

## NEW NORFOLK IN EVOLUTION

By

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(With two text figures.)

### ABSTRACT

An account is given of the town of New Norfolk, Tasmania, from its early colonial beginnings until the present day. The town owes its foundation to Governor Macquarie, its continuation to a productive immediate hinterland and the heritage of an early administrative function, and its present position, as the State's sixth ranking town, dominantly to one industry—newsprint manufacture.

### INTRODUCTION

Late in the spring of 1811 Lachlan Macquarie, Governor of New South Wales, viewed the three-year-old settlement of New Norfolk, Van Diemen's Land, from the vantage point of the elevated Government farm on the south bank of the Derwent River. Behind him, between this place and the colony's main settlement at Hobart Town, the river had forced its way between two mountains, but upstream the valley broadened. Fresh water was at hand, and for two miles above the Government farm the river was navigable. On the north bank were the many small farms of the Norfolk Islanders, but there were none here on the southern side; from the river the land rose over one hundred feet to a flat, basalt capped river terrace which terminated half a mile upstream against a high wooded hill. In his 'Journals' Macquarie wrote 'This situation appeared to me so eligible and so remarkably well adapted for a township, being twenty miles only from Hobart Town, that I have determined to erect one here for the District of New Norfolk . . . .'

### IN THE BEGINNING

#### The Norfolk Islanders

In the same year that Van Diemen's Land was first settled initial moves were made to relocate the settlers of Norfolk Island. First occupied in 1788, the island became a prison for the worst criminals and doubly convicted of New South Wales, but also, and increasingly, it was a home for free settlers. Opinions differed as to the island's potential, but factors against its continued maintenance were the isolation, the agriculturally difficult climate, and a population (dominantly of ex-soldiers and sailors) largely ignorant of the arts of husbandry. In 1803 Governor Phillip was instructed to move some of the settlers to Van Diemen's Land, but his successor (King) and the Island's settlers were equally unwilling to see the order fulfilled. By the end of 1806 there were still seven hundred people on the Island, over three-quarters of the total of 1803, and nearly all

were free settlers. However, the rate of evacuation was considerably increased in the next two years as the British authorities, impatient with colonial tardiness, issued new orders for removal, offering favourable terms of transfer with respect to land, homes, and immediate requirements for provisions and labour in Van Diemen's Land. By October 1808, 554 Norfolk Islanders had arrived. Of these only twenty-three were convicts, and nearly half the remainder were children. If any new arrivals were satisfied with the terms of their relocation they were soon to be disillusioned. The land promised was available but the other promises, so blithely made in far-off Britain, could not possibly be met. The influx more than doubled the population of Van Diemen's Land at a time when those already there were struggling to survive. The more resourceful of the Islanders accepted what was available and set to building for themselves, but most were resentful of the situation; many bartered their land for easier living in the town, eventually as Walker records, to 'sink out of sight in poverty and wretchedness'.

#### The founding of New Norfolk

The ship 'Sydney' brought the first of the Norfolk Islanders to Van Diemen's Land in 1805. On board was the Irish exile Joseph Holt who, on arrival in Hobart Town, was despatched by Governor Collins to look for a suitable place for the newcomers to settle, in the Derwent area. Holt's exploration apparently probed little further than the present site of New Norfolk, and he reported to Collins that although there was land for good farms it was not of sufficient extent for a large settlement. Nevertheless the district became the home of most of the Islanders who took up their land in 1807 and 1808. They were the pioneers: when Lieutenant Laycock passed through the region in 1807 the lands were unoccupied, but in May the following year the Revd Robert Knopwood was able to record a trip up the Derwent in the course of which he was the guest of one of the first New Norfolk residents.

John Oxley reported on the settlement as it was in 1810:

A considerable portion of the Norfolk Settlers have chosen to settle on the lands at the Upper part of the River; their district is named New Norfolk and is represented as being a most delightful Country, the land contiguous to the Banks of the River being extremely fertile and not liable to flood; extensive plains and rising Grounds afford Pasturage for any

Number of Cattle; a number of small rivulets, intersecting the Country in every direction, is an advantage the Country near the Sea Coast is deprived of; the main River, being navigable for Boats for a considerable distance, affords an easy Communication with the principal Settlement. These Lands have not been settled for more than 18 Months, and appearances are so favourable as to Warrant the Expectation that with proper Care and Management a short Space of time will preclude the Necessity of further Importations of Grain . . .

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The following year the district was visited by Lachlan Macquarie, new Governor of New South Wales. By this time a Government farm had been established on the vantage point from which Macquarie chose the town site. During his visit he inspected the farms of the district, which extended for four miles along the north bank of the river. Of their condition he wrote 'the soil . . . in general is excellent and there is at present every appearance of a plentiful and abundant harvest; but the houses of the settlers are mean and badly built, and themselves miserably clothed'. According to the historian West 'their frail dwellings soon exhibited all signs of decay, and their ground was exhausted by continual cropping'.

New Norfolk, then, held the Colony's greatest concentration of free settlers, as at this time the Norfolk Islanders constituted nearly half the total population, and most of the remainder were convict. And, beyond the two main centres of Hobart Town and Launceston, it was the first district in the Colony to be closely settled.

### The village of Falls

The rural population of New Norfolk, fairly dense in relation to that of Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales generally (the average land grant to Norfolk Islanders was about forty acres), would have given rise to urban development without Macquarie's declaration of a town site, and even in the face of this a small village developed near the banks of the Derwent at the place now known as Lawitta, but then known as The Falls, or simply, Falls. As the old name suggests (albeit with exaggeration) bedrock here broke the surface of the river, establishing the head of navigation. This factor, and its location central to the rural community, made the site a more logical one for a village than that of the planned town, at the downstream periphery of settlement. The village is named on a chart of Van Diemen's Land published by Joseph Cross of London in 1838, but there is little recorded of it; most attention is given to 'Elizabeth Town', as New Norfolk was first known, which in accord with Macquarie's desires developed as the administrative centre of the district. The only description found of the village is in J. Syme's 'Nine Years in Van Diemen's Land', written in the 1840s:

' . . . though it has not the honour of being a town . . . we find many shops for the ordinary articles of tea, sugar,

tobacco, rum and slop clothing, a medical resident, and some approximation to a country village at home'.

There are earlier references to a ferry across the river at this point, although there was also one at Elizabeth Town, and when in the mid 1820s plans were first mooted for the construction of a bridge to serve the district, the Land Commissioners investigating the matter were unanimous that it should be at Falls. However with the extension of rural development further up the Derwent, and amalgamation of some of the early New Norfolk small holdings, demands on the little village declined in favour of the administrative centre, Elizabeth Town. In 1840-41 the bridge was eventually built, but it was at the town, not at Falls. Some thirty-six years later the village still had a school, an inn, and the chapel, but in the 1880s its functions ceased, and the name of Falls was heard no more.

### Some early town plans

Following the selection of the site for Elizabeth Town in 1811 Macquarie was concerned that his requests be carried out. The next year the deputy to the Surveyor-General of New South Wales, James Meehan, was instructed in the course of a survey to mark out the site of the town. He came to Van Diemen's Land in 1813 to carry out the task, and a plan was produced the following year. The earliest plan still available was produced by G. W. Evans about 1824 (signed, but not dated); the streets were marked out and named, but both names and street pattern were later changed. This plan probably never existed on the ground: the rigidity of the grid was not practicable on the steeper slopes of the terrace, but also an open square, four times the size of the present Arthur Square, occupied a wastefully large proportion of the flat land. Of the few buildings shown on this early plan the schoolhouse was begun in 1823 and Turriff Lodge, the Governor's retreat, was built some time prior to 1817. Accompanying a painting of this by J. Lycett is a note that it 'was frequently resorted to by the late Lieutenant-Governors Davey and Sorell, as an agreeable relaxation from the bustle and fatigue of public business.'

Another plan of the town was produced in 1833 by W. S. Sharland, an Assistant Government Surveyor of the time. The differences between this and the earlier plan are quite profound, the first real urban development having taken place in the interim. With the exception of Bridge Street (which was constructed soon after the bridge was proposed in 1836) the plan, within the 1833 limits, has remained almost unchanged (see Figs. 1 and 2).

### Town growth in the Colonial context

Development of Van Diemen's Land was slow until about 1820, partly because of the difficulties encountered in establishing agriculture under foreign conditions but dominantly because of the isolating effects of the Napoleonic Wars. By 1820 however the way was cleared for progress. The realization of a wool market in Britain coincided, and was associated, with a changed attitude among British capitalists. Once again they were seeking outlets for overseas investment, and for the first

time the Australian colonies were seen as having possibilities. Government immigration policy had also changed: now capitalist immigration to Australia was favoured, to absorb the convict workforce, and regulations were designed to this end. The result was a large-scale granting of land to immigrants who could afford proof of capital, and the 1820s saw rapid occupation of new territories. The town of New Norfolk, under official sanction, at last began to develop: in 1825 the 'Hobart Town Gazette' reported—

'We understand with much pleasure that New Norfolk, the favourite retirement of Colonel Sorell and other distinguished characters, is rapidly becoming improved. The Church . . . has been considerably enlarged. Several most excellent buildings have been commenced . . . Everything therefore indicates the rapid rise into special eminence of that very beautiful town; and that ere long it will constitute a flourishing mart for at least one fourth of the Colony we think with others is a supposition far from improbable.'

By 1831 there were some substantial buildings in the town, including 'several excellent private dwellings'. Among these were Woodbridge, built by W. S. Sharland in 1827, and Hallgreen, home of Robert Officer, first Government Medical Officer for the district. Both still stand above the south bank of the Derwent, a beautiful location early favoured by the more wealthy residents.

This decade of development saw considerable official attention focused on New Norfolk. Governor Arthur was anxious that it should become the chief town of the Colony, and although this grandiose scheme was coldly dismissed by British authorities the town did become the centre for the Colony's first Police District, and on this account a number of public buildings were required. These included soldiers' barracks and convicts' quarters, and in 1827 work on the hospital was begun, continuing over some years as further extensions were required. In 1832 when Governor Arthur ordered all Government invalids to be transferred there it became the Colony's military hospital, and yet more extensions were needed when a few years later provision was made for mental patients.

The building boom of the late 1820s and early 1830s both public and private (many buildings of a more modest nature were constructed on the south side of High Street—see Fig. 1), testifies to the rapid development of the Derwent Valley in general and New Norfolk in particular. The 'Hobart Town Courier' of April 14, 1832, refers to 'that thriving settlement', and the stage coaches (the first between towns in the Colony) which had infused a 'vivifying spirit of circulating activity throughout the district'. By this time too a regular steamer service was operating, invaluable to the settlers in the interior of the district in forwarding produce to market with a certainty formerly unknown.

The circumstances which so favoured the town in this period were not to continue for very long after. The bridging of the Derwent in the early 1840s had little effect on the town's growth, indi-

cating the slower tempo of the times. Apart from the bridge toll-house no building was generated on the north bank; even fifty years later the only buildings on this side of the river (with the exception of a few farm houses) were those in connection with the railway.

## RECESSION AND RECOVERY

### The Van Diemen's Land scene

This state of reduced activity was symptomatic of all Van Diemen's Land, and was the unrecognised herald of stagnation. British immigration policy had again changed, this time in response to the influence of Wakefieldian ideas, and the Ripon land regulations of 1831 were the result. Hereafter land was to be released by sale only, grants being allowed only if already promised. Governor Arthur favoured the old grants system and took full advantage of the 'grants promised' loophole, with the result that more land was granted than sold in the following decade. But land was a limited resource, and with decreasing opportunities in the island and increasing mainland competition the Colony began to lose attraction, not only to immigrants but to some of the early settlers and the native born as well. Until this time the general trend of Van Diemen's Land fortunes had been upward, with markets both in Britain and mainland Australia. Wool was the major overseas export, but in intercolonial trade wheat was the chief item. Until the 1840s Van Diemen's Land was the 'Granary of Australia', but from this time it suffered increasing competition from South Australia to the extent that wheat growing was no longer profitable, except for the small and decreasing local market, and with the best land alienated by grants decline of the Colony was imminent.

The mainland gold rushes of the early 1850s greatly speeded migration from Van Diemen's Land, leaving a residue of the extremes of rich and poor. The effects of this, plus loss of markets and lack of economic opportunity, were obscured at first by great demands from the goldfields for primary produce, but with some stabilization there after the initial rushes this demand sharply slackened and the full effects of the Colony's economic plight were realized. Even when gold no longer attracted immigrants the advantages of the developing colonies on the Australian mainland were enough to keep Tasmania, as it was by now known, well in the background. The depression, deepest in the first decade, cast a blight over the land for twenty years until mineral discoveries, and agricultural pioneering in the north and north-west, at last brought promise of a brighter future.

### Change in the New Norfolk region

The depression was particularly marked in the south of the Colony, and New Norfolk's position as a leading district was well and truly lost, but even so it fared better than other old agricultural districts around Hobart Town. The pastoral districts further up the Derwent and along its tributary the Clyde remained throughout the lean years a prime wool producing region, and closer to New Norfolk agricultural pursuits of a different kind were soon to bring new life to the district.

Hopgrowing, which had been carried out on a small scale in the Derwent region from the 1830s, became a much more tenable occupation with the success of experiments by the enterprising Derwent family of Shoobridge. With this stimulus hop acreage increased markedly from 1864 along the river flats and low terraces around and upstream from New Norfolk, and further strides were made after 1870 when Tasmania's natural advantages in this field were shown to outweigh the disadvantages of Victorian protective tariffs. In these years orcharding too became a commercial proposition, promoted in the Derwent by the same landholders. Original markets were in free-trading New South Wales, but with the introduction of refrigeration in the 1880s export overseas also became possible.

Revival of agriculture in the New Norfolk region had little marked effect on the development of the town: it grew, but only slowly. When the 'Traveller through Tasmania' passed through in 1885 he was impressed, as visitors usually are, by the beauty of the river, where 'somewhat antiquated houses lay more or less hidden among bright and pleasant garden shrubberies'. But in the main street he found very few buildings that could be called 'handsome or imposing'; away from the river it was not much of a town. By the end of the 19th Century most building was still contained within the area laid out in Sharland's plan, although there was the first suggestion of ribbon development along the Glenora and Lachlan roads west and south of the town.

#### **The Lachlan Park Asylum**

From 1848 the one-time military hospital was exclusively for mental patients, and catered for the entire Colony. As the island's population increased so did the demands on the hospital, and new buildings were added in the late 1880s and early 1890s. In the new century more land was acquired for hospital purposes, and by 1921 nursing staff accounted for eight per cent of the town's population, and probably about twenty per cent of the workforce. Thus although the institution created little direct demand for local business (supplying many of its own services and provisions), in terms of income generated it was a vital factor in the prosperity of the little town.

#### **Country town**

The asylum was evidently an important factor in town growth from about 1890, but earlier than this the economic life of the town had received something of a fillip little reflected in physical expansion. From 1868 to 1890 there was some increase in retailing and other service functions but little in the town to account for this. The stimulus came from the immediate region, where horticultural practices were revolutionizing the scene and reviving the economy. Settlements and farms around New Norfolk were heavily dependent on the town; the nearest villages to offer the most basic services were Macquarie Plains (Gretna) and Glenora, twelve miles away. These, and the more remote valley settlements, probably also relied on New Norfolk for their less frequent demands.

Directories of the time indicate increases in retailing outlets in the new century, particularly in the 1920s. From 1921 to 1933 the town's popula-

tion increased by six per cent (see Table 1), and the surrounding rural areas also increased their demands. Contrary to the prevailing situation in Tasmanian country districts the population of localities around New Norfolk was on the increase.

Prior to 1921 the only processing or manufacturing establishments at New Norfolk were of a very rudimentary nature, or very short lived. The only industrial activity which endured was sawmilling, which was pursued rather intermittently and on a small scale. However 1926 saw the establishment of the Pioneer Woodware Company's peg factory, the first industry in the town with a market beyond its own area, and in the 1930s some other small scale industries also began operations. Improvements in transportation, communications, and mechanical processing were making country town industry more feasible.

Post-1920 developments were reflected in physical expansion of the town. Infilling of the old town area continued, and ribbon development increased along the Glenora and Lachlan roads and was quite strongly initiated on the Hobart road, on the other side of the rivulet from the town. There was also considerable building on the eastern slopes of Peppermint Hill, and a few town houses were built on the northern bank of the river. In view of developments in the town, and with evidence of buildings constructed in this period, it is probable that there was an increase in the rate of population growth in the 1930s. Unfortunately the extent of this is not known as there was no census between 1933 and 1947, and at this latter date figures were considerably influenced by post-1940 development. However the years between the wars were years of growth, only slow perhaps when compared with the changes of the next twenty-five years, but at least introductory to them.

### **THE INDUSTRIAL ERA**

#### **Industry and population**

The small-scale enterprises established at New Norfolk in the 1930s were symptomatic of a new trend to industrial expansion in Tasmania. A few relatively large-scale industrial enterprises had come into production in the last years of World War I, but in the 1930s more were proposed, and these included the establishment of the Australian Newsprint Mills on the Boyer Estate, near New Norfolk.

The coming of the industry in 1938 meant not only the establishment of a large industrial plant on New Norfolk's doorstep but also the creation of a new Company village, Maydena, at the fringe of the forest country high up the Tyenna Valley. At both centres the activities of the industry led to, in fact demanded, an infusion of new blood. This influx of newcomers was most marked in relation to Boyer employment, as the high demand for skilled and experienced workers could not locally be met. In the early years of its existence most of the administrative, technical and office staff was recruited from areas beyond New Norfolk and its surrounding country districts. The need for this has lessened over the years, yet as late as 1965 only half the Boyer workforce had lived in the region prior to association with ANM. At this time thirty per cent were drawn from other Tasmanian

towns and cities, and collectively the other Australian States and countries overseas provided only six per cent.

Industrial development at Boyer has been carried out in three stages: that of initial construction (1938-1941), that involving construction of the second paper machine (1947-1951), and the current construction programme, providing a third paper machine, begun in April 1966 and with completion expected by January 1969. Each phase has brought an increase in town population, new housing construction, and increased commercial and service activities. In turn these latter have also provided opportunities for employment, drawing more people from surrounding country areas.

Town population since 1921 has increased as follows:—

TABLE 1

Year	Town Population*	Intercensal increase (%)	Annual rate of increase (%)
1921	1464	.....	.....
1933	1555	6.4	0.5
1947	2275	46.3	2.8
1954	3989	75.3	8.3
1961	4682	17.4	2.3
1966	4868	4.0	0.6

\* Town population excludes mental hospital patients.

Notable is the low rate of increase in the 1961-1966 intercensal period. The census was taken before the current expansion programme really got under way; in the first twelve months following the last census, town population (including the asylum) increased from 5775 to an estimated 6308 (an increase of nine per cent).

#### Lachlan Park expansion

Another factor in population growth has been the increased employment at Lachlan Park of nursing staff and other workers. Since 1954 (the earliest year for which relevant records are available) total employment here has increased by thirty per cent. In contrast with the industrial workforce most employees are native to New Norfolk or its immediate region. This increase in employment has been associated with considerable building activity, new land having been acquired for expansion. The early hospital buildings, some over one hundred years old and most dating from last century, have long been outmoded and inadequate, and nearly all have now been demolished and replaced by modern, efficient structures. Also many new homes have been constructed for employees near the new hospital buildings, an effort to attract more staff, nursing staff especially.

#### Residential development

Most of the residences in New Norfolk today are of relatively recent construction, more than half having been erected since 1940 to accommodate the increase in population. The nature of this recent development is markedly different from that which preceded it. Previously homes had been built piecemeal, here and there, by private individuals, first filling in the old town areas and then creeping along the main roads and up the hill slopes. In contrast post-1940 construction has been dominantly through the development of housing estates, financed by industry and government. There has also been some

private development along traditional lines, and that already mentioned at Lachlan Park, but this constitutes only a minor part of the whole.

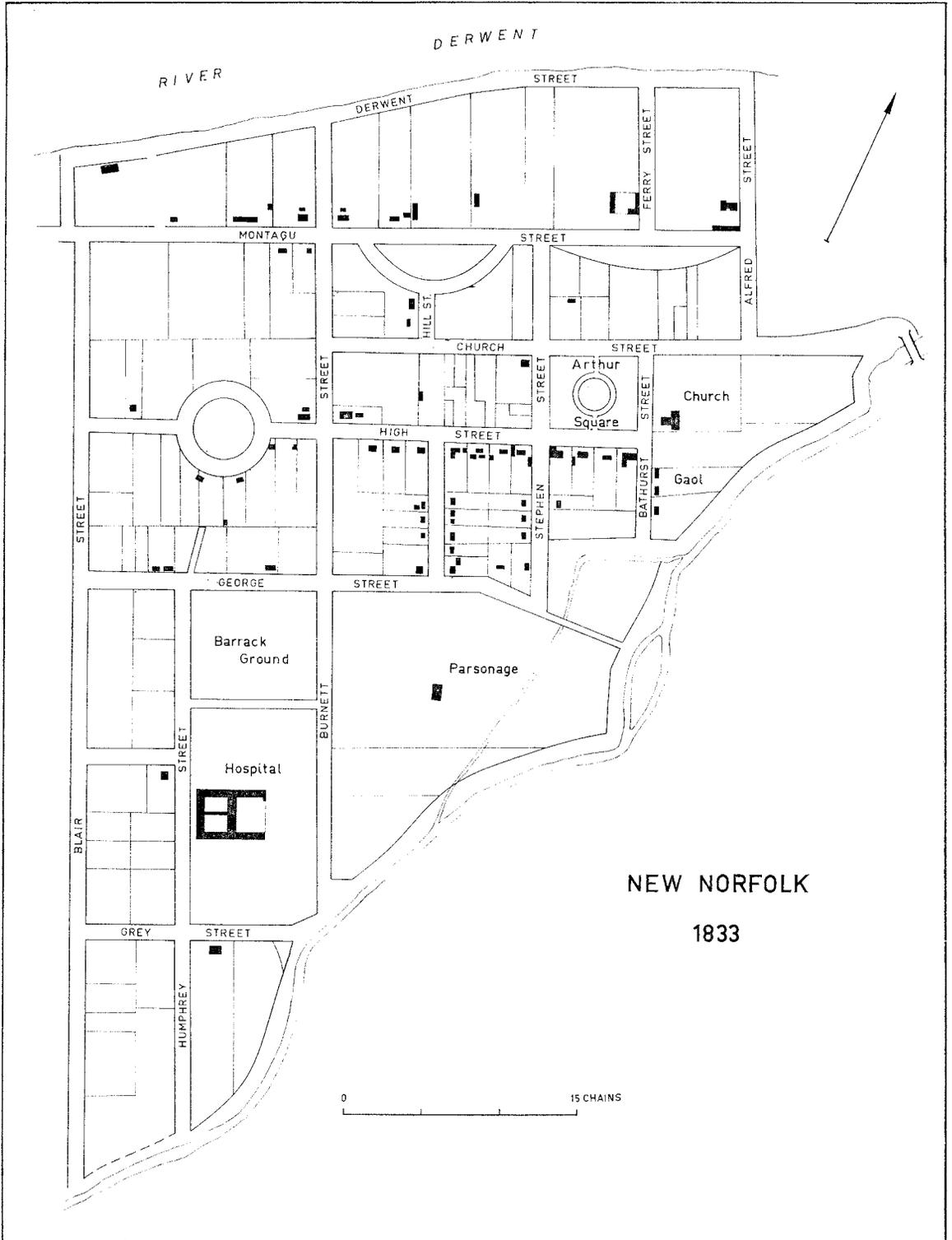
Australian Newsprint Mills has been the largest contributor, home-building booms accompanying periods of increased industrial activity. By 1965 the company had built 345 houses, nearly all on its large subdivision on the northern side of the river, and the current expansion programme has involved the construction of 130 homes on a new estate adjacent to this. Housing Department development has also recently taken place in New Norfolk North. Government housing in New Norfolk dates back to the early 1950s when the Agricultural Bank built 90 structures near Kensington Park. Since then the Housing Department has added about 150 homes, near the first estate, at Tynwald, and most recently at Fairview (see Fig. 2).

#### Commercial and service functions

Residential expansion in the town since the coming of ANM is plain to see, but far less evident is the increase in commerce. High Street, in the old town, does have quite a range of shops, yet commerce is underdeveloped for a town of this size. A prime reason for this is the proximity of Hobart. Nevertheless there has of course been a considerable increase in business in the last twenty-five years. Increase in retailing and other services has been closely associated with increases in population. The greatest rate of town population growth was in the 1947-1954 period, and in these years there was also an increase in the rate of functional expansion, though this was greater in the years immediately following. Decline in the rate of population growth from 1954 to 1961, and more so in the next intercensal period, has its parallel in a decreased rate of functional growth from about 1960.

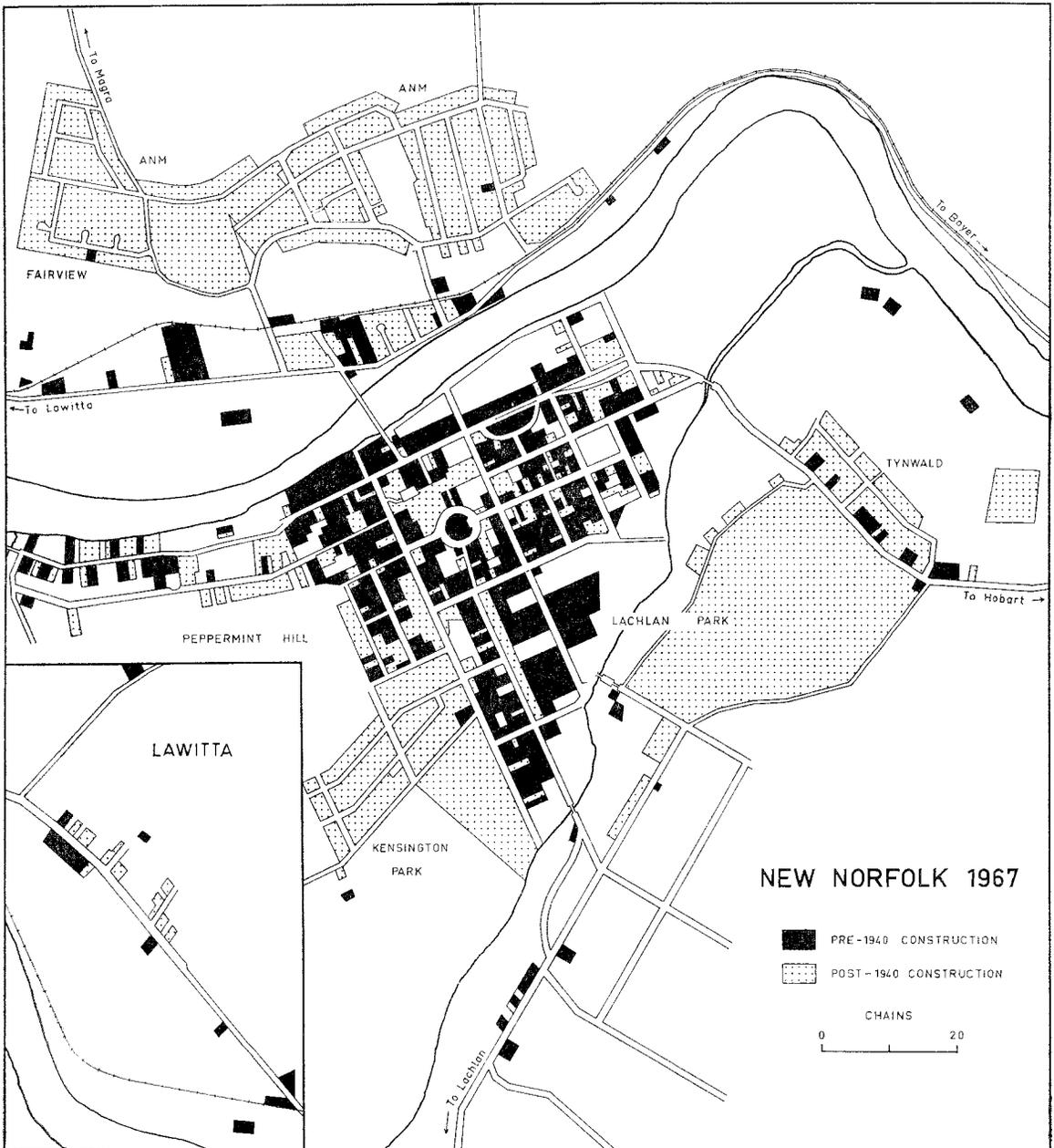
Expansion in retailing involved the opening of a number of new shops, for household goods and clothing particularly. A feature was the establishment of a number of branch stores by several large city businesses. By the mid-1950s the growth in population was such that increases in both educational and hospital facilities were necessary. The Norfolk North Primary School and the new District High School were both built in 1957, and a new hospital was built in the following year to replace the fifty-year-old Cottage Hospital. The type and number of retailing outlets have changed little in recent years, and hospital facilities too appear to be adequate, although steep population increases in the next few years may alter the situation. Education facilities have been rather more heavily taxed, and as a result the High School is currently being enlarged and the Norfolk North primary school is to have new classrooms added.

By 1965 the outlook for the town was not particularly bright. Job opportunities were declining just as large numbers of young people were ready to enter the workforce, and there seemed no option for them but to commute to the city or leave home. However, developments since then have considerably changed the picture for the better.



NEW NORFOLK

1833



### CONCLUSION

New Norfolk today functions mainly as an industrial, institutional, and regional centre. This last role it has held from the very beginning. By Macquarie's decree the town was created 'for the District of New Norfolk', and this it has served and by this it has been at least in part maintained for over 150 years. The prosperity of the relationship has been determined by the prosperity of agriculture in the valley; first in wheat and potato growing, then in the establishment of hop-fields and orchards, and later, of the small fruits industry as well. Yet the central place function has never been the town's sole reason for being, although it was the chief one for much of last century. In the early days when settlements were sparse and communications limited the town was an important administrative centre, and related to this was the establishment there of the military hospital. By midcentury this had assumed its role as Tasmania's mental institution, and expansions associated with this, in the past and in more recent years, ensured its operation as a dominant town function today.

Increased mechanisation early in the present century increased New Norfolk's accessibility and thus fostered the development in the town of small industries utilising the products of the region. Improved transport and communications also opened the way to the use of Hobart as well as or even rather than New Norfolk as a centre for the Derwent region. Smailes has said 'Towns no longer belong to the countryside as they once did', and this is true of New Norfolk since the introduction and development there of the newsprint industry. The town is still in the countryside, and, largely independent of other urban centres, it may still be called a country town, but its interests and associations are with the town itself.

Growing industrialisation and Hobart competition together are working to reduce the town's role as a regional centre—relative to other town functions, if not yet absolutely. The importance of the mental institution to the town also is declining in relation to industry, although otherwise it is not likely to change very much, independent as it is of the region and of economic interests. The industrial role therefore is dominant and on the increase, yet it should nevertheless be recognised that this is limited. The Town and Country Planning Commission Report of 1957 states—

'New Norfolk has certain advantages in industrial location: there is ample water and there are good communications and excellent factory sites . . . However one should be guarded against unfounded optimism: the desire by prospective industrialists to locate their factories as close as possible to large centres is still very powerful . . .'

Developments of the last ten years notwithstanding, this still holds true. The New Norfolk site happens to suit the peculiarities of the newsprint industry but has little to attract anything

else. There is a reserve of female labour, but with the outskirts of Hobart only twelve miles away factories locating in or nearer the metropolitan area could still draw on much of this and also enjoy the advantages of better transport links, with the port and with the main north-south highway, a wider labour shed, and greater proximity to related businesses and industries. Beyond the bounds of ANM expansion, then, New Norfolk's future role appears to be that of an outer suburb of metropolitan Hobart.

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