



BERRY NSW



Name: Berry School of Arts

Address: Alexandra Street, Berry NSW

The Place:

Berry is a small village within the City of Shoalhaven local government area on the South Coast of NSW. The population is 2421 (2011 census). By road, Berry is approximately 145 km south of Sydney, 10 km inland from Seven Mile Beach and 18 km north of the main commercial and administrative centre of Nowra, located on the Shoalhaven River. The rail way station of Berry is approximately 3 hours travel time from Sydney.

The History:

Europeans first crossed the district overland in April of 1797. The ship *Sydney Cove* was stranded on an island in the Bass Strait. The remaining survivors of a rescue party of 17 walked from where their longboat was wrecked at Ninety Mile Beach in an attempt to reach Sydney, a distance of 740km. They passed through the tribal area of the Wodi Wodi people now known as the Shoalhaven Coastal plain. In May 1797 the three survivors of the march made it to the cove at Wattamolla and, on 15 May 1797, they were able to signal a boat out fishing, which took them on to Sydney.

On 10 March 1805, Lieutenant Kent of HMS *Buffalo* returned to Sydney after exploring the district 18 miles north from Jervis Bay with James Meehan, the assistant Surveyor General. Independent cedar getters were in the Shoalhaven from at least 1811.

Settlement:

In February 1822, Alexander Berry and Edward Wollstonecraft jointly applied for a grant of 10,000 acres, which was approved by Governor Brisbane, though the deed was not issued until 1830.

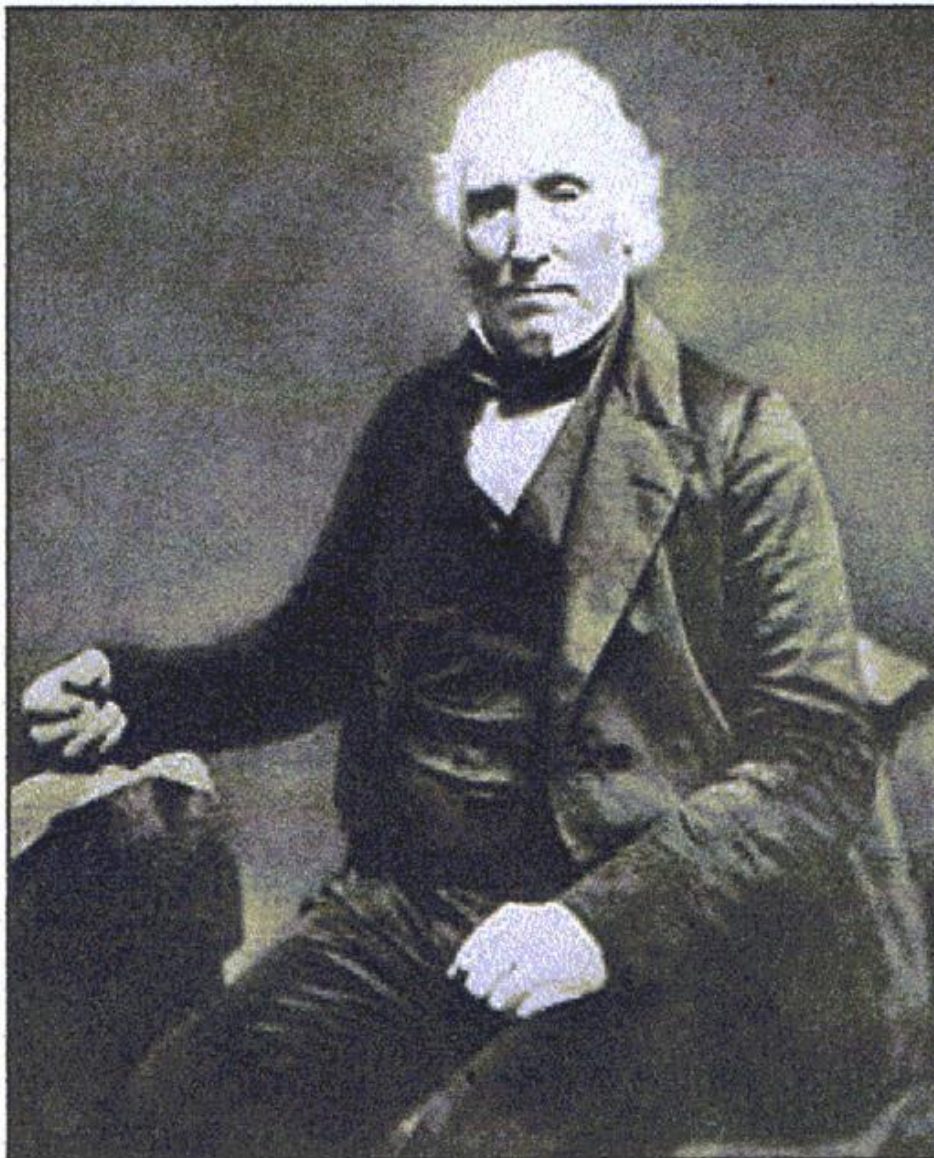


Berry's residence called "Cullengatty Farm" was begun in 1823 on the lower slope of Mount Coolangatta. By the early 1840s additional purchases of land from the crown and private individuals increased the size of the estate to 32,000 acres. Berry and Wollstonecraft obtained a virtual monopoly on cedar cutting.

After his wife died in 1845 Alexander Berry became a virtual recluse and his brother David took charge of the estate. In the 1850s Berry began to let farms on clearing leases and with this occupation by tenant farmers the real development of the Shoalhaven commenced. Alexander Berry died in 1873.

David Berry died unmarried in 1889 and he left an estate valued at £1,250,000. John Hay, his cousin, was the principal beneficiary of his will. Enormous bequests by David Berry to the University of St. Andrews (Scotland) and to the endowment of a hospital at Berry, amounting to a quarter of a million pounds, made it necessary for the trustees to sell the estate.

On 29 March 1892 the sale of the Berry (Shoalhaven) Estates began and continued for 3 days.



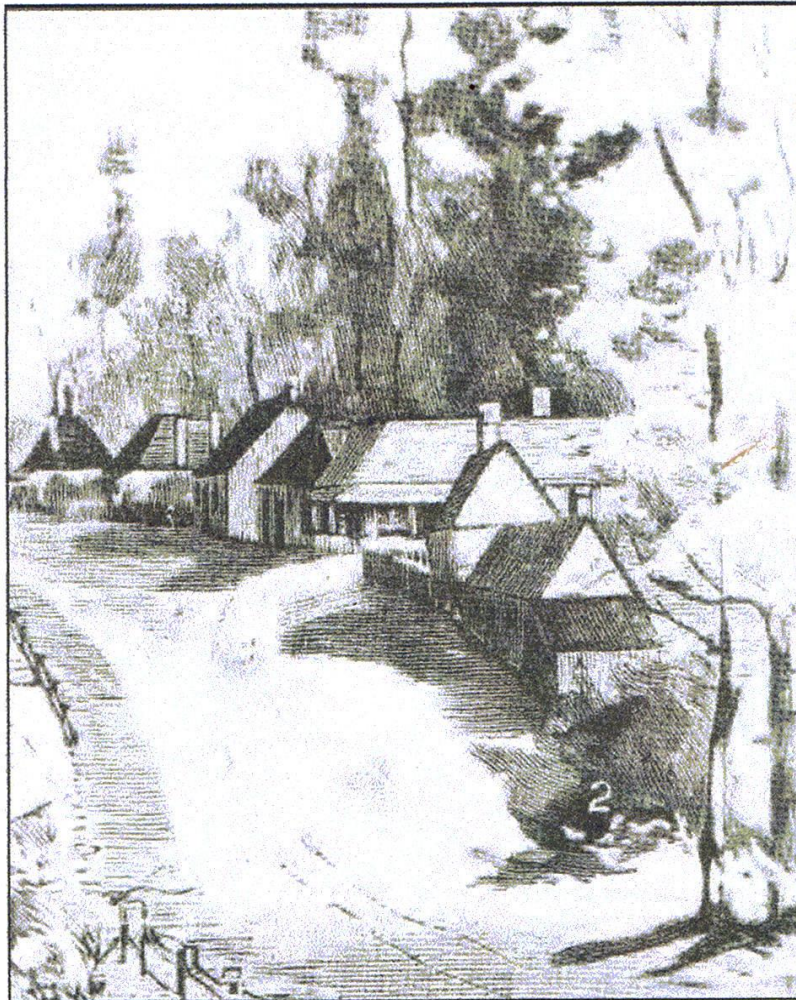
Alexander Berry



Development of the Township:

Until 1899, the town of Berry was known as Broughton's Creek. The place was named after Broughton (c.1798 – c.1850) an aboriginal guide, tracker and constable, who was born at Boon-ga-ree, which became known from 1822-1888 as Broughton Creek and subsequently as Berry. Broughton, whose Aboriginal name was rendered as Toodwick, accepted and strove to adapt to the new society introduced by the colonists.

Broughton Creek was strategically sited on the northern part of Berry's Estate with a wharf on the creek, a water powered sawmill and a tannery. As the land was opened up, first by Berry Estate tenant farmers and then in the 1860s by settlers under the Robertson Land Act, Broughton Creek became the port of a very large area where dairy farms were established. In 1879, six years after Alexander Berry's death, Broughton Creek was surveyed and a plan for a town on the higher land on the west of the creek was drawn up.



Broughton Creek Village – Pulman Street 1870s

After David Berry's death in 1889 the name of the town was changed from Broughton Creek to Berry in his honour. The Illawarra rail line (now the South Coast Line) was opened as far as Bombo just north of Kiama. The Bombo to Bomaderry section was opened in 1893. The town of Berry continued to flourish as a service centre for a predominately saw milling and dairying district. The population was 1300 in 1884. Today Berry continues to provide basic service needs to the community, but the 1980s saw it transformed into a tourist town, with coffee shops, antiques and gift shops.



The beginning.....from 1866:

When the Berry School of Arts building was constructed in 1906, the School of Arts and Mechanics' Institute movement was still at its peak in New South Wales. Other Schools of Arts were established in the Illawarra and the south coast region of New South Wales. Wollongong formed a School of Arts in the 1870s, Kiama in 1889, while Jaspers Brush, Pyree, and Kangaroo Valley also established their own Schools of Arts.

The School of Arts Committee in Berry existed as an established entity long before the planning of its new building was begun, this being the fourth home for the organisation. This demonstrates how the developing community accommodated and adapted to changing circumstances and how it expressed their collective aspirations.

In 1879 the old courthouse at Broughton Creek housed the municipal chambers and a free library. Given the timing, this library may have been the first of the Reading Rooms occupied by the Broughton Creek Literary and Debating Society (BLDS), originally formed in 1866. This earlier group changed its name prior to 1888, since the society's 'Manuscript Journals' were produced from that year. From this evolved the Berry School of Arts. From 1889 meetings were held at the former Agricultural and Horticultural Association's (AHA) exhibition hall up until the current building was constructed for the Berry School of Arts Society in 1906.

Thus the Berry School of Arts has an association with the current CWA rooms, this being the former Pulman Street school house in which the BLDS was founded, and also the Gilham Street caretaker's cottage which is a remnant of the first AHA 'long room' Hall. The current School of Arts building is close by both of these buildings.



CWA Building

The former Pulman street school house where the BDLS was founded in 1866



Gilham Street Caretaker's Cottage

Remnant of the first AHA Hall where meetings were held from 1889 until 1906 when the new School of Arts building was opened.

The Building:

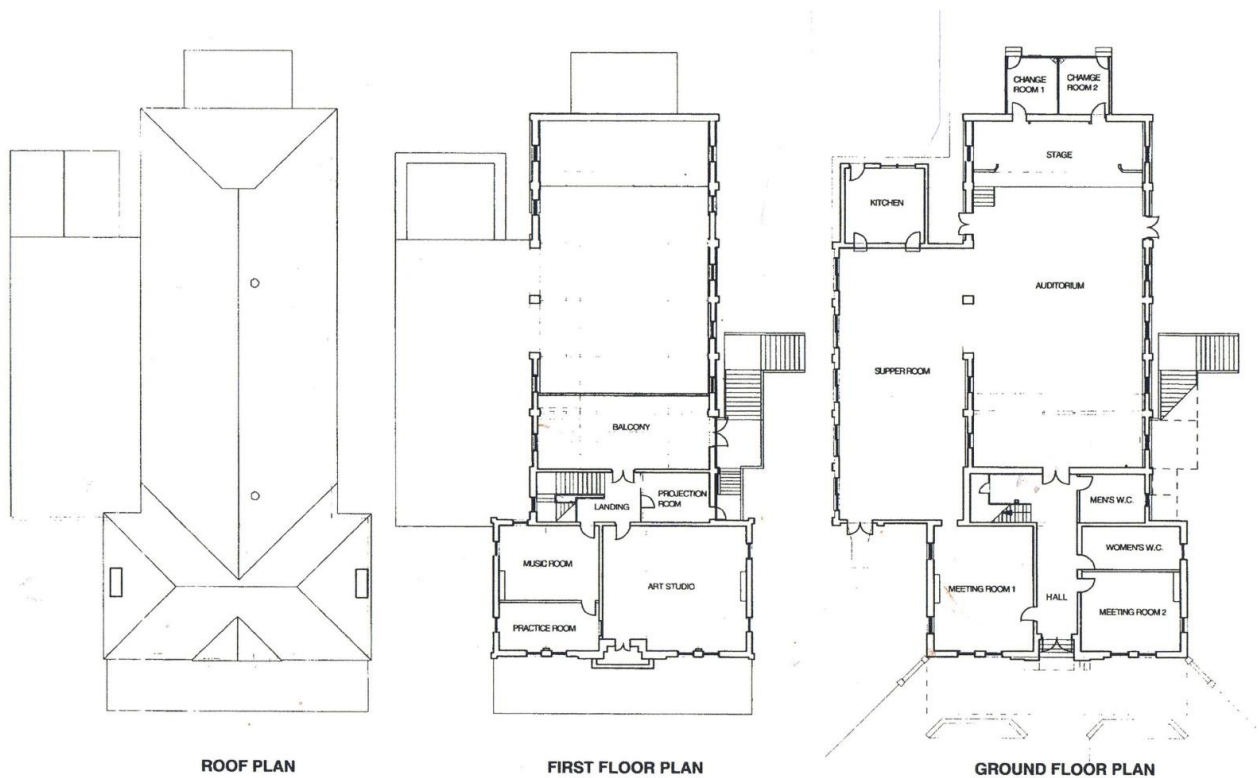
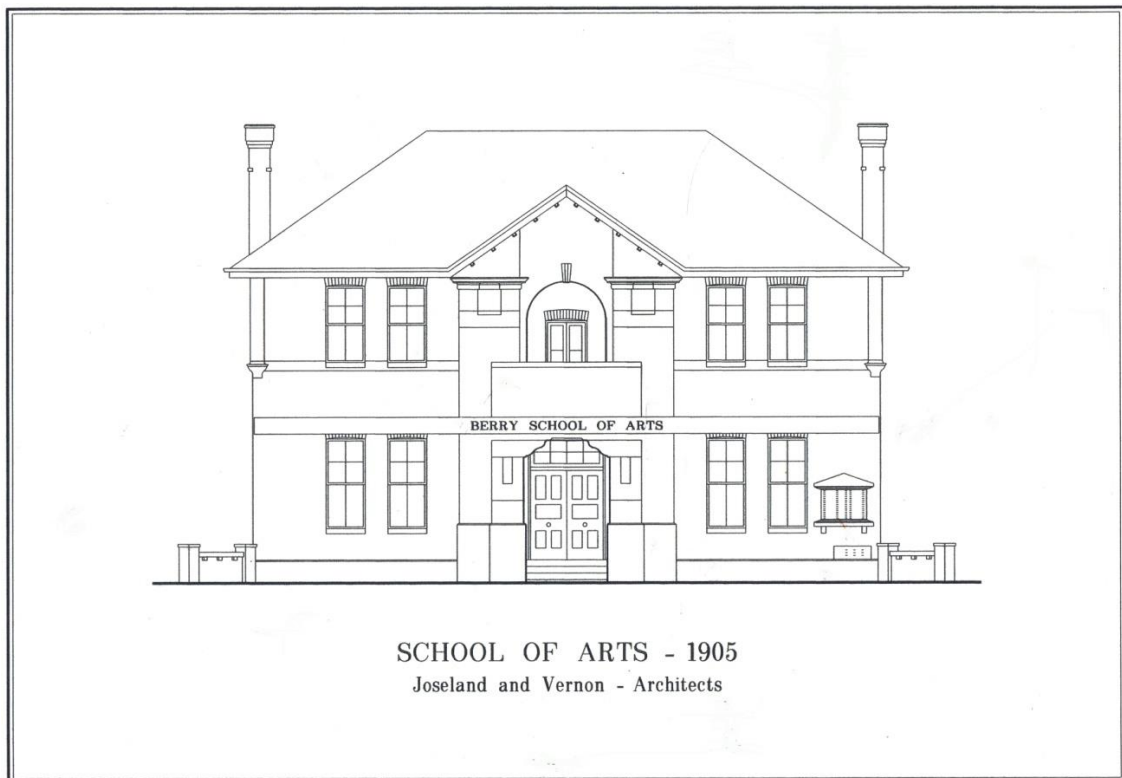
Design, patronage, and finances

Historical associations related to the patronage from the Berry/Hay family, the architect, and the prevailing financial circumstances prior to the First World War.

The first design for the current building was drawn up by the builder, Jack Johnston of Berry. References indicate this to have been of an ornate Victorian style. Due to funding subsidies of the time, the overall plan may have been based on a Public Works pattern, though confirmation of this is yet to be located.

Given Hay's involvement in financing the project, it is probable he sought the advice of his brother-in-law the Architect Howard Joseland. The project was then passed to his firm, Joseland and Vernon. Comments at the building opening speak of its modern and up-to-date appearance. The building's facades are characteristic of Joseland's restrained use of the Free Federation style and honest use of materials. The project confirmed Joseland's close association with the Hays, who also commissioned him to design the David Berry Memorial Hospital in 1908, Joseland's largest commission in the area.

Joseland's work, for the greater part, was domestic in nature. He was responsible for the design of many substantial houses on Sydney's North Shore, particularly on the Berry estates at North Sydney and Wahroonga, where he himself lived. Joseland is celebrated for his rejection of the decorative excess of late Victorian architecture, advocating designing for the climate, use of appropriate materials and the exclusion of irrelevant embellishments. These principles contributed to the widespread use of the Queen Anne and Federation styles in Australian domestic architecture.



Floor Plan for Berry School of Arts

These plans show on the left the later addition of the Supper Room first mooted in 1914; and the kitchen, added in 1911



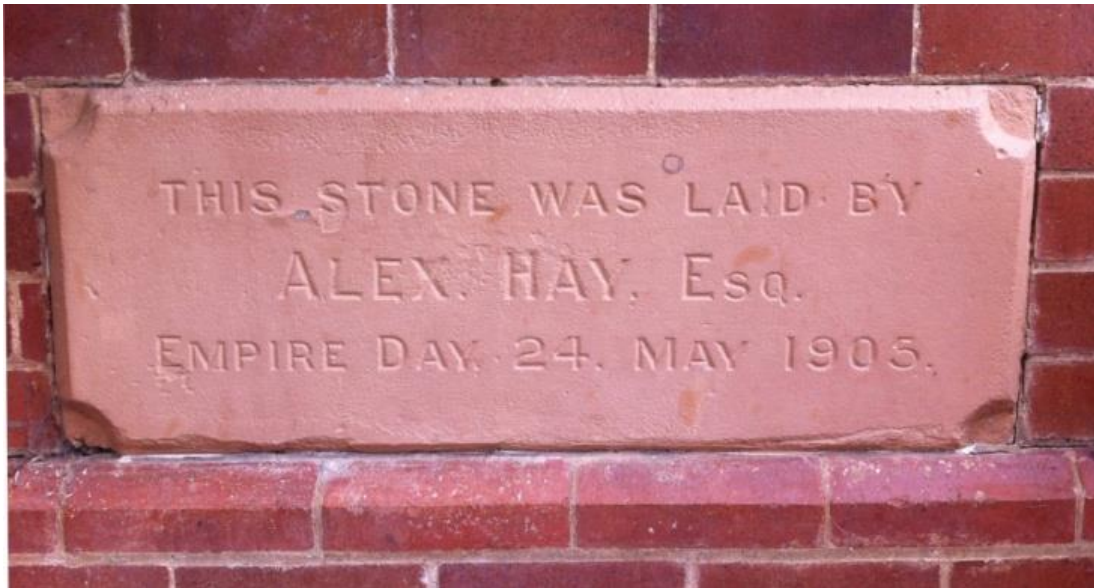
Alexandra Street façade 2015



Building interior: Entrance Hall



The financing for construction of the Berry School of Arts had been arranged before Alexander (half-brother of John Hay and then manager of the former Berry estates) had set the foundation stone on 24th May 1905. Total cost of the construction was £2,100.



Foundation Stone 24 May 1905

The strong movement toward construction of Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts in New South Wales was a direct result of government financial encouragement. The Berry School of Arts received a grant of £199/15/10 from the Colonial Treasury in 1907 and a further £26/16/7 was paid as the first instalment of a series of annual maintenance grants.

Sir John Hay donated the land outright to the Committee, which then used this asset to raise the residual funds for the building's construction. A mortgage of £1,511/3/11 was taken on the land and while the sum of Hay's promised donation is not clear from the statement of accounts, it is likely to have been around £400.

The treasurer's report of 1907 announced a debt of £1800. It was made up of £1200 loaned by a Mrs Jeffries and £600 owed to Sir John Hay. Over the following four years, over £400 in mortgage interest was paid. In 1912 Mrs Jefferies called in her loan. As Hay had died in 1910, the Committee approached the trustees of his estate for relief from this debt.

They were treated extremely generously, receiving a donation of £450, and the balance of £150 owed to the Estate was simply wiped from the books. In addition Mrs. Jeffries was paid in full and terms of £50 annually were allowed for repayment of the new loan. The School of Arts Society was in a much more agreeable situation financially but possibly because of these new circumstances the government subsidies were discontinued in 1915.



Sir John Hay who gifted the land and provided funds to support the new School of Arts building

Uses:

The need to secure a regular income despite the generosity of the trustees of Hay's estate competed with the cultural and intellectual aspirations of the School of Arts committee. A billiards table had been purchased in 1903, while still in the old premises, and this proved to have been a profitable investment. In its first year the society gained £35/18/3 from Billiards Room receipts. In early 1914 the committee approved the purchase of a second billiards table to be installed in the large room upstairs. Receipts from billiards were almost doubled in 1914, amounting to £62/11/9, while other rents amounted to £146/8/3. By 1915 the mortgage debt was effectively halved and the minutes of the Annual General Meeting expressed optimism for the future of the society.



Phases resulting in building modification and changes:

Like other similar institutions, the Berry School of Arts followed a path adapting to changing circumstances in order to survive, moving from its Literacy Society base to the provision of a billiards room and later, picture shows, whilst retaining a community function centre focus.

Many of the Journals of the 1890s, although highly fragile, continue to survive within the local Museum and at Riverview College Library in Sydney. These demonstrate the vibrancy of the organisation in this period and how heavily involved various community representatives were.

The Chronology contained in Appendix B of the Shoalhaven Council's Conservation Management Plan contains numerous references to the array and types of social events associated with the site and how it functioned as a major community focus. Throughout the 20th century, despite waxing and waning of activity and prosperity, the building largely remained the same despite some modifications to accommodate changing community needs and services.

The School of Arts opened on 18th January 1906. The building was operational immediately, with an evening of dramatic and musical entertainment following celebrations, which included a sports carnival. Guests were free to wander the building's reading room and library, and to admire its billiard and lodge rooms.

The Town and Country Journal of January 17th 1906 records the names together with a photograph of the committee members as:

President: A J Colley

Vice Presidents: Jas. English and Thos. M^cLay,

Secretary: Geo. Gilliam,

Treasurer: Jas. Wilson,

Librarian: J Jacobs, and

Committee Members: Messrs Lovegrove, Bouse, Osbourne, Quirk,
Watts, Baralay, Jas. Robertson, A Binks,
Dunlop, Cox, and Love.

Minutes of planning meetings record that the upper floor of the building had been deliberately designed for use by Berry Council and early photographs indicate that, at least for a short time, the upper meeting room was also being used as a Masonic Lodge room.

Shortly after its completion, the new building was struck by a severe gale, causing damage that required the expenditure of an additional £130 for repairs whilst scenery valued at £23 was completely ruined.

Minor modifications were also found necessary as the committee settled into its new home.



Storm damage 1905

In 1906 kerbing, guttering and asphalt were used to seal the approach to the front of the building for the comfort of the members but also maybe because the building contained the Council offices. This treatment lasted for more than twenty years but in July 1930 Mr Schofield reported that the footpath in front of the institution, recently resurfaced, had suffered considerable damage from heavy rain.

A kitchen with a copper and benches was installed in 1911 at a cost of £17/ 12/-. The supper room, mooted in 1914, was a later addition to the building.



The Supper Room



A marble tablet engraved with the names of local men who had enlisted in the 1914-18 War was installed on the front wall of the Berry School of Arts. Sir Walter Davidson, Governor of New South Wales, and Lady Davidson unveiled the memorial on 1 February 1922. Several trees were planted in the street to commemorate the occasion.



Great War Honour Roll

The first connection of electricity in Berry was made in 1927 when the supply of power reached the town from the power station at Port Kembla.

Sydney audiences had seen Al Jolson that year when *The Jazz Singer*, the first movie to be made with sound, was screened. To meet the demand for this new sensation the committee permitted Mr. J. McIntyre to rent the School of Arts for his Lyric Theatre. This addition to the entertainment register necessitated several modifications, a projection room was constructed on the northern end of the gallery and there is some indication that the stage was altered to provide space for a screen. The introduction of the pictures was mutually satisfactory despite some friction between McIntyre and the other tenants.

An awning bearing the legend 'Lyric Theatre' required some modification of the front of the building, detracting from the aesthetic appeal of its facade.



The Lyric Theatre

In 1928 a contract was let to Mr. J Blow to concrete the floor of the kitchen at a cost of £5/15/-, while in October 1929, the dressing rooms were found to be in a deplorable condition and this problem was handed over to the works committee.

Interior Architectural Features

Ceiling plaque which appears in several areas of the building including the Upper Gallery



Capital to arches in the Entrance Hall and the Supper Room





The Great Depression had an effect on the running of the School of Arts. In 1914 twenty-six schoolchildren sat for the examinations and 12 scholarships were awarded. These scholarships often included books as well as membership of the library. But in 1930, the Society offered to one boy and one girl scholar only a Reading Certificate, which gave free membership of the School of Arts to June 1931.



Stage

The committee rejected an application in September 1930 from the organisers of a boxing contest to hold an event in the School of Arts hall. The electrical installation however had been altered to accommodate changes made to the projection room of the pictures in April 1930, and had to be paid for, so the boxing match went ahead. There was then a matter of conflict over the use of chairs that were often borrowed for their own functions from the pictures, by the Red Cross Ladies, whose tenancy of the building dated from 1914. At the risk of offending these long-term tenants, in 1931 Mr. McIntyre was given permission to screw down the chairs in the picture theatre to prevent their removal.

Despite the repugnance with which the committee on first application greeted such non-intellectual events and functions as boxing matches and picture shows, they provided financial benefit. A committee member had observed in 1911 that besides the obvious financial benefits to be gained, encouraging members such as those who were billiards players or who only wanted boxing matches and the pictures, was bringing male members into close contact with the institution and all its benefits.

In 1931 regular tenants of the hall requested a 22% reduction in their rental. In January 1931 Mr. Wilson was asked to draw up specifications for a concrete and rail fence fronting Princess Street, and the minutes of April 1931 call for a wire netting partition between the Reading Room and the Library.



In May 1931 several alterations were made with lights placed at all the exits, the (external) ladies lavatory moved and paths constructed to it.

The School of Arts committee received an order from the Chief Secretary's Department in 1932 that listed a great number of safety features to be effected to comply with the Theatres and Public Halls Act. Widening of the exit steps was required, and lights installed at the corners of the exterior wall of the building; all exit doors were widened and fitted with spring bolt locks; and widening of the (internal) staircase to ensure the safety of patrons or the upper gallery was required to avoid its closure. An alternative scheme was put into effect and a six-foot stairway was placed from the gallery on the north side (exterior) to the ground. Mr. J. Blow built the external fire staircase in 1932, to plans supplied by Mr. James Wilson who also supervised the project.



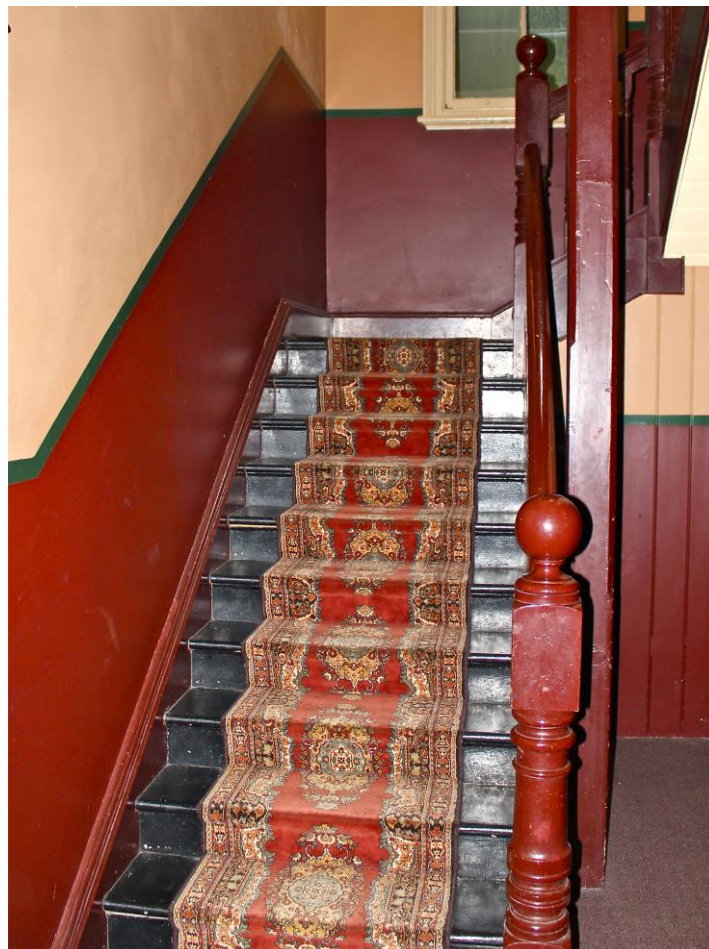
This photograph of the side elevation of the building shows to the rear on the right the external stairway built in 1932 to meet safety requirements for continuing use of the upper gallery of the hall.

During this same year it was also found necessary to place wire netting over windows in the supper room as a protection against tennis balls from the adjoining court. The cost of all of these items was £54/3/6.



Upper Gallery

In 1933 the load-bearing capacity of posts under the gallery was examined to establish whether they might be removed. A reason for the examination has not been established but it was subsequently determined that this work was possible and the posts were removed while the flooring beneath was repaired by Mr. Cook.



Staircase to the Upper Gallery



In 1955 Harry Waghorn took over the operation of the cinema from relatives of Mr Gordon McIntyre's sister and brother-in-law. A ticket box, 'Raycophone' sound system and two Australia C&W carbon arc projectors were installed.

The hall was licensed for 310 seats and a further 90 in the upper gallery mezzanine. The local milk bar operator, Bill Blanley, sold items during interval from the former library front room, while Mrs McDonald ran the library in the reading room during interval on Wednesday and Saturday nights. It appears that this was the only income for the building during this time with no occupants for the upper rooms. The dressing rooms were used more for archival storage.

The committee held title to the land from the time of its donation by Dr Hay and this had been used as security since the construction of the building in 1906. Shoalhaven Council took over the ownership of the site and management of the building in 1964 and operation of the building became the responsibility of a committee delegate under the Local Government Act, 1919.

This change was brought about by a range of factors. Over a number of years the building had deteriorated markedly from lack of maintenance. Changes in regulations for public halls required a major upgrading of the building's facilities, which the committee could not afford. Income had decreased with the shifting demographic profiles and, in part, due to offering a greater accessibility to a wider range of entertainment choices.

Despite the loss of a consistent source of income when the billiard tables were removed (anecdotally to the rear of premises in Queens Street), and the Lyric Cinema was closed in 1968, the building became the venue for other community functions continuing to play an important role in the town.

As no other premises in Berry were large enough, the hall was used for dances and balls by local organisations, such as the football club, although contemporary oral histories indicate that a lack of respect for the premises was not uncommon.

The AHA has continued to have annual bookings. Its *Show Queen* competition was a part of its 1934 annual show celebrations, and was won by the aptly named Miss Cheadda McKinnon. In 1965 the same organisation presented Mrs. Dudley Atkins with a token of their appreciation at a testimonial function at the Berry School of Arts.

The Berry Camellia Society Exhibition was held on 7 July 2000. St Patrick's Easter Parade and Concert was held in April, entertaining the school's parents and friends; and the ladies of the Berry branch of the Red Cross, founded in 1914, continue to meet in the same rooms they have occupied for almost ninety years.

The Berry School of Arts has had a significant role in the history of the town of Berry and has been in continuous use. Once the material needs of their lives had been satisfied, the people looked to the School of Arts for those more instructional and enlightening needs of the spirit.



Currently:

ADFAS Shoalhaven uses the Berry School of Arts as its lecture venue for its eight lectures per year.



Members of ADFAS Shoalhaven enjoying convivial company after a lecture.

Other current users of the Berry School of Arts are: -

Antique Fairs, Art Society meetings, and Community meetings, Book Fairs, Painting groups, Historical lectures, Weddings, Music Concerts and Drama performances.



Bibliography:

1. BERRY SCHOOL OF ARTS, Conservation Management Plan, 2000.
Prepared for the Shoalhaven City Council by
Susan Jackson – Stepowski, Heritage Planning Consultant and
James Phillips, Weir and Phillips, Architects
in association with Margaret Neihus, Historian.
2. NSW DEPARTMENT OF ROADS AND MARITIME SERVICES.
Foxground and Berry Bypass, Environmental Assessment Report.
Appendices:
Appendix J – Aboriginal Cultural Heritage (Part 1).
Appendix K – Non Aboriginal (Historic) Heritage Part 1.

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Additional photographs: Jim Birkett, Chairman ADFAS Shoalhaven

ADFAS Shoalhaven

April 2015