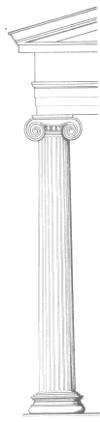


GUNNING NSW



Name: (1) School of Arts; (2) Literary Institute; (3) Shire Library

Address: Main Street (Old Hume Highway) Gunning

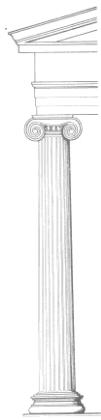
The Town:

Gunning is located on the Old Hume Highway between Goulburn and Yass in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales. It is 75 kilometres from Canberra and 260 kilometres south west of Sydney. The population is 487 (2006 census).

The region was first explored by Europeans in 1820 and settled in 1821 by the family of explorer Hamilton Hume. John Kennedy Hume established a station, later called *Collingwood*, on the Fish River at Gunning and it was from here that the famous Hume and Hovell overland expedition to Westernport on Port Phillip Bay commenced in 1824.

The first known official sale of land by public auction was held in 1838 with the condition that buildings of a certain value were to be erected on the land within a specified time.

Gunning was originally a coach stop and service centre for the surrounding farms which produced fine wool as well as merino sheep for breeding. The growth of the town was enhanced by the arrival of both passenger and freight services of the main railway from Sydney in 1875 and it was extended to Melbourne in 1881. Gunning was at one time a large centre for railway works gangs and Fish River was one of the important watering points on the main southern line.



Today, Gunning is a peaceful small town, bypassed by the invasive and noisy traffic of the past. It remains a centre for agriculture and pastoral industries and is part of the tourist trail of historic towns and villages in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales.

Establishment: 1876 -1924

The Sydney Morning Herald of Monday 15 May 1876, noted the following:

A public meeting of the townspeople of Gunning (reports The Goulburn Herald) was held in the courthouse on the 9th instant to decide what steps should be taken towards erecting a School of Arts on the valuable site of land recently granted by the Government. The court room was well filled.....A committee was appointed to canvass the district for subscriptions and promises of cash amounting to about 115 pounds were handed in.

Further progress was noted in The Queanbeyan Age of 20 July 1876 which reported that *Among the items in the additional estimates for the present year laid before the Legislative Assembly a few days ago was 500 pounds towards the erection of a School of Arts at Gunning.*

Formalities relating to these allocations of public assets were recorded shortly after in The Australian Town and Country Journal which identified from the Government Gazette that *Trustees of the land dedicated as a site for a School of Arts are Messrs Francis Rawdon Hume jun. JP, Henry Saxby JP and Algernon Sydney Jones.*

The same journal in a comprehensive article on Gunning in its issue of 1 November 1905 included a reference to the School of Arts

The institution is currently in rented premises but it is hoped that before long it will be possible to erect a more commodious building. Perhaps the earlier initiatives to establish the institution had little success since the article also noted that it began in 1898 and referred to the *remarkable headway* made by the institution in the few years since. It also noted that the Library opened on 1 August 1898.



Committee of Gunning School of Arts November 1905

Front row: Mrs Lovegrove, Mr FW Timmis (President) Mrs Timmis
Back row: Rev JR Penman, Mr P Rocks, Mr EE Morgan (Hon. Sec.)

Photo: *The Australian Town and Country Journal* 1 November 1905



Further progress in the development of the institution was reported from time to time in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH).

A debating club has been formed in connection with the School of Arts. (SMH Friday 9 June 1899).

A report of several years later noted that

A debate on parliamentary lines was held in the School of Arts on Wednesday. The subject “That arbitration is a more desirable method in the settlement of international disputes than war, and was possible of realization.” The ballot taken was in overwhelming favour of war.

A debating society was formed at the close. (SMH Saturday 19 June 1909)

The debating club of ten years earlier needed to be revived: perhaps more evidence of sporadic interest in these and similar activities.

Nevertheless, the institution continued to progress: *At the annual general meeting of the School of Arts it was stated that the membership had more than doubled and the finances were correspondingly good. Mr WH M’Laughlin was re-elected president as was Mr TM MacDonnell as secretary and treasurer.* (SMH 15 July 1912).

But despite the early grant of land for a site and allocation of funds to support construction of a building, the School of Arts did not reach this goal.

The Building: 1924-1925

It was decided that the centenary in 1924 of the Hume and Hovell overland expedition should be marked in some significant way at the place where the explorers set out on their historic and important journey. This commemoration included ultimately the erection of a building to serve the community and it was designated the Literary Institute. In this respect, the people of Gunning seem to have set their sights rather lower than originally intended for the building of a School of Arts, with the proposed Literary Institute of a more modest construction and more limited in its accommodation.

The tender to construct the building was first advertised in *The Queanbeyan Age* of 25 January 1924. But there seems to have been some cause for a delay of several months since it was re-advertised in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 20 August 1924 with the requirement stated as

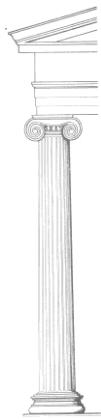
Erection of a Literary Institute at Gunning. Bricks supplied by the committee on the ground at the end of October. Building to be completed by end of April 1925. Plans with Messrs Manfred and Son of Goulburn or with the secretary of the Institute Mr GE Ardill.

The plans were presumably drawn up by Manfred and Son, architects located in nearby Goulburn and responsible for a number of important buildings in the area, including the refurbishment of the Mechanics' Institute in Goulburn in this same period.

The foundation stone for the building was laid by NSW Premier Sir George Fuller and Sir Austin Chapman MP on Friday 17 October 1924.

On Friday 17 July 1925 the opening ceremony of the Gunning Literary Institute was performed by Sir Austin Chapman MP, the local member and former Minister of the Government, and Mr John Perkins MLA. Both delivered addresses and Mr Perkins was presented with a gold mounted fountain pen for his services in the past for the Institute. It was at this occasion that the Federal Member took the opportunity to deliver a vigorous address in which he deplored the Victorian opposition to the Federal Capital. *The Queanbeyan Advocate* of 23 July reported his address, including that

Melbourne had enjoyed benefits from having the seat of Government for nearly a quarter of a century and should now bow to the will of the people in the selection of Canberra which would grow apace and prove a splendid market for the productions of Eden-Monaro and surrounding districts.



Fund raising for the new Institute was a constant part of the life of the community. The Canberra Times reported on Friday 17 September 1926 that

To augment the Funds of the Gunning Literary Institute, a dramatic and variety entertainment was staged by local artists in the Oddfellows' Hall last Wednesday and the proceeds amounted to more than 30 pounds.

Next Saturday a repeat performance will be given in the Gundaroo Hall.

The will of Charles Henry Frederick Grovenor, who had been proprietor of the principal trading store in Gunning in the 1890s but who died in Queensland in 1929, made bequests to the Literary Institute as well as to other institutions in Gunning.

Uses:

The local newspaper in Gunning carried an advertisement for the Literary Institute in 1939:

Up-to-Date Library, Reading Room and Billiard Room

Subscription – Gentlemen 3/6 Ladies 2/6 per quarter

It is the only public institution in the town – Support it!

These facilities in such institutions were the basis of its community use. As well, other interests were catered for including events such as a euchre tournament, and readings and debates.

Currently (2012):

Now the sole function of the building is as the town library operated and supported as the Shire Library which is visited regularly by classes from the local school.

It has become the venue for public lectures during Book Week and is used by local craft groups.

References:

A Glimpse of the History of Gunning: Longmire, Tempe Hornibrook. Gunning NSW: TH Longmire 1981

Historical Landmarks of Gunning Shire

Gunning NSW: Gunning and District Historical Society 1992

Trove, National Library of Australia. Digitised Newspapers: *The Sydney Morning Herald; The Australian Town and Country Journal; The Queanbeyan Age.*

Research: Jan Conoplia, Helen Creagh

Photo: Jan Conoplia