

Raymond Terrace River Life

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History of the River

The Hunter River stretches across 460kms from the Mount Royal Range of the Barrington Tops to the port of Newcastle. The Hunter River catchment is the largest catchment area in NSW covering 21 000kms. Both Aboriginal peoples and early European colonisers alike recognised this river as valuable. The Awabakal people lived a very rich and vibrant existence in and around *Muloobinba* (Newcastle) and the *Coquon* (Hunter River).



Figure 1. An 1857 sketch by an unknown artist captures a moment in time when the two worlds of indigenous culture and European occupation combine. It features small buildings of Raymond Terrace and a Worimi person in the foreground on the bank. (John Turner Collection, Newcastle Cultural Collections, 2020)

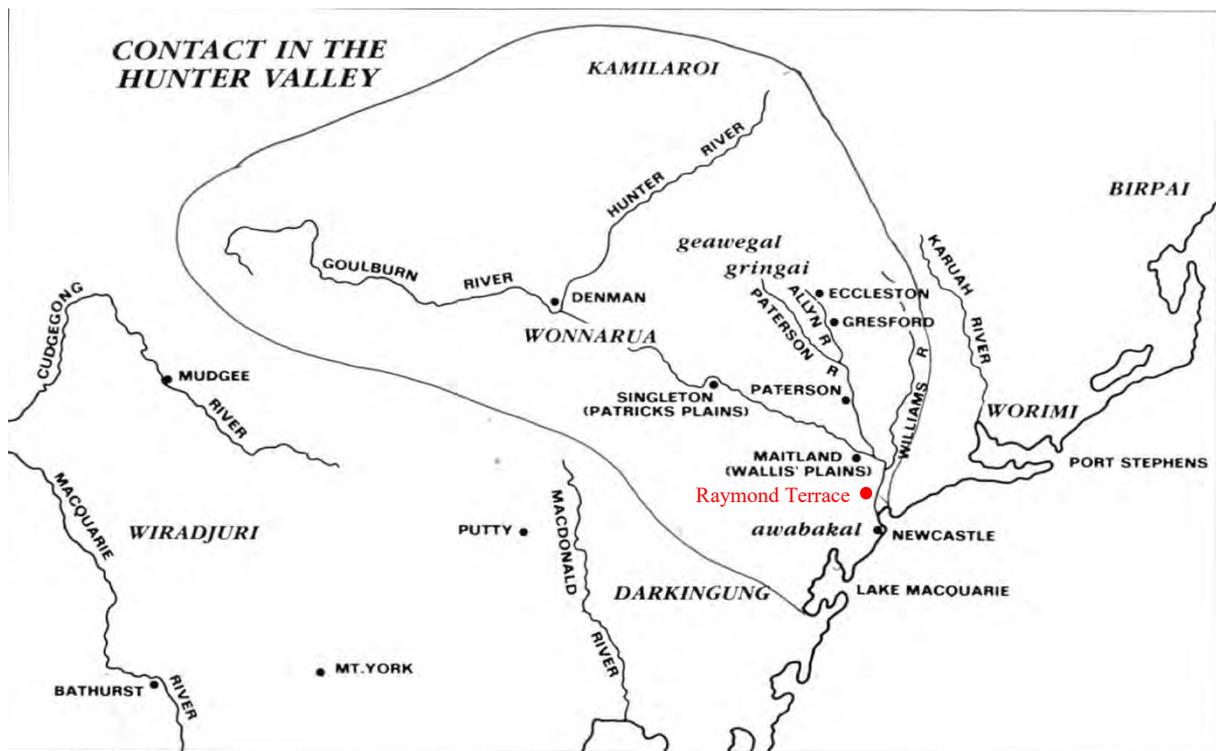


Figure 1. The Wonnarua map shows the location and names of the Aboriginal Clans that live in the Hunter river catchment. (Brayshaw, 1987)

Early European explorers surveyed the Hunter River many times. Then in 1797, a midshipman called Raymond was sent on an expedition. He recorded in his journal information about the terraced appearance of the trees at the junction of the Hunter and Williams rivers. This is why the area is now called Raymond Terrace.

Aboard the first boat to stop and camp on the site of Raymond Terrace (captained by Colonel Paterson on June 29, 1801), was Bungaree—the first Aboriginal person to circumnavigate Australia (Library, 1987) The area proved to be a good camping spot for the first exploration due to its location at the junction of the Williams and Hunter Rivers. Francis Barrallier was also aboard and his map survey of the Hunter can be found in River Stories.

The town of Raymond Terrace grew rapidly and soon became a busy river port, transporting red cedar (known as red gold as it was more valuable than coal), stone, hay, and flour. (Living Histories, 1987) The river was the main form of transport in those early days, as only horses and carts managed to navigate the roads that were no more than sand tracks.

With the introduction of roads and rail in the late 1800s, Raymond Terrace diminished as a river port, and continued through peaks and troughs of both progress and setbacks.

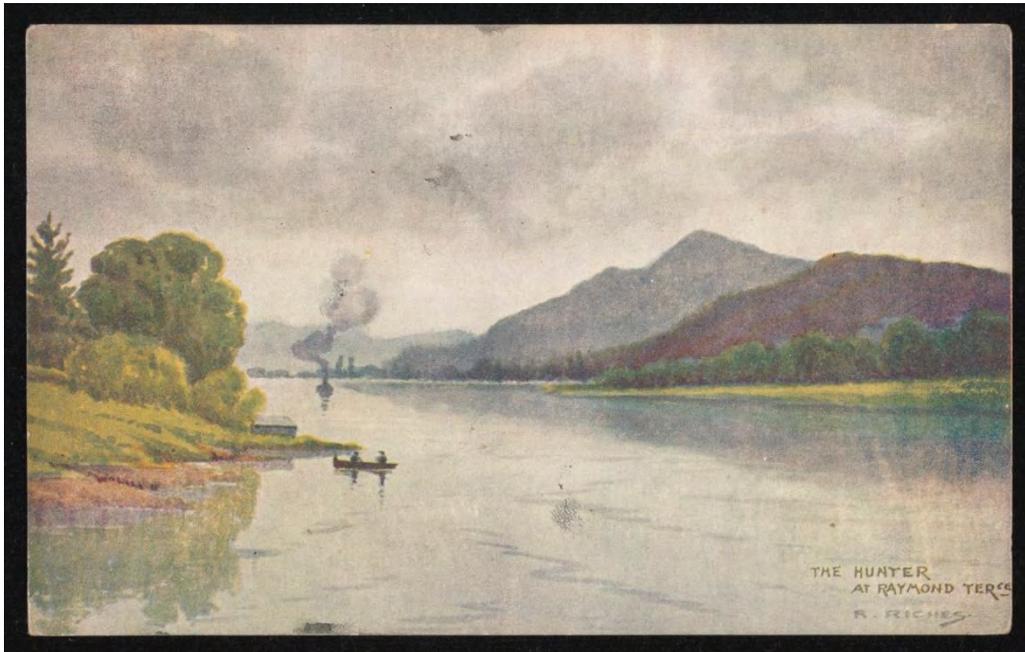


Figure 2. provides insight into what the river and surrounding land looked like in 1906. It is from a postcard stamped with the date 9 April 1906, painted by Dr R. Riches. (National Museum of Australia, 2020)

Scott Bevan, a local and former ABC foreign correspondent, kayaked down the Hunter River, and wrote in this book, *The Hunter: paddling through time along a great Australian river* of the experience:

“One of the things that struck me is that the river nurtures us and defines us, but we have fallen into the habit of ignoring it.”

“You are paddling through history.”

“This is a member of the community. The River has given life to the community. The community is there because of the river system, and should be respected, nurtured, and treated as such.” (ABC News, 2013)

What do you know about the history of Raymond Terrace and the Hunter River system?

Share your knowledge in the comment section below.

Crossing the River

Raymond Terrace was home to two ferries known as the 'Nelsons Plains Punt' and the 'Millers Forest Punt.' The Nelsons Plains punt begun operating on the Williams River around 1830 and continued operation until 1965 when the Fitzgerald Bridge opened next to it. The Millers Forest Punt was located on the Hunter River near the *Junction Inn* on Hunter Street, Raymond Terrace.



Figure 3. The final voyage of the Nelsons Plains Punt on the opening day of the Fitzgerald Bridge, 16 October, 1965.

Source: (Department of Main Roads, 1965)

The ferries connected the community of Raymond Terrace to their neighbours across the river and provided them with a way to conduct farming business over the river. To operate the ferry:

“The passengers seized the rope at one end of the ferry and walked to the other, and then returned to the other end to repeat the performance” (Dungog Chronicle, 1941).



Figure 4. An undated photo of farmers with their herd on one of the Raymond Terrace punts. Source: (Newcastle Herald, 2013)

The ferries were described as an “escape from the helter-skelter race along the roads... [an] opportunity to absorb the peace of the surrounding scene” (Maitland Mercury, 1967) and allowed those from Raymond Terrace and surrounding communities to travel into neighbouring towns for work, school, and recreation. Since it was the only way to travel to Millers Forest and Nelsons Plains directly, the townspeople grew frustrated when the ferries’ timetable was disrupted due to delays, floods, or a breakdown. The following audio recording is an excerpt from the Raymond Terrace Examiner (1951), it is accompanied by an undated image (Newcastle Herald, 2013b) of the Farley family leaving the Millers Forest punt on a sulky/horse cart as they move to their new house in Millers Forest.



Figure 5. Audio recording of family relocating from Raymond Terrace

(Audio recording is attached separately)

What do you remember about the Raymond Terrace ferries?

Please share your memories in the comment section below.

Living with Floods

This year, the 24 February 2020 marks the 65th anniversary of the 1955 Hunter Valley Flood, which changed the geography and citizens of Raymond Terrace forever. The country is currently experiencing extreme weather events high temperatures, bushfires, and flash flooding, Raymond Terrace has historically been plagued by heavy rainfall, made destructive by its proximity to the river.

At its peak, the 1955 flood reached a height of 15 feet (4.57 metres) in Hunter, William and King Streets, engulfing many houses and business buildings.



Figure 7 Flood height markers in Raymond Terrace. (Port Stephens Examiner, 1981)



Figure 8. King Street, Raymond Terrace, during the 1955 flood. (Raymond Terrace Examiner, 1972)

The flood also resulted in the CBD being relocated from King Street, which had been the business and shopping hub for approximately 125 years, to William Street, one block further back from the river (Watts, 2015).

The flood undoubtedly had damaging effects on the businesses and livelihood of residents. Newcastle Morning Herald (1950) reported that the water from the 1950 flood (which was of a much smaller scale), cut off all telephone communication, and its high levels across the Pacific Highway essentially isolated the town. Food either was delivered to the town via launch or gathered by residents in rowing boats.

“They [the rowing boats] are lined up along the street where normally motor cars and horse-drawn vehicles are parked.” (‘Boats Moored to Verandahs’, 1950)

The 1955 flood had an even more damaging effect, with many homes becoming victims of the flood’s destruction. Many accounts suggest that although families did prepare for times of flood, they simply could not fight the extent of the 1955 flood.

Resident John Shearer has such a memory:

“Many people living in the flood area pre the 1955 flood were always prepared for minor flooding. They always lifted their floor covering and furniture to higher ground, some placed them on 44-gallon drums, and some were placed in the ceiling of their homes. This could happen up to three times a year after heavy rain. Because everyone got caught out by the sudden rising of water it was too late to be fully prepared and homes had to be abandoned. After the flood, the streets, homes and surrounding area was covered in thick smelling mud and all types of rubbish. All the damaged goods were placed outside of buildings into heaps and on the footpaths ready for pickups. The homes were full of muddy water and thick mud, some could be hosed out and had to be removed by shovel. All of the buildings had to have repairs carried out before family members could move back in. Damage was that great that some had to re-wire their buildings for electricity and replace their brass light fittings before power could be restored. It took months before the town started to get back on its feet again. A lot of us had seen the 1955 flood and I hope we don’t have to see another one.” (Shearer, 2020)

Former resident Jan Wirth also had such an experience in her own home:

“At the peak of the flood, I recall my Dad coming home at midnight after finishing an afternoon shift at the Masonite factory. With the help of a friend he moved all of our furniture upstairs. I recall watching him and seeing snakes and animals flowing past in the swiftly moving water. The next day we were rescued from the house in a surf boat and taken to the top of William Street near the clock tower. The clean-up of the house was horrendous, but my Mum and Dad just got on with it. Soon after we moved to Bareena St where floods were no longer going to bother us. And so, began the best years of my life!” (Wirth, 2020)

Unfortunately, after similar experiences, many townspeople reacted similarly, choosing to relocate elsewhere, leaving the historic town behind. One man was quoted in the Port Stephen’s Examiner as saying:

"As the water receded, I thought: 'Righto - that's the last time I live by the river'." (Watts, 2015)

What do you remember about the 1955 Hunter Valley Flood?

Please share your memories in the comment section below.

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