

<i>Month & Year of Topic</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Written & Spoken Presenters</i>
November 2005	Dr. Peter Orlovich Archivist Kogarah Council Oatley School of Arts Letters 1905 – 1969 History Oatley School of Arts	Peter Orlovich Sister Ann Stedman Alec Leach

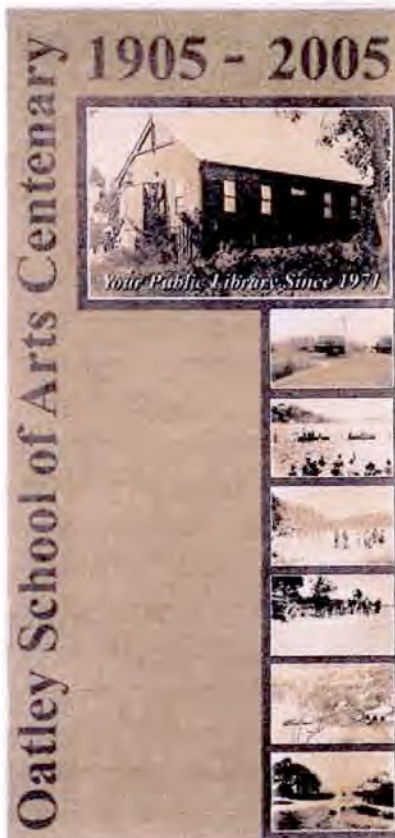
Copyright Except where material is attributed to an earlier creator, you may copy, distribute, display, download and otherwise freely deal with this work for any purpose, provided that you attribute Oatley Heritage Group as the owner. However, you must obtain permission if you wish to (a) charge others for access to the work or (b) include the work in advertising or a product for sale, or (c) modify the work.

Disclaimer: Some material prepared by the Oatley Heritage Group is based on information provided by its members or others and is intended to be for general information purposes; as to its accuracy, therefore, no warranty is given or implied.

OATLEY HERITAGE GROUP
Oatley School of Arts Centenary
1905 - 2005

A Summary history of Oatley School of Arts

Compiled by Alec Leach For The Oatley Heritage Group's general meeting 24th November 2005



In late 2004 it was realised by Kogarah Council's Librarian staff that Oatley School of Arts would be 100 years old on the 13th October 2005. We at the Oatley Heritage Group were approached to make a contribution to assist in the centenary celebrations at the Oatley Library. We took it on board and have adopted it as our topic for tonight.



Photo Courtesy: Alec Leach

I will not be delving into the intricacies involved over inadequate toilets when it was used as a school, nor will I relate to you the many pages of correspondence to and from Kogarah Council and the Secretaries for the building.

I am not going to say that the hall was built at a cost of four hundred and fifty pounds, including land, a weather board 45ft by 30ft hall with eight windows. A library of 400 volumes and a piano. My reason being every snippet one reads on the history of the hall opens with those statistics.

The School of Arts was formally put into use after the official opening by Chief Secretary of N.S.W. and local Member of Parliament, the Hon. J. A. Hogue on the 13th October 1905. In the "The St. George Call", on Saturday 21st October 1905, it reported the event and concluded by saying, "That night of the 21st a Concert and Social would be held in the hall".

Tonight Peter Orlovich, Kogarah Council's Archivist, will explain the importance of keeping archival records and will exhibit examples of typical correspondence received from the community by Council since 1913.

Peter and Sister Ann Stedman, have meticulously sieved through Council's records to compile an 88 page detailed record of correspondence relating to the School of Arts from February 1905, through to the official opening of the Baby Health Centre on Saturday 10th May 1969, by The Hon. R. W. Askin, M.L.A. Premier of N.S.W.

I will no doubt repeat some of the facts that have been produced in various publications over the years. To mind I recall Elaine Howard's book *The Working Man's Paradise*. In it is a photo of pupils outside the hall circa 1920, submitted by the late John Derwent. The same photo we have was given to us by Honor Stroud nee Earls. Honor was about a five year old in the photo and has named a number of the pupils. **Attachment 1.**

Interesting to note that two members of the School of Arts Committee designed and then supervised the construction of the hall free of charge. They were Harry Towers and W. G. Colborne. (W. G. Colborne was the grandfather of two of our members, Mary Conway and Nola Davies). The builder was Mr. Nicholson. The rest of the Committee consisted of Mr. Edgar Williams, President. Mr. Frank Lombe, Treasurer. Mr. Fred Ludwig, Secretary and Messrs. W. P. Judd, T. Thompson and W.G. Colborne, Trustees.

The railing for the front porch steps was erected by the Father of Phil Phillips nee Davidson. Phil had to hold the railing for her father whilst he fitted it.

The Billiard Hall, a room of 40ft by 24ft was added to in 1909. Until 1998, it was used as the Municipalities Band rehearsal room.

The Oatley Public School began lessons on the 2nd October 1917 and by years end there were 69 pupils enrolled. This catered for students to 3rd class and below. In the ensuing years 1918, 4th class and January 1920, fifth class were admitted. In June 1921 the School moved to its present location on the corner of Letitia and Neville Streets.

There's some interesting reading in the Council's correspondence between Mr. W.J. Horne, Headmaster of Oatley Public School from 1917 until they moved to the new premises in 1921 and Mrs. R. F. Cormack, Hon. Secretary Oatley P & C from "Burnley" Southern Street Gungah Bay. Two pan toilets were not good enough for 155 pupils.

Marjorie Phillips nee Dunsmore, performed some of her practical teacher training at the School of Arts.

During the Great Flue epidemic of 1918 the School of Arts was used as a temporary "Hospital"

In 1923, a Mr. A. Guest had been negotiating with Chief Secretaries Department to show moving pictures in the hall. It appears that the alterations required to the hall for the projectors didn't go ahead. However he was given permission for a one night show on the 18th August 1923. A letter to the Chief Secretary from Mr. R.W. Pratt. Hon Sec for the School of Arts, explained the reason for the pictures not been shown. "The engine he had could not be got to work".

The hall was used together with the Masonic Hall for most of Oatley's social gatherings and at times used for a Polling Booth for Council Elections.

A popular dance night under the name of "The Gumnuts" was mainly held in the Masonic Hall and on occasions in the School of Arts.

Mrs. Cole, a caring, well meaning organiser of the twenties, thirties and forties, regularly organised dances in the hall as well as concerts.

A plaque is affixed to the wall on entering the Library.

This plaque was erected to commemorate the service given by Mrs. Minnie Cole in the establishment of the Oatley School of Arts which provided the first library service in Oatley.

When the Square Dancing craze arrived in the fifties, the natural place to conduct them was in the hall.

It was a popular venue for Wedding Receptions and Twenty First Birthdays. Joyce and Jack Marks were married in the St. George Church of England Church, Hurstville on Saturday 10th March 1945 and had their Reception in the hall. Joyce was a very worried girl leading up to the wedding. Jack was away at the war in Bougainville and had not been home for over two years. He was still missing until 3.00pm the day before the wedding. Joyce's mother consoled Joyce by saying that if he didn't turn up they could still have the reception without him and then have the wedding later. Today, after sixty years, Joyce knows exactly where Jack is.

A clipping from the local Newspaper, thought to be "*The Propeller*" during World War 11 describes a typical social evening held at the hall.

"OATLEY CHURCH CONCERT"

"An entertaining variety of musical numbers were included in the programme of the annual tea meeting and concert of St. Paul's Church of England, Oatley, held in the Oatley School of Arts last Saturday evening. Approximately 150 persons were present, including the Rector, Rev. W. J. Siddons, who presided. The tea was arranged by the Women's Guild, and the concert was organised by Mr. G. Kendall. The principal item was community singing conducted by Mr. & Mrs. Leach with the aid of lantern slides. Singing competitions for girls and boys were won respectively by Marie Brant and Noel Plaxter. Vocal solos were rendered by Misses Mary O'Connell and Robbie Nesbit, and humorous musical sketches were presented by Misses Alys Cole and Robbie Nesbit and Master John Chapman. Trombone solos were contributed by Charles Stamford, while members of Oatley Flute Band were heard in quartets selectios., The artists and organisers were thanked on behalf of those present by Rev. Siddons." **Attachment 2**

Three main denominations have used the hall for their services over the years, the CofE, Methodist and most notably the Catholic Church. Patricia McGrath nee Holdsworth, has compiled a comprehensive account of the Churches association with the hall. Briefly, it was used from 1935 until 1952. The Holdsworth family played a tremendous role in obtaining a permanent place to worship in Oatley. Patricia's grandfather donated five hundred pounds to purchase land on the corner of Rosa and Frederick Streets for the new Church. The late family home at 29 Ada Street became a home for the Nuns. **Attachment 3**

Eileen Harland, still living in Oatley, recalls attending Church in the early 1950's. Their children being baptised at St. Declans in 1951 and the New St. Joseph's in 1954 and 1960.

Attachment No4.

Interestingly, Eileen's husband who was a bricklayer built the Oatley War Memorial in the Memorial Gardens.

Before the church was built in Rosa Street, the Oatley Church of England held their services in the hall in 1908.

Gordon Anderson, who sleeps at Maroubra, is the son of Jack the Caretaker of the hall. Gordon remembers his father being the caretaker in 1938 when he was a lad of ten. He relates that the Billiard Room was open Monday to Saturday 7.00 pm to 11.00pm and consisted of two tables. Billiards and Snooker were played with a limit of forty minutes per game. The loser had to pay sixpence for the game. Friday night a pool game called thirty one was played. The first player to exactly reach that score won. There was a lucky prize for the person who potted a secret number between seven and fifteen. Regular patrons were Bill Colborne, Nev Courtney, Jim Loveridge, Billy and Lance Brooks. Gordon also recalls a Buffalo Lodge meeting of Sunday morning. **Attachment 5.**

Billy continues his reminiscents of the Billiard Room.

Billy Brooks, now sleeping at Maclean, recalls back in about 1947 when Jack Anderson was the Caretaker. Billy and his brother Lance hired the Billiard Room on Friday nights and Sunday afternoons. The arrangement went on unabated for twelve months before one night they were raided by the police. Oh! I forgot to say how they were putting the hall to use. They were conducting a glorified two up game using hot dices on the billiard tables. The Police bundled about twenty of the gamblers into the big Black Maria just as the picture theatre crowd was coming out. All of Oatley soon knew who had been apprehended that evening. **Attachment 6.**

By 1954 the School of Arts had to comply with strict emergency lighting arrangements. Honorary Secretary Paul Vincent of 11 Rosa Street answered the Chief Secretaries Department by stating that "Ample panic lighting is provided by three pressure lamps, which are kept alight during public functions".

The first mention of a Baby Health Centre was brought to Council's attention by P.L. Hughes. Hon. Sec. Improvement Association in May 1943. It wasn't until the 10th May 1969 that the then Premier of N.S.W. The Hon R.W. Askin opened the new Centre in front of the School of Arts. Earlier in the morning he opened the "Douglas Cross Gardens"

The School of Arts has been used for a variety of activities.

Listed are a few of the Groups who used the premises and where possible a little of their history.

State Records mention in 1962 that the hall was being shared by two kindergartens. Kingsgrove and Arkana. Another report referred to Arkana College and the hall had been partitioned as class rooms, serving up to sixth class. In mid 1963 it was again referred to as a kindergarten.

Physical Culture: - Norma Straney together with Sylvie Leech were a couple of the instructresses.

Norma in particular warrants a special mention. She taught at the School of Arts from 1953 until about 1960. Her teaching skills began at the Church of England from 1946 until 1953 where between there and the School of Arts most daughters of Oatley's well known citizens passed through her hands.

Names such as Dunsmore, Davidson, Phillips, Sullivan & not to forget our George's sister Judith Kendall. Another of our members Jan Crane nee Pier was one of Norma's star pupils.

Norma since 1976 has conducted a Physical Culture Group at the Oatley Senior Citizens

Jan Cardie age 6yrs. And Leone, (Joyce & Jack Marks daughter) age 10yrs & 9mths in 1957 were dressed ready for the Physic Concert.

Photo Courtesy: Joyce Marks.



Oatley Red Cross. This group was active during the war years. Apart from the immediate requirements for the forces, our young girls were trained as Junior Red Cross Aids.

1st Oatley Scouts. The Group was started on the 25th February 1941 by virtually a Dad's army. Our younger men were at War. Mr. G. Shooter the first Scout leader soon joined the A.I.F. This left Tom Booth, a man in his forties, Scout Leader. He was known as Tabs. The Cub Pack was led by Miss Fry and Miss Thompson. In 1945 my Cub Akela was Mrs. Walters. My parents helped form the layside committee. Mum being the inaugural secretary. In 1991 the Group recognised this by having Mum and Mrs. Harris who although not an inaugural member, had been a long time dedicated District Delegate of the group for many years, both cut the fiftieth anniversary cake.

RSS & AILA.

The hall was used extensively for fundraising functions by the RSS&AILA

There was an active Women's Auxiliary busy raising money for a new RSS & AILA hall.

Some of the Committee members included: Mrs Bryley, Chapman, Chopping, Derwent, Dodd, Papworth, Riley, Wenman, and Yates.

After the war the returned diggers who required rehabilitation would be entertained by the Women's Auxiliary in the hall.

An extract from the State Records made me chuckle when I read Sergeant Dunn's answer to his investigation.

A monthly dance was held in the hall, at times the local citizens showed their concern with correspondence between Council and the Police. It related to the noisy alcoholic activities when the monthly dance was held on a Saturday night. The Police were requested to investigate if liquor was being taken into the hall. Sergeant Dunn's reply about the complaint on the 26th November 1954, was, "Yes, privately, no license required"

Since 1971 the main hall has been used for Kogarah Council's Oatley Branch Library. It was officially opened by Worship the Mayor K.R. Cavanough on the 4th September.

In conclusion, today the School of Arts is being utilised fully. The main hall as a modern library including the latest computer technology and the "Billiard Room" or as it is now known as the Oatley Library Hall, is being used by the Community as a meeting place, covering a variety of activities. They include Children's Activities for 2 - 5 years. Children's book lovers club for 6 - 12 years. U3A (University of the third age) conducts Calligraphy, Italian Language and Culture and gratefully our Oatley Heritage Group.

Acknowledgement to the following institutes and people for their information used to compile this report.

State Records: Series NRS 15318, Container 10/53068 Item T1161
School of Arts Oatley 1923 - 65

Kogarah Council Archival researchers Peter Orlovich and Sister Ann Stedman.

Kogarah Council Librarians: headed by Helen Fulton, assisted by Allison Grellis and Margaret Lowther.

Russell Gibbs. The Oatley School of Arts.. Presented to the Oatley Heritage Group. May 1996.
Topic "Meeting Places of Oatley".

The Establishment of Oatley Public School by J.J. Fletcher.

Patricia McGrath nee Holdsworth

Eileen Harland.

Honor Stroud nee Earls.

Joyce Marks nee Bray.

Norma Straney.

Billy Books.

Listed are some of the publications about Oatley that have mentioned Oatley School of Arts.

OATLEY The Working Man's Paradise. Elaine Howard.

OATLEY IN EARLY DAYS. D.J. Hatton.

Oatley Writes. A Souvenir Publication of Oatley's 150th Anniversary 1833 – 1983.

OATLEY PUBLIC SCHOOL 75th Anniversary Year Book 1917 - 1992

Note: *Reference to Gordon Anderson and Billy Brooks Residential status.*

Although one may leave Oatley, one never ever lives in a new location. The body only sleeps there. The heart remains in Oatley.

*Photo Courtesy.
Norma Gibbs.*



*Oatley School of Arts Library
Christmas Party.
1995*

*Santa. (The late Russell Gibbs)
And
Margaret Lowther. (Oatley Librarian)*

*Russell Gibbs
was the inaugural
President
Of
THE OATLEY HERITAGE GROUP
In 1995*

*School Children
Oatley School of Arts
Approx. 1920*



Photo Courtesy: Honor Stroud. Nee Earls.

Honor Stroud kindly donated the above photograph; she was a five year old at the time and has put names to many of the faces.

Working along the 2nd row, from left to right i.e. No 5 will be fifth from the left.

Back Row: 10: Jack Earls. 14: ? Bayley

2nd Row: 1: Marie Stanley. 2: Marie Hart. **5: Honor Earls.** 6: Violet Honeyman 7: Iris Drever
8 & 9: Nellie & Peggie Francis. 10: Carol Peasley

3rd Row 3: Vernie Honeyman. 4: Katherine Raten. 5: Margaret Jones (Peg O'Connell) 7: Ada Clarke
8: ? Firth. 11, 12 & 13 Derwents.

4th Row (front row) Sadly Honor wasn't interested with little boys at that age and could not remember anyone.

Headmasters at the time were: Mr. Horne, followed by Mr. Fitzgerald.

ATTACHMENT 2

Newspaper Clipping
From
St George local paper
World War II era

... to co-operate.

OATLEY CHURCH CONCERT.

An entertaining variety of musical numbers were included in the programme of the annual tea meeting and concert of St. Paul's Church of England, Oatley, held in the Oatley School of Arts last Saturday evening. Approximately 150 persons were present, including the Rector, Rev. W. J. Siddens, who presided. The tea was arranged by the Women's Guild, and the concert was organised by Mr. G. Kendall. The principal item was community singing, conducted by Mr. and Mrs. Leach with the aid of lantern slides. Singing competitions for girls and boys were won respectively by Marie Brandt and Noel Plaxter. Vocal solos were rendered by Misses Mary O'Connell and Robbie Nesbit, and humorous musical sketches were presented by Misses Alys Cole and Robbie Nesbit and Master John Chapman. Trombone solos were contributed by Charles Stamford, while members of the Oatley School Flute Band were heard in quartette selections. The artists and organisers were thanked on behalf of those present by B. ... ans.

334
Agen

Best
qu

A.
QUEEN

Call and
Elsewhere

£

Advances
lery, and

P
THE

Co

ATTACHMENT 3

1 of 3

Dear Alec,

As we are about to celebrate another milestone in the history of the Oatley School of Arts, I thought I would add a few details about one of the uses to which the Hall was put - and possibly one of the lesser known uses.

I was born in Oatley in 1933, but my earliest memories of the Hall were about ten years later. However, a 1978 edition of a Parish magazine from St. Joseph's Catholic Church tells of the early association with the Hall.

In the 1930's the Catholic congregation in Oatley was part of Penshurst Parish and, as there were few cars around then, most people had to walk to Penshurst. Trains were running from Oatley, but none arrived at Penshurst in time for Mass. The Railways were approached and asked to send a train, starting from Montdale, down to Oatley to pick up the intending passengers. Astonishing at it seems now, they agreed to do this - I wonder what would be the response these days! Unfortunately, this didn't last long and the service was discontinued a few months later.

Then, in 1935, it was discovered that the Hall could be hired on Sunday mornings. The caretaker was approached and agreed to rent of the Hall for an hour at a cost of 2/6d.

ATTACHMENT 3
2 of 3

As the Hall was often used for parties on Saturday nights some of the women parishioners used to arrive early to clean the Hall in time for 8.00 AM Mass. In fact the magazine even contained such details as the problems associated with stray pieces of chewing gum slowing down a parishioner's efforts to rise from his seat! As the congregation only numbered about fifteen at that time, the collection usually amounted to 2/9d. - take away the cost of hiring the Hall and you have the magnificent amount of 3d for the priest.

My father and Mr Dick Conway used to take it in turns to drive to Penhurst to bring the priest to Mass. The congregation gradually increased until in the 1940's there were about 100 families. Building regulations at that time meant permission could be given to build a hall or classrooms, but not a church. So an enthusiastic band set ~~out~~ about fund-raising activities. As a result there were many enjoyable nights when house parties were held each month in various parishioners' homes, with raffles, a chocolate wheel and various other mild games, as well as House nights.

The Hall continued to be rented for Sunday Mass until a block of land on the corner of Rosa and Frederick Streets was purchased with a

ATTACHMENT 3

3 OF 3

donation of \$500 from my grandmother. The foundation stone of St. Joseph's was laid on October 8th 1950. Two years later, on Sunday January 6th, 1952, the first Mass in St. Joseph's was celebrated, thus concluding the long association with Oatley School of Arts and the many happy memories associated with it.

Yours sincerely
Pat McGrath (nee Holdsworth)

ATTACHMENT 4
1 of 2

Dear Alec..

I am writing to tell you I have a few memories of Oatley School of Arts. My husband & I were married at Peshurst the end of 1949, having no Catholic here we attended mass in the School of Arts on a Sunday morning in the fifties.

My eldest Daughter was born in 1951 and was baptized in St Declans old Church at Peshurst. My son was born 1954 and was baptized in the new St Joseph Church. Also my daughter who was born in 1960.

My husband & I are still living in the same house he built been a bricklayer, he also done the brick work on the War memorial in the park about 1962 or 63 not sure.

We have seen a lot of changes in Oatley. The Post Office was where the gourmet shop is across the road was Moran & Cato grocer shop.

ATTACHMENT 4

2 of 2

Mr & Mrs Ellis had a grocery shop on the corner where the bottle shop is situated. A chemist shop where Bakers Delight is. There was no R.S.L. Club; but they had part of the School of Arts where they served beer.

There was a very old brick house opposite our place which belonged to quads who owned quads brick yard. There was a fruit shop where the Post Office is to-day, also a butcher next door. Also these are a few of my memories of Oatley. I hope it will help your Heritage Group.

By for now

Yours Faithfully
Eileen Harland.

ATTACHMENT 5
1 of 1

GORDON ANDERSON
7 HARRAVES PL
MAROUBRA
9661-6990

ALEX LEACH

I WOULD LIKE TO FORWARD TO THE HERITAGE MEETING MY KNOWLEDGE OF MY FATHER JACK ANDERSON AS CARETAKER OF THE CATLEY SCHOOL OF ARTS.

I REMEMBER HE WAS CARETAKER IN 1938 WHEN I WAS 10 YRS OLD. HOW HE BECAME CARETAKER I DO NOT KNOW

THE BILLIARD ROOM WAS OPEN MON-SAT 7PM - 11PM
2 TABLES - BOTH BILLIARDS AND SNOOKER WAS PLAYED
TIME LIMIT WAS 40 MINUTES PER GAME. A LOT OF THE
TIME SNOOKER WOULD BE PLAYED BY 4 WHERE AS
BILLIARDS WOULD BE PLAYED BY 2. THE LOSER WOULD
BE REQUIRED TO PAY SIXPENCE FOR THE GAME.

ON A FRIDAY NITE THEY WOULD PLAY A GAME OF POOL
CALLED 31 WITH 9 PLAYERS WITH A SECRET NO BETWEEN
7-15. AND YOU WERE REQUIRED TO REACH EXACTLY 31
BY POTTING THE COLOUR BALLS (GREEN 3 BROWN 4 BLUES PINK 6
BLACK 7) SOME OF THE REGULARS ^{WERE} BILLY LANCE BROOKES BILLY
COLBOURNE NEV COURNEY. SIM LOVERIDGE.

IN THE MAIN HALL REGULAR TENNANTS WERE RED CROSS.
CUBS AND A BUFFALO LODGE MET ONCE A MONTH ON
SUNDAY MORNING.

I HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT A MRS COLES FROM WONDON A PDE
PLAYED THE PIANO FOR SAT NITE DANCES IN THE EARLY 20.

YOURS TRULY
GORDON ANDERSON

ATTACHMENT

6

1 of 2

4494 Lawrence Rd.

Maclean 2463

P.H. 6645 1427

The President:

Alice Leach,

Thank you for sending me the usual News letter which I appreciate, your next meeting on the 24 Nov. about the school of arts certainly brings back a lot of past memories to me, one story which I will tell happened a long time ago I say about 1947, told Jack Anderson was the caretaker he lived directly behind the school of arts, through him my brother Lance & myself negotiated to hire the billiard room for a quid a week which was OKayed

We went ahead to run a dice game on Friday evenings 8-12 & on Sunday afternoons 12 to 6 its a game same as two up played with H&T dice on the billiard table, Now because of all this happened one Friday night about 11 pm, after the game we had been running for over 2 mths, The Police raided the game. I was running the game & I was caught unaware I didn't expect them to come through the dance hall & never had a chance to get rid of the dice, unfortunately about 20 of us was put in the big black main just as the heath^{rom} the cinema was coming out & they had a good look at every body, turn over

ATTACHMENT 6
2 of 2

they knew been put in the Van.
We were finger pointed at the station
on the Monday fined & quit.

It didn't worry most of us but to several
the conviction was a set back

As this happened a long time ago, I don't
believe that telling this story is harmful
to any body.

Best wishes
Bobby Brooks 11x57028

P.S I knew Heddy Mallard when he was
the mayor of Hamstrick. stood for state Parle
for Hamstrick. He polled well but his Party was
on the outer at that period, he was a good
bloke

There were once two Schools of Arts contributing very actively to community life in the Kogarah municipality. The first to be established was, naturally enough, at Kogarah. The other was at Oatley.

Schools of Arts had an important place in the social life of early communities and were public meeting and learning places from the 19th to the 20th century, gradually becoming redundant during later years.

They had their beginnings when most families toiled hard to earn a living, even the youngest members being called on to share the load. Formal education was minimal for most children who had to leave school when they had learned not much more than the three "R's". To further their education, if they were ambitious or their parents hoped they would qualify for a trade or profession, they had to study in their own time. Two types of institutions filled this need - Mechanics' institutes and Schools of Arts. The provision of libraries was one of their functions with quiet places where books could be read when they were not being borrowed. They were usually handsome spacious buildings when the population was large enough to afford it. In the course of time it became natural for people to gravitate to them in their leisure hours; debating halls and lecture rooms were added; then billiard and euchre tables were brought in and in most Australian communities before their way of life was changed by the introduction of moving pictures, wireless and later television, these buildings were the centre of civic activities.

Recreation rooms gave opportunities for table games such as chess, draughts and cards to be played; the equipment could be cleared away for dancing or a games night, or the staging of concerts, recitals and plays. Classes, especially for children, in tap-dancing, ballet and ball-room dancing could be held there conveniently. Lodges, clubs and community groups could arrange to hold their meetings and functions there. The buildings were ideal for important civic occasions when no Town Hall or large civic building had as yet been built.

As economic pressures eased and the welfare state developed the character of these centres changed, with more accent upon the use of leisure and a decline in the more serious and studious side of their activities. Erection of civic buildings, alternative meeting places and counter attractions eroded the usefulness of Schools of Arts. The growth of clubs and the upgrading of hotels as they competed with clubs for social patronage both had

page 10
an impact on Schools of Arts. Membership fell away steadily and nowadays most have been converted to other purposes or have made way for newer buildings.

KOGARAH SCHOOL OF ARTS

Mr. J. H. Carruthers called a meeting in 1886 of those interested in forming a local School of Arts. The idea was received enthusiastically, a fund was commenced, and within a short time work on a suitable building was begun. A little over twelve months later it was ready, having cost £1,600 (\$32,000). Leading Kogarah citizens took out debentures to finance the building but obtained no rights of ownership. The fact is that a School of Arts is an edifice which no person owns - it belongs to the people as a whole. When (not if) it ceases to exist, the building reverts either to the government or to the local Government body. Therefore when that time came there was a deal of wrangling about who was to become the owner of the Kogarah School of Arts.

In its heyday it had serving as trustees the municipality's civic leaders, solicitors, doctors, headmasters and the chairman of the original St. George Hospital. Its membership rose as high as 500. At the turn of the century it served the district as a courtroom before a courthouse was built; Kogarah Council met there for many years until the first Council Chambers became available in 1912; the inaugural meeting to build the district's first hospital, the St. George Cottage Hospital, was held there; religious worship was practised there by groups who had yet to gain the numbers and means to establish permanent churches; for years it was the most popular meeting place for most of the district's sporting bodies while they themselves were developing; weddings and celebrations were gay affairs which made its rafters ring. It was a hive of constant activity, and in many ways it was the cradle of modern Kogarah.

In the 20th century during the 1950's and 60's it housed the Kogarah branch of the National Service organisation and served for some years as a branch of the State Employment Office. At one period a room was set aside for classes conducted by the Board of Technical Education. It was in the 1960's that the trustees refurbished the public hall in the hope of attracting more users: however in this they were disappointed and agreed to lease it to the Marist Brothers as a school annexe. When this lease expired the trustees were no longer able to afford a caretaker and librarian or to keep up with maintenance costs. When its affairs were wound up at the end of 1978 the only two tenants were Mr. W. Crabtree, Kogarah's representative in

State Parliament and the Kogarah branch of the Labor Party.

The building stands on 600 sq. metres of land at the corner of Queens Avenue and Bowns Road, within walking distance of the fire station. This land was purchased from Charles Bown, for whom Bowns Road is named, for £800 (\$16,000) and at current values would be worth more than \$250,000.

On 22nd May, 1886 the foundation stone was laid by Dr. A. Renwick, then Minister for Education. The completed building cost \$3,000. Funds not donated were raised by subscriptions from concerts, horticultural shows, etc.

Now classified by the National Trust as having historical significance to Kogarah municipality, the building was the pride of local residents when it was officially opened in March, 1887, primarily to serve as a mechanics' institute but taking on its School of Arts character when the railway was opened soon afterwards.

According to the National Trust "it has aesthetic, historic and social significance and other special values for the future generation as well as for the present community" and hence has been included in the register as being a component of the natural or cultural environment of Australia.

The building is a solid imposing one of two storeys. On the ground floor the vestibule is flanked by what was the library on one side and the committee room opposite. Behind, with a stage and an annexe, is the main hall capable of holding 400 people. The annexe was used as a changing room, a supper room complementing functions, and as another place for meetings to be held. In 1902, or thereabouts, a billiard room was added to the eastern side and very good use was made of this amenity. Upstairs there was further accommodation in another large hall and some smaller rooms. Separate residential quarters were also provided for the Librarian. This position was held for very many years by Mr. R. MacFarlane. A long-serving member was Mr. Alister Hawkins, who was on the committee for thirty-two years and was Secretary for eight.

Initially the building was lit by kerosene lamps; these gave way to gas, then electricity, and finally fluorescent lighting was installed.

Membership fees were very low at first - ten shillings per year, payable quarterly, half-yearly, or yearly. They were later raised to seven shillings and sixpence per quarter (75c.). The trustees and founding members had the satisfaction of seeing the School of Arts develop into one of the biggest in the State, but like so many other public buildings time brought about the loss of its original usefulness. Before its closure in 1978 the membership had dwindled to a handful - only sixteen were still financial. There seemed no future

Kogarah School of Arts

for the grand old building. The threat of demolition was very real.

Kogarah Council felt it had needs that were possibly more urgent than those of government authorities which were showing interest in the building. Accommodation was wanted for its State Emergency Services, the municipal band, and community uses for which provision was lacking. The municipality does not possess a Town Hall; its Civic Centre is fully utilised; and many smaller groups needed encouragement and assistance.

It was supported in its representations by the trustees of the School of Arts who wanted their building preserved. Finally ownership was gained. In the interim the building was unoccupied and boarded up, with the sorry neglected air common in such cases. The Council undertook to carry out repairs and renovations and to restore the external appearance of the building. Basically it will remain as it was constructed although some changes will be done to its interior to modernise it and adapt it for its new functions. The present plan is that it will once again serve the community, this time as a cultural and activities centre.

Thousands of dollars will have been expended by the Council to keep its pledge.

The Kogarah Historical Society has become custodian of its old records and honour boards naming billiards champions from 1911 to 1937 and snooker champions from 1930 to 1950. Many well-known names are associated with the Kogarah School of Arts. Some early ones were Drs. Lamrock and O'Keefe who must have helped into the world residents alive today; and Mr. H. Hatfield for whom Hatfield Street, Blakehurst was named.

The extensive library of the School of Arts (by 1890 it had accumulated 800 volumes, with newspapers and periodicals additional, but the number had decreased latterly) was broken up and distributed where the books were to be preserved or could be put to further use. Its four billiard tables were sold and the building was stripped of its equipment but many Kogarah people look back with affection to the good times it afforded them.

OATLEY SCHOOL OF ARTS

Being later to develop as a township Oatley's need for a public hall did not emerge in strength until the early 1900's. A School of Arts was the obvious answer and on 13th October, 1905 the need was fulfilled when the Oatley School of Arts was declared open by the then Chief Secretary, Mr. J. A. Hogue. Funds had been raised from public subscriptions and a subsidy from

the Government of half the sum collected. The land had been bought very cheaply from a local company and is at 26 Letitia Street, Oatley.

Land, building and a piano to start its life on a happy note, were all obtained for £450 (\$900), some of the finishing touches to the wooden hall being done by voluntary labour. It was not grand but it was adequate and served the small community very well until better venues became available. Like the Kogarah building it was added to when in 1909 a billiard room was constructed.. Also, like it, its uses ranged from the serious to the frivolous, covering the all-important library and its availability for educational usage, meeting place for groups without one, and the social and community functions typical of the times.

It served as a place of worship, temporary school, picture theatre and the headquarters for numerous local fraternities. The Anglican, R.C., and Methodist congregations gathered strength under its roof until they were able to provide one of their own. Oatley Public School had its beginnings there and residents of the area saw their first moving pictures there. Romance blossomed there - weddings, birthday parties, family reunions and the people's entertainments took place there. As in all other cases it was the hub of community life for the residents.

Like fledglings moving out from the sheltering parental wing the users gradually found premises for their own particular use. In 1922 a Masonic Hall was built; the R.S.L. erected its clubhouse across the street and so the story continued. The trustees were faced with a diminishing income but with no diminution of expenses. They had no option but to quit.

So it was that Kogarah Council took over the building to convert it to the Oatley Library and Baby Health Centre. The latter was added to the front of the building which was brick veneered and the site improved by landscaped gardens. Thus it continues in service of the community.