



## WOODVILLE NSW



**Name: Woodville School of Arts**

**Address: 872 Paterson Rd, Woodville. NSW 2321**

### **The Town/District:**

Woodville, with a population of 600, is a small rural township 174 kilometres north of Sydney, 42 kilometres northwest of Newcastle and 9 kilometres northeast of Maitland. It consists of a few buildings and shares the government areas of Port Stephens and Maitland. The primary land use is agricultural with an increasing growth of housing and small rural residential lots. It is situated on the Paterson River in the Lower Hunter, NSW. Originally occupied by aboriginals, it was one of the first areas settled by Europeans. Many historical buildings can be found in this area. They include Dunmore House, Stradbroke, All Saints Church (1864), Woodville General Store (1844), which is Australia's oldest continually running business, and Iona Public School (1918).

Woodville's oldest farm, Albion Farm established in 1812, is directly opposite the Woodville School of Arts Hall (1876). The first title of Albion Farm was held by David Brown, then in 1824, the Tucker family was granted more land giving them 630 acres for Albion Farm. The School of Arts and its neighbouring buildings, an old slab hut and Iona Public School, now occupy some of this land.



The Redman family has owned Albion Farm since the early 1970s and in the ensuing years has had a close association with both the School of Arts and Iona School.



Entrance to Albion Farm, which is opposite the School of Arts.

The Woodville School of Arts was built on some of the Albion Farm land.

**James Leslie (Les) Darcy** (1895 – 1917) legendary boxing champion and folk hero, is Woodville’s most famous son. Several sites in the area lay claim to being his birthplace. His family lived in a cottage on the Paterson Road, removed about 1931 to nearby historic Stradbroke, where he and his family worked. The Darcy family cottage, which no longer survives, is seen at left in the photograph below. It was attached to Stradbroke cottage;



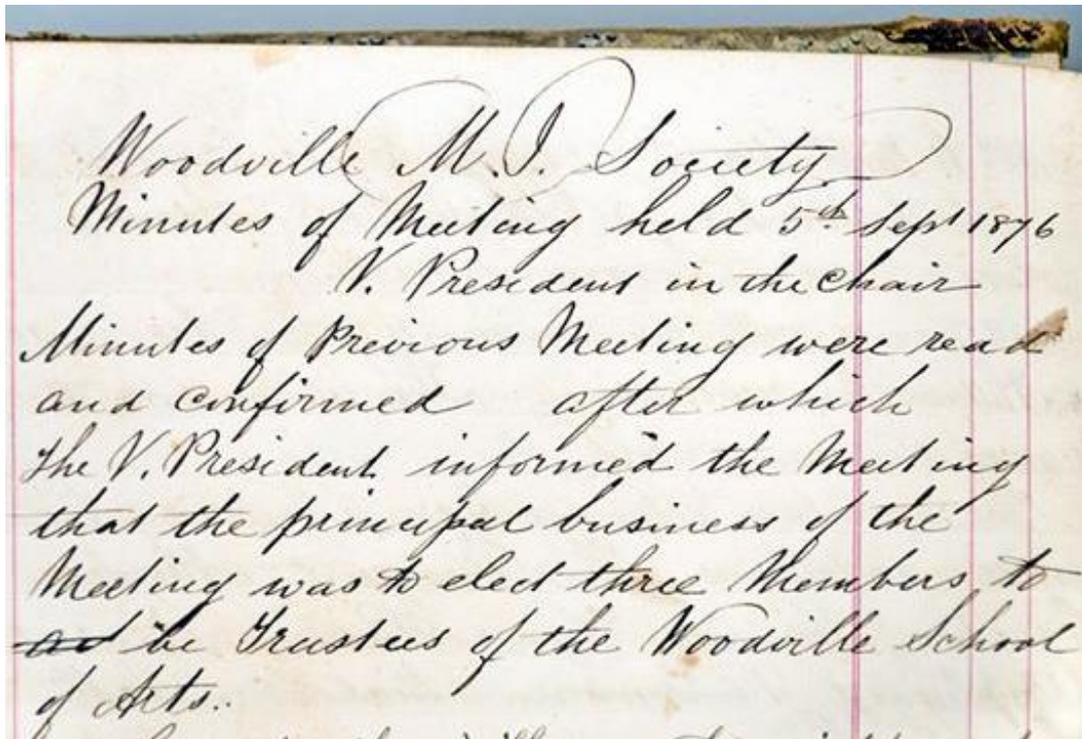
Stradbroke cottage in the 1960s with the Darcy home attached at left. The Darcy home was moved from Paterson road about 1931 (photo: by Athel D’Ombrain, held by Paterson Historical Society).

Photo: Athel D’Ombrain. (Held by Paterson Historical Society)



## Establishment

When the Woodville Mutual Improvement Society, formed around 1870, could no longer meet in the old school room of the Church of England church at Dungog, a building was erected in Woodville on land gifted by Mr John Pearse. This new building would be used as a meeting place for the Society. On 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1876 the Society's name was changed to the Woodville School of Arts.



Entry from the original Minute Book of the Woodville Mutual Improvement Society:

Meeting of 5th September 1876 to elect three members to be Trustees of the Woodville School of Arts.

The Society became the Woodville School of Arts on 29th September 1876.

Image from the Facebook page of the Woodville School of Arts

The first office bearers were all men: President- J Pearse, Vice-President- J Wynn, Secretary- T Pearse, Librarian- J F Munday, Committee- R F Graham, J McPhie, G Bishop, J F Munday. The first trustees were H Croaker, J Wynn and S Skinner.

The present School of Arts building, which is quite a bit larger than the original building, was opened on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1923. The Office bearers, again all men, were: President- W J H Graham, Vice-President- S G Skinner, Secretary- F Cook, Treasurer- Mr V Munday, Librarian- Mr J Harden and Committee- W Carter, U B Hughes, R Hicks, C Beggs and L Tacon. The guarantors were W J H Graham and W Carter.



Woodville School of Arts celebrated its centenary with a Cabaret Ball on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 1976. The hall was aptly decorated and patrons dressed in period costume, with some arriving by horse and sulky. The committee, which now had five female members, were President- C S Skinner, Vice-President- G Rumbel, Secretary- C S Hicks, Treasurer- Mrs B Weller, Committee- N Eveleigh, C Burley, J D Skinner, Mrs M Osborne, Mrs C Hicks, Mrs C Burley, Mrs G Rumbel. A souvenir booklet was also produced to celebrate the occasion.

The building has always been owned by the community and managed as a non-profit facility by volunteers. The present committee comprises seven members. The office bearers are President- Lis Smark, Secretary- Viv Wood, Treasurer- Helen McCall, Publicity- Bob Beale.

## **The Building**

A wooden hall on the land at Woodville, built by W & A King, was completed by 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1877 and opened in March. The King tender of £55 (pounds) was for the supply of sleepers, posts, wall plates, and all labour required for the building. The committee had to source all other materials. Roof shingles were cut by Mr Tranter. The committee had £108 from subscriptions and donations so a loan of £50 was required for the balance. The cost of the building was under £160 and included the porch, forms, window wire guards and fences. This building was opened on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1877.

This earlier building was replaced by the present School of Arts Hall which is a somewhat larger building and on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1923, was opened by Mrs J F Munday. The opening was celebrated at a social tea and dance function with music provided by Gilligan's Orchestra. The cost of the new building was around £625, of which the committee had already funds of £468. However, the lining and ceiling which were completed a few years later were not included in this cost.

Since 1876 the surrounding grounds have been enlarged. In 1920 P Pomphrett, the local bootmaker, sold an area on the northern side of the hall to the committee. In 1926 land on the western side was purchased, resulting in the realignment of Paterson Road. Port Stephens Shire gave the committee more land further west. In the 1960s this area was levelled and resurfaced to be used as a car park. Since then a supper room and toilet block have been added to the building.

In 1930 a porch was added and electricity was installed. Mr R J Wilcher helped to beautify the grounds by donating Cape Chestnut trees in 1932.

## **Uses**

Since 1877 the Woodville School of Arts building has been used for many purposes, including as a meeting place, skating rink, war memorial, flood refuge, venue for weddings, parties, dances, wakes, political rallies, and educational talks, as well for school activities.



There are not many council facilities in the Wallalong, Duns Creek and Woodville areas so the Woodville School of Arts building served as the local hall. It continues to serve this purpose.

## Social History

Ever since its inception, ladies have greatly assisted at all functions providing excellent food.

Woodville School of Arts has always had a close association with community entertainment. During the depression years, membership reached 151, with many social evenings held in the form of dancing, games such as cards, quoits, table tennis and at one stage, roller skating. This latter pastime had to be abandoned when it was realised the dance floor was being damaged. An extremely popular dramatic society was formed by Mr and Mrs W. Baldwin, the Iona teacher and his wife.



Interior of Woodville School of Arts looking towards the main entrance.  
Shown are the Honour Boards for World War One and World War Two.

As is the case with very many of these institutions, the Woodville School of Arts also has an historic role as the memorial to the members of the district who have served their country in times of war.

During the presidency of S Hicks from 1935 to 1955 the ladies auxiliary helped in supporting the committee. They raised money to help World War Two efforts and to maintain the building and grounds in satisfactory condition.



During the 1955 flood many locals left their flooded homes and sought refuge in the hall even though it was surrounded by flood water.

Another local teacher Mr H Smith and his wife reintroduced fortnightly dances which were well supported by committee members, the ladies auxiliary, and residents from all parts of the Maitland district. These activities provided the School of Arts with its main source of income.

Teachers of Iona Public School together with their wives have been actively involved with the Woodville School of Arts, contributing educationally, culturally and socially. In 1877 Mr J F Munday, the first teacher at Iona Public School, taught his students in the first School of Arts building. This occurred because the school building was deemed unsuitable and was closed as a result. After two years a new school building was ready for occupation. The school still uses the School of Arts for assemblies and various activities.

The School of Arts library with over 800 volumes was in great demand before motorised transport made Maitland City Library easier to access.

Over the decades Woodville School of Arts has served the community through being available as a venue for meetings, social functions, concerts, parties, wedding receptions and school functions.

### **Currently (2014)**

The Woodville School of Arts remains in use today. It is still used for Iona School weekly assemblies and as a place for meetings of the local management committee. It is regularly hired out for social functions, such as weddings, parties, and social get-togethers. It is also used for community celebrations and all manner of meetings; for scouts and guides as well, and it is the local polling booth for elections at all levels of government.

The building now houses a formally accredited kitchen, a legal requirement for the public sale of food. When the beautiful gardens of Albion Farm are open to the public, the hall is used to supply afternoon tea and to set up a variety of arts and craft stalls.

Community and information days are hosted in the building to let people know about local enterprises and community events happening in the district. This information is displayed by renting spaces for stalls or notice boards.

The management committee has received Government Grants for furniture and other acquisitions but not for ongoing running costs. They rely on fund raising through memberships, currently about 100, and hall hiring to pay for annual running costs of \$5,000.

The Woodville School of Arts has its own website <http://www.woodvillehall.wordpress.com> and a Facebook page. The latter provides much evidence of the community focus that the Woodville School of Arts continues to provide.



Interior of the Hall from the entrance.  
The New South Wales Coat of Arms is mounted above the arch of the stage space.

**Acknowledgements:**

Woodville School of Arts, current President: Lis Smark

**References:**

Woodville School of Arts, website: <http://www.woodvillehall.wordpress.com>

Woodville School of Arts Centenary Booklet

Wikipedia

Woodville School of Arts Facebook page.

**Photos:** Bev Holden

**Research and Compilation:** Bev Holden. Member ADFAS Pokolbin

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**August 2014**