

ARMIDALE COMMON.

By September 1864 a number of Armidale residents supported the acquisition of a common and the *Armidale Express*, 10 September 1864 commented, 'it would be a great advantage to the residents of Armidale if ... a town common could be secured'. The correspondent suggested a block of 800 acres immediately north of Mr Atherton's old farm at Tilbuster Creek. The Armidale Police Magistrate called a meeting in September to discuss the proposal and in October, council applied to the Minister for Lands for a permanent commonage near Martin's Gully on the Great Northern Road.

Council sought assistance from Mr Cooper MP in February 1865 to enquire of the Minister for Lands 'requesting the grant of a common to the S.W. of the town'¹ in February 1865. A further approach was made to Mr Cooper in November because the common had still not been surveyed because of the absence of the district surveyor. In June 1866 council applied to the Colonial Secretary requesting that the town common be proclaimed and vested in the municipal body with as little delay as possible. This action was endorsed in July. The *Government Gazette*, 9 November 1866 defined a permanent commonage of 1440 acres and a temporary commonage of 1600 acres and notified Armidale freeholders and householders within the boundaries that they were entitled to use of both commons. In September 1868 the mayor asked the district surveyor to define the boundaries of the common. The temporary common was reserved from annual lease or occupational license on 13 April 1892.

Council was gazetted as trustees on 10 June 1870 by the Department of Lands for the land set apart as permanent and temporary commonage. Under the Commons Amendment Act 1866, section 6 council agreed in November 1887 to be trustees of the town common.² Council appointed residents as trustees and December 1890, concern was expressed in council that timber was being destroyed in the common. It was revealed that trustees had not met for some three years and council moved in February 1891 to take control of the common. A sub-committee was set up in April to establish rules for the common.

A herdsman was appointed in September 1891 and the rules and regulations for the management and control of the common as determined by a sub-committee were accepted by council in January 1892. The Department of Mines and Agriculture proclaimed the council as trustees of the common under the Commons Act 1873-1886 on 7 October. J. Moore was appointed secretary to the common in November and council also called applications for the position of commons ranger. Council took action to apply to the district surveyor to have the boundaries of the common properly defined in March 1893. In June council discussed the opening up of land north of the town boundary as far as the Tilbuster Bridge and settling people on land set aside for temporary and

¹ *Armidale Express*, 25 February 1865, p.2.

² Council minutes, 8 November 1887.

permanent commons. This would enable the government to excise 1000 acres for commonage purposes.

In February 1894 council sought a further temporary common and asked the Minister for Lands to reserve all government lands within the suburban area at the eastern and south eastern boundaries of the town and adjoining rifle range. Council accepted from the Department of Lands a temporary common of 890 acres in March and agreed to relinquish it if needed in the future for suburban purposes. At that stage, the area was only used for a sheep walk.

In January 1895 R. McDonald, district surveyor, forwarded a map of the temporary common as surveyed by J. Martyn. That March the Local Government Commissioners informed 'Council that the recommendation to have a permanent common included in the proposed municipal area would receive full consideration'.³ The temporary common of about 890 acres to the south east of Armidale was gazetted on 5 May. In July 1896 the Department of Mines and Agriculture asked council to take action to prevent the removal of soil and gravel from the common and council referred the matter to the trustees.

George Bauer was awarded the contract to fence the common at £37 per mile in July 1901. That November council was informed that portion of the temporary common at East Armidale was to be set apart for a lunatic asylum but council protested against any portion of the common being cancelled. In May 1902 council agreed to the leasing of part of the temporary common for coursing purposes.

An application by the district surveyor to subdivide an unfenced portion of the permanent and temporary commons lying to the north west of the Rockvale Road was granted. Subdivisions were not to exceed 40 acres each and they were to be on a strictly residential basis to prevent speculation. Council determined that not less than 40 acres along the water frontage to take in Charlton Waters was to be vested in council as a pleasure resort and watering place.⁴

In February 1911, the district forester approached council to consider the possible moving of an area of 500 acres to another part of the common. The district surveyor asked council in March if it had any objection to an area being withdrawn from the temporary common for a residential settlement and another for a camping reserve. Council had no objection. Negotiations took place between council and the Forestry Department in March and June concerning 500 acres of the permanent common. Council was willing to offer the area for an afforestation station provided the department refunded £150 spent on improvements. The department agreed and council decided to allow the area to

³ *Armidale Express*, 29 March 1895, p.3.

⁴ Council minutes, 23 January 1906.

be taken over by 1 July⁵ but by October 1911, no action had been taken. Council was still trustee of the common in March 1912.

In September 1912 Albert Lee, of the State Forestry Department arrived in Armidale to take charge of the local afforestation area. Following an approach by the Department of Land for the revoking of a further part of the town common, council objected in September 1912 to the proposed move. At that stage the government had taken 500 acres of the former town common and the travelling stock route at Tilbuster. The State Forestry Department acquired the local afforestation area from council and by November 1912 'the Forestry Department had completed their line of fencing, which would necessitate the mustering of all stock on that part of the common into the Council's part'.⁶

Council applied to the Land Board in October 1913 for 80 acres on the Glen Innes Road. That month a proposal to revoke 83 acres of the Armidale Temporary Common came before the Armidale Lands Board. Mayor Ald. Kearney held that the common should not be further revoked because 'the area was also required to give access from the Rockvale Road to the permanent common'.⁷ The district surveyor, Mr Broughton favoured the revocation and Gilbert McDonald, the commons ranger also gave evidence. Despite the opposition from council, the Board recommended the revocation and council formally protested to the Minister for Lands.

The Director of Forestry, R.D. Hay and A.A. Gollan, superintendent of planting at the Forestry Department visited Armidale on 25 January 1915 to inspect the local afforestation area at Tilbuster. This area had been going for two years where mostly pines had been planted but there was also experimentation with softwoods.

The Armidale State Forest, No 207 was dedicated on 14 July 1915 and the Eastwood State Forest, No 548 was dedicated on 14 September 1917. The Armidale Bird and Animal Sanctuary was proclaimed on 4 September 1931.

In April 1934 council decided to apply for the renewal of the Special Lease No 17/40 of 20 acres (Rockvale Common)

Accompanied by the Hon. D.H. Drummond, the Hon. R.S. Vincent, Minister for Mines and Forests, inspected the Armidale State Forest on the Rockvale Road in June 1935. The minister stated 'the plantation was most disappointing'⁸ because the timber was not ready for commercial use and he felt an emphasis should be placed on Australian hardwoods.

⁵ *Armidale Express*, 26 June 1911, p.3.

⁶ *Armidale Express*, 15 November 1912, p.3 also see 13 December 1912, p.3.

⁷ *Armidale Chronicle*, 1 November 1913, p.3.

⁸ *Armidale Express*, 26 June 1935, p.4.

In 1947 the question of ownership of the Tilbuster Pine Forest arose. D.H. Drummond MLA informed council in March 1947 that schools could become involved in the Tilbuster Pine Forest under the School Forest Act. This act had been passed by him during his 'term of office to assist in the encouragement and establishment of school forests'.⁹ He sought the assistance of schools and council in preventing the purchase of the pine forest and forestry station at Tilbuster by private citizens. Council referred the matter 'to the Citizen's Town Planning and Beautification Committee for consideration and suggested co-operation with the Dumaresq Shire Council'.¹⁰

⁹ *Armidale Express*, 5 March 1947, p.8.

¹⁰ *Armidale Express*, 19 March 1947, p.4.