

AT 86 NORMAN LINDSAY DESIGNED SPRINGWOOD'S TOWN CREST

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Historians

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It was 1965 and, at last, Springwood was to have a hall! Designed by local architect and World War II veteran, Eric Skarrat, and built by Alec Gall Constructions Pty Ltd. It was begun in February, 1965 and completed in February, 1966. The people of Springwood had long felt the need for a hall.

William Rayner, one of the earliest general store proprietors, set up his extensive business in about 1877. He had a large room attached to it and this became known as Rayner's Hall.

Here despite its inadequate size, most of the meetings and gatherings of the town were held – the Progress Committee, various political gatherings, the Literary and Debating Club, church services, concerts.

This continued until 1893 when William found he needed the extra space for his business.

Gustav Larsen and his nephew, Axel Bech, Sydney tobacconists, had a holiday home, Elsinore, in Macquarie Rd which had a billiard room and they kindly offered this for community use.

The Royal Hotel also hosted meetings.

William Honeysett, another general storekeeper, built a fairly large hall (66ft x 30ft) in 1909 which included a refreshment room. This burnt down together with the shops around it in 1921.

The Springwood School of Arts was opened in 1913 but it was not suitable for dances or balls having only a library, office space and a large billiard room.

Meetings were sometimes held there but nothing on a large scale.

Both during and after World War I Springwood people began campaigning and fund raising to build a War Memorial Hall but this came to nothing.

In 1923 an open air theatre was built in Macquarie Rd by Harry Williams.

It was known first as the Springwood Theatre, then the Plaza and finally the Roxy.

It had seating for 450 people and could be used for dances and balls when it was later roofed. Made of corrugated iron, it was not a beautiful building but could be decorated with a bit of imagination.

But now in 1965 the town was actually getting a purpose built, architect designed hall. 1965 also happened to be the 150th anniversary of the naming of Springwood by Governor Lachlan Macquarie.

The Springwood Chamber of Commerce decided it was a propitious time for the town to have its own coat of arms which could then be permanently displayed in the new hall.

Bruce Jackson, son of Joseph Jackson MLA and proprietor of the Stonewall Jackson store in Macquarie Rd suggested that respected local artist, Norman Lindsay, who had been a Springwood resident since 1913 and was still an active creative artist at the age of 86, should be asked to design the coat of arms.

The Macquarie Historical Society (now known as the Springwood Historical Society) of which Bruce Jackson was a member enthusiastically adopted the idea and Norman Lindsay agreed to create the design.



Springwood's town crest on the wall
of Springwood Civic Centre.
Photograph courtesy John Merriman.

He painted in water colours a coat of arms with a central figure of a lyre bird with tail spread and crowned with a waratah.

Lyre birds were commonly found in the Springwood bush and were actually bred in captivity by Jack Coyle who lived in Raymond Rd Springwood in the 1930s. He had a licence to do so.

The waratah was also commonly found in the Springwood bush and was frequently plundered by tourists to the area.

On one side of the lyre bird was an aboriginal man holding spears who represented the first inhabitants of the region and on the other side was a white man representing the contribution of explorers to Blue Mountains.

Underneath was the name Springwood on a curved ribbon.

Considerable research went into the devices of the design with the cooperation of the Society of Australian Genealogists to conform to the rules of Heraldry.

Royal College of Arms did not recognise it as a genuine coat of arms

However, it could not be regarded as a genuine coat of arms, the right for which needed to be granted by the Royal College of Arms in London.

The Macquarie Historical Society wrote to the Blue Mountains City Council proposing that Lindsay's design *"be embodied as a feature in the front of the building [i.e. the new Civic Centre], and that it be constructed of some durable material."*

"We think that this feature would embellish the new building and, at the same time, relate it to the outstanding progress of the district from the days of the aborigine and the explorer, to the present state of development."

It was thought that executing the design in tiles by the majolica process would provide a suitably durable display and would ensure the permanence of the colours and quotes were sought from Diana Pottery in Marrickville.

This pottery was probably the most important of the Australian in the 1960s producing brightly coloured ceramics often featuring flora and fauna.

Lindsay and the pottery artists had consultations regarding the colours and Norman also experimented a home, decorating tiles using pen and ink, watercolours and oils according to Harry McPhee in his Memories of Norman Lindsay. To set the colour he fired the tiles in his own electric oven.

In addition to the tiled reproduction for the Springwood Civic Centre the design was said by Alderman Powell, a Springwood developer, have been intended for reduction to a size suitable for letterheads etc. However, he said, it was not the intention of the Macquarie Historical Society or the Springwood Chamber of Commerce to commercialise the emblem.

When Alderman Powell showed the design to the council, Alderman Hunter was not entirely satisfied with it, saying he felt it was archaic.

Other criticisms were made regarding the position of the lyre bird's tail. Alec Chisholm, noted ornithologist, disagreed. Mr F Walford, a well known bushman, said that the lyre bird normally held its tail parallel with the ground and only occasionally threw it over its head for a very short time.

Aldermen Hunter and Campbell moved that the design be displayed publicly in the Springwood district and the public asked to express approval or disapproval.



Norman Lindsay was better known for controversy surrounding his painting of nudes and the naked nymphs like this sculpture which still stands in the grounds of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) owned property, Norman Lindsay Gallery at Faulconbridge.

The result showed 702 approvals and 24 disapprovals. These votes came from Springwood, Faulconbridge, Valley Heights and Warrimoo with 23 votes cast from elsewhere.

Diana Pottery quoted £65 for the work, 36 inches by 30 inches with the Springwood Chamber of Commerce agreeing to meet the cost.

The Macquarie Historical was given the custodianship of the work. The only problem the name “coat of arms”.

The Blue Mountains City Council already had a coat of arms so it decided to call it the Springwood emblem or crest.

‘Even this innocent work of art, with not a naked lady insight ’caused controversy

When Norman Lindsay heard of the controversy he was quite amused. Harry McPhee, his assistant and companion in those later years, said in *Memoirs of Norman Lindsay 1879 – 1969*: *‘Even this innocent work of art, with not a naked lady in sight, invited controversy.’*

‘Would you believe that some of the council aldermen disputed the position of the lyre bird’s tail. With his usual aplomb, he retorted that at his age he didn’t take aldermen very seriously and wouldn’t care if they threw it in the garbage. He said that generations of critics had been trying to brain him with their feeding bottles.’

He was also quoted as saying: *‘At my time of life one does not take aldermen very seriously. They came and bothered me to design a crest. It represented about a morning’s work. I don’t care what they do with it. I can’t take the whole thing seriously.’*

And: *‘Heavens, Lord love a duck. When I think of all the uproar over my work in the past... now this. I think it’s damn funny; I wouldn’t care a hoot if they put it in the garbage. At my time of life one does not take aldermen seriously.’*

So the tiled and framed work was duly completed and now hangs on the wall in the Springwood Civic Centre facing the entrance which is glassed and has a westerly aspect.

Despite the hopes for the durability of the colours it appears to have faded and has lost the brightness of the original painting.

Springwood Historians were privileged to view the original which is safely archived at the Norman Lindsay Gallery. It has been occasionally shown as part of special exhibitions but otherwise is safe from the depredations suffered by the tiled rendition.

I wondered if the Springwood town crest had a part in today’s local life and was delighted to discover it is still being used (with the approval of the Springwood Historical Society) by a few groups.

Early on the Springwood Chamber of Commerce had the design stencilled onto something like firm plastic with “Member of the Springwood Chamber of Commerce” added.

One of these was framed and is in the local studies section of the Mountains City Library.

Another is attached to the window of the Honey Gem Nursery.

I can find no one with any recollection of this initiative. It was also said in a letter to Mr Keith Wingrove of the National Art Gallery of South Australia from the Blue Mountains City Council that the Springwood Chamber of Commerce has made use of the emblem on signs erected on the outskirts of Springwood bearing the inscription Welcome to Springwood. This remains other mystery.

More recently the crest is used by the Springwood Historical Society on their letterheads, newsletters and calendars.

The Springwood Chamber of Commerce has it on their letterhead.

The Springwood Sports Club has had the design on their badge for many years and it is also printed on their membership card. It decorates a lot of their merchandise – shirts, jackets, vests, caps and bowling cloths.



A lyre bird.

A history of the club was printed as place mats for the official opening of their new premises and it is liberally decorated with the crest and they have recently had the design stencilled on the glass entrance doors.

I think Norman Lindsay would be pleased.

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