

DISCOVER



Hunter Street 1950s

# Significant Women of Newcastle City

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Discover the many sites across Newcastle city where acclaimed Australian women lived, worked, wrote, created and where pioneering activist women transformed the city's urban form.

**NSW National Trust Heritage Festival**  
Self-guided walking tour

**Weekends**

Saturday and Sunday 9am - 4pm

April: 18 - 19, 25 - 26. May: 2-3, 9 -10, 16 - 17.

Newcastle and Hunter Valley Branch





## Self Guided Heritage Walk

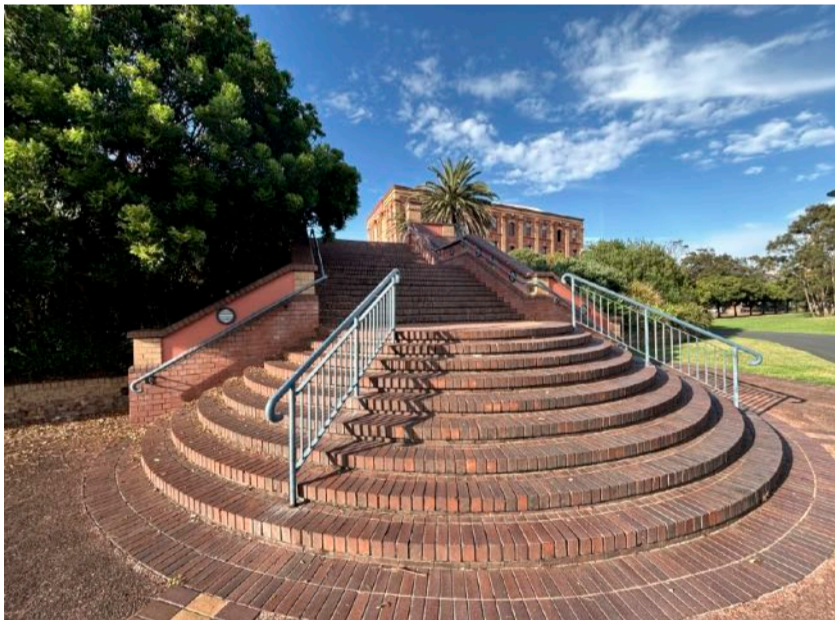
This is a weekend walking tour as two sites, 9 & 10, are only accessible on weekends.



Allow 1.5 hours for this walk. The walk starts at the Newcastle Beach light rail station. Begin by walking along Scott St., turn left into Telford St and walk to the end of that street. Stop at the cnr Telford and Stephenson St. (1)

1

**Jean Perrett Stairs (1913 – 1985)** Community activist.  
Place: **Foreshore Park**, with the stairs leading into the park dedicated to Jean Perrett, by the Newcastle Council in 1997.



Jean Perrett Stairs

Photo: Johanna Trainor 2026

In 1971, the Askin Liberal Government proposed the 'renewal' of Newcastle East, planning to demolish workers' cottages and heritage buildings for high-rise development. In response, **Jean Perrett**, a teacher and resident of Parnell Place, founded the Newcastle East Residents Group (NERG) to defend both the area's built heritage and its community. Residents of the traditionally working-class East End had not been consulted and turned to the Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF) for support.

Through Perrett's leadership, and with union support, Newcastle East was saved from destructive redevelopment, preserving its historic character and social fabric.



Turn tight into Stephenson place and walk straight up to Parnell Place and cross the park. Stop opposite 3 Parnell Place. (1a)

1a

Building: **3 Parnell Place**. Jean Perrett community activist lived in this house.

2a

As you walk along Parnell Place take a look at the row of houses across the street at 18-14 Parnell Place. They were shelled by the Japanese on 8 June 1942.



Parnell Place June 1942

Newcastle Herald



Walk along the left hand side of the street to Scott St., turn left at Scott and stop at cnr. Scott at 1 Murray Ave. (2)

2

**Dymphna Cusack (1902 – 1981)** Australian author.  
Building: Cusack lived in this house at **1 Murray Ave, Newcastle East**. The house is distinctive for its Federation Queen Anne (typically c1890-1915) style.



Dymphna Cusack 1947

SLNSW

**Ellen Dymphna Cusack** was a high school teacher and internationally renowned, bestselling Australian author. Appointed to Newcastle Girls' High School in January 1942, she later transferred to Newcastle Technical High School due to wartime staff shortages. Ill health forced her retirement in 1944.

While in Newcastle, Cusack lived with a working-class family at 1 Murray Avenue. On 8 June 1942, she experienced the Japanese submarine shelling of Newcastle, which damaged nearby homes. These events informed her novel *Southern Steel* (1953), which depicted the wartime lives of local families and explored the broader social impact of war. The book became one of Australia's ten bestselling titles that year.

**Cross the street and walk up to the top of Tramway Park. (3)**

**3**

**Awabakal Women (1800s)** Indigenous landowners and fishers. Place: Stand in Tramway Park and look over the Newcastle baths to the ocean pools and rocks where these women would have fished.



Aboriginal Women Fishing ca. 1790s Papers of Sir Joseph Banks, SLNSW

Newcastle Harbour, known as **Muloobinba**, was central to the lives of the **Awabakal people**, who camped along its southern foreshore. In this coastal environment, fishing was a vital activity, particularly for women, who supplied most of the community's food. They fished from canoes or the shore using lines and spears, sometimes keeping small fires in canoes for cooking and light. Fishing lines were crafted from kurrajong bark by the women, carefully transformed into strong twine, while hooks were made from shell or bone. Women were recognised not only as skilled fishers but also as makers of these essential tools. It was believed that the special power a woman naturally held over fish passed into the lines she crafted, tying her irrevocably to the fish, she nourished.



**Walk back along Scott St. continuing to the cnr Scott and Pacific Sts. Stop in front of 61 Scott St. (4)**

**4**

**Joy Cummings (1923 – 2003)** 1st Australian female Lord Mayor 1974 - 1984. Building: **Joy Cummings Community Centre** - former Newcastle East Police Station, originally erected for water police in the late 19C.



Joy Cummings ca. 1974 - 1984 UoN Library

**Joy Cummings** became Australia's first female Lord Mayor in 1974, serving three terms to 1984. Her consultative leadership reshaped local government and promoted Newcastle as a people-focused city. A strong advocate for heritage

conservation, environmental protection and planned development, she helped preserve the city's historic character and key public spaces. Cummings supported Aboriginal advancement, the arts and social reform, achieving several historic firsts. Awarded an AM in 1975, she retired in 1984, leaving a lasting legacy in Newcastle's identity and urban form.



**Turn left at Pacific St, and walk to Pacific Park at the cnr Hunter and Pacific St. (5)**

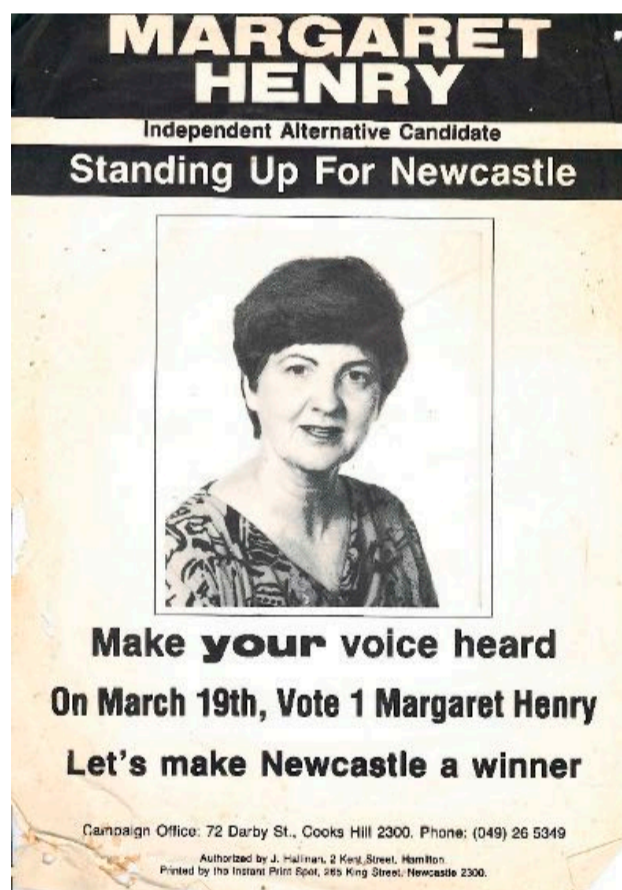
**5**

**Margaret Henry (1934 – 1915)** community activist and Green's councillor. Place: **Pacific Park**. Henry launched her NSW state election campaign here in 1988.



Pacific Park

Photo: Johanna Trainor 2026



Margaret Henry's Campaign poster for the 1988 NSW state election. Margaret Henry Papers

**Helen Margaret "Marg" Henry** was a prominent Newcastle activist dedicated to education, social justice, heritage conservation and environmental protection. In 1964 she founded the city's first playgroup, later joining the ALP in 1968. From 1969 to 1990, she lectured at the University of Newcastle, mentoring many mature-aged students and helping establish the Wollotuka Institute in 1983. After leaving Labor, she became a founding member of the Newcastle Greens and served as Deputy Mayor (1996–2000). Following the 1989 earthquake, she led heritage campaigns, including Save Our Rail. Widely honoured in her lifetime, her legacy endures in Newcastle's preserved heritage and engaged community.



**Keep walking along Pacific St. to the cnr of Ocean St. and stop in front of 21 Pacific St. (6)**

6

**Irene Slater Hall (1888 – 1961)** matron of Royal Newcastle Hospital.  
Building: **North Wing Royal Newcastle Hospital** built 1917 in the Federation free style with the ward design influenced by Florence Nightingale's nursing traditions.



North Wing Royal Newcastle Hospital ca. 1950s Photo: Sam Hood SLNSW

**Irene Slater Hall** began as head nurse and deputy matron at Newcastle Hospital in December 1914, becoming matron five months later. Over a forty-three-year career, she guided the hospital's transformation into a major modern institution. Known for her imposing stature and authoritative yet compassionate manner, Hall upheld strict Nightingale principles in nurse training, emphasising discipline, morality, and professional ethics. A respected administrator, she advanced the nursing profession through leadership roles in key organisations and publications. Honoured with national awards and an M.B.E. in 1957, she retired in 1958. In 1960, the Irene Hall Building at 26 Pacific St, (now known as Essington Apartments), was named in her honour, but later lost to redevelopment.



Turn left at King St. and walk down to Bolton St. Turn right and stop in front of 30 Bolton St. (7)

7

**Joan Cairnes Watkins (1915-2011)** journalist.  
Building: The **Newcastle Morning Herald** had occupied this site since 1876. This building was constructed in 1929 in the Inter-War Free Classical style. The paper ceased operations here in 2015.



Joan Cairnes Watkins 1987 UoN Library

**Joan Cairnes Watkins** was educated in Bowral and Goulburn, before training as a kindergarten teacher in Sydney. After two years in England, she returned in 1939 and began her journalism career at the Daily Telegraph, reporting on human-interest stories and court cases. During the Second World War, she was transferred to the Courier-Mail, where she covered wartime developments and,

in 1943, interviewed Prime Minister John Curtin following his discussions with Douglas MacArthur.

In 1947, she moved to Newcastle, covering diverse topics. That year, she married Alan Cairnes and worked for the Newcastle Sun. After raising two daughters, she returned to journalism in 1956 with the Newcastle Morning Herald and worked for decades as social editor and arts columnist. Towards the end of her full-time career, she served as a police reporter, remaining a respected figure in Newcastle journalism.



Walk back up Bolton St, to the top of the hill stopping in front of the old Court House at 5 Church St. cnr Bolton and Church Sts. (8)

8

**Annie Belinda Turnbull (1864-1928)** convicted criminal.  
Building: **Newcastle Court House** was designed by the colonial architect James Barnett in the Victorian Italianate style and completed in 1892. It ceased operating as a state judicial building in 2016.



Newcastle Court House 1893 Photo: Ralph Snowball UoN Library

THIS FORM TO BE CAREFULLY FOLDED IN SIX PARTS

No. **478** Name **Belinda Turnbull**

Date when Portrait was taken **20th May 1920**

Native place **Newcastle**

Year of Birth **26. 5. 1864**

Arrived in State (Ship) (Year) .....

Trade or occupation; previous to conviction **Nurse**

Religion **Roman Catholic**

Education, degree of **Read & Write**

Height, without shoes **5 feet 3 inches**

Weight in lbs. (On committal) **196** (On Discharge) .....

Colour of hair **Brown**

Colour of Eyes  **Hazel**

Marks, or special features **Scar on left arm**

(No. of previous Portrait.....)

Annie Turnbull's criminal record sheet, Long Bay Jail Sydney, 1920 MHNSW

**Annie Belinda Turnbull** was a well known abortion provider operating in Newcastle and later Sydney from the 1890s to the 1920s. She first married Walter Henry Bright in 1885; the marriage was brief and marked by the deaths of their three children. In 1891, she married widower William Turnbull. By the late 1890s, abortion services had become her primary means of supporting her family.

She first came to police attention in 1895 following the death of Mary Bryant but was acquitted of murder. In 1899, she was convicted for unlawfully using an instrument and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, with further charges heard in Sydney. From 1906, she appeared regularly before the courts, later operating from premises across from the court house at 14 Church St. Relocating to Sydney around 1914, she continued practising under various names, facing repeated prosecutions and imprisonment before disappearing from the record after 1923.



Stay on Church St. and head East. Turn right into Watt St. continuing up the hill to the entrance of James Fletcher Hospital at 72 Watt St. Enter the grounds and walk to the end of the main road. (9)

9

**Newcastle Industrial School and Reformatory for Girls (1867-1871).**  
Building: Newcastle Military Barracks 1842.



Newcastle Military Barracks 1880

Photo: Ralph Snowball UoN Library

Between 1867 and 1871, the New South Wales government established a **girls' industrial school and reformatory** in Newcastle's former military barracks, responding to concerns about uncontrolled children. The 1866 Act for the Relief of Destitute Children empowered authorities to remove children under sixteen from their families for reasons such as criminal activity, vagrancy, or association with criminals. The Industrial School admitted its first girls in August 1867, and the reformatory was established in January 1869. Girls remained for at least twelve months. Many inmates, some older than sixteen, protested their confinement through riots, escapes, and disruptive behaviour. Notable disturbances occurred in 1868 and 1871, with inmates attacking staff and property. Public outcry over these events led to the closure of the Newcastle schools in 1871, with 104 girls transferred to Cockatoo Island, Sydney and others either relocated or discharged to their families.



Walk left past the old barracks buildings and take the stairs up to to the next level and stop in front of the community access offices. (10)

10

**Rose Scott (1847 -1920)** suffragette.  
Building: Police Stipendiary magistrate's Residence (former Military Hospital and surgeon's quarters) 1842.



Rose Scott ca.1880s

SLNSW

**Rose Scott** was New South Wales' leading women's rights and suffrage activist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Growing up next to the

Industrial School for Girls, her awareness of women's social inequality was heightened by this experience and contributed to the shaping of her feminist ideals. Scott co-founded the Women's Literary Society in 1889 and helped create the Womanhood Suffrage League in 1891, serving as its first secretary. She played a key role in achieving women's right to vote in 1902 and became the inaugural president of the Women's Political Educational League. Scott also championed raising the age of consent to sixteen, achieved in 1910. She advocated for women's independence from party politics, opposed Federation, and was a critic of war. Scott served as president of the Sydney Peace Society and was active in cultural and social reform organisations, always working to expand women's opportunities, independence, and civic participation.



Scott family playing croquet in front of their home ca.1860s

SLNSW



Walk out of the Hospital grounds onto Watt St. and turn right. Continue up the hill turning right into Ordinance St. Further along Ordinance St. turn right and stop on the cnr of 10 Barker St. (11)

11

**Essie Jenyns Wood (1864-1920)** Shakespearian actress.  
Building: **Jesmond House** was constructed in the late 1870s in the mid-century vernacular style. The tower, designed by James Henderson, was added in the 1880s, and two double-storey rear wings, designed by Frederick B. Menkens, were completed in 1894.



Essie Jenyns as Portia in The Merchant of Venice ca. 1880s

SLNSW

**Elizabeth Esther Helen Jennings**, known professionally as Essie Jenyns, was a celebrated Shakespearean actress. She debuted at the Theatre Royal, Hobart in 1879 and, by seventeen, had already played major roles such as Ophelia and Desdemona. In 1884, Essie travelled to Europe with her family, observing and drawing inspiration from renowned performers. Returning to Australia, her stepfather W. J. Holloway founded a Shakespeare Company in 1886, where Essie quickly became the star, praised by critics for her performances. In 1888, at the height of her fame, Essie married John Robert Wood and retired from the stage, making Jesmond House a hub of Newcastle's cultural life. In 1902, Jenyns established Newcastle's first kindergarten at her own home, initially enrolling six children from well-to-do families. Later that year, the Newcastle Free Kindergarten was officially opened by the Governor of NSW at the Pro-Cathedral School. Essie Jenyns received him in her role as president of the society.



Walk along Barker St. turning right into Tyrrell St and then left into Newcomen St. Stop at the cnr of Newcomen and Church Sts. (12)

12

**Merrilie D'Arcy Roberts (1915-1993)** headmistress, Church of England Girls Grammar School. Girls only school originally opened on the site on 22 July 1918. Building: Merrick House, Newcastle Grammar School.



Merrilie D'Arcy Roberts ca. 1950s  
The Mitre Dec 1959 CEGGS

**Merrilie D'Arcy Roberts** was headmistress of Newcastle Church of England Girls' Grammar School from 1952 to 1959. Educated at SCEGGS North Sydney, she earned a BA in Mathematics from the University of Sydney in 1937 and a Diploma of Education in Melbourne. During World War II, Roberts worked at De Havilland Aircraft Co., preparing mathematical calculations for RAAF propeller designs, reflecting the era's shift of women into technical roles. After the war, she taught in England, gaining further qualifications, before returning to lead the Newcastle school. As headmistress, she enhanced academic standards, expanded facilities, and engaged in Newcastle's civic life. Roberts later served as president of the Association of Heads of Independent Girls' Schools and was a fellow of the Australian College of Education. She was remembered for her approachable nature and her smoke-filled study.



Turn left at Church St., cross the road and enter the ChristChurch Cathedral grounds. Walk around the back, stop and look over the headstones in the park behind the church. (13)

13

**Dorothy English Paty (1805-1836)** colonial natural history artist buried in the Newcastle colony's first graveyard. Headstone removed for repairs. Place: Christ Church Cathedral graveyard. It was proclaimed a place of burial by Governor Macquarie in 1816.



Dorothy Paty Gigantic Lily Newcastle, Nov 6<sup>th</sup> 1835 NLA

**Dorothy Paty** was a natural history painter whose watercolours hold significant botanical value. Born in Bideford, Devon, to a prosperous family, she received a genteel education that included sketching and watercolour painting. After marrying military officer John Paty in 1829, she moved to Australia, settling in Newcastle in 1832. There, she produced two albums titled "Wildflowers around Newcastle, New South Wales," painting nearly sixty native plant species collected by family and friends from local heathlands and rainforests. Dorothy was meticulous in documenting her works, always noting the date, location, and collector of each specimen. She balanced her artistic pursuits with her roles as wife and mother, painting over 55 watercolours between 1832 and 1836. Dorothy died at age 31, shortly after the birth and loss of her fourth child, and was buried in Christ Church Cemetery, Newcastle.

**The inscription on her headstone read:** Elizabeth Dorothy Mary Paty, daughter of Deputy Assistant Commissary General Paty, and of Dorothy, his wife, died at Newcastle 8<sup>th</sup> January 1834, aged 8 months and 8 days, also Dorothy his wife, third daughter of the late Thomas Burnard, Esq., of Bedfordshire, England, died at Newcastle 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1836, aged 31 years. Save me for I have sought my precepts Psalm 119-94.



Exit the cathedral grounds and walk right along Church St. to number 70. (14)

14

**Margaret Olley (1923- 2011)** artist. Building: Victorian terraces 70 & 76 Church Street, owned by Olley and where she lived and established a studio.



Margaret Olley 23 January 1949 The Australian

**Margaret Olley** is celebrated as one of Australia's most significant painters of still-life and interiors, drawing inspiration from everyday objects in her home and studio. Born in Lismore, NSW, her artistic talents were nurtured at Somerville House and Brisbane Central Technical College, before she graduated from East Sydney Technical College in 1945. Olley's first solo exhibition in 1948 led to acquisitions by major galleries, and she was famously depicted in William Dobell's Archibald Prize-winning portrait that year. After overcoming alcoholism in 1959, her productivity and success soared, supporting both her art and philanthropy. Olley moved to Newcastle in 1965, painting the city in her renowned 'Newcastle Watercolours' series and acquiring properties there. She held over 90 solo exhibitions, was awarded AO and AC honours, and donated 48 artworks and \$500,000 to Newcastle Art Gallery, leaving a lasting artistic and philanthropic legacy.



Continue to along Church St. turning right into Perkins St. Descend the stairs, and walk along Perkins St. past King St. and stop in front of 8-10 Perkins St. (15)

15

**Del de Glorion (1917 - 2013)** theatrical producer. Building: Victoria Theatre was originally built on this site in 1876. That building was replaced in 1896. It is the oldest theatre still standing in NSW and ceased operating as theatre/cinema in 1966.



Victoria Theatre ca. late 1890s Newcastle Herald



Del de Glorion ca. 1950s Newcastle Herald

**Adele "Del" Wynne** was born into the renowned de Glorion theatrical family, known for their international trapeze act before settling in Newcastle in 1876. Her great-uncle William became the inaugural manager of the New Victoria Theatre, and her father, Edward, began his theatre career there as a boy, later becoming stage manager. Del's own stage debut came as an infant in 1917, marking the start of her lifelong connection to the theatre. After school, she worked as a stenographer and joined the Newcastle Choral Society's ballet during WWII, performing in productions such as High Jinks in 1946 and Noël Coward's Blithe Spirit the following year. A turning point came in 1954 when she was invited to perform and then produce for the local Gilbert & Sullivan Society, leading to a 23-year involvement as producer and choreographer. Del balanced her theatrical commitments with work as a secretary and also produced for the Comedy Players. She retired in 1970, yet the de Glorion name—and Del's own contribution—remain integral to the city's cultural heritage.



**Return to King St. and turn right. Walk along Kings St. to Newcastle City Hall between Wheeler Plaza and Christie St. (16)**

**16**

**Reta Light (1898 - 1989) and Hilda (1888 - 1958)** philanthropist and feminist advocate.  
Building: **Newcastle City Hall** 1929 was designed by architect H. E. White in the Inter-War Academic Classical style.



Reta Light ca 1917



Hilda Light 1908 UoN Library

Hilda and Reta Light were the daughters of Morris Light, Mayor of Newcastle (1924-25), who led the campaign to build the Newcastle City Hall and Civic Theatre.

Hilda became the youngest person in NSW to earn a BA from the University of Sydney in 1908. She taught, campaigned for Labor candidates and used her platform to advocate for the equal rights of women, encouraging women to vote and participate actively in political life. She later travelled widely, giving lectures on her return and writing on topics as diverse as the Russian social experiment, her 2000-mile trip along the Yangtze River, and her interview with Gandhi. She also sought support for a public library in Newcastle. During World War II, both

sisters were interned in the Vittel Camp, France, as prisoners of war, but survived and returned to Australia by 1947.

Reta, an accomplished pianist, invested in various ventures and regularly performed in Sydney. On her death in 1989, she bequeathed \$1.5 million to the University of Newcastle's Auchmuty Library to support its collections. The Light sisters' activism and philanthropy significantly enriched Newcastle's cultural and educational life.



Newcastle City Hall ca. 1947

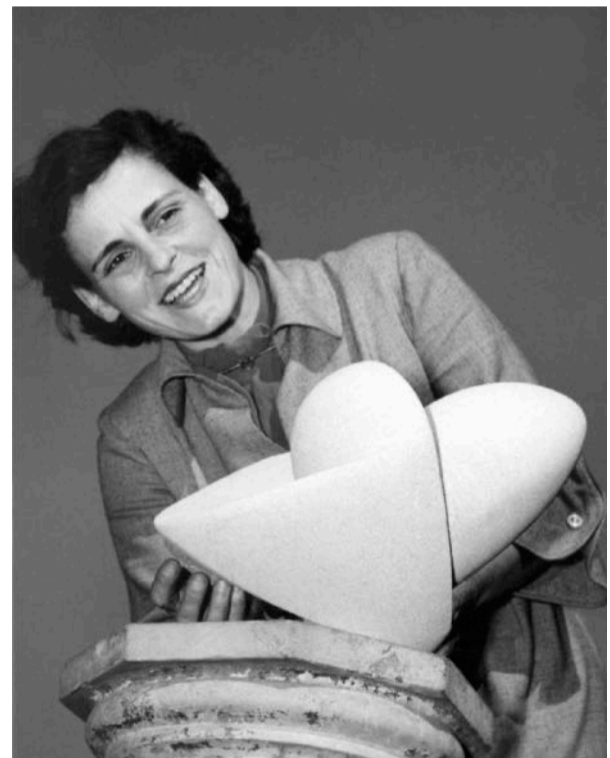
Photo: Frank Hurley NLA



**Cross the road directly opposite, and walk along the path in Civic Park until you reach the fountain. (17)**

**17**

**Margel Hinder (1906-1995)** artist and sculptor.  
Place: Civic Park "Captain James Cook Memorial Fountain."



Margel Hinder and 'Garden Sculpture' 1945  
www.margelhinder.com.au

**Margel Ina Hinder AM** was a pioneering Australian sculptor and key figure in Australian modernism. Born in the United States, she met her husband, artist Frank Hinder, in 1929 and moved to Australia, becoming a citizen in 1939. Hinder's innovative use of materials and focus on light, movement, and abstraction marked a significant break from traditional sculpture. She was part of a progressive Sydney art circle that drove Australian abstraction. During WWII, she assisted Frank in camouflage research in Canberra. After the war, she taught at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Art School, and from her home studio. Hinder gained national acclaim in the 1950s and '60s, winning the Blake Prize for Religious Sculpture in 1961 and completing major public commissions, including Newcastle's Captain James Cook Memorial Fountain in 1966. Both Margel and Frank were appointed Members of the Order of Australia in 1979.



**Walk behind the church towards the edge of the park, and stop on the cnr Auckland and Gibson Sts. (18)**

Florence Austral (1892-1968) internationally acclaimed opera singer.



Florence Austral 1929

SLNSW

**Florence Austral** (born Florence Mary Wilson) was an internationally acclaimed Australian opera singer, renowned for her powerful interpretations of demanding Wagnerian roles. Born in Richmond, Victoria, she adopted the professional name "Austral" in 1921. With little formal training at first, she won major prizes at the South Street competitions in 1913, leading to study at the Melbourne Conservatorium. By her late twenties, critics praised her remarkable voice, launching her professional career. Austral made her Covent Garden debut in 1922 as Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*, earning immediate acclaim and performing with the British National Opera Company until 1924. She recorded over 100 discs for His Master's Voice and became principal singer at the Berlin State Opera in 1930. Diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, she returned to Australia in 1934, for an extensive concert tour of capital cities and major regional centres. In 1954, Austral accepted a teaching position at the newly established Newcastle branch of the NSW Conservatorium of Music. Her health declined at the end of 1959, forcing an early retirement and ending a distinguished musical career.



**Salvation Army Peoples Palace** 1929 repurposed into the present day Newcastle Conservatorium of Music in 1984. Newcastle Regional Library



At the end of the walk, the closest light rail stop is Civic. Turn back along Auckland St and walk to Hunter St. Turn right into Hunter St., and you will find it in front of the Civic Theatre and Lowry Lane.



Walk designed and compiled by Dr Johanna Trainor  
with research contributed by Dr Jude Conway.

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