

The Old Avoca State School

Avoca had its own grammar school in 1856 at 'Blenheim', the two storey building opposite St Thomas' Church. This building catered for boys' studies while girls who could afford to go to school had the opportunity since 1831 to travel to 'Ellenthorpe Hall' at Ross. Then the first Avoca State School, a small redbrick schoolhouse at the northern end of Arthur Street opened in 1860 with 43 pupils and for most of the time only one teacher.

In 1908, at a cost of 348 pounds, the building in Boucher Park was erected as the new school and the Education Department introduced a policy requiring State School teachers to be certified. Provisional teachers not holding certificates of competency were phased out. In May 1916 school was held in the town Hall while repairs costing 135 pounds were done on the building. In 1920 there were 63 students, in 1921 there were 70 students enrolled with two teachers. In 1928 additions to the building costing 375 pounds were made.

As there was no set age for leaving school boys often left relatively young to work with their fathers. For girls the only employment was to become a servant and as few families could afford servants most girls stayed longer at school, meaning that in many instances the breadwinners were not as well educated as their wives.

In April 1930 thirteen students travelled to St Marys to take part in the Anzac Flag competition with Avoca gaining third place, and Avoca students frequently won prizes in local shows and competitions.

On 28th February 1935 electric lights were fitted in the school, although electric power was not connected until May 1936 in readiness for the wireless set for broadcasting lessons.

The wireless set was installed in June 1936 and the Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon. J A Lyons MHR visited the school and addressed the children on “Loyalty to the Empire”. He congratulated the school on its up-to-date appearance, having pictures of merit on the walls, the electric light and the wireless set.

It was the first occasion the Prime Minister Of Australia visited the school, although he stated he had often played cricket matches against Avoca when he had been head teacher at Conara and Storys Creek schools.



At a Teachers Conference in November 1936 Avoca was the only school on the East coast which had a wireless installed, and in that year Claire Arnold topped the State with 100% in a State spelling test. In 1951 a new school was built in St Pauls Street and the students carried their desks up the street to the new school, but the old building was still used for several years to prepare hot soup lunches which were made and then driven up to the new school.

The Country Women's Association used the building for several years as a meeting place, planting trees with special brass plaques beside them to commemorate the outstanding work done by local CWA women. Other groups in the community also held functions here, but the building fell into disrepair and needed to be fenced as it became unsafe. The Council held off having the building condemned because the newly formed Greater Esk Tourism group were keenly seeking funding to restore the old building.



The Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal was the first funding body to come on board giving GET \$10,000 for 12 months and providing the leverage towards successfully gaining \$138,000 from the Urban Renewal and Heritage fund and then the balance of the restoration funding required from the Tasmanian Community Fund. Support for the volunteers came from the Department of Families and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Dfacsia) and support for local artists who will exhibit in the gallery has come from Arts Tasmania in the form of hanging and lighting systems.

The Avoca Museum and Information Centre was opened by the Northern Midlands Council Mayor, Kim Polley OAM on Australia Day, 26th January 2012.