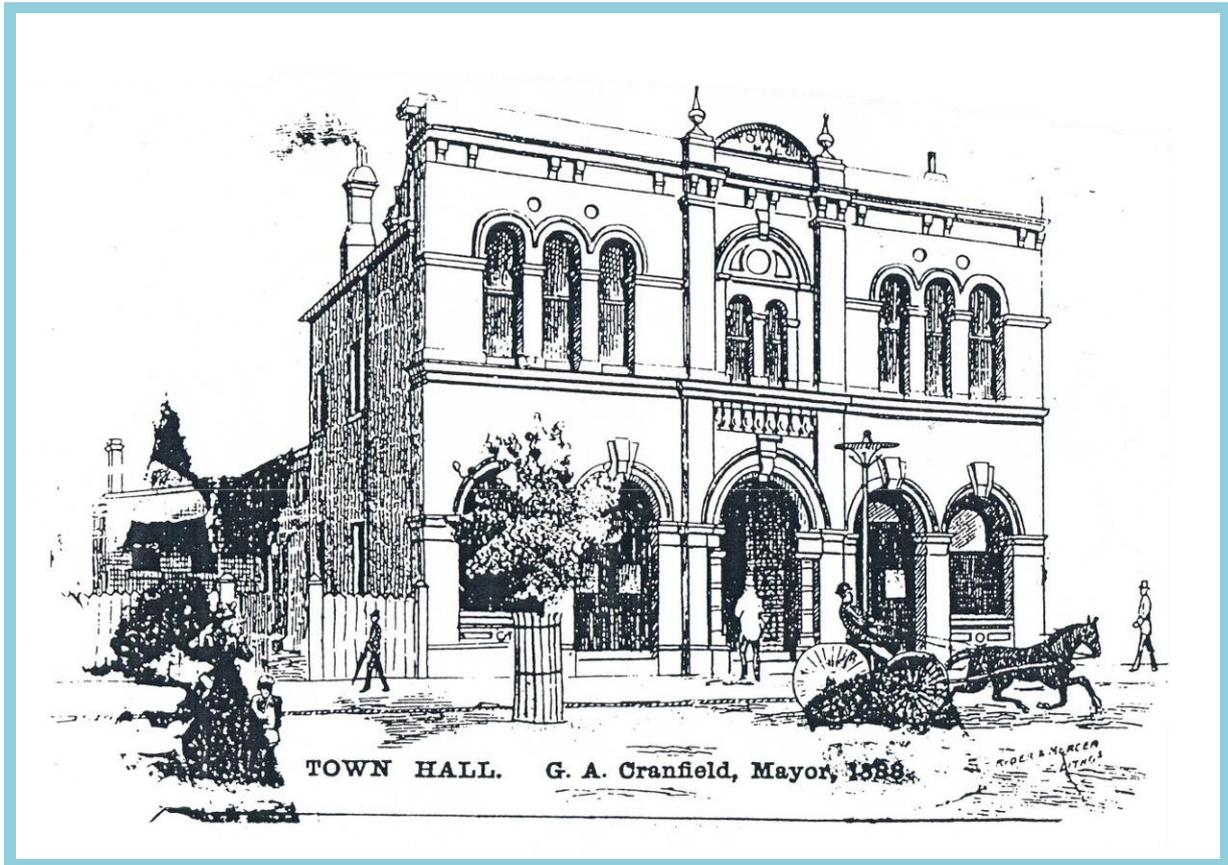




## YOUNG NSW



**Name: (1) The Mechanics' Institute 1875** Booroowa Street Young  
**(2) The School of Arts 1904** Lynch Street Young

### **The Town:**

The town of Young, in the South West Slopes of New South Wales, was formerly called Lambing Flat. Home to the Gold Rush of 1860, it was the scene of the violent days of anti-Chinese riots in 1861. Some 20,000 miners had dug over the ground along the Burrangong Creek, leaving a primitive village of small wooden-slab houses and shops, of unpaved streets impassable in heavy rain, open drains and abandoned mine holes.

The Rush lasted about six years, after which the town settled into a role as a rural service centre for a large area descending from the hilly region between the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee river systems to the flat plains of central New South Wales.

Young is today the owner of the Lambing Flat 1860 'Roll Up Flag', which can be seen on display at the local museum.

It is interesting to note that on 11 December 1889 Young became the first country town in NSW to install electric light not only in its streets but also in its houses. The previous year Tamworth had become the first town in the Southern Hemisphere to light its streets by electricity, but Young before that had begun inquiries.



### **Establishment:**

In 1875 the Mechanics' Institute was built at the cost of 4,000 pounds, including the fence. The reading room was opened on July 2<sup>nd</sup> with the district and Sydney papers and English periodicals, but few used it. The building, however, was described as far ahead of the needs of Young and was the town's most important building. Dr Carr described it as superior to those at Wollongong, Kiama, Bega, Queanbeyan, Yass or Goulburn. William Sharp, who is named as the builder, may well have been the architect since he designed additions and modifications to the hall during the next decade. Sharp was also at times a member of the council and designed and built the Masonic Hall in Zouch Street, opened in 1888, which is a similar design to the Institute building.

“The Mechanics' Institute in Burrowa [sic] Street... had been the place for meetings and concerts, the lending library, the centre of town. The two-storey building had a hall at the back and the library and meeting rooms above shops on the street front. It was the one substantial building in town...”, remarks William Forbes in his 2003 biography of George Cranfield, “Bow Bells to Burrowa Street”. Owing 3,500 pounds on a mortgage, the Institute closed in 1887, and was offered for sale. Cranfield, who had been alderman from the beginning of Local Government in the town in 1882, was keen that the building be purchased for a Town Hall, since the Council always met there and it offered all the requisite facilities. After much discussion and vigorous local debate, the Institute was, according to the commemorative inscription on the front of the building, “purchased for Town Hall by Borough Council Young 24<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1888”.

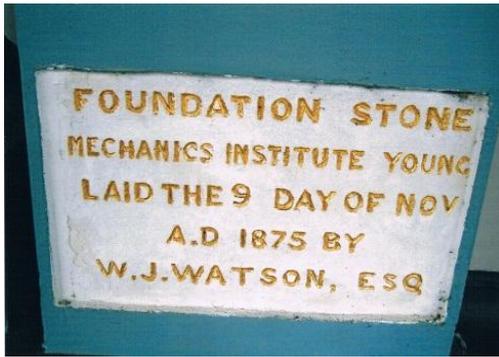


### **The Building:**

The Institute has a two-story front in the Italianate Manner, with five heavy arches at ground level. At the first floor there is a playful change of rhythm, with an arched central feature containing a pair of windows supported on either side by a triplet of tall round-headed windows. The Parapet has an arched Pediment at the centre of a strong cornice. On either side of the central archway at street level are two inscriptions, one on the right marking the foundation in 1875, led by WG Watson, and the other marking the purchase for the Town Hall.

### **Uses:**

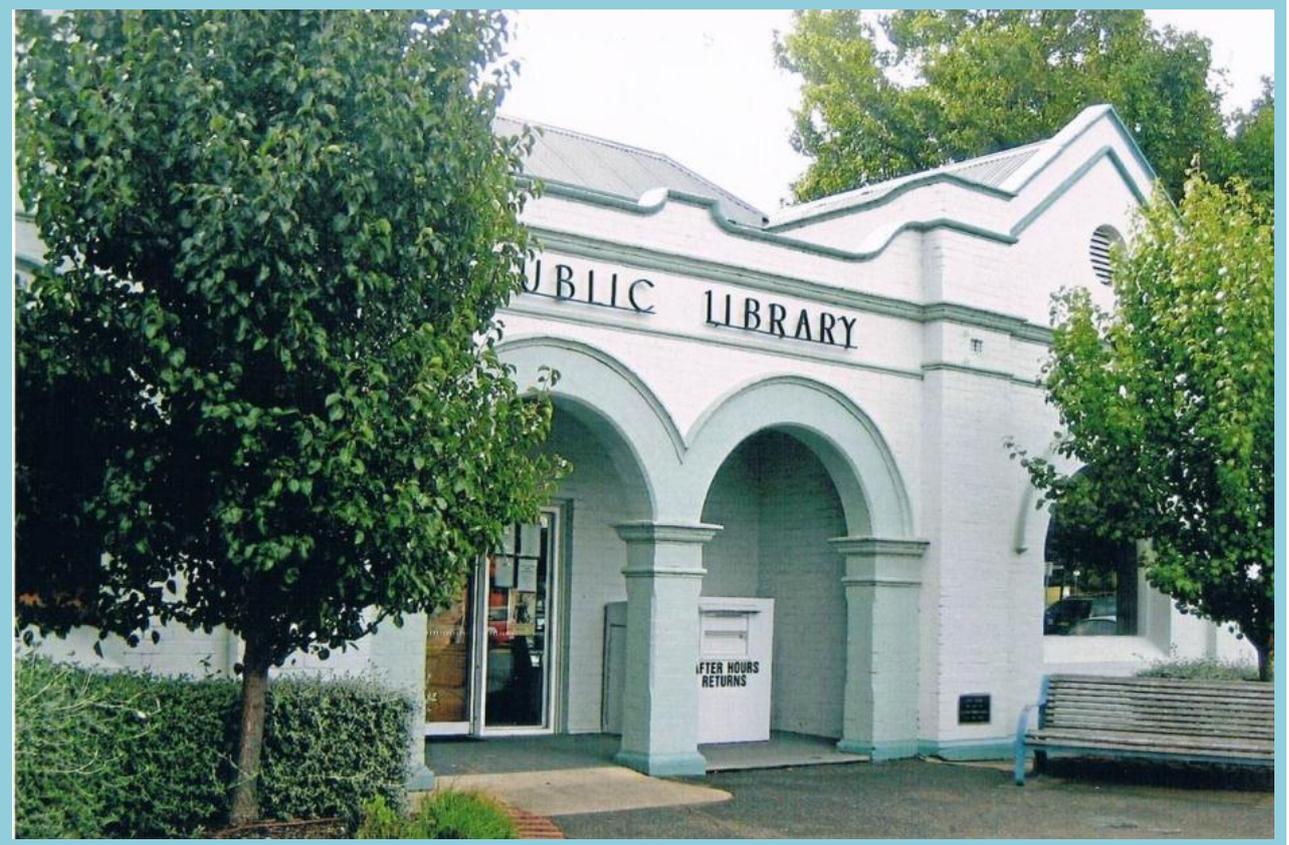
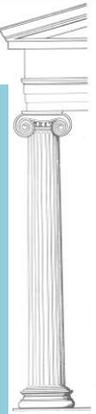
After the Council took over the Mechanics' Institute, it remained closed for twelve months and a meeting in December 1887 was attended by only seven townsmen. When it closed it only had 20 members on the roll, although the library contained 800 books.



As the Town Hall, the building served well as the civic centre and administration for the town. After World War I the desire to provide an appropriate memorial for those from the district who had died in service led to the decision to double the size of the building by the construction of a tall clock tower and the replication of the frontage on the western side. With later modifications to the interior and rear, the building dominates Young's commercial centre. It is probably the largest and (some might say) finest town hall in country New South Wales.

Local government functions took over all the space in the Institute building, so that a separate building was needed for the town's library. In 1904, a 'School of Arts' was built in Lynch Street in the Arts & Crafts style; it operates today as the South-West Regional Library.

**The School of Arts operated until 1944 when the Public Library Act was passed. Young formed one of the first Public Libraries in NSW under the Act, taking over the Library premises of the School of Arts, which were altered to provide for the new scheme. The South West Regional Library headquarters are still located in the old School of Arts building. It is one of the few libraries in NSW still housed in its original building.**



## **The School of Arts**

When one looks along Lynch Street with its profile of fine public buildings, banks and churches, the South-West Regional Library looks rather humble. Not a big structure, it has been enlarged a few times over the years. Also it is painted in 'background colours'.

When opened, this library building also housed billiards tables and a room for playing cards, because it was intended to restore the role of the earlier Mechanics' Institute for the town. That had been built in the 1870s, offering a library and meeting rooms, and a hall for debates and public assemblies. The Institute had been bought to form a Town Hall in 1888. The library continued to occupy space in the crowded premises, a situation that led to the formation of a School of Arts committee in July, 1900.

The several times Mayor of Young in those years was G.S. Whiteman, who took up the cause with enthusiasm, starting a fund to provide new accommodation. He offered rent-free a room above his drapery store and donated 100 pounds to allow the library to be moved out of the Town Hall. Owing to drought and disinterest, subscriptions were slow, so Whiteman gave a further 300 pounds to the cause. This amounted to half the building costs for the New School of Arts. Construction was by the firm of H.R. Blackett (who may have provided the design). In June 1904, as Mayor of Young, George Whiteman laid the foundation stone and in the same capacity, seven months later, opened the place free of debt.



The present paint scheme disguises the strong red-brick character of the School of Arts. Many specially moulded bricks were used in construction. The handsome arched windows were very fine, with lightly-coloured small panes. Now all that can be seen are expanses of plate glass. Photos of the original offer a comparison with how it looks today, and it is clear that a good restoration is needed to bring back the original character if this charming building.

*I remember going there on Saturday mornings when I was very small. A nice but rather stern lady would read a chapter from popular children's books, and I shared with forty other tots the terrifying rampages of the Big Bad Banksia Men, and the sad plight of poor, beautiful Ophelia in "Snugglepot and Cuddlepie".*

**Joseph Kinsela**

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*The Young Witness.*

**Research:**

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**Photographs:**

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