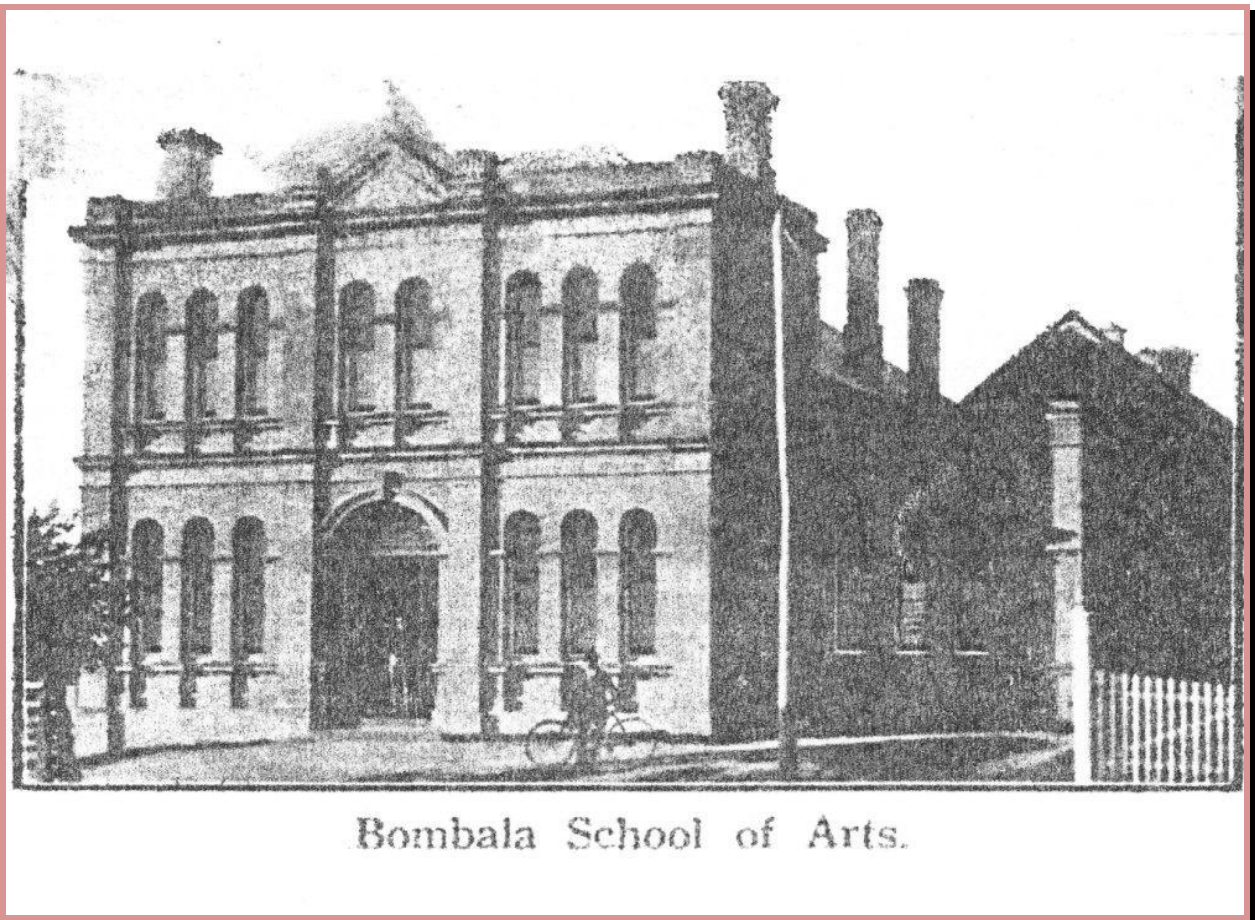




BOMBALA NSW



Name: **School of Arts** (also variously, Mechanics' Institute, Literary Institute and Institute).

Address: 15 Caveat Street Bombala

The Town:

Bombala is located in the Monaro district, the south eastern region of New South Wales between the coast and the snowfields of the Snowy Mountains. It is just under 500 kilometres south of Sydney and 80 kilometres south of Cooma. Situated on the Bombala River, its name is from the Ngarigu people of the region and thought to mean 'meeting of the waters'. Today, the town is small with a population of about 1206 (2006 census). With an elevation of 760 metres above sea level, it experiences cold, often snowy winters. The region of the town is fringed by National Parks, nature reserves, and State Forests. The major industries are grazing, for the production of fine wool and beef cattle, and timber-getting; with some more recent 'specialist' industries such as the production of lavender. Tourism is becoming more important and the picturesque local area is promoted as 'Platypus Country' with the largest population in NSW of this iconic native creature.

The area was first settled in the 1830s when Captain Ronald Campbell established a grazing property. By 1848, he owned 6500 hectares which he called 'Bombalo'. By 1856, Bombala



had a population twice that of Cooma, which is today the largest town of the region. The town of Bombala was created a borough in 1891. It was proposed in 1903 to be the site of the new national capital because of its location midway between Sydney and Melbourne. The Senate of the Australian Federal Parliament voted in support of Bombala but the House of Representatives voted for another site and because the divergence of opinion was unable to be resolved, a quite different location, to become Canberra, was chosen.

The railway reached Bombala in 1921 but the line was closed in 1986. The main road to the coast now bypasses Bombala, resulting in a gradual decline in the population.

Establishment: 1872-1874

On the afternoon of Thursday 14 November 1872, a meeting was held in Bombala at Curran's Imperial Hotel. The meeting was chaired by Mr WVM Cooke and Mr S Perry consented to act as Secretary. After some discussion, Mr Hogarth moved "*That in the opinion of this meeting it is expedient that a School of Arts be formed in Bombala.*" The motion was seconded by Mr Myers and carried. It was further moved and carried that a prospectus should be produced setting out the benefit and scope of such an institution and circulated throughout the district, together with a subscription list.

The meeting also proposed the creation of a Sub Committee to take action on these decisions, with members Messrs WVM Cooke, D Myers, JE Bennet, H Hogarth, T Curran, H Wyndyer, CL Tweedie and T Perry.

The next meeting, 28 November 1872, elected officers of the institution: John Boucher of Bukalong President; John Nicholson, WVM Cooke, DM Myers Vice Presidents; S Perry Secretary; the Manager of the Commercial Bank in Bombala for the time being to be Treasurer; W Rutherford and W Coulter Trustees. A Committee of Management was also appointed. All officers were elected unanimously.

The subscription was set at one pound per annum, to be paid quarterly in advance.

The earlier idea of a prospectus was raised again and Mr Wyndyer made an offer to print the prospectus as his donation to the institution. The rules and regulations of the Sydney Mechanics' Institute were proposed to be adopted until such time as Bombala could frame its own. It was decided that meetings of the School of Arts could be held in a room at Mr Strickland's house *with the room to be attended and lights provided*. Mr Sharpe offered to make shelves for all books that may be given to the temporary institute and this offer was accepted with thanks.

By the end of 1872, there were several offers of land for the fledgling institution. In May of 1873, an offer of land in Caveat Street by Mr David Bell of Spring Flat was accepted. This gift, Mr Bell was informed, constituted him a life member of the Institute. Ultimately, the land made available was on the opposite side of Caveat Street. The land title, valued at 122 pounds, was formally conveyed to the Institute.

Despite seemingly good progress, the local newspaper reported complaints about the conduct of some of the officers of the institution and as a result, at the meeting of 8 September 1873,



it was decided that the business of the proceedings of meetings be published. The record of minutes of meetings was noted and signed to this effect from that date.

With land available, it was decided that application be made to the government for the amount of grant able to be claimed. A government subsidy for maintaining the institution was paid and in the following year, 1874, 500 pounds was requested for a building fund. It was proposed to arrange a course of lectures throughout the winter *with a view to carrying out the objects of a School of Arts* and so *demonstrating the necessity for a Hall*. It was also decided that the ladies of the town and district be approached, asking them to form a ladies committee to assist in running the School of Arts 'bazaar' [we would call it a fete]. At the meeting of 1 April 1875.... *..In consideration of their valuable services at the recent Bazaar in aid of the Building Fund, these ladies be elected honorary members: Mesdames Hogarth (2,) Tivey, Bennet, Thorne, Myers, Harper, C Solomon, Morgan and Hardaker*. The Bazaar raised just over 370 pounds for the building fund.

There seems to have been no bar to membership for ladies and in mid 1874, the rules stated that *A member, a paying adult, should be allowed to introduce not more than two children (between 8 and 12) to the course of lectures and to readings free of charge*. Those elected to membership included ladies.

Complaints about the Institute seemed to arise periodically and to have adverse impact on its continuing success. On 4 May 1887, the Bombala newspaper reported on a plan of the Committee *for re-establishing the Institution*:

1. *Add books to the Library in all departments of literature.*
2. *The Reading Room to be supplied with leading newspapers.*
3. *A good piano of powerful tone to make musical entertainments a feature; possibly organise a Philharmonic Society or Glee Club in connection with the School of Arts.*
4. *Make energetic efforts to promote a series of lectures on popular subjects; for an elocution and debating class and for evenings of a mixed literary and musical character.*
5. *The interior of the Hall to be made more attractive with brilliant chandeliers instead of the present inefficient lamps. ...The proscenium and stage fittings renovated.... the gallery properly lighted.*
6. *The Hall should be operated, except when otherwise engaged, as a Skating Rink (under suitable rules).*
7. *A room.....should be built as a general social rendezvous for members only.....to include a billiard table and facilities for chess and draughts.*
8. *To raise funds to pay off an instalment of debt, a Bazaar or Art Union be organized at the earliest possible date.*

There was immediate effect: on 1 June 1887, a new Committee was elected and the next day there were immediate moves to implement the plan.



1 12"

Telephone 7463 CENTRAL

18-19, GRACECHURCH STREET, LONDON, E.C.

Established 1851

June 15 1914

To Hon Secretary, Bombala Literary Institute, Bombala, N.S.W. Australia.

L.S. 6323 To Alfred Wilson, EXPORT BOOKSELLER, NEWSAGENT, &c.

Bankers, London County & Westminster.

TITLE.	PERIOD.		£	s.	d.
	FROM	TO			
Boys Own Paper & do	July	June 15	7	6	
" " "Xmas do	"	"		8	
Strand Mag & do	"	"	9	4	
Pearsons " & do	"	"	10		
Mumsey " & do	"	"	10		
Harpers " & do	"	"	13	6	
Storyteller " & do	"	"	7	8	
Q Paper & do	"	"	8	6	
Junior Mechanics & do	"	"	6		
Sci American & do	June 29	June 26/15	19		
Sketch & do	"	"	2	1	
Punch & do	"	"	18	4	
Thick & do	"	"	1	19	8

Invoice for Periodicals and Journals from a London supplier to the Bombala Literary Institute

But the report of the Annual General Meeting of 23 July 1901 paints a picture of an institution where progress has faltered. In his report, the Secretary, WJ Fell, describes a range of problems: The subscriptions are falling off. The Club Room, for members only, is less popular, with equipment and furnishings in a poor state. Some of the members are constantly finding fault with the Committee and Secretary but never attempt to help the Institution in any way. The Public is generally apathetic: instead of 40 members there should be at least 100. Continuing, he relates that.....*at every small township the public there are running over each other in their eagerness to maintain such an Institution. Here they do all they can to smother it..... In other words there is something rankling in the public imagination against this Institution.... So many of the public do not stand off such a grand Institution for nothing.*

Again, there were new efforts to revitalise the Institution with demonstrated success. The Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) report on 27 July 1904 of the Annual General Meeting judged the past year as 'most successful with the debt on the Hall reduced by 50 pounds'. Even better, on 20 July 1909, the SMH again reported 'a very satisfactory state of affairs with a credit balance of 116 pounds. Since then, 263 pounds was spent on a caretaker's residence. In the current year, a new supper room is to be erected and the interior of the building will be repaired and redecorated. A new library system has been implemented and a juvenile library is to be introduced this year'.



The building as it now stands

The Building: 1874-1876

At the Meeting of the Committee of the School of Arts on 13 July 1874, it was decided to arrange for plans for a Hall to be drawn up and to make an enquiry in Sydney to begin the process. A committee for communicating with an architect with respect to plans and specifications for a suitable building was established early in 1875. Messrs Mansfield Brothers, architects for the Council of Education, were engaged to draw up plans for the Hall with an amount of 800 pounds reckoned to be available for the building. The responsible architect was JF Hilly.

Tenders for the building were advertised but the first tenders by D Mackay and Sons, Sydney and C Ralphs Bombala, were rejected as being too high and the project was readvertised. Meanwhile, the government grant for 500 pounds for the building was allowed on the basis of a one pound subsidy for every two pounds raised, with an annual subsidy, also from government, of 150 pounds for maintaining the institution.

New tenders were received from the two original bidders together with an additional tender from Teague and Chidgely of Bombala. At the end of August 1875, this new bid was deemed the most favourable and their tender for 1572 pounds was accepted. Building work commenced but in November 1875, the builders expressed some concern that the soil was not strong enough to bear the building. Work was suspended with the agreement that the Commercial Bank building, presumably located nearby and of similar size, should be examined to determine whether the building could safely proceed.



The foundation stone for the building was laid by John Boucher on Thursday 10 February 1876, arrangements having been made to purchase a silver presentation trowel *to cost no more than four pounds* for the great occasion . A sum of fifty two pounds was placed on the stone as contributions to the costs of the building. Midway through the building process, a plan was adopted for the raising of the front of the building to make a second storey. As well, in October, it was agreed that three rooms to accommodate a caretaker be erected and Teague and Chidgely undertook this work for an additional cost of 110 pounds.

An Art Union for the Bombala School of Arts was arranged in November with 5000 tickets to be sold at five shillings each. Fund raising, especially for the building, and donations of all kinds, including books, and services in support, are regularly recorded .

The building was opened on Friday 29 December with 400 people present. Mr HM Joseph took the chair and Mr David Myers delivered the inaugural address.



The National Trust in recording the building describes it as ‘a substantial part single storey, part two storey hall; a brick building with iron roof, rendered Italianate front with central entry with bolection moulded doors’. It is an impressive and attractive building with changes to adapt to different uses through its life.

Entry doors Bombala Literary Institute

A Club Room incorporating a billiard room was added in 1888, with provision for the hall to be used as a skating rink in the same year. The Reading Room was renovated in 1889 and a Gymnasium was made available in that year.

The interior was equally impressive: an article published by *The Australian Town and Country Journal* in 1887 describes this. (*See separate text below for this description*).

Uses:

In November 1876 with the building nearly completed, the Committee made projections for use of the hall and set fees for various purposes. Fees were to be charged for concerts, theatrical performances, lectures, banquets, balls, public meetings, auction sales, bazaars, tea meetings, and commercial travellers, a wide and varied usage. The scale of fees accorded



with the demands of the purpose, with additional charges for use of the stage, music, lighting, the supper room and other extras. Lodge meetings and athletics clubs became regular users. The Hall was the focus of community activity for the town. Later, in early 1877 after the opening of the Hall, it was decided that the use should be free for District Court sittings and for the Land Commissioners' Court, a reasonable decision, given that there were continuing applications for government grants which were mostly met, though not always for the full amount.

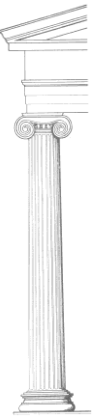
The Committee advertised in 1876 for both a librarian and a caretaker in preparation for the opening, a clear indication of priorities for facilities to be made available to members. Accommodation for the caretaker was erected as part of the original building. Frederick Warburton Hare is named as an early occupant of the position. After he returned from the First World War, where he lost an arm, Harold Payne is identified as caretaker. The citizens of Bombala raised funds to purchase a house for the family. Later, a caretaker's cottage was built in Caveat Street close to the Institute. A later caretaker is named as Benjamin Atkins. A Miss Perry is recorded as being one of the early librarians.

Apart from the customary library, reading room, newspapers, billiards, lectures and other provisions of the Institution, there was a flourishing Debating Club. Topics for debate were to be submitted to the Committee for approval and as a result there is a range of the topics recorded, some reflecting the times, others topical and contentious still today.

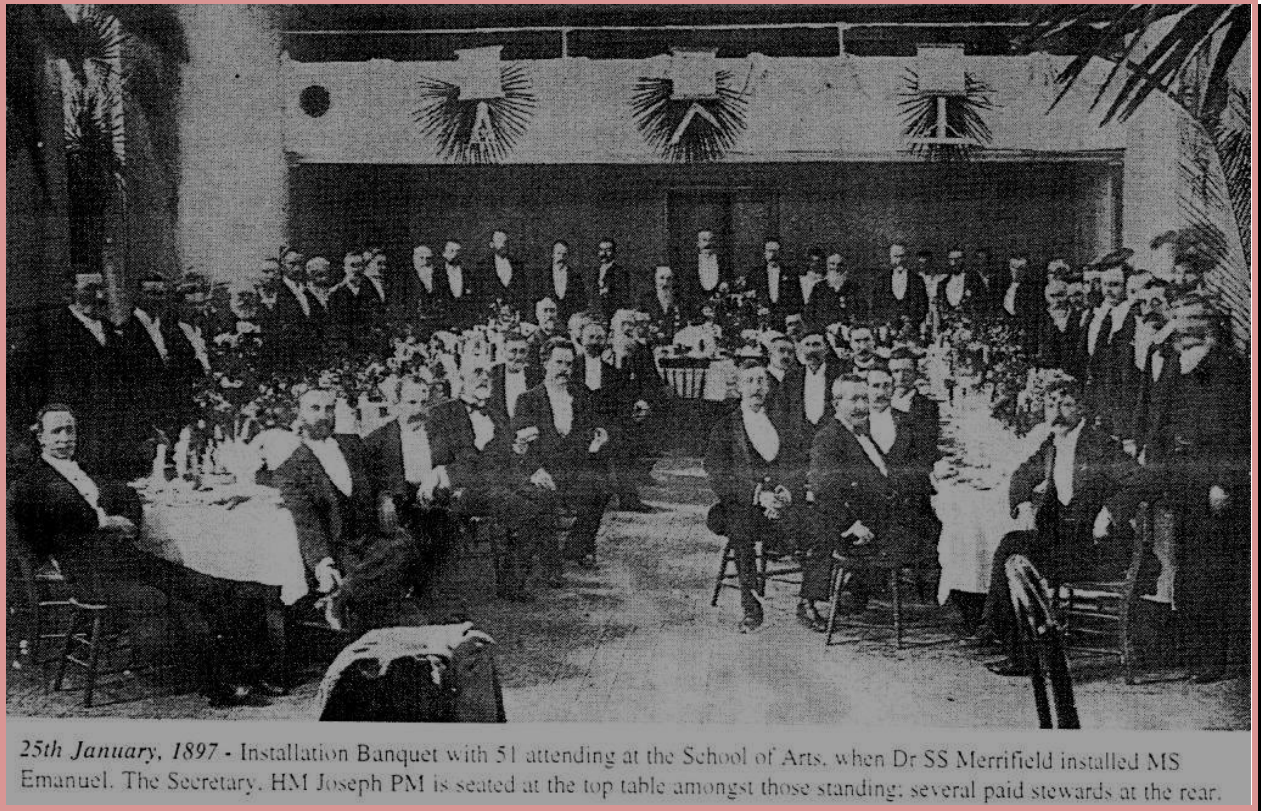
Some examples:

- *Is Mr Parkes' resolution to spend 150 thousand pounds on immigration one likely to prove beneficial to the colony?*
- *Has the stage a moral or immoral tendency?*
- *Whether the gold discoveries of Australia have retarded, or otherwise, its manufacturing industry.*
- *Should Members of Parliament be paid?*
- *Would it be advantageous to disannex the colony from the British throne?*
- *Is the intellect of the sexes equal?*
- *Should the franchise be extended to women?*
- *A Bill for the better protection of Aborigines in this Colony.*

The first grand occasion held in the Hall seems to have been the Sons of Temperance Dinner and Ball, on January 26th 1877, soon after the building was opened. Other grand and important occasions were numerous.



The first 'grand occasion'.....

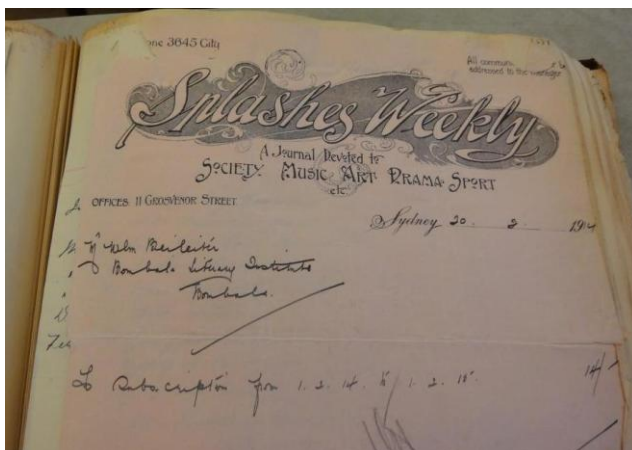


The *Australian Town and Country Journal* made the following report dated Saturday 29th August 1885:

‘Bombala School of Arts was crowded on Tuesday afternoon, between 300 and 400 people attending a prayer meeting for rain. All places of business and trades were closed between 1 and 5 o’clock. Members came from long distances to attend’.

And on 27 July 1889:

‘A Military Ball, in aid of funds for our local rifle company came off in the School of Arts last week. About forty couples faced the music which was kindly furnished by Miss Vidler and Miss Rowley. Dancing was kept up till day light. The Hall was nicely decorated by Sergeant-Major Hare’.



Ledger item for 1914: Annual subscription for *Splashes Weekly*.

Note range of content for this magazine:

Society Music Art Drama Sport

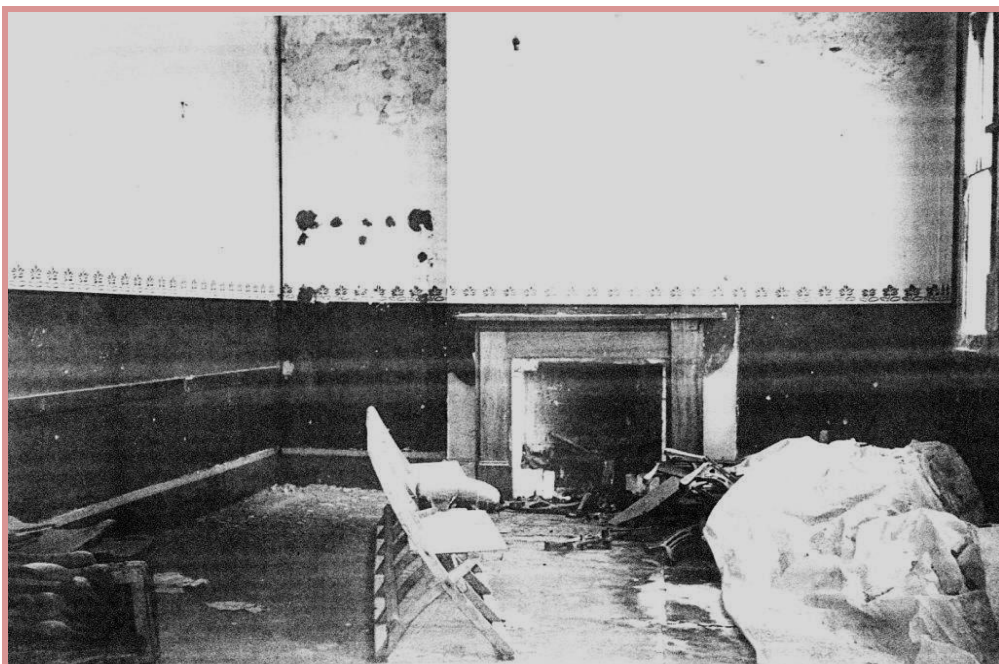


Currently (2012):

This interesting and impressive building is currently in a state of disrepair, a sad reality of the times when the need for such a building seems to have faded. Many of the regular users of the past, such as the various lodges, provided valuable income to sustain the activities of the School of Arts and maintain the building. Gradually though, these institutions built their own premises and use of the hall declined as a result and the income with it. As well, with universal compulsory education there was less need for the improving activities provided by the School of Arts movement. In the mid 1940s libraries also became a government responsibility, taken over by local councils, and 'private' libraries such as in the Schools of Arts were subsumed or closed.



Building decay





Acknowledgements:

Bombala and District Historical Society Inc.
National Library of Australia (NLA)

Photos: Bombala and District Historical Society; Barbara Litchfield, Helen Creagh

References:

The NLA holds archival records of the Bombala School of Arts. They are held in the Manuscript Collection, identified as **MS6373**. The records are the Minute Book of meetings of the Committee 1872-1901; and an account book 1908-1918. As well, there are two monographs, presumably books from the former library of the School of Arts.

This document draws extensively on the Minute Book referred to above and quotes from it. Direct quotes are in italics.

Trove National Library of Australia: Digitised newspapers: www.trove.nla.gov.au

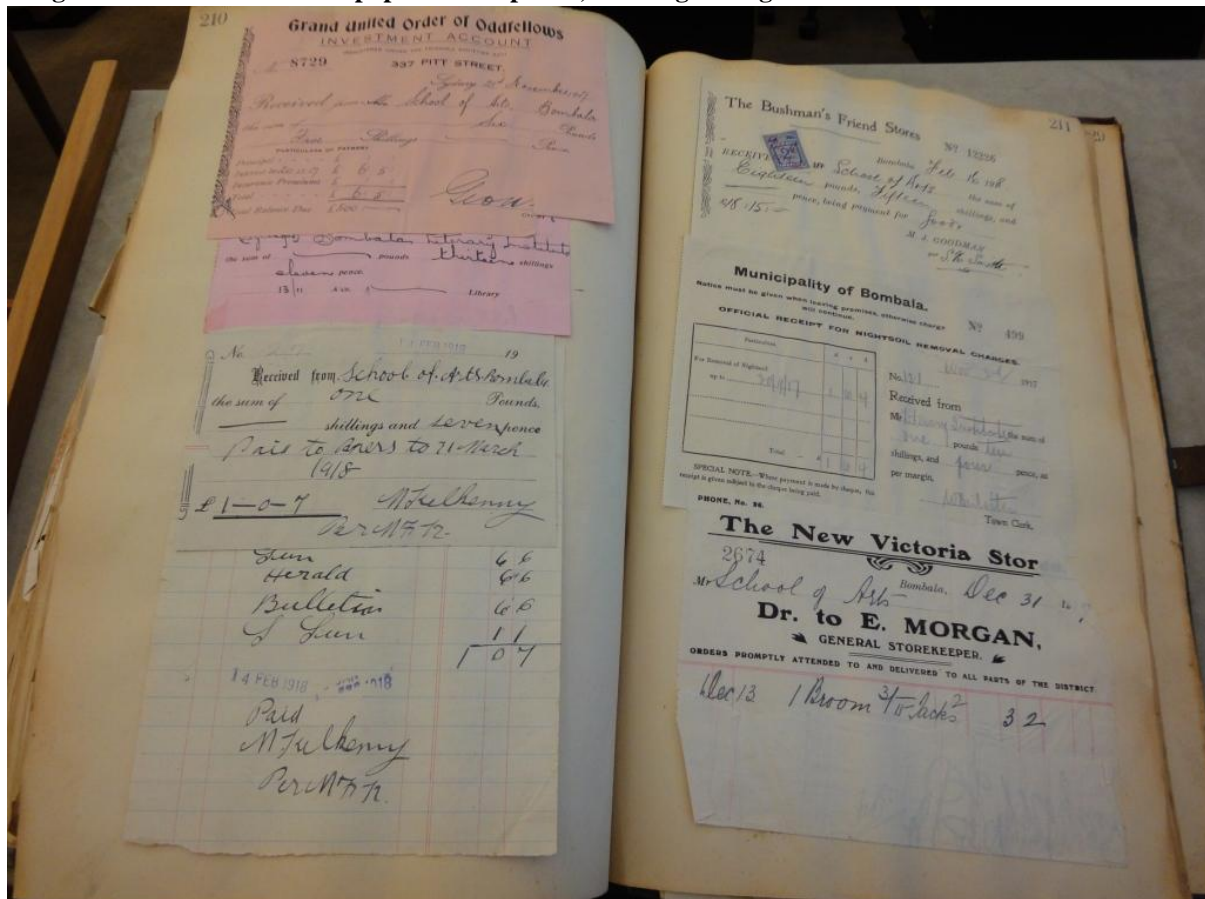
Newsletter of the Bombala and District Historical Society: Vol 6 No.9 July 1993

Research: Barbara Litchfield; Helen Creagh

ADFAS Canberra

June 2012

Ledger with accounts for newspaper subscriptions, building management





BOMBALA SCHOOL OF ARTS

Amongst the many signs of progress of settlement and civilisation in the interior during the last few years there are no more noteworthy or hopeful evidences of the spread of education and intelligence than the establishment of Schools of Art – one of which is to be found in almost every centre of population. When it is considered that the sites of these institutions have been reclaimed from the wilderness but a few years, and that the only inhabitant of the surrounding country within the time of the present generation was the unfortunate blackfellow, it must be admitted that the progress of which the Schools of Art are such conclusive evidences has been little else than marvellous.

Among one of the most promising and most efficiently conducted of these quasi-educational institutions is that of Bombala, a view of which is given in the accompanying engraving.

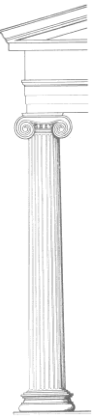
The foundation stone of the new building was laid on the 8th February 1878; the architects were Messrs Mansfield Brothers of Sydney; and the cost (including furniture) was 2000 pounds. The library consists of 950 volumes of carefully selected books. The hall is 55 ft long by 33 ft wide, including stage 12 ft deep; the stage is fitted with proscenium, trapdoor with windlass, scenery &c., and an act drop, painted by Mr John Smedley, lately of Japan, said to be one of the best in the colony.

The height of the hall is 19 ft 3 inches from floor to wall plate, and an open roof like a church. There is a gallery capable of holding 100 persons, and the hall together with the gallery will seat 500 persons. Besides the hall there are two front rooms, one of which forms a library and committee room and the other a reading room, each being about 15 ft square and separated by a lobby or vestibule 8 ft wide. Over the rooms is a large room and ante-room 27 ft by 15 ft, approached by a staircase from the hall. This room is rented by various societies of the district. A debating class meets weekly and is well attended. A course of lectures alternated with readings, recitations, and music has been arranged by the committee to last through the winter nights. Behind the hall is a corridor used in connection with the stage, and behind that are the caretaker's rooms, three in number. The number of members on the roll, including life members, and honorary members, is 105, and it includes a very large proportion of mechanics and men of the humbler ranks. The institution is extremely popular, and is admitted to have done a great deal of good work for the district. The Hon. Secretary is Mr EW Evans, to whose courtesy we are indebted for these particulars

This article was printed in *The Australian Town and Country Journal* on Saturday 30th June 1877.

The *Journal* was published in Sydney as a periodical between 1870 and 1919 and, as its name indicates, it provided articles on matters of interest to country people as well as those in the larger towns of the Australian colony. The publishers were Frank and Christopher Bennett.

Accessed through Trove digitised newspapers National Library of Australia: www.trove.nla.gov.au



BOMBALA LITERARY INSTITUTE

From the lack of early newspapers, it is hard to trace the activities of this institution until after 1912, when it is recorded in *The Bombala Times* that H Lancaster had the contract to erect a new supper room; the first structure was apparently unlined and very cold and "drippy" on a frosty night. 1913 H Lancaster had the contract to put down a new floor and remove the stairs and pillars below the balcony to make more room on the bottom floor for dancing.

A caretaker's cottage was built for the resident caretaker, and several references are made to the occupation of that of a billiard marker. The front rooms were set up as a LIBRARY with an extensive variety of works by eminent authors in all fields of intellectual endeavour - from literature to the decorative arts and science and technology, magazines and newspapers to cater for all tastes - being the only source of culture in the community. A librarian seemed to be employed to cater for the requirement of members; the library remained open some nights, especially Saturday, to cater for the out of town members. Interesting handbills pinned on the walls advertised the visit of travelling theatrical companies.

The P. & C. Pictures were operated from the School of Arts for many years and they later installed a lighting plant which was of great benefit to functions held in this hall. In 1924 the first movie picture in colour to be screened in Bombala was seen here.

During World Wars one and two, the School of Arts served many purposes, from send-off's to fund raising functions too numerous to mention, to make the sacrifice for their country as comfortable as possible for the local lads.

The first public meeting to form a branch of the Red Cross in Bombala was held there and later used as a distribution and packing point for garments knitted and sewn by the energetic female population for the Red Cross war effort. Garments like pyjamas were cut out ready to sew by energetic volunteers who held "cutting" afternoons in the hall.

My fond memories of the School of Arts in the 1940s were the Saturday night dances. We actually had a choice in those days between going to the pictures or the dance on Saturday nights. These were run successfully for many years by Mr & Mrs Will Platts, with the oldies playing Euchre in the supper room or the men playing pool in the pool room. The School of Arts was also a popular venue for wedding receptions.

In the course of progress "culture" became a thing of the past for this building. Churches and lodges built their own temples and halls, the Exhibition Society built a new and larger hall and supper room which catered for balls and large functions, the Olympia Theatre provided movie picture patrons with new and improved accommodation, which left this proud old building to join the ranks of decrepit bricks and decaying wood, as have the vast majority of these institutes in other small towns. What became of all those well stocked shelves of valuable books and periodicals; were they left to turn into mouldering dust, or take a quick trip to the local dump as was the resting place for so much of local history?

In the present economic state in which our country now finds itself everyone is turning to tourism as a ladder to tomorrow's prosperity. In a town settled in an area rich in history, this building, which was the first of this magnitude to be built, is a sad and dilapidated specimen to present to a stranger with any kind of pride in our town or its early history.

Sheila Barber

President, Bombala and District Historical Society Inc.

Published in the Newsletter of the Society: July 1993. Vol. 6 No. 9