

PARK BATTERY

The name 'Shepherd's Hill' is derived from the name 'Sheep Pasture Hills' which was given to the place by Lieutenant Colonel Paterson when he first visited the site in 1801, because the steep grassy slopes reminded him of England. The area was mined for coal during the 1840s, with a copper smelting works operating on the site. Huts were constructed for miners and their families.

In 1879, Colonel Scratchley proposed a self-contained and self-defensible fort with the purpose of protecting the settlement as well as the Newcastle coalfields from foreign attack.

Military occupation of the site began in the 1890s, with the construction of an 8-inch disappearing gun emplacement with underground rooms. This was developed in response to the threat of an attack from Russia. A cottage was also built, and this was first inhabited by Master Gunner Wollitt, when he was master to the gunner for the Shepherds Hill and Fort Scratchley emplacement. There were two batteries in operation at Shepherds Hill, one to the south of the site near Cliff Street and one to the north, above York Drive. The second battery has since been demolished. These two batteries were established as part of an integrated project to advance the defences of the city of Newcastle. This project included the strengthening of fortifications at Fort Scratchley.

In 1896 a gun was constructed at Shepherds Hill, one mile south of Fort Scratchley, in order to strengthen Newcastle's defence system. The disappearing gun, also known as a 'jumper' or 'hydro-pneumatic gun' had been developed in 1883 and seemed to offer cheap, effective protection with the benefit of being discreet. Major General Scratchley ordered many of these new guns for the Australian colonies, despite the reservations that the War Office had about the guns. The gun was supported above the gun pit by a carriage and after firing, the gun would contract down below the parapet to be reloaded. The energy of this contraction was absorbed in compressing hydraulic rams which then returned the gun to firing position.

However, this weapon had two significant drawbacks. Firstly, it only offered limited elevation and secondly, the time taken to reload the gun was a hindrance. The new warships that had been developed demanded a faster rate of fire which could only be achieved by a gun which stayed in position and could be simultaneously fired and loaded.

The British Government discontinued this system of defence in Australian colonies after a few years. In 1906, the Shepherds Hill gun was deemed unsafe, and this, in combination with the fact that Fort Scratchley did not have a clear view of Stockton Bight led to the establishment of Fort Wallace at Stockton.

By 1939, Newcastle was one of the primary sources of munitions production for NSW and during WWII it became a significant industrial area. The company BHP which operated in Newcastle, had been preparing for the outbreak of war since Essington Lewis, its head had made an overseas trip in 1934. Munitions productions began at the steelworks and metallurgists were forced to adapt new technologies involved in manufacturing alloys not

previously been produced in Australia. After acquiring the steelworks at Port Kembla, BHP became the only integrated iron and steel producer in Australia.

Thus, the defence of Newcastle had an importance beyond the immediate area and was significant to Australia as a whole. The majority of the state's shells were produced in Newcastle and it was also the site of the NSW Dockyards. In order to protect these productions, a new system of defence was undertaken, which included the strengthening of Fort Wallace at Stockton and construction of two new close defence batteries, Shepherd's Hill and Fort Scratchley. Both sites were armed with 6 inch MK VII ex naval guns and controlled from an Observation Post on the site of the old 8 inch battery on Shepherd's Hill. All defences in area were controlled by the Observation Post on Shepherds Hill.

As part of the strengthening of Newcastle's defence system, various new projects were undertaken at Shepherds Hill during WWII, such as accommodation for troops stationed on site and erection of the No's 1 and 2 searchlights and engine rooms and driving a 100 metre long tunnel to provide a housing for the No. 1 searchlight, 60 metres above sea level. The cottage was used as an Officers Mess for troops stationed at Shepherds Hill.

The most important construction was that of an Observation Post. The natural height of the hill as well as the ruggedness of the hills made Shepherds Hill a good location for this construction. The Observation Post was 106m above sea level and was used as a range finder for Fort Wallace, which had an Observation Post only 22m above sea level. This was unusual because it meant that the post was 6000 yards away from the guns that it controlled, but the extra height of Shepherds Hill was necessary in order to have a clear view of targets. New technologies in instant communication via electric telegraph made this possible.

During WWII the Observation Post was simultaneously **run by all three services; the Royal Australian Navy, the Army and the Royal Australian Air Force**. The Port War Signal Station was controlled by the Navy and used to collect information on ship movements. The Early warning radar was manned by the Air Force. Those functions manned by the Navy were the Fire Commander's Post, Officer Commanding Searchlights, a Fortress Observation Post, a Battery Observation Post for Fort Wallace as well as one for Park Battery and a searchlight direction station for Park Battery.

The development of the Observation Post at Shepherds Hill during WW II reflects Australia's growing fear of invasion. One of the reasons for this concern was the realisation that Australia could not rely as heavily on Britain for protection as it had in the past. There seemed a real threat of a Japanese invasion, especially since the League of Nations mandate, which allowed Japan to administer various Islands in the Pacific. Thus, defence of the coast was a priority. Fort Scratchley, which had close ties to Shepherds Hill, responded to an attack on the city by a Japanese submarine in June 1942. This is the only place on the mainland of Australia to have returned fire. The batteries at Shepherds Hill formed an integrated system with the batteries at Fort Scratchley, Fort Wallace at Stockton and at Tomaree on Port Stephens. Shepherds Hill had the role of coordinating this system.

In 1946, a policy of classifying Australia's defences in three different categories was adopted. **Newcastle's defences were classified as category 'B', which meant that they were to be kept fully operational and stored in such a way that they could be quickly installed in the appropriate location during wartime. The only other city in NSW classified as 'B' was Sydney.**

In 1956, following orders from the British Government, Coast Artillery was disbanded. In the 1950s to early 1960s, the Gunner's Cottage at Shepherds Hill was inhabited by Jack Green, the Officer Commanding the School Cadets. It was used by the Army until the 1960s. Following this, it housed Newcastle city's 'Artist in Residence', as part of a program aimed towards promoting young local artists.

Between 1988 and 1992 Tony Steinbeck lived in the Gunner's Cottage.

The land is now held by the State Government's Department of Lands, with Newcastle City Council appointed as Trustee. The cottage has been renovated and is now used by the Newcastle branch of the Volunteer Coastal Patrol.

Along with Fort Scratchley and South Head in Sydney, Shepherds Hill is one of the few sites in NSW where fortifications are still intact. As with Shepherds Hill, South Head is a natural defence point of the coast. South Head formed part of an integrated system of defence of the Sydney coast-line with other sites of strategic importance being Middle Head and North Head. The remaining fortifications at South Head are illustrative of an open system of defence. Open batteries were cheaper to construct than closed batteries or casemates and were also effective against new warfare technologies such as explosive shells. This system of defence was implemented at South Head during the 1870s. Although South Head, North Head and Middle did have disappearing guns, these were replaced in the 1890s by Quick Firing Guns, which were in open concrete pits. In contrast, the system at Shepherds Hill is illustrative of a closed system of defence, with the disappearing gun and underground passages providing physical evidence of this system. Thus, if South Head and Shepherds Hill are looked at together, an archaeology of changing military technologies becomes apparent.