

ARTHUR DEWHURST, Surveyor 1833-1889.

In Manilla there are street names that have special significance – they are – Dewhurst, Arthur, Strafford, Rowan, Florence, Stephen and Church streets. These Manilla streets were all named by the Surveyor, Arthur Dewhurst, who completed the detailed sectional survey of Manilla in May, 1864.

He named Dewhurst and Arthur streets after himself; Rowan and Strafford streets after the village and town he came from in England; Florence, Stephen and Church streets were family names.

Arthur Dewhurst was born in Cambridge, England, about 1833. He was the son of Rev Edward Dewhurst, the Anglican rector, and his wife, Caroline, nee Dury. As a young man he realised the opportunities that would be available in Australia. so he sailed for Sydney. His first position in the new country was in the N.S.W. Civil Service, where in June, 1858, he was listed as a Surveyor, second class. Almost immediately he was transferred to Tamworth- and in June 1860 he was sent to the Dubbo area where he did survey work on the Lachlan river. In 1862 on his promotion to Surveyor First Class, he was transferred to Cooma but by January 1863 he was posted back to the Tamworth Lands Board Office and it was in Tamworth he stayed for the remainder of his working life. When he returned to live permanently in Tamworth he brought with him his bride, the former Emma Owen.

His work included the survey of a road from Tamworth to Moore Creek after which he received instructions to do a detailed survey of Manilla. In this work he was, according to his Diary, continually interrupted as work of a more urgent nature arose. These works included the survey of a road from Attunga to Dead Horse Gully. His diary states : May 16, 1863:- “Started for Manilla – camped out – very cold – May 17 to 28 – making preliminary survey for a bridge at Manilla; returned to Attunga and surveyed a road from there to Moore Creek; November 21, returned to Manilla and made a preliminary plan of the junction. Left for Tarpawlin creek and spent a night there.”

Dewhurst did a survey of Narrabri and then a detailed survey of the Namoi river from that centre to its junction with the Manilla river at Manilla. He had just completed this work when the great flood of February, 1864, occurred. Dewhurst’s Diary gives a clear picture of that flood.

“January 21–pegging allotments; February 11 – weather very unsettled, river rising; February 12 – river very high, Harper and flock of sheep have disappeared; February 13 – helped to rescue people from the roof of a house; rescued a man from a tree, had difficulty with the boat; it is the highest flood ever known on the Namoi , ten foot higher than the 1840 flood.; February 15 – marked a tree and a stump on the river bank with a line showing

the height of the flood and cut a sign in the wood “A.D. 64”. (However the tree was removed in 1902 when the streets of Manilla were cleared of trees).

Dewhurst named other Manilla streets – River, Namoi, Manilla after the rivers; Market street where he visualised a market similar to market squares in English towns , and Court street where he selected sites for a Court House, Clerk of Petty Sessions office, Police Station and residence. Charles and Lloyd streets were a compliment to Charles Lloyd who was member of the N.S.W. Parliament for Liverpool Plains, Manilla being part of that Electorate. South street was on the southern extremity of the town plan while Barraba street was the outlet to the Barraba road.

In May, 1875, Dewhurst purchased two building allotments facing Marius street in Tamworth and there his home and office were built. He developed a magnificent garden. And later he had a farm at Moore creek.

In 1875 he was listed as District surveyor for Liverpool Plains with his headquarters still being in Tamworth. About the same time he purchased from Abraham Cohen, two allotments facing Peel street and these linked up with his land in Marius street – his office then faced on to the Peel street frontage.

Dewhurst was described as a “highly capable man in every respect. He was possessed of remarkable artistic ability”. Tamworth students frequently used to visit him for help and advice and he was noted for kind services rendered.

When Cassell’s “Picturesque Australasia” was produced in 1889 Arthur Dewhurst combined his great knowledge of the area with his wonderful literary skills to produce the chapter entitled “Liverpool Plains and New England”.

He died on May 27, 1889, and his obituary records that he was a mathematician, photographer and an expert in other sciences and arts He left a wife and two sons.

His daughter, Caroline, born in 1864, married Thomas Polk Willsallen of Gunnible, near Gunnedah. She and her husband became noted for their charitable work, and were the driving force in establishing and developing Gunnedah Hospital.

Although Dewhurst never lived in Manilla, he is remembered with respect as the man who made the basic survey of the town and gave the names to the streets on that town plan. In doing so he envisaged a good future for the town from the small township he knew of 1864, with its population of fifty persons for town and district.

by Marion Bignall, May, 2007.

Sources: Macleod’s “Transformation of Manellae”;
Hobden’s “Fifty Early Pioneers of the Tamworth District”.