NORTHCOTE TIME LINE

Geology:

Geology plays a major factor in the development of Northcote industry. The lava flows in turn would have made farming difficult. Particular the western side of near the Darebin Ck – Chifley Drive (Preson) was almost unfarmable.

The area covering most of Northcote and Preston is a small ‘geological island’ - mostly Upper Silurian (420 million years). Within Northcote there are two intrusions on this. Newer volcanics dating from Pleistocene and Pliocene. The newer volcanics would have come from the Western District Plains volcanoes between 7300 – 22,000 years. Though some are quite old – the volcanics at Alphington are around 800,000 years.

These new lava plains, sometimes up to 30m thick, buried the former Merri Creek, which was now forced to run atop. The lava flow ends at the Darebin Creek west side. It is this basalt, or bluestone, that becomes an important industry for crushed rock for roadways in the nineteenth and early century. The Silurian formation has been used in the district for clay-pits to make bricks, and the newer volcanics have yielded ‘blue-stone’.

The Silurian period is very early geologically speaking and represents the beginning of more complex plants other than algae. This the clay deposits of the Northcote, Preston Brunswick triangle.

A 50m drop in sea-level would allow the crossing to Tasmania. During the last ice-age (about 20,000 years ago) the sea level dropped 100m.

Aboriginal Activity:

- Aboriginal history – at least 40,000 years. (Lake Mungo Man & Woman)
- 22-6000 years ago Last Ice Age.
- 18,000 Begin of thaw. Sea levels start rising
- 10,000-8000 years Creation of Port Phillip Sunkland. (lake and falls at the heads)
- 6000 years ago seas stopped rising.
- 800-1000 years ago – Port Phillip Bay may have dried up. (Most midden sites around the bay well over 2000 years).
- There would have been extensive aboriginal settlement within the dry Port Phillip bay beside the widening river (the channel). Now all buried under sand and water.
- In Northcote due to some ‘recent’ volcanics past history would have been buried in the former Merri Ck.
**European Visits**

Almost all European accounts of Australia identify a land with smoke.

- **1522** Portugese visit – Mahogany ship at Warnambool ???? fact ??? (subject to much debate – many sightings in 19 century)
- **1606** Dutch ‘visitors’ Willem Janszoon
- **1622** Tryall shipwreck in Western Australia (commonly known as Batavia incident). Captain abandons survivors who then eat/murder each other.
- **1623-6** Further Dutch visits
- **1642** Abel Tasman – claims Van Dieman’s Land for Dutch East India Co. Further explorations in 1644.
- **1688** William Dampier comes looking for Tryall wreck. First to report kangaroos.
- **1770** Cook’s Endeavour explorations.
- **1788** Settlement by convicts under Captain Arthur Phillip (11 ships 1530 people). Use of convicts as cheap labour to build infrastructure for new colony following the loss of the American colonies after the revolutionary war 1775-1783.
- **1793** First free settlers

**1835 - 1842/3**

- **1835** June John Batman (from Tasmania) signs treaty with Aborigines. Some say on the banks of the Merri Creek at the end of McLachlan Street near Rushall railway station. More than likely the Treaty was signed elsewhere.
- **1836** Ill fated settlement at Sorrento. Shortly after squatters were settling on various sites more hospitable around Melbourne.
- **1837/8** Robert Hoddle (and Russell) surveys land. High Street part of a North/South line for the grid in surveying Melbourne’s suburbs. Aboriginal names used where possible for creeks and rivers.
- **1841** William Rucker (?) builds ‘Rucker’s Mansion’, atop Northcote Hill. It is the most extensive country house in district. Later the building is known as ‘Sunnyside’ and ‘The Alpines’ and is altered. The ballroom of this building (a much later addition) still survives in Clarke Street. Original building demolished c1926 and Church of Ephiphany built (1927).
- **1842** Dr Peter MacArthur builds a hut in Yarra Bend near the junction of Merri Creek. Thomas Wills finishes ‘Lucerne’ in Alphington after two years of construction. Rucker sells part of his land on Rucker’s Hill to George James - known as James’ Paddock. Later part of it became Town Hall precinct.
1842/3  **First Major Depression in Victoria.** William Rucker insolvent. His house (?) and land is sold to another group of speculators the repossessed by the bank.

1844 – 1863

1848  Melbourne Lunatic Asylum opened - (called Yarra Bend Asylum in 1851.)
1850  Victoria separates from New South Wales. Pilgrim Inn, later called Croxton Park Hotel opened in Thornbury.
1851  Victorian gold rush begins.
1852  Shade's Ironmongery established in a tent in High Street. Near the corner of Separation St. One of the first traders in the district.
1853/55  Township of Northcote in area of today's Westgarth gazetted. Land subdivided and sold for housing in this district during this period.
1853  Probably first house built - John Grinrod at 5 McLaclan St. Westgarth. Yan Yean pipe track - first water pipes laid along St George's Road. Brings fresh drinking water to Melbourne. Poor development for about eighty years along later St Georges Rd.
1854  Competition between ‘lower’ and ‘upper’ Northcote (on the hill) when the Wesleyan church/school opened. Robert S. Bunn first teacher. Original Peacock Inn built (current one dates from 1897). First Post Office at Bastings new two storey Store in High St. (Now demolished). Shannon's Hotel (now Commercial Hotel) opened. Eventually centre of Northcote moves away from Westgarth village.
1857  First timber bridge crossing Merri Creek on High Street built. (Replaced with current structure, though 1/2 width, in 1875.)
1860  All Saints Church in High Street, Westgarth opened.
1861  German Cemetery established

1864 - 1882

1864  **Northcote becomes part of Epping Road District.** Bridge Hotel, High Street, near Merri Creek, commences business (now demolished).
1865  Twentyman House crnr Waterloo Rd & Bastings St. With Askew notable architect. 'The Block' arcade, Melbourne Meat Market, etc.
1866  Carters Arms Hotel opened – owner J Roberts (Demolished c1990's.) He sets up small brick business based on clay deposits behind hotel.
1869  First bicycle races: One at MCG, other at Croxton Park.
1870  Epping Road District expands to become Shire of Darebin.
1871  Northcote and Preston separate from Shire of Darebin to form Shire of Jika Jika.

1873  Northcote Patent Brick Company established in Separation Street behind old Carter's Arms Hotel. In 1882 Northcote Brick Company took over the site - 'most of Melbourne built on Northcote clay'.

Inebriates Retreat on site of present Northcote High School in St George’s Road opens. (Operates until 1893.)

1874  First government school - Northcote State School (No.1401) in Helen Street, opened. Richard Tobin was head teacher. [Wesleyan school closed.]

1875  Gas lines connected to businesses and some street lighting! This could only be done with a permanent bridge across Merri Creek at High Street.

1876  First bank - Commercial Bank in High Street (now demolished).

1880's  Building boom - many farms broken up for residential building blocks. Completion of Rucker's Hill embankment to allow cable trams to travel.

1882  Northcote Brick Company incorporated in Separation Street.

1883 - 1889

1883  Northcote separates from Shire of Jika Jika to form Borough of Northcote. C H James builds and operates railway between Clifton Hill and Alphington – known as 'nowhere to nowhere railway line', as it didn't connect to another railway. It connected to James' horse-drawn tram that ran up Station Street to meet his land subdivision – Fairfield Park.

1884  Council establishes a free reading room for the public. Uses money from the demise of the Northcote Health League in 1883.

One of the first tramways (horse-drawn) established in Station Street, Fairfield by C H James. Used mainly on sale days to convey buyers to land sales.

1885  Little Sisters of the Poor convent opened in St Georges Road on Brown's Farm property.

1886  First Austral Wheel Race (Bicycle Race).

1888  Leader Newspaper (under various titles over the years) begins publication.

Town Hall foundation stone laid - first stage opened in 1889 with Post Office and Law Court completed in 1890. Design by G R Johnson - local resident and designer of Melbourne Exhibition Buildings.

Grandview Hotel in Fairfield erected.

Heidelberg Railway line opened.

1889  Whittlesea Railway line opened on 8 October. Railway stations - Northcote, Middle Northcote, Croxton, Thornbury opened. Link to Melbourne via Fitzroy. Approx. 30 min journey to city by train!
1890 - 1912

1890  Northcote proclaimed a Town by the Earl of Hopetoun, Governor General of Australia.
      Rucker's Hill embankment completed for cable tram.
      Beginning of Second Major Depression.

1891/3  Opening and closing of the Outer Circle railway line section between Fairfield and Camberwell - loss of Fulham Grange railway station.

1892  Northcote Library opened in new Municipal Buildings.
      First telephone used in district at Town Hall.

1893  Banks closed due to ‘Second’ Depression.
      Cable Tram Company in liquidation.
      Over 1/4 of all shops closed in Northcote.

1898  Northcote Tile & Pottery founded in Clyde Street, Thornbury.

1897  First screening of a motion picture in Northcote arranged by the Primitive Methodists.
      Original part of Peacock Inn pulled down and re-built.

1901  Rachabite Hall built opposite Town Hall.

1902  Gaiety Theatre opens in High St.

1904  Northcote linked by railway to Clifton Hill and thus shorter route to Melbourne.

1910  Local telephone exchange constructed.

1911  Library building built mostly from funds donated by Andrew Carnegie on the condition that use was free of entry and use.

1912  Northcote Picture Theatre opened - first Mayoral ball held there.
      Westgarth railway station opened, Northcote South station closed.

1913 - 1932

1913  Town Hall part of Municipal Buildings opened

1914  **Northcote proclaimed a City** coinciding with introduction of electrification of City.

1917  Sutton Tool & Gauge established.

1919  Establishment of paper manufacturers in Fairfield on the Yarra river.

1920  Australian Broom Company (ABC) established. W S Needlands takes over Tharrat Joinery & Timber business.

1921  Westgarth Picture Theatre opened in Westgarth. (For 15 years renamed Vahalla in 1980s.)
      First Infant Welfar Centre established. Others follow within decade.

1923  Northcote Baths in Fredeick St opens. Old Pimms Quarry.
1925 | Last patient transferred from Yarra Bend Asylum. 1926 Yarra Bend becomes a park. 
Regent Theatre opens in Thornbury. 
Northcote cable tram links directly with Clifton Hill (across Merri Ck) without need of changing trams. 
Overhead bridge constructed for railway to cross High St.

1928 | History of Northcote published by Northcote Council. The author is William George Swift the Town Clerk. 
Northcote High School opens in St Georges Rd. Students taken in 2 years earlier but lessons at other sites.

1929 | Beginning of Third Major downturn – Great Depression – lasted till 1939.

1930 | (Later) Chandler Hwy – Old Outer circle railway line over Yarra opens for road traffic. Linking Kew. 
Trams, Buses, etc.

1933 | Northcote's Jubilee. Special publication issued Northcote Jubilee Celebrations 1883-1933.

1939 | World War II - September - September 1945

POST WWII

1954 | Newly crowned Queen of Elizabeth II's motorcade passes Town Hall.

1956 | Olympics held in Melbourne coinciding with introduction of television and subsequent closures of local picture theatres. Westgarth alone survives by showing Greek films through the 1960s and 1970s.

1960s | Modern industrialisation of Northcote. 
Migrants – Italians and Greeks settle.

1962 | Alphington and Fairfield become part of Northcote from Heidelberg Council. Increases size and population.

1967 | Infill building next to Town Hall built.

1970s | Decline of traditional industries such as footwear.


1981 | Opening of Northcote Plaza on the site of old brickworks.


1983 | The Northcote Side of the River published by Council to commemorate 100 years. Written by historian Andrew Lemon.


1986 | Carters Arms Hotel demolished.


1994 | 22 June. City of Northcote merged with City of Preston to form City of Darebin. Area to the south of Heidelberg Road is now part of the newly formed City of Yarra. Commissioners
appointed to oversee the City. Over 50% of council staff leave over next two years.


1997  Council elections and new council installed.

**Northcote Town Hall ceases to be used as Preston Town Hall now administrative base.**

1999  New municipal offices opened in Gower Street, Preston.


2000  Infill building demolished.


2002  Discover of tunnel beside Merri Ck. Linked to WWII munitions storage. (Between 1942-1945 Preston Town Hall was used as Allied Command HQ.)

2004  Northcote Town Hall reopens after extensive renovations as Theatre Precinct. 1930s colour scheme including curtain.

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Fully revised and updated 2015.

Highlighted dates are of significance.

Bibliography:
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