

## The Agricultural Hall



The Hall as a public library and tourist bureau

5 Pinjarra Road

The Agricultural Hall, on Pinjarra Road, was built during 1897 and since then has served the Mandurah community in numerous ways. The Agricultural Hall, on Pinjarra Road, was built during 1897 and since then has served the Mandurah community in numerous ways.

Sir John Forrest's State Government gave grants to rural towns, to enable them to build their own social centres. Mandurah received a grant of £100 in 1896 and raised a further £150 so as to build the Agricultural Hall the following year. The building was of limestone rubble with a corrugated iron roof, and it had jarrah floorboards. There was a front porch, which has since been removed, and the Hall now also has three additions at the rear.

The Agricultural Hall was opened on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 1898 by the Premier (Forrest), and a host of other parliamentarians, who had travelled by train to Pinjarra, and then took the steamboat *Coolanup* along the Murray River to Mandurah. The parliamentarians were shown Smart's preserving works, before being treated to a luncheon by the Mandurah Progress Association at the Hall. Many locals attended, and discussed fishing in Mandurah. The Western Mail described the opening:



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*“The hall is not an extravagant structure, but it is a monument to the go-ahead spirit of the people of the place, and, though, perhaps, the total population of the township and vicinity does not number more than a couple of hundred, the Parliamentary visit was regarded as such an important event that people flocked from quarters which could not be regarded as parts of Mandurah”.*

Between its opening in 1898, to being taken over by the Mandurah Roads Board in 1949, the Hall was used for community activities such as roller skating and silent movies. This latter was ended, however, with the opening of an open-air cinema in Mandurah near the Brighton Hotel in the 1930s. The Agricultural Hall also held the auctions for the sale of land in the Creery Estate in January 1905. When diphtheria broke out at a local school in 1905, the Hall was used as a temporary diphtheria hospital, as the Pinjarra hospital was deemed too far away. Medical aid was sent by the Public Health Department in Perth, and the outbreak lasted about 6 months. In 1909, the Agricultural Hall was also used as a polling booth.



The Hall in early days



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The Hall also functioned as a schoolroom from 1928 to 1939, taking in the overflow from the next-door Dalrymple School, with the Murray Roads Board's Permission. It was used by the Infants and the Standards I and II, and had an assistant and Monitor (a trainee teacher). By late 1937, there were 70 students in the Hall, and so in 1938 the classes were regrouped. A second assistant was hired, and the hall used by two groups. At one end were the Infants and Standards I and II, and at the other end were the Standards III and IV. There was a lean-to at the back of the schoolroom, used by the younger set of students for oral presentations and story work. The distraction of noise from the class at the opposite end of the Hall could not be helped, but the P and C bought a canvas curtain to separate the room, so as to limit visual distraction. The Hall was still used for social events, with desks being pushed up against the walls to make space.

The school's many teachers were:

- Miss Win Jones (later Mrs Rooney), who had joined the staff by 1935, and who left in May 1936. She was replaced by Miss Carvossa
- Miss Florence Carvossa (later Mrs Phillips)
- Charlie Paton, a Monitor
- One unknown Monitor
- Miss Brownfield
- The Headmaster, John Martin. He left in December 1936
- Jock Wilton, a member of staff for one year
- Margaret O'Keefe, who divided up her class between Miss Jones and Miss Brownfield
- Wilfred "Bar-T" Goode, who moved to Mandurah to teach in the Dalrymple School in 1938. He became the first Headmaster of the Hackett Street school when it opened in 1939, retaining the post until his retirement in 1959

During the war, the Hall continued as a social centre. It was used in raising money for the Comfort Fund, with activities including badminton, card games and dances.

In the 1940s, Mandurah residents managed to save the Agricultural Hall from destruction. The Murray Roads Board had considered demolishing the building around 1946/7, as it was rundown. Mrs. Halliday organised a petition to save it and got 66 signatures, and Hobart Tuckey spoke of its historical importance. The Hall was renovated and became the offices of the new Mandurah Roads Board.



The south side of Pinjarra Road, looking east, in the 1940s. The Agricultural Hall, with its front porch, is on the right.



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Mandurah had felt isolated from the Murray Roads Board, and so decided to secede from it. The details were sorted out with the Minister for Local Government, with a full-time inspector to be engaged for six months of the year and a health inspector to visit once a week. The new board was to meet once a week in the Agricultural Hall. Thus, in 1949 the Mandurah Roads Board was formed, holding its first meeting in September 1949, at the Hall. The chairman was J Grey, with members Bert Phillips, Brian Mainwaring, Frank Digney, A J Donald, Roy and Dick Tuckey, and the Secretary for Local Government named Lindsay.

In the mid-1950s the board attracted a great deal of criticism. The Minister of Local Government claimed that the allegations were unwarranted and that there were "insufficient grounds for dismissal" of any members. However, he did state that the board was "so sharply divided" that it could not function, and so the board members were encouraged to resign. In 1956 a Commissioner, Richard Rushton, was appointed to manage the town. He was replaced in 1960 by Acting Commissioner Albert White, and later that year the Roads Board was reformed. On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1961, the Roads Board was upgraded to Shire status, with the gazettal of the Mandurah Shire Council. The Council moved away in 1966, having had new Council Offices completed the previous year.

The Agricultural Hall was used as a Branch of the State Library from February 1968 to December 1980. It cost about \$15,000 to convert the Hall from council offices to a library, which included adding to the front of the building. The Silver Chain Nursing group had a fibro extension at the back of the Hall, which was later used by the council's Community Relations Officer. This was Mandurah's first library, and the first librarian was a Mrs E Bricknell. She left in 1975, after hurting her leg in an accident, and was replaced by Mary King. At this time, the Hall was also used by the Tourist Bureau. There were about 4,000 library members and more books were needed, although there was not enough space. The 1978 council budget put aside \$200,000 for a new library in East Mandurah (current library site), and in December 1979, the new library was opened. The old one in the Agricultural Hall remained, causing troubles for the staff running back and forth between the two. Thus, the library in the Agricultural Hall was closed down in December 1980.

The Tourist Bureau had occupied a small part on the eastern side of the Agricultural Hall since 1969, sharing with the library. The first manager was Frank Semmens, also first President of the Mandurah Historical Society. He and one assistant ran the Tourist Bureau, although the first assistant had left by the time that Isabel Borland arrived in 1975. She was at first an assistant, and a year later became manager when Semmens retired. When the library left the Hall, the Bureau took over the library's part of the Hall, renovating it to fit the new decor for country bureaus. The renovations were overseen by the manager, Borland. Once the Bureau had a larger office space, a second assistant was hired. Borland dropped down to part-time work in 1992 when her ill mother moved in with her, and Jayne Colgan took on the managerial role. In 1997, the Bureau moved to new premises at the Eastern Foreshore, where it is currently located.

The Citizens' Advice Centre moved into the part of the Agricultural Hall previously used by the Tourist Bureau in 1980, when the library left. When, in 1997, the Bureau moved to its new premises, the Citizens' Advice Centre moved into a part of the Mandurah Community Museum next door. It left the museum in 2003 when the building was renovated and is now located at the Mewburn Centre on Sholl Street.



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The Hall as Tourist Bureau and Citizen's Advice Centre

The City Council renovated the Agricultural Hall for use by the Rangers, who moved into the building in March 1997. In 2004, the Mandurah Historical Society tried to get the Hall listed on the Heritage Council State Register but was refused.



# The Agricultural Hall Cont'd

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## Timeline

### **1896**

Funding given by Forrest government to build an Agricultural Hall

### **1897**

Agricultural Hall is built

### **5<sup>th</sup> January 1898**

Official opening

### **1905**

Used as a temporary diphtheria hospital

### **1928-39**

Used as a primary school

### **1939-45**

Used for fundraising during WWII

### **September 1949**

Mandurah Roads Board first meets at Agricultural Hall

### **1949-66**

Used as offices by the Mandurah Roads Board

### **February 1968 – December 1980**

Used as Mandurah's first branch of the State Library

### **1969**

Tourist Bureau moves into Hall

### **1975**

First librarian Mrs Bricknell leaves; new librarian Mary Kings arrives

### **December 1979**

New library in East Mandurah opened

### **1980**

Tourist Bureau takes over the library's part of the Hall, and conducts renovations  
Citizens' Advice Centre moves into the Tourist Bureau's part of the Hall

### **1997**

Tourist Bureau moves to new premises

### **March 1997**

City of Mandurah Rangers move into Hall

### **3<sup>rd</sup> June 1998**

The Mandurah Historical Society celebrates 100 years of the Agricultural Hall

### **2004**

Mandurah Historical Society does not succeed in listing the Hall on the Heritage Council State Register.

