

HOWE HOUSE

A HAWKESBURY REGIONAL MUSEUM FACT SHEET

c.1811 – 1850

John Howe acquired the allotment of land on which Howe House stands around 1811. We are not sure exactly when the house was built, but archaeological evidence tells us that at least part of the building was in place by the 1820s.

Howe had farmed at Portland head (now Ebenezer) after arriving as a free settler on the Coromandel in 1802. In 1809 he came to Windsor to manage the business and farming interests of the district's most prominent citizen, ex-convict Andrew Thompson.

After Thompson's death in 1810, Howe took over many of his affairs, and the House was both the Howe family residence and the headquarters of various enterprises, including major engineering and exploration projects. Howe also took over Thompson's roles as Government Appraiser, Chief Constable and Coroner.

In 1837 he advertised a 'newly constructed building for sale or lease' in Thompson Square and two years later he left the Hawkesbury to live on his Hunter property, Raworth Farm, near Morpeth.

By 1841 there was an inn on the site, run by Edward Coffey and named after the Irish rebel, Daniel O'Connell. It was patronised by Governors Gipps and Fitzroy, and was the venue for social meetings and balls including the Bachelors' Ball, the social occasion of the year. At the Ball of 1847, the polka (a dance craze sweeping Europe and America at the time) was danced in Windsor for the first time.

A number of repairs were carried out between 1848 and 1850, commissioned by Laban White, who had married John Howe's eldest daughter, Mary.

1867 – 1912

In 1867 Windsor experienced its highest ever recorded flood, with the river rising 63 feet 2 inches (19.26 metres). It created an inland sea from Windsor to the Blue Mountains, and resulted in unprecedented damage and hardship.

Twelve members of the Eather family lost their lives in the flood, which affected the farms around Windsor, Wilberforce, Pitt Town, Riverstone and parts of Richmond.

At Howe House, floodwater filled the basement and came halfway up the walls of the ground floor.

*William Stevens
bought the property
for £150 (\$300).*

In 1876 the house left Howe hands and was sold to George Davies, a printer. In addition to general printing, Davies published a weekly paper called The Australian, Windsor, Richmond and Hawkesbury Advertiser. Over a century later, pieces of printing equipment (typeface) could still be found in the basement.

The paper's reporting style was colourful if not controversial, and its proprietor went bankrupt three times before finally going out of business in 1899, when the mortgage on the building was taken over by Thomas Ware of Waterloo in Sydney.

In 1912 a baker, Williams Stevens, bought the property for (pounds symbol)150 (\$300). It was passed down to his son Ernest Stevens in 1961 and used as his family's private home.

1862 – 2000

In 1962 three upstairs rooms were made available to Hawkesbury Historical Society for use as a museum. The official opening by H. Macleod Morgan, President of The Royal Australian Historical Society, was attended by hundreds, in spite of very bad weather. They enjoyed a grand procession featuring the RAAF band and a cavalcade of transport, including an open carriage bearing Mr and Mrs Maris, dressed up as Governor and Mrs Gipps.

In its first two years, the volunteer-run museum attracted over 8,000 visitors. Ernest Stevens, the owner, lived on the ground floor and was caretaker until his death in 1967, when Windsor Municipal Council purchased the property. This made it possible for the Historical Society to occupy the entire building, and joined in April 1970 by Hawkesbury District Tourist Association. A major refurbishment took place in 1988, with the help of a Bicentenary grant.

By 2000 the Historical Society's collection had grown to around 5000 objects, and the museum was in need of an upgrade. In 2001 Hawkesbury City Council resolved to expand the museum by adding a new building on the Baker Street side. Most of the collection is now housed and displayed there, enabling Howe House to be refurbished and interpreted as you see it today.

Howe House is registered as an historic Building, being a typical Georgian inn that is vital in retaining the urban colonial character of Thompson Square. The Square and its component parts have been recognised as having high State significance and are protected by the New South Wales Heritage Act.

THE BASEMENT

The entrance to the basement rooms was originally from the back yard, with steps leading down into a hallway. A covered porch protected the entry, and by the 1840s wooden poles supported a more substantial roof covering of shingles.

The present stairs are in the same position. The basement walls are about half a metre thick and some parts are made from stone rubble while others are from early sandstone bricks. It could be that the base of an earlier building on the site was incorporated into the present building's foundations.

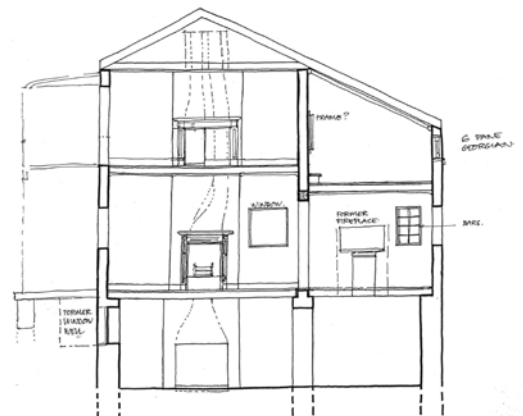
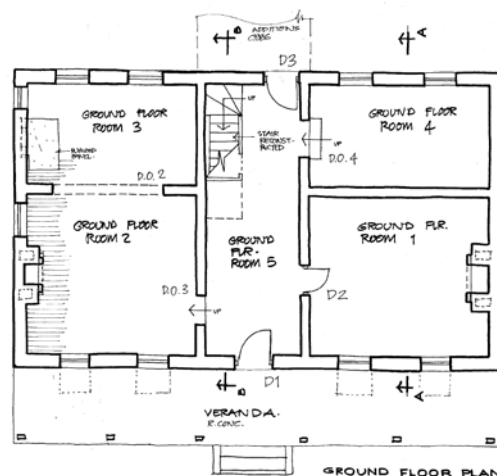
Howe House had its origins in a colonial world, where those rising in affluence – like the Howe family – were assigned convicts or employed servants. It is possible that female servants occupied one of the front rooms as it has floorboards and a fire place but no windows.

The other front room was flagged with stone. With its large fireplace, complete with kitchen crane and iron hooks, it was probably used as a kitchen, at least from the building's rental days. Prior to this we are not certain of its use, as before the 1820s, kitchens were usually external. The small room off the kitchen with its original pounded dirt floor was a cool room, used for keeping milk, cream, butter and other perishable items in an age with no refrigeration. The final room, being small, could have been a store room.

THE FIRST FLOOR

The upstairs rooms were mainly used as bedrooms, first for the Howe family, and later for the building's tenants and patrons of The Daniel O'Connell Inn. There are two medium-sized rooms either side of the stairs at the front of the building. Originally these overlooked the roof of the downstairs verandah, but in the 1880s - 1890s the sloping verandah roof was remodelled to make a balcony.

The basement walls are about half a metre thick and some parts are made from stone rubble...



Top left: Hawkesbury Museum of Local History Early 1960s D G Bowd Collection Hawkesbury Library Service.

Top right: Hawkesbury Museum 1973 NSW Dept of Tourism/Werner Bartel Collection State Library of NSW.

Above left: Richard Read Snr, *Portrait of Mary Howe* National Library of Australia.

Above centre and right: ground floor plan and section looking towards George Street. Conservation Management Plan 2003.

Over: Thompson Square 1879 Government Printing Office, State Library of NSW.