

CLAYFIELD QLD



Name: Clayfield Memorial School of Arts

Address: Corner Wagner Road and Vine Street Clayfield, Brisbane

The Place:

Brisbane, as the capital city of the State of Queensland, was home to a number of School of Arts buildings, established in various suburbs throughout the city. Clayfield, together with the bordering suburbs of Albion, Ascot, Hamilton, and Nundah, was settled in the early part of Brisbane's history with many of the city's best homes and gardens and private schools situated there.

The beginnings:

A report in The Brisbane Courier of Friday 4 September 1903 refers to a public meeting held the previous Tuesday night, 1 September, in the Eagle Junction State School.:

Messrs. J Reid (chairman), C Atthow, and H J Oxley referred to certain land given to the district by Mr Gregory some years ago for the erection of a public hall to be used as a School of Arts.it is proposed to sell Mr Gregory's land and buy another piece in a more central position.

The donor, Mr E Gregory, did not object to this course of action saying that it was immaterial what they did with the land as long as they spent the money in the manner stipulated under the terms of his gift.

The following motion was put to the meeting and carried:



In the opinion of this meeting it is desirable that a public hall, or School of Arts be erected in the district as speedily as possible. That the land already dedicated for the purpose of a School of Arts is not sufficiently central, and that the trustees of the land are hereby requested to take the necessary steps to dispose of this land by sale or exchange, with a view to securing a more central site, as near the tram terminus as possible, and that the trustees take such steps towards the erection of a building as they think necessary.

The site was in Hill Street and considered 'unsuitable' because of its location in a corner of the district rather than at a more central site. There is little doubt that it was identified as the site for the School of Arts as this was recorded in early minutes of the institution. The sale of this land and the subsequent purchase of a new site at the corner of Wagner Road and Vine Street are also recorded, together with the names of the Trustees of the School of Arts.

There is a belief that the land at this new site was also donated. The Nundah and Districts Historical Society Bulletin of July 1990 states that *.....the sisters Jane Elizabeth and Eliza Wagner gave land.....* But this is not the case, since there is evidence of formal transfer of title from the Wagner sisters on payment of a sum of money by the three trustees.

The Clayfield Progress Association met at Clayfield College on 15 February 1915 when it was proposed *....that the Association proceed with the establishment of a School of Arts to be called 'The Clayfield School of Arts'.* At the next meeting, in March, it was further proposed that a 'more suitable and central site' be found and by the following meeting, on 19 April 1915, the record shows that *Land in Hill Street sold for £150. Another site secured for School of Arts at the corner of Wagner Road and Bismarck Streets¹*

New Trustees were appointed at this meeting but the election of office bearers for the institution was deferred. It is also recorded that there was a Government subsidy available of ten shillings for every pound collected, with a maximum of £150 pounds in any one year. There is little record of the Progress Association available to provide information about further developments.

On 2 May 1916, members of the School of Arts met again at Clayfield College.

Draft rules were amended and passed, including the following:

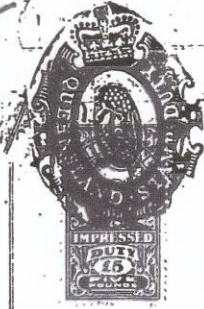
The Institution shall be incorporated under the provisions of the Religious Educational and Charitable Institutions Act of 1861 under the name of Clayfield School of Arts, the President, Secretary and Treasurer for the time being constituting the body corporate.

Mr F Tritton was elected President.

It is interesting to remark that the commencement years of the Committee from early 1915 showed no mention of World War One until October 1918 when, as fund raising was restricted to the war effort, it was decided to hold a fete raising funds to purchase war bonds which could be later redeemed for building funds.

On 14 January 1921, the title of the land for the School of Arts was transferred by the Wagner sisters to the Trustees of the institution, Frederick Tritton, Arthur William Rudd, and James Joseph Trundle, on payment of the sum of £530.

¹ Author's note: It is assumed that the Bismarck Street referred to is the present Haig Street, renamed during World War One when German names were regarded as unpatriotic and anti-German sentiment ran high.



Queensland.

Nomination of Trustees.

We JANE ELIZABETH WAGNER and ELIZA WAGNER both of Munday Brisbane in the State of Queensland Spinsters being the registered proprietors of an estate in fee simple as joint tenants subject however to such encumbrances liens and interests as are notified by memorandum endorsed hereon in all that piece of land situate in the County of Stanley Parish of Toombul being resubdivisionssixty seven to seventy one of subdivision D of portion seventy six containing two roods twenty five perches and one half of a perch and being the whole of the land contained in Certificate of Title No.146018 Volume 905 Folio 6 in consideration of the sum of Five hundred and thirty pounds paid to us by Frederick Tritton Arthur William Rudd and Joseph J a m e s Trundle all of Clayfield Brisbane aforesaid DO HEREBY TRANSFER all our estate and interest in and to the said land to the said FREDERICK TRITTON ARTHUR WILLIAM RUDD and JOSEPH J A M E S TRUNDLE as Trustees of the same under the provisions of the Real Property Acts of 1861 and 1877.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF we have hereunto signed our names this *fourteenth* day of *January* one thousand nine hundred and twenty-one.

SIGNED by the abovenamed JANE ELIZABETH WAGNER

this *fourteenth* day of *January* 1921 *Jane Elizabeth Wagner*
in my presence *W. H. Robinson*

A Justice of the Peace.

SIGNED by the abovenamed ELIZA WAGNER this

fourteenth day of *January* 1921 *Eliza Wagner*
in my presence *W. H. Robinson*

A Justice of the Peace.

Accepted by the abovenamed FREDERICK TRITTON

ARTHUR WILLIAM RUDD and JOSEPH JAMES

TRUNDLE in the presence of:

W. H. Robinson
W. H. Robinson
A Justice of the Peace.

Frederick Tritton
Arthur William Rudd
Joseph James Trundle
JA

5211 * 12

Extract from document showing payment of £530 by the Trustees of the Clayfield Memorial School of Arts to Jane Elizabeth Wagner and Eliza Wagner for the purchase of land.

Dated 14 January 1921



A motion was carried on 16 October 1924 that the Plan No 2 for a brick building, with a classical portico, be the selected design, with building costs not to exceed £1505. On 12 December of the same year, it was proposed that the name of the institution be the Clayfield Memorial School of Arts. Mr McLean's tender of £1988 was accepted.

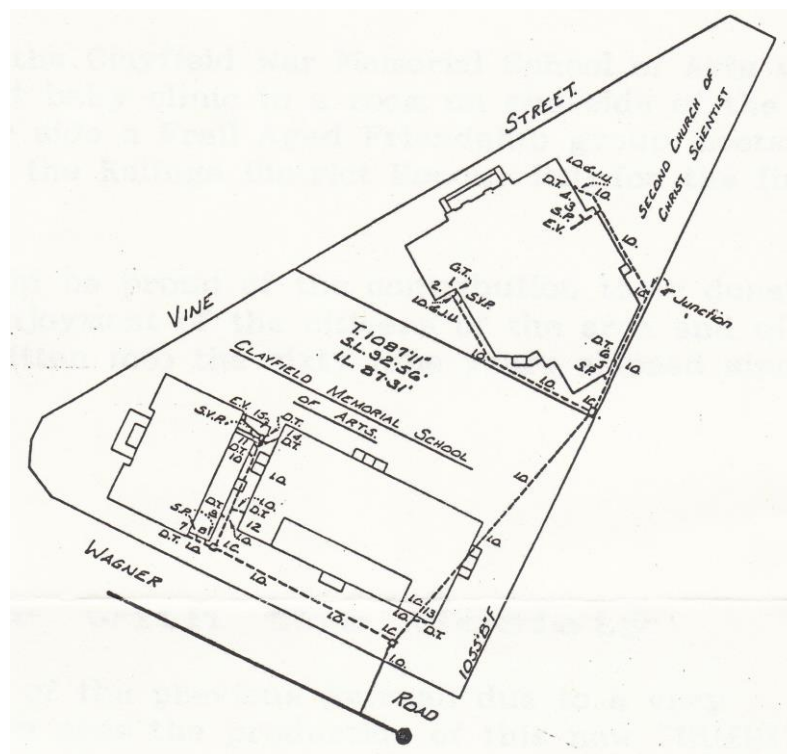
The Foundation Stone was laid by the Governor, Sir Matthew Nathan, on 7 March 1925.

A motion was passed on 27 May 1925 granting the Toombul Returned Services League use of a room free of charge. This endorsed the role of the building in commemorating the service of local residents in World War One. (Note: The RSL had been meeting in St Columb's Hall Clayfield).

On 5 June 1925 the building was officially opened by Mr JF Maxwell MLA. A subscription dance celebrated the event.

Further developments:

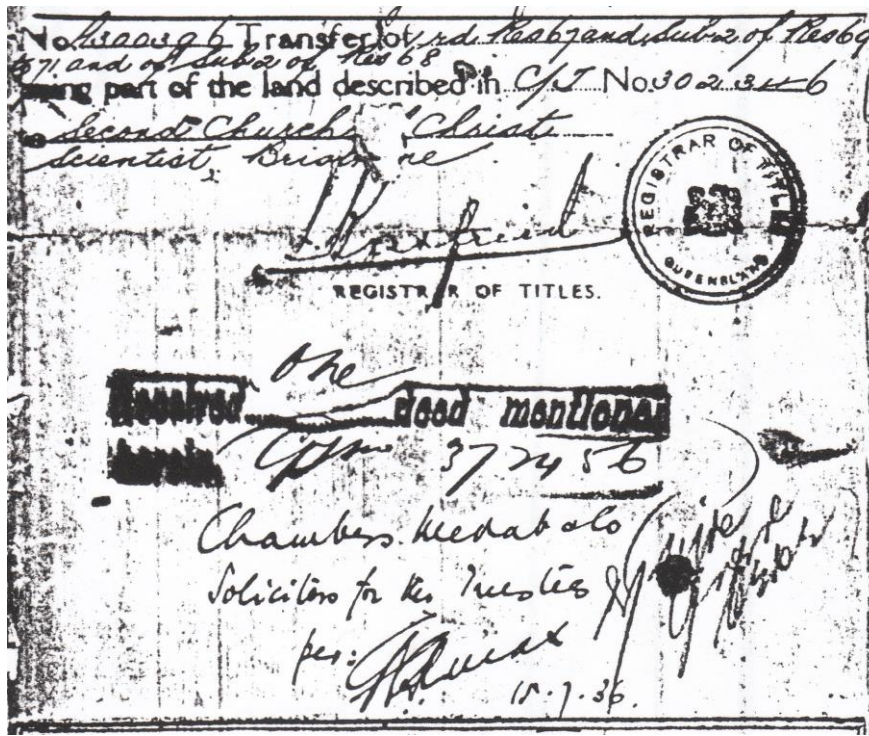
A public meeting in March 1936 approved a proposal by the Trustees and Committee of the School of Arts to sell a portion of the ground vested in the Trustees. The President, Mr F Tritton, in moving the motion said that the piece of land to be sold would never be required by the institution and the price of £375 was satisfactory. The government had removed its subsidy of £150 per year and the funds from the sale would ease the financial burden for the Committee. The land was sold to the Second Church of Christ Scientist.



Plan of the whole part of the land subdivided to allow the sale of the smaller triangular section to the Second Church of Christ Scientist.

The Clayfield Memorial School of Arts retained the larger more regular section of the land where the building stands.

Plan reproduced from the Nundah and Districts Historical Society Bulletin July 1990.



Extract from document recording the transfer of title for the designated section of land to the Second Church of Christ Scientist.

Dated 15 July 1936

In April 1937 an alteration to the Constitution of the School of Arts was approved at a Special General Meeting. The number of Vice-Presidents was increased from three to five, and members of the Committee from eleven to eighteen to enable members of the Toombul sub-branch of the RSSAILA to take an active interest in the affairs of the institution. It was also approved that the new positions be filled by members of the sub-branch.

Following the Second World War, with the intention of passing effective control of the School of Arts to the Returned Services League, the Committee decided to ask the Trustees to appoint new Trustees, all to be members of the RSL. This was effected in April 1946.

The Building:

Tuesday 9 December 1924, The Brisbane Courier reported on the proposed School of Arts:

An energetic committee, representing the residents of the progressive suburb of Clayfield, has made final arrangements for the erection of a memorial School of Arts. The first portion of an ambitious scheme is the erection of a two-story brick building.....provision has been made on the ground floor for a spacious library and reading room and committee room, the top floor being set out to allow of accommodation for large meetings and party gatherings. The façade is set off by a classical portico of the Greek Doric order, which adds dignity to the building. The lower portion of the building is to be built with picket faced brickwork, and the portion above is to be rough casted, illustrating a feeling of the Elizabethan period..... The design is from the office of Mr Sidney Wm Prior A.Q.I.A.

The Brisbane Courier ran a comprehensive article on 30 August 1930 titled

*Beautiful and Populous Suburb
The Spread of Clayfield – Its History and Progress.*

An extract from the article reads:



A centre of social and progress activities of Clayfield is the Memorial School of Arts which was built as a memorial to the soldiers of the district who had enlisted during the Great War.....It is in every way a credit to the district with which it is quite in keeping in style and dignity.....The tenders for its erection ranged from £1988 to £2700Mr JH McLean, a contractor who for many years had been an enthusiastic supporter of the movement, secured the contract, which he carried out at a loss to himself.

The Kalinga District Honour Roll for the 1914-1918 War hangs in the entrance hallway. Prior to the building of the School of Arts, this was located in St. Colomb's Hall in Clayfield after being dedicated at a welcome home to the troops held on the site of the School of Arts in May 1919.

Since its construction in the mid 1920s, the building had not had major maintenance work and in the 1970s the Brisbane City Council required major renovations to be carried out. A large modern RSL Club had been built quite close to Clayfield and this affected membership of the local RSL. With declining numbers and their ageing membership, the interest of the RSL in the building was waning. It was proposed to the Brisbane City Council that it should take over the School of Arts building but the Council refused this proposition.

In October 1970, a Committee known as the Clayfield Combined Civic Committee was formed by members of the School of Arts, the Toombul RSL and the Clayfield Child Care and Kindergarten to raise funds to carry out the upgrade required by the Brisbane Council to avoid "closure of the building as sub-standard". With borrowed money and successful fundraising and a great deal of community support, these improvements were completed by October 1973. Other local organisations helped with fundraising on behalf of the School of Arts.

The Brisbane City Council notified the Committee in June 2005 that the Clayfield Memorial School of Arts was to be listed on its Heritage Register from 1 July 2005.

The present Committee meets regularly and maintains the building to required standards. The area at the front of the building has been landscaped and a new flagpole installed.

Uses:

The activities of the School of Arts followed the customary pattern. As well as for concerts and dances, the building was a venue for bridge groups and similar recreational pursuits such as draughts and chess. It hosted meetings of local sporting clubs such as cricket and hockey; and dressmaking and pattern cutting demonstrations. It was also a venue for political addresses by the local representatives and visiting dignitaries. A Masonic Lodge held regular meetings there until about 2008 and a ballet school operated for approximately 50 years. These activities were held in the upstairs room.

As for all these institutions, the library was an important community resource. The Annual Report to a meeting in August 1929 showed over 24,000 books were loaned during the year past and at 3d per book (1d for children) this also provided valuable revenue. Educational activities were also important with a Literary and Scientific Circle hosting well-attended meetings which presented, according to the Annual Report in 1934, *subjects intensely popular and educational and work of a high order.....*

Outbreak of war saw a new emphasis in the 1940s. The Red Cross, the CWA and especially the Australian Comforts Fund, a wartime organisation, all had regular working bees in the



School of Arts, running sewing circles and fund raising events to provide parcels for troops serving overseas.

By the 1970s, as the library did not have funds to purchase new books or to employ professional staff, it was decided to disperse the books and the library was gradually closed down. By then, the Brisbane City Council was operating excellent libraries in adjoining suburbs. With the library closed, the RSL, who had been using a building at the back of block, decided to move into the School of Arts building which was more secure, and large enough for their membership.

In his Annual Report in August 1997, the President, Mr George McGregor, noted that “recent appointments of Trustees indicate the waning influence of the RSL” but are in conformity with the provisions of the Trust Deed “that the land and Building be held for the benefit of members of the general public of the district”. After several years of consideration, the Clayfield Memorial School of Arts Committee became an incorporated association in September 2001.

Currently (2013):

One of the ground floor rooms of the building is permanently occupied by the Clayfield-Toombul sub-branch of the RSL. The Wagner Road Early Childcare Association (the name now of the Clayfield Child Care and Kindergarten) uses the other large room as well as a laundry facility at the rear of the building. A kitchen is installed on the first floor for the convenience of the Hall hirers.

The hall upstairs is regularly used by the community. Yoga lessons are scheduled daily, as well as Tae Kwon Do; and negotiations are under way to start ballet lessons for ‘Tiny Tots’. Stamp and coin auctions are held and some painting classes.



The forecourt of the Clayfield Memorial School of Arts

Anzac Day 2012

This area is used for Anzac Day services with a large number of local residents attending.



References:

Minute books of Committee meetings are held by the Clayfield Memorial School of Arts, but there are gaps in the date range of these records. Some of the significant information in this account is drawn from these records, especially for the early period.

Nundah and Districts Historical Society Bulletin No1 July 1990.
Sir William Knox Archives 1a Bage Street Nundah Qld 4012.

National Library of Australia: **Trove**, digitised newspapers: *The Brisbane Courier*; *The Courier Mail*

Research: Margaret Spilsbury Member, former Chairman, ADFAS Brisbane

Photos: Rob Best

Margaret Spilsbury has been a member of the Clayfield Memorial School of Arts since 1970, and became a Committee member in 1980. At a meeting of the Committee on 6 May 1981, Margaret was made a Life Member of the School of Arts.

She was appointed a Trustee in 1988 until incorporation in September 2001. She has been President since 2003.

Postscript:

Margaret retired as President in September 2014 but remains a Life Member of the Clayfield Memorial School of Arts.

ADFAS Brisbane

March 2013