LITHGOW HISTORY WEEK 2020

HISTORY: WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

5TH TO 13TH SEPTEMBER 2020

The study of the past and telling its stories are critical to our sense of belonging, to our communities and to our shared future.

History shapes our **identities**, engages us as **citizens**, creates inclusive **communities**, is part of our **economic** well-being, teaches us to **think critically and creatively**, inspires **leaders** and is the foundation of our **future generations**.

Identity: History nurtures identity in a world characterised by difference and change. History enables people to discover their own place in stories of families, communities, First Peoples, and nations—individuals and groups who have shaped the world in which they live. There are stories of freedom and oppression, justice and inequity, war and peace, endurance and achievement, courage and tenacity. Through these varied stories, the systems of personal and community values that guide approaches to life and relationships with others are shaped.

Engaged citizens: History helps people craft solutions that meet community needs. At the heart of democracy are individual citizens who come together to express views and take action. Understanding the history of contemporary issues that confront our communities, nation and world can clarify misperceptions, reveal complexities, temper volatile viewpoints, and open people to new possibilities, leading to more effective solutions.

Legacy: History is the foundation for future generations. It is crucial to our future because it explains our shared past. When we preserve authentic, meaningful and significant stories, places, documents, images and artefacts, we leave a foundation upon which future Australians can build.

Critical skills: History teaches independent thinking and vital skills for the twenty-first century. Historical thinking requires critical approaches to evidence and argument and develops contextual understanding and historical perspective, encouraging meaningful engagement with concepts like continuity, change and causation, and the ability to interpret and communicate complex ideas clearly and coherently.

Economic development: History is a catalyst for economic growth. People are drawn to communities with a strong sense of historical identity, material heritage and character. Cultural heritage is a demonstrated economic asset and an essential component of any vibrant local economy, providing an infrastructure that attracts talent and enhances business development, including cultural tourism.

This statement was adopted on 3 July 2019 by the History Councils of New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. It draws on the work of history organisations in the USA that promote the relevance and value of history through their History Relevance campaign. The four Australian History Councils have, with permission, adapted the USA 'Value of History' statement for all Australians to use.

Strong communities: History lays the groundwork for strong, diverse and inclusive communities that are vital places to live and work. Communities are wrapped in human memory: Indigenous knowledge, family stories, oral histories, social customs, cultural collections, heritage and civic commemorations. These all strengthen our connections and commitment to one another. History supports a sense of community identity and place; and that in turn promotes social cohesion, individual and collective wellbeing, and resilience.

Leadership: History inspires leaders. It provides them with role models to meet complex challenges. Personal stories of leadership reveal how women and men met the challenges of their day and can give new leaders the courage and wisdom to confront the challenges of our time.

This display is a small example of local heritage items and the history interwoven into their fabric. Lithgow is a trove of history dating as far back as indigenous tribes almost 20,000 years ago. To learn more about how Lithgow City Council undertakes heritage conservation and management, please visit **http://council.lithgow.com/ heritage-conservation-management**. A list of local and state heritage items, including informative inventory sheets describing the background of each site, can be found on **https://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/search- for-heritage/search-for-nsw-heritage** by selecting 'Lithgow' in the Local Government Area drop-down box.

RAILWAY HERITAGE

The conquest of the Blue Mountains and the building of the roads to Bathurst and to Mudgee had opened Lithgow City to settlement, encouraged pastoralism and created service villages. It was, however, the coming of the railway in the 1870s, half a century after settlement had begun in earnest, which transformed Lithgow City into a major industrial area.

A decade after the opening of Australia's first public railway from Sydney to Parramatta in 1850, plans were laid to cross the Blue Mountains and create a rail link to the western plains. Between 1863 and 1868 track was laid from Emu Plains to Mount Victoria. The completion of the Zig Zag railway line would be achieved in 1869, heralding a new age in Australian engineering.

The Zig Zag Railway between 1869 and 1910 became a major force in the development of western New South Wales. Due to the immense success of the line, new alternatives to the Zig Zag line were considered as traffic became a serious contentious issue as the steep gradients on the line, causing bottlenecks. The success of the line would continue until 16th October 1910 when the Ten-Tunnels deviation was opened and the Zig Zag line would be closed. The original line would be stripped and abandoned but the platform would remain for sightseers and picnickers.

In 1972 a group of railway enthusiasts formed a Co-operative, starting to rebuild the track and buy suitable rolling stock.

Above: Two workers overlooking the Lithgow Valley from the Zig Zag Viaducts shortly after completion in 1874. Source: NSW State Library, Alexander Brodie, 1874.

Today the **Zig Zag Railway** is owned and operated by the Zig Zag Railway Co-op Ltd. The trains resumed in 1976 and with the assistance of a NSW Bicentennial Grant, the track was extended along Top Road to Clarence in 1988. The service originally only included steam engines but was upgraded in 1994 to include diesel railmotors and began to run throughout the week instead of its weekend and public holiday operations. The railway however was temporary closed in 2012 after a collision, and with bushfires in 2013 and 2019 causing significant damage, the reopening was further delayed. The Zig Zag Railway is now working towards a reopening date around late 2021.

What is it good for?
- Retelling the historical stories of Lithgow such as *the Crossing of the Blue Mountains* and the *Pioneering of Australian Engineering*.
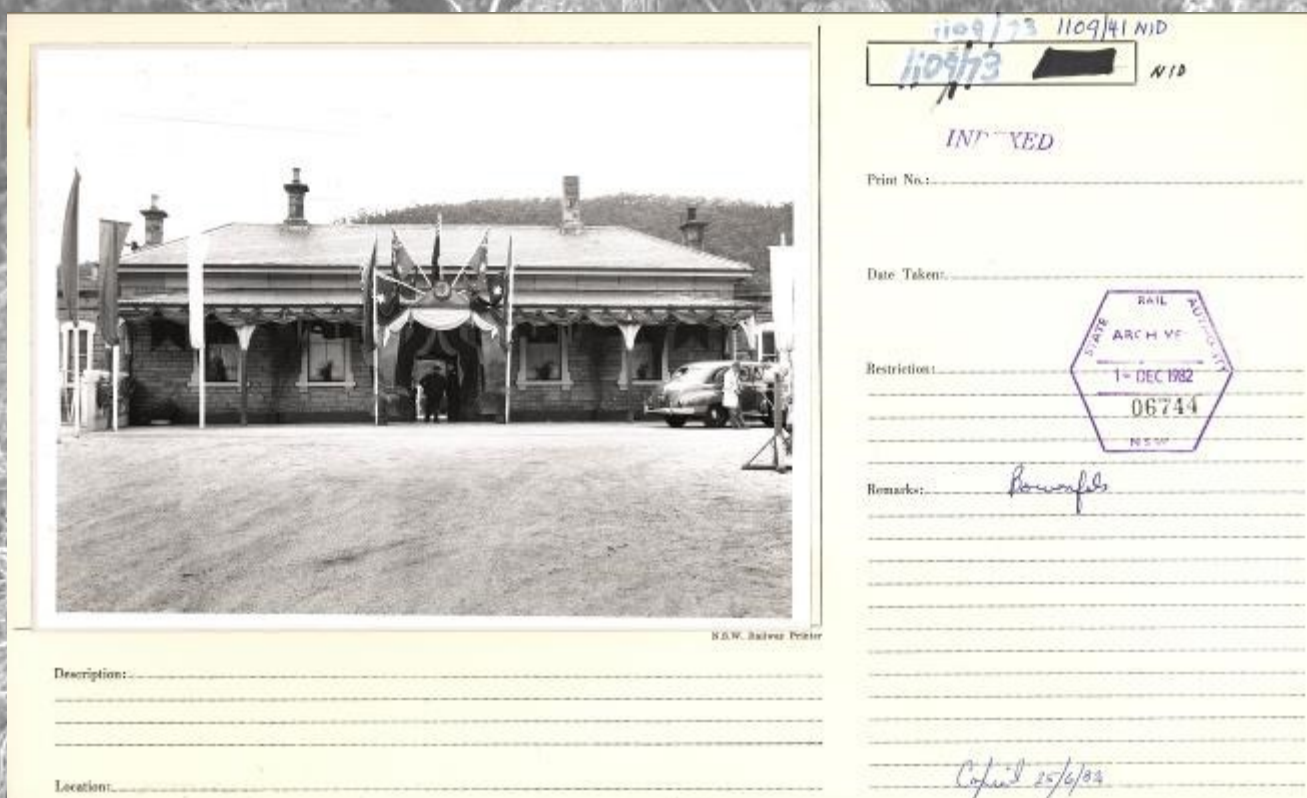

The **Bowenfels Rail Viaducts** is comprised of two different stone viaducts. The 1870 viaduct (forefront) is significant as it is one the oldest stone arch railway viaducts in New South Wales. It is an impressive curved sandstone structure on the edge of historic Bowenfels with its construction contributing significantly to the subsequent railway extension to Bathurst and on to western New South Wales.

The 1920 viaduct became necessary with the upgrading of the Bathurst line to dual tracks due to increasing congestion, necessitating the construction of one of the largest brick arch structures in NSW.

What is it good for?
- Providing scenic photography opportunities for aspiring and seasoned railway enthusiasts.

Above: A postcard showing the preparation of the Bowenfels Station for the arrival of Queen Elizabeth II and H.R.H Duke of Edinburgh as part of the 1954 Royal Tour. Source: NSW State Library, 1954

The **Bowenfels Railway Station and Residence** was officially opened in October 1869, providing the impetus for the growth of Lithgow and the availability of transporting coal and agricultural products back to Sydney. For 5 years it was the only station within the Lithgow Valley. The station remained in use until 1974 when passenger services ceased and the sidings to the Zig Zag were removed shortly after in 1975. The station underwent minor alterations in 1994 to be repurposed as the Lithgow Visitor Centre. Today the Bowenfels Station stands vacant as the visitor centre moved in to its own building across the road.


The **Rydal Railway Station** was officially opened on the 1st July 1870 and was the end of the western line until it was extended to Bathurst in 1876, requiring passengers and goods to be transferred on to carts and coaches to be transported further west. The building is a rare piece of railway history as the structure combines the features of a railway office and residence, similar only to five other stations in the state, and demonstrates the past custom of providing accommodation for railway staff on-site. After the closure of the station house in 1989, the station was repurposed as a library until it was once again repurposed by the Rydal Village Association Inc.; a volunteer organisation as self-contained accommodation.

What is it good for?
- Bringing to life beautiful old buildings that brought the community together to once again.
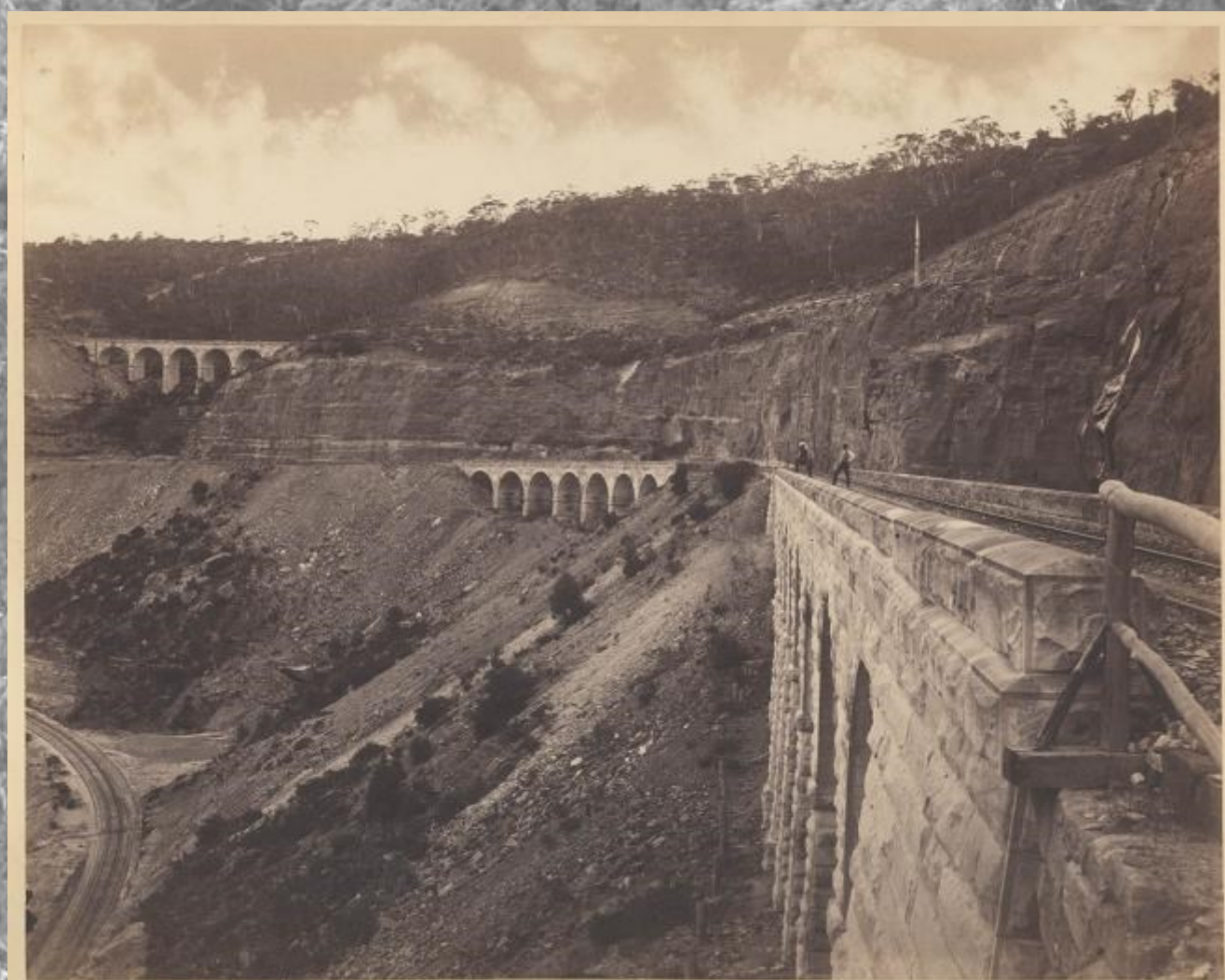
INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

In the last 130 years, Lithgow has built up a remarkable collection of industrial heritage which reflects its pioneering industries that were founded on coal, but utilising also its large oil shale, limestone and clay deposits. The most lasting industrial heritage is encapsulated in the towns and villages, in their worker's housing and their amenities.

It wouldn't be too long after the crossing of the Blue Mountains when coal would be found and extracted, beginning a new legacy for Lithgow which would continue to this day. With the commercial mining of coal came industries and would eventually lead to the establishment of Australia's first commercially viable steel mill.

The Lithgow Blast Furnace was erected by William Sandford in 1907 for the sole purpose of smelting iron from ore. Due to financial difficulties, Sandford could not fulfil its contract to supply the NSW Government with pig-iron and the furnace was sold to Hoskins Bros in 1908. It was not too soon after the handover that the furnace became a financial success.

The outbreak of WW1 saw a considerable expansion in operations, although contested by BHP who opened their own smelting plant in Newcastle in 1915. The furnace operations however were supported by the opening of the Small Arms Factory in Lithgow which provided another avenue for the selling of iron.

It was not until 1927 when the decision to move operations to Hoskins new Iron and Steel venture at Port Kembla would be made, attracted by new investments in natural resource and transport network infrastructure. In November 1928, Australian Iron and Steel was formed and announced that the Lithgow operations would be shut down. It would only take until the following year to begin demolition work and the final employees were dismissed in 1932.

Above: An artists performs to the backdrop of the Lithgow Blast Furnace as part of Lithglow 2019. Renovations and improvements to the Blast Furnace has allowed for the site to take on higher purposes such as hosting community events. Source: VisitNSW
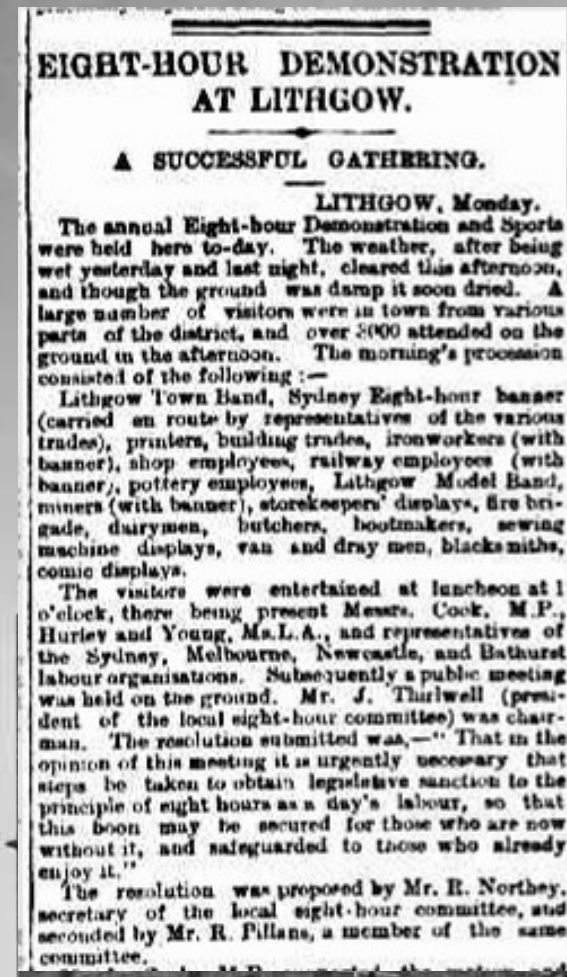
Above: A newspaper snippet detailing the outcomes of the Eight-Hour demonstration held in Lithgow. Lithgow became heavily involved with the movement by the late 1800's as majority of the workforce was employed in the trade sector. The eight hour marches comprised of local societies and union labour groups would be lead through Main Street down to the grandstand at the old Lithgow racecourse, led by local brass bands. Not only did the demonstrations become a rallying cry for the miners and trade workers, it became an important social event which was 'accompanied by banquets, sports carnivals, smoke socials and dances (Patmore, 2000)'. The parades would continue all the way up to the 1960's even though the Eight Hours Act was passed in NSW in January 1916. Source: Lithgow Mercury, 1903.

Today the **Lithgow Blast Furnace** remains as a relic of one of Australia's major industries and as a memento of the birthplace of the Australian iron and steel industry. Due to the sturdiness of the construction, many of the structures on site withstood demolition and were left to remain as ruins. As part of the conversion of the industrial site to a recreation park and tourist item, Lithgow City Council has undertaken significant works to improve the functionality and accessibility to the site, adding interpretive signage, raised walkways and other amenities.

What is it good for?
- Rediscovering the entrepreneurship of early Australians and the foundations of a newly developed nation.

The **Portland Cement Works** holds a long-dated milestone in Australia's industrial history. It is one of Australia's first and most successful lime quarrying and cement manufacturing enterprises with quarrying operations commencing on the site from as far back as 1863. It not the turn of the century in 1900 when the cement works became a successful venture under the guidance of Dr August Scheidel. The works would be heralded as '*the town that built Sydney*' due to the quality and amount of cement the works produced. Demand for the cement works would however decline by the 1980's, and by 1991 cement production work would cease with quarrying works continuing up until 1998.

Today, known as the Foundations Site, many of the cement works buildings remain with new ventures starting to taking place within the once abandoned site including:

- The murals on the Portland Silos, painted by artist Gudio Van Helten, depicting 6 former workers of the Portland Cement Works.

- The Annexe building which is currently being refurbished to create a new home for the Museum of Comparative Zoology.

- The repurposing of disused buildings for Artist residences.

- The Glen Museum, a privately owned museum focusing on the history of Portland from community life to the products of the cement works.

- Indoor markets offering a range of local crafting, artisan and food goods.

What is it good for?
- Providing a space for travellers to immerse themselves in the identity and culture of our history rich towns.

Without its hundred coal-mines, Lithgow City would have remained a pastoral area with some significant agriculture and orcharding.

Although the ready availability of coal is the basic factor in encouraging industrial development such as the iron industry from the 1870s until 1930, the most significant of the surviving heritage features were created by the extraction of oil products from shale. Before oil-wells were developed in Australia in the 1950s, the retorting of crude oil from shale was the only way in which Australia could have some self-sufficiency in kerosene or, after the arrival of the motor-car, in petrol, as well as in heavy lubricating oils.

There had been ten major oil-shale sites in New South Wales and one in Tasmania. Six of these oil-shale plants were in Lithgow City and all have left significant heritage in picturesque locations.

The most prominent oil-shale landscape of state and national importance in Lithgow is the Glen Davis shale oil-works, where the great vertical casings of the Pumpherston retorts dominate the visually exciting entrance to the Capertee River gorge, along with a village designed like a mini-Canberra, the workers' bathhouses and the mines themselves. This product of the commitment by a Commonwealth government desperate to guarantee fuel supplies during World War II is the most remarkable combination of scenic grandeur with industrial heritage.

In 1947 the population was 1600 and the school had 7 teachers for 260 pupils. Senior staff who were married lived in 11 brick houses; 30 junior staff lived in a hostel;150 houses were owner occupied by workers, while 300 single men lived in barracks on the north side of the river. The least satisfactory feature of the town was a 'bag town' of 125 substandard houses, served, however, by the cinema theatre. The hotel on the original plan had materialised with 25 rooms on its 0.8 ha site and still remains the principal building in the town.

Production of shale oil would come to an end in 1952 and much of the old buildings on the shale works site were demolished.

Today the **Glen Davis Shale Oil Works** lies abandoned with almost all of the previous residents who worked on site leaving for other mine sites around Australia. Steeped in the natural splendour of the Gardens of Stones National Park, the ruins offer a surreal impression as natural vegetation has started to reclaim the site. While most structures that once stood are no longer usable, they provide an amicable backdrop for professional photo shoots and for the curious of the sites history, guided tours that are run frequently. Some of the old cottages still stand and have been preserved for accommodation.

What is it good for?
- Displaying the legacy of decision making done to secure the national fuel interests of Australia.

Above: Miners clock off a shift at the State Coal Mine. Strikes were synonymous with the State Coal Mine as workers regularly found grievances with management on a fortnightly basis. The comradery shared by the workers on this front afforded new found privileges, the envy of other mine workers employed in local private enterprises.

''The figure regularly quoted in reports hovered around twenty percent, but two days before Christmas 1944, only five miners reported for work out of a possible180. After the holiday period, in the Manager's report dated 6/1/1945, the absenteeism level of 35.5% was recorded as "satisfactory" - Pratten & Irving 1994, p.17'

The fuel and transport needs of the First World War, along with the establishment of the Small Arms Factory, prompted five new collieries in the decade following 1916. The first of these was the government-owned **State Coal Mine,** known until 1932 as the Railway Mine because it was initially developed by the Railway Commissioners. Begun in 1916, the State Mine's main shaft did not reach the coal seam until 1921 to which it could produce up to 1000 tonnes a day, considerably less than other mines opened up in the Lidsdale-Wallerawang areas by the 1950's.

The mine operated in conjunction with the electric power-house close by, opened in 1922 and connected to the mine by a conveyor belt. The mine was ultimately closed in 1964 due to dangers associated with flooding and other workings.

Today the State Coal Mine has been turned in to a museum, operated by The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc; headed by a volunteer board of directors. As part of repurposing the site, various existing buildings were repurposed for the display of old mining instruments and to cater for an array of activities including:

- Museum operations include tours,
- Leasing of studio spaces for artists and artisans,
- Wedding venue and reception,
- Community events and celebrations,
- Commercial photography and film making,
- Corporate and workplace training, and
- Publication of mining history.

What is it good for?
- Discovering the tumultuous past of Lithgow's labour movements and their battle for better work conditions and pay.

DEFENCE HERITAGE

Lithgow has been seen for a hundred years as a suitable site for a national armaments plant. The proposal to build a factory for this purpose was first made in 1895, just before Kitchener reopened the Sudanese wars to which Australia had sent an expeditionary force in 1885. The remoteness of Lithgow from Sydney, the seamless access to a power source in coal and the physical barrier that the Blue Mountains provided made Lithgow a key defence site early on in the colonies life.

'The fall to an enemy of Sydney or Melbourne is a remote but not an inconceivable contingency. A Capital in the West, self-sustaining [with Lithgow coal], would be invulnerable, whether viewed as arsenal or fortress.' - William Astley, 1903

The newly formed Commonwealth had already by 1902 determined on building a factory for small arms and when Canberra was chosen as the new capital. Using the reasons above, federal MP's and in particular Joseph Cook pressured the newly formed government to locate the small arms factory in Lithgow. By 1909 Cook became the Minister for Defence, and the location of the Small Arms Factory was all but inevitable.

Land had been purchased in Lithgow in 1908 by the Department of Home Affairs, for the purposes of defence. The goal was to produce rifles, pistols, bayonets and ammunition. The contract was let in July 1909, to the US company Pratt and Whitney. Construction dragged on to the extent that locals determinedly going about their daily lives, converted the factory dam to a popular bathing spot.

Somehow the American scientific management principles and hustle of Pratt and Whitney's meshed with the ideals of local workers, and the company attracted union support. Although it had begun making rifle parts earlier that year, the official opening of the Small Arms Factory was held on 8 June 1912. The Small Arms soon kicked into gear, producing British designed guns for soldiers in World War I and, from 1916, producing Australian-designed guns for diggers on the front.

When World War I was over, the Small Arms Factory went into decline. Pratt and Whitney withdrew. However, the factory was able to diversify, producing Westrex projectors, and hung on to a small workforce of around 250 until gun production slowly increased. By 1939, when World War II loomed, there were nearly 2,000 workers and at the peak of the conflict, around 1942, there were nearly 6,000 workers at the plant, including, for the first time, hundreds of women.

In the 1950s and 1960s the Modernist buildings that now fill the site were created and the site doubled as a high precision manufacturing facility, making sewing machines and casting machinery parts using the lost wax method. However, in recent decades production at the Small Arms Factory has contracted to such an extent that operations are confined to a corner of the old site.

Today the Lithgow Small Arms Factory is still in operation under the private ownership of Thales for the purposes of constructing firearms for the Australian military. Separate to the functional arms production, a volunteer-run Museum has been established at the front of the site. The museum contains a rare collection of weaponry constructed on site in addition non-military items constructed outside during the non war periods after WWI and WWII including sewing machines and hand cuffs.

What is it good for?
- Bringing recognition to the skills of men and women who contributed to the Australia wartime effort at home.

Above: As the Small Arms Factory became a major employer during WWI, new allotments were rapidly being purchased by workers moving to Lithgow. Many of the cottages that were built by the workers still stand to this day and provide a significant amount of character to our streetscapes. Source: Google Maps, 2010.

The **Bowenfels Gun Emplacements** are the only known inland heavy anti aircraft gun emplacements of their type in NSW and were erected during World War II after Japan's entry into the war late in 1941 to protect the Lithgow Small Arms Factory. A nest of machine guns was installed on the Small Arms Factory with an addition to two anti-air emplacements being constructed; one being located at the existing Bowenfels site and one at Clarence. To protect the sites, mock farm buildings were erected as a form of camouflage and manned by the Volunteer Defence Corps up until 1944 when the area was deemed safe by Army Command. The guns were removed and the mock farm buildings were sold in 1945.

Today the emplacements stand strong with 3 of the 4 emplacements manned by replicant 3"7 inch heavy anti aircraft mobile guns. New signage has been erected overtime, providing local interpretations on local history and events. One of the guns now displayed was used in the filming of the movie 'Australia' in 2007.

What is it good for?
- Engaging new generations in to the history of WWII and the real threat war posed for the Lithgow township.

'To the westward the Country is rocky and barren without a single tree standing for many miles, but had a most picturesque and romantic view, the sun shining on the rocks they appeared to the beholder like Towns & Castles in ruins.' - Matthew Everingham, 1795.

In 1795 the First Fleet convict Matthew Everingham thus described the Wollongambe wilderness as he stood in all likelihood on Du Faur's Rocks at Mount Wilson. It was the first recorded European glimpse of any part of what was to become Lithgow City, and it was shared by three First Fleeters: a seaman become settler, William Reid, and two ex-convicts John Ramsay and Everingham.

The establishment of a viable permanent route across the Blue Mountains and down into what we know as Lithgow City was dependent on government policy in relation to land settlement. This purpose would arise with Governor Macquarie in 1813 for the purposes of expanding the colony's grazing and agricultural lands and the settlement of Bathurst. The government expedition by assistant-surveyor George Evans in 1813 followed hard on the heels of the private enterprise by Gregory Blaxland, William Wentworth and William Lawson who between 11 May and 6 June 1813 successfully crossed the mountains, using the ridge still occupied by the Great Western Highway to investigate the possibility of creating a road over the mountains.

On 14 July 1814, William Cox was instructed by Macquarie to construct a road on Evans' line over the mountains. By 12 November 1814, Cox's teams of convict labourers had reached Mount York and by the 24 December, the road had reached Fish River. The road was tinkered with extensively over the next fourteen years, and was in part replaced by other routes and deviations between 1822 and 1832. A significant deviation to the old route would be Major Mitchell's new line of the western road down Victoria Pass which lead the road to Bathurst through the Hartley area.

It would not take long until settlers realised the importance of the Hartley area and a new town would be born along the Bathurst road. As much of the labour used in the construction of the road and other industries out west were performed by convicts, the need for a detention and judicial centre was recognised and erected by 1837. Hartley would continue to grow as an important stop for travellers going further inland. The township growth would not last as by the 1860's, the new Zig Zag railway would be completed, reducing the amount of travellers along the road.

It would not be until the late 19th century when Hartley would see a new lease on life. Tourists would start to appraise Hartley for its historic value as well as being a connection route to Jenolan Caves. 17 of the old historic buildings were acquired by the then Blaxland Shire Council and by 1972 the Hartley Historic Site was declared under the administration of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Above: *'A halt near Hartley on return from Jenolan Caves'.* With the introduction of personalised motor car transport in the 1900's, many residents who lived in Syndey now found the opportunity to venture further inland. Of significant early tourism destinations was the Jenolan Caves which required passing through Hartley, bringing the village back to life. Source: NSW State Library, 1919.

The **Eskbank House** is synonymous with the settlement and future industrial development of the Lithgow area. While looking after the Cooerwull Estate in the late 1830's, Thomas and May Brown realised the potential of what would be the now Lithgow township area purchased 210 acres and named his holdings 'Esk Bank Estate'. In 1841-1842, Thomas had built a well-capitalised homestead named Eskbank House. The house would play a pivotal role in the future of Lithgow, housing prominent mining and business officials all the way up until WWII were the house would be transformed into flats, operating as a boarding house for new families working at the Lithgow Small Arms Factory.

In 1948 Australian Iron and Steel who owned the property at the time donated it to Lithgow Council with the financial support of local business owner Eric Bracey to conserve and furnish the house. In 1966 the Historical Society reopened the Eskbank House as a museum. Today the house is a popular tourism attraction hosting a variety of community events including community functions and school holiday programs.

What is it good for?
- Demonstrating the manner in which Lithgow developed from an isolated, rural locality into the colony's third most important industrial area.

Today the **Hartley Historic Village** remains as a highly intact ninetieth century village, containing a fine array of government, church, hotel and residential buildings that have been preserved. Many of the historic buildings have been restored and repurposed for educational and tourism purposes such as St. Bernard's Presbytery & Old Tralee cottages becoming overnight accommodation.

What is it good for?
- Bringing history back to life with new reinvigorated purpose.