

# THE STORY OF NEWCASTLE YHA



Girvan YHA



Carrington YHA

*"Today's travellers enjoy affordable accommodation because of yesteryear's volunteers who built and maintained hostels, often with donated materials"*

Tom Blunden, YHA volunteer, who taught in the 1950s at a bush school in Girvan that later became a hostel.



Newcastle Beach YHA

*A bush school; a church built by former convicts; a gentlemen's club that became a nurses' home - all went on to become YHA hostels in the Newcastle region.*

## 1960 - Girvan

Located 60kms north of Newcastle, Girvan was named after a school inspector's Scottish home town. The hostel there was originally a schoolhouse, linking it to the origins of YHA and Hostelling International (HI) where a German teacher, Richard Schirrmann, exploring the countryside with his students in 1909, got caught in a storm and slept on straw in a school. It became this teacher's dream to provide young travellers with temporary accommodation, resulting in a network of youth hostels around the world.

At Girvan, there were too few children in the area between 1886 and 1904 to have a formal public school, so local youngsters attended a 'provisional school' a few days a week. Around 1902 to 1904 a one-teacher bush public school opened for between 10 and 30 pupils, but by 1957 it closed due to low enrolments. The timber building became derelict, and YHA acquired it around 1964, with unpaid volunteers transforming it into a 12-bed youth hostel. Its rustic charm included three-tier bunks, 'tea-drinking competitions' and outside 'thunder boxes' for toilets! Keith and Glenys Grey were the key holders for the hostel, however with fewer guests staying, it closed in 2008 and the property returned to the NSW government's Lands Department.

## 1960 - Carrington

Just 40 kilometres north of Newcastle, in the Port Stephens area, was a stone church that would become a hostel at Carrington. The area owed its name to the first chairman of the region's Australian Agricultural Company (ACC). Former convicts built the church out of rubble stones, bound by crushed-up oyster shells, and it opened in 1847, being consecrated in 1851. The ACC, having thrived in the area, gave the site in perpetuity to the Anglican Church, and former convicts, soldiers, and free settlers worshipped there.

Over time, however, the church became dilapidated and in 1888 a parliamentarian named Robert Hoddle Driberg White organised its restoration. Worshippers had to travel by boat or on poorly-maintained roads to reach the church, though, and the building was used infrequently, again falling into such disrepair that a large tree grew through its roof. The church, first called Holy Trinity, and later St Andrew's, was deconsecrated by the time that YHA members, impressed by the area's beauty and its proximity to Newcastle, decided to lease it.

YHA members sold boomerangs as part of their restoration fundraising efforts, and it took four years for volunteers and professionals to carry out the necessary repairs. The 12-bed hostel opened in 1965 with 300 people celebrating by flying kites and having a campfire sing-along. More than 20,000 travellers had taken advantage of the hostel's quiet rural atmosphere by 1992 when the hostel closed to make way for a church-run youth facility.

## 1990 - Newcastle

The Newcastle Beach YHA building formerly belonged to the exclusive Newcastle Club, set up in 1885 as a 'gentlemen's club' for social interaction and to provide accommodation. The purpose-built club had been at its Pacific Street address, opposite Newcastle Hospital, since 1911.

In the middle of World War I, nurses at the hospital were crowded into ward spaces that were urgently needed to accommodate patients instead. So in 1916 club members decided, as part of the war effort, to relocate their own premises elsewhere and to hand over the site to be used as a nurses' home. Nurses began living in the building in 1917 and photographs from that era show them using the ballroom as a recreation room. The building remained part of the hospital until 1997, when it was sold and renovated, retaining many of the original features. It opened as Newcastle Beach YHA in August 1998.

The building retained its heritage links with its ornate patterned ceilings and fireplace in the large ground floor common room. The luxurious leather lounges also hint at the grandeur of its 'gentlemen's club' origins.



This YHA is part of the world's largest budget accommodation network, Hostelling International, which provides more than 4,000 YHA/HI hostels in over 80 countries. YHA is a not-for-profit membership organisation providing travellers with quality accommodation and services.