



## GUNDAROO NSW



**Name: Working Man's Library; Literary Institute**

**Address : Cork Street Gundaroo**

### **The Town:**

Gundaroo is a small historic village in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales, about 35 kilometres north of Canberra and 15 kilometres west of Lake George. The explorers Charles Throsby and Joseph Wild travelled through the Yass River valley in 1820. In 1825, Governor Lachlan Macquarie granted 30 acres to the first white settler, Peter Cooney. And by the 1840s there were approximately 400 residents in the area.

The Harrow Inn was the first non-residential building, built in 1834. The Post Office was built in 1848, the first school opened in 1850 and the Police Station in 1852.

The district's prosperity grew when gold was discovered in 1852 and by 1859 the mining population was over 500.

Gundaroo is now considered a dormitory village for Canberra, with residents attracted by its charm and the preservation of the character of its streetscapes. The population is 331 (2006 census). It is regarded as an important example of a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century Australian village and is a significant tourist attraction for the area. Most of the old buildings, constructed between 1860 and 1890, remain in generally good condition.



## **Establishment:**

A Literary Institute was established in Gundaroo in 1894. Whilst there were some facilities in existence by 1895, the visit by the Minister for Education in 1897 to the Gundaroo Library and Reading Room so impressed him, he promised to grant ten shillings for every pound subscribed to assist in paying for books and periodicals; and further, if the members thought of building a place, he would give a pound for every pound subscribed.

As the premises at that time were rented, Mr William Affleck gave a half acre of land in the main street in the centre of town, Cork Street, and fifty pounds as a start to a subscription list for building purposes. The Goulburn Evening Post, reporting this generosity on Saturday 23 January 1897 stated

*If this liberality is followed up in anything like a worthy manner, with the Government subsidy those interested ought to erect a building worthy of the object and place.*

At the Annual General Meeting of the Gundaroo Literary Institute on Friday 17 July 1914 The Queanbeyan Age reported

*The attendance of members was rather larger than usual.*

It was also reported that

*Some new rules for the better government of the Institution were submitted at the meeting, and after discussion were adopted. The question of a new building was touched upon, and a contracting firm made an offer, which will probably be accepted later in the year.*

But the tender price proved to be out of reach, given the funds available.

The yearly reserve showed a balance of seven pounds. By September 1915, the Annual Meeting noted that the Government subsidy was just half the usual amount. Sports meetings and other functions held regularly over many years provided funds to support the Institute and to add to the stocks of books for the Library and newspapers and journals for the reading room.

From 1915, newspaper reports begin to show the impact of the faraway war. In March 1916, the Literary Institute was the scene of a send off by the Gundaroo folk for Private Garnet Keir, home on final leave before an anticipated early sailing date. Private Keir was presented with a silver wristlet watch by his Gundaroo friends. Privates Jack McInnes and Reg Rowley of nearby Sutton, home on final leave too, were also present.

*Speeches eulogising the departing soldier were delivered.....Private Keir feelingly responded and in an appropriate speech returned thanks for the honour done him, and expressed his determination to do his utmost to uphold the reputation of his native land on the field of battle.*

Such occasions were repeated as other men Gundaroo men enlisted to fight the war.

By 1917 a well attended meeting noted that the finances of the Literary Institute had improved, a new supply of books was added to the Library and several new periodicals placed in the Reading Room. In 1920 the treasurer reported a highly successful year with a creditable balance in hand. A suggestion from the secretary that a new reading room be erected shortly was favourably received.

Sadly, in 1943 a report in The Canberra Times of 11 January advised that the Gundaroo Literary Institute would in the future be locked owing to the pilfering of newspapers periodicals and magazines from the Library.

*Deploring this lack of civic responsibility on the part of certain people, the committee viewed with regret the general lack of interest by the townspeople in the institution.*



## Building:

The aim over many years to erect a purpose built structure for the Literary Institute in Gundaroo appears never to have been realised. The building used for the Institute was a dressed weatherboard cottage built by William Affleck in 1888 and it still survives as part of the historic streetscape. It seems to have been willed to the village 'in perpetuity' by William Affleck, who was one of the major supporters of the institution from its establishment.

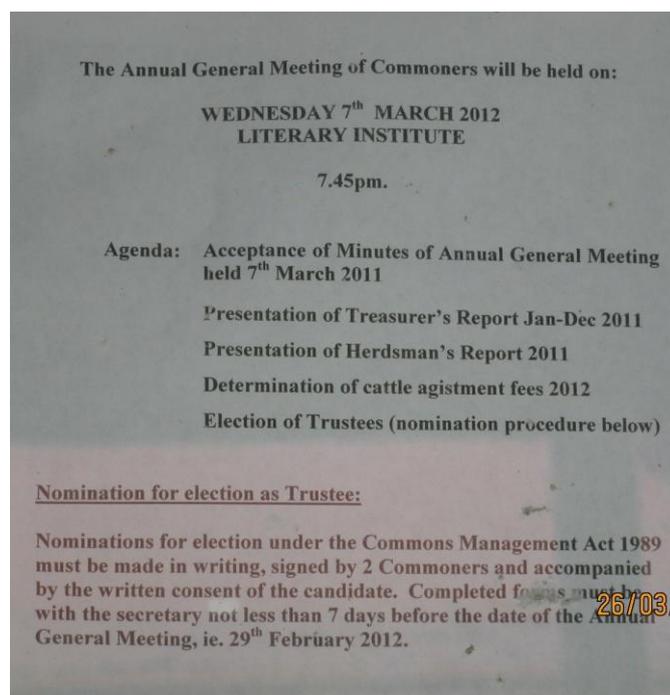
## Uses:

The Literary Institute was used as a public library, reading room and meeting place for local sporting clubs, especially cricket and tennis. It was the venue for entertainment of all kinds including, as reported in *The Queanbeyan Age* of Friday 8 May 1914, a *Lantern Entertainment* showing slides of Antarctica and Japan and *a dance wound up the evening*.

## Currently (2012):

The building is used as meeting place for the local volunteer Bushfire Brigade; as a polling place for government elections; and for meetings of the Gundaroo Common Committee, to manage one of only three Town Commons still in operation in New South Wales.

The Gundaroo Literary Institute is listed in The Yass Valley Heritage Register. The village of Gundaroo is listed by the National Trust and is designated an Urban Conservation Area.



**Advertisement for the Annual General meeting of 'Commoners' in Gundaroo March 2012.**

**Note that the Herdsman's Report for 2011 was to be presented and a Determination of agistment fees for 2012 was also an agenda item.**

## References:

Trove, National Library of Australia. Digitised Newspapers: *The Queanbeyan Age and Observer; The Goulburn Post*

Wikipedia

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