

NEWSLETTER

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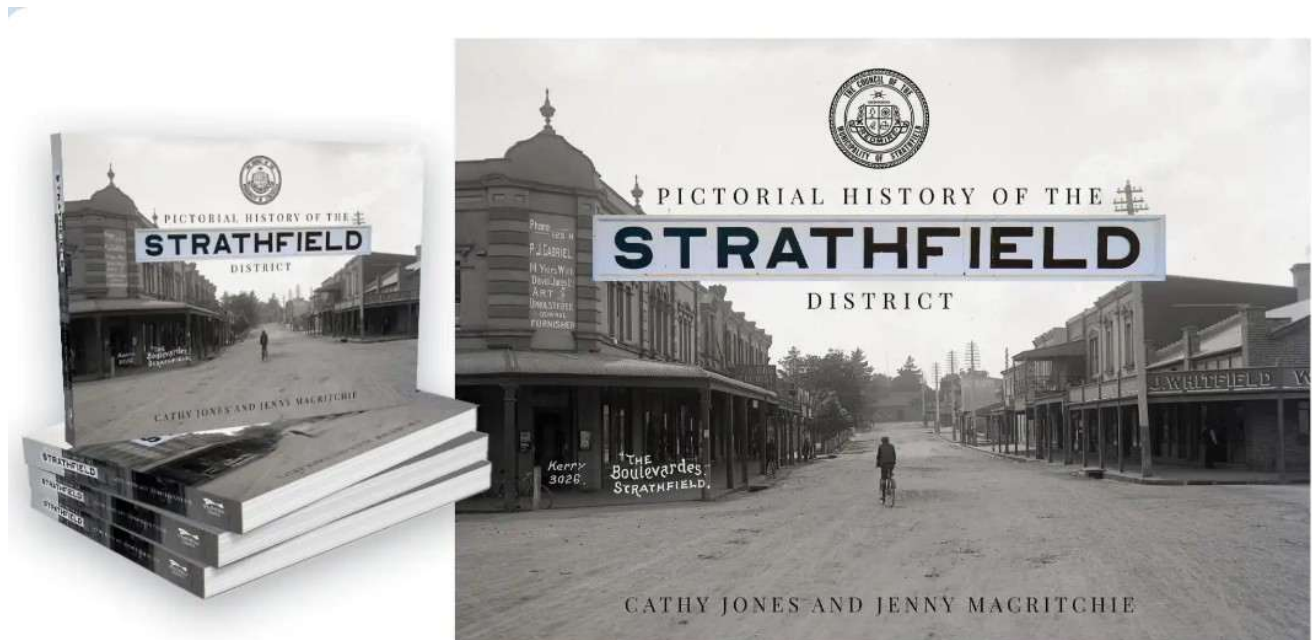
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'Pictorial History of Strathfield'

By Cathy Jones

2025 marked a significant milestone for Strathfield with the celebration of the 140th anniversary of the incorporation of Strathfield Council in 1885. To commemorate this occasion, a range of events were held, including a commemorative meeting at the Strathfield Town Hall on 2 June 2025, the 100th anniversary of incorporation. Speakers on the night included the Minister for Local Government the Hon. Ron Hoenig MP and Strathfield Council's General Manager Michael Mamo. I also spoke about historical highlights of the Council over the last 140 years. The text from the speeches was published in the Council minutes for the extraordinary meeting of 2 June 2025.

An exhibition was held in the Ironbark Gallery, Strathfield Library & Innovation Hub from 28 May to 27 July 2025. The exhibition features many aspects of the Municipality history including Aboriginal history, early land settlements, wartime, transport, schools, rivers and natural environment etc. The official opening was held on Thursday 5 June 2025, 6pm with a speech by the then Mayor, Cr John-Paul Baladi. This exhibition was produced in collaboration with the Strathfield-Homebush Historical Society. A Seniors' Morning Tea was held at Strathfield Library with a talk about Strathfield's history on 13 June 2025.



But perhaps the most enduring tribute is the publication of the *Pictorial History of Strathfield*, a book that captures the district's rich and varied past using a blend of images and narrative. The book was launched in December 2025. The *Pictorial History of Strathfield* is a journey through the district's past, present, and future. The book spans 280 pages and contains over 45,000 words with 314 beautiful black and white

and colour photographs. Its primary purpose is to present history through images, supported by insightful text, offering readers thoughtfully curated and visually engaging journey from Strathfield's earliest origins to the present day.

This book was written by Jenny Macritchie and Cathy Jones. Jenny MacRitchie is Strathfield Council's Local Studies Advisor and has been a librarian with a love of history for many years. This is her second historical book. She also writes about Strathfield's history on Council's Local Studies blog. Cathy Jones has written extensively on the history of the Strathfield district and publishes the Strathfield Heritage website. She is the long-term Secretary of the Strathfield-Homebush District Historical Society. She has worked in many areas of Council including corporate strategy, public land management and sustainability.

The publication springs to life thanks to the skills and innovative design of Council's graphic designer Evita Bourbon as well as the wide range of photographs and images from local collections, including the Strathfield-Homebush District Historical Society, as well as lending and collecting institutions across Australia including state and national libraries, museums, universities, councils and the Royal Australian Historical Society. Preparation of the publication involved a deep dive into these collections, uncovering images and stories that are not easily found online or featured in other publications. The result is a book that not only documents the well-known aspects of Strathfield's history but also shines a light on lesser-known narratives and communities.

The opening chapters focus on the pre-European history of the district, highlighting thousands of years of occupation by the Wangal people of the Eora Nation. The book offers a respectful and nuanced perspective on the area's Indigenous heritage.

Following this, the narrative explores early European settlement from the late 18th century. Land was granted in 1793 to free settlers to establish farms in the area known as Liberty Plains (which is partly located in Strathfield and Homebush) along a track which became Parramatta Road. These stories are enriched by vivid accounts of travel, bushrangers, and the challenges faced by early settlers. Most major settlement was delayed until the 1860s, however, a few early estates were established including the Wentworth Estate at Homebush, Clareville Estate in Enfield, and the Village of St Anne's at Strathfield South.

Transport has played a pivotal role in shaping Strathfield. The district boasts one of Sydney's earliest railway stations at Homebush in 1855. Followed by Strathfield (1876-77), and Flemington (1884). Each station served distinct purposes, from supporting residential growth (Strathfield) to facilitating the operations of the Homebush Racecourse (Homebush) and Homebush Saleyards (Flemington).

The book also chronicles the other public transport systems including the Enfield tram system (1891-1948) and the advent of motorised buses in the early 1900s, which led to the demise of the tram system. In the early 20th century, the Strathfield district increasing transitioned from horse-drawn vehicles to automobiles. Notably, the Strathfield district was home to several motor vehicle factories, including the Ford Motor Company at Homebush and the Pressed Metal Corporation in Enfield.

Strathfield's architectural heritage is celebrated commencing with its grand 19th-century mansions, particularly those built on The Boulevarde and Albert Road Strathfield. Stories of these homes and their owners are featured followed by chapters on successive periods of housing development in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The Union Recreation Club of Redmyre (later known as the Strathfield Recreation Club) was established in 1881. The Club was renowned for tennis and hosting the Metropolitan Championships. Many champions played at Strathfield, including local sporting identities such as Harry Hopman, Daphne Akhurst, Sylvia Lance, and Louie Bickerton.

Strathfield is renowned for its large and diverse array of public and private schools. The book provides an overview of the district's educational history, acknowledging the wealth of information on Strathfield's educational history could fill another book. Many schools occupy buildings that were once grand residences, such as 'Llandilo' (now part of Trinity Grammar Preparatory School), 'Brunyarra' (Santa Sabina Junior School), and 'Mount Royal' (Australian Catholic University), illustrating the adaptive reuse of Strathfield's architectural heritage.

The book dedicates chapters to the development of the Strathfield local government area, which today encompasses the original Municipality of Strathfield, the former Homebush Council, and the West Ward of Enfield Council. Each area's unique history, demographics, and stories are explored, providing a comprehensive understanding of how the district evolved.

Strathfield's transformation from a district of country-style mansions to an area with public parks and recreation areas is documented in detail. The first park in the Strathfield Municipality, Strathfield Park, was dedicated in 1914, followed by the acquisition of other parks in the 1920s and 1930s. The book also recounts the use of parks during World War II for military purposes and the creation of foreshore parks through land reclamation initiatives.

The Federation period saw a doubling of dwellings and population growth in Strathfield. Many Federation-era buildings were designed by prominent architects, contributing to the district's distinctive character. Grand mansion-style residences and estates featuring various Federation styles are highlighted, showcasing Strathfield's architectural diversity.

World War I and II left indelible marks on Strathfield. The book discusses local memorials, the service of men and women, and the community's response to wartime challenges including formation of patriotic associations and charities, supported by volunteer efforts. A selection of biographies of stories of local men and women who served during the Wars is also featured.

A unique chapter contrasts the impact of the Spanish flu pandemic in 1919 with the recent COVID-19 pandemic, drawing parallels between the responses and protocols implemented to protect the community.

The 1920s brought rapid population growth and housing development, supported by accessible home loans and employment opportunities. Strathfield Council declared most of the Municipality a residential district from 1920, thereby prioritising residential development while significantly curtailing the operation of industries, shops and public amusements. The book also examines the effects of changing social and economic conditions, including the decline of grand mansions and the conversion of many to new uses.

As the community emerged from World War 1, entertainment and leisure flourished. Cinemas, radio, theatre, sports, and hotels became central to social life, which continued over successive decades. The book recounts the rise of suburban cinemas, the building of new hotels, and the popularity of bowling clubs and dance halls, such as Vic's Cabaret, which became a local institution.

Strathfield weathered the 1930s Depression with relatively low unemployment rates, partly due to availability of work in local industries. The book details the impact of the Depression on building activity, council finances, and community support initiatives, including public works programmes to provide employment for local residents.

Brief histories and photographs of local industries, such as Brickworks, Saleyards, Arnotts Biscuits and EMI Record Factory and Recording Studios, are included, alongside accounts of shopping centres that served the district's day-to-day needs.

The book explores the Strathfield district's experiences during World War II (1939-1945), including air raid precautions and building restrictions. As a result of post-war housing shortages, the NSW Government resumed land throughout the district for housing development. The 1940s amalgamations of Strathfield Council with Homebush and the West Ward of Enfield Councils, expanded the size, population and changed areas of land use in Strathfield Municipality.

After World War II, the Strathfield district experienced successive waves of migration with communities arriving initially from Europe and later from Asia and beyond. By 2021, 59% of residents were born overseas, and more than 62 languages were spoken at home. The book celebrates this rich blend of cultural and linguistic diversity, highlighting the influences of changing demographics on churches and cultural institutions by migrant communities.

The final chapters address major changes from the 1970s onwards, including the construction of the M4 motorway, establishment of Sydney Markets in 1975, and the impact of the Sydney Olympics in 2000. The book also touches on significant events such as the Strathfield Massacre in 1991.

Historical Talk Sunday 1 March 2026



A talk on the Pictorial History of the Strathfield District will be held on Sunday 1 March 2026 from 2pm to 4pm. Bookings can be made at <https://events.humanitix.com/strathfield-pictorial-history-talk> or using the QR code. For more information, contact Cathy Jones at strathfieldhistory@gmail.com or call 02 9642 3145 (home).

Afternoon tea will be served at 2pm before the commencement of the talk. **The event is free.**

About the talk

Come along to a talk and hear some of the stories featured in the Pictorial History of Strathfield district book. The book and talk explores many important chapters from our past, from the Aboriginal history and early settlement to the arrival of the rail and homes as well as events including the 1930s Depression and World Wars.

Books will be available for purchase (\$30) and author signing on the day.