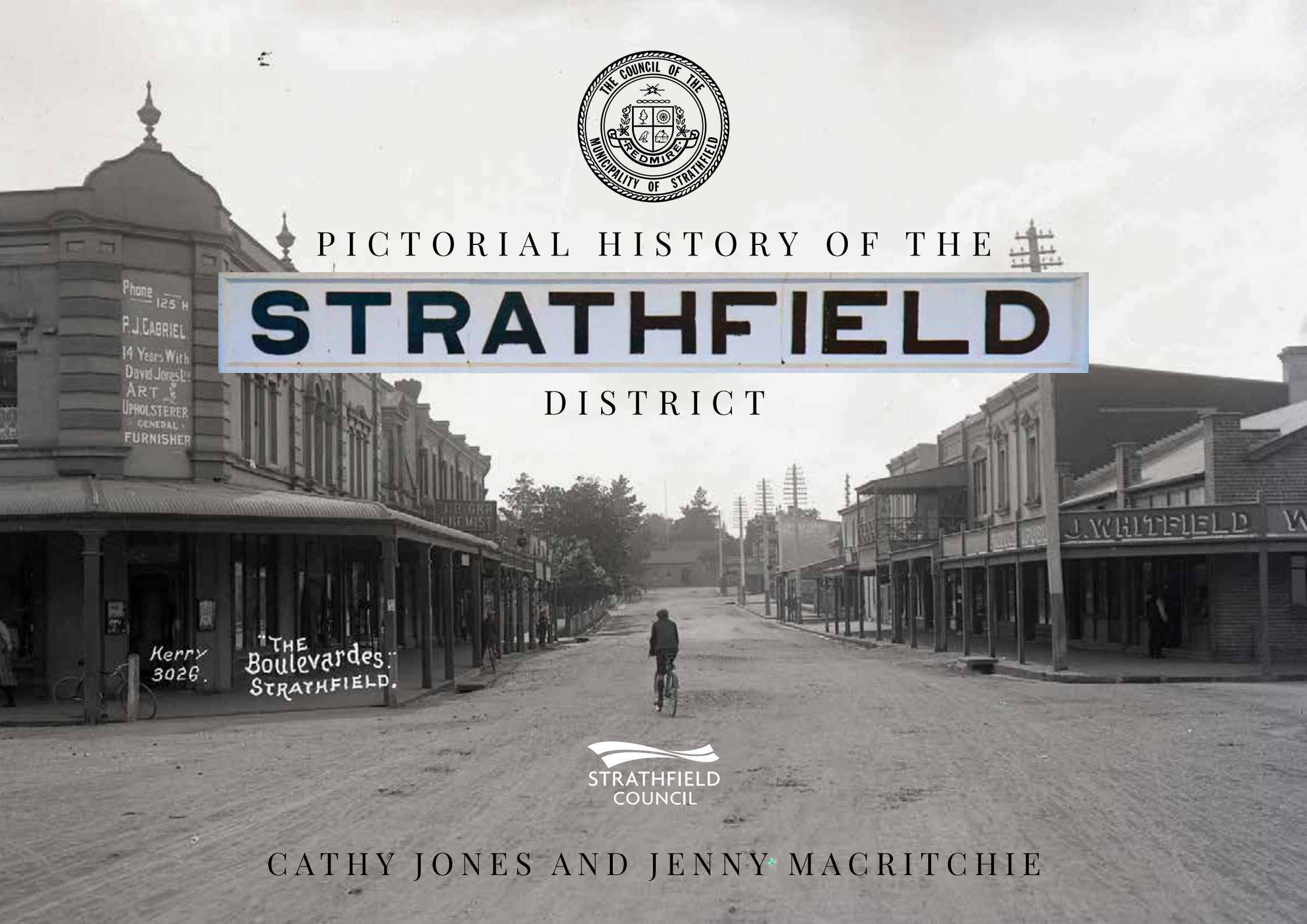




PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE

STRATHFIELD

DISTRICT



Kerry
3026.

"THE
Boulevards:
STRATHFIELD."



CATHY JONES AND JENNY MACRITCHIE

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Strathfield Train Station Sign, Stepan Skorobogadko via shutterstock.com

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P I C T O R I A L H I S T O R Y O F T H E

STRATHFIELD

D I S T R I C T

CATHY JONES AND JENNY MACRITCHIE

DESIGN BY EVITA BORBON

About the Authors

This book was written by Cathy Jones & Jenny MacRitchie, with design by Evita Borbon.

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- State Library and Archives of Tasmania
- State Library of New South Wales
- Strathfield-Homebush District Historical Society (SHDHS Collection)
- University of Tasmania

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Contents

Foreword	9	20. Bay to Bay	134
1. Aboriginal History	10	21. Federation	138
2. Landforms and Environment	13	22. Motor Vehicles	148
3. Early Settlement	21	23. World War I	156
4. Wentworth Estate and Homebush Racecourse	29	24. War Memorials	167
5. Clareville Estate	34	25. Pandemics	173
6. Village of St Anne's	37	26. 1920s	178
7. Roadside Settlements	40	27. Entertainment and Leisure	184
8. Establishment of Rail Services	44	28. Depression	191
9. Trams and Motorbuses	55	29. Industry	199
10. Early Development in Strathfield	60	30. Shops	214
11. The Boulevard - an Avenue of Great Mansions	69	31. World War II	223
12. Albert Road Late 19th Century	76	32. Post World War II	234
13. Union Recreation Club of Redmyre	86	33. Council Mergers	240
14. Churches and Religious Education	90	34. Community Services	244
15. Public and Independent Schools	98	35. Changing Communities	248
16. The New Strathfield Municipality	106	36. Post 1980s	257
17. Enfield	112	37. References	264
18. Homebush North	120	38. Appendix	266
19. Parks and Recreation	127		

12. Albert Road Late 19th Century



Agincourt, built c.1891, later owned by Washington H. Soul, Albert Road Strathfield c.1925. Fred Pollock and Strathfield Local Studies.

By the early 1890s, Albert Road, Strathfield had developed a reputation as one of the most prestigious residential areas in Strathfield. Albert Road travels west from Strathfield Railway Station ending at an elevated peak dominated by the grand mansion *Mount Royal*. The road was named for Prince Albert, the consort of Queen Victoria, and featured many picturesque mansions, built for prominent and wealthy businessmen, high ranking public servants and political identities.

These included tobacco merchants George Todman and William von der Heyde, pharmacist Washington H. Soul, Sir Samuel Hordern of Anthony Hordern's stores, wool broker, John Hinchcliff of *Mount Royal*, Donald Vernon, Secretary for Railways, Joseph Barling, Under-Secretary of the Department of Works, and Henry Gorman of auctioneers and agents, Hardie & Gorman.

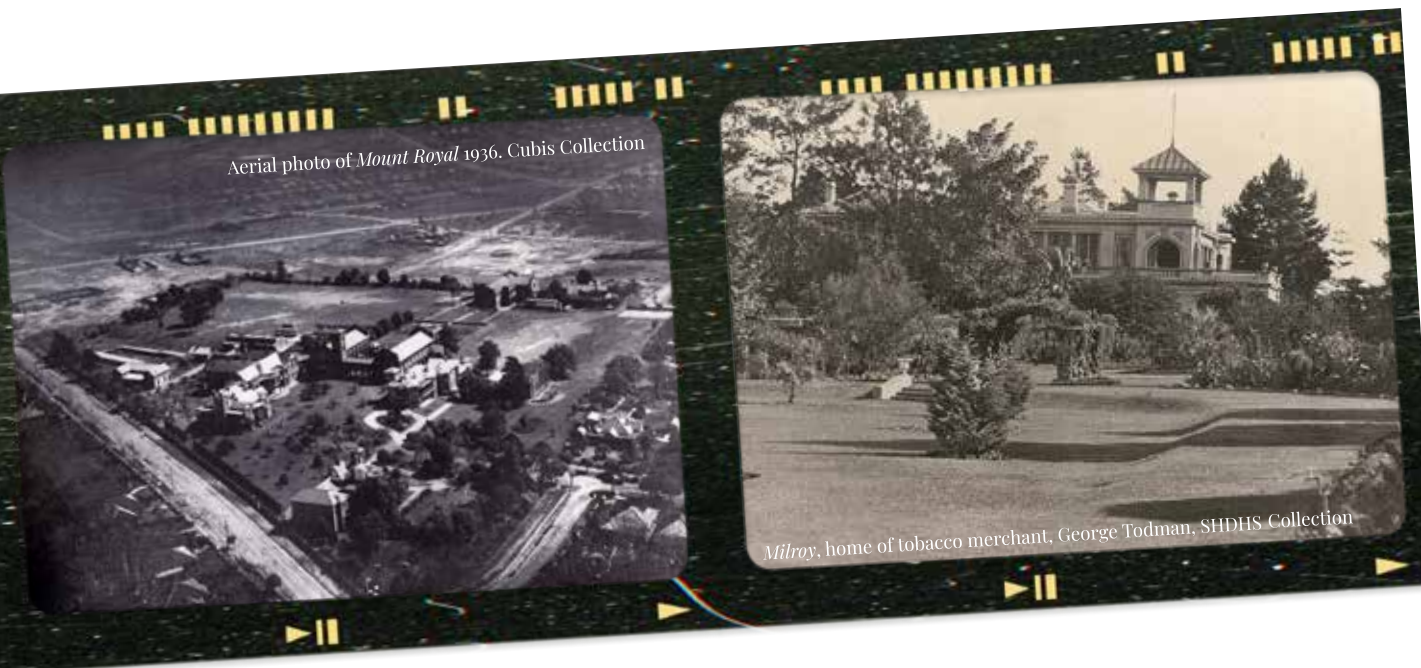


Agincourt dining room. Fred Pollock and Strathfield Local Studies

Mount Royal, a grand Victorian house, was built in 1887 as a private residence. The house was set on a ten-acre elevated site, built for wool broker and former Mayor of Strathfield, John Hinchcliff. His family's firm, A. Hinchcliff & Sons, was among NSW's oldest and largest in the wool industry. *Mount Royal* featured luxurious amenities, including a billiards room and a grand ballroom, offering panoramic views extending for miles. The house was later occupied by Sir George Reid, former NSW Premier (1894–1899). Reid vacated the property upon becoming Prime Minister of Australia in 1904.

From 1907, *Mount Royal* was owned by the Christian Brothers, a Catholic religious order, who renamed it *Mount St Mary's*. This transition marked a shift from its secular use to a semi-monastic environment dedicated to Christian education. The Brothers expanded the site, commissioning architect John Hennessy to design additions, including a small Gothic chapel in 1908 and the Barron Memorial Chapel in 1925. In 1928, St Patrick's College, a Christian Brothers boys' school, opened on the property's northern border. In

1993, the property was transferred to the Catholic Diocese of Sydney, leading to the establishment of the Australian Catholic University at Strathfield, known as the *Mount St Mary's* campus.



Milroy, home of tobacco merchant George Todman, was located on five acres of land on the south-western corner of Albert and Homebush Roads, Strathfield. It was one of Strathfield's most famous homes. Todman and his business partner, William von der Heyde, founded the tobacco importing business Heyde, Todman & Co in 1875. Todman, an English immigrant, quickly established a large fortune from the tobacco industry as well as interests in mining and land development. By his early thirties, he had amassed sufficient wealth to build *Milroy* in c.1882. The two-storey mansion featured luxurious

inclusions such as marbled walls and bronzed ceilings. The house and gardens were tended by a large staff of servants and gardeners and *Milroy* was known for its lavish garden parties and social functions. Todman owned *Milroy* until his death in 1924.

Todman was a noted philanthropist who contributed significantly to the Homebush-Strathfield Congregational Church and the Western Suburbs Cottage Hospital. He mentored many, including the architect John Sulman, who designed the Strathfield Council Chambers in 1887. The Chambers' clock tower was said to reflect a similar tower on *Milroy*.

Todman's business partner William von der Heyde's home *Elwood House* was built c.1882 on the western border of *Milroy* facing Albert Road. The mansion was designed by the prominent architectural firm of Charles Blackmann and

Varney Parkes. Von der Heyde was a German immigrant who migrated to Australia in 1849. He ventured into the tobacco industry in Victoria and later relocated to Sydney, where he and Todman formed their business partnership. Von der Heyde remained the senior partner until his death in 1896.

An active community member, von der Heyde petitioned for the incorporation of local government in Strathfield in 1884 and served on the first Strathfield Council in 1885. He held the position of Mayor in 1886-1887 and 1888 and played a pivotal role in the construction of the Strathfield Council Chambers in 1887. Additionally, he was President of the German Club in Sydney and was appointed Consul for Spain in 1891. *Elwood House* was renowned for its extravagant social events, with contemporary accounts praising its exquisite decorations and art collections.

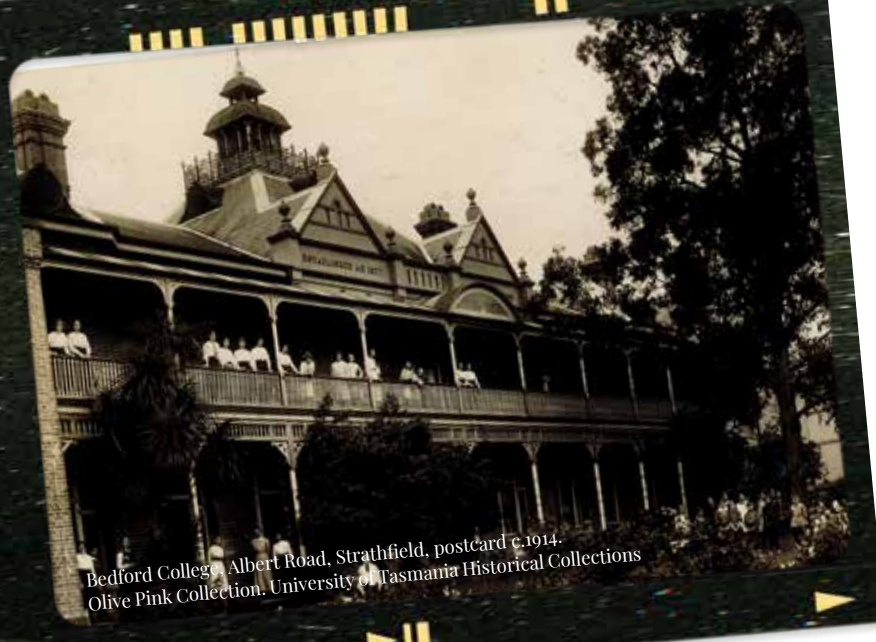
After von der Heyde's death, Todman continued to lead the business, which was merged with W.D. & H.O. Wills (Australia) in 1901. In 1929, after the death of Todman's widow Minnie, the two homes were sold for demolition and redevelopment into a new residential estate called *Milroy Gardens*. The sale and plans for demolition were widely reported in Sydney's newspapers. There was significant shock expressed about the proposed demolition of two grand homes less than 50 years old. While the demolition



Albert Road, Strathfield.



Albert Road Strathfield postcard. Cathy Jones



Bedford College, Albert Road, Strathfield, postcard c.1914.
Olive Pink Collection, University of Tasmania Historical Collections



Birralee Albert Road Strathfield, built c.1889 for solicitor Charles Laurence,
now part of the site of Strathfield Girls' High. SHDHS Collection



Elwood House, 1912, home of the von der Heyde family.
Powerhouse Museum. Photograph album 85-1065



Mrs Minnie Todman and children of *Milroy* c.1890s. SHDHS Collection



Washington H. Soul and family of *Agincourt* c.1890s. Fred Pollock and Strathfield Local Studies

proceeded, few houses were built as most of the land was acquired by the NSW Minister for Public Instruction for a new school, which took 25 years to build. Until 1953, when Strathfield Girls' High School was finally built, the land was used as a public park known as Milroy Park. During World War II, the land was leased by the Australian Army for training purposes, and, after the war, part of the land was laid out as a cricket oval.

Agincourt, a large two-storey Victorian Italianate mansion, originally set on three acres of land, was built c.1891 for John Paul, a ships' chandler. In 1903, it was sold to chemist, Washington Handley Soul who lived there until his death in 1927. Soul and his father, Caleb established their first drug store and dispensary in Pitt Street Sydney in 1872, called Washington H. Soul & Co. Soul merged with Pattinson & Co in 1903 and became a public company known as Washington H. Soul, Pattinson & Co. Soul was also a prominent Freemason who built his own Masonic Lodge in 1922 at the rear of his property, which he named *Lodge Washington H. Soul*. After the death of Soul, the house was converted into the *Deaconess Children's Home*, a Church of England Orphanage. It was also known as *Pallister Girls' Home*. The house has been significantly altered and extended and is currently occupied by the Jesmond Nursing Home.

Sir Samuel Hordern moved to *Tuxedo*, Albert Road Strathfield, in 1903 upon his marriage to Charlotte See, daughter of Sir John See, Premier of NSW. He was the grandson of retailer Anthony Hordern but had wide business interests. He is best remembered for his associations with the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW. The Hordern Pavilion, at the former Sydney Showground at Moore Park, is named for him. The new Showground at Sydney Olympic Park also features references to Hordern in the naming of buildings and lawns. Hordern is credited for the growth of the Royal Easter Show from a small fair to one of the world's greatest agricultural shows.



Agincourt front garden. Fred Pollock and Strathfield Local Studies



Foster, A.G. Christian Brothers' Training College (formerly *Mount Royal*) c.1920-1945. National Library of Australia Bib ID: 3083058

23. World War I

Australia's involvement in World War I began when Britain and Germany went to war on 4 August 1914. Australia was in the midst of an election, but both Government and Opposition leaders pledged full support for Britain assuring her that Australia would *'defend her to our last man and our last shilling'*, which received overwhelming public support. Whether motivated by the prospect of overseas adventure, or support for Britain, either the birthplace or ancestry of most Australians of this period, the initial number of volunteers for military service exceeded requirements. At home, communities gathered to raise funds, knit socks and provide comforts for those on the front line.

At the commencement of the war, the Strathfield district was still a relatively small community with an estimated population in Strathfield of about 4,000, Homebush, 700 and Enfield, 3,600. Burwood's population numbered 9,000. Most, although not all, World War I local memorials list the names of those who served and died, compiled from information mainly provided by families. Based on the names listed on local memorials, it is estimated that at least 1,700 men and women served from the Strathfield, Enfield, Burwood and Homebush areas with 254 giving their lives.

Based on advice about developing land defence capacity for Australia from Field Marshal Lord Kitchener, the *Federal Defence Act 1911* required compulsory military training in NSW. This system trained boys as junior cadets from the age of 12, as senior cadets from 14 years, and then, for four years, as militiamen, and operated from 1911 to 1929. To support meetings and training of local cadets and militia, residents of Strathfield and Homebush donated funds to acquire land in Station Street, Homebush for a Drill Hall. Until the hall was built in 1916, a shop was rented in Rochester Street, Homebush for training and, from 1914, war recruitment. The Strathfield-Homebush Rifle Club was formed in 1915 to provide a home reserve for the militia. In February that year, 125 men joined up after a meeting chaired by the Mayor at the Strathfield Council Chambers overflowed onto the footpath. Members were trained in drills and rifle handling and participated in marches through the streets of Strathfield.

*The Strathfield-
Homebush Rifle Club
was formed in 1915 to
provide a home reserve
for the militia.*

Patriotic associations and charities were formed in the Strathfield district to raise funds and send comforts such as food and clothing to servicemen at the war front, which continued throughout the war. Groups like the Strathfield War Service Committee, Strathfield-Homebush Red Cross Branch, Homebush Patriotic Association, War Chest and the Win-the-War League were led by Mayors, Aldermen or prominent local residents, however most of the work was undertaken by women volunteers. Newly married Edith Monk, later Commandant of the Strathfield Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), took her sewing machine to *Milroy*, the home of the Todman family, where it remained for the duration of the war, the ladies of the district sewing at every opportunity. Local committees also supported recruitment activities and planned war memorials to commemorate those killed in conflict. In a letter to the Strathfield & Burwood Comforts Committee, General Wallace wrote from Egypt in January 1916:

'...I saw the presents distributed to the Australian Army Service Corps men this afternoon. I wish you could all have seen how happy the distribution made the men. As their general I heartily thank the free-handed and warm-hearted givers. Australia may well be proud of her sons ... The war has made us feel that we are one people.'

From 1915 to 1921, the Federal Government floated ten War and then Peace Loans to assist in funding the war. Quotas and targets for loan subscriptions were set for each Council area. For the 1919 Peace Loan, the Government offered bronze plaque incentives for those Councils who met their

quota. One of these plaques is installed at Strathfield Council Chambers, issued by the Prime Minister William Hughes to Strathfield Council for meeting his quota of £25,000.

By 1916, with mounting casualties, the number of volunteers declined. Prime Minister Hughes, facing pressure from Allies to provide more soldiers, proposed introducing conscription (compulsory service) to boost

enlistments for overseas service. *The Defence Act* limited conscription to the limits of the Commonwealth or its territories. Overseas service, therefore, required voluntary agreement. Conscription divided the Australian Parliament

and, therefore, referendums were held in 1916 and 1917. Both were defeated in NSW and were narrowly defeated nationally.

Conscription provoked furious debate within communities, families, clubs and churches across Australia and in the Strathfield district. Both pro and anti-conscription meetings were held in Strathfield, Homebush and Enfield prior to the referendum votes.

The Prime Minister William Hughes sent telegrams to local councils requesting they support the conscription campaign, but both Homebush and Enfield Councils refused. Homebush Council resolved that they were of the opinion that *'the voluntary system has not failed'* and they did not *'see the necessity of conscription'*. Enfield Council considered it *'was a matter of conscience'* and resolved not to call a public meeting to assist with the conscription campaign.

Strathfield Council, in contrast, voted *'in favour of Compulsory Service during the time the War lasts and will work for the success of the Federal Government's proposals'*. All, that is, except the Mayor, Alderman John Robert Firth, a pacifist who had long opposed conscription. Firth resigned as Mayor in January 1917, citing his inability to *'take necessary public action in connection with the recruiting campaign and on account of his views generally on military training.'*

The guns finally fell silent after more than four years of bloody warfare when the Armistice was signed at 11 am on 11 November 1918. More than 416,000 Australians had

Conscription provoked furious debate within communities, families, clubs and churches across Australia and in the Strathfield district.

28. Depression

The Wall Street Crash of 1929 triggered a worldwide economic Depression, leading to the collapse of both national and state economies. In Australia, the effects were particularly harsh, with unemployment rising to 32%, one of the highest levels among industrialised nations. This economic hardship was worsened by Australia's already vulnerable economy in the 1920s, marked by falling export prices, mounting debt, and high levels of unemployment, even before the crash. It would take nearly a decade, and the outbreak of World War II, to fully restore employment and economic stability in Sydney and across the country.

The Strathfield district was affected by the Depression but, owing to relatively high rates of employment, and stable local employers, the impact was not as severe as in other areas of Sydney. Strathfield recorded an unemployment rate of 19% which ranked fourth in Sydney areas of relatively high employment, after Vacluse, Kuring-gai and Mosman. Homebush also recorded much lower unemployment rates as many local residents were employed at the Homebush Abattoir or factories like Arnott's Biscuits, which avoided laying off staff by reducing its hours of operation. The shanty towns which developed in response to the economic crisis in other areas such as Lidcombe were not present in the Strathfield district.

Throughout the 1920s, the Strathfield district had experienced a residential building boom accompanied by strong population growth. In 1929, Strathfield Council approved over 200 building applications including 106 new dwellings with an estimated value of £146,445. However, applications plunged to 30 in 1930 and just four in 1931. In 1932, the building industry recorded 80% unemployment and was one of the industries hardest hit by the Depression. This led to the closure of Enfield Brickworks as construction work all but ceased.

Among those hardest hit in the Strathfield district were returned soldiers and their families. The local Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia organised charity balls at the Town Hall to raise relief funds, with support from prominent politicians and public figures.

Local councils struggled as revenue declined sharply while demand surged for employment, relief, and social support. In 1932, Strathfield's land values dropped by 20%,

In July 1932, work began dredging and constructing stormwater channels and drains within the watershed of Powells Creek.

reducing rateable income by £10,000. To assist ratepayers in distressed financial situations, Strathfield Council allowed men to work on community projects in lieu of paying rates. Council also publicly advocated for income assistance to be distributed by councils through 'work-for-the-dole' schemes, such as road and park construction.

In 1931, the NSW Government introduced the *Rate Exemption Act*, exempting schools, churches, and government-owned properties from paying council rates. Strathfield Council estimated its loss in 1932 to be £1,600. Despite Council lobbying the Minister for Local Government, and other councils, for support, the exemptions were implemented.

A letter from Enfield Council to ratepayers in 1932 appealed for early payment of rates to avoid cutting jobs and services:

'By doing so, you will minimise the curtailment of employment... and enable

the work of the municipality to be carried out in the most efficient and economical manner.'

Homebush Council records from the same year reveal that desperate local men wrote asking for work simply to pay their rates. The council, already laying off its own staff, could not offer additional employment. On 18 May, Mayor Smallwood acknowledged:

*On 15 December 1932,
Homebush Council
resolved to allocate £100
for local relief work
during Christmas Week.*

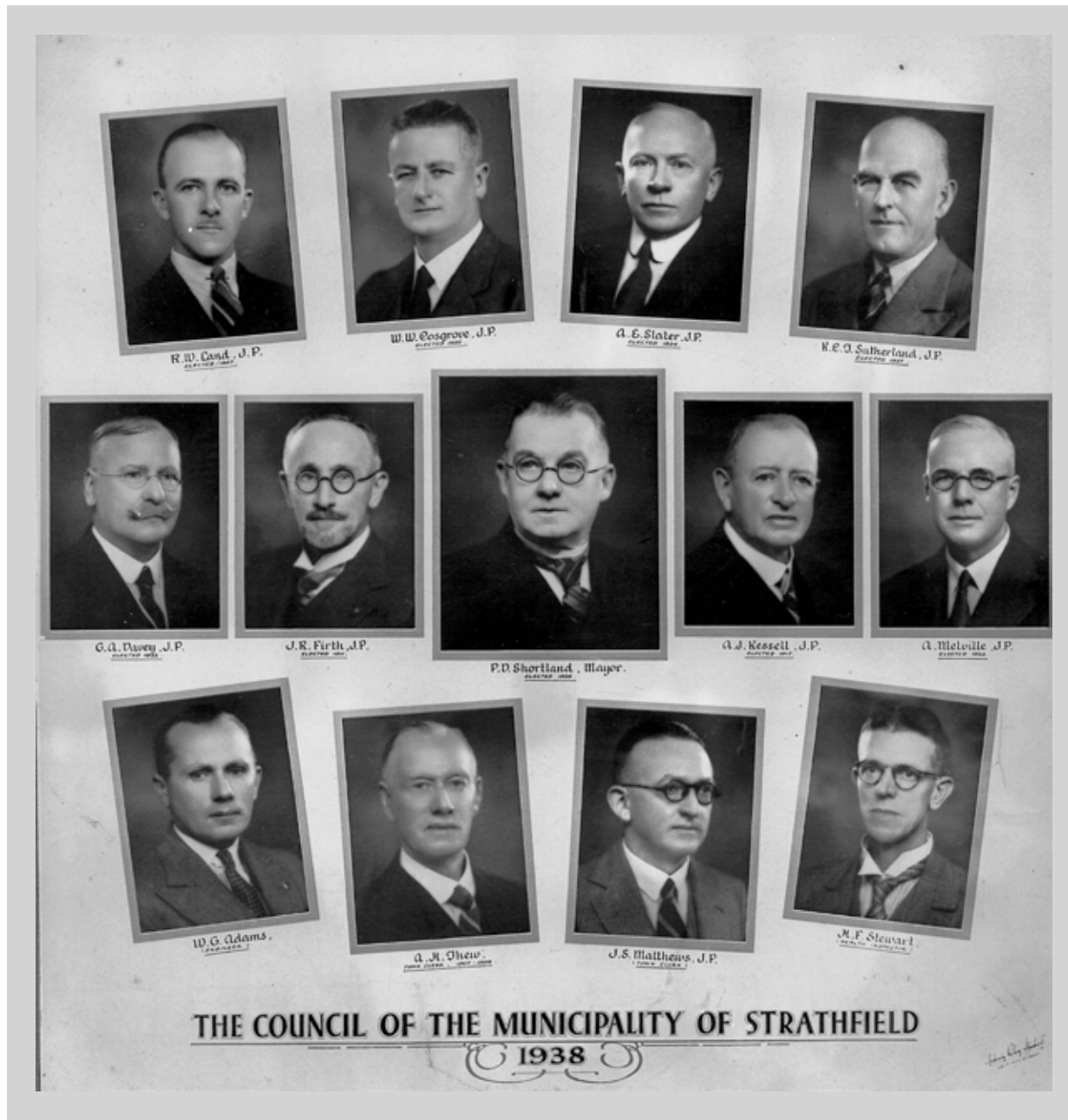
'We all feel sympathy for those who are unemployed, and it is necessary for the council to assist in every way possible.'

Community efforts helped fill the gaps. Enfield Council's Mayoress, Mrs Lloyd, headed the Citizens' Relief Fund drive in July 1930, collecting food and clothing that filled three rooms in the Town Hall. Bus proprietor Frederick Stewart made large donations to several councils, contributing £200 each to Enfield, Strathfield, Burwood, Ashfield, and Concord.

To stimulate employment, the NSW Government funded public works programs, allowing councils to apply for grants and loans for infrastructure projects. In July 1932, work began dredging and constructing stormwater channels and drains within the watershed of Powells Creek. This included dredging Powells Creek and Saleyards Creek Stormwater Drain, the extension of stormwater channels and drains in Airey Park, Arthur Street Channel, Strathfield Creek Branch and Wentworth Street Branch. The work involved excavation, concreting, and bricklaying. Parramatta Road was also concreted from Homebush to Lidcombe. Local married men with children were often prioritised for work, although this was often casual or for only a week at a time.

Daily newspapers advertised these jobs by location and skill. On 25 August 1932, the *Daily Telegraph* called for concrete labourers and horse-drivers with four or five dependent children from Enfield, Homebush, and Strathfield.

Still, demand outstripped support. On 15 December 1932, Homebush Council resolved to allocate £100 for local relief work during Christmas Week. That same month, the Homebush Parents & Citizens' Association and Strathfield Community Service Club,



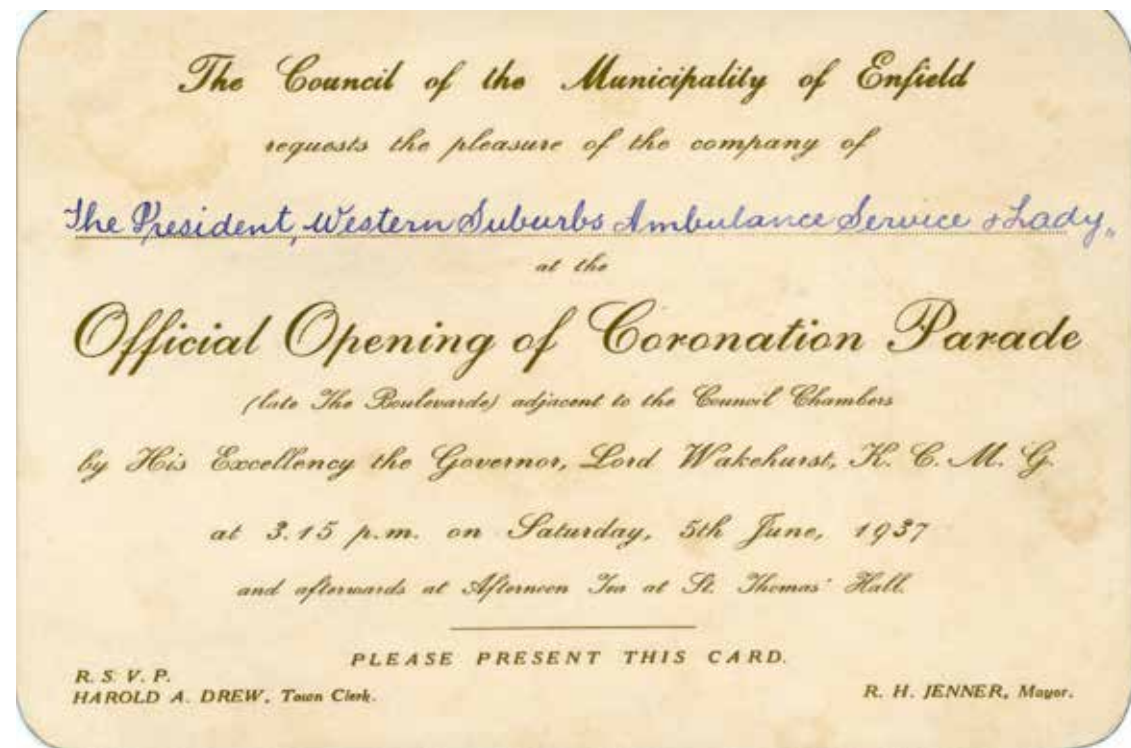
Strathfield Council Aldermen, 1938. Strathfield Council



Sam Hood. Departure of F.H. Stewart and family, 13 March 1935. State Library of NSW. SLNSW_FL1317032

with the help of the 2nd Concord Boy Scouts, collected 300 toy parcels. The initiative brought joy to over 900 children, with strong support from Homebush Public School staff and students.

Government funding also supported significant community improvements. The Enfield Olympic Pool, Australia's first freshwater Olympic-standard pool, was built with a £14,000 government loan and opened in 1933. In 1936, under the *Local Government (Further Amendment) Act*, Enfield Council received £30,000 for drainage, park upgrades, and work along the Cooks River. The major project transformed wasteland into Coronation Reserve, with gardens, a central path, and a ceremonial archway honouring the recently coronated King George VI. The Arch, Reserve and Coronation Parade were officially opened by Governor Lord Wakehurst on 5 June 1937. The Arch was later restored by Strathfield Council in 2001.



Invitation to opening of Coronation Parade 5 June 1937. Strathfield Local Studies

35. Changing Communities

The Strathfield district has experienced successive waves of migration since World War II. In the post-war period, migrants arrived from Southern and Eastern Europe, including the United Kingdom, Russia, Italy, Serbia and Ukraine. Many established churches and cultural institutions in Strathfield for their local and regional communities. From the mid-20th Century onwards, Strathfield also became home to a growing Lebanese community. Following the dismantling of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s, migration patterns shifted towards Asia, with significant communities arriving from China, South Korea, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, India and, more recently, Nepal. By 2021, 59% of Strathfield's residents were born overseas, with more than 62 languages spoken at home, reflecting the district's rich blend of cultural and linguistically diverse communities.

During the early 1940s, many Jewish refugees relocated from Sydney's Eastern Suburbs to the Strathfield district, likely influenced by the 1942 Japanese attacks in Sydney Harbour and coastal areas. The Jewish community in Strathfield further grew after World War II, as refugees from Europe settled in the district. The Strathfield War Memorial Synagogue, opened in Florence Street in 1959, became a regional centre of worship and community life. At its peak, it drew around 200 families to its services. However, with shifting population patterns and demographic changes, the congregation gradually declined, and the synagogue closed in 2011.

In 2021, 59% of Strathfield's residents were born overseas, with more than 62 languages spoken at home, reflecting the district's rich blend of cultural and linguistically diverse communities.

The opening in 1954 of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Vernon Street, established Strathfield as a key area of settlement for the Russian community in Sydney. By 1956, the Russian Club relocated to Strathfield and became a hub for cultural life, hosting theatre, music, ballet, folk dance, and exhibitions of Russian-Australian art. Strathfield became home to many displaced Russian refugees from Europe and China, especially from the Harbin and northern Chinese provinces. The home *Merrivaa*, 55 Homebush Road Strathfield, became a hostel and then a Home for the Aged as many of these migrants were elderly or disabled and lacked family support. During a 1967 visit, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, planted a memorial tree at the home.

Naturalisation formalised the growing community of post-war migrants settling in the Strathfield district. The first naturalisation ceremony was performed by the Mayor of Strathfield at a Council meeting in 1954 for Antoni Klenofsky, a Russian-born immigrant, in the presence of Dr Leslie Parr MP (Member for Burwood) and Thomas Murphy MP (Member for Concord).

The centrality of the Strathfield district attracted the establishment of new churches that served regional communities. St Sava Serbian Orthodox Church opened in 1954 in Hampstead Road, Homebush West and was the first Serbian Orthodox Church built



Australia Day citizenship ceremony in Strathfield Town Hall, 2023. Strathfield Council

38. Appendix

Mayors of Strathfield Municipal Council 1885-2025

Dates	Name
1885-1886	George Hardie
1886-1889	William von der Heyde
1889-1890	Albert Allen
1890-1891	John Hinchcliff
1891-1892	Albert Allen
1892-1893	John Hinchcliff
1893-1895	Albert Allen
1895-1898	Frederick Parsons
1898-1901	Thomas Mackenzie
1902-1904	Thomas Dickson
1904-1906	Frederick Parsons
1906-1908	John Price
1908-1911	Thomas Mackenzie
1911-1913	Charles Capper
1913-1916	Benjamin Gelling

Dates	Name
1916-1917	John Robert Firth
1917-1919	Ernest Albert Laurence
1919-1920	Arthur Kessell
1920-1922	William Pilgrim
1922-1924	Frederick Wallis
1924-1925	John Curnow
1925-1927	George Davey
1927-1932	John Robert Firth
1932-1938	Percy Douglas Shortland
1938-1940	Alexander Melville
1940-1943	William Cosgrove
1943-1949	Colin Hudson
1949-1951	Charles Morgan
1951-1954	Arthur Cave
1954-1957	William Dunlop

Dates	Name
1957-1959	Stanley Nelson Hedges
1959-1961	Bruce Ward
1962-1964	Beresford Calverley
1964-1966	Harvey Ford
1966-1967	Frederick Cartwright
1967-1968	James Smith
1968-1970	William Boyce
1970-1972	Frank Zions
1972-1976	William Boyce
1976-1983	Clarrie Edwards
1983-1984	Robert Kell
1984-1985	Rodney Rimes
1985-1988	Robert Kell
1988-1990	John Elvy
1990-1991	Robert Kell

Dates	Name
1991-1992	Eve Dutton
1992-1994	Leo O'Donnell
1994-1995	John Elvy
1995-1996	Eve Dutton
1996-1997	Peter Smith
1997-1998	Elizabeth Gewandt
1998-2000	Laurel O'Toole
2000-2003	Virginia Judge
2003-2004	John Abi-Saab
2004-2005	Alfred Tsang
2005-2007	Bill Carney
2007-2008	Scott Farlow
2008	Paul Barron
2008-2009	Keith Kwon

Dates	Name
2009-2011	Tony Maroun
2011-2012	Paul Barron
2012-2013	Gulian Vaccari
2013-2014	Daniel Bott
2014-2015	Gulian Vaccari
2015-2016	Sang Ok
2016-2017	Andrew Soulos
2017-2019	Gulian Vaccari
2019-2021	Antoine Doueihi
2021	Stephanie Kokkolis
2022-2023	Matthew Blackmore
2023-2024	Karen Pensabene
2024-2025	John-Paul Baladi
2025 -	Benjamin Cai



PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE

STRATHFIELD

DISTRICT

*This pictorial history is a unified historical presentation of the Strathfield district.
It features aspects of the life and events from the areas previously and currently located in Strathfield, Enfield and Homebush.*



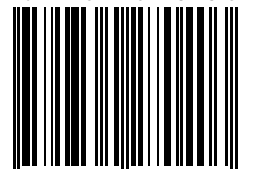
Albert Road, Strathfield, 1922 showing, from left: *Mount Royal*, *Ovalau* and *Andross*, Strathfield Local Studies



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DESIGN BY EVITA BORBON

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