



## ACT Heritage Council

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION Tharwa School (Blocks 6, 7 and 8 Section 7, Tharwa)

At its meeting of 16 November 2017 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Tharwa School was eligible for provisional registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Tharwa School against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Tharwa School is an early rural school that has followed a familiar history for such places. The small size of the community meant that it was difficult to establish the school and acquire resources, but it would also take advantage of its size and location. They would utilise the farms, bush and rivers around them as a part of everyday lessons; yet they would also struggle with the location and size which would see attendance drop significantly during shearing season or during a flu epidemic, the occasional snake scare or having to design the grounds to accommodate visitations from wildlife such as wombats wrecking fences. The close-knit community had an important role to play in the running of the school with a very active P&C committee, teachers living in and being a part of the community and relying on nearby school partnerships to keep attendance up.

### HISTORY

There is a long history of private and public schooling in the region that was to become the Australian Capital Territory. The first school in the region opened at Palmerville in 1844 (Gillespie, 1991:78). The first public school, referred to as a 'national school' at the time, was established at Yarralumla in about 1850 (Gillespie, 1991:80). The number of schools grew over time and there was a significant expansion in the 1870s as a result of the *Public Schools Act 1866*. One important change was that the number of students required to receive government funding to establish a school was dramatically decreased, particularly with the introduction of provisional and part-time schools which required even fewer enrolments.

Gillespie (1991:90) notes that: 'The last two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the opening, closing and change of status of many schools in the Canberra district'. A key factor in this activity was the *Public Instruction Act 1880*, which repealed the *Public Schools Act of 1866*, dissolved the Council of Education and transferred its responsibilities to the Minister for Public Instruction, cut funding to denominational schools, made school compulsory and lowered the numbers of students required for the different levels of school funding (Public schools required 20 enrolments, provisional 12 and half-time and home-to-home schools being more flexible again). The new Act also provided for a system of teacher training and a new government department, the Department of Public Instruction, was created that was more energetic and had more funds for schools. Five schools opened in the 1880s in the Canberra district, and eleven in the 1890s. The opening of new schools continued in the early part of the twentieth century and beyond.

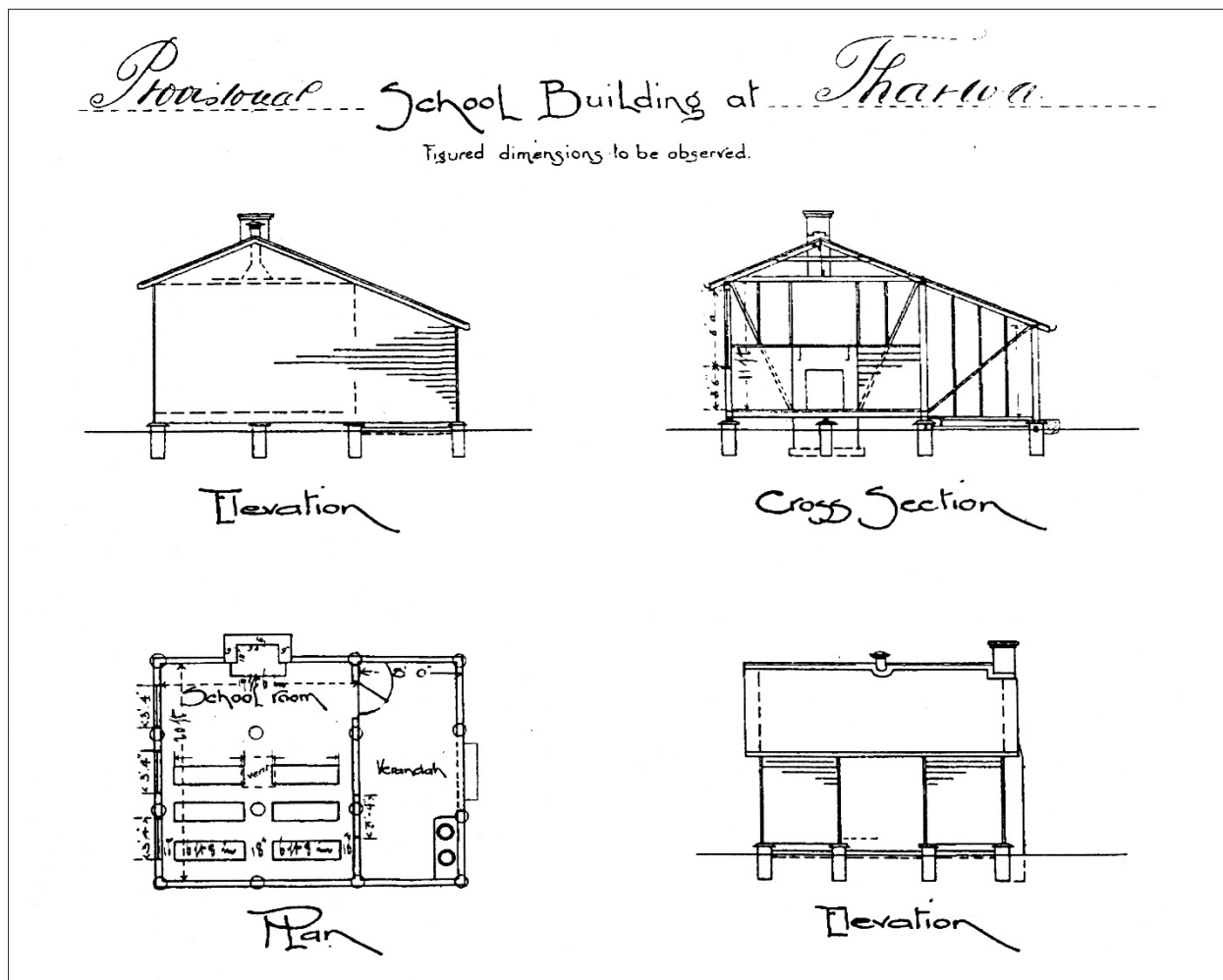
The community of Tharwa first sought the construction of a local school in a 28 June 1897 petition for a half-time school partnered with Naas that was organised by Isaac Cregan, a groom from Lanyon (ACT Schools Authority, 1989:24; and Higgins, 1999). The original school building was provided by the community in 1898. It was a vertical slab construction with a tin roof, hessian ceiling, stone floor, paper-lined walls, an open fire, three windows and it measured roughly four by three metres (Higgins, 1999). The half-time school opened on 2 August 1899 with 17 students enrolled, ranging in age from five to fifteen years, with 26 students enrolled by the end of the year (Higgins, 1999). On 5 October 1899 the school was used as a polling booth for the first time for the state election, which is a practice that still continues (Tharwa Primary School website, History).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION – THARWA SCHOOL

In 1900, the Department of Lands advised that allotment 6, 7 and 8, section 7, which included the site of the current school, had been permanently dedicated for a public school (Higgins, 1999:18). The school operated as a half time school until 1908, when it became a full time school.

There were complaints about the suitability of the 1898 slab school building and Daniel White organised a petition for a new building in 1908, noting the rotting floorboards (presumably these had been added during the previous decade); however, several inspectors had reported that the slab building was satisfactory. The school's teacher, Fred Cleaver, was influential in making sure a new building would be approved. During a visit by the school inspector, Cleaver arranged for two boys to surreptitiously push out two slabs just as the class said 'good morning' to the inspector (Higgins, 1999:25).

The plans for the new building were approved in September 1911 and in April 1912, Henry Holland of Queanbeyan began construction of the one room weatherboard classroom with verandah as well as new pit toilets and the demolition of the old slab building for £160 (Higgins, 1999:25; see Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Plans for the 1912 Tharwa School building

The school's garden was established in 1921 by Nellie Wigg. A rain gauge was added in 1938 and readings have been maintained since then. The rain water tanks attached to the school building had a pipe extended out to the garden in 1946 (Higgins, 1999).

In 1932-33 hundreds of trees were planted in and around the school grounds, but by the late 1940s only a dozen or so survived to provide shade (Higgins, 1999). The trees are still an important part of the grounds and offer the children places to play as well as shelter from sun and wind.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION – THARWA SCHOOL

In 1934 when Allan (Hec) Jones started teaching at the school, the library had 124 volumes but by 1953 this had risen to over 350 (Higgins, 1999).

1947 saw a large increase in the number of students enrolled in Tharwa School due to the introduction of a bus bringing students in from Naas and the surrounding areas. This also allowed the school to apply for more funding which resulted in a shed being added to the building, the fireplace being replaced by Warmray heaters, extra windows installed, better desks, shelving and a blackboard for a total of £288 (Higgins, 1999).

All the regular activities that were expected of 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century school children were observed such as a Monday flag-raising ceremony with anthem and swearing an oath to God and Queen, bell ringing (the bell from the Tuggeranong School was moved to Tharwa in 1956), Wattle Day, Arbour Day, picnics, Christmas celebrations, sports days, Empire Day and saying the Lord's Prayer (Higgins, 1999).

The late 1950s saw the student numbers increasing at Tharwa School and a second teacher was appointed in 1959 when enrolments reached 40 students and the 1912 building extended with an extra room (Higgins, 1999:44-45).

Around 1968, a new free standing classroom was built and a covered walkway to join it to the old weatherboard building, which now housed the school library and a mobile pre-school would also utilise the space (Higgins, 1999:45). It was also during this time that the school grounds were improved with paved and landscaped play areas.

In 1989, the school was repainted to match the original colours and electrical wiring and conduit were removed from the 1912 building to re-establish the school character (Dowling and Cosgrove, 2002:15, Tharwa Primary School website, History). Also in 1989, descendants of Isaac Cregan, who organised the original petition for the school in 1897, and Daniel White, who organised the petition for a new school building in 1908, were attending the School, showing continuity over time (Lind, 1989). These descendants also took part in a series of School history projects such as publishing *Tharwa – A Living History*, a 34 page introduction to the district by students and staff at the School; and producing a short educational video *Golden Reflections: the Path to Settlement* about the goldrush and mining in Kiandra (Higgins, 1999:66).

In 1993, the School commenced an oral history project to record memories of school life by former students of Tharwa School. The oral recordings and transcriptions form part of the School's heritage collection. The School celebrated its centenary in 1999 by holding a ball, a bush dance and an old time film night. It also published *A Century of Learning, Tharwa Primary School, 1899-1999*, by Matthew Higgins.

The school closed in 2006, but the 1912 building and grounds has continued to be used as a part-time pre-school partnered with Charles Conder Primary School. The place continues to be used for community events such as the Tharwa Bush Fair, as a polling booth, or for community meetings.

Type of School	Opening Date	Closing Date	Half Time Partner Schools
Half Time School	August 1899	November 1899	Church Rock Valley (non-extant)
Provisional School	January 1900	December 1904	
Provisional School	June 1905	February 1907	
Half Time School	January 1905	May 1905	Naas (non-extant)
Half Time School	February 1907	April 1908	Tuggeranong (extant – registered)
Provisional School	April 1908	December 1911	
Public School	January 1912	December 1923	
Provisional School	July 1926	December 1926	
Public School	January 1927	January 1974	
Transferred to the ACT school system	January 1974		

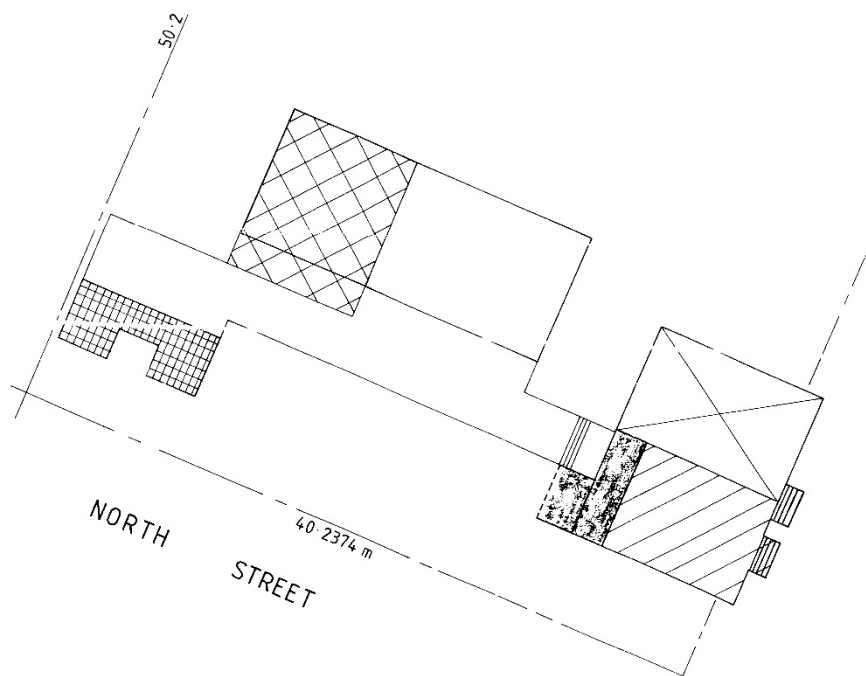
**Table 1** Tharwa School status (NSW Government)

## DESCRIPTION

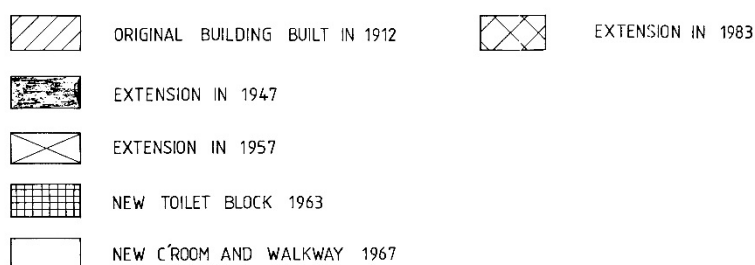
The Tharwa School consists of two school buildings and a toilet block connected by covered walkways set in landscaped and paved grounds.

The 1912 school building has weatherboard walls, brick pier footings, a corrugated iron roof, timber frame windows and timber tongue and groove floorboards in a simple Georgian style with a number of extensions and alterations to accommodate changing functions within the school. It is joined by a verandah to a modern classroom block to the west.

The 1912 building is in good condition and displays a fair level of integrity, noting that all of the alterations throughout the years have been in a sympathetic manner and have all added to the use of the place as an expanding school. The original chimney has been removed, a shed added to the west side, the whole building extended to the north and the entrance repositioned to maintain a central placing.



### THARWA PRIMARY SCHOOL SITE PLAN SCALE 1:200



**Figure 2** Plan of changes at Tharwa School

The modern building in the Late Twentieth-century Sydney Regional style of architecture, constructed in 1967, is also of weatherboard with a corrugated iron skillion roof with clerestory windows on the southern elevation. Although it is a modern style of architecture, it was built in a sympathetic style to the earlier building and is painted in the same colours. The new building was extended to include a craft/science room and staffroom in 1984.

The school site, which includes Blocks 6, 7 and 8, section 7, has been modified over time. A number of rainwater tanks have been installed around the buildings and a toilet block (built in 1963) is located on the south (North Street) side of the school. The grounds of the school feature paved and grassed areas and exotic and native plantings. These include mature peppercorn trees (*Schinus molle*) reputed to have been planted in the 1940s, located at the front entrance to the School, a mature Roman Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*) and a Kurrajong tree (*Brachychiton populneus*). Playground equipment and a variety of minor sheds and gardening structures are also located in the grounds. The bell from the old Tuggeranong School is mounted on a post in the school yard.

## SITE PLAN



Image 1 Tharwa School boundary

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## REFERENCES

ACT Schools Authority, *Tharwa A Living History*, Canberra, 1989.

Dowling, Peter and Cosgrove, Carol, *Tharwa Heritage Survey Stage One and Stage Two*, unpublished report for the ACT Heritage Unit, National Trust of Australia (ACT), 2002, 2003

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Tharwa Primary School History, from Tharwa Primary School website: [www.tharwaps.act.edu.au](http://www.tharwaps.act.edu.au)

*Public Instruction Act of 1880*

*Public Schools Act of 1866*