



## ACT Heritage Council

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHUMACK STONE HUT SCHOOL SAMPLER (HALL SCHOOL MUSEUM AND HERITAGE CENTRE, BLOCK 3 SECTION 6, HALL)**

At its meeting of 10 February 2022 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Shumack Stone Hut School Sampler was eligible for provisional registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Shumack Stone Hut School Sampler against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

### **HISTORY**

The Shumack Stone Hut Sampler is a rectangular linen cloth embroidered with several colours of woollen thread (Image 1). It was made by Margaret Shumack in 1887. At that time, she was eleven years old and a student at the Stone Hut Public School.

#### Margaret Shumack's family

Margaret's grandparents, John and Margaret (nee O'Toole) Shumack, migrated from Ireland to Australia arriving on 11 November 1841 (White, 1993). Many of John's siblings and their families also migrated to Australia adding to the extended family of Shumacks and their descendants in Australia.

Upon their arrival in Australia, John Shumack took a job with William Klensendorff, and the family took up residence in Canberra (Shumack, Shumack, & Smith, 1967; White, 1993). They lived at Elizabeth Farm, a property that was located near Albert Hall but is now covered by Lake Burley Griffin. In 1842, John leased 100 acres of glebe<sup>1</sup> land and built a three-room slab hut with a bark roof. He was the first tenant of the glebe land and active in the church. It was while living there that their fourth child, Peter, was born in 1844.

Peter ('Big Peter') Shumack was Margaret's father (White, 1993; Proctor, 2001). Peter was married first to Elizabeth Gillespie and they had two children. He later married Elizabeth (Betsy) Williams and they had another 12 children together. Margaret is the second child and eldest daughter of his second marriage. The family lived at the property *Fern Hill*, which adjoined lands owned by Peter's brother, Richard (Image 2).

Margaret (Sis) was born on 6 September 1875. Based on the evidence provided by the sampler, we know that as a young girl she must have attended Stone Hut Public School, which was located close to her family home. Since 1880 primary education was compulsory in NSW, so all boys and girls were expected to attend school until 12 years of age. Only fragments of information are known about her later life, but White (1993) reports that she never married nor had children. Apparently, she was considered a beauty and had many suitors, but may have been "too fussy in her requirements." Other biographical details reported by White (1993) include:

- 1903 – living at the family home *Fern Hill*;
- 1915 – working as a domestic at *Brindabella*;

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<sup>1</sup> Cultivable land owned and leased by the church.

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- *unknown* – ran a boarding house at Katoomba with her sister, Ida;
- 1919 – working for the Bethune family at 283 Edgecliff Road, Woollahra. It is noted that her position here may have been obtained through connections with the Crace family.

Additional electoral role information shows that Margaret resided at (Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre, n.d. b):

- Kia-Ora, the property of her younger brother Edward (Ted) located in the current suburb of Lyneham, between 1928 and 1937 with “home-duties” listed as her profession.
- By 1943 until her death, Margaret resided with her sister-in-law Monica Shumack (Edward’s estranged wife) in Torrens St, Braddon.

Margaret died on 26 July 1945 and was buried at St John’s Church in Canberra.

### Stone Hut Public School

The sampler identifies the Stone Hut School. This school was a provisional school in the colonial NSW education system between November 1873 and 1883, later changed in status to a public school between 1884 and 1888 (Gillespie, 1999).<sup>2</sup> It was originally located on the right side of the Queanbeyan Yass Road when headed towards Ginninderra (Image 3). This was on the land, then named Gungahleen, of Edward Crace, who was also a member of the Stone Hut School board (Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre, n.d. c).

The school opened in November 1873 with Humphrey Wainwright as teacher. In September 1884, the school was closed temporarily while an enquiry was held into the conduct of the teacher, by that time John Scannell. He was ultimately dismissed for drunken and slovenly behaviour. The school was reopened in November that year with Elizabeth Colvin as teacher. However, the physical conditions of the school were not good. In January 1885 a group of local residents, including Joseph Shumack, Richard Shumack, William Boyd, Archibald McKeahnie, John Winter, Mrs Peter Shumack Snr and Robert Maloney, wrote to the education authorities to draw attention to the dilapidated condition of the school building (Gillespie 1992, 1999). Consequently, a contract was given to John Kealman in March 1885 to build a new school building across the road. In August 1885, new premises were completed and the school was moved (Image 4). In November 1885 Mary Clare Nolan began as teacher at the school (Gillespie, 1999; Image 5). It is in this new school building, under the instruction of Ms Nolan, that Margaret would have been attending school at the time the sampler was made in 1887. Despite being located in new premises, made from wooden planking, it retained the name ‘Stone Hut Public School’ for some time. Many found this misnomer incongruous, so the school was renamed ‘Gungahleen Public School’ on 23 August 1888 (Gillespie, 1992).

The Gungahleen Public School was formerly listed on the ACT Heritage Register from 1998-2014 and continues to appear on the Register of the National Estate (a non-statutory listing). However, the building was destroyed by fire in 2007. A new building was built at the same location in a similar style to the original, but was not deemed to retain any significant heritage features.

### Needlework in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was a sociocultural norm in the Australian colonies that girls were taught needlework, with the expectation that they would utilise these skills when they were adult women. This gendered association between women and needlework can be linked back to earlier developments in British society.

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<sup>2</sup> Public schools were created where an attendance of 20 or more children could be had. Provisional schools were created where an attendance of 12-19 children could be had. Provisional schools differed from public schools in that the parents were expected (up until 1882) to provide the site, buildings and furniture used for the education of the children.

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The gendered relationship between needlework and women was particularly evident between the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, needlework was strongly entwined with notions of femininity and played an integral part in establishing ideals of feminine behaviour (Parker, 1984). Indeed, it has even been stated that, “To know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women,” (Parker, 1984, p. foreword).

Prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, embroidery was viewed as an art form, and many important works were produced in guild workshops, or workshops attached to monasteries and nunneries. Thus, in these medieval times embroidery was not necessarily viewed as a gendered pursuit. However, beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century this began to change to such an extent that by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, embroidery was used to inculcate skills in girls from such a young age that the ensuing behaviour came to be seen as innate (Parker 1984). At that time, needlework served two functions: to elevate the class associations and to make the education of girls “safely feminine” (Parker 1984, p73). The inclusion of needlework in the curriculum was thought to make education more acceptable for girls, as well as providing a practical skill that would be deemed useful for a married woman.

The increasingly gendered associations of needlework and the addition of names and dates to samplers evident from the late 16th century can be understood in the context of developments in Protestant ideologies especially those associated with notions of individualism and child discipline (Parker 1984). An emphasis on individual salvation and a ‘calling’ led to an increased emphasis upon women’s roles in domestic labour and needlework as women’s ‘work’. At that time, the notion of childhood was also a developing concern, but these ideas applied less to girls who were expected to be “little women” (Parker 1984, p82). Thus, embroidery was the continuum that linked the girl to the woman she would become. In addition, children were seen as naturally sinful leading to an increased emphasis upon parental discipline and authority. As a consequence, “[Embroidery] was taught in such a way as to inculcate obedience and patience during long hours sitting still, head bowed over an increasingly technically complex, demanding art,” (Parker 1984, p83). All these ideological changes contributed to cultural and societal expectations that a young girl would demonstrate her developing needlework skills by producing a number of samplers and other needlework projects.

In the 18th century, not working came to be an indication of femininity in the aristocratic classes as symbolised by the time to do embroidery (Parker, 1984). These elitist notions were reinforced by the fact that the husband was able to support the wife in her leisure (time dedicated to embroidering). Furthermore, the embroidery signified the worthiness of the woman who acted in a way which was thought to demonstrate docility, obedience, love of home and life without work. This in turn contributed to the status of the home and class position.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, views on embroidery and femininity became fused to such an extent that the connection was deemed to be ‘natural’: “Women embroidered because they were naturally feminine and were feminine because they naturally embroidered,” (Parker 1984, p11). Needlework occupied a key role in establishing what it meant to be a middle-class woman when economic capitalism was disrupting the previously established social and economic structures. At this time, women were expected to be the social centre of the home and embroidery was an example of correct behaviour.

Although needlework was already an important pursuit for women in Britain, this took on an even more nuanced role for those living in the Australian colonies. Needlework in the colonies was undertaken with additional challenges in acquiring knowledge and resources, so that the deliberate display of needlework helped to establish the gentility of a home: “Through their stitching, women constructed and expressed their genteel identity, shaping an emergent Australian middle class whose values would soon constitute the largest segment of Australian society,” (Cramer, 2020, p. 174). This was enabled through education in needlework, which inculcated feminine values and behaviours that in turn contributed to the status of families in the shifting colonial society.

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### Needlework in Childhood Education

With the sociocultural expectation that women would be adept at needlework, the training of girls in needlecraft began at a young age. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries embroidery was more or less an activity of the privileged classes and embroidery was often taught to upper-class girls in the home. Where girls were educated in establishments outside the home, as discussed above, the inclusion of needlework was often thought to make education more relevant and practicable for girls. However, starting in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries charity schools began to appear aimed at educating the working classes, these schools generally included the stitching of samplers for young girls within their curriculum (Parker 1984). In Britain and the colonies, needlework for girls was a standard educational requirement and all girls were expected to work on samplers as part of their schooling (Cramer, 2020).

Public schools in 19<sup>th</sup> century NSW followed an educational framework based on the Irish National Curriculum (Burnswood & Fletcher, 1980; Gillespie, 1999).<sup>3</sup> Generally, education was focused on the three 'Rs' (reading, writing, and arithmetic) alongside grammar and non-denominational religious instruction. In practise, several other subjects were included and, in 1851, William Wilkins devised a timetable for National Schools wherein all girls were to devote one hour per day to needlework (Burnswood and Fletcher 1980, p58). Needlework, in the form of samplers, was also expected as part of the minimum attainments for classes in National schools (1856) and later adapted into standards of proficiency applicable to all schools in the colony (1867) (Burnswood and Fletcher 1980). As a further example of the continuing importance of needlework, the course of instruction of the Maitland Girl's Highschool in 1884 also specified needlework as a requirement (Burnswood and Fletcher 1980, p106). Basic literacy and numeracy, along with needlework were the only subjects common to, and the latter practised exclusively by, all girls in colonial Australia (Cramer, 2020). The inclusion of needlework as a requirement for girls in the curriculum is not surprising given the social and cultural importance of those skills for women and girls at the time.

A sampler was a demonstration of the developing skills of the young girl, and all girls at this time were expected to make one or more during their schooling. In colonial NSW, needlework was recognised as a "particularly useful feminine accomplishment" and thus a central part of the girls' education regardless of the social background or school attended (Burnswood and Fletcher 1980, p27). This was particularly the case when in 1880, six years before the creation of this sampler, the *Public Instruction Act* made education compulsory for all children up until 12 years of age. In fulfilling their educational requirements, young girls of all social classes inevitably spent many hours stitching samplers usually including the alphabet, some mottos and decorative designs.

Young girls were expected to spend time everyday doing needlework as part of their educational requirements in 19<sup>th</sup> Century NSW - an expectation that did not apply to their male counterparts. Therefore, a school sampler, such as that made by Margaret Shumack, is a reflection of the roles and expectations for women and girls in 19<sup>th</sup> Century NSW, which in turn reflected broader developments in British society and their colonial relations. The display of the item would show off the girls' developing skills at a time when needlework was considered an important skill for women in society.

### Developments in Sampler Design

The design of samplers changed over time, reflecting developments in their usage. The earliest known samplers from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, often called 'spot' samplers, were generally composed of randomly placed motifs on bands or rectangles of material that could be rolled or folded away in a workbox (Colby, 1987; Parker, 1984). These samplers had the purpose of a reference to which professional needleworkers or the women and girls could refer in producing other needlework products. But samplers changed in appearance

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<sup>3</sup> Governor Burke introduced the Irish National System to the NSW colony in 1831, his intention was to introduce a Christian non-denominational education provided by the government and withdraw support for the denominational schools that were dominant at that time (Burnswood and Fletcher 1980). Although the motivations and intentions did not bear out in application, the curriculum did come to be central to the public school system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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and design as their purpose shifted towards use as a teaching tool.

As the educational purpose of samplers become more common in the 17<sup>th</sup> century a new style of sampler developed that was composed of bands or rows of symmetrical patterns. These band samplers<sup>4</sup> provided the repetition necessary for educational purposes, whereas the spot samplers were more suitable for skilled needleworkers (Colby 1987). In addition to the arrangement of the patterns in bands, these educational samplers also came to include common elements of design and were more standardised in shape. The design elements included repeated patterns, alphabets and personalised decorative elements. The inclusion of the alphabet and numerals had practical application in 'marking.' Marking was the practise of stitching identification into household items. Colby (1987, p115) even argues that marking was the primary function of 19<sup>th</sup> century samplers. Changes in shape saw samplers become more compact and squarer, which made them more suitable for display (Colby 1987, p29). These common characteristics of design and shape of the educational 'band' sampler are evident in the sampler made by Margaret Shumack.

### Rarity of Surviving Samplers in the ACT Region

Despite the fact that the production of samplers was an educational requirement for all girls in colonial NSW in 1887 when Margaret Shumack made this example, there are no other known examples in public collections in the ACT region.<sup>5</sup> This example has additional significance as it directly references a known historical location within the region. It is likely that some samplers may be held in private collections, but these are unknown at this time and not publicly available.

### DESCRIPTION

An embroidered textile sampler dating to 1887. It was created by Margaret Shumack while a student at the Stone Hut School. Image 1 shows the sampler, including its design. A woollen thread was used and the design is stitched onto a plain weave linen ground fabric (Art & Archival, 2020).

At the top of the sampler there are four variations of alphabets. The uppermost alphabet, along with the numbers 1-9, are stitched in red thread, with the remaining three alphabets stitched in green thread under this. Below the alphabets, there is wording embroidered in green thread, which reads:

Margaret Shumack  
Public School  
Stone Hut  
9<sup>th</sup> August 1887

At the bottom of the sampler are images of birds, trees and a basket embroidered in green, red and yellow thread. The whole is surrounded by a stitched border and several dividing lines composed of different patterns and stitching types.

### Physical condition and integrity

The Shumack Stone Hut School Sampler is located in the collections of the Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre, which occupies premises at the former Hall Primary School on Palmer Street, Hall.

After Margaret created the sampler it was held in the private collection of the Shumack family until it was donated to the Canberra District Historical Society (CDHS). While in the collections of CDHS it was displayed

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<sup>4</sup> Differences in terminology exist. For instance, Cramer (2020) refers to 'spot samplers' as 'band samplers' in reference to the overall shape of the long strips of linen and she in turn refers to 'band samplers' as 'marking samplers.' However, descriptions given for the characteristic changes in the samplers are the same. The terminology used in Colby (1987) is used herein to provide consistency.

<sup>5</sup> Canberra Museum and Gallery, Queanbeyan and District Historical Museum, Canberra District Historical Society *pers. comm.*

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to the public at Blundell's Cottage and at the National Capital Exhibition. More recently it was transferred to the collections of the Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre, where it remains at present.

Although in generally good condition for its age, the sampler has several areas which show wear, general deterioration and insect damage. There is also some dark brown staining of unknown origin. In 2020-2021 the museum received an ACT Heritage Grant for the conservation of the sampler. It has since been professionally cleaned, mounted, framed and glazed by Art & Archival Cultural Materials Conservation to ensure its continued preservation.

## IMAGES





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**Image 2 - The family of Peter and Betsy Shumack at their home, Fern Hill. Margaret was the eldest daughter and is standing at first left (Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre n.d. a).**



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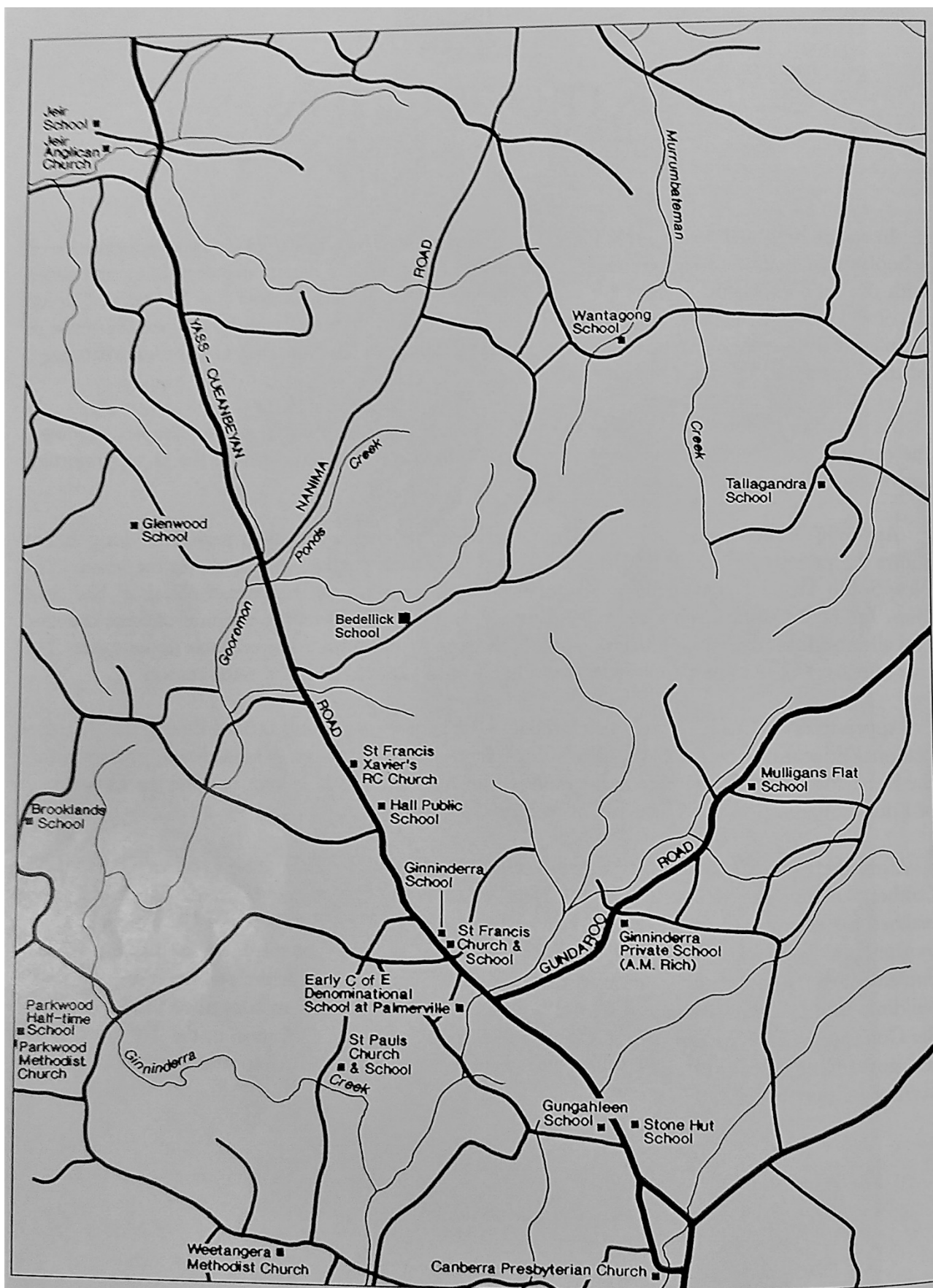


Image 3 - Map showing the location of Ginninderra district schools (Gillespie, 1999).

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**Image 4 - Stone Hut School after its move from the eponymous stone hut (Gillespie, 1999).**



**Image 5 - Miss Mary Clare Nolan, teacher at Stone Hut Public School (Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre d).**

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