

Armidale and District Historical Society Inc.

'Dumaresq Chambers', Corner Faulkner St and Cinders Lane, Armidale

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Newsletter for May 2023

**The next meeting of the Society will be held at the Imperial Hotel
on Tuesday, 16th May at 5.30pm**

The speaker will be Sue Tanner, who, in 2022 brought us the intriguing story of her research into the little-known bushranger, the 'Hairy' Man'. She has now followed the life of **Minnie Webb**, the intrepid young member of the 1920s 'Amazon' Armidale Womens' Fire Brigade.

WHO WAS MINNIE WEBB?

All are welcome to come and hear her story, browse our 'bookstall' and stay on to socialise and have a meal if not wanting to cook dinner.

Annual subscriptions: June 30th is approaching and the membership fee for 2023-4 remains at **\$55 (\$65 if journal is to be posted)** with monthly newsletters and the use of all that Dumaresq Chambers has to offer. The renewal form can be downloaded from our website and will be included with the May newsletters which are posted.

Signage: Three years ago, responding to a suggestion by Anthony Hardwick, Council removed the metal signage bracket from the former Library for the Society to re- erect on Dumaresq Chambers. Covid intervened and the bracket languished at the Mens' Shed awaiting a 'facelift'. This was finally expedited by one of our members at the Mens' Shed and AOK signs have completed the sign and the installation. '**Armidale and District Historical Society**' is now proudly displayed on the Cinders Lane corner of the building.

A Trip Down Memory Lane: Topics for May meetings each decade.

1963: Mr John Ryan – Some Place Names in New England

1973: No meeting (May school holidays)

1983: Mr P. Lamb – Armidale College – A Personal View

1993: Alwyn Jones – The Beautification of Armidale over the Last Fifty Years.

2003: Judith Grieve – Albert Berry Earle: Librarian at Armidale School of Arts

2013: Margaret Small – Subdivision of "Saumarez' and 'Gostwyck' between 1905 and 1909

Snippets of History: Visitors to Armidale admire our Victorian style buildings with balconies and iron lacework – we are so lucky that they have survived, as many of graceful the nineteenth century buildings have suffered renovation, alteration or demolition. The Empire Hotel near the western corner of Beardy and Jessie St was allowed to deteriorate and was then demolished in the 1960s to make way for Woolworths (and Woolworths subsequently moved from this site). Tatts Hotel and the City Bank building to its west were completely re-modelled and re-created in Art Deco style in the 1930s. The ‘Minto’ on the corner of Rusden and Jessie Streets, the Wicklow and the Royal Hotel were stripped of their verandas and awnings, the ‘Minto’ transformed from a typical attractive Victorian hotel to the bland, unadorned and uninteresting building of today. The arrival of K Mart spelled the end of the Caledonian Hotel, the façade of which was to remain, but unfortunately, during demolition was decreed unstable and demolished, while its neighbour, the handsome Hardman’s building, suffered the same fate. The remaining buildings with balconies in the CBD are principally the hotels, which were defended and protected from change by big breweries who owned them and wished to retain their architectural integrity.

Graham Wilson’s historical documents on the Council website follow the fate of verandas, veranda posts and awnings and records that the *Armidale Express* in 1903 reiterated that a number of posts in Beardy Street had previously been recorded as rotten and unsafe. In 1920 the Arcadia picture theatre was denied permission to erect a balcony as Council preferred cantilevered awnings to be utilised in front of buildings. In 1932 the first notices were served to remove street veranda posts and that balconies, which ‘gave the place a slum-like appearance’. A motion passed in 1937 gave owners five years from 1938 to remove posts supporting awnings, verandas and balconies, which affected around fifty buildings. Posts were to be removed by 1949 and could be replaced by cantilevers. The matter was discussed in Court when tenants were given eviction notices by the Bank of Australasia, who owned the building, using the reason that it was preferable to rebuild, probably rather than undertake the work to comply with Council orders. Council indicated that their intention to widen Beardy Street required the removal of posts and that balconies detracted from the appearance of the city. The costs involved were considerable and the availability of materials was scarce. Alderman Ken Jones regretted the fact that the owners of the Imperial Hotel ‘were not imbued with the same ideal of beautification as the owner of Tatts Hotel’.

In 1951 Tooheys Ltd mounted a strong case in Court to save the Imperial Hotel balconies, stating that the veranda was essential for public convenience, was used for overflow accommodation, kept the building dry, protected it from heat in summer, that the plans which included the balcony had been approved and that they were integral to the architectural style of the building. The judge refused Councils’ application to have the orders carried out, but added that ‘if the Council at a future date considered that the veranda posts must be removed to allow widening of the road, he was ‘sure that that application would be sympathetically received’.

In 1963 the owners of 106, 110-112, 312 Beardy and three other premises were ordered to remove veranda posts – but not the Imperial. By the mid-1970s, the National Trust and Royal Institute of Architects, officially recognised the value of heritage buildings and an Armidale CBD Conservation Area was created including the Court House, Post Office, CBA Bank (Boobooks), Bank of New South Wales (Westpac) building, AMP building (Roberts and Morrow), Imperial Hotel, Folk Museum, Sherriff’s Cottage, Lands Department and the Town Hall to provide permanent protection of our Armidale heritage. An Inaugural Heritage Awards Dinner was held in the Town Hall in August 1991 to ‘harness community interest in conservation and promote the heritage of the city as an asset’.

