

WALLSEND - 2



Photograph L C Gent 2019

Name: School of Arts 1879 - 1929

Address: 69 Cowper Street, Wallsend

For the history of Wallsend and the beginnings of the School of Arts movement see Wallsend – 1.

The first School of Arts in Wallsend operated successfully from 1870 to 1878 when it was realised the size of the building in Metcalfe Street was not large enough to accommodate functions organised by the Committee or other community organisations.

After the decision was made to sell the Metcalfe Street building things moved very quickly. John Wiltshire Pender was approached to draw up plans and a block purchased from the Wallsend Coal Company around the corner in Cowper Street.

It was reported that:

Plans for the proposed new building, prepared by Mr Pender of Maitland have been adopted by your committee; and tonight resolutions will be submitted to you to empower

them to purchase a new site more centrally situated on which to erect a better suited and more commodious building.¹

An advertisement appeared on the same day in the *Newcastle Morning Herald* asking for tenders for 200,000 bricks to be delivered on their ground opposite the Railway Station. As the purchase of the block opposite the Railway Station had not been passed at a meeting it would seem the committee was getting ahead of itself.

At the half yearly meeting in January 1879 the committee announced that they had accepted the tender of Mr James of West Maitland for the erection of a new building for the sum of £2440 although it was mentioned that it was expected to cost more when finished. Mr James had already started work on the project. The committee must have been well satisfied with Mr James as he had built the first School of Arts in Metcalfe Street.



J W Pender²

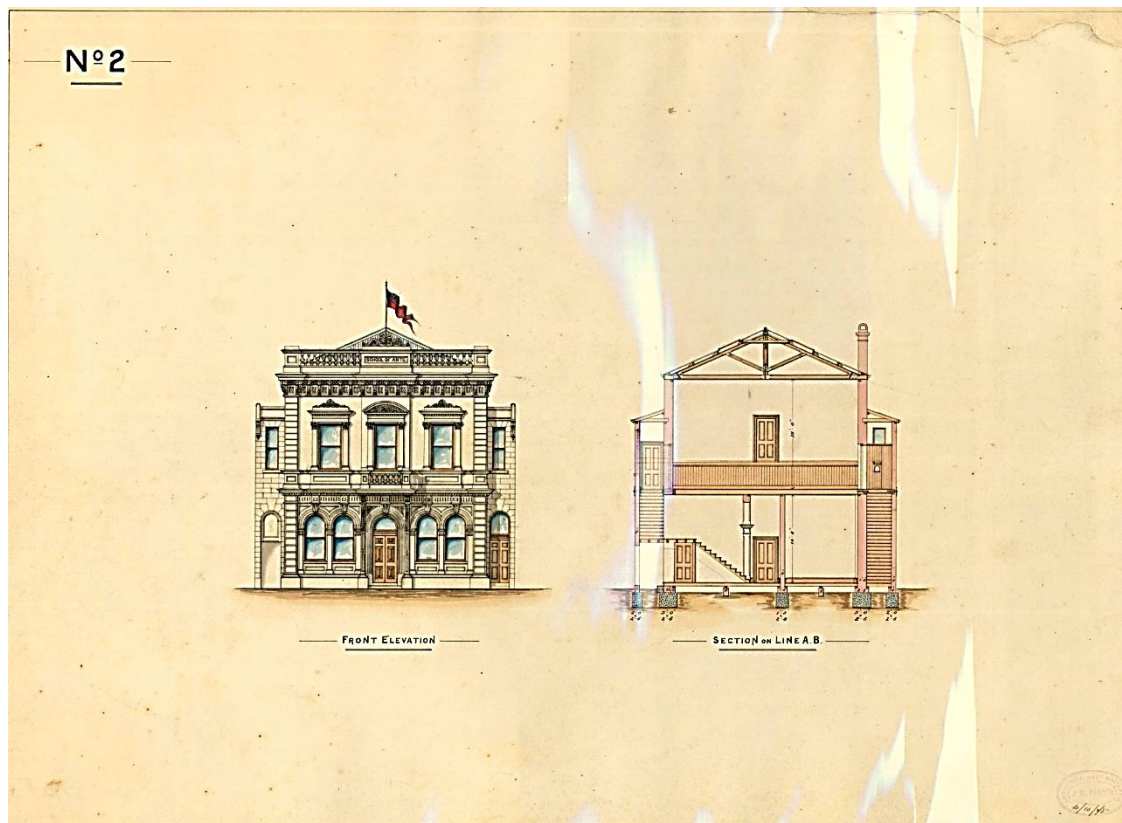
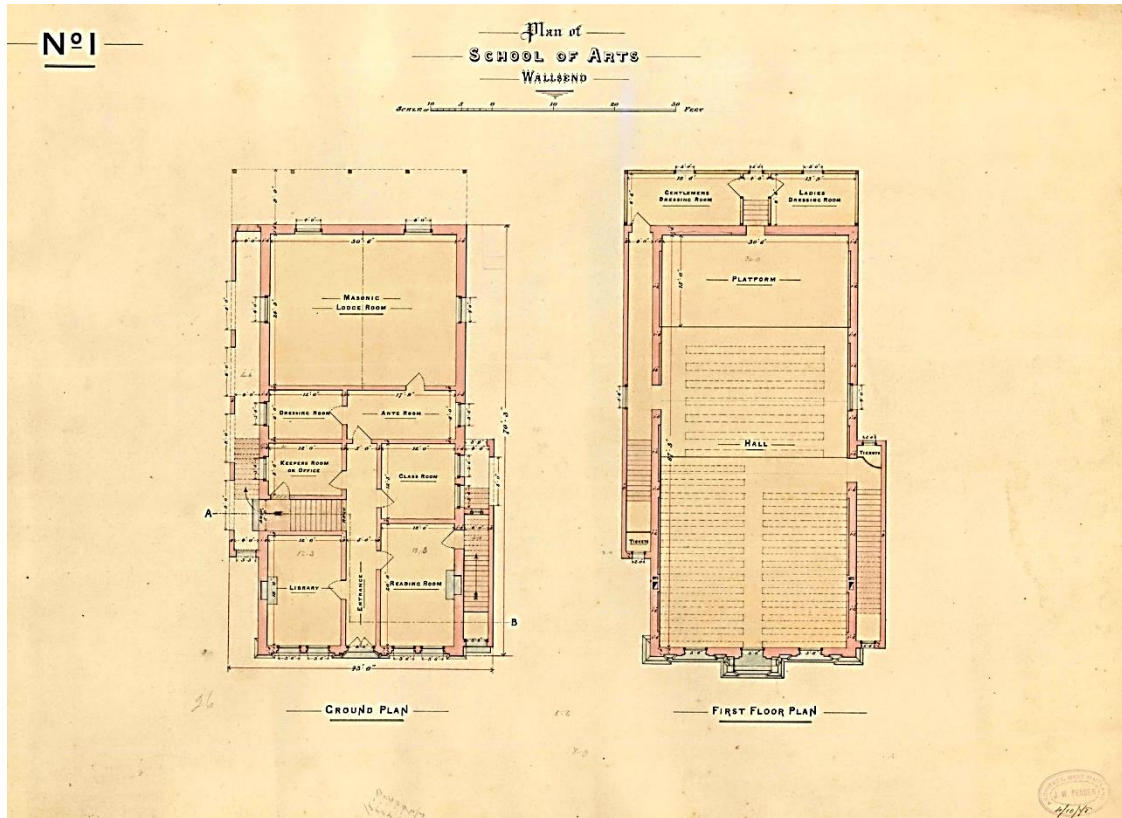
John Wiltshire Pender came to Australia with his family in 1855. In 1863 he set up his own business as an architect having spent the previous eight years trying his hand at many jobs including gold prospecting and working for his uncle, a builder at Maitland, becoming his foreman and also doing design work for the business. His architectural business continued for 46 years and in that time they designed hundreds of buildings and renovations around the Hunter. Some of his most notable buildings are *Belltrees*, *Brandon* and *Saumarez* homesteads. He designed or renovated more than 15 School of Arts and Mechanics Institutes for towns throughout the Hunter. The second Wallsend School of Arts took some time to come to the version we see today.

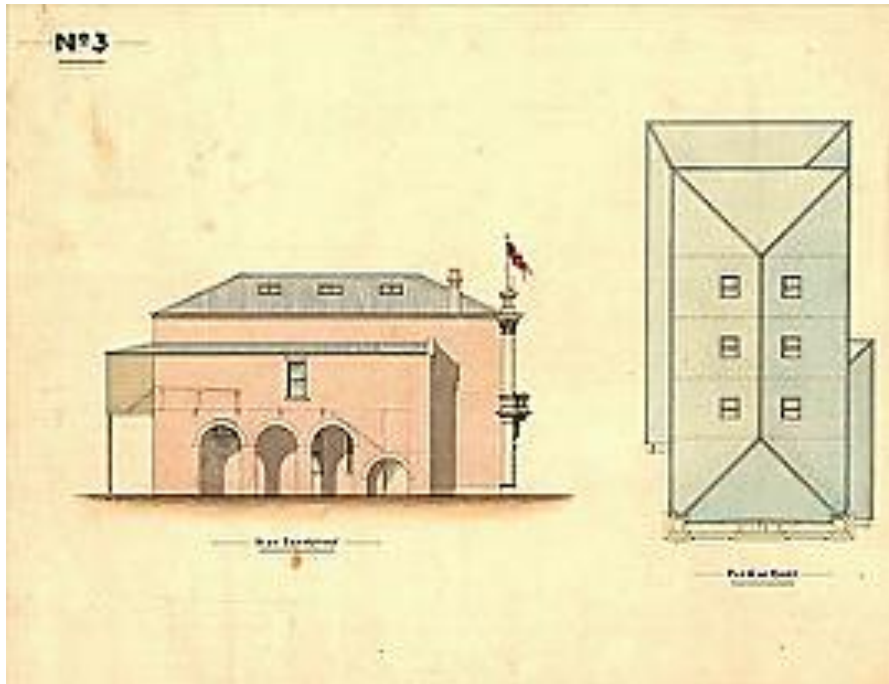
Building:

The foundations attracted much interest, so much so a reporter wrote about the process - a first for Wallsend:

I notice that the contractor is progressing with the foundations, which is of concrete, and, after laying for a short time sets in a solid mass. This kind of foundation, especially for heavy buildings must be superior to stone, there being no joints, the whole of the bed being in one block, as hard as granite.³

To achieve the beautiful building that was to become the Wallsend School of Arts Pender did what he usually did for his clients – a series of drawings before the final plans were agreed on. His first sketch was dated 4 October 1878 there followed two more sketches/plans until the final one dated 24 February 1879. The building actually went out to tender in November 1878 without a few final details.





Plans from the Pender Collection - University of Newcastle, Cultural Collections

Plan No 1 consists of the ground plan and first floor plan of the building. This plan is very similar to that drawn in M5038-1, differences being that the measurements in this plan are slightly shorter and there are less windows.

Plan No 2 consists of the front elevation and a cross section of the ground and first floor (M5038-1) of the School of Arts building on Cowper Street, Wallsend

M5038-3 Plan of School of Arts in Wallsend. Side elevation and roof plan.

The Foundation Stone of the new building was to have been laid by Hon Saul Samuel MLC, Postmaster General, on Friday 21 February 1879 to be followed by a banquet at 4 o'clock. Due to an attack of gout he had to withdraw at the last minute. Mr F W Binney, Traffic Manager and Secretary to the Wallsend Coal Company did the honours, a banquet followed at the Colliery Hotel. Many visitors had come great distances and a special train was arranged to bring them from Newcastle. The local residents were out in force to support the new venture.⁴

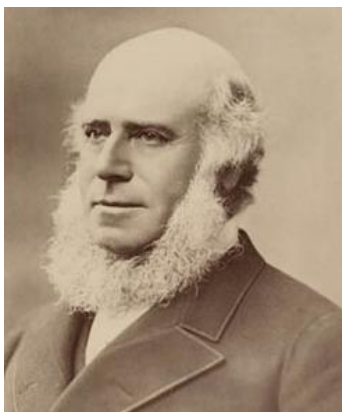
As the plans are a little hard to read. Below is the full description of the building written by a journalist of the *Newcastle Morning Herald* two days before the official opening.⁵

The building exteriorly, has a very imposing appearance, and reflects great praise on the designer, Mr Pender, of Maitland whose design is being faithfully carried out by the contractor, Mr James, also of Maitland. The balconet over the main entrance is highly ornamental, and supported by nondescript heads and consoles. The segments over the doors and windows are dentiled with beautifully worked scrolls in the centre, and supported by columns surmounted by Corinthian caps. The cornice is very massive, supported by ornamental struts with panel intersections, and the whole surmounted with an elegant balustrade. In the centre

is a massive scallop, supported by a finely finished scroll on either side; and immediately beneath is the title of the institution. The floral designs on other portions of the front are entirely in keeping with the above, the whole presenting a fine specimen of art not to be surpassed in the district.

On ascending the steps through the main entrance, the hall is entered, 6 feet wide by 33 feet in length, when it is intersected by a cross hall of lobby leading into the lower Masonic Hall, 26 x 30 feet. Off the lobby are the ante-rooms. The first door on the right, on entering the main hall from the street, leads into the reading room, 21 x 12ft; and on the left is the entrance to the library, 18 x 12ft, containing over 1000 volumes, many of great value.

Just past this room is the main stair-case 6ft in width. On the first landing is placed the ticket office for the front seats. Ascending the next flight the corridor is traversed, leading into the front part of the main public hall, 31feet wide by 68 feet in depth from the front of the stage, which is 15feet deep, 3feet 6 inches high, rising 6 inches at the back. A heavy cornice runs round the hall, with an elliptic ceiling, with centre floral designs from the centre of which are suspended two large gaseliers of 18 jets. The front is comfortable seated with chairs; the second seats with back railed polished cedar forms the entrance to which is by staircase direct from the street. The doors on either side of the hall are sliding, so that in case of fire they can be easily opened. The dressing rooms at the rear of the stage are fitted up with every convenience; patent ewers are fitted in each compartment, supplied with water from elevated tanks. There is also a turncock on the stage, fitted with hose affording an immediate supply in case of fire. The acoustic properties of the hall is, I believe, everything that could be wished, and the highly finished manner in which the whole work has been done certainly reflects great credit upon the contractor, Mr James.



Sir Saul Samuel⁶

As befits such a magnificent building a grand opening was organised for Wednesday evening September 24 and this time Hon Samuel Saul, KCMG, NSW Postmaster General, was able to make the journey from Sydney. During his time in Parliament he is probably best remembered for establishing the GPO.

Saul had long standing connections to Wallsend being a founder of Newcastle Wallsend Coal Co. He held many positions in the Government as well as representing Australia in England as Agent-General he was invested a Companion of the Order of the Bath and was created a baronet in 1898.

The programme commenced with a poem written expressly for the occasion by “Maori” (James Inglis), expressing the aspirations of the pitman for self-improvement, which Dr Andrew Nash rather gallantly read. (extract next page).

The Hon Saul Samuel delivered the inaugural address in which he spoke of the role of such institutes in furthering education after primary school and even the possibility that such technical education might be available to women! He announced that some finance from the Government had been approved, two grants and a fund for the payment of lecturers. Indeed a welcome boost for the School of Arts.

Nor yet alone his merely physical wants
 "To eat, to drink, or wherewithal be clad,"
 His sole attention claims. His mental being pants
 For streams, wherein he may refresh him and be
 glad.

This TEMPLE, reared by sons of toil is proof
 That learning, science, and historic lore
 Are to the miner dear; and 'neath this roof
 The hardy pitman o'er the lettered page will pore.
 When the day's weary task is done, he hies
 Off to his School of Arts, to feed his mind
 With varied charms of literature—the prize
 That casts all sordid wordly cares behind.

And let us hope that this now finished hall
 Will ne'er resound with aught of wordy strife;
 But here our miners—truly brethren all,
 Will learn to aid each other in "THE HIGHER LIFE."
 Let it be emblematic of that nobler court
 Where all shall join, no wrangling creeds shall vex,
 Excluded all "foul fellows of the baser sort,"
 No selfish vile contentions to perplex.

Here, let our Union be for kindly words and deeds,
 For mutual sympathy, be this THE LODGE!—
 Engendering desires to aid a brother's needs,
 And burying for ever every bitter grudge.
 Here let mind counsels hold their silver sway,
 Here learned the lesson of "THE GOLDEN RULE,"
 Here kindly instincts only we'll obey,
 And keep our tongues, our tendencies, and tempera-
 cool;
 And may a hallowed influence around be spread,
 Cementing and uniting hands and hearts;
 And by each miner here the prayer be said,
 God prosper still, the "WALLSEND SCHOOL OF ARTS!"

ADVANCE WALLSEND! Another step to-night,
 In the onward path, our meeting here portends;
 Let envy and discord be banished quite;
 Let this be but a meeting place for friends.
 ADVANCE AUSTRALIA! Be this our prayer
 May truth prevail, all strifes and factions cease,
 May every miner strive his part to nobly bear,
 In ushering in THE REIGN OF RIGHTOUSNESS AND
 PEACE.

The Newcastle Morning Herald of 26 September gave a long, but comprehensive, description of the opening and the GRAND CONCERT that followed which was described as undoubtedly the best and most extensive musical festival ever held in the Newcastle District. Hundreds were reluctantly refused admission through lack of space so it was afterwards decided by the committee to repeat the entertainment on the following Friday.

One of the unexpected highlights of the evening was the presentation to Mr F W Binney of a magnificent silver ink-stand with two ink wells and penholder trays covered with a splendid glass shade and mounted on rich blue velvet inscribed:

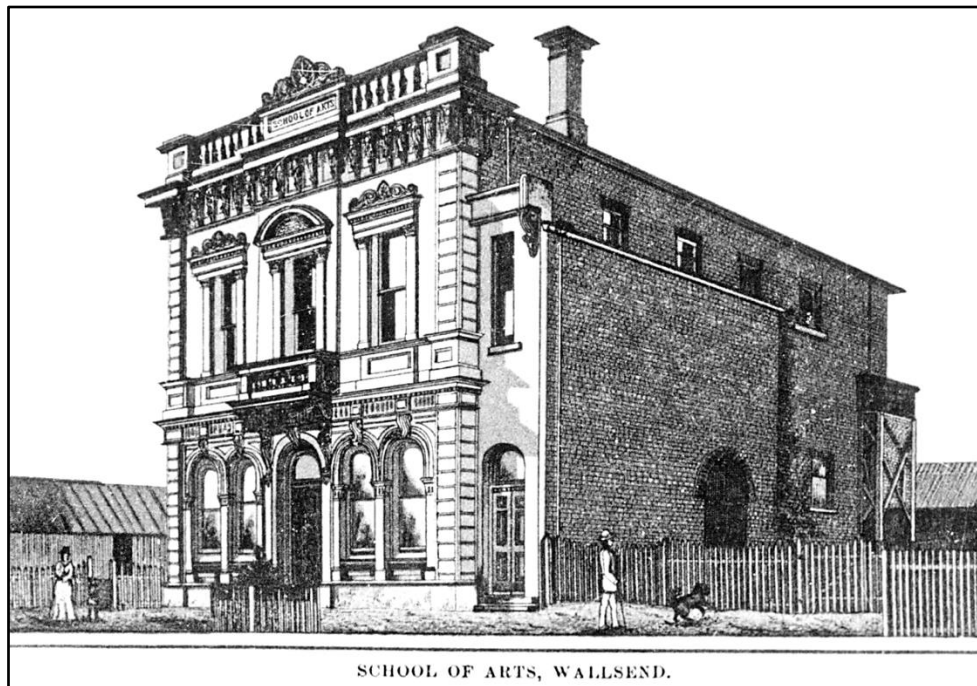
Presented to F W Binney Esq. by the members of the Wallsend School of Arts, for his kindness in laying the foundation stone of the new building on February 23, 1879.

The concert ended about 11 o'clock and the approximate 700 persons assembled dispersed, some to travel onto Newcastle on the special train put on for the evening arriving there about mid-night. There was a Grand Ball the following night in the spacious hall of the building with dancing commencing at 9 pm and continued with unflagging zeal until daylight.

High praise for the new building in Shaw's Newcastle Directory 1880-1881 –

The School of Arts is a fine edifice, second to none in the colony out of Sydney.

On 27 February 1886 the *Australian Town and Country Journal* ran a feature on coal mining in Newcastle and the Wallsend School of Arts featured in a pen drawing which once again indicated the significance of the building.



Copy of an illustrated postcard of the Wallsend School of Arts, date unknown, with SCHOOL OF ARTS on the top façade. *University of Newcastle Archives*

By the end of the nineteenth century the finances of the School of Arts were in trouble. Empire Pictures rented the hall in 1910 and ran a full cinema session but the opening of the Picture Palace next door in 1913 almost completely removed that source of income. The scholarships for outstanding students were still offered and the library stood at 4,000 books in 1914 but Government subsidies decreased and the function of the School of Arts moved from educational to recreational. By 1915 there were only 36 members on the roll. Billiards still proved popular but added little to the coffers of the organisation.

Britain declared war in August 1914 and Australia immediately pledged her support. The men from Wallsend-Plattsburg were quick to answer the call to arms. WW1 saw 332 enlistments recorded at Wallsend, 75 of whom died or were killed in action. Wallsend records 2 VC recipients. Captain Clarence S Jefferies (left) and Private William Curry (right) both born at Wallsend and were together through the fiercest fighting on the Western battlefields in 1918. The residents of Wallsend sent over 3000 comfort parcels overseas.



In the midst of the WW1 the battle for a unified town continued and by Gazette Notice of the 20th October 1915, the Municipalities of Wallsend and Plattsburg were re-united and reconstituted a Municipality under the name of the Municipality of Wallsend. From the establishment of the Municipality, Wallsend and Plattsburg at once entered into improvement to the areas. Bridges were built, roads were formed and gravelled, footpaths constructed.

In December 1916 a deputation from the Wallsend Council attended the School of Arts meeting and put forward a proposal to combine the Plattsburg Mechanical Institute and the Wallsend School of Arts. The idea seemed to make a lot of sense as the town really wasn't big enough to carry two institutions, and both were struggling.⁷

The Council wanted to use the School of Arts main building for Council Chambers however there was some difficulty in coming to an agreement. The School of Arts committee put so many provisos to the transfer – Council to build an extra room in brick, new lavatory arrangements and much, much more. The Council sub-committee set up to investigate the institutes conditions were unanimously of the opinion that they should not be entertained.

March 1917 the matter of amalgamation was mentioned again and it had not been considered by the committee. The committee met again on 13 June to address a letter from Plattsburg Mechanics Institute asking for the two committees to meet to confer on the question of amalgamation. The School of Arts committee graciously agreed to meet on 27th if the date was suitable.⁸ By the AGM in July nothing had occurred. The Plattsburg Mechanics Institute was annoyed that nothing was forthcoming from the Wallsend School of Arts as the Department of Public Instruction desired to ascertain the views of the members relative to the question of amalgamation.

After the cessation of World War 1 the numbers increased with many returning service men looking for activities and entertainment. There were 137 on the roll in July 1919. Scholarships continued to be awarded to scholars of the Wallsend School that entitled them to six months free use of the library and reading room.

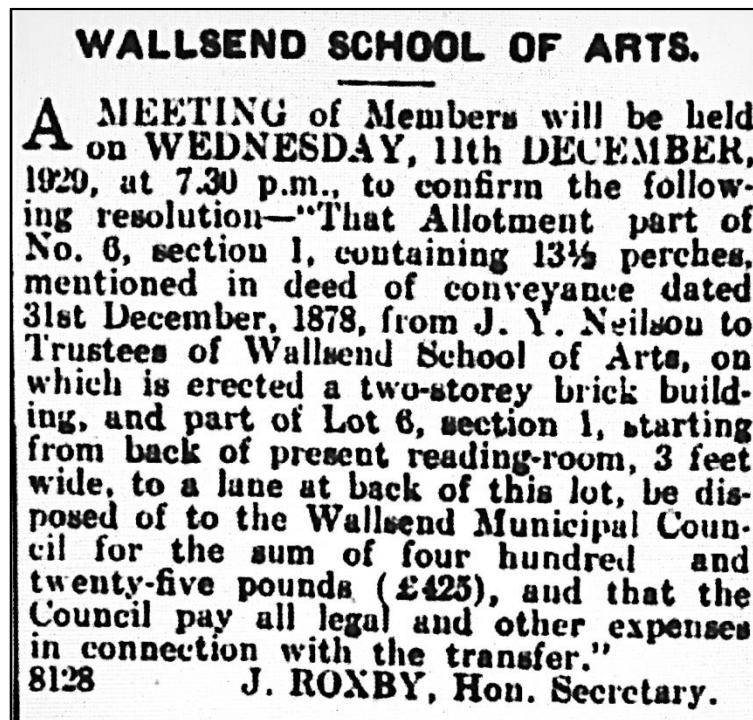
23 March 1920 the two institutes were at least meeting - this time to arrange the subscription for the coming year. Games amongst the various institutes in the district was discussed and a committee set up to investigate the possibility with a representative from each institute.

Wallsend Council met on 29 August 1929 and a resolution to purchase the Wallsend School of Arts building was passed. The building to be converted for use as the Town Hall, repairs and conversions needed to be done and it was thought all up the town should have a “serviceable Town Hall” for £1200. The hall could no longer be used as it did not fill the requirements of the Public Hall and Theatre regulations and the building's maintenance was more than the School of Arts committee could manage.⁹

School of Arts subscribers now had to give formal sanction of the proposal requiring a two-thirds majority. The vote was unanimous. The committee proposed the building of a lean-to billiard room adjacent to the reading room and library block, and the expenditure of about £100 on requirements of the library out of the proceeds of the sale. The resolution carried was: *that lot 6 section 1, containing 13½ perches, together with the building thereon, and part of the lot on which the reading room is erected be disposed of to Wallsend Council for the sum of £425, the council to pay all legal and other expenses in connection with the transfer*”. A further meeting was to be held under the terms of the Act.¹⁰

Another step in the scheme to convert Wallsend School of Arts building into a Town Hall had to be taken for the ratification of the previous decision in favour of the scheme at a meeting of

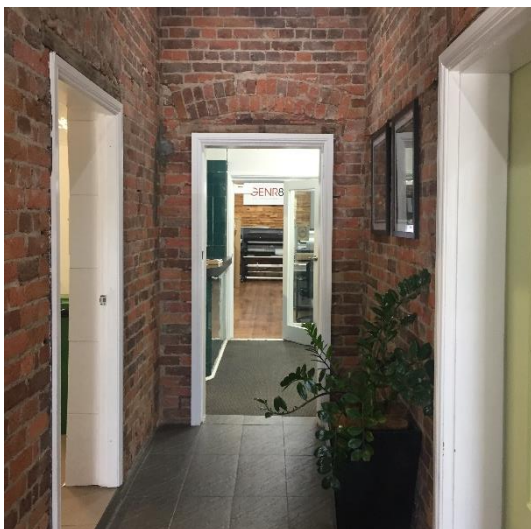
subscribers. It will then be competent for the Minister for Education to give his consent and the council will be able to arrange for the change over¹¹. This was confirmed and the price of £425 agreed upon.



Newcastle Morning Herald 25 November 1929

A letter from the Department of Education expressed the view that the committee should use the proceeds of the sale on a recreation room and a library. Under the sale agreement the School of Arts retained the two front rooms, that is the reading room and library. To this they added a billiard room and recreation room.

The Building Today



Wallsend School of Arts still stands proudly overlooking the main street of Wallsend dwarfing the buildings adjoining. The railway and station which were opposite the School of Arts have long gone and the area is now a car park. Although the interior of the building has changed many

times over the years the brick work in the entrance hall remains the same as the original plans. There are a series of offices on the ground floor and further down the main entrance a bar, built in the time of the RSL occupation, remains. Upstairs the magnificent hall has also been divided into small offices and a mezzanine floor, that fitted easily under the 23ft high ceilings, has been added to the front half the room. The outside stairs are boarded up and no longer in use. Unfortunately the outside of the building is deteriorating with greenery growing through the joins of the columns and pieces that have broken from the scrolls have not repaired.

WALLSEND - 3

And now we come to what is essentially the third Wallsend School of Arts building.

Once the Wallsend Council had taken possession of the School of Arts building tenders were called for the small building the School of Arts was to have adjoining the original building. *The Newcastle Morning Herald* of 27 February 1930 reported the acceptance of the tender from F C Fryer, of Lambton, for £315/13/- for the erection of a new brick billiard and recreation room, adjoining the reading room and library building. The tender also provides for the renovation of the reading room and library. This meets with the arrangement entered into with the Minister for Education which was that the bulk of the balance remaining after settlement with the contractor has been made, will be devoted towards making the library more attractive with new books. At this time there was no public library in the district.

Disposing of part of the building appeared to be the best option. Arthur Cox Castleden, an architect, submitted plans for the restoration of the main building. It was hoped the building of the new brick recreation room at a cost of £320 would make the institution more compact and with attention to library requirements be the means of stimulating interest.

The new recreation room abutted the present reading room and library. Billiards still being played in the new recreation room proving very popular. The committee was monthly adding to the library, especially popular fiction, and this in turn resulted in an increase in members. Membership fees in August 1931 were 1/3 men and 1/- ladies a month. The committee was constantly purchasing new books with 260 books added to the library in the previous 12 months making it one of the better libraries in the State. The membership entitles a member to six books a week, as well as other privileges.

It was still a constant battle to make ends meet and the committee was always on the lookout for new fund raisers to attract members. As a fund raiser in April¹² a euchre party was organised, it proved so popular that it was decided to make it a permanent fixture on the calendar for each Monday evening.

The committee was still improving the facilities for members with a contract let for a chimney to improve the heating in the recreation room.¹³ At the AGM¹⁴ for 1936 it was noted that there was a large increase in the membership and income due undoubtedly to the library being kept up to date with popular fiction. Membership stood at 238. Volunteer labour of members had seen all the rooms painted.

In 1938 a movement was started for Free Libraries and it was suggested that an institution like the School of Arts could be appointed a sub-centre. The building was considered one of the best available in the suburbs of Newcastle.

By the time the AGM came around in 1939 the support for the local library had waned and it was deplored that there was lack of support for the library from the residents of Wallsend. Many residents now went to the city paying a higher subscription as well as tram fares for their reading, although their requirements could be met by the School of Arts Library which was constantly purchasing books to up date the library.

The committee of the School of Arts put forward an application for a subsidy to the Greater Newcastle Council in August 1940. The city Treasurer said there was no record of any subsidy by the council in 1939 but since similar institutions had been given a subsidy it was recommended the application be approved - this was adopted and the amount of £2/ 11/ 4, the amount of the yearly rates, was granted for 1941.

In March 1941 a meeting was called to discuss the future of this once proud building. The Council certainly did not want it. Mr E Truscott, representing the School of Arts, said *that his body did not want anything to do with the building*. The residents of Wallsend were to be consulted and a result hopefully within a few weeks.¹⁵

In April 1946 we see the first signs of the final closure of the Wallsend School of Arts when the Greater Newcastle Mayor, R. Norris, told members of the Wallsend School of Arts that it was essential to have public libraries throughout the Greater Newcastle area. The School of Arts had hundreds of reference books which could not be bought today and they would form the nucleus of a good library. The Mayor went on to say the first library in Wallsend was opened 75 years ago when the School of Arts was formed with the major roll being the library. The library at present contained thousands of books which would be impossible to replace. It is hoped to use the Waratah and Lambton School of Arts libraries to form the nucleus of a Council Library service.¹⁶

The last of the Wallsend School of Arts was demolished by Council in October 1947 and the Council Free Library erected in its place.

On 3 December 1948 the Right Worshipful The Lord Mayor of the Council of the City of Greater Newcastle, Alderman H D Quinlan, officially opened the Wallsend Branch Library so ending 80 years of the School of Arts movement in Wallsend. The Council had the assistance of the Joint Coal Board who contributed £4,000 towards the cost of the new building. The Joint Coal board also would assist all cultural activities on a 60-40 basis. The library had the capacity for 10,000 books.

Mr E Truscott speaking on behalf of the School of Arts said only three members of the committee had carried on for several years, and that the committee had issued 15,000 books annually during the peak period but before the closing of the Wallsend School of Arts only 500 books were issued annually.

The Wallsend School of Arts had served well its primary purpose of education and introducing the residents of Wallsend to the wonders of a library. For that reason the School of Arts legacy lives on.



Wallsend Branch Library - Newcastle City Library - Hunter Photo Bank 350 000297

Upon the opening in 2006 of the new Wallsend Library in Bunn Street, the building above was converted to the Heng Loong Chinese Restaurant

No longer anything to indicate the original purpose of the two storey School of Arts building except for a tourist guide in front. The present building has seen many lives -

1879 - School of Arts

1930 - it became the Council Chambers until 1937/38 when Wallsend was amalgamated into Great Newcastle Council

1948- it served the town as the RSL Memorial Hall

1961 - The Methodist Church purchased the building and it became known as Fellowship House

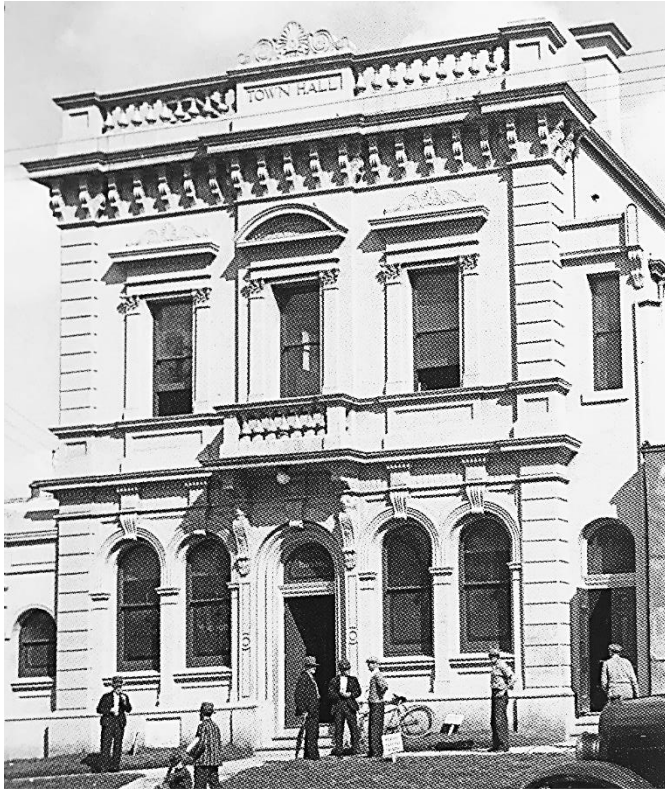
1972 - Wallsend Court proceedings were transferred there while the old Court House underwent renovations.

1981 - The Newcastle Revival Centre and renamed Revival House

1987 - The Newcastle City Council purchased the building making the facility available to both community and sporting groups as a meeting place.

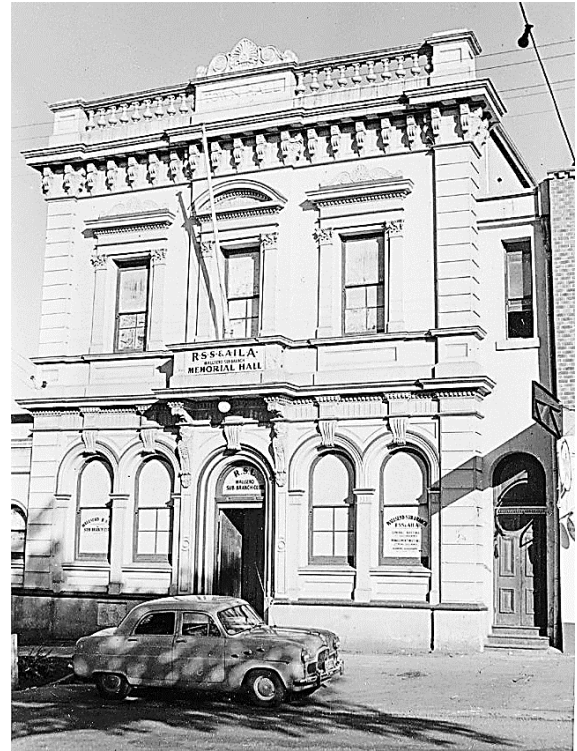
2019 - In recent times the building has been divided into offices and serves people in various walks of life undertaking new business ventures.

Through the years the façade which proudly bore the words SCHOOL OF ARTS changed with each occupancy until the present with no indication as to its former life.



Town Hall

The balcony has been filled in and the name RSS & AILA MEMORIAL HALL emblazoned. At the very top of the building, although painted over, can be made out the words TOWN HALL.



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Monthly Journal Vol VII May 1953 arts VIII & IX WALLSEND PLATTSBURG

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 - ⁸ *Newcastle Morning Herald & Miners' Advocate* 15 June 1917 p3
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