

Paterson (including Woodville)

Tiny village on the Paterson River

Paterson is a tiny but attractive little hamlet settled amidst mountains on the Paterson River which has its source in Barrington Tops to the north. The main road and trainline twist through this village which is located 175 km north of Sydney and 18 km north of Maitland.



1 - Paterson Post Office

The area was once occupied by the Gringgai clan of the Wanaruah Aboriginal people. The first known European in the area was the man whose name the town was to adopt, Colonel William Paterson, who, in 1801, surveyed the area beside the river that Governor King named in his honour. As with so many colonial settlements timbercutters, after local supplies of cedar, followed in the footsteps of the explorers and surveyors. Indeed the Paterson River was then known as the Cedar Arm due to the abundance of timber. By 1818 there were known to be eight farms along the river, six of them belonging to convicts.

The first land grant in the area was made to Captain William Dunn in 1821 on land by the river to the south of the town. The land on which Paterson was built was granted to the husband of Susannah Matilda Ward. When he died she had to fight for the grant but Ms Ward was well connected and in 1825 she received 600 acres at the limit of the river's navigability. In 1832 some of her land was required for the construction of the village so she swapped 90 acres of her land on the western side of the river for property both on the eastern bank and under what is now Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Although the townsite was the third to be surveyed in the Hunter Valley, after Newcastle and Maitland, it was not proclaimed until 1833. Paterson soon became an important river port. As such it also became a service centre to the surrounding community. Considerable supplies of tobacco were grown, as well as grains, grapes, wine, citrus fruits and cotton. Shipbuilding also commenced with the development of the river trade.

Many early settlers were Scots and hence a Presbyterian Church preceded an Anglican establishment. Indeed St Ann's, built in the late 1830s, is said to be the oldest Presbyterian Church on mainland Australia.

The river trade began to decline in the 1850s as the road to Maitland improved. Timber mills were established by the 1870s. In its heyday Paterson had four stores, five hotels, two shipyards, a sawmill, a tannery, four blacksmiths, two butchers, a bakery and a boarding school for girls.

By the time the railway arrived in 1911 the long-term decline of river transportation had taken its toll. With bizarre symbolism the railway line passed directly over the wharf and

a mishap during the construction of the railway bridge badly damaged one of the local ships. The same boat was nearly destroyed again when a spark from a steam train set it ablaze. The last cream boats visited the area in the 1930s.

Throughout the 20th century agriculture has been the major source of local income. Citrus production was particularly strong at the turn of the century with an estimated 30 000 cases being handled at the port each year.

Things to see:

A walking tour of Paterson

A good way to see Paterson is to obtain a walking tour pamphlet and map from the Paterson Country Cafe in King St, opposite the Court House Hotel. What follows here is a slightly different and more economical route.

The Court House Hotel

This is not an old building but the Court House Hotel has a long history. It started as the Cricketers Arms in 1864 on the river bank north of the present village site. A major flood in 1875 made the building uninhabitable. It was demolished and the material moved to the current site and rebuilt as the Court House Hotel. That building was badly damaged again by flood and then fire in the 1930s and, in 1960, the manager's wife was burned to death in another fire.

Next door is the former school of arts building (c.mid-19th century), now rather decrepit. King St then crosses over the railway bridge and the Paterson River. It was below this point that the town's original wharf stood. The views from the roadside here are very pleasant.

St Ann's Presbyterian Church

On the other side of the crossing, to the right, is St Ann's Presbyterian Church. Many early settlers in the area were Scots and St Ann's, built in the late 1830s and still holding services today, is said to be the oldest Presbyterian Church on mainland Australia. As a sign of the Scottish highland presence and of altered folk traditions, the church's first teacher had to be skilled in Gaelic grammar. The building has arched lancet leadlight windows with timber tracery.

Paterson Courthouse

Over the road is the Paterson Courthouse Museum in King St, open on Sundays from 1.00 p.m. - 5.00 p.m. It traces the European history of Paterson and has exhibits relating to poet Dorothea Mackellar, who spent her teenage years on a nearby property, and bushranger Captain Thunderbolt whose wife Mary Ann Ward was tried here. The building is situated on a slight rise overlooking the river. It was erected in 1857 with additions completed in 1865. Its dominant feature is the arcaded porch with its three monumental arches. There is a central courtroom and four ancillary offices. The police were stationed in the barracks upstairs. Court services ceased in 1967, tel: (02) 4938 5183.



The Court House Museum

Church Street

Head up the hill along Church St. Next door to the courthouse is the old and rather plain police residence (1882). The red brick building over the road is the Oddfellows Hall, built in 1865 by the courthouse's architect, Stephen Stanbridge. The fine painted brick building past the police station was erected in 1877 as a primary school and only ceased to serve that function in 1971. Set amidst fine gardens it has arched lancet windows, a steeply pitched roof, carved timber bargeboards and a gabled porch supported by two columns. At the corner of Church St and Prince St, is St Columba's Catholic Church (1884), an interesting brick building with an unusual design and arched lancet windows topped by decorative tiles.

Rail Motor Society Museum

Turn right into Prince St then take the next left into Webbers Creek Rd. Just around the corner, to the left, is the Rail Motor Society Museum housed in the old station master's residence. They are open on the second Saturday of each month from 9.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m., contact (02) 4938 5411 or (02) 4945 3677.

King Street

Just past the Court House Hotel, on the corner with Duke St, is the post office (1885). On the other side of Duke St is the former CBC Bank, designed by G.A. Mansfield and built 1897-1902. The bank had previously been in the blue building with timber columns and balcony over the road which started its life as a residence (c.1840) became the Royal Oak Inn and is now a private residence. Next door, in the small yellow building, is the Paterson Masterworks Gallery. It is open weekends from 10.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. or by appointment, contact (02) 4938 5157.



The former CBC Bank designed by G.A. Mansfield and built 1897-1902

Walk to the T-intersection at the end of King St and look to the left at the fine, two-storey house with shuttered upstairs windows, known as Annandale which was built by a Captain Johnson, the local police magistrate (c.1839). The second storey was added c.1860.

John Tucker's House and Park

In Queen St there is a timber house surrounded by trees and a verandah which belonged to the Hunter Valley's first free settler John Tucker Jr. Opposite is John Tucker Park, a very nice, green, shady reserve with well-established trees and childrens' play facilities on the banks of the river. A last wharf was built here after the railway arrived in 1911 but it didn't last long.

There are two intriguing structures in the park - an open, rectangular timber box and an old brick shed. A nearby plaque reads: 'From the 1860s to the 1920s this site was the base of Frys Coaching Enterprise which served the Hunter Valley and New South Wales. Coaches carried passengers, mail and some were hired to vaudeville companies and travelling salesmen who made regular tours. The two buildings are all that remain of the former business. The brick building housed the town's hearse and this timber structure is a corn straddle designed to store fodder in a dry, vermin-free environment.'

Prince Street

The Paterson Tavern was originally the Commercial Hotel. This attractive building was erected in 1882. It once served as a coach depot. Renovated in 1975 it has a hipped roof, upstairs balcony, cast-iron lacework and a pleasant atmosphere. Inside there are historic photographs dating back to the 1830s.

The house to its left is Noumea. The oldest surviving house in Paterson it was built in 1826 and once served as a school. It has been purchased by the Tavern which plans to open it up as a bed and breakfast.

St Paul's Anglican Church

The large, two-storey building in Duke Street is the rectory (1906) to St Paul's Anglican Church (1845) next door. This simple, Gothic Revival rubble stone church has a rendered interior with original cedar pews and timber pulpit. The windows are Tudor-style with timber tracery. One bears the family coat-of-arms, in stained-glass, of the first minister, Reverend James Jennings-Smith. He died in 1846 and is buried at the rear of the church adjacent the wall.

The large tomb of his son-in-law, William Munnings Arnold, can be found at the end of the path, by the fence. Arnold represented the area in parliament. He died in the 1875 flood. John Galt Smith who, in 1823, took up the land on which Woodville developed is also buried here.

By the front door is the tomb of Edward Gostwyck Cory known as the 'King of Gostwyck'. Another tomb in the church is that of Frederick Bedwell, who in 1815, at the age of 19 years, was first officer on the HMS Northumberland - the vessel which

conveyed Napoleon to his exile on St Helena. On the voyage Bedwell painted a watercolour depiction of Bonaparte which is still in the family. It is believed to be the only portrait of Napoleon in which he did, as was his custom, pose with his arm in his jacket.

Alternative Route South via Woodville

Head south on the main road to Maitland then take the turn to Woodville. The wrought iron bridge over the Paterson River was designed by John MacDonald and built in Belgium in the late 1880s in three separate pieces which were then assembled on-site. It is an interesting lattice truss structure. Three similar bridges over the Hunter at Singleton, Elderslie and Aberdeen are also by MacDonald and also followed the same construction process.

Les Darcy Memorial

About 5 km from the Woodville turnoff, to the right, is a memorial cairn to noted Australian boxer Les Darcy who was born here. Darcy left Australia for the United States without a passport in 1916 as a conscription referendum approached (it failed). To what extent he was pursuing a budding career or fleeing a possible draft will never be known. However, he found himself banned from fighting in the USA for political reasons as that country was entering the war itself. He died of pneumonia in May 1917, one month after enlisting in Memphis.

Woodville, Iona and Albion Farm

2.4 km from this memorial, on the left, is the Woodville School of Arts (1877) and Iona Public School which opened in 1877 although the current building dates from 1946.

Opposite the school is the Albion Farm homestead with the property's name emblazoned on the entrance wall. The associated property was granted to John Tucker Jr and his convict father, John Tucker Sr who, upon completion of his sentence, had become government storekeeper in Newcastle, a position he held until his retirement in 1823. John Tucker Jr was permitted to farm the land in 1814, making him the first free settler in the Hunter Valley.

All Saints Church, Woodville

All Saints Church on the corner was built of rubble stone in 1863-64. It is a small Gothic Revival church of good quality with arched lancet windows. The porch, with its leadlight windows, was added in 1924 after general restoration work in 1922. The general store on the other corner dates from the 1860s. A right turn will take you across Dunmore Bridge (1899) to Maitland.



The wooden church at Woodville

The first land grant in the area was made out to John Galt Smith in 1823. A village was in existence by the 1850s. It grew up around the river where a punt ferried passengers to and fro, approximately on the spot where Dunmore Bridge now stands. The first span was

erected in 1863. A cottage once stood adjacent for the lift operator who also had the task of sweeping the bridge in the days of horse power.

Tocal

Tocal is an impressive two-storey Regency mansion set among large fig trees and overlooking the Paterson River. It has a gracious encircling flagged verandah with a sloping roof supported by slim columns and shuttered windows on the lower floor. The roofing is of slate and the interior has timber floors and cedar joinery.

Some of the outbuildings date back to the 1820s. The barn, called 'one of the finest timber barns in Australia', was designed by noted architect Edmund Blacket c.1850. Other old outbuildings are the rubble stone barn, the stallion boxes, a blacksmith's shop, a timber bull shed, the slaughterhouse, brick terraces which are a rare surviving example of rural housing, and Thunderbolt's cottage.

The agricultural complex's field day is held on the weekend of the first Sunday in May. The homestead can usually be inspected at this time and on a small number of other days in the year. For more precise information and to arrange group tours of the complex or homestead tel: (02) 4939 8888. The Tocal Spring Fair is in September.

Arts and Crafts

The Craftsman's Croft is located behind the Paterson post office. They are open Thursday-Sunday as well as public and school holidays from 10.00 a.m. - 4.30 p.m. or by appointment, tel: (02) 4938 5253. Clarence Brae Antiques at 9 Queen St are open any time by appointment, tel: (02) 4938 5332. Heirloom Studio is 7 km from Paterson on the Dungog Rd at Martins Creek, tel: (02) 4938 8134. They are open by appointment.