected a 20-hectare parcel of land in 1821 at the junction of three permanent watercourses and named it ‘Moyne Farm’ after Grant’s childhood home in Tipperary. Moyne, which still stands, was the first house built west of the Blue Mountains. It was built in 1822-1823, by five assigned convicts. Grant acquired a further 1200 hectares by 1823 and managed Redfern’s estates in the Kanimbla. He secured further runs at Canowindra and the Lachlan River.

By 1828 he held more assets than any other Catholic in the colony, and instigated the building of further Catholic churches at Blayney and Carcoar.

**The Gentry: a Presbyterian hegemony**

While many convicts were Irish, a significant proportion of the free settlers who arrived in Lithgow shared Scottish ancestry and Presbyterian faith. A number of notable colonial buildings and early townships like Wallerawang and Bowensfels owe their existence to the social, economic and political bonds between wealthy Presbyterian families. This influence is visible in important surviving colonial

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11 Dept. of Mines Annual Report 1893. pp.87, 88, 91; Map Parish of Lidsdale County of Cook 1892
12 Dept. of Mines Annual Report 1920. p.155
buildings, constructed by Presbyterian stonemason Alexander Binning, including Cooerwull, Eskbank House, the Donnybrook Hotel, Bowenfels Presbyterian Church, Fernhill and even St Bernard’s Roman Catholic Church at Hartley. While land ownership was the driver for James Walker, the Presbyterians who followed were instrumental in starting industrial activity in the Lithgow Valley, and in establishing important educational and religious legacies. It is no coincidence that a later migrant entrepreneur, Charles Hoskins, chose Presbyterianism as the dedicated religion for the church he built to honour his lost children, despite his personal ecumenism.17

Presbyterianism arrived in the district with James Walker, the eldest son of Archibald Walker, the laird of Edenshead, in Fife. As an officer of the Royal Marine Artillery, Walker arrived in Sydney in September 1823 on half-pay. He was a shareholder in his younger brother’s merchant, whaling and shipping venture William Walker & Company. James Walker was granted 2,000 acres that he called ‘Wallerowang’, and settled there in 1824. When the naturalist and explorer, Charles Darwin, crossed the Blue Mountains in 1836 he carried a letter of recommendation to Walker, and overnighted at Wallerowang. In Walker’s absence, Darwin was entertained by then overseer Andrew Brown and David Archer, Walker’s cousin.18 Darwin observed that Walker was squatting, noting that he held 15,000 sheep, under the care of convict shepherds, who grazed on ‘unoccupied ground, at the distance of more than a hundred miles, and beyond the limits of the Colony.’19

Walker was a rapacious pastoralist, who squatted over an empire that eventually stretched from Wallerowang to Lue near Mudgee and beyond the Warrumbungles. By the 1840s Walker and his overseer Andrew Brown held vast stretches of country along the Castlereagh River from Caigan near Mendooran to Koonambil and Baradean. The Colonial Government tacitly approved of this land grab. Walker served as Bench Magistrate at Hartley Courthouse, and was appointed as one of the founding members of the NSW Legislative Council when self-government was achieved in 1856, serving for six months before his death in November 1856.20 Occupying the highest rung of Lithgow society, he did much to ensure the prosperity of the countrymen who moved into the area after him.

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17 Parry, Lithgow History Avenue.
19 Charles Darwin, 1836, A Journey to Bathurst in January, p.42
Perthshire native, Andrew Brown, the Laird of Cooerwull, was one of the prominent Presbyterians who heavily influenced Lithgow’s early development. (Lithgow Regional Library, Lithgow District Historical Society Collection)
Andrew Brown, born in Tibbermoor, Perthshire in 1797, travelled to New South Wales with James Walker and worked as his overseer.21 Brown was granted 200 acres in the Lithgow Valley in 1824 and named this property Cooerwull. As convict transportation declined, and eventually ceased in 1842, the numbers of convicts available for labour fell. Brown promoted non-European migration by employing Chinese stockmen and labourers around on his property at Bowenfels, and on the Castlereagh River. Wilton states the Chinese worked alone, in small groups and alongside Aboriginal and European labourers.22 Many of these men were indentured from Fujian Province and some may have been kidnapped.23 Chinese shepherds and hut keepers worked on Brown’s properties throughout the labour shortages of the 1850s gold rushes.24

Brown was also an entrepreneur, and developed the first industrial enterprise in the Lithgow region, a water-driven flour mill, erected in 1837.25 Ian Jack reports that in 1857, at a time of turmoil in the Scottish textile industry, Brown brought out Scots weavers Houston and Cormick to ‘erect machinery for the Manufacture of tweed and other woollen fabrics’. They employed Scottish migrant weavers, as did the tenants who followed during the 19th century.26 After the Second World War, the woollen mill provided employment for migrants from elsewhere in Europe, until its closure in the 1960s.

With indistinct origins, but no less ambition, Thomas Brown (1811-1881) and his wife Mary Maxwell Brown (1804-1879) were Scots Presbyterians who set sail soon after their wedding in Dumfriesshire and arrived in Sydney in December 1838 with Mary’s sister, Wilhelmina. Mary’s brothers were farmers at Glenroy, which appears to have drawn them to the district. The Browns soon forged a bond with Andrew Brown, and rented Cooerwull for two years before buying land themselves. Brown was from coal mining country and a noted collector of mineral samples, so quickly grasped the coal-bearing potential of the area.27 He bought 200 acres of land adjoining Cooerwull, where coal was already being used, in 1840. By 1842 he held 630 acres. However, without transport, commercial mining was impossible. Brown bided his time, living the life of a well-connected country gentleman. Brown was made a Commissioner of Crown Lands in 1847 and two years later became a magistrate. By 1855 he was Police Magistrate at Hartley Courthouse. In 1865 Thomas Brown was the subject of a fulsome article in Empire by a W. Hamilton Henderson, fellow Scotsman, who drew attention to Brown’s accomplishments as a collector and geologist:

At the bottom of a deep defile in the Hartley mountains, surrounded with ‘the fragments of an earlier world,’ Mr. Thomas Brown, the police magistrate of the district, has chosen his abode; and a more romantic site than Eskbank cannot well be imagined. For many years past Mr. Brown has relieved the monotony of his magisterial duties by minutely studying the formation of the rugged and desolate scenery around him; and to one

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23 Williams, M., 1999. Chinese Settlement in NSW a thematic history. p.4
27 Naomi Parry, Lithgow History Avenue, 2013.
who loves such studios, a better field could not be presented than this parish, with its gold, its irons, its jewels, and its coals ...

It is a great mistake to suppose that the kerosene coal, now worked at Hartley, was discovered at the instance of the fortunate firm who purchased it from the Government, Mr. Brown having long ago directed public attention to its existence, although, perhaps, at the time, ignorant of its extreme unctuous properties. Yet the fact of his having sent a specimen of this fossil to the Sydney exhibition in 1862, proves that he had formed no indistinct notion of its value, and, therefore, ought to be recorded, since the disinterment of this bituminous fossil will form one of the grandest epochs in our geological history. Mr. Brown, it may here be mentioned, received two medals from the judges of the exhibitions held at Sydney in 1854 and 1862, and the kerosene coal specimen will be found enumerated in the inventory of contributions published by the trustees, though 'simply mentioned as 'bituminous schist,' the virtues of the fossil not having been then tested.28

Within a short time of the publication of this article, Thomas Brown was able to capitalise on his geological knowledge by working his own land in the Valley.

Scottish-born Thomas Brown of Eskbank was quick to grasp the benefit of railway construction through the Lithgow Valley.

The friendship between Walker and the gentlemen Browns bore fruit when the families lobbied for the Great Western Railway extension to come through the Lithgow Valley. They appear to have had great influence over the NSW Government railway surveyor, Edwin Barton, who retired from his post in 1866 to marry Walker’s daughter. The first official stop was at Andrew Brown’s

Cooerwull (Bowenfels) in 1869, but Thomas Brown soon put in a siding (Eskbank Station) and the line ran out to the Walker-Barton property at Wallerawang.

By that time Brown was mining coal commercially at Eskbank. He entered the NSW Parliament as the Member for Hartley in 1872, but was obliged to resign four years later for a conflict of interest, when it was proven that his companies were selling coal directly to the Great Western Railway, and thus to the NSW Government. Brown was fundamental to the creation of Lithgow. The coal from his Eskbank Estate fired smelters for iron, steel and copper and powered the Great Western Railway. His land was sliced into subdivisions for worker housing. His manorial habit of allowing locals to play sports and course greyhounds on his land resulted in Brown’s Paddock being converted to a permanent greyhound racing track.29 His legacy is marked by landmark buildings including Eskbank School (Lithgow Public School), Eskbank Station, Eskbank House and St Mary’s Presbyterian Church, which honoured Brown’s wife Mary and was constructed by George Donald, Lithgow’s most celebrated builder of the late 19th century, himself the son of a Scottish stonemason.30

Another Presbyterian who had less capital but did much to shape Lithgow was the stone carver and builder Alexander Binning (1801-1863). Binning came to Sydney as a free emigrant on the Stirling Castle, one of 140 ‘mechanics’ (skilled tradesmen) recruited by the firebrand Scots Presbyterian Minister Reverend John Dunmore Lang to build Australian College in 1831. Like Thomas Brown, Binning was from Inverness.

Sydney was both good and bad for Binning. He was celebrated for memorials he carved in Scots Church, which The Sydney Morning Herald said were ‘at once classical and chaste in design and execution’. In 1833 he married Christiana Ross in the same church, beginning a union that produced 12 children. By 1835 Binning was working for the Road Department as Inspector of Bridges at Bathurst. But in that same year Sydney newspapers printed a letter from him that reported he had been insulted and harassed by two constables in Hyde Park. These officers had questioned whether he was a free man and had abused him for being an emigrant who had come with ‘the b____y Scotch parson’.31

By that time Binning had received a land grant at Bowen’s Hollow (Bowenfels), and it must have been a relief to be able to retire from city life and live amongst countrymen. He built the Glasgow Arms on one side of the western road and constructed a commodious residence opposite. His home is now The Royal Hotel, which is referred to as the Donnybrook or ‘the brook’. He also designed and built significant extensions to Cooerwull and constructed Eskbank House. Although the Browns were teetotalers, the publican Binning ran his cattle on their land, and joined with them and Gaelic-speaking Reverend Colin Stewart to buy the land for Bowenfels Presbyterian Church, which Binning also designed. Binning also built Fernhill at Bowenfels and accepted the government commission to

29 Parry, Lithgow History Avenue.
30 Reid, W., 1973 George Donald, First Mayor of Lithgow
build St Bernard’s Roman Catholic Church and Presbytery at Hartley. Binning’s buildings have a restrained style that reflects the values of Binning’s countrymen: dour and Presbyterian, dignified and enduring.

The Reverend Colin Stewart arrived in Sydney in 1839 as an ordained Minister of the Established Church of Scotland and was assigned to the district of Hartley. He was born at Dingwall, Ross and Cromarty in 1803 and had qualified as a Master of Arts at Edinburgh University. He initially lived near the Hassans Walls convict stockade and held services in the Hartley Court House. Stewart was granted 130 acres on Cooerwull Brook (now Farmers Creek) in the Lithgow Valley. He constructed a residence on this property, which he named ‘The Hermitage’. Like a number of prominent Lithgow district Presbyterians, Stewart had influence well beyond the region. He was the first clergyman to visit the Castlereagh region, making regular visits from his home in the Lithgow Valley from 1839. His circuit seems to have been based on the long sweep of the Brown and Walker properties from Caigan to Baradean. In 1846 he was instrumental in the formation the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

Stewart married Alexina (Mary) Mackay and resigned from his post in 1857. His next ventures were commercial. The first commercial coaling venture in the Lithgow Valley was established on his property in 1868 and when the first meeting of colliery owners was held at Bowenfels in 1869 he was asked to act as chair. The couple lived at The Hermitage until 1873 when they moved to Sydney.

Walker, Andrew and Thomas Brown, Binning and Stewart left behind them a set of beautiful buildings but also established important cultural legacies for Lithgow. Andrew Brown and the Walker family provided land for public schools at Bowenfels and Wallerawang, and Andrew Brown was instrumental in establishing the Cooerwull Academy. His connections with St Andrew’s College at the University of Sydney have also been well documented.

Free settlers

Englishman Robert Venour Dulhunty was one of the early Anglican settlers in the district. He arrived in New South Wales in 1824 with his brother Lawrence Vance Dulhunty. Granted 809 hectares and assigned six convict servants, Dulhunty selected a property on the banks of a watercourse that later became known as Dulhunty’s Creek. Dulhunty called his property ‘Cullen Bullen’, apparently adapted from the Wiradjuri name for the lyrebird. He also acquired land further north at Ben Bullen. Dulhunty imported stock and established a breeding program on his property. He specialised in breeding Arab horses. Dulhunty later expanded his runs to the Macquarie River, establishing ‘Dubbo’ and several other major properties. From 1839 he and his new wife, Eliza Gibbes,

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33 Pickette, J & Campbell. M., 1983. Coonabarabran as it Was in the Beginning. p.95
34 Carne, J.E., 1908. Geology and Mineral Resources of the Western Coalfield. p. 190; The Sydney Morning Herald 3 July 1869.
based themselves at Claremont near Penrith. Dulhunty’s *Cullen Bullen* run was purchased by Sir John Jamison around 1841.\(^{37}\)

A steady stream of free settlers moved into the district in the decades after 1820. These people came from all parts of the United Kingdom. One grouping of early settlers came from the 39th (Dorsetshire) Regiment of Foot, which had arrived in New South Wales in late 1825. Irish Catholic members of this regiment settled at Hartley and Bowfenfels. Among these were Michael Keenan and his wife Susannah, and George McGrath and his wife Rosa. The McGraths failed at an attempt to work 100 acres at Wiseman’s Ferry so retreated to Mitchells Road, Bowens Hollow, where they ran The Beehive Inn. They had several brushes with the law in 1837-1838, for illegally selling spirits, drunkenness, keeping a disorderly house, theft and assaulting a constable in the execution of his duty. Rosa features heavily in the charge lists.\(^{38}\)

The Keenans were based on a grant of 80 acres at Hassans Walls, where they conducted The Travellers Inn, and supplied postal services and liquor for the soldiers and convicts at the Hassans Walls Stockade. After this property was repossessed in 1840 Michael and Susannah moved to Jews Creek, Ben Bullen. Following Michael’s unfortunate death in 1846, Susannah and her son Thomas established the Crown Ridge Inn. Susannah later married Irish immigrant Patrick Corliss.\(^{39}\)

Thomas Sheedy and his wife Johanna Carroll were Irish assisted immigrants who arrived in 1840 and were recruited by Andrew Brown from the immigration depot. Thomas worked for Brown as teamster, coachman and gardener for 18 years before seeking his fortune on the goldfields and winning a large enough stake to buy land in the part of Lithgow Valley that now bears his name. He supplemented his income with work on the Great Western Road. As faithful Roman Catholics, Thomas and Johanna walked with their children over the mountain to St Bernard’s Catholic Church in Hartley to attend Mass in the years before services were held in ‘a small bark shed’ in the Lithgow Valley.\(^{40}\) Thomas opened a small coalmine on his property in 1869 and in the following year sold this land to the Bowfenfels Coal Mining Company Pty Ltd.\(^{41}\)

The Corliss family arrived from Galway at the same time as the Sheedys. After living in Sydney for a month William took a job shepherding at Airly Flat for William Russell of Cullen Bullen. For the next ten years William moved his family around the Capertee district working for various landholders, but in 1851 he was able to claim the Bandanora run, which stretched from Ilford to Portland. When he died in 1853 he left his family 2,000 sheep and £200.\(^{42}\)

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\(^{41}\) The Sydney Morning Herald 3 July 1869; The Argus, Melbourne 10 April 1871

\(^{42}\) Piddington, M. (ed.), 1996. *Over Cherry Tree Hill. 150 Years of Pioneer Settlement Over Cherry Tree Hill. 150 Years of Pioneer Settlement*. pp.137-138
Development around Ben Bullen and Cullen Bullen appears to have been largely guided by Irish immigrants. After the discovery of gold in the 1850s, traffic along the road from Wallerawang to Mudgee increased. A village developed around the locality known as Cullen Bullen and William Hart was appointed its first postmaster in July 1861, later offering 81 lots for sale in the township. Hart was ahead of his time, for little residential development occurred in the area until large scale coal mines were established in 1889.43 However Thomas Lonergan, who married Hart’s daughter, built an inn, The Coachhouse, with a German stonemason Carl Muller. It was a post office, coach-stop and venue for Roman Catholic mass.

By the 1850s the Lithgow region was a pastoral idyll, of sheep and cattle runs. Free settlers and emancipists lived in its valleys. The population was scattered but around the corner loomed the industrial development that would change the face of the Lithgow Valley for ever, and fill it with the trappings of the industrial revolution.

43 The Sydney Morning Herald 26 September 1864
The Gold Rushes
1851 – 1870

Short Street, Hill End, 1872, Beaufoy Merlin, wet plate glass negative, ON 4/Box 5/No. 18504, collection of the State Library of New South Wales.
The gold rushes, closer settlement and the first ‘aliens’

The eminent geologist Reverend William Branwhite Clarke explored Hartley in 1841. His observation of the presence of oil shale and the tell-tale fossil fern *Glossopteris* alerted him to the heavy coal seams that lay beneath the valley. He also chipped the quartzite he found in Hartley, and realised it was gold-bearing. *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* reports that Governor Gibbs told the Reverend ‘Put it away, Mr Clarke, or we shall all have our throats cut’. The secret was kept for just ten years.

In February 1851 Edward Hargreaves orchestrated a find of gold at Ophir near Bathurst, and by June there were 2,000 men on the diggings. In 1872 the world’s largest gold nugget, weighing in at 286 kilograms, was discovered in the Star of Hope Mine, which was operated by brothers-in-law Louis Beyers and Bernard Otto Holtermann at Hill End. Neither Hargreaves nor Holtermann were very interested in digging; Hargreaves received a government reward for finding a paying goldfield, while Holtermann used exquisite photos by Beaufoy Merlin to whip up enthusiasm for the diggings on the Turon River. Both men were entrepreneurs, who knew the real wealth of a goldfield lay in the businesses that supported it.

The rush of migrants to the goldfields at Bathurst, Sofala and Hill End was fuelled by the desire for riches, and it attracted miners from the well-worked goldfields of California and New Zealand: Englishmen, Europeans, Americans and New Zealanders. Civil unrest in Germany and China also contributed to the rush. So many men from southern China camped at the bottom of Mitchell’s Pass, in the bend of the Bathurst Road, that the area became known as Chinamans Bend.

Passage of the Chinese to Australia was organised by brotherhood societies that provided funds for travel and helped arrange working parties in the new country. In New South Wales the most prominent of these was the Yee Hing Brotherhood. This secret, triad-like organisation grew out of the disruption of the Tai Ping rebellion that threw China into turmoil from about 1850. The Yee Hing organised groups of miners to come to Australia under a credit-ticket system, under which they secured credit for their passage through personal contacts in their local communities or supportive merchant houses, often against the security of property. This credit was tied to interest. It was the role of societies such as the Yee Hing to ensure that debts were repaid by the immigrants once they arrived in Australia. The Yee Hing operated from a base of

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local groups in regional communities, eventually formed the Yee Hing Company and, in 1911, the Chinese Masonic Society.\(^5\)

The New South Wales *Chinese Immigration Restriction Act* of 1861 and subsequent uniform legislation passed by almost all colonial parliaments meant Chinese men were unable to bring family members to Australia and were forced into solitary lives. Local anti-Chinese sentiment was pronounced. The Chinese population locally was never large, but was always reported in articles about the presence of ‘aliens’ in the district, and there were Chinese market gardens in Sheedy’s Gully.

Many German migrants fleeing hardship in their own principalities also sought their fortunes in the Australian colonies. A number of these people settled in the Lithgow district and had an ongoing impact on the local landscape and economy. Carl Muller of Cullen Bullen was one, but perhaps the most prominent was John William Berghofer, who left Germany and settled in Hartley during the 1870s. Berghofer became a prominent citizen and civic leader in Lithgow, as the first President of Blaxland Shire Council, but the outbreak of World War I saw him fall victim to anti-German sentiment, which is discussed a following chapter.

The interior of New South Wales, and the areas surrounding Lithgow, were changed forever as people poured into the diggings. In these years the population of New South Wales trebled. The migrants brought experience and technical knowledge from the mineral industries of the Britain and America, and labour and mercantile experience from China. Amongst those brought to these shores by gold was the London-born family of Charles and George Hoskins, who would have an enormous impact on Lithgow.\(^5\) Towns burst forth where none had been before and lines of transportation were laid down, including the legendary Cobb & Co coaches, led by James Rutherford, an American from New York State. He had set out for the Californian goldfields in 1853 but ended up catching a ship to Victoria. After his own gold ventures failed, Rutherford managed and then bought Cobb & Co and in 1861, with his business partner William Whitney, moved the operation to Bathurst.\(^7\) Rutherford later used his capital to energise industry in Lithgow. The rushes also generated pressure for railways, and many of the diggers who failed to make their gold claims pay applied their skills and their hardened muscles to railway lines and coal mines. It is understood that stonemasons were brought from Italy to cut the stones for the viaducts on the Great Zig Zag.\(^8\)

The surge in migration over this period also resulted in an intensification of agriculture. This was marked in the Hartley Valley, where Italian migrants established themselves as fruitgrowers.

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The 19th Century Italian migrants

The Italian peninsula was also in a state of ferment in the 1850s. Desultory conflict, and social dislocation linked to the Risorgimento and other factors, prompted many disgruntled young people to seek new lives and adventure overseas. After the unification of Italy, the industrialised north of the country prospered while much of the south continued in rural poverty. This was a spur to Italian emigration to the New World, including Australia. As a result, a number of Italians settled in the Hartley-Lithgow district in the late 19th century. These people founded family dynasties that had a profound effect on the story of Lithgow in the 20th century.

Around 1851, Alessandro Luchetti, a 32 year old man from Ancona, arrived in the Hartley Valley. In 1858 he married Irish-born Sarah Jennings at St Bernard’s Roman Catholic Church. Alessandro and Sarah became the patriarchs of a family that was to include farmers, miners and the prominent Australian Labor Party politician Anthony Luchetti, who held the Federal seat of Macquarie from 1951 until 1975. Tony Luchetti Showground was named in his honour.

Antonio Butta was granted land at Little Hartley around 1888. Antonio had come to Australia from Salina, an island of the Aeolian group located north of Sicily. He was listed in the 1908 Sands Directory as a fruiterer at Hartley Vale. The ruins of his house are still visible on the northern side of Browns Gap Road near its intersection with Mid Hartley Road. Antonio’s nephew Bartolo (Bartholomew or Uncle Batt) Butta took up land at the confluence of River Lett and Blackmans Creek on the eastern side of Brown’s Gap in 1886. He developed orchards there. By 1901 Bartholomew was farming the Butta properties in partnership with Antonio’s son Antonino. When Batt died in Lewisham Private Hospital in July 1938 at the age of 69 the Lithgow Mercury carried a short article on his life:

The late Mr. Butta was exceptionally well liked, and had lived in the district for 50 years. He was an orchardist and farmer, and conducted a holding at the foot of the Gap ever since he arrived in Australia from his native Italy as a young man of 19.

Early on, his 13-year-old brother, Giuseppe, had joined young Bartolo Butta. Giuseppe stayed for some years before returning to Italy for compulsory military service, which he completed in the Italian Navy, the Regia Marina, and mainly toured the South China Sea. Following his discharge, Giuseppe returned to Australia in November 1911 and established a fruit shop at 187 George Street, Sydney. His new wife Angelina joined him the following year. They relocated to Lithgow in 1916. Between 1932 and 1938 Giuseppe leased two lockup shops on

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10 Sands Directory 1908-1909
12 Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal 3 August 1901
13 The Lithgow Mercury 4 July 1938
the Great Western Highway at Blackheath. Giuseppe and Angelina's son Angelo became one of the driving forces in Lithgow business and mining during the 20th century.

In the 1920s Antonio Butta's land was taken up by members of the Facchina family. Davide Facchina had arrived in Australia from Italy in 1923, and in 1936 Domenico and Ida Facchina were listed as orchardists in Hartley. The family established an apple stall on the Great Western Highway. Oral history evidence gained from Hill End indicates that, as well as selling Hartley apples, the Facchinas sourced fruit from small orchards across the region. The family also established the Hartley Valley Coal Company to operate the Blue Mountains Colliery near Brown's Gap.

In May 1897 the Italian community in Lithgow hosted a gala double wedding that was reported across New South Wales: the nuptials of Giuseppe (Joseph) Della Bosca to Parma Nigro and Christi Caratti to Nini (Johann) Nigro. The Goulburn Evening Penny Post set the scene:

> Side by side and arm-in-arm these venturesome couples marched through Main Street, escorted by the Town Band, and by a miscellaneous eager concourse of several hundreds. The band played ‘Sweet Marie,’ the crowd applauded, and the little boys made various encouraging remarks in public. The sacred edifice was packed in a brace of seconds. The brides, who were becomingly dressed in grey cashmere with veils and the indispensible orange blossom, looked superbly composed, the only visible nervousness being attached to their gallant spouses. In three quarters of an hour the small army emerged from the church, the procession was reformed, and amid a tremendous fusillade of rice the band struck up ‘Daisy Bell’. Up Mort Street they went, the newly-wedded in front as before, the band playing behind, followed by an immense and exceedingly mixed gathering. The front, the rear, and the sides of this unique procession swarmed with juveniles, who applauded loudly, and made cheering observations at frequent intervals. The party headed for the Protestant-hall where a Gargantuan feast had been made ready under the supervision of Mrs Deeley. There were countless suckling pigs, vast store of fowl and acres of turkey, besides enough liquids to quench the thirst of all the unemployed in the province. This prodigal festivity was maintained for quite a long time, and must have cost pretty nearly as much as would furnish the Greek army with ammunition.

The reception was attended by some 200 residents, and it was noted that ‘the Italian colony in this district was strongly represented.’ Italians also travelled from Sydney to attend. The journalist struggled to describe the wild Italian dancing and the antics of the non-Italians who attempted to emulate it. The writer concluded: ‘No gathering on an equal scale has been seen here since Lithgow was christened’.17

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17 Goulburn Evening Penny Post 11 May 1897
The Della Bosca family, star of that double wedding, has long resided in Lithgow, and a nephew, John Della Bosca, born in 1956, rose to be ALP Party Secretary and a Minister of the New South Wales Government.15
The boom era
1868 – 1900

Members of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows pose for a photograph in the 1890s. Mutual benefit societies such as the GUOOF were part of the English heritage of the Lithgow district.
(Lithgow Regional Library, Hyndes Family Collection)
The boom era
The impetus for the industrial, retail and residential development of Lithgow was the presence of coal, which began to be commercially mined in the late 1860s. As the Great Western Railway snaked through the Lithgow Valley, it was met by feverish commercial activity and rapid population growth. Most of the new arrivals were migrants, many of them skilled from working in the Black Country of England and the industrial districts of Scotland, all of them lured to Lithgow by the ready availability of work. However the costs imposed on freight by the government, which differed from industry to industry, had a significant impact on the viability of mining and mineral processing industries and, in turn, on the remuneration available to miners and other workers. This, and the organisation of labour in the Valley and surrounds, led to conflicts, some of which were marked by fears of aliens and outsiders.

In 1865 a number of oil shale mining and processing ventures were commenced at Hartley Vale and Sawyer’s Swamp (Kerosene Vale). The Kerosene Vale works, commenced by Lancashire-born brothers Walter and John Mackenzie, failed quickly but the Hartley Vale operation grew rapidly to become one of the largest mining operations in the region.

As the shale industry was being established in Hartley Vale, the first commercial coalmining ventures started near Bowenfels. In 1868 Nathaniel Woolley and Robert Anderson, storekeepers at Main Camp No.5, employed men to get coal for use in railway construction activities. By 1872 the Eskbank, Bowenfels and Cooerwull Collieries were in production and the Lithgow Valley Colliery Company had commenced development of its colliery at the head of Sheedy’s Gully. Within a few years the Vale of Clwydd Colliery Company had commenced development of a colliery. By 1878 Lithgow had been firmly established as a mining and industrial centre, and 264 men were working in collieries and shale

1 Came, J.E., 1908. Geology and Mineral Resources of the Western Coalfield. p.190
2 Came, J.E., 1908. Geology and Mineral Resources of the Western Coalfield. p.192
mines across the district. The population of the Lithgow Valley was estimated to be ‘about one thousand souls, and ... rapidly increasing.’

The growing town of Lithgow viewed from Eskbank in the early 1880s. (John Henry Harvey photograph. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.)

The entrepreneurs

This new economy was built on the capital of entrepreneurs who had profited from the gold rushes and rapid growth of the New South Wales economy. They were a new type of investor and came from England, Ireland and the United States of America, at a time when there was a worldwide boom in demand for metals such as copper and iron. They grasped the possibility of using the region’s coal reserves to smelt the copper and iron ores of the Central Tablelands. By the mid-1870s Lithgow boasted two copper smelters and an ironworks. Plans were also in train to establish a large iron making venture at Pipers Flat west of Wallerawang.

After Irish-born railway construction contractor Patrick Higgins had fulfilled his contract to construct the railway to Wallerawang, he partnered with a number of wealthy English born Bathurst and Hill End businessmen to establish the Lithgow Valley Colliery Company. Brothers John and Walter Mackenzie, from a coal-mining family in Wigan in Lancashire, developed an early interest in Lithgow and played an important, but under-appreciated role in the exploration of coal seams around the district.

Thomas Saywell, from a family of Nottingham lacemakers, was another significant player in the development of the mining industry. He used capital gathered in Sydney to fund the development of the Vale of Clwydd and Zig Zag Collieries, and was instrumental in the development of one of the valley’s first copper smelters. Saywell’s Sydney connections brought another Englishman to Lithgow, Samuel Levy Bensusan, who was a Jewish businessman and mining entrepreneur and had interests in mining ventures all over Australia. Bensusan smelted copper at Saywell’s Eagle Copper Smelter in the 1870s and developed the Cullen Bullen Colliery in the late 1880s.

3 Department of Mines Annual Report 1878, p.137
4 Goulburn Herald and Chronicle 9 March 1878
From the beginning the local mining and mineral processing industries relied on expertise and labour from Great Britain. The practices, traditions and language of the coalmining districts of England, Scotland and Wales, and the social customs and political organisation of those districts, were imported to Lithgow by mining immigrants. When Thomas Saywell and William Wilson opened their Zig Zag Colliery in 1883, they erected a large marquee and roasted a bullock on a spit, as would have been done on such an occasion at home in Lancashire. This beast was served to guests with copious amounts of beer and bread to the sound of music played by the Lithgow Imperial Band.⁵

The ironmasters
The presence of iron ore in the district attracted the interests of a diverse consortium of entrepreneurs seeking to cash in on the world-wide iron boom of the 1870s, and this resulted in the development of the Eskbank Ironworks. At the instigation of Enoch Hughes, an abrasive and itinerant entrepreneur from England's Black Country who had worked in early iron-making ventures at Mittagong, the American James Rutherford and his Canadian partner William Whitney, mentioned in the previous chapter, teamed with various American and English born investors to establish an ironworks on land leased from Thomas Brown in the Lithgow Valley.⁶

After a difficult start, the responsibility for direction of the works was taken up by Daniel Williams, son of a successful builder from Luton in Bedfordshire, England. Williams travelled to Victoria for the gold rushes, marrying Eliza Myles, whom he had met on the voyage from England. The couple moved to Sydney in 1861 after Williams and John Young won the contract to build St. John's College at the University of Sydney. Williams drifted into railway construction and in 1868 was awarded the contract to extend the Great Western Railway from Rydal to Dirty Swamp (now Locksley). Williams was a founding investor in the Lithgow Valley Iron Company formed by Rutherford and others, and took an active role in the development of the ironworks from 1875 until 1880. Williams’ finest moment was contributing the iron for the Garden Palace that displayed the 1879 Great Exhibition – his brother Alfred had worked on London's Crystal Palace.⁷ Failing health forced Williams to leave and James Rutherford stepped in to control the ironmaking business.⁸

In 1886 the works was taken over by William Sandford, another migrant who is known as the pioneer of Australia’s steelmaking industry. Born in Torrington, Devon, Sandford arrived in New South Wales in 1883 to establish a wire netting plant on behalf of John Lysaght Ltd. Sandford developed an interest in the local ironmaking industry and, having leased the Lithgow works from Rutherford, he moved to Lithgow where he built a fine house. Sandford’s ‘Eskroy’ is now the home of the Lithgow Golf Club. He shepherded the works through the 1890s depression while developing plans to manufacture steel in Lithgow. Under his leadership iron production increased and by 1900 the plant was producing steel. He planned the development of a large blast furnace that was opened in 1907 but was eventually forced to relinquish the enterprise to his principal creditors,

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⁵ The Sydney Morning Herald 3 December 1883
⁶ McKillop et. al., 2005. Furnace, Fire and Forge. pp.29-39
⁷ Parry, Lithgow History Avenue.
the London-born, Sydney-based pipe producers G. & C. Hoskins. The Hoskins brothers operated the plant from 1908 until 1928, weathering many storms as they tried to recruit new workers, including overseas migrants, and shoehorn their own philosophies of workplace relationships into the strong local labour culture.

![Image of Lithgow Valley Colliery and Pottery Works in 1889](image)

**The miners and their families**

Extractive industries readily relocate capital from place to place in order to pursue new opportunities. It has been the task of workers and the families who rely on their income to follow the new ventures as best they can.

The coalmines that developed in the Lithgow area attracted migrants from the mining districts of Great Britain. Copper smelting attracted expertise from the copper-processing districts of Cornwall and Wales, while the iron-processing industry encouraged the movement of labour from England’s Black Country. These workers were not just attracted to Lithgow – a diaspora of skilled workers spread to the mining areas of the Americas as well as to New South Wales. The siblings in the Leake family, whose descendants still live in Lithgow, spread all around the world – while David Leake came to the Vale of Clwydd to mine, his siblings went to the Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Further research is required to gauge how many people came to Australia with the specific purpose of working in Lithgow. It does seem the fame of Lithgow’s coal deposits had spread widely, inspiring English and Welsh workers to try their luck in a new land. Amongst them were Lithgow’s most famous immigrants, Joseph Cook and his wife Mary who would, after a long career serving the...

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10 Personal communication with Mrs Larraine Spice, 2010.
Lithgow community and rising to the Prime Minister’s office, return to Staffordshire as satisfied, high society prodigals.

The Leakes are a different story. David Leake spent his whole working and married life in the Vale of Clwydd and his children married into local families. When he was retired his wife, the mother of his children, died from the effects of losing her arm when her ginger beer plant exploded. David Leake, in his late 60s, voyaged to America, to visit his siblings. He was reunited with his sister Sarah in Pennsylvania, and she gave him a crazy quilt that she and other women had made in 1893, as a gift for David’s baby grand-daughter Jean Sutton. David brought the quilt home and Jean, who later became Mrs Hutchinson and raised her own daughter in Lithgow, kept the quilt for 70 years before donating it to Eskbank House and Museum.

Lithgow’s migration connection to North America is represented by this crazy quilt, made in Pennsylvania by Sarah Leake and given to her brother, a miner who had migrated to the Vale of Clywdd, for his granddaughter, the late Mrs Jean Hutchinson. (Photography by JP Henfrey, 2011)

As well as bringing their families, and making new families in Australia, the workers who arrived in the second half of the nineteenth century held tight to their religious and social traditions. Miners from the English Black Country – Northumberland, Durham, Shropshire, Wales and Cornwall – continued their home traditions of religious practice and collective organisation. Miners’ leader Robert Vought came from Newcastle-on-Tyne and arrived in Lithgow sometime around 1870. For the rest of his life he was an active member of the local lodge of the Loyal Order of Free Gardeners, one of many organisations that laid the foundation for the modern labour movement.11

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This apron, originally belonging to union leader Robert Northey, is part of the regalia of the Loyal Order of Free Gardeners. The apron displays the Free Gardeners’ symbols of a square and compass set with a grafting knife. This order was formed in Scotland in the 18th century and was active in Lithgow during the 19th century. It combined the functions of a friendly society with the activity of gardening.

(Eskbank House Museum collection)

Joseph Cook was one of these migrants, and brought with him religious tradition and skills as a labour organiser. He was born at Silverdale in Staffordshire in 1860 and entered the mines at 13. He left Staffordshire in 1887 to follow his brother-in-law to the Vale of Clwydd. Like most of his mining colleagues, Cook was a member of the Manchester Unity Loyal Order of Oddfellows and also active in the Primitive Methodist Church.12 Throughout this time Mary was his support. They had one child before they left England, and she bore eight more while her husband immersed himself fully in the life of his new home town, and then took up politics. Frank Crowley’s Australian Dictionary of Biography entry on Cook speaks of the man, but never of the wife who stood beside him:

In Cook’s spare time, having abandoned earlier studies for the Methodist ministry, he learned shorthand and book-keeping, and helped manage the Lithgow Enterprise and Australian Land Nationaliser; he also audited the books of the Lithgow Mercury and, in 1890, those of the municipal council. He served in the important position of check-weighman in his mine, and as secretary and president of the miners’ lodge.13

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12 Christison, R., 2011. A Light in the Vale. p.76
Yet it was Mary Cook, a teacher, who showed her husband how to do shorthand and book-keeping. We don’t know what support Mary had around her. We know being a miner’s wife was hard work – just getting the water to wash a coal miner’s clothes was hard. Perhaps her brother’s wives helped out, but, given the evidence of her later talents as an organiser for the Australian Red Cross, Mary was developing her own networks, in Lithgow and beyond.

Coal was not the only industry bringing families to the Valley. The unmarketable ‘slack’ from coal production was converted into a fuel source for the brickworks established by the Lithgow Valley Colliery Company [LVC] in 1876. By 1878 the LVC was producing terracotta water pipes. Staffordshire-trained potter James Silcock had taken a gamble and left for Sydney with his young family, and the LVC recruited him from the dock.14 Silcock received wide recognition for his skills, and was the first of many artisans who developed the ‘Lithgow-style’.15 However the family suffered great physical hardship. Housing was non-existent so they lived in a tent, and Anne Silcock lost an infant to the cold. They stayed only a few years before the Silcocks moved to Maitland to start their own business.

Outside the valley, mineral discoveries created new population centres. The commencement of operations by the Sunny Corner Mining Company in 1884 led to a ‘silver rush’ that drew in hopeful miners and their families from all over the region for six short years.16 By 1885, 745 men were employed by the thirteen companies operating on the field.17 The need for coke to feed the smelters at Sunny Corner led to the establishment of a new community around the Cullen Bullen Colliery.

By 1888, Lithgow’s population was approximately 4,000 people – 752 were working in the mines and shale industries.18 The New South Wales Government began to plan a water-supply scheme capable of serving a population of 10,000.19 The New South Wales Census of 1891 enumerated the population of the newly formed Municipality of Lithgow as 8,888: an increase of 90% in just ten years. However, the 1890s depression stymied the growth of the economy and by 1895 the colliery workforce had declined to 296.20 Unemployed miners and their families moved to other coalfields, to growing gold mining areas such as West Wyalong, or the goldfields of Western Australia.21 As the shale mines at Hartley Vale closed down in the mid to late 1890s the mining families, including the Luchettis and Hyndes, were forced to relocate to new mines at Airly in the Capertee Valley. These families constructed rough huts among the rocks of Airly Mountain, creating a community of around 200 people by 1898. Mining and oil refining continued until around 1914 when all workers were dismissed.22

14 Evans, I., 1981. The Lithgow Pottery. pp.9-11
15 Ibid., p.153
16 Stuart, I., 2012. Sunny Corner Historical Background. pp.9-10
17 Department of Mines Annual Report, 1885. pp.47-48
19 The Sydney Morning Herald 7 May 1889
20 Christison, R., 2011. A Light in the Vale. p.70
Tenants-at-will: A shale mining family with Scottish origins building a tent dwelling at Airly Mountain in the 1890s. (Harry Mow photograph. Lithgow Regional Library, Hyndes Family Collection)

This sort of bust in the local economy was to establish a pattern that is evident in Lithgow today, as workers are obliged to leave the town to follow prospects of employment.

**Building an industrial town**

The township of Lithgow developed from the 1870s as a series of villages clustered around various mining and industrial enterprises, utilising subdivisions created from larger properties such as Eskbank. The coal and copper smelter concentrated industry around Brown's Siding, which became the official Eskbank Station. However, because Thomas Brown opposed alcohol consumption and forbade the building of public houses on his land, the business district developed further down the line of the Great Western Railway, using a new ‘Lithgow’ passenger platform constructed in the 1870s. Further down the line still, on Cooerwull, was Bowenfels Station.

In the 1870s Lithgow had the appearance of a frontier settlement with few substantial buildings. Former resident Thomas Druery recalled:

> No streets were formed, and of course there was no kerbing. The traveller had to pick his way as best he could, often at the risk of a big spill … There was no public school, and almost all the buildings were bark huts and calico tents.²³

By 1878 the town was showing features of permanence, as ‘a public school, post and telegraph office, banks, stores, a brewery, a hotel; and model cottages’ were

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in the course of construction.\textsuperscript{24} A thriving retail district was also developing in Lithgow, two kilometres down the line from Brown’s siding at Eskbank. In March 1886 Major Horace Edward Seymour Bracey arrived to take over the Excelsior Arcade, which had been founded by two earlier storekeepers, Cohen and Sampson. Originally from Great Yarmouth in England, Bracey had arrived in Sydney in 1873 and worked in retail. He chose to establish a business in Lithgow for lifestyle reasons: his wife, weakened by an accident, was advised to live in a cooler climate. Bracey had a knack for taking over the stock of failing businesses during times of depression, and winning the confidence of shoppers, and his business developed into series of department stores that sold everything from ribbons and hosiery to cars and farm equipment. Major Bracey became a Labor councillor, Mayor and benefactor, and his sons and grandsons followed his traditions of civic duty. The Bracey business lasted more than a century, employing four generations of Braceys, as well as hundreds of Lithgow residents, and became an integral part of the town.\textsuperscript{25} It was the backbone of the town’s retail sector, along with the Lithgow Co-operative Society, which formed out of the labour movement in 1891.

In the 1880s, when Bracey arrived, Lithgow was still small but the three railway stations within the Valley had already led to suburbanisation. \textit{The Illustrated Sydney News} was bemused by this in 1889:

There really seems no reason to the casual tourist why the district should be overburdened by three designations. If you alight at Eskbank and ask 'how far Lithgow is?' you will be answered by a nod down the street, and a confused, comprehensive gesture, 'This is Lithgow.' And if, dismounting at Lithgow you enquire concerning Bowenfells (sic), an index finger pointing along the road emphasises the friendly propinquity of that important subdivision.\textsuperscript{26}

This suburbanisation was compounded by the way families lived as tenants-at-will on the landholdings of mining companies. \textit{The Illustrated Sydney News} succinctly described this practice:

Around the feet of the hills are houses, made apparently on schoolboy architectural principles - four walls, a simple pointed roof, two windows in the façade, and a door between them. These little homes are mostly erected on the 'shilling-a week principle': i.e., the landowner, who is also probably the mine owner, grants the use of the small necessary plot of ground for a nominal ground rent of 1s. (one shilling) per week. The miner erects his own house, which, in event of desertion, of course lapses to the proprietor of the estate.\textsuperscript{27}

The business model of some mining and industrial ventures included the subdivision of freehold land close to their workings for sale to employees. This practice tended to be adopted by Sydney-based investors who were speculating in real estate ventures: Saywell’s Vale of Clwydd and Lithgow Valley Coal Mining

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Goulburn Herald and Chronicle} 9 March 1878
\textsuperscript{25} J. Bayliss, 1986. 100 Years of Retailing 1886-1986: Bracey’s Centenary; ‘Bracey’s have great record of service in seventy years of trading’, Supplement to \textit{The Lithgow Mercury}, 16 February 1956.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{The Illustrated Sydney News} 7 February 1889
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{The Illustrated Sydney News} 7 February 1889
and Copper Smelting Company [VCC] were adept at squeezing every possible advantage from employees. Within four years of establishing its colliery the VCC had sold 51 allotments of a township precinct and sold building materials from their brickworks and limekiln. They had even built their own hotel.  

Historical archaeologist Aedeen Cremin noted that ‘some employers had no interest in housing their workers, some had paternalist views and created housing development, others sold land to get some return on a disappointing investment.’ On the whole though, housing was inadequate housing, and Cremin has likened Lithgow’s early settlements to Brazilian favelas. It is very likely that these conditions contributed to the tendency of working families to leave when the work dried up.

![Image](image-url)

The western end of Main Street, Lithgow viewed from the north sometime around 1880. (Lithgow Regional Library, Lithgow District Historical Society Collection)

**Development of a community**

Despite the hardships and despite the unstable work conditions, community bonds were developing. A scan of newspapers from the 1870s and 1880s reveal a dynamic mixing of migrants who were seeking to establish new lives in a frontier environment. They formed associations, societies and clubs: friendly and mutual benefit societies, sporting associations, worker associations, the Workmen’s Club and church communities. When New South Wales Governor Lord Loftus visited Lithgow in 1879, members of the Lithgow friendly societies in full regalia escorted him along Main Street. These groups included the Lily of

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28 *The Sydney Morning Herald* 27 February 1878  
the Valley Lodge of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Lithgow Masonic Lodge, and the Good Templar Lodge. The party was led by a brass band.\textsuperscript{20}

As the newcomers worked to replicate the institutions of home in their new town, they sought leaders with experience from home. Recently-widowed Shropshire coalminer William Teague moved from Minmi to work in the Hermitage Colliery in 1888 and was readily accepted into the community. Within a year he had been elected President of the Hartley District Miners’ Mutual Protective Association and was also Secretary of the Lithgow Single Tax League. Teague’s experience was similar to many others.

The funeral cortège for miners Isaiah Hyde, Thomas Rowe, Lancelot Allison, Thomas Mantle and Joseph Buzza, who were killed in the Lithgow Valley Colliery in 1886, also displayed this strong community and religious organisation. The procession of 3,000 mourners was led by ranks of Oddfellows and Druids followed by uniformed Salvation Army members and a brass band playing the Dead March. Behind these were the teachers and scholars of the Primitive Methodist Church Sabbath School, where Hyde had taught.\textsuperscript{31} When the Oddfellows Hall (Union Theatre) was opened in August 1891, the ceremonies were presided over by the Labor MLA, former union General Secretary and Oddfellows member, Joseph Cook. Floral arrangements were provided by the Scottish-inspired Loyal Order of Free Gardeners.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{20} Christison, R., 2011. A Light in the Vale. p.27
\textsuperscript{31} Christison, R., 2011. A Light in the Vale. p.48
\textsuperscript{32} The Sydney Morning Herald 26 August 1891
Precarious occupations and dangerous work reinforced the need for collective organisations. For similar reasons, families and wives were a critical anchor point for the community. Oral histories indicate that women and men worked in partnership to facilitate the process of income gathering, and women met the care needs of their families, particularly during times of sickness and injury. When young Levy Collie was seriously burned in an explosion of slag at the ironworks in 1883 his primary healthcare was centred in his family home. According to Bob McKillop, his mother was seen to be the person best able to offer comfort and care, as the boy died of his injuries.33

**The rise of the Methodists**

The influx of miners and mineral processing workers that occurred in the 1870s and 1880s was accompanied by a rise in influence of nonconformist Protestant Christian denominations. Many came from the coalmining regions of Scotland, Northern England and Wales. Others came from Cornwall, either directly or through the mining areas of North America. As the gold mines of the Turon began to decline in the late 1870s, Cornish families were also drawn from these areas. Many of these migrants shared an adherence to the principles of Methodism.

Methodism developed in the 18th century as part of the evangelical revival movement encouraged by the preaching of John Wesley. Primitive Methodism emerged from the Methodist movement from about 1810 and appealed to workers struggling in the new industries fostered by the Industrial Revolution, particularly to coal and tin miners in the English north, Cornwall and Wales. Both sects were missionary in flavour and encouraged members to take to the pulpit and organise Sabbath or Sunday Schools. Its members, called by some ‘ranters’, were associated with many of the 19th century radical movements in Britain. The popularity of the Primitive Methodist Church in Lithgow in the 19th century can be gauged by the fact that 700 people attended its Sunday School Anniversary in 1898.34

During the late 19th century, Methodists and Primitive Methodists based in Lithgow played a pivotal role in the establishment and development of a mining union in the Western Coalfield. The Druery family provides a clear example. The first union lodge in Lithgow was formed at the Vale of Clwydd Colliery in August 1878 and was led by Thomas Druery, a migrant from County Durham. Druery’s brother Robert Ross had emigrated to the Victorian goldfields in 1873 and married at Ballarat in 1882 before moving to Lithgow to join Thomas, establishing a union lodge at the Ironworks Tunnel Colliery. Their father Robert, one of the heroes of the 1886 Lithgow Valley Colliery fire, worked in Lithgow’s coalmines until he was well into his seventies. He was an active Methodist who was remembered as one who ‘had worked faithfully for the cause of the kingdom of God’.

The Druery brothers were prime movers in the establishment of a district miners’ union, the Hartley District Miners’ Mutual Protective Association, in

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February 1886 and Robert Ross was its first President. In the following ten years the union was led by a succession of Methodists and Primitive Methodists, including Samuel Penna, William Teague and William Rickard, who had preached in the Methodist church in Cornwall when he was just 16 years old. William Rickard and his wife Sarah had migrated to Lithgow on the urging of his brother Thomas who had worked in North America before settling here.

Joseph Cook derived much of his personal popularity from his work as a Primitive Methodist circuit preacher in the towns and villages around Lithgow, as well as his work as union General Secretary between 1889 and 1891. This ensured he was elected as the Member for Hartley in the New South Wales Parliament from 1891 until 1901. Although his politics had already begun to move to the conservative side, Cook’s support was so strong that he served as the Federal Member for Parramatta from 1901 until 1921, including 18 months as Prime Minister of Australia from 1913 until 1914.

Mary Cook on the verandah of the family home, ‘Silverdale’, in Macauley Street, Lithgow c.1889. (Ian Holt Collection)

Mary’s work, via local women’s networks, and the tight community bonds the couple forged helped Cook survive the Labor Loyalty Pledge disputes of 1893 and 1894, when the Central Labor Electoral League called for his resignation. Although ’Cook’s views changed radically over his life and he moved along the political spectrum from a Labor Protectionist to an arch-conservative Free Trader, his support in Lithgow never wavered and this enabled him to rise to the high office of Prime Minister. Newspapers of the time reveal he was involved in every major decision and dispute in Lithgow: whether it involved men being forced to work on the Sabbath at Zig Zag in 1895, the licensing of the Workmen’s

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In 1921, after nearly 30 years of service to the communities of Lithgow, New South Wales and Australia, and international engagement at the Treaty of Versailles, Joseph Cook was appointed the High Commissioner to London. With Mary by his side, he went to Court and to Westminster. Joseph and Mary also took the time to make a triumphant return to Silverdale. On his retirement in London, Cook said his 'whole life had been an outstanding romance'. It was also the epitome of a Colonial migrant success story.

**Sports and culture**

Sport has played a significant role in the development of a cohesive community in Lithgow. It has also been an important vehicle through which new arrivals can find friendship and acceptance. Numerous sporting associations were established as the town of Lithgow grew. Many of the sports enjoyed by residents originated in the English Midlands and North Country, such as quoits, which was peculiar to the mining and industrial districts of England and often played in fields behind pubs. Regular quoits competitions were held behind the Royal Hotel in Cullen Bullen and a quoits field and club house were constructed behind the Lithgow Valley Colliery. The remnants of this field are located adjacent to a small creek below Hassans Walls Road on land that was once part of the Lithgow Valley Colliery holdings.

Greyhound coursing was recorded as occurring at Brown’s Paddock in the 1860s, and jumped the class barrier. The Vale Colliery Manager, John Turnbull

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39 Johnes, M., 2002 Sport and leisure in the South Wales Coalfield, [http://www.staff.ucsm.ac.uk/mjohnes/leisure.atm](http://www.staff.ucsm.ac.uk/mjohnes/leisure.atm) [Accessed November 18 2004]
from Durham County, was the first President of the Coursing Association, which was established in Lithgow in 1889, but all levels of society in Lithgow engaged in dog racing and dog breeding. In so many ways, sport was a leveller in Lithgow.

Hard work in the ironworks, copper smelters and collieries created a breed of hard men. An appetite for sports that encouraged toughness was matched by an appetite for beer. Workers in the rolling mills were known to send young lads into town to purchase billycans full of beer to quench their thirst. Iron moulder Tom Reid summed up the social habits of hard men: ‘... their chief diversions during leisure hours were quoits, beer drinking and bare knuckle fighting.’

Richard J Inch opened the first brewery in 1878, and beer quickly became central to local culture. It was not unusual for the district’s trade unions to become involved in disputes regarding its cost. In January 1881 *The Sydney Morning Herald* carried a report of a strike in Lithgow involving miners and other workers. This strike and accompanying demonstrations were aimed directly at Lithgow publicans who had increased the charge for a standard drink from 3d to 6d. *The Herald*, tongue in its cheek, congratulated both the publicans and the strikers on their attitudes:

Sixpenny drinks have our warmest approbation – so long as people resolutely refuse to drink them ... As manly Britons they (the strikers) would fail in their duty to themselves and to the community did they permit themselves to descend into the bestiality of drunkenness at sixpence a nobbler.

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40 *The Sydney Morning Herald* 6 July 1889
41 McKillop, B., et. al., 2005. *Furnace, Fire and Forge*. p.75
The newspaper expressed its sincere desire that the strike should continue indefinitely!\(^{42}\)

One of the most enduring institutions in Lithgow, the Lithgow Workmen’s Club and Mutual School of Arts, was established in rented premises on Tank Street on 24 September 1887. Its rules stated it aimed to provide:

... A Reading-room, Library, Chess, Cards, Dominoes, Draughts, and such other lawful amusements ... and to advance the interests of and promote genial and social intercourse and for the advancement of literary, political, sporting, athletic, and other lawful purposes amongst its members.

In fact the Workmen’s Club, also known as The Workmen’s Institute, was soon selling more beer and spirits than any single hotel in the town. Run by a steward, the only women in the club were employed behind the bar, and as cleaners.\(^{43}\)

Traditions of body building, boxing, wrestling and athleticism continued well into the twentieth century. Drinking and fighting traditions also continued. Lithgow resident Bill Hanby recalled how, during the 1950s, miners from the Lithgow State Coal Mine would spend Friday evenings drinking at the New Scenic Hotel, which the legendary 20\(^{th}\) century radio character ‘Rampaging Roy Slaven’, voiced by Lithgow boy John Doyle, called the ‘Bloodhouse’. After every few rounds the crowd would spill into Inch Street to watch men punch out a personal difference. This fighting culture created many champion boxers, including blacksmith’s striker Billy Boyce who represented Australia in the 1948 Olympic Games.\(^{44}\) More recently Grahame ‘Spike’ Cheney won silver in boxing at the 1988 Olympics.

Celebrations of community solidarity such as Eight Hour Day and later May Day demonstrations included large sporting events conducted at showgrounds and other sporting places, as did colliery and factory picnics. The trophies made for these events were highly prized. The competition associated with most sports encouraged a culture of gambling. By the 20\(^{th}\) century both legal and illegal gambling – even over games of marbles, as the men played at Tyldesley - were endemic in Lithgow and surrounding districts.\(^{45}\)

Even by the 1900s, Lithgow was developing its own culture: one largely informed by waves of Anglo-Celtic migrants, but shaped by the collective experiences of mining and manufacturing. A new community was being made on the floor of the Valley and its core institutions were the organisations that comprised the labour movement, the Workmen’s Club and the Co-op. This is what Greg Patmore calls ‘localism’ and has underpinned the survival of the community, from tenuous beginnings into the 21\(^{st}\) century.\(^{46}\)

\(^{42}\)The Sydney Morning Herald 21 January 1881
\(^{43}\) Parry, Lithgow History Avenue.
\(^{44}\) Christison, R., 2009. Lithgow State Coal Mine a pictorial history. p.85
\(^{45}\) Interview with Colleen Waters 27 July 2009
Attitudes to ‘non-white’ immigration

Anglo-Celtic migrants appear to have forged labour, sporting and social bonds in Lithgow with ease. However it is clear that migrants from other countries could face determined opposition, which was often expressed through the labour movement. This was partly due to anxieties about the race, colour and habits of non-Anglo workers. In Lithgow it was intensified by ‘localism’, as the labour movement demanded that, as industries waxed and waned, the industrialists should prefer locals in employment.

Agitation for restriction of entry of ‘non-white’ migrants into Australia had its origins in the goldfields of New South Wales and Victoria. In a number of instances during the 1850s and 1860s, miners in the increasingly competitive and disappointing alluvial goldfields had resorted to physical violence to drive out Chinese miners. These spontaneous acts of civil unrest reached their zenith when insurrection occurred at the Lambing Flat Goldfield in Young during 1861. The response of the New South Wales Government was to legislate to restrict Chinese immigration.

In the second half of the 19th century, the growing trade union movement was focused on improving the conditions and remuneration of Australian workers. Large-scale immigration of workers from non-European countries was considered to pose a threat to the growing improvement in the position of those who worked ‘with their head or hands’. Agitation from worker organisations ensured that restrictions on migration remained a cornerstone of government policy. The experience in Lithgow showed that these attitudes were not restricted to the union movement. The anti-Chinese fervour of the late 19th century was avidly championed by workers and entrepreneurs alike.

Like many mining and industrial communities, Lithgow saw China as a source of cheap labour that could be used to undermine wages and working conditions. Members of the Lithgow community met numerous times during the 19th century to express their opposition to Chinese immigration. In May 1881 self-proclaimed ironmaster Enoch Hughes chaired a ‘largely attended’ meeting at the School of Arts called as a protest against the ‘Chinese influx’.47 Seven years later, a similar meeting included the cream of Lithgow’s labour and political class, and provides a good insight into contemporary debates:

Last night an anti-Chinese meeting was held in Lithgow. About 400 attended. Mr. Samuel Penna, president of the Miners' Union, presided. Mr. Joseph Cooke, secretary of the Land Nationalisation Society, and Mr. John Owens, secretary of the Miners' Union, respectively proposed and seconded an anti-Chinese resolution. Mr. Ninian Melville, M.L.A., and Mr. John Norton supported it. Mr. Norton said hardly anything on the Chinese question, but attacked the protectionist party. He said the manufacturer now demanding protection would oppress the working men, and after getting protection for themselves they would not help to get labour protected. The action of the protectionists on the Chinese question was

47 The Sydney Morning Herald 5 May 1881
suspicious, and the protectionists were in league with the imperialists and ‘grog’ party.\textsuperscript{48}

The protectionists won that day, and worker organisations such as the Hartley District Miners’ Mutual Protective Association maintained strong opposition to Chinese immigration throughout the 1880s and 1890s.

Fears of migrants were not, however, simply racially based. As early as 1878 workers engaged in industrial disputes in Lithgow expressed resentment at the arrival of workers from Sydney and elsewhere who were more than willing to take their jobs. In the first recorded response to these arrivals locked out Vale of Clwydd Colliery miners remonstrated with the ‘strangers’ to join their union and offered them the cost of rail fares to Sydney or any place on the Western line.\textsuperscript{49}

This opposition gained strength during the years of the 1890s depression. By the time of the 1899 colliery-weighing disputes, striking miners had learnt to organise effective picket lines and were patrolling the Lithgow Valley’s railway stations with dogs in search of strikebreakers arriving in the town.\textsuperscript{50}

This sense of localism had many benefits for the Lithgow community, and is a large part of the district’s character in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century. However, elements of it would, at the turn of the century, harden into the White Australia Policy. It is worth noting that, while by 1901 Joseph Cook had become a free-trader, he never resiled from his views on immigration restriction. Throughout the coming decades, Lithgow’s ardent labour organisation, and anxieties about immigration, would produce a potent political mix.


\textsuperscript{49} Christison, R., 2011. A Light in the Vale. p.31

\textsuperscript{50} Christison, R., 2011. A Light in the Vale. p.88
Growth, turmoil, then decline 1900 – 1945

Adopting the emblems of a new land. A Scottish migrant family, adorned with wattle blossom, sit proudly in front of their simple cottage in the oil shale village of Newnes. The children are displaying prized possessions: a book, a doll and a gun.

(Lithgow Regional Library, Hyndes Family Collection)
Optimism in a new century

The depression of the 1890s caused an exodus of industry, labour and people from Lithgow, but the establishment of steelmaking capability at William Sandford’s Eskbank Ironworks in 1900 hailed the commencement of a new boom. New businesses were started and old ones revived, diversifying the industrial base of the town, providing new job opportunities and attracting new workers. It is abundantly clear from the source material that new arrivals were viewed with suspicion during this period, and that the boom coincided with the formation of the White Australia Policy. However, in Lithgow the suspicion was evenly distributed between strike-breakers and migrants – indeed, much of the antagonism directed at migrants appears to have stemmed from the willingness of industrialists like Charles Hoskins to use them to leverage local pay and conditions.

The Commonwealth Portland Cement Company Limited began to erect a large modern cement manufacturing plant at Portland, drawing people from the failed gold mining areas of the tablelands, and from the former silver, lead and zinc mines of Sunny Corner.¹ In 1905 Staffordshire potter William Arthur Brownfield brought craftsmen from England to revive the Lithgow Valley Colliery Company’s


Ironworkers at William Sandford’s No.1 Blast Furnace.
(Pictures Collection State Library of Victoria)
pottery works, which had ceased production in 1896, although the venture failed within a few years.2

In 1906 the newly-formed Commonwealth Oil Corporation commenced development of its massive oil shale works and associated private railway in the Wolgan Valley.3 In the same year William Sandford Limited began construction of his No.1 Blast Furnace on Coal Stage hill near Eskbank4. The good news continued to flow when the New South Wales Government commenced a massive capital works program associated with constructing a railway deviation around the Great Zig Zag. A temporary township at Clarence and a tent city at Kilday’s Camp housed a small army of workers involved in tunnelling and railway construction.5

When the London-born brothers George and Charles Hoskins, trading as G&C Hoskins Co. Limited, took over the steelworks in 1908 they injected capital, enabling the construction of a second blast furnace on Coal Stage Hill from 1912.6 Lithgow’s future as an industrial metropolis seemed to be assured when the Commonwealth Government, at the urging of then Defence Minister Joseph Cook, agreed to develop a Small Arms Factory in the town. This expansion of industry created employment and encouraged population growth. By 1911 Lithgow’s population had grown to 8,196, although the proportion of first-generation migrants is unclear.7

Lithgow was, at the turn of the century, a lively town with many platforms for debating the pros and cons of migration. In 1905 the Lithgow Progress Association had called for more migrants from Great Britain and Europe, arguing that this was an issue of ‘efficient defence for the Commonwealth’ and for the maintenance of a White Australia.8 In 1906 at the Oddfellows’ Hall (The Union Theatre) the Anti-Socialist candidate for Nepean, the New South Wales seat that then encompassed Lithgow, argued in favour of immigration, although he did not win.9 A lay missionary from the China Inland Mission was even brave enough to visit and speak about the many misconceptions Australians held about the Chinese.10 There was a small Chinese population, who were mostly engaged in market gardening in Sheedy’s Gully, south of the Lithgow Valley Colliery. They appear to have flown under the radar although during the 1911 ironworks strike, when Hoskins imported non-union labour to keep his steelworks going, these gardeners were praised by the Sydney publication The International Socialist for supporting the strikers, saying ‘White Australia’ unionists scabbed

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2 Evans, I., 1981. The Lithgow Pottery. pp.109-139
4 McKillop, et. al., 2005. Furnace, Fire and Forge. p.111
6 McKillop, et. al., 2005. Furnace, Fire and Forge. pp.149-150
7 McKillop, et. al., 2005. Furnace, Fire and Forge. p.252
on the strikers’ but the Chinese gardeners had refused to supply the scabs with vegetables’.11

While local Chinese gardeners refused to supply vegetables to scab workers, Lithgow’s unionists continued to campaign against ‘non-white’ immigration. The 1911 Eight Hour Day Parade was an opportunity to represent the perceived evil of foreign migration. (H. Mellor photograph, Lithgow Regional Library)

The door to migration from Asia, Africa and other parts of the world had been firmly shut after the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. One of the new Commonwealth’s foundation acts was to pass an *Immigration Restriction Act*. This legislation provided a barrier to reinforce the philosophy of a White Australia through much of the 20th century. The Act was also used to prevent ‘undesirables’ such as political activists from entering Australia. It did not explicitly use race to bar people, but subjected new migrants to a dictation test, in ‘any European language’. In 1905 this was changed to ‘any prescribed language’. Migrants could be subjected to the test at any stage in the first five years of their residency in Australia. The immigration officer administering the test was at liberty to choose the language used – the dictation test used to facilitate the deportation of people judged ‘unsuitable’.12 The Act was enforced in a way that actively discriminated against anyone considered to be of ‘non-white’ background and had the effect of permanently isolating Chinese migrants who had come to Australia in the 1800s from their families.

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12 Department of Immigration & Border Protection Fact Sheet 8 – Abolition of the ‘White Australia’ Policy [Online]
Calls for increases to migration were always of ‘the right sort’, which did not include people from the ‘non-white’ regions of Southern Europe, such as Italy, or even the British Colony of Malta. This is despite the presence of a well-integrated Italian community in and around Lithgow. As the Great War broke out migrant workers became caught up in a general hysteria about enemy spies and agents.

In 1916, a small group of 20 labourers was sent to Lithgow by the Labour Bureau, apparently at the behest of Charles Hoskins. They were part of a contingent of 500 Maltese workers who had paid their way to Sydney, and elicited a ferocious reaction in Lithgow. The Lithgow Mercury hysterically reported the men’s arrival as a ‘Maltese Invasion’ and other newspapers called them ‘The Black Menace’. Lithgow steelworkers refused to work with the new arrivals and went out on strike. This caused heated debates in the New South Wales Parliament, where it was stated that Hoskins had told the strikers ‘these Maltese are as much British as you are!’ The Maltese were returned to Sydney.

Some Italian migrants did obtain employment at the Hoskins Iron and Steel Works during the war but were generally given the more menial and disagreeable jobs, including the onerous task of charging materials into the tops of the large blast furnaces.

Regardless of restrictions on the immigration of people of non-English speaking backgrounds a steady stream of migrants continued to arrive from the British Isles. Locals seem to have been divided between those anxious about an influx of lazy strangers and those keen for workers for local industry. Around this time we begin to see the first clear sense of Australians defining themselves in opposition to ‘Poms’.

In 1915, just a few months after the ANZAC landings at Gallipoli, there was a robust debate in the pages of the Democrat that indicated some locals were irritated by the fact that the town’s ‘Aussie’ sons and fathers had been sent overseas to fight what they saw as a European war, while ‘Poms’ arrived in their place. Others highlighted the difficulty of distinguishing between Australians and people who had been born in Britain.

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Anti-German sentiment was also, understandably, pronounced during World War I. In 1914 local unions had pressured steelworks owner Charles Hoskins to dismiss German and Austrian workers, and allegations were made in 1916 that 'Germans and Austrians were posing as Italians' [17]. These views were to have a devastating impact on one of Lithgow's more prominent, and celebrated, migrants, John (Johannes) W. Berghofer. Berghofer had left Germany in 1855 and settled in Hartley during the 1870s. He purchased the former Victoria Inn at the base of Mitchells Pass in 1892 and renamed it 'Rosenthal'. Berghofer played an active role in community affairs, serving on the Parents and Citizens Association at Mount Victoria and as Chair of the local School Board. He was also a warden of St John's Anglican Church in Hartley. [18] His election as the first President of Blaxland Shire after its creation in 1906 is an indicator of the esteem in which he was held in the district. As President of the Shire he led agitation for an alternative route to Mitchells Pass. This alternative road, constructed between...
1907 and 1912, was named in his honour.  This reputation was sadly no reassurance of loyalty, and Berghofer was asked to resign from Council in March 1916, and then forced to in May 1916 by the Alien Disenfranchisement Bill.  Lithgow Council in 1917 unanimously supported a Manly Council proposal to intern ‘all aliens of enemy origin’.

Migration continued to be a live issue in Lithgow after the end of World War I. The town continued to grow, reaching 13,500 people by 1921, although men outnumbered women to a significant degree.  Sydney-based organisations like the Million Farms Committee offered to boost migration to centres such as Lithgow, by providing closer settlement around towns and improving railways, but little came of such initiatives.

This clipping from the Democrat, published in Lithgow, indicates some local tensions.

However, the 1920s was a period of chronic under-employment for many Lithgow families. The troubled coal industry faced high levels of industrial disputation and a massive over-supply of labour. The placement of Lithgow’s Small Arms Factory on a maintenance basis in 1922 had dramatically reduced its workforce, leaving approximately 300 employed there during the subsequent
decade. Struggling families grew vegetables and men hunted or fished to provide food.

Yet the town was growing. The Police Census for 1926 noted the population of the Municipality of Lithgow as 13,581. This consisted of 13,325 people described as ‘Europeans’, ‘six Chinese and 250 other aliens’, 140 of whom were Italians employed at the ironworks and blast furnace. The previous year there had been 8 Chinese and just 38 ‘aliens’. Poignantly, in 1923 Lithgow’s tiny Chinese community had been obliged to pay for the funeral of a lonely countryman who had died of natural causes on a train while travelling from Sydney to Bathurst. This community endured, although it was small enough that in 1935 the appearance of a solitary, aged ‘Celestial Swagman’ provoked great interest in the papers.

A ‘good class of migrant’ was represented by Mrs Janet Riley from Glasgow, who arrived on the Osterley in 1924 with eight of her children to join her husband, an ex-serviceman working at the steelworks, and their oldest son. Mr Riley had written to her ‘to come out and bring the kiddies’, and the Singleton Argus called them ‘a sturdy and healthy family group’.

Throughout the lean years of the 1920s the local union movement appears to have remained antagonistic to Italians and Yugoslavs in the steelworks, and newspapers record a string of minor industrial disputes centering around the 10 inch mill. Despite this resistance, many gained a reputation as good workers. The Italians were prepared to tap into the undercurrent of socialism, and the late 1920s saw the development of an embryonic internationalism among Lithgow workers.

By 1926, 140 Italians were employed at the iron and steel works and this group had begun to create their own organisations. However, there was also a series of conflicts at the Ironworks, which turned into a serious strike after an Italian worker was dismissed in November for disregarding the foreman’s direction on the use of safety switches. Amidst allegations that the problem was cultural and due to language issues, the workers’ countrymen went out in sympathy and the Ironworkers’ Union was called in to resolve the situation. The Italians were, however, determined to settle. Just a week later the Italian Vice Consul visited Lithgow to address the opening ceremony of an Italian Club which boasted membership of more than 100.

26 The Sydney Morning Herald 13 January 1926
31 The Sydney Morning Herald 13 January 1926
33 The Sydney Morning Herald 2 December 1926
It was widely reported in 1927 that Italians composed about 75 per cent of the participants in the Lithgow May Day Parade, while ‘a large proportion of the remainder were immigrants and foreigners’. However, other accounts of worker organisation during this period clearly refute this claim. The allegation that radical movements had substantial foreign involvement appears to be little more than hyperbole intended to marginalise the voice of Lithgow’s left, but nevertheless, the visibility of the Italians represents their contribution, and the way they were prepared to demonstrate their affinity with the beliefs of local workers.

Speaking to the May Day rally that year, Mr S. Morisse, representative of the Lithgow Italian Club, appealed for recognition of the contribution of Italian workers to the industrial struggle in Australia, and appealed to the internationalism that was attractive to many local unionists:

> Italians did not come to Australia for the purpose of ‘scabbing,’ but to fight shoulder to shoulder with the Australian in his struggle. In Italy the workers suffered under Fascist rule and the treatment meted out to them was even worse than accorded Chinese.  

The banner of the Italian Section of the Ironworkers Federation carried the following slogans:

- International solidarity is our aim
- Workers of the world unite
- United we stand – Divided we fall

The closure of the Lithgow blast furnaces in 1928 pushed many of the town’s Italian residents into unemployment. In the latter months of 1928, large numbers of Italian workers left Lithgow seeking work in other parts of Australia, or to return to Italy. It is clear that by the end of the decade most of Lithgow’s Italian industrial workers had left the district. These workers were victims of the ‘last on – first off’ employment policy adopted by the Hoskins brothers at the insistence of the ironworkers’ unions.

One of these men was Osvaldo Bonuto, who had written to a friend of his brother who worked at the Lithgow steelworks asking for sponsorship. When he received a positive response he booked his passage for Sydney, arriving there on Christmas Eve 1924. However Osvaldo found that opportunities for work at the iron and steel works were few and he joined other Italians rabbiting in the surrounding hills. Although he got work at the blast furnaces as a barrowman, he was one of many Italian men who turned their backs on Lithgow to seek work in the canefields of North Queensland.

The internationalism that seemed to be growing steadily during the 1920s failed rapidly as employment opportunities evaporated and the antagonistic attitude of local unions to migrant workers from non-English speaking backgrounds continued into the 1950s.

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34 The Barrier Miner (Broken Hill) 3 May 1927
35 Illawarra Mercury 8 December 1928
Italian ironworkers marshalled in Railway Parade, Lithgow prior to the 1929 May Day Parade. Their banner speaks of international solidarity and calls for the unity of all workers.  
(The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc, Jack Blake Archive)

Communism in Lithgow – the coalminers

The years between World War I and World War II were turbulent times for the Australian labor movement. The development of organised trade unions in the nineteenth century, and the rise of Communism in the years before and during World War I, helped workers to struggle for higher wages and better working conditions. The bitter anti-conscription campaigns of World War I, the devastating general strike of 1917 and the turmoil of the Great Depression led to conflicts within the labour movement. During the 1920s many Australian workers, disillusioned with the moderate Socialism of traditional Labor, looked to Communism as a source of new hope. Union leaders from the Western Coalfield developed an industrial reform agenda that helped to establish the working conditions enjoyed by contemporary coal miners. This agenda was informed, to a significant degree, by a branch of radical socialism imported from the British coalfields. During the 1920s this style of communism was joined by socialism imported from the Italian peninsula. The blending of the two created a rudimentary internationalism within the town of Lithgow.

Images of the 1929 May Day Parade in Lithgow highlight a number of the great issues embraced by the Communist Party of Australia in the 1920s - a fight against the mechanisation of industry, the uneven distribution of wealth and the Japanese threat to invade China. Above all the May Day banner proclaimed the desire of workers for the creation of the OBU – the One Big Union of all workers.
British-born miners Bill Orr and Charlie Nelson, two of the great Communist leaders of the Miners’ Federation of Australia during the 1930s, started their political careers in Lithgow in the 1920s. Bill Orr, son of a mining engineer, worked in the mines in Scotland from the age of nine. He migrated to Australia after serving in the British Army during World War I and began working in mines around Lithgow. Charlie Nelson was an experienced shale miner from Scotland who had previously worked in the oil shale mines at Newnes and was renowned for his ability to win people over to his way of looking at the world. In Lithgow he conducted classes in Marxism and recruited many fellow workers to the Communist Party. He was one of the men dismissed from the State Mine in December 1933. After 1934 Bill and Charlie took up leadership positions in the Miners’ Federation of Australia. At different times both served as president. They were described as ‘quite different types, even physically, the diminutive stocky figure of ‘the bulldog’ Orr contrasting with the rather tall ‘rangy’ Nelson. While they had some personality clashes, they were, in a sense, complementary to each other. Orr was the systematic planner and tactician, Nelson was adept at the practice of ‘how to win friends and influence people’ and they shared a sensibility born in Scottish coalmines. In 1937 Bill Orr wrote a sustained argument for improvements in the working conditions of Australian Coal Miners. This became a platform for Miners’ Federation claims over the next two decades.37

Communist Party of Australia leader Joy Barrington addresses a rally in Lithgow Park in 1929. British born miner Alfred Airey (Jack Blake), standing to the right of centre in homburg and bowtie, chaired the meeting. (The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc, Jack Blake Archive)

Alfred Airey, who took the ‘Communist name’ John David Blake, was from Newcastle-on-Tyne. He came to Australia with his family at the age of 13, in 1922 and eventually made his way to Lithgow, working at Iron Works Colliery and the State Coal Mine, where he met Orr and Nelson and joined the Communist Party. In 1930, while still working at the State Coal Mine, he stood for election as the Communist Party candidate for the seat of Hartley. Alfred travelled to Russia in

1931 where he attended the Lenin School in Moscow. He returned to Australia in 1934 to take up a full-time role in the Communist Party. Airey moved to Victoria, but spent time in Moscow as the Australian Communist Party’s representative to the Communist International, before moving to Sydney to assist with the 1949 coal miners’ strike. Although the excesses of Stalinism would lead him to fall out with the leadership of the Communist Party of Australia in the 1950s, labour historian Stuart Macintyre has called him the ‘most rigorous, original and critical of his generation of revolutionaries’.  

The Great Depression

By the late 1920s the Lithgow district was reeling from the impact of Hoskins’ relocation to Port Kembla. The substantial loss of jobs associated with the cessation of iron smelting in 1928 and gradual dismantling of the steel and rolling mills was exacerbated in 1929 when the district was swept into the maelstrom of the financial crisis that commenced in Wall Street in October. Local collieries rapidly lost customers as industries in Sydney stopped producing. This led to a series of colliery closures resulting in unprecedented levels of unemployment. As the surviving collieries reduced operating days, employed miners often struggled on only a few days’ work per month.

In Lithgow many houses sat empty, abandoned by their former occupants. The garden suburb of Littleton, developed as a showpiece settlement for Small Arms Factory workers after prolonged agitation, presented a forlorn sight:

Doors hung loose on their hinges, skirting boards were torn up, and homes fell into ruin and desolation.

Regardless, in 1931 Lithgow had 17,000 residents and was the fourth largest town in New South Wales. Furthermore, it was experiencing only a small degree of ‘drift’ to the city. Many residents appear to have decided to stick with it, and the contraction in housing occupancy may have been due to families deciding to bunk in with each other.

With unemployment at record levels in August 1932, the NSW Government, following the deflationary orthodoxy of the time, announced it would close its Departmental Coal Mine in Lithgow and set the community reeling. Feverish lobbying by community leaders convinced the government to review this decision but a restructuring of the colliery workforce led to further job losses. Severely troubled by the crisis affecting Lithgow, Ben Chifley, MHR for Macquarie, lobbied to secure civil contracts for the struggling Small Arms Factory to manufacture wireless sets, telephone parts, shearsers’ combs and cutters, and other items. Unemployment relief schemes included installing roadways and lookouts in the Hassans Walls Reserve and relocating the former Hoskins Steelworks power station, brick by brick, to the Lithgow Recreation Reserve, to make the city’s Civic Ballroom.

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38 McIntyre 2001, ‘Critical Communist cultivated the cause’ Obituary of John David Blake
39 Griffiths, T., 2006. Lithgow’s Small Arms Factory and its People, p.227
Migrants also kept coming to Lithgow. Sam Hodgkinson, a qualified mine manager from St Helens, Lancashire, migrated to Australia in 1929 with his wife Annie. His decision to migrate had been prompted by a desire to free himself from the cloying system of class and privilege that limited the prospects of so many bright young people in England at this time. During the 1930s and 1940s Sam worked in collieries in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania before being recruited by the Coronation Coal Company to manage its Tyldesley Colliery. The couple were offered a company house at Tyldesley, but after years of living in isolated mining settlements in Tasmania, Annie refused. Sam and Annie settled their family in a modern house at Portland in 1947.43

James Hutchins Robson was a coalminer who had served in the Northumberland Fusiliers. In 1928 he migrated to Lithgow with his wife and children and settled at Lidsdale. He joined the Lithgow branch of the ALP and held executive positions in the Miners Federation and Ironworkers Union. Jim Robson was nicknamed ‘Fellow Worker’ as this was the way he greeted all who came across his path. He was elected to Lithgow City Council in 1947 and twice served as Deputy Mayor. In 1956 he was elected to the NSW Legislative Assembly and held the seat of MLA for Hartley until 1965.44 His son James Malone (Jim) Robson had been born in Northumberland in 1919. After a short career as a coalminer he developed a small grocery business into a successful enterprise. He followed his father into politics and was elected to Lithgow City Council in 1953. He held a seat on Council until 1974, serving ten years as Mayor, and drove the development of the modern Lithgow Hospital. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2011 for service to the community of Lithgow, particularly through church, aged care and health service groups.

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43 John Hodgkinson, interview with Ray Christison 17 August 2009
44 NSW Parliament. Former Members Index A-Z, Mr James Hutchins Robson (1895-1975) [Online]
The Second World War

The commencement of hostilities in September 1939 led to a rapid acceleration of activity at the Small Arms Factory. Previously unemployed or underemployed people brought their families from all over New South Wales in the hope of finding work in Lithgow. Many hopefuls were encouraged by family to come to the town.

Among these was Arthur Christensen, son of a Norwegian seaman, and his Scottish-born wife Jean. Arthur and his brother Harry acquired a Registered Mining Lease on the Mount Gahan Goldmine behind Pambula at the height of the Depression in 1930.⁴⁵ They had relocated their families from Chatswood to Pambula and worked over tailings and mullock at the old mine site, recovering a tiny amount of gold during 1931 and 1932.⁴⁶ The families eked out a living in Pambula, with Arthur working in State Forests and as proprietor of a barber’s shop, but news of the expansion at the Small Arms Factory in Lithgow led the brothers to move there, joining Jean’s extended family. Arthur and Jean moved their five children to Lithgow in 1940 – their daughters Violet and Margaret never forgot the shock of moving from the beautiful beachfront at Pambula to the dreary, polluted Lithgow Valley.⁴⁷ By the end of the war, Arthur and his brothers had established a sawmill in Rifle Parade, Lithgow.

A 1946 view from Scotchman’s Hill showing the showground and Small Arms Factory Men’s Hostel (Outer Recreation Reserve Hostel). The Women’s Hostel (Littleton Hostel) is in the right background. Both hostels were constructed in 1942. (State Library of NSW, Government Printing Office Collection d1_38306h)

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⁴⁷ Margaret Monaghan pers. comm. 24 March 2013
It was reported in 1943 that the population of Lithgow had swollen to 34,967. With little housing stock, it was bursting at the seams, and the Commonwealth Government installed hostels for Small Arms Factory workers at the showground and near Barr’s Hill. Local Italians, however, had a different set of issues, as many found themselves detained. Italian Prisoners-of-War (POWs) were employed by farmers nearby, but local attitudes towards them are hard to gauge. The presence of a POW at a Red Cross dance in Hartley Vale indicates the unnamed man was welcomed by some members of the community, even as reports of the event, and of complaints made by the Hartley District Trades and Labor Council that the man had too much freedom, and that the Italians were being treated as naturalised Australians, shows a level of discomfort.

As had been the case in World War I, wartime inflamed passions against European nationals. When a Polish-born, Paris-trained doctor, Szyva (Oscar) Rychter, was charged with performing an abortion on a married Wallerawang woman, he said he was the victim of a hate campaign and that other doctors had told residents he was a German. The unfortunate Dr Rychter, who was actually a British citizen and a Jew, told the Parramatta Court that the operation was necessary to save the woman’s life. Searches of his name in Trove show that he managed to retain his practicing certificate and returned to Lithgow before moving to Sydney in the 1950s, where he was an active member of the Jewish community.

Dr Rychter was one of the first known Eastern Europeans to live in Lithgow but the aftermath of World War II, and thousands of displaced Eastern and Southern Europeans who sought a new life in Australia, ensured the town took in many more, with more peaceable results.

48 The Lithgow Mercury 19 August 1943
The postwar economy 1946 – 1970

Residents at the Outer Recreation Reserve Hostel in the mid-1950s. This hostel, operated by Lithgow Woollen Mills Limited, housed a large number of migrant workers.

(Kurt Bech Frandsen)
The Lithgow district after World War Two

The 1947 Census of the Commonwealth of Australia reported the total population of the Municipality of Lithgow and Shire of Blaxland as 23,741, of whom 91% had been born in Australasia. Those who weren’t had come from Great Britain or Ireland, and there were a few Italians. However the chaos and dislocation of post-war Europe resulted in thousands of displaced persons seeking a new life overseas. By 1954 roughly five hundred and fifty (550) people born in Europe had arrived in the area. An additional 13 of the district’s residents had been born in Lebanon or Syria.

![Table](image)

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(*Note: Blaxland Shire – Rest of Shire includes South Littleton, Hartley, Wallerawang & Cullen Bullen)

The new residents appear to have settled well. Although there were instances of racial discrimination, most appear to have been linked to the trade unions, and to traditional anxieties about scarce jobs being awarded to newcomers. As this was a period when employment was readily available, these anxieties seem to have been limited. Ready work also meant many workers decided to stay.

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Accounts from this period indicate that migrant workers were obtaining employment in the district’s largest industries, mining and engineering. The vast majority of jobs were located in the Lithgow Valley. Many migrants found work in the textile and clothing industries, which were highly feminised. In 1954, 116 women and 42 men worked in textile manufacture while 191 women and 22 men worked making clothing. In addition, new arrivals found work with Lithgow City Council – by 1949, there were enough Eastern Europeans (‘Balts’) working on Council’s gasworks that the Federal Gas Employees’ Union asked that Australians be given ‘absolute preference over Displaced Person employees’. Council rejected the notion, saying it would adhere to the traditional ‘last on, first off’ principle.

Female garment workers in the shirt factory located above Castelli’s Fruit Shop in Main Street, Lithgow in 1945. (Courtesy Stuart Charlton)

An account of a naturalisation ceremony held in the Lithgow Town Hall in November 1956 reveals the mix of nationalities in Lithgow at this time. The happy couple, Vladas and Maria Jurgutis, was Lithuanian. Their party included Polish-Ukrainian Pelagia Hromov, Polish Zofia Moroz, Ukrainian born Larysa Aitken (wife of Bob Aitken of the Lithgow Co-operative Society), Hungarian Ernest Lits and Polish born Jozef Kazimierz ‘who is married to a Lithgow girl.’ The newspaper reported that Larysa and Bob Aitken had incorporated Ukrainian traditions into their wedding ceremony held a year earlier.

Newly arrived migrants were initially offered work that was of lower status than their education or previous experience. Arvids Strauss had been studying civil engineering prior to the German invasion of Latvia in 1941. He was pressed into labour gangs and spent the remainder of the war in the Black Forest in Bavaria.

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On arrival in Australia in 1949 he was offered work as a bulldozer driver with Blaxland Shire Council. It wasn’t until he obtained employment with Eric Newham’s contracting business that he was able to apply the skills he had learnt at university.⁶ Zoltan Von Rhedey was born into a Hungarian noble family with connections to European royalty. With qualifications in agriculture, he had managed a large workforce on the family estates. Zoltan and his wife Heidrum (Heidi nee Kretzchmann) migrated to Australia in 1951 and were sent to the Bonegilla Migrant Hostel. After being questioned about Zoltan’s qualifications and experience, he and Heidi were offered work as hands in a chicken hatchery at Corowa. With experience gained at Corowa, the couple arranged to purchase a poultry farm at Marrangaroo in 1956.⁷

The Lithgow Woollen Mills appear to have been a mecca for newly arrived migrants, with their owner, Mr Rosen, actively seeking employees from within the Commonwealth Government’s migrant hostels. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the woollen mills employed workers from many backgrounds, including large numbers of Italian workers. Rosen, a man of Polish and Jewish backgrounds, spoke five languages and appears to have been quite comfortable dealing with people from many European countries. During the 1950s the woollen mills employed approximately 100 people who worked in two shifts. The workforce consisted of Lithgow locals, people who commuted from Sydney and newly-arrived migrants recruited from the government migrant hostels. Rosen appears to have overlooked telling his migrant workers about their right to join a union.

A strange division of labour developed at the woollen mills, with Australian-born workers generally staffing the more highly paid afternoon shift, and the migrants working the less remunerative day shift. Mr Rosen also developed a habit of not

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⁶ Interview with Bob Strauss 14 February 2014
⁷ Interview with Margaret Strauss 14 February 2014
paying migrant workers for extended periods of time. Migrant concerns came to a head in the late 1950s when a stop work meeting was called. At this meeting the non-unionised migrants voted to strike in order to obtain better wages. When the Australian union members refused to join this action the migrant workers quickly realised that, not being members of a trade union, they were not in a position to undertake industrial action.

Among the mill workers were Polish-born Edward Kempa and his German wife Gertud who arrived in 1956. Edward and his close friend Stefan Madel had been soldiers in the Polish regular army. They were captured by the Germans during the invasion of their country in 1939 and were taken to Germany in a work gang. Both men were quite competent handymen and spent the duration of the war assigned to building repairs and minor construction projects in and around Mannheim. After the war they met German sisters Gertud and Margot Schwinn. Edward married Gertud and Stefan married Margot. Gertrud and Margot’s brothers, who had served in the Wehrmacht during World War II, were somewhat hostile towards their Polish brothers-in-law and the ensuing antipathy made life difficult. As a consequence Stefan and Margot decided to leave Mannheim. They migrated to Australia where Stefan obtained employment in the chroming plant at the Lithgow Small Arms Factory. The couple actively encouraged Edward and Gertrud to join them. In 1956 they sold all their possessions and migrated to Australia.

Edward and Gertrud travelled to Lithgow with their young sons Wolfgang and Edward, and were met by Stefan at Lithgow Railway Station (hurried telegrams keeping him aware of where they were and expected arrival). Stefan took them to the home he had purchased in Fourth Street, Littleton. The two families shared this tiny ‘duration cottage’ (Margot and Stefan having two infants of their own – Brigitte and Stefan junior), until accommodation could be arranged in the Woollen Mills hostel at the Commercial Centre. Edward and Gertrud both worked at the Woollen Mills and young Wolfgang had the responsibility of feeding his brother and ensuring he got to and from school safely. The two boys shared a bed in their family’s apartment. In a very clever strategy designed to help him learn English, Gertrud bought Wolf a ‘Chip’n’Dale’ comic book, instructing him to study it until he could understand what the chipmunks and other characters were saying. She bought more comic books and took her two boys to the movies at the Theatre Royal, Trades Hall and Union Theatre every night of the working week, and the Saturday matinee. Through these processes they quickly learnt to speak the new language. This was a practice adopted by many migrant families keen to learn English.

Some of the mill workers were housed in company dwellings close to the plant. This worker accommodation included Tweed Mill Terrace, two rows of terrace houses constructed in timber and some very old brick cottages located close to Farmers Creek. Former mill worker Kurt Frandsen described the brick cottages as hovels and remembers a young Italian couple with a baby who were devastated when given one of these cottages. Accommodation for mill workers was also available in two blocks located behind Caroline Avenue.

8 Interview with Kurt Bech Frandsen 5 February 2014
9 Interview with Wolfgang and Edward Kempa 19 December 2013
10 Interview with Kurt Bech Frandsen 5 February 2014
father Allan worked in the woollen mills for many years and his family lived in one of these houses. Trevor recalls the neighbours being Santo and Giovanna Mondello and their family from Italy, a Norwegian family whose name may have been spelled ‘Shellaruston’ and who had daughters Liv, Irene and Ina, and an Estonian family. The Mondello daughters, including Maria, often looked after young Trevor, and Santo would take him hunting and fishing along the creek to catch rabbits, fish and ducks. The Mondello family eventually moved to Sans Souci. 11 Many more woollen mill employees were housed in a hostel located within the Lithgow City Council Commercial Centre adjacent to the Lithgow Showground. 11 This is described as the Outer Recreation Reserve Hostel in the section covering post war hostels.

Migrant workers employed by the NSW Government Railways lived in tents pitched on railway land located west of the Lithgow Locomotive Depot. The small tent city housed families who had moved from other parts of Australia. Among them was the Luka family that had migrated from Albania. Other migrants arriving in Lithgow found accommodation in private boarding houses or rented premises. From the late 1950s until 1968 the Lithgow District Historical Society rented Eskbank House to a former Yugoslav POW, Michael Blagoyevich, and his wife Helen, a Polish concentration camp survivor. 13 Blagoyevich established a building company and employed other former Yugoslav soldiers, including Zivko Karaklic. Zivko had moved to Lithgow in 1957. He and his friend Bora Glisic, both from Belgrade, were serving in the Yugoslav Army at the time of the German invasion in April 1941. They were captured and spent the remainder of the war working on farms in Germany. During the war Bora met Austrian-born Helena Phleger. The couple married in 1947 before he and Zivko migrated to Australia. The two had been told that it was too dangerous for them to return the Yugoslavia. Bora sent for Helena and their daughter Borika in 1949 and the couple lived in the Littleton Migrant Hostel until 1950. They purchased a house and land in Clwydd Street. Here they developed a market garden to supplement their income. Bora died in 1957 and Zivko, who had worked on the railways in Port Augusta, on the Snowy Mountains Scheme, Australian Iron and Steel and on the railways in Bathurst, moved to Lithgow to assist Helena. Zivko and Helena married, and he obtained work with Michael Blagoyevich. 14

Most migrants appear to have settled well into Lithgow, aided by their involvement in sporting and family life, but single men appear to have had a harder time settling in, and to have become involved in disputes in hotels and guesthouses. In 1950 a man described as a ‘depressed Balt’ took poison after being teased by his ‘friends’ that he was due to be deported. 16 In 1952 a Yugoslav migrant was charged with murdering his friend, a Polish migrant, during a fight in a guesthouse in Lithgow. No translator was provided during his trial in Sydney and when he was convicted of a lesser charge of manslaughter no one could tell

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11 Interview with Trevor Evans 7 February 2014
12 Interview with Wolfgang and Edward Kempa 19 December 2013
13 Narelle Kearney, oral history in Eskbank House and Museum Collection.
14 Interview with Rose Edwards 3 February 2014
him what the verdict meant, leaving the man ‘looking around the court appealingly’.  

**Migrant miners**

As World War II ended Australia was faced with a desperate shortage of coal. The New South Wales Government and mining companies wanted to expand production through mechanisation and modernisation so recruited skilled labour from Great Britain and elsewhere. When English firm George Wimpey & Co. Ltd. obtained a contract to operate the Ben Bullen Open Cut Colliery in 1950 it announced that key personnel, including engineers, technicians and foremen were to be imported from England. While the company stated Australian labour was to be employed where possible, it was anticipated the ‘shortages’ would be filled from England.

In 1948 the New South Wales Western Miners Federation and Federal Ironworkers Union had placed bans on the employment of miners from non-English speaking backgrounds. At Glen Davis the union specifically banned the employment of Polish workers, in response to a Commonwealth Government decision to send 51 Polish ex-servicemen to Glen Davis. These men, who *The Sydney Morning Herald* said had served in the army of the Polish Government in Exile during World War II and had fought beside Australians at Tobruk, were employed on the surface at Glen Davis. The group, experienced oil drillers and mining engineers, had been recruited in England to work at Glen Davis. An unstated problem with their arrival was their membership of the rival Australian Workers Union (AWU).

The Miners’ Federation ban probably had as much to do with union demarcation issues and ideological rifts as with ethnic differences. Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell issued union officials with a ‘please explain’, summoning them to Canberra for discussion of the issue. The media characterised the ban as part of a Communist plot to deprive essential industries of much needed labour and asserted that the Communist controlled Miners Federation considered Polish and Balt (Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian) migrants to be ‘hostile to the Soviet Union’.

Glen Davis existed largely at the behest of the Commonwealth Government and accordingly featured strongly in government planning for the employment and housing of migrant workers and their families. In the early 1950s the Commonwealth Government entertained the possibility of allocating the town as a migrant reception centre. To support such a scheme it was proposed that a new munitions filling factory be established there.

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17 *The Sydney Morning Herald* 17 November 1950
18 *The Sydney Morning Herald* 4 September 1948
19 *The Sydney Morning Herald* 14 August 1948
20 *The Sydney Morning Herald* 4 September 1948
21 *The Sydney Morning Herald* 29 September 1948
22 *The West Australian* (Perth) 12 January 1951
Hostility towards migrant workers reached a fever pitch in 1951 after a Yugoslav man stabbed a man and a woman to death behind a hotel in Kandos. Union officials were quick to brand migrant workers in the town, who were generically branded as ‘Balts’, as ‘gangsters’. Protests about the presence of migrant workers were referred to the Mining Union District Executive in Lithgow and reveal the degree of antagonism to the employment of non-English speaking workers in the region’s collieries. So great was the disputation that The Canberra Times devoted an editorial to the matter. Headlined ‘For the cause that locks assistance ‘Gainst the wrongs that need resistance For the future in the distance, And the good that we can do’, the editorial condemned the insular attitudes of the miners and their attempts to ban the immigration of Balts and Germans to Australia, and called for a helping hand for New Australians. Despite the position adopted by the union, new arrivals from various parts of Europe began obtaining work in the Lithgow coal industry during the 1950s. It is noteworthy that their numbers were small enough for individual cases to attract comment in industry publications.

Mechanisation and changes in markets for coal led to the closure of numerous collieries during the 1950s and 1960s. This period saw the demise of the Steelworks Colliery, Vale of Clwydd Colliery, Tyldeley Colliery and Lithgow State Coal Mine. Many displaced miners took advantage of an industry-sponsored scheme administered by a Western District Re-employment Committee to relocate to the Illawarra, Central Coast and Hunter Valley. This scheme provided the cost of rail fares and furniture removal for the families of

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miners transferring to colliery employment in another district. This industry restructuring displaced families and had a major impact on population.

Despite major restructuring of the coal industry, a number of mines such as Wallerawang Colliery expanded and modernised their facilities during the 1950s. This photograph was taken at the official opening of the Wallerawang Colliery Offices and Bath House in 1951. (Lithgow Regional Library, Lithgow District Historical Society Collection.)

The 1961 census revealed a population decline in the Lithgow region of almost 1,600. This census coincided with the completion of the almost ten-year long construction of Wallerawang Power Station. This massive civil engineering project had been planned during the 1940s to support electrification of the railway line across the Blue Mountains. Construction of Wallerawang 'A' Station commenced in 1952 and continued until 1957, employing approximately 1,000 men. Construction of the adjoining Wallerawang 'B' Station between 1956 and 1961 had ensured the ongoing employment of a large construction workforce.

In addition, the original section of the Lithgow Woollen Mills was destroyed by fire in 1963. Work continued in a more modern building on site but the enterprise eventually closed around 1965. By the time the mill closed most of the Lithgow Woollen Mills’ Italian workers had relocated to Rosen’s other woollen mill located at Mascot or to other similar enterprises in Sydney.

The Post-War Hostels
As Australia demobilised after the cessation of hostilities in 1945, the Government faced the prospect of decommissioning numerous manufacturing facilities, hostels and military camps that had been constructed during the war years. There was also an urgent need to provide employment for the thousands of people who had been engaged in the defence forces and wartime industries. To make the most of opportunities presented by these circumstances government began to encourage manufacturing industries to relocate to regional towns. Decentralisation of industry was supported by the establishment of

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27 Interview with Kurt Bech Frandsen 5 February 2014
migrant hostels in targeted areas. These hostels were intended to provide a workforce for new industries. The Small Arms Factory hostels constructed in Lithgow during the early 1940s became a part of this program.

**The Outer Recreation Reserve Hostel (SAF Men’s Hostel)**

A men’s hostel was constructed from 1940 on the Outer Recreation Reserve adjacent to the Lithgow Showground to house Small Arms Factory workers.  
This complex, constructed by E.V. Campbell of Kingsford, was designed to accommodate 256 men. It comprised 16 dormitory blocks, a recreation hall, dining hall, kitchen, four laundries, four hot water houses and an administrative block.

By early 1945 the Men’s Hostel was empty. In June that year the Department of Interior advised Lithgow City Council that this hostel was to accommodate British subjects released from Japanese internment camps in South East Asia. The facility was to be managed by the New South Wales Division of the Australian Red Cross Society, which was already accommodating former internees from the Philippines at the Mount Victoria Hotel.

In 1946 control of the former Men’s Hostel was passed to Lithgow City Council ‘for care and eventual sale on the Government’s behalf’. The complex of buildings was re-designated as the Commercial Centre and converted to host various local and decentralised manufacturing enterprises. Sydney-based manufacturers Californian Products Limited and Berlei Limited moved into redundant hostel buildings within the Commercial Centre. Californian Products commenced with 20 workers and by 1947 had 420 employees. Berlei employed 16 people in 1946 and in 1947 had 82 employees. The majority of these workers were women. Other industries occupying the redundant buildings included Jeldi, Gladys Grieve, Lithgow Shirt Manufacturing and Lithgow Box Service.

The Lithgow Woollen Mills leased a group of hostel buildings located on a site now occupied by the Lithgow Basketball Stadium. This complex housed migrant workers employed at the woolen mills and their families. Former resident Wolfgang Kempa described these as follows:

> The hostel consisted of two wood and fibro buildings which each held four living units. At the end of each building was a shared bathroom and a separate shed housed the communal laundry.

The residents appear to have managed the hostel themselves and were responsible for their own catering. Hugo Frandsen, who had learnt the spinning and weaving trade in a Viborg woollen mill, migrated to Australia in 1956, leaving his wife Ellen and their two sons in Denmark. He was sent to the Bonegilla Migrant Hostel near Albury and offered a job at the Lithgow Woollen Mills. The majority of residents at the time were Italian and Hugo, who could not

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28 *The Sydney Morning Herald* 26 October 1940
29 *The Lithgow Mercury* 21 February 1941
30 *The Lithgow Mercury* 27 June 1945
32 *The Sydney Morning Herald* 24 February 1947
cook, came to an arrangement in which the Italian men cooked and he washed up. He was very happy in Lithgow and warmed to the Australian attitude to life. Within a year he had paid for his wife Ellen and two sons to migrate to Australia. Hugo and Ellen initially lived with their boys Kurt and Sven in one room within the hostel. They later moved to a three-room apartment. Kurt obtained a job at the woollen mill and Ellen was employed at Don Bennett’s Grocery Store in Main Street. She worked there for some time, learning to speak English through interactions with Don’s wife Margaret whose broad Scottish accent infiltrated Ellen’s English.

Kurt recalled puzzling over the strange customs of some of the locals and particularly the greeting of one man he and his father met every morning on the way to the woollen mills. He would shake his head and wink as they passed. The Danes took this as a sign if his disapproval instead of a friendly greeting. Another strong impression was how unreliable people were. Time did not seem to matter to Australians and personal appointments were rarely kept. Kurt still puzzles over the habit of young males who would approach him in the street and challenge him to a fight. This behaviour quickly convinced Kurt to dispense with his European style clothing and wear garments that helped him to blend in. The inability or unwillingness of the local population to accommodate the Danish accent created some irritations and led to some behavioural changes. It proved easier to order Coke at intermission in the cinema than to request more complex fare and Hugo changed his cigarette brand from Rothmans to Craven A.34

Residents of the hostel undertook basic maintenance tasks. Resident accounts indicate that, despite the mix of nationalities and language groups, a strong

34 Interview with Kurt Bech Frandsen 29 November 2013
community spirit and mutual support prevailed. Wolfgang Kempa recalls that he had 23 playmates drawn from the various families living in the hostel, most of whom were Italian. For a time he and his brother became quite fluent in Italian. Each month the Italian residents would arrange the purchase of a barrel of wine. This was shared among the residents who stored it in any available bottles or containers. After equal distribution to all the families a large party was held by the adults to consume the remaining stock of wine. This always turned into a festivity with music, singing and dancing.35

Residents of the Outer Recreation Reserve Hostel undertook maintenance tasks. Here Hugo Frandsen is digging a trench for a new drainage system. (Courtesy Kurt Bech Frandsen)

### The Littleton Hostel (former SAF Female Hostel)

A separate hostel, generally referred to as the Littleton Hostel, was constructed between Rifle Parade and Barr’s Garage, from October 1942. It was designed to house 300 women.36 As the war came to an end and residents found alternate accommodation various uses were proposed for this facility. The Lithgow Hospital Board rejected a proposal to use it as an isolation unit so Lithgow City

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35 Interview with Wolfgang and Edward Kempa 19 December 2013
36 The Lithgow Mercury 30 October 1942
Council discussed converting it into either an aged care centre or a maternity hospital.  

Neither proposal was implemented so in 1950 the Commonwealth Government announced that the facility would be included in a scheme intended to host 1,600 migrant families in regional New South Wales to provide additional workforces for industries relocating to regional areas. Eight country towns had been chosen to be part of this plan: Maitland, Taree-Wingham, Grafton, Gunnedah, Wagga, Albury, Lithgow and Cootamundra. Each was to provide accommodation for 50 workers and their families.  

The Immigration Department operated 64 hostels, accommodating about 26,000 beds, two hostels for dependents of the R.A.N., and one hostel at Lithgow open to Australians and migrants. The Lithgow hostel was the former Small Arms Factory female hostel. Following transfer to the control of Commonwealth Hostels Limited, the Littleton Hostel continued to maintain a dual role, providing accommodation for newly arrived migrants and workers transferring to Lithgow. It appears that the Small Arms Factory maintained some influence over the allocation of accommodation, using the hostel to house workers brought in during expansionary periods.  

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37 The Lithgow Mercury 23 March 1945  
38 Northern Star (Lismore) 22 July 1950  
39 The Canberra Times (ACT) 23 August 1951  
40 The Lithgow Mercury 5 December 1956
The main block of the Littleton Hostel photographed in 1946.
(State Library of NSW, Government Printer Collection 1, d1_38300h)

The living quarters at the Littleton Hostel.
(State Library of NSW, Government Printer Collection 1, d1_38299)
The interior shots are most probably posed by staff of the Commonwealth Housing Commission.
(State Library of NSW, Government Printer Collection 1, d1_38317)

The dining room of the Littleton Hostel.
(State Library of NSW, Government Printer Collection 1, d1_38303)
The kiosk, posed by the same staff of the Commonwealth Housing Commission. (State Library of NSW, Government Printer Collection 1, d1_38309)

The industrial size kitchen at the Littleton Hostel. (State Library of NSW, Government Printer Collection 1, d1_38305)
In 1951 the Commonwealth Government announced the establishment of Commonwealth Hostels Limited to take over hostels operated by the Immigration Department. Newspaper reports of the time indicate ongoing discontent at the Littleton Hostel. Journalists speaking to attendees at a function held by the New Settlers’ League of New South Wales in Sydney during 1951 interviewed two female weavers from Lancashire who were married to miners. Both couples, who were living with friends at the time, had spent a year in the Lithgow hostel and were very disillusioned by their experience. The discontent was not restricted to residents. In July 1951 the hostel manager, Harry Hooper, shot himself after an altercation with his wife.

The Littleton Hostel attained some notoriety at the height of the Cold War after the unexplained disappearance of industrial chemist Ervin Toeroek in July 1955. This story received national attention and in Lithgow it was sensational. Thirty two year old Ervin Toeroek had been employed as Chief Analytical Chemist at the N.S.W. Mining Company’s coal preparation plant from 1951 and had constructed a house at Kandos before moving to Lithgow. He disappeared from the Littleton Hostel in mysterious circumstances, leaving all of his possessions including a car and wallet. The case was rapidly escalated into a Federal security matter after NSW Police dismissed the possibility of suicide. The Commonwealth Investigation Service maintained an open file on this matter for over two years. Mr Toeroek came from the coalmining district of Hungary in which the 1956

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41 The Sunday Herald (Sydney) 4 November 1951
42 The Canberra Times (ACT) 9 July 1951
anti-communist uprising commenced and it was suspected that foreign agents might have been involved in his disappearance.\textsuperscript{43}

During September 1955 \textit{The Lithgow Mercury} published a series of high profile articles exploring aspects of the disappearance and conjecturing over the possible involvement of Communist agents. These articles shared column space with reports on the implications of the Petrov affair and the disappearance of British diplomats Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean. Local reporting included the claim that Toeroek had been courted by a beautiful Hungarian Communist operative, that his wallet had disappeared and mysteriously reappeared during successive police searches of his hostel room, and that the disappearance was possibly linked to a ‘Communist controlled agency of the Hungarian secret police organisation operating in Australia’. Conjecture on Toeroek’s disappearance included reports that the Littleton Hostel had been used by ‘foreign Communist agents who, in various sympathisers’ rooms, conducted political study classes and brought into line former communists who were beginning to waver’.\textsuperscript{44} The circumstances of Toeroek’s disappearance and conjecture surrounding the following inconclusive investigations appear to have caused much disquiet among citizens who had migrated from Eastern Europe.

Fellow Hungarian Emil Koro was the last person to see Toeroek before his disappearance. Koro, who had served as a Lieutenant in the Hungarian army during World War II and received one of his country’s highest military honors, had migrated to Australia with his wife and young family in 1950. They moved to Lithgow in 1951 and lived in the Littleton Hostel until at least 1955.\textsuperscript{45}

Controversy over the future of the hostel erupted in December 1956 when Commonwealth Hostels Limited announced plans to close the hostel and install a caretaker. It was claimed that the facility was uneconomic but would be kept functional to cater for a possible increase in demand. Local trade union officials claimed that the closure would disadvantage Australian-born workers who would be left jobless or homeless. They complained that, in contrast, resident migrants had been offered accommodation elsewhere.\textsuperscript{46} Labor MHR A.S. (Tony) Luchetti, fully supported by NSW MLA Jim Robson, took up the cause of the local unions, leading representations to various Commonwealth Ministers\textsuperscript{47}.

Reporting in the local press made it clear that the hostel was seen by local unions as a subsidised facility for workers recruited into local industries. Local union officials, supported by Lithgow City Council, went as far as advocating transfer of the hostel to the private sector to ensure it continued as an accommodation facility for local workers. Throughout the campaign to keep the hostel functioning, Lithgow City Council articulated a hope that new industries would come to Lithgow, bringing workers requiring short-term accommodation.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{The Canberra Times} (ACT) 14 September 1955, 8 November 1957
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{The Lithgow Mercury} 2, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19 September 1955
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{The Lithgow Mercury} 7 May 1992
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{The Lithgow Mercury} 5 December 1956
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{The Lithgow Mercury} 6 December 1956
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{The Lithgow Mercury} 20 December 1956
It appears that such a transfer was arranged and management of the hostel transferred to A. & P. Shawcross Enterprises in 1957. Under their management the facility traded as Littleton Guest House and residents were referred to as boarders. A. & P. Shawcross Enterprises supplemented the cash flow of the Guest House by leasing the hall for private functions, including weddings. At the time of its closure in May 1964, the facility hosted 21 boarders, nine of who were ‘pensioners on a reduced rate’. When announcing the closure Arthur Shawcross stated: ‘bluntly, I cannot afford to keep the guest house open, it has been a losing concern for the past 2½ years’.

The Wallerawang Hostels
In the late 1940s the Joint Coal Board established a hostel at Wallerawang. A 1949 industry article on the critical shortage of housing being experienced in the district made the following comment:

The Joint Coal Board proposes to re-build the Wallerawang township in conjunction with the Blaxland Shire Council, on another site, and to build houses for workers in the district. All the Coal Board has done tangibly up to the present is to construct barracks for the workmen who are to rebuild the township in the future, and these barracks are for the most part untenanted.

It is likely that the hostel accommodated European tradespeople engaged to construct houses on Joint Coal Board land in Wallerawang. These houses, constructed by contractors under the supervision of the Housing Commission, included prefabricated homes imported from Europe and erected by German firm Otto Delfs. The 1954 Census revealed a related increase in Dutch and German families moving to the district. Among those who arrived in the district was the Van der Velden family from The Netherlands, who were first sent to the Bathurst Migrant Hostel before moving to Wallerawang.

The Joint Coal Board advertised a wholesale clearance of its hostel in February 1953. In advertising for the sale the complex was described as follows:

The Buildings comprise Dining and Kitchen Block, of weatherboard with Cement Roof, all cooking and catering equipment. Recreation Hall, 40ft x 20ft of weatherboard with iron roof. 26 Huts 16ft x 14ft. each containing four single beds and appropriate furniture; Buildings are weatherboard, Masonite lined, with iron roof. Two Ablution Blocks. Surrounding Fencing, together with Crockery, Cutlery, Mattresses, Blankets and the usual equipment.

This closure appears to have marked the end of a frenetic period of housing construction around Wallerawang.

Prior to the closure of the Joint Coal Board Hostel another large hostel had been established at the western end of the Wallerawang Power Station construction

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49 The Lithgow Mercury 14 May 1964
50 Australian Coal, Shipping, Steel and THE HARBOUR. 1 November 1949
51 The Sydney Morning Herald 30 July 1953
52 Personal comm. Pip Van der Velden 7 February 2014
53 The Sydney Morning Herald 4 February 1953
site. This hostel contained sixteen large dormitory blocks, kitchen, common rooms and wash house. It remained in place until the completion of ‘B’ Section in 1961. One building remaining on site was converted into a hall for the Wallerawang Power Station Staff Social Club and is still in use.

Challenges to the Immigration Restriction Act

The White Australia Policy and Immigration Restriction Act continued to be rigidly enforced until the late 1950s with only minor exceptions being granted in special circumstances. Changes occurring in community expectations and the patterns of migration after 1945 created pressure for changes to migration policy. During the mid-1950s the community of Portland lobbied against a Commonwealth Government decision to deport Chinese national Chu Shao Hung. His story is indicative of the cases that led to ongoing changes in the content and administration of national migration policy.

Five Chinese seamen; Chu Shao-Hung 37, Woo Wan-Wo 24, Chang Ah-Tang 21, Wong Guey-Yong 24 and Lau Ah-Kit 32, obtained work on the construction of Wallerawang Power Station in 1952. Soon after arriving they were arrested and charged with being prohibited immigrants. Under the provisions of the Immigration Restriction Act the Immigration Department administered the Dictation Test to all five men. The languages chosen were Estonian and English. According to newspaper reports the men failed the test and were sentenced to six months in prison. They were apparently ‘held in custody pending deportation’.

Former Chinese National Kuomintang Army officer Chu Shao-Hung appealed against his conviction and his case was eventually taken to the High Court of Australia. In April 1953, after considering the legal issues involved in the administration of the Immigration Act and Crimes Act, three judges of the High Court gave permission for the appeal to be heard. Chu Shao–Hung managed to remain in the district and commenced a market garden in Rowsell Street, Portland. During the severe flooding that affected New South Wales in 1955, Chu had donated hundreds of bags of vegetables to New South Wales flood victims.

His appeal to the High Court was apparently unsuccessful and in 1956 local residents led by Rose Fitzgerald began campaigning to prevent his deportation. The deportation decision was overturned on the grounds that the dictation test was invalid and he was permitted to remain in Australia. In the early 1960s he was still operating his large market garden and had additional gardens on Williwa Creek. Portland locals referred to him as Johnny Chu or Chinese Johnny. Presumably the Chinese seamen who arrived in the region with Chu Shao were also former Kuomintang soldiers. Chu was working at the Lithgow State Coal

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54 Newcastle Morning Herald & Miners’ Advocate 6 September 1952
55 Ian Milliss, pers. comm. 14 January 2014
56 High Court of Australia: Chu Shao-Hung v. The Queen 9 June 1953 [Online]
57 The Argus (Melbourne) 29 March 1956
59 Grahame Woolmer, pers. comm. 15 January 2014
Mine prior to its closure in 1964. Following this, he left Portland to seek work on the Snowy Mountains Scheme.\(^6\)

The first substantive change to migration legislation occurred in 1957, when non-Europeans who had been resident in Australia for more than 15 years were permitted to apply for citizenship. The following year a new Migration Act simplified entry requirements and abolished the dictation test. Further changes in 1966 sought to encourage qualified professionals from non-European backgrounds to live and work in Australia. Various additional changes introduced during the 1970s ensured that ethnicity was no longer considered as a qualifier for immigration to Australia.\(^6\)

At the end of the long post-war boom, Lithgow was a much more diverse town than ever before, with residents drawn from all over the world. While people continued to move through Lithgow as they chased work, many of them had made it their permanent home.

\(^6\) Maureen Hermann Nanya, pers. comm. 15 January 2014
\(^6\) Dept of Immigration & Border Protection Fact Sheet 8 – Abolition of the ‘White Australia’ Policy [Online]
Migration since 1978

Lithgow’s continuing coalmining connection to the United Kingdom is demonstrated in this brass statuette presented to the Western District Mining Women’s Association by Ian Seargal, representative of the British Mining Union in 1988-89.

(The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc.)
Lithgow from 1978 to 2011

Changes to government policy have seen a gradual movement of people on non-European ancestry into Lithgow. In 1954 less than 0.03% of the population of the district had been born in Asia or Africa and the majority of them were people of European descent who had relocated from former European colonies. Census figures from 2006 and 2011 reveal a gradually accelerating increase in residents who have origins in Asia. This trend appears to be generally consistent with changes occurring across regional New South Wales.

This period of Lithgow’s history is distinguished by the diversification of the local economy, owing to changes in the nature of extractive industries like coal, and the cessation of manufacturing. This diversification has provided opportunities for migrants with different skills to find a place in Lithgow. This chapter presents an outline of those changes, and case studies of more recent migrants that provide insight into the experiences of the migrants who have arrived in Lithgow in the last 40 years, and have elected to settle here.

Economic changes in Lithgow

In the last years of the 1970s Lithgow was riding a wave of prosperity. The oil crisis of the early 1970s had increased demand for Australian coal, and oil company investment. Buoyed by the prospect of increasing returns for coal, a number of Western Coalfield operators began to seek out new production opportunities and sparked an intense search for new coal reserves across the region. Geologists, surveyors and drillers scoured the rugged landscapes of the Great Dividing Range in search of economically viable coal reserves.

The City of Lithgow and Shire of Blaxland amalgamated in 1977, just as the Lithgow Valley was on brink of urban transformation. After 100 years of coalmining, the only two remaining collieries in the valley had reached the limits of their coal reserves. By 1980 the Lithgow Valley Colliery and Hermitage Colliery had closed and new underground collieries were being developed outside the valley at Fernbrook and Clarence. By the early 1980s all coalmining was located outside the Lithgow Valley. As mining within Lithgow wound down, new commercial development was undertaken. The opening of the Lithgow Valley Plaza around 1980 was a sign of confidence in the district’s prosperity.

As new coalmining ventures opened a new, large electricity generating plant was being installed at Wallerawang Power Station. The Electricity Commission of New South Wales had commenced a massive expansion of the power station in 1969 and the 500 megawatt No.7 generator entered service in 1976. The Wallerawang No.8 turbine of equal capacity was completed in 1980. The power station expansion had involved a massive civil works program, including construction of a new dam on the Coxs River. These projects required a large construction workforce. Large numbers of construction workers, engineers and other professionals assured the profitability of the district’s hotels and motels.

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2 Thomas, P., 1983 Miners in the 1970s. p.150
The wave of construction activity continued through the 1980s as the Electricity Commission developed its Mount Piper Power Station near Portland, Baal Bone Colliery opened north of Cullen Bullen and numerous roadworks projects were undertaken. In preparation for the construction of Mount Piper and supporting infrastructure a number of large workers' hostels were constructed in the Portland-Wallerawang district. It was estimated that, during the 1984-1986 period, approximately 300 to 400 workers would be required on the construction project. The hostels, developed on private land, were operated by construction and engineering firms for their staff and contractors. Publicans also cashed in on the increased trade. The Royal Hotel, Cullen Bullen filled its yard with temporary accommodation blocks to house transient workers.

Portland landowners were approached by various companies to sell parcels of land for construction of hostels. Ray Clark, who owned a property on the corner of Boulder Road and Back Cullen Road sold land to Multicon for a hostel around 1983. Clark remembers the hostel housed construction workers who had come ‘from all over’ and was operated by Multicon employees brought in for the purpose. When Multicon vacated the site it was purchased by Ray's son Geoff who subdivided it as a rural residential development. Joe Batty's property on Back Cullen Road hosted a similar hostel to that developed by Multicon. Toshiba Corporation obtained approval to construct a hostel on Boulder Road but did

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4 The Lithgow Mercury 25 January 1984
5 Ray Clark pers. comm. 12 January 2014
6 The Lithgow Mercury 1 March 1982
not proceed with this.\textsuperscript{7} Transfield-Saipem built a hostel for 300 men on Thompson’s Creek Road, Piper’s Flat, and CIR Australia also proposed a hostel on the Wallerawang-Portland Road. This development was proposed to replace an earlier Thiess hostel that had become an eyesore.\textsuperscript{8}

Despite numerous economic changes coalmining has continued to sustain the local economy. This photograph was taken on the longwall at Baal Bone Colliery in 2011. (Natalie Bailey)

The prolonged period of construction development did not cease until after the opening of Mount Piper Power Station and Springvale Colliery in 1993. Within a few years of the completion of Mount Piper, the local economy was facing a crisis reminiscent of the 1920s. The Portland Cement Works closed in 1991 and 1996 is remembered in Lithgow as a year of crisis.\textsuperscript{9} The closure of the Berlei factory following transfer of manufacturing offshore and the sudden decision by Cyprus Australia Coal to close Clarence Colliery shook the confidence of the community to its core.

These traumatic events followed eight years of restructuring of government owned enterprises involving hundreds of redundancies. Redundancies sometimes facilitated a comfortable retirement for older workers but the loss of critical coalmining jobs and of Lithgow’s fifty year-old garment manufacturing industry shook the community. As the 1990s drew to a close Lithgow resolved to continue a path to economic diversification, and community strategic planning forums were held in 1997 and 1998. However, as has always been the case, through boom or bust, new migrants have continued to come to Lithgow, and make it their home.

\textsuperscript{7} Ray Clark pers. comm. 12 January 2014
\textsuperscript{8} The Lithgow Mercury 25 January 1984
Some recent migration stories

Those who have come from Asian countries since 1980 have come singly or in family groups. Siva Kumar Kanangaratnam migrated to Australia from Jaffna, Sri Lanka with his family at the age of 13 in 1974. They settled in Broken Hill where Siva’s father established the pathology service at the Base Hospital. Siva attended school in Broken Hill and also spent one year in a boarding school in Adelaide. The family subsequently moved to Sydney and Siva studied medicine, graduating in 1984. In 1985 he began working as a doctor. His time in Broken Hill had given him a desire to work in regional areas. He worked initially in Newcastle, Tamworth and on the Central Coast.

In 1986 Siva met Ruth Hendricks, who had migrated to Sydney from India with her family in 1982. Ruth was born in Pune, Maharashtra State in 1963. After finishing high school Ruth spent one year at university before her parents decided to migrate to Australia. She recalls the family attending an interview at the Australian Consulate in Mumbai and noted that, while her father did not possess any special qualifications, their application was approved on the basis that they were a nice family. After they settled in Sydney Ruth studied Occupational Therapy at the Cumberland College of Health Sciences, qualifying with a Bachelor of Science.

The couple met a week before Ruth was to commence work in Bathurst. Siva was smitten with Ruth but was at that time working on the Central Coast. He decided to seek work closer to Bathurst and took up a 10 week Family Medicine Programme Rural Placement with Dr Kim Field in Lithgow. At the end of this time he returned to the Central Coast and continued courting Ruth. They were married in 1987 and settled on the Central Coast before moving to the United Kingdom in 1989 for a nine-month working holiday.

After returning to Australia, Siva was approached by Dr Angus Mackay who had worked with Kim Field in Lithgow. Angus was keen for Siva to work as a locum in his Mort Street Medical Practice. Ruth and Siva stayed with Angus and his wife Elaine during this time then returned to the Central Coast. They started seeking rural placements and, after a series of rejections possibly based on racial motives, Angus Mackay encouraged them to join him in a new medical practice in Lithgow. They moved to Lithgow in 1990 for a period of two years and have lived in the town ever since. Siva has developed a very successful medical practice at Bowenfels and is one of the principal visiting doctors at Lithgow Hospital. Siva and Ruth recall that their settlement in Lithgow was greatly helped by Angus and Elaine Mackay who ‘really supported them’. They have been well treated in the town and formed many close friendships.\(^\text{10}\)

Matnur (Mat) Sijabat was born into a Lutheran Christian family on Samosir Island, North Sumatra in 1952. During the late 1970s he was working as a diamond driller for David Young Drilling, a subsidiary of Lithgow mining company Austen and Butta Collieries Limited. Mat was dreaming of a better life and considering migration to Australia, Canada or England. As Australia was the closest he decided to venture there.

\(^{10}\) Interview with Siva & Ruth Kanangaratnam 11 January 2014
After some enquiries, David Young Drilling offered to sponsor Mat’s migration. In early 1980 he moved to Lithgow where he was accommodated in a company house with other single men. Mat recalls encountering genuine kindness which he regards as a hallmark of Lithgow on his very first day, when work colleague Bruce Calderwood invited Mat to dinner at his family home and gave him a black and white television to take back to the company home.

Having settled in his new home, Mat decided to return to Indonesia to find a wife at the end of 1980. At the top of his list was eighteen year old Dian Mulatiur Silahahi with whom he had corresponded. Dian had been born into a Catholic family in Lubuk Pakam, North Sumatra in 1962. Dian agreed to Mat’s proposal with the full support of her father and travelled to Lithgow as his wife in 1981. Dian recalled leaving the train in Lithgow and being overwhelmed by offers of assistance to carry her luggage up the long station ramp. The couple were given accommodation in a caravan located on the property of Roger Lord and his wife at Clarence and eventually purchased a house in Lithgow.

In his role as diamond driller, Mat was involved in the intense exploration for new coal reserves that occurred in the Western Coalfield during the first years of the 1980s. When a downturn in the coal market ended this work he obtained work at Hyrock Quarry, Capertee. In April 1984 he was appointed as a cleaner/labourer at Wallerawang Power Station. After completion of a Diploma in Engineering, Mat was promoted to the role of Assistant Power Plant Operator. He worked at Wallerawang and Mount Piper Power Stations for the remainder of his working life.

Dian found work at Berlei in 1983 and stayed with the company on and off until its closure in Lithgow in 1996. She became a supervisor and was asked to return to Indonesia to train staff involved in the re-establishment of manufacturing operations there. She subsequently worked at Ferrero Australia for seven years. Mat and Dian’s three children were born in Australia and attended school in Lithgow. The couple agree that people in Lithgow are very warm and Dian notes: ‘It’s a luxury living here’.11

Brothers Ken, Chhay, Jack and Henry (Heng) Kouch arrived from Cambodia in the 1990s and, after learning the baking trade, established the Golden Sunshine Bakery in the Lithgow Valley Plaza. They settled in Lithgow with their mother and respective families. When Jack had problems with the immigration of his wife Luch, the business community of the town rallied around them. Business and political leaders lobbied on behalf of the family to have an adverse Immigration Department ruling reviewed. When the case was eventually heard by the Immigration Appeals Tribunal, a petition containing 5,000 signatures was presented to support Luch’s case for acceptance.12

Mousa Keyhanee and his wife Narges Zolfaghari moved to Lithgow with their three children, Mahta, Amin and Eilia in 2012. They had lived in the ancient Silk Road city of Mashad, Iran before moving to Tehran in about 2001, where Mousa and Narges had obtained tertiary qualifications. Mousa is a Bachelor of Biology with a specialisation in Zoology and worked in Tehran as a researcher with

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11 Interview with Matnur & Dian Sijabat 7 January 2014
NIGEB (National Institute for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology). After graduating from Mashad Medical University, Narges had qualified as a General Practitioner and was employed for some time as an on-call genetic and health counsellor.

Mousa’s uncle migrated to Australia many years ago and began encouraging the couple to follow. They were encouraged to seek a new life in Australia by the limits on freedoms evident in Iran and the potential for their children to obtain better educational opportunities in Australia. They engaged an immigration lawyer in Sydney to progress their applications under the Skilled Independent Visa program. The process proved to be quite protracted and rather expensive. Mousa’s application was rejected after a period of two years and Narges was eventually accepted as a medical researcher after a six-year period. While their qualifications were being assessed the family converted from Islam to Christianity. This life-changing decision placed them in some danger and Mousa, a government employee, was hunted by the authorities because of his role in the Christian church.

They arrived in Sydney in 2009 with only $400.00. Mousa obtained casual work in the genetics lab at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) while Narges studied to upgrade her medical qualifications. The cessation of the UNSW research program left Mousa unemployed for four months but the family’s new church at North Epping supported them with gifts of money and other necessities. Mousa eventually obtained a permanent position as a Porter/Cleaner at Westmead Hospital and worked there for two years. During that time the family made regular visits to the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. They took Persian food to the inmates, provided companionship and advice, and helped to conduct Bible studies. They have continued to visit Villawood regularly while living in Lithgow.

After qualifying as a medical practitioner in Australia, Narges obtained a position with Iraqi-born Dr Baraz in Lithgow and the family moved in 2012. Mousa recalls his first impression of Lithgow as being a place of peace. This impression was aided by him listening to the community radio station EZYFM while he waited for Narges to complete her interview with Dr Baraz. The family settled in Lithgow and the feeling of peace and friendliness has continued throughout their time here. They find people to be generally friendly and kind. Experiences of racism have been rare and rather minor in nature. Mousa speaks very warmly of the town and the couple considers their move here to have been a very positive one.

Mousa commented that the required English preparation they undertook in Iran did not equip them to engage in conversational English in a country with a different dialect and they virtually had to re-learn Australian English after arriving here. The children’s English education was better facilitated by their school experience in Australia.13

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13 Interview with Mousa and Elias Keyhanee 2 January 2014
The population in 2011
In 2011, 1,811 people living in the City of Lithgow were born overseas with 7% of this number having arrived in Australia in the previous five years. Over one fifth of those born overseas had arrived in Australia between 1961 and 1970, and a similar slightly smaller cohort had arrived prior to 1960. Of the 1,811 born overseas, approximately 39% were from the United Kingdom and 54% had been born in non-English speaking countries. The percentages and distribution of people born overseas was roughly consistent with averages occurring across regional New South Wales. The 2011 Census identified the varied ancestries of Lithgow’s population:

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Lithgow's retail sector has recovered, and the town continues to be a major service centre. As Lithgow develops new industries, including regional education facilities such as the new campuses of Notre Dame University at Lithgow Hospital and the University of Western Sydney in the main township, it seems likely that Lithgow will become even more diverse.
Summary of findings
Summary of findings

This heritage study has been a scoping study to trace stories of migration to Lithgow. While the findings are preliminary, certain key themes have emerged.

First and foremost, Lithgow is a town composed of migrants, who have primarily been drawn to the area because there was work here.

Secondly, the boom and bust cycles of industry in Lithgow have meant many migrants have been unable to stay for long. The reality of migration to Lithgow is that people have often moved through the town on their way to other jobs. However, a significant number have stayed. As a result, Lithgow is a diverse community, and a high number of its residents have a parent or a grandparent who came to Lithgow from overseas.

This study has turned up new information about areas that have not yet been considered by historians and researchers in Lithgow. These include Lithgow’s migration hostels at Littleton and the Outer Recreation Reserve, and the hostels created for the Joint Coal Board and for power station developments in Wallerawang and in surrounding districts.

These important aspects of Lithgow’s social history deserve closer attention and there remains much research to be done. Topics for future exploration might include:

- Closer statistical analysis of migration, including the patterns of first-generation migrants moving onto other areas or towns
- Oral history with woollen mill workers and garment workers
- Research into women’s organisations and networks
- Research into the migration histories of the owners of later 20th century industries and their links with migrant employees
- Researching the lives of women who have come to Lithgow from Asia after marrying Australian men
- The experiences of children who came here as migrants.

While funding would be required to support such projects in the future, the Lithgow Migration Heritage Study has established central themes in the migration history of the Local Government Area, and brought to light some important untold stories of this region.

Ray Christison
Naomi Parry

26 June 2014
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