

EAST GRESFORD NSW



East Gresford School of Arts

Building at right is the Supper Room moved from the original Gresford School of Arts

(Photograph J Wotton)

Name: East Gresford School of Arts

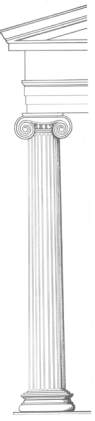
Address: 42 Park Street East Gresford NSW 2311

The Town:

The two locations, Gresford and East Gresford, are just a mile apart - less than two kilometres. As Gresford failed to develop, East Gresford grew and each of the 'twin towns' evolved to be quite different from one another.

According to the oral history and comments from older local residents, East Gresford grew to be the residential and commercial centre of the area as a result of two major Gresford events. One was the destruction by fire on 26 May 1922 of the Hancock's Hotel located on the corner of Church Street and Lostock Road in Gresford. The second, and probably the more significant, was the construction of Gresford Road from Dungog to the north of East Gresford in the latter part of 1920s. This location at the junction of important regional roads made a natural centre for business development. Although the public school remained in Gresford, almost all of the commercial activity migrated progressively to East Gresford, where another hotel (originally 'The Victoria' renamed the 'Beatty Hotel' in 1937) was located. Grey's long established store moved, a Post Office and a branch of the Commercial Bank were set up, and various other shops, as well as small engineering facilities, were established to service the rural community.

Today, East Gresford is a village with a population of over 300. The picturesque area attracts tourists and the Barrington Tops National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is close by to the north of the village.



Establishing the new School of Arts:

When it was proposed that the School of Arts building in Gresford be sold, all the Trustees were deceased and this caused some delay in the legal processes involved in the sale. New Trustees as established on 20 January 1928 were Messrs AH Lindeman, GH Crew, and D Smith. (NSW Government Gazette Friday 20 January 1928 [Issue No. 8] p.333)

The assets of the Gresford School of Arts that were retained under the terms of the sale included the lighting plant, the piano and furniture, and importantly, the building that accommodated the supper room, billiard room and the library. All of this would allow the operation of a School of Arts to continue, though in a more restricted way. The building was subsequently moved to East Gresford, re-erected and improved to make it suitable for its use in the new position, a centrally located site. It was formally opened on Friday 7 December 1928. A report on the opening described the facilities:

The supper-hall is 46 by 22ft, billiard room 28 by 22 ft. library 16 by 12ft, lobby 12 by 5ft, kitchen 22 by 12ft. The library is well stocked with books. Billiards, ping pong and cards provide recreation. The main supper room has been licensed and functions are held within. (Dungog Chronicle: Durham and Gloucester Advertiser (DC) Friday 14 December 1928 p.5).

The new location in East Gresford proved popular and many social events were held. Meanwhile, in June 1929, the Minister for Education approved the raising of a loan of £1000 for construction of the new brick building long planned for the site. (DC Friday 14 June 1929 p.2) The Annual Report, delivered in August, declared the institution to be “in a very flourishing condition”.

Back to Gresford

CARNIVAL AND FAIR.

“Back to Gresford” celebrations were held at Gresford on Friday night and Saturday. Proceedings commenced on Friday evening with a fair in the hall. There was a record attendance and the sum of £100 was taken. Hon. W. Bennett, M.L.A., performed the opening ceremony.

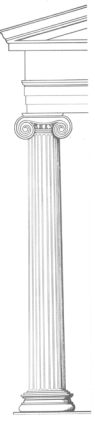
On Saturday, at 11 a.m., a monster procession formed up and proceeded from West Gresford to the sports ground at East Gresford. In the procession were the Light Horse Troop, the “old timers,” Cook’s Hill band, children from all the district schools, members of Friendly Societies, decorated cars, business turn-outs and the general public. Nothing so successful had ever been seen in Gresford before.

Once on the ground the stall holders, raffle sellers, chocolate wheel experts, etc., operated with keen enthusiasm. Horse and athletic events were keenly contested and there were displays of maypole and flag drill by the children.

The object of the carnival was to raise funds for the new School of Arts. It is anticipated that between £500 and £600 will be cleared.

A carnival and sports day arranged to celebrate the centenary of Gresford and organised by a strong committee of ladies was held in November. First there was a fair held on Friday evening where a great array of decorated stalls offered goods for sale. On Saturday there was a colourful procession extending over three-quarters of a mile to the showground. Here, there were stalls, as well as sports that were well contested in various centres, but the great display was by the school children who presented flag and scarf drill and maypoles. “It is doubtful if ever in the history of the place such a sight was seen. Action, intent and pride were there...” It was all a wonderful success, raising over £400 for the building fund. (Maitland Weekly Mercury (MWM) Saturday 9 November 1929 p.1)

◀Brief report by the *Dungog Chronicle* Tuesday 5 November 1929 p.5 The *Maitland Mercury* reports are more extensive, running to several column inches.



The New Building:

For some time the planning process had been in place for the establishment of the substantial building now sited on Lots 33 & 34, 42 Park Street East Gresford. On 15 April 1929 the Trustees had purchased the site, which was a portion of the original land grant to George Townshend in 1836. Plans had been prepared by noted architect Mr WH Pender of West Maitland and tenders were called. (Record A7784/761 held by the University of Newcastle Cultural Collections includes specifications for the building but no plans – see ‘References’ at p.8 below).

The successful tender was by Mr J Idstein also of West Maitland. Funding came from the proceeds of the Gresford District’s Centenary Celebrations in 1929 and a subsequent mortgage was arranged on 17 July 1930 which was discharged on 10 June 1947.

The Opening



◀ Advertising the opening

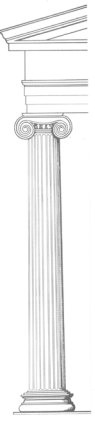
Dungog Chronicle Friday 14 March 1930 p.2



On 20 March 1930, the formal ceremony began with the “laying” of a foundation tablet by Miss Marion Lindeman, granddaughter of Mrs Eliza Lindeman who had donated the site of the original building in Church Street Gresford.

◀ Miss Lindeman with one of her descendants.

Photo: Courtesy of the Capp Family, descendants of the Lindeman family



On March 20 1930, preceding the formal opening of the building, which was already by that time fully operational, Miss Marion Lindeman “laid the foundation stone” of the East Gresford School of Arts. Below is a transcript of her speech....

Speech by Miss Marion Lindeman 20 March 1930 -

“A short time ago I was at a wedding and the bridegroom, when called upon to make the usual speech, said he had been told the first essential in speech making was to stand up – the second to say something. Like the bridegroom, I find the second much more difficult than the first.

However, I wish to express my appreciation of the honour conferred upon me by asking me to perform this most important ceremony, particularly as I fully realise it is really the memory of my grandmother which, through her granddaughter, you wish to perpetuate.

Many of you attending knew that it was old Mrs Lindeman (one of the finest types of old English pioneers) who donated the ground on which the original School of Arts was built.

It was always her desire to assist in the progression of the district and now this exceedingly fine hall (which is a great credit to the district and all concerned) has been erected. I think it is a very nice idea that my grandmother should in this remote way be connected with it, and in her name, I thank you.

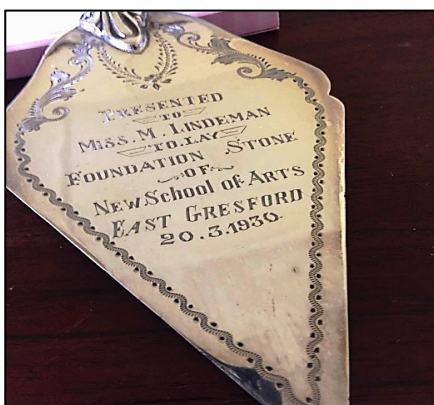
I heartily congratulate you all upon this magnificent and up-to-date building, where I trust many happy, lucrative and instructive hours will be spent.

I sincerely hope it will very shortly be entirely free from debt.

Knowing the generosity and progressiveness of the people of Gresford, I feel sure it will be and, with that end in view, I have much pleasure in making a small donation.

I now declare this stone to be well laid and firmly established. In witness I have this artistic little trowel which will always remain amongst my treasured possessions.

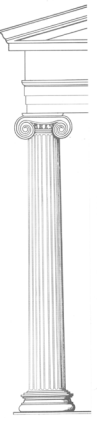
I very much regret that the inclemency of the weather has prevented many from being present tonight.”



- ◀ The silver trowel presented to Miss Lindeman to mark her role in the opening ceremony.

Photo: Courtesy of the Capp family descendants of the Lindeman family

The ‘opening’ of the building was performed by the Hon. Walter Bennett MLA. He congratulated the committee and noted that it compared more than favourably with other halls and he hoped that people of the town and district would benefit by all that it would provide.



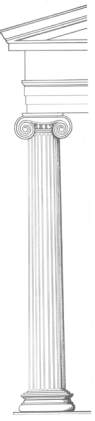
The Building:

The old wooden building, transferred from Gresford, provided the Supper room, Billiard room, and Library. The new hall, considerably larger than the old one, was erected alongside. It is a simple brick structure with a Classical Revival front. Pebbledash covers part of the brickwork and rendered plastered columns add to the effect of the façade. The roofing is corrugated iron. An extension to allow access to the rear of the building and stage has recently been added. The inside walls are cement dado and plaster with a fibro plaster ceiling. The floor space is 60 by 30 feet with a capacious stage; and provision for two dressing rooms. The flooring boards are of dressed tallow wood. There is a spacious porch erected by the Paterson and Allyn Rivers RS&SILA (Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia) in memory of "Fallen Comrades". An Honour Roll of those who fought in World War One is sited within the porch. Other memorials mark service in later conflicts.

The total cost of the building, including new lighting, was £2500 and at the time of the opening the debt was £780. The major costs were reported: Land £100, upgrade for the old buildings £480, the new hall £1050, new lighting £200. Dressing rooms and furnishings were needed and donations of more than £26 were collected. The celebrations began with dancing continuing till 2.30 am. In spite of heavy rain, the hall was well filled and 225 persons sat down to supper. (Extracts from *Maitland Daily Mercury (MDM)* Wednesday 26 March 1930 p.2)



Interior of East Gresford School of Arts 2018
(Photograph J Wotton)



Social History:

The School of Arts was used as the social centre of the area with church balls and school events, concerts and farewells, meetings of sporting clubs, lectures on topics important to local farmers, public meetings on important local matters, electioneering, or any event that needed space for a crowd to gather.

The contribution of the ladies in support of the School of Arts cannot be overestimated. It seems that a Ladies Committee was probably first elected following the move to East Gresford and “complimentary references were made to the work done by the ladies sub-committee” at the annual meeting in August 1929. They played a big part in the very successful ‘Back to Gresford’ celebrations in November of that year. The support of the ladies was influential in the fortunes of the institution in East Gresford, as was very often the case elsewhere. The establishment of a formal (sub) Committee was less common and recognises the reality as well as the significance of their contribution.

The School of Arts also housed for many years a lending library which was supported by honorary librarians, usually ladies, and the institution also provided a billiard table. Both these latter activities were controlled by sub-committees of the Trust which included other sub-committees as well, which dealt with lighting and sports.

A librarian, Miss K Jones, was formally appointed in 1933, seeming to indicate that the library was developing well, and a Debating Society was formed but it did not prosper and was abandoned. Race meetings were organised with considerable success over a period of years. The Annual Cup meeting in aid of funds for the School of Arts had been run since 1926, when the institution was still located in (west) Gresford. A social event such as a ball or a dance followed in the evening after the races and the funds of the School of Arts benefited from all of these events. The billiard room was closed in 1934 as it had become a non-paying proposition. Electric lighting came to the town in 1937, celebrated by a Ball in the School of Arts to mark the ‘switch-on ceremony’.

Musical events were conducted from time to time to raise operating funds for administration and maintenance. For a period, the building was also used as a cinema. The projection box is still in place. Bodies such as the Agricultural Bureau, the Country Women’s Association (CWA) and the local Show Society used the building for their regular meetings and their functions.

Despite the rigours of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the report of the Annual Meeting in 1938 showed that the remaining £100 balance of the debt on the new building had been paid. But it was noted that there was a lack of interest with only 28 members enrolled, the Library was now a backward area and there was no longer any interest in billiards. (*MDM* Tuesday 30 August 1938 p.10)



Much had changed by the following year, 1939. There was “a large attendance” at the Annual Meeting. *“The activities of the management of the School of Arts appear to be bright and we look forward to seeing the improvements to this institution put into operation.”* (MDM Thursday 24 August 1939 p.3) Global events, however, again intervened to have significant impact. World War Two curtailed many of the ordinary activities and it was reported in 1943 that there had been no functions organised by the Committee, and no additions or alterations to the building but the Volunteer Defence Corps had free use of the hall for lectures and drill. (*Dungog Chronicle (DC)* Tuesday 14 September 1943 p.1)

In 1946 the hall of the School of Arts was the location for a Welcome Home to local servicemen. The numbers were so great that many could not get into the hall. There was dancing and a splendid supper was provided with no fewer than six sittings, each for 150 people! Numerous toasts were proposed to mark such a momentous occasion. (*DC* Tuesday 19 February 1946 p.1)

In 1964 new Trustees were appointed being Mr Maxwell James Hall (grazier), Mr Colin Crew (Dairy Farmer) and Mr William Robert Sellins (Grazier). The Trustees continued until 22 October 1970 when, by agreement, the complex was transferred to Dungog Shire Council. The conditions of transfer are in place under a plan of management controlled by a Section 355 Committee acting on behalf of Council.

The Local Section 355 Committee established by the Council is now, by delegation, responsible for the care, control and management of the complex. Several of the executive members are also involved with the amateur theatre group that, as a result of successful fundraising activities, has financed significant renovations and additions to the stage area, including a disabled access and assembly area at the rear of the main building.



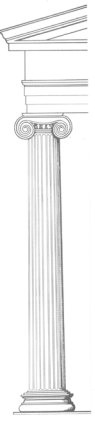
◀The Honour Roll for World War One

It is sited in the entrance porch of the School of Arts

(Photograph J Wotton)

This Honour Roll was installed by the time of the opening of the building in March 1930. It is situated in the porch to the building and was a contribution made by the former servicemen of the district.

Commemoration in other forms for later conflicts have been added and are also sited in this area.

**Currently (2018):**

The building is used for cultural activities by the Gresford Amateur Performing Society (GAPS) as well as for social fundraising events such as dances and community celebrations.

The foreground area is the location of the town cenotaph and memorial plaques. World War I Honour Rolls are located inside the building in the porch funded at the time of construction in 1930 by the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia (RS&SILA), now the Returned and Services League (RSL)..

The supper room complex (formerly situated at Gresford and now adjoining the brick building) includes a kitchen, and is also used as a preschool. As well, it incorporates the Gresford RSL Sub-Branch Meeting Room. Male and female toilets constructed of brick have been erected between the two adjoining buildings for use by patrons engaged in activities within each building.

The land under Assessment No 1296 is not affected by the Threatened Species Law. There is no evidence of “Critical Habitat”; it is not affected by a recovery plan; or a threat abatement plan. The land has no “Cultural Significance” although the building has heritage significance; the site has no “Significant Natural Features”.

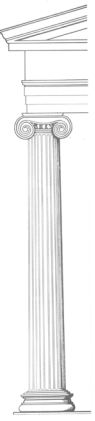
The Trustees in 1970 transferred the trust property to the Dungog Shire Council and in turn it established a local committee in 1971 to act on its (the Council’s) behalf.

The building remains a centre of community activity in the Gresford area.

Gresford School of Arts

East Gresford School of Arts was a new building erected in a central location in the village after the decision was made to close the School of Arts which operated for many years in the neighbouring village of Gresford.

An account of the Gresford School of Arts is also part of this ADFAS series recording the stories of these buildings.



Acknowledgements:

Mrs Margot Capp and Family – Lindeman Family history

Mr Kel Merriman - Secretary Gresford School of Arts 355 Committee

University of Newcastle Cultural Collections

References:

National Library of Australia – Trove: Digitised newspapers –

Maitland Daily Mercury (MDM)

Maitland Weekly Mercury (MWM)

Dungog Chronicle Durham and Gloucester Advertiser (DC)

A History in Three Rivers. Dungog Shire Heritage Study. Thematic History

Michael Williams August 2014. NSW Heritage Council

Pender Family Maitland – Specifications

Item: A7784/761: *School of Arts East Gresford* 23.11.29

University of Newcastle Cultural Collections (see p.3 above).

Photographs:

Judith Wotton Member ADFAS Newcastle - photos 2018

Mrs Margot Capp and Capp Family - Miss Lindeman's photograph;
- Ceremonial trowel.

Contributor: John Price AM

Member ADFAS Newcastle

ADFAS Newcastle

December 2018