

TIGHE'S HILL NSW



Data Source: Local Government; Data Base Number: 2170824 File Number: 824

Name: Tighe's Hill School of Arts*

Address: 15 Elizabeth Street Tighes Hill NSW 2297*

Newcastle/Tighes Hill Suburb:

Tighes Hill is a north-western suburb of Newcastle, New South Wales. The suburb was named after an early resident A.A.P. Tighe, the eldest son of Robert Tighe, Chief Constable of Newcastle, who bought the land in 1843. After construction of a bridge over Throsby Creek the area developed very quickly, spurred on by the opening of the Ferndale Colliery in 1877 and a tramline from Newcastle in 1894. Within three years Tighes Hill had a school, post office, church and stores. In 1901 the tramline was extended to Mayfield, the adjoining suburb to the north, and the site of the Newcastle Steelworks in 1914.

*Throughout the text we have used Tighe's Hill for the Institution, and Tighes Hill for the Suburb.

Establishment:

The first Tighe's Hill School of Arts, originally referred to as the Mechanics Institute, was established in 1879 in Howell's Hall and located in an old house on Maitland Road. In the first meeting on 18 March the following men made up the committee: Messrs Wm. Robson, Croft, Absalom, Galbraith, W. Pitchford, Broom, Pepper, J. Powell, D. Bowen, M. O'Hara, A. Morgan, W. Russell, G. Lowe, G. Gilbert, J. Elliott. At the original public meeting Mr Bussell stated that when he saw *"a large number of youths, having finished their day's work, rush into a public house for shelter, he thought what a good thing it would be for them if, instead of rushing into a public house, where they could learn nothing but evil, they could take a seat in a Mechanics' Institute, and read the different papers and works, eventually teaching them to be good men and true"*. Then Mr Morgan suggested they could *"pass away the time in chess, drafts, and other such innocent games"*.¹

The committee's half-yearly meeting on 15th July 1879 referred to their cause as "The Tighe's Hill School of Arts" and reported that they had obtained from Messrs Bryant, an allotment of land "in a very prominent position".² The opening of the building was celebrated by a concert in 1880. *"...the object of the concert and quadrille party was to raise funds towards paying off the debt incurred by purchasing an allotment of land, and building a suitable place for reading and cultivating the mind"*.³ Very little is known of the early years of the School of Arts, except that the Government gave it £50 as an endowment⁴, its library increased (*"2 handsome volumes of the Statutes of NSW were given by Mr Melville MP"*)⁵, and concerts were held on its behalf. In 1883 and 1884 the Government Estimates provided £25 as grants.^{6,7} Half-yearly meetings were held and committees elected. However, on 31 May 1887, the Newcastle Morning Herald reported *"As will be seen by advertisement, another effort is to be made to resuscitate the Tighe's Hill School of Arts"*.⁸ It is believed that it closed, and was subsequently to be sold by auction on "pay-Saturday", 26 July 1890⁹.

By 1890, it was decided that the first building was dilapidated and in a poor location, and a new building should be erected in a more suitable place¹⁰. From the time that decision was made until the present building was constructed late in the 1890s and officially opened as the School of Arts in June 1900, there were constant events arranged to raise funds for that purpose – bazaars, novelty fairs, concerts, even an "Illusionist", Professor Davenport. They also held an Art Union in which one of the prizes was a wagon of coal (1898)¹¹.

There is clear evidence of strong determination and goodwill to establish such a building. The laying of the foundation stones of the new building, subsequent opening and celebrations were grand affairs, covered in detail in the Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate.



Opening of Tighe's Hill School of Arts – 1900
(source: NCC Photobank)



**Tighe's Hill School of Arts Committee, 2 June 1900. (Names not listed)
Snowball Collection, University of Newcastle.**

The Building:



**Building side view as it stands today –
Photo Sally Henning**

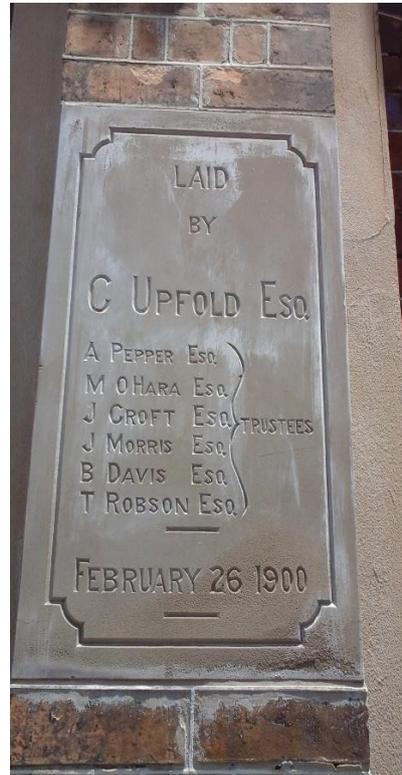
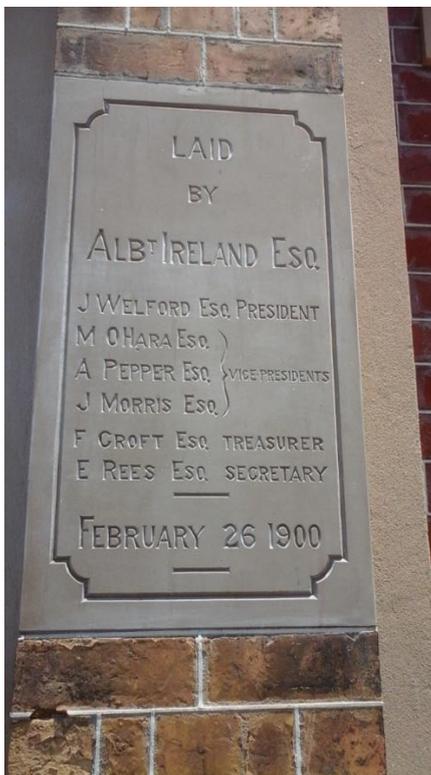
The first stage of the building, designed by architect Mr J Henderson and built by Mr C Davis at a cost of £480 boasted an impressive parapeted façade of double-pressed tuck-pointed, dichromatic brickwork with cement facings and windows of stained cathedral glass. This building is a finely crafted and architecturally substantial example of an arts institute in the Victorian Italianate style.



Side view of detailed corners, brickwork and parapet.



Detailed close-up of corner pilaster



**Foundation stones set in the brickwork frames on either side of the front door.
Photos Sally Henning**



**Detailed close-up of pilaster higher on the building depicting the idiochromatic nature of the brickwork and the ornately varied cement work.
Photo Sally Henning.**



Some features of the original building still remain such as the back door with the original doorknob



Internally some original features remain. Below are the front door with stained glass fanlight window and the rear double doors.



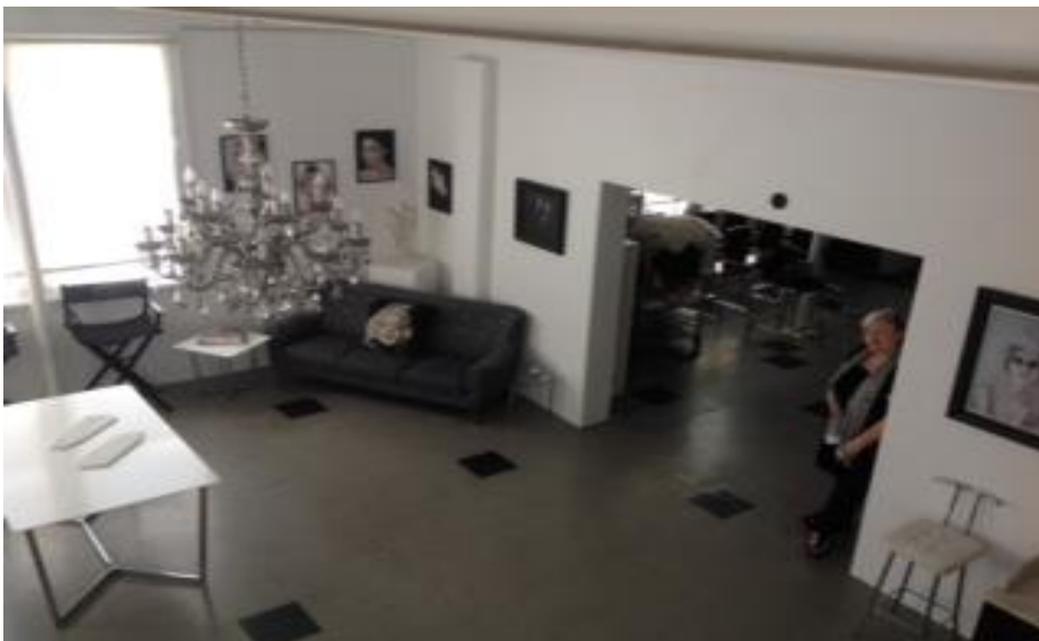


Upstairs, the original flooring still exists and has been restored.



On the ground floor the original ceiling is still in place.

Upper and ground floors are divided into equally large front and rear spaces, each being the width of the building. The upper floor provided two lodge or meeting rooms. The ground floor provided a reading room, library, Secretary's office (and at some time a recreation room).¹⁴



**Ground floor in 2017 set up and used as a beauty school.
Photos Jane Smith**

The Newcastle Morning Herald on 27 February 1900 praised the central location of the school. “Possessing ‘cement’ foundations”, the press confidently declared “*the building should be of a lasting character*”.¹⁰

Opening:

On 26 February 1900, the Foundation Stones were laid. Great satisfaction was expressed about reaching the financial goal by the opening: “*The wisest move taken was the formation of a ladies’ committee, and the opposite sex have proved a tower of strength, and it is due to their energies that two-thirds of the funds now in hand were collected.*”¹⁰

The building was formally opened with great fanfare on Saturday 2 June 1900¹¹ by the Minister for Education, the Hon. J. Perry, accompanied by many speeches, including reference to the Boer War.

By the first half-yearly meeting in February 1901 the Institution had a building free of debt. There were 60 members and 523 volumes in the library. New books were to be purchased when the government subsidy became available. This subsidy was paid every year, apparently for library purchases only.

History:

In the Rules and Regulations of the Tighe’s Hill School of Arts, published on an unspecified date early in the 1900s, the purpose was stated as the “mental and moral improvement and rational recreation of its members, by the opening of a Library and Reading room, by Lectures, Readings, by the formation of Classes, and by any other means that may appear desirable to the Committee of Management”.¹² Subscriptions were 12 shillings per annum for men and 6 pence per month for ladies to be admitted to the reading room.

As with many such institutions, Tighe’s Hill had a chequered history, with highs and lows in patronage, governance, finances and activities. Whenever extra funds were needed for building alterations, to purchase more books (1901) or assist the building fund (1906)¹³, the ladies were called upon to hold a bazaar. “*The new and the old structures combined have given the suburb one of the finest institute buildings in the district, the value of which is over £900. During the years that have elapsed since the project of having a local institute was mooted, the committee have always had before them the clearly defined policy of an institute untrammelled by debt. This object has been closely followed, and the members practically have a valuable property entirely their own. This has not been attained without much arduous labour, and in reaching the desired end the ladies have taken no small measure of the task.*”¹³ At that time the building consisted of a reading room, library, recreation room and two lodge or meeting rooms.¹⁴ After the purchase of a billiard table from Newcastle School of Arts in 1906, 21 new members were added.¹⁶ Billiards tournaments continued for some years. In 1907 lighting was improved.¹⁵ At the AGM in 1908 the committee reported on having experienced the most successful year in the history of the Institution with regard to membership, income and involvement by the members. It is worth noting that visits were also exchanged with the Smedmore Institute in nearby Maryville.¹⁷

In 1909 there were 106 financial members and 2,857 books had been issued from the library.¹⁸ In 1911 the free library scheme was discussed but the committee felt it was not suited to a “*place like Tighe’s Hill*”.¹⁹

In 1918, the Newcastle Morning Herald reported in January²⁰ that despite the impressive amenities, devoted service of the Secretary Mr E Rees, and favourable bank balance, the poor

local support of the Tighe's Hill School of Arts appeared to be leading to its closure, which occurred for a short time. Then the building was re-opened with some fresh enthusiasm.²¹ The appointment of a permanent caretaker (a returned soldier), and the opening of the Institute all day, contributed to this positive situation.

A year later, the half-yearly meeting reported some interesting news of the times. The Institute had to be closed for 5 weeks through the (Spanish) influenza outbreak, a female librarian was appointed, and public liability insurance was taken out for the officers.²²

Due to the "*misbehaviour of youths, mostly billiard patrons*", the games room was closed and the billiard tables sold. On the reopening, renovations were made to improve the building²³ and further changes made in subsequent years.²⁴ By 1932 the AGM was very positive, with a membership increase, comprehensive renovations and 200 new books added to the Library.²⁵ Lodges and other organisations continued to hold meetings there.

In 1940 both Merewether and Tighe's Hill Schools of Arts applied for and received subsidies from the Greater Newcastle Council equivalent to the municipal rates paid on each institution.²⁶

The Library Act was introduced in 1939. Its purpose was "*to ensure that the outdated schools of arts and other institutions providing library services were replaced by modern library systems*". A Council that adopted this Act should acquire the property of those institutions.²⁷ Then began the push for free libraries, with Tighe's Hill recommended as being centrally situated to serve Mayfield West, Islington, Wickham and Maryville, and besides, being free of debt.²⁸ The debate went on for some time. It was suggested that Tighe's Hill be used as a children's library, but that would disadvantage the adult patrons. The Council could not provide many branch libraries; "...there was one already planned for Mayfield, and eventually the decision was made for Adamstown."²⁹

In 1957 there was even a discussion that the building be made available to the Hunter Valley Research Foundation³⁰ but this, and other options, were not implemented, and the Institution lay dormant for many years, although the building's imposing appearance continued to draw interest.

Uses:

The School of Arts was used for a variety of purposes over the years, although it was originally established as an educational library. The users who have been identified were those wishing to read books and magazines. In 1903 the library had 618 volumes including 186 new items added during the year, and 928 loans were issued.¹¹ By 1914 it held 1448 volumes. The Library appears to have ceased functioning about the end of the 1950s.

The community offered a very useful meeting place for any organisation which needed to call a meeting, such as lodges, churches, sporting clubs, political parties and social events.

Wedding receptions and parties were held there, and soldiers welcomed back from the front.

Games became very popular for a long time – chess, billiards, cribbage, euchre, draughts and even dominos. Competitions were also held between schools of arts in the district. For example, in 1907, Carrington School of Arts defeated Tighe's Hill at billiards in Carrington. There was a debating society for some time. Also, in 1907 free maths classes were offered and from 1910 library scholarships were offered to children attending schools in the area.

In later years it has been an art gallery with café, a clothing store with café, a beauty school in 2017 and the local headquarters of the domestic violence charity, "Got Your Back Sista" in 2019.



**EbonyBennett:Birdwood Illustrations. Exhibition held in June 2009.
School of Arts Gallery (SOAG)**

Social & Economic History:

Following his military discharge in July 1839, Robert Tighe became the Chief Constable of Newcastle where his investments included a butcher shop in Watt Street and the Union Inn on the corner of Hunter and Bolton Streets (the former site of the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Ltd). He received a land grant of 200 acres at Bingle Hill in 1841, having purchased 10 acres near Throsby Creek the year before. Robert died in 1844 and left his widow and family with property in what became Tighes Hill, along with property in Newcastle, Clarence Town, Maitland, Port Macquarie, Gosford and Goulburn.

However, it is his eldest son, Atkinson Alfred Patrick Tighe, who gave his name to the suburb known as Tighes Hill. The first bridge over Throsby Creek was named the Tighes Bridge and eventually the whole suburb became known as Tighes Hill.

AAP Tighe owned a slaughter yard near the bridge in 1860 and was one butcher among several in the swampy area. Agricultural activities were diverse with Chinese gardens established in the area, and there was economic interchange between Mayfield, Tighes Hill and the farming on the river islands. Sheep and cattle from resting paddocks in Mayfield were driven through Elizabeth Street, en route to Carrington for shipment.

With respect to industry, Tighes Hill was usually overshadowed by developments in nearby Waratah. The Waratah Coal Company was established in 1862 with a capital of 60,000 pounds by Thomas Grove, AAP Tighe's father-in-law. Tighe was one of the original directors.

The high-quality coal prompted the establishment of brick and pottery works. In 1867, the Hunter River Copper Smelting Works at Port Waratah began smelting the copper ore from Moonta and Wallaroo. The ships took coal to South Australia and returned with the ore. There were stone quarries from 1870 onwards and the stone was used in mine construction and harbour side infrastructure.

The Waratah gas works was established in 1889 and this provided gas for street lighting and domestic use, as well as for industrial purposes. The Hunter River Meat Preserving Works (developed from several butchering businesses) sent shipments of their tinned meat products to the UK and to Chile, where they were well received.

The largest industry in the Tighes Hill area was mining and the work force was concentrated around that and smelting in Waratah. There were several mines between 1877 and 1896, and Ferndale was the largest. After a mine disaster in 1886, the industry did not expand further and commercial developments were sometimes built on top of filled-in mine shafts.

Nonetheless, there was a sufficient population in the 1870s for a new primary school (1878) and the first School of Arts (1879) to be established in Tighes Hill.

Richard Jones, a baker, arrived in 1878 and had a substantial business in the district by 1888. R Bryant, a tanner and currier, made harnesses and saddles and became the largest supplier in Newcastle. His wholesale trade extended throughout NSW.

Another meat preserver was William Hamilton who opened in 1888 in Tighes Hill and had the capacity to produce 40 tons of preserved fruit of all kinds as well as preserved meat. William had won prizes for preserved products at the NSW Agricultural Society Shows.

A welcome industry in 1886 was the opening of the Sydney Soap and Candle Company. It was the largest and most modern equipped soap manufacturing company outside of Sydney. Various soaps, stearin and paraffin candles, refined glycerine, all kinds of lubricating oils and manufacturing grease were available. The company offered many jobs to people in Tighes Hill. After World War I, this became Sunlight Lever and Kitchen Pty Limited.

Another business in Tighes Hill was that of E Price's newsagency and stationery business, which arrived in 1902. He also had shops in Mayfield and Islington, and carried a range of fancy goods, newspapers and magazines, fashion books and school requisites. All items could be delivered.

Transport between Newcastle and Tighes Hill was originally in horse-drawn buses until steam trams commenced in 1894. The line was electrified in 1923 but Tighes Hill was fading as a commercial centre. The islands were de-populating and the suburb's population was not increasing.

BHP had been established and new, drained areas had become available for industry, but the benefits were not expanding Tighes Hill. However, the age of the motor car was slowly arriving and the headquarters of the Australian Motorists Petrol Company Limited was established in 1937 in Tighes Hill. This eventually became BP (Australia). The following decade saw the establishment of the Commonwealth Oxygen and Acetylene P/L in Elizabeth Street: this was the forerunner of CIG, which is still there.

In the 1950s a certain amount of land was devoted to oil storages; the Olympic Tyre & Rubber Company established a re-treading and tyre service on Maitland Road and the Newcastle City Council approved a new bulk cement handling plant, as the Sulphide Corporation had ceased production of cement at Cockle Creek.

While all these developments were gradually occurring, there was also another significant change and that was in education. Before World War II, Mr W E Clegg and Mr J K MacDonald had set up the Newcastle Technical College and continued to assist the project to plan and build a University College in the 1950s. One well publicised aspect of these changes was the announcement in 1944 of the new free public library with nearly 2,000 books. The public were urged to use the professionally staffed library, which was initially in the Technical College. The description of the services available as well as the books and magazines clearly indicated that it would be a superior institution to that of the School of Arts.

If AAP Tighe had still been alive in the 1940s, he would have supported the library and educational developments. Like his father before him, AAP Tighe was very civic minded and, in addition to his business interests, he found time to represent Honeysuckle Ward on the Newcastle City Council, the seat of Northumberland in the NSW House of Assembly and, also served on the Waratah Council when it was established in 1871. Tighe retired from parliament in 1887 and died at Glebe Point in 1905. He was 78 and his family members are revealed in local street names: Phoebe, Elizabeth, John, Atkinson and Tighes Terrace.

Currently

Currently (2020) the building is being used as the administrative centre for “Got Your Back Sista”, a charity devoted to supporting victims of domestic violence as an initiative of Newcastle City Council.

The condition of the building: After the publication of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter (2000), new guidelines for dealing with Heritage issues were drawn up and all Heritage Buildings in NSW came under those new guidelines. The Tighe’s Hill School of Arts needed conservation work done on it and this work was carried out in the first decade of the 21st Century. It was a joint project between the NSW Government and Newcastle City Council - conservation of timber window frames, renovation of the existing internal stair case, a general upgrade of internal finishes, and various other improvements in order to comply with modern regulations.

The Tighe’s Hill School of Arts building is listed as a heritage item in the Newcastle Local Environment Plan 2012.



**The rear courtyard looking at the original back door with leadlight glass.
Photo Jane Smith**

The building was purchased by Diana and Stanley Wollen in 2009 and is still in their possession.

Acknowledgements:

Staff in Local Studies at Newcastle Library, Diana and Stanley Wollen current owners, Sally Henning photographer, Jane Smith photographer, Jim Smith, Judith Wotton and Lindy Henderson.

References relating to numbers in text:

1. NMH (Newcastle Morning Herald) & MA (Miners' Advocate) 1879 March 20 p3.
2. NMH & MA 1879 July 18 p3.
3. NMH & MA 1880 April 20 p4.
4. Maitland Mercy 1880 July 10 p7.
5. NMH & MA 1881 September 16 p3.
6. Maitland Mercy 1882 November 4 p4.
7. Maitland Mercy 1884 January 28 p14.
8. NMH & MA 1887 May 31 p5.
9. NMH & MA 1890 July 22 p?
10. NMH & MA 1890 July 2 p6.
11. NMH & MA 1898 July 5 p5.
12. Rules and Regulations of the Tighe's Hill School of Arts. [19--]
13. NMH & MA 1906 March 2 p3.
14. NMH & MA 1906 March 30 p6.
15. NMH & MA 1907 September 28 p6.
16. NMH & MA 1906 August 29 p6.
17. NMH & MA 1908 July 10 p6.
18. NMH & MA 1909 July 16 p6.
19. NMH & MA 1911 July 11 p6.
20. NMH & MA 1918 January 8 p5.
21. NMH & MA 1918 January 22 p5.
22. NMH & MA 1919 July 24 p7.
23. NMH & MA 1922 August 16 p2.
24. Newcastle Sun 1925 September 8 p3.
25. NMH & MA 1932 July 23 p7.
26. NMH & MA 1940 June 6 p5.
27. NMH & MA 1949 September 2 p3.
28. NMH & MA 1950 March 29 p4.
29. NMH & MA 1952 September 3 p2
30. NMH & MA 1957 July 10

References relating to Social and Economic History section:

W F Morrison *Aldine Centennial History of New South Wales*, Sydney, 1888.

B Heaton, G Preston and M Rabbitt *Science, Success & Soirees - The Mechanics Institute movement in Newcastle and the Lower Hunter*, Newcastle 1997.

J Keating (comp) *Waratah & Mayfield: Nineteenth century industrial towns*, Newcastle, 2016.

Tighes Hill Public School Commemorative Booklet 1878-1978, The Organising Committee, Tighes Hill Public School, 1978.

W H P "Newcastle Already Has A Free Public Library" *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* (NMH), 15 July 1944, p2.

L Butler "From Slaughter yard, Mines to Learning Industry" *NMH*, 29 October 1955.

C Ridley "Early Years on Tighe's Hill" *NMH*, 2 September 1939 p7.

NMH 30 April, 1880, 11 February 1888, 27 February 1900, 4 June 1900, 11 December 1937, 27 June 1944, 27 March 1956, 10 July 1957, 25 March 1961.

Heritas April 2005.

Photos:

Sally Henning, Jane Smith

Contributors:

Graydon Henning, Australian Economic Historian and ADFAS Newcastle member

Jane Smith, ADFAS Member and the Association of ADFAS Executive Committee member

Dianne Thomas, Art Gallery Guide and ADFAS Newcastle member

Liz Thwaites, ADFAS Member

Gwen Hamilton, ADFAS Member

ADFAS Newcastle

May 2020