

HISTORICAL WILLOUGHBY

Willoughby District Historical Society & Museum Inc. (Chatswood, Sydney, Australia)

Mowbray House School

Terry Fogarty
June 2016



'Belrose'
Cnr. Mowbray Rd & Gordon Rd
PW 0010/0010187
Fig. 1

The corner of the Lane Cove Road (North Sydney Rd/Gordon Rd/Pacific Highway) and Mowbray Rd is steeped in the history of Willoughby. It was originally part of Isaac Nichol's 1810 Estate of 230 ac.

Prior to the coming of the railway in 1890, the nascent commercial centre of Willoughby, was focused in this area. The first Council meetings in 1865 were held in John Bryson's house 'Belrose' at the corner of Mowbray Rd and the Lane

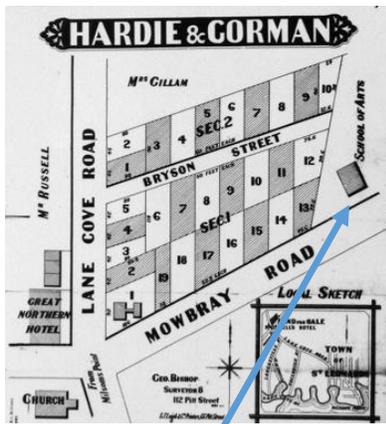


Bryson's 'Belrose'
PW 003/003989
Fig. 2

Cove Rd (Pacific Highway). [Forsyth, L.C. (1987), Willoughby and Lane Cove 1865 – 1895]. Also, it appears that the first schooling in the Parish of Willoughby was located on this site.¹

The Bush Mission (Society) as early as 1860 had conducted services at or near John Bryson's cottage 'Belrose' at the north-eastern corner of Mowbray Road and the Pacific Highway then called the Lane Cove Road and now part of the **Sydney Metro South 'dive site'**. (WDHS 1974 – 1999 p.35). It is most likely that a '**Sunday School**' associated with these services taught basic literacy and numeracy to students at this site. It is reported that Mrs. McGilvray opened a school in a cottage on Mrs. Bryson's ground and this served the district of until the North Sydney Public School was opened about 1869. [The Suburbs of Sydney – No. XXVII – Willoughby, SMH Jan 15th 1891]. Nearby, Jan Bryson had conducted **school classes** for several years. (WDHS 1974 – 1999 p.35). So it appears that schooling on this site may have predated Eliza Davies' 1862 school in Penshurst St, and as such was **the first schooling in Willoughby**.

¹ Prior to 1865 most of the Lower North Shore was part of the Parish of Willoughby. In 1865 when the Municipality of North Willoughby was formed it contained not only the present day Willoughby Council area but also the current day Lane Cove Council area until 1895..



School of Arts c.1897
PW 010/0010981
Fig. 3

In about 1870 the **North Willoughby School of Arts and Mechanics' Institute** was established. It had first met in John Bryson's cottage "Belrose". In their day, amongst other things, Mechanics' Institutes were the forerunner to the later Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges. Then a site in Mowbray Rd (now part of a Sydney County Council Works Depot) was purchased. In 1875, the Reverend Gilchrist of Scotts Church gave an address on a proposed **School of Arts** at North Willoughby. [Forsyth, L.C. (1987), Willoughby and Lane Cove 1865 – 1895. P.81]. Then later in 1875 a foundation stone for a new School of Arts was laid. At the ceremony the chairman proposed



Council Chambers 1895
PW 0010/0010555
Fig. 4

that the Government should place a sum of money of the estimates for the purpose of **enabling the Professors of the University** to visit the various Schools of Arts throughout the colony **for the purpose of delivering lectures**. [Source: Evening News, 1875 (May 12) p.2]. The School of Arts operated for two years. In 1877 Willoughby Municipal Council rented the building for use as Council Chambers. Council purchased the building in 1879 and it remained in use as Council Chambers until 1903. After the Council takeover of the building, the School of Arts became defunct, although the building itself continued to be known as the School of Arts. It was a fine sandstone building which in 1957 was moved to Beaconsfield Road to become the Church of the Holy Trinity after being used as a school chapel for a number of years.



Chatswood Preparatory School c.1910
PW 001/001380
Fig. 5

In 1906 the **Chatswood Preparatory School** opened in a new building next door to the old School of Arts building. In 1914, the name of the school was changed to **Mowbray House School**. The building is still standing opposite Hampden Rd. It is acknowledged by a Heritage Plaque in the footpath outside. The original School of Arts Building that had become the Council Chambers finally became the **school chapel** until it was removed to the corner of Dalrymple Ave and Beaconsfield Rd in 1957 to be used as the Holy Trinity Church.

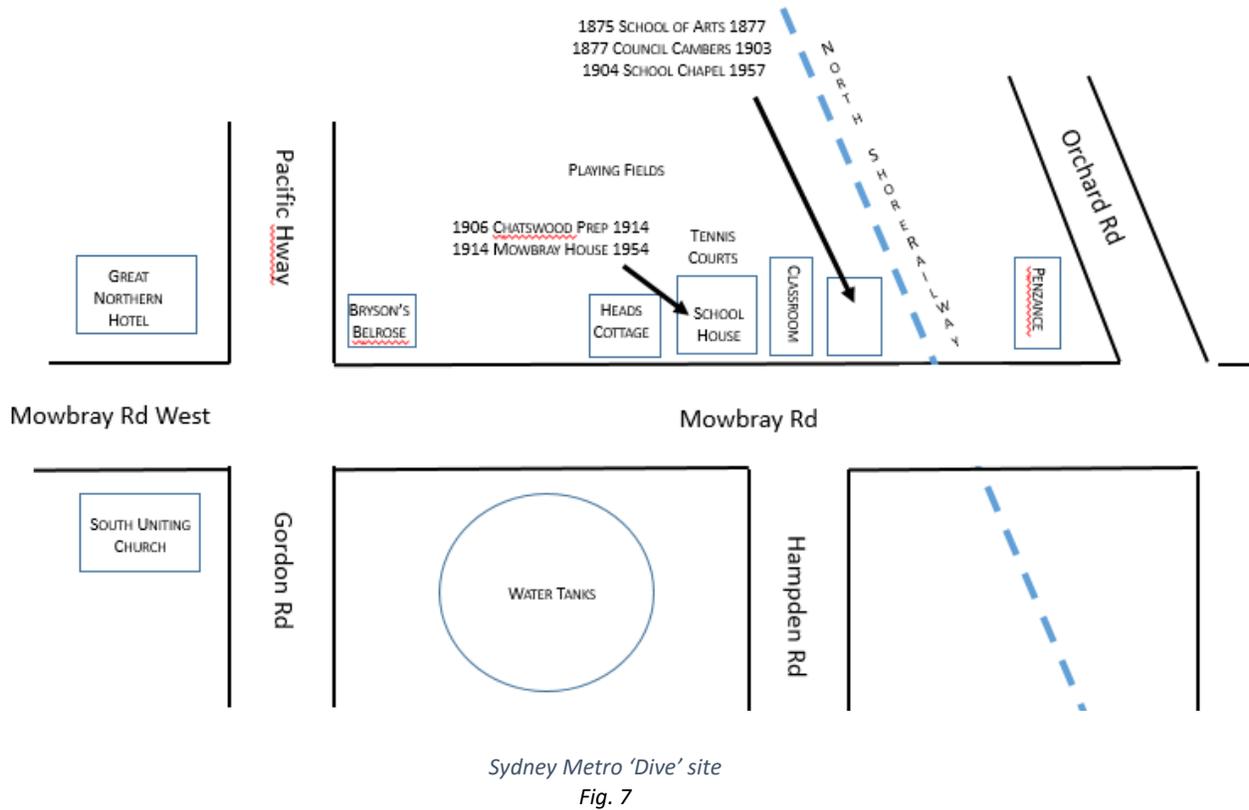


Mowbray House School 1930s
PW 003/003317
Fig. 6

In 1953 the Sydney County Council had bought the Mowbray House School for boys at Chatswood, The deputy general manager of the council said the council would convert the school into an administrative centre. "The centre will control our electricity construction and maintenance work on the North Shore,"

[Council Buys School, The Sun-Herald, Aug 1953 p.4]. Mr. L. Bavin who founded the school in 1906 and who is still its headmaster, said "We will close down at the end of 1954",

GEOGRAPHY OF THE SITE



It appears that the land between the Gordon Rd (Pacific Highway) and Orchard Rd remained undeveloped until the mid 19th century. It was acquired by John Bryson and was part of the grounds of a large estate called "Bryson" (or "Belrose") where he lived until 1870. Bryson's cottage was at the corner of the Highway and Mowbray Rd as shown in Fig.1. The subject land was subdivided and sold from the main Bryson holdings by 1882. By 1889 the land was noted as having been part of an orchard. [NSW Govt. Heritage Listing details].

The original structure on the site was Bryson's house 'Belrose' on the corner of Mowbray Rd and the current Pacific Highway (see Fig. 1). At the time the land on which 'Belrose' and Mowbray House its Chapel and Cottage sit appears in Fig.7



Mowbray House School site
PW
Fig. 8

The site of what was to become Mowbray House School is shown in the accompanying diagram. We know that the School of Arts/Council Chambers that was removed to Beaconsfield Rd was to the east of 'The School'. This leaves the area between 'The School' and where 'Belrose' stood. It is clear in many photographs



'Penzance' n.d
Cnr. Mowbray Rd & Orcard RD
PW 6536/6536528
Fig. 9

looking toward Nelson St there were substantial playing fields behind and next to the school. So it appears the school site originally ran from 'Belrose' right through to Orchard Rd where there was a cottage known as 'Penzance' occupied by the Headmasters' mother.

There has been a number of additional claims relating to the educational heritage of the area

WAS PART OF THE SITE EVER OWNED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION?

1. It has been asserted that records show the site was sold by the Dept. of Education to Sydney County Council (hence site now owned by Ausgrid) in 1990 for \$6m. [Croft, S. 18 June 2016 email]. This claim is inconsistent with the public record of the 1953 sale. However, the significance of this claim is such that additional research and documentation should be undertaken in relation to this matter.
2. *It has been asserted that Willoughby Domestic Sciences High School opened at 337 Mowbray Road Chatswood.* [Nolan P. 22 June 2016, email]. According to the Dept. of Education Willoughby Girls High School was established in 1934 as Willoughby Domestic Science High School on the corner of Mowbray Rd and Penshurst St, Willoughby. The school is Heritage Listed as a local item. [<https://online.det.nsw.edu.au/schoolfind/locator/?do=showRecord&code=8159>]. However, this assertion has subsequently been discounted {Croft S. 19 June 2016. Email: "It wasn't Willoughby Domestic Sciences as that was former name of Willoughby Girls HS and it has been on its current site for 90 years."}
3. It has been asserted that *"the site was previously a public girls high school site (called Chatswood Girls Domestic Science High School or something?"* [Croft. S, 18 June 2016, email]. In 1913 the Domestic Science School for girls was opened at Chatswood on the site of the current public school at the corner of Centennial Ave and the Pacific Highway. [CPS].
4. Croft has asked *"Could part of the school site have been sold to SCC and part to DEC and used at one point in time before or after CPS site and after Mowbray House School closed, and have been adjoining an existing SCC site ...and SCC bought from DEC and expanded their existing site?"* There is no evidence that part of the site was sold to the Department of Education. Given that

the Sydney County Council occupied the majority of the site it seems unlikely that they would only have purchased part of the site. However, further research should be undertaken to clarify this point.

There is no documented evidence that the site was owned by the Department of Education but the possibility should not be discounted without further research being undertaken.

Every effort should be made to return educational services to the site.

Annexure



*Playing fields behind the school
PW 6537/6537997*



*Exercise yards of the Mowbray House School
PW 6538/6538373*



*Tennis courts at rear of house
PW 6537/6537992*



*MHS looking toward Nelson St.
PW 001/001380 c.1910*



*Classroom between the 'Chapel' (shown on right) and the main school building to the west.
PW 6536/6536545*



*Master's Cottage with external boarder's dorm.
PW 6536/6536532*