

CSU Regional Archives Saturday Openings

The CSU Regional Archives is currently extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of every month. On these days the Archives will be open from 10am to 3pm. The next Saturday opening will be today, December 3.

This trial initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the Archives on weekdays during normal business hours. It is hoped that enough researchers and visitors will avail themselves of this service to warrant it becoming a permanent occurrence.



The Drill Hall in Docker Street, 100 years old this year.

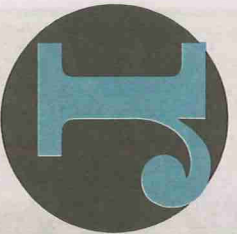
Photograph courtesy John Bowman

100 years on ...

Docker Street's Grand Old Lady is still standing



at the archives
Wayne Doubleday



Recently the "Grand Old Lady of Docker Street" celebrated its 100th birthday.

Following the disastrous fire in 1908, which destroyed the drill hall on the corner of Beckwith and Gurwood streets, land was purchased in 1910 in Docker Street for the construction of a new drill hall.

The contract for the building of the new drill hall and offices was signed on February 13, 1911, with C Hardy and Company for £1330 and work commenced soon after.

In an editorial in *The Daily Advertiser* on July 3, 1911, the new building was described as being "a very pokey little place," the "large" hall being 66 feet by 30 feet. There were four little rooms at the front, measuring 11 feet by 11 feet, to be used as offices.

"It is constructed in a manner suggesting that it will have to serve its present purpose for at least a hundred years."

This tongue-in-cheek prophecy turned out to be so correct.

Apart from some internal alterations, the main building has changed very little in those 100 years. A gun park and stables were added in 1914 at a cost of \$800. A new wooden floor was placed over the concrete floor in 1935, which is still in use today. Also, the large wooden doors at the entrance to the hall are the originals from 1911. A succession of Infantry



The interior of the Drill Hall located on the corner of Gurwood and Trail streets, after being destroyed by fire in 1908. (Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society Collection, RWS/545).

Battalions and Australian Field Artillery Batteries occupied the drill hall from 1911, including:

- Companies of 43 and 44 Battalions (1911);
- 2 and 3 Battalions of 56th Infantry Regiment (1918)
- 56th Battalion (1921 to 1925);
- 3 Battery (1911);
- 16 Battery (1913);
- 26 Battery (1919); and
- 61st Battery (1921).

When, in August 1929, the army abruptly removed all the guns and equipment from the drill hall, there was no longer a militia unit in Wagga.

Several suggestions were put forward for the use of the drill hall. One was for it to become a part of the Rural School (now, Wagga Public). The other, which was pursued more vigorously, was for it to become a technical college with the main hall being used by the boys for technical and trade

training and the gun park used for domestic sciences by the girls.

Neither of these ideas came to fruition, probably due to the lack of funds during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Instead, it was used to house unemployed families. Partitions were erected in the hall and each family had an area of ground allotted in which to grow vegetables.

Several infantry units had occupied the hall from 1911 to 1925 due to Universal Training.

In September 1933, the military again took control and E Company of the 56th Battalion (Riverina Regiment) was located in the hall. This unit remained until it was transferred to West Australia in 1942 for mainland defence, where it was later disbanded.

At the same time, the headquarters of the 21st Light Horse (Riverina Horse) was located there from 1937 to 1941.

As in 1914-1918, the drill hall was again used for recruiting and the processing of recruits for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) during World War II. The Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) used the site for its training as well as the US Army Engineers.

The hall was in a caretaker mode until the Citizen Military Force (CMF) was raised on July 1, 1948, when A Squadron of 7/21 Australian Horse under the command of Captain (later Lieut. Colonel) Stan Sly was the occupant. With increased numbers due to National Service Training, B Squadron was also domiciled there in 1953.

The gun park and stables were destroyed by fire at the end of 1949 when a number of armoured cars and vehicles were burnt and later removed for use as targets by the RAAF.

The drill hall has been home to other organisations over the years.

such as the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), and was used for practice by the Wagga Citizens Band, rifle drill squads during World War I and for voluntary drill squads during World War II.

Many dances and social functions have been held over the years in the drill hall, which was a centre not only for training but also for social occasions.

Many high-ranking military officers have visited it over these years. A miniature range was constructed in 1925 and reconstructed in 1934. Many shooting contests between the militia rifle clubs and local business houses took place.

A re-organisation in 1957 saw the 4th Infantry Battalion (Australian Rifles) become the new unit occupying the hall until June 1960 when a complete restructure of the Army took place and National Service was phased out.

E Company of the 3rd Battalion of the Royal New South Wales Regiment (RNSWR) was then stationed there with its headquarters in Sydney.

In 1967, this designation was changed to B Company and the headquarters moved to Canberra.

In 1987, the unit became A Company of 4/3 Battalion RNSWR and later became A Company of 1/19 Bn RNSWR. This unit is the present occupant.

There have been a large number of soldiers and a variety of units pass through the drill hall during this past 100 years. Many of these soldiers went on to achieve high rank and the units have had proud histories.

It is difficult to encapsulate 100 years of history into a short article but the many people who have been associated with the drill hall will have their own memories, fond or otherwise.

Compiled by John Bowman

What you need to know

■ The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building on South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue. Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with enquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward enquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 02 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au, or visit our website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.