Auburn

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Auburn, the centre of the municipality of the same name, is in western Sydney on the main western railway line and accessible by Parramatta Road or the M4. It lies on the traditional lands of the Dharug peoples. The original vegetation of the area was open forest, dominated by woolybutt red gums, with grey box, ironbark and stringy bark. The land is slightly undulating, with a minor ridge running south along Park Road and a gradual slope west towards Duck River.

Governor Phillip rowed up Parramatta River with an exploring party in April 1788. They landed approximately where Duck River meets Parramatta River, and walked to the present site of Parramatta. Returning, they saw ducks, which provided a name for the river and the creek.[1]

A track from Sydney to Parramatta was developed early in the 1790s, though the river remained the main means of transport. The track ran about a mile south of the current Parramatta Road.[2] Land in the area was granted to free settlers and ex-convicts. Most grants were small, often only 30 to 100 acres (12 to 40 hectares). Larger grants were given to prominent merchants and officials, such as James Chisholm, a merchant, who received 600 acres (240 hectares).

The first areas to be taken up were along Parramatta Road and the river. Thomas Bates received a grant on 1 January 1806, as did Thomas Francis.[3] Land to the south was not taken up until the 1820s.[4] By 1828, there was a thin spread of settlers. These included James Wright, who conducted a hotel on his grant of 1823.[5] Other hotels and inns soon appeared, providing food, lodging and liquor to travellers.[6]

Private coach services ran along Parramatta Road, but a regular service did not emerge until John Raine's began in 1823. Coaches ran until the railway took away their passengers.[7]

The soil proved too poor for agriculture, but early industries included timbergetting, and brickmaking, which began with the establishment of the Duck River Brickworks by Charles Linney.

The first railway from Sydney, opened in 1855, ran to Parramatta Junction (now Granville) and made suburban development possible. Auburn emerged from subdivisions by John Yelverton Mills near the railway station. He named it after the village in Oliver Goldsmith's poem 'The Deserted Village'. From the 1860s to the 1880s, a number of main roads were officially aligned and gazetted through the area, and in 1880, when local residents sought a postal service at the railway platform, a postal inspector reported that there were about 40 residences with a population of about 200.[8] In 1911, 200 new buildings were built at Auburn,[9] and in 1912–13 the

suburb had the 11th largest number of new buildings in the metropolitan area, with 268 approvals.[10]

There was only a single store in Auburn in 1885, but within a year others had been established.[11] The first bank is believed to have been the City Bank, in 1892;[12] the Government Savings Bank opened branches at Auburn in 1912.[13] The municipality was proclaimed on 19 February 1892, and the first meeting of Auburn Council held on 13 April 1892, although there was no Town Hall until June 1898.[14] The Government built many workers' houses in the area and helped set up semi-public bodies to do the same.

Industrial development from the 1870s onwards was crucial to the way the suburb evolved, and this process was set in motion from the 1860s, when the NSW government began buying small lots of railway rolling stock locally.

When tenders were let in 1878, Henry Vale & Co acquired some of the work. The company's works were then near Darling Harbour.[15] About 1884 they moved to Auburn, where they built a number of locomotives.[16] Contracts continued throughout the 1880s.[17] By 1888, the firm had built 42 engines, of which six were suburban tank engines for the government.[18]

RA Ritchie of Parramatta also obtained some of the railway contracts, but passed the work to Hudson Brothers, which had a large works at Clyde and had absorbed Ritchie's company.[19] Ritchie Brothers, a separate enterprise started by his sons, began operations in Auburn about 1884.[20] The plant was near Auburn station, with a spur line running into the works. By 1911, it was employing 500 men manufacturing railway rolling stock, wagons, and agricultural implements, as well as carrying out general engineering work.[21] Its agricultural machines, such as wool presses, wheat strippers and binders, won numerous prizes.

Other important industrial ventures in the area were the car and tractor maker Caldwell–Vale, which set up in the Vale Brothers works at Queen Street, Auburn, in 1910, and Purcell Engineering, formed in 1916, which manufactured drilling and grinding machines, precision lathes and oil locomotives, which were used in cane-fields and on construction projects.[22]

In 1905 the Auburn Brick, Tile and Pottery Company was set up in Princes Road, taking over the business of the Duck River Brickworks. The new company pressured the railway department for a railway to Regents Park, particularly since it wanted a line to allow better access to markets. Initially successful, the company went out of business in September 1935.

Other works included Mashman's pottery, on Parramatta Road, near Hampstead Street, in 1914.[23] The Clyde Brick Company was incorporated on 12 January 1911 and operated on a site bounded by Beaconsfield, Newton and Carnarvon streets.

By 1914, Auburn was one of the principal shopping centres on the railway line between the city and Parramatta, with only Burwood as a serious competitor. During the 1920s, chain stores came into greater prominence and they began to suck away the custom of the smaller, family-owned stores. Local shopping centres reached their peak in the 1930s, when disposable income rose, but few could afford a car.

One of Auburn's most famous sons was Jack Lang who, as NSW premier in the 1930s Depression, irritated the forces of conservatism and transgressed the principles of sound government. Lang had previously worked for Robert Harley in his Auburn real estate office. In November 1901, Lang set up business with HH Dawes in opposition to Harley.[24] Lang also became active in the local Labor Party, eventually being elected to the NSW Parliament, and finally becoming premier. Lang and his government were summarily sacked by the NSW governor, Sir Philip Game, on 13 May 1932.

In the immediate postwar period, growth was boosted by government initiatives: the Housing Commission was active, planning an initial group of 83 houses. But it was the gazettal of the Strata Title Act of 1961 that had the greatest impact throughout the suburb, permitting the erection of multi-unit housing blocks. Later still, 'cluster development' from the 1970s onwards alleviated the worst aspects of the standard home unit blocks.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the number of Middle Eastern immigrants settling in Auburn had grown, making Auburn one of the main Arabic/Middle Eastern centres in Sydney, vying only with Canterbury. In the 1991 census, 47 per cent of the population of the municipality had been born overseas.

By the late 1950s, the regional shopping centre had arrived in Sydney, with detrimental impacts on local 'high street' shops. The redevelopment at Parramatta, which included branches of Grace Brothers and David Jones, particularly affected Auburn. On the other hand, the decline of the small corner shop appears to have been arrested by the diverse ethnic mix of the district: many still function, selling goods in demand by people from varied cultural backgrounds.

The suburb is also known for its Japanese Gardens, officially opened in September 1977, and the Gallipoli Mosque, a prominent landmark beside the railway, completed in 2000.

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