



Mechanics' Worldwide Conference Prahran—Melbourne - Australia 2004 - Will you be there?

AS THE WORD SPREADS around the world interest is flowing in for this the **First International Conference of Athenaeums, Literary Institutes, Lyceums, Mechanics' Institutes, Schools of Arts and Workingmen's Institutes (MW2004)**.

It's just over two hundred years since **Dr George Birkbeck** started his classes for the mechanics' of Glasgow and the idea for the Institute movement that spread around the world to grow into some 4000 entities.

However, membership libraries were operating long before Birkbeck came on the scene with **Chetham's Library**, Manchester (est. 1653) and **New York Society Library** (est. 1754) being two still operating.

One cannot help feeling that the original optimism is again afoot with Institutes being in general renaissance. Perhaps people feel that they must again empower themselves and their communities.

The **Mechanics' Worldwide Conference** was on the agenda at Boston last year for the **US Membership Libraries Group**. So far **Harold Augenbraum** of the **Mercantile Library of New York**, **Richard Wendorf** of **Boston Athenaeum**, **Professors Richard Newrock** and **Maria Kreppel** of **Ohio Mechanics' Institute** and **Jonathan Bengtson** of **Providence Athenaeum** have all put their names down to attend, with others pending. The **Birkbeck College**, **Strathclyde** and **Heriot-Watt University** folk have it in their 'wish lists'. Librarians from Cambridge and London are writing papers and **MW 2004** was on the agenda for the June AGM of the **UK Association of Independent Libraries**.

The President of Canada's only remaining Institute, **Marshall Wansbrough** of the **Atwater Library and Computer Centre, Montreal Mechanics' Institute** has put his hand up. (The Canadian Government legislated their Institutes out of existence by withdrawing funding if they didn't rebadge to 'Public Library'.)

Several New Zealanders, including **David Ver-ran** of the **Auckland Public Library History Unit**, are contemplating on crossing the Tasman for this landmark event.

Then we've got reps from all Australian States except the Northern Territory, but there's still time. (The **Darwin Institute** merged into the **State Reference Library of NT** and its original building was demolished by a cyclone.)

We're confident of getting starters from the European and African continents and the Indian sub-continent and we live in hope of having a visitor from St Petersburg the home of Russia's only known Institute.

DIARY

DATE

MIV

ANNUAL

MEETING

Melbourne

Athenaeum

188 Collins St

16 August

2003 - 10am

And you're most welcome to attend!

Inside this issue:

Housekeeping - Ideas...	2
President's Greetings	3
Sydney's 170th Birthday	4
Welcome Minister	5
Plaques / Marketing	6
World Mechanics'	7
Logos and More	15
MISA Bookshelf	17
Around the Institutes	18
UK Independents' AGM	30
Mechanics'... and Proud	31
Swinburne... Our Venue	32

HOUSEKEEPING - Opportunities and Ideas

'...all Institutes should set up their own Building Fund with a medium to long term wish list... We can't be wilting violets and we must be known by our deeds.'

People "could endow the Building Fund, an annual or biennial lecture, an event in their memory, a youth award ... or even ... a specialist library."

INSURANCE

We've just heard the news that the **Municipal Association of Victoria** and the **Victorian Government** have again signed with insurance brokers **Jardine Lloyd Thompson** to provide public risk insurance cover for Victoria's not-for-profit organisations for a further three years.

The good news is that premiums will be remaining about the same. A good idea is to add on a clause to your policy to cover excursions and goods in your care, such as projectors, display stands, etc.

So if you're still having trouble with public risk insurance click on to www.ouocommunity.com for details or contact your local Council, but if you're still having no joy ring **Ken Graham** on (03) 9860 3400.

There is hope that the Victorian insurance model for community non-profit public risk may be extended to all Australian States, but until this happens you can contact the Jardine office in your capital city and hopefully they will lend a sympathetic ear.

Jardines also undertake building insurance but you will need to ring them direct and talk to **Bill Hogg** on (03) 96131415.

THE AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE AND TAX DEDUCTIBILITY

We're talking to the ATO and the Federal Government about having MIs and SAs proscribed as cultural organisations to enable easier registration of your Institute as a tax deductible entity. Registration may be in the form of a blanket cover or it could be for a 'Building' or 'Library' Fund.

We're coming up with 'model' broad aims and objectives that the ATO would favourably consider in a model 'Institute Rules'.

In the meantime if you want to apply for tax deductibility contact the ATO at Non-Profit Centre, CDCC, Box 1130, Penrith, NSW 2840.

WHY NOT START A BUILDING FUND

With building maintenance on the agenda at every second Institute meeting, all Institutes could set up their own Building Fund with a medium to long term wish list

(This also applies to where buildings are on Department of Sustainability and Environment or Council land.)

We all must develop business plans to show where such money can be strategically placed.

If we're doing good and imaginative things the public will come behind an Institute. **We can't be wilting violets and we must be known by our deeds.**

The barometer, with the objective and the total raised to date, as was pinned to the front of the **Clifton School of Arts** (NSW) was a great way for the local community to see how things were going.

(They no doubt celebrated when they painted the filled barometer.) Local service groups could even come on board or there may be some fund administered by your local pokie venue or services club that gives occasional handouts. The Courts' 'Poor Box' is also another source of funding.

Then there are the local solicitors and accountants who occasionally have funds to distribute from clients and/ or their estates.

BEQUESTS

The feeling of helplessness as one fields a phone call from a 'dying' Institute, such as recently from **Edenhope**, makes one wish there was an emergency fund to draw on to provide such assistance.

One can but ask but if there is anyone out there contemplating a will the MI movement could be a worthy recipient of endowments large or small for such a purpose.

There are many people in our communities who have had good times in the 'Old Mechanics' and some may wish to see those memories continued into the future.

They could endow the Building Fund, an annual or biennial lecture, an event, an annual award for youth, or even funding for a specialist library in connection with their Institute or on permanent loan to the local hospital or high school.

CATERING EQUIPMENT

Halls all need crockery, glassware, cutlery and kitchen equipment and other major capital items such as bain-maries, water urns and hotplates.

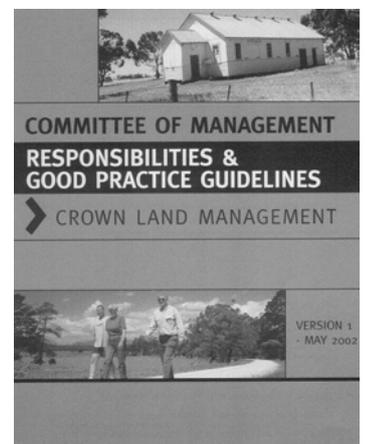
It could be that other Institutes in your area are planning acquisitions so the idea of talking with your neighbouring MIs on a regular basis could be the way to go.

Savings on these major items can be considerable by dealing with a specialist firm and one of these that will give Institutes quotes is **Hotel Agencies** of 298 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy. Tel: (03) 9419 7777.

We would be interested to hear of other suppliers who work in the same area who have provided 'good deals' for Institutes in Victoria and elsewhere.

MI MANAGEMENT MANUAL

This very useful manual is available from local DSE offices and is meant for those MIs operating on Crown land, but the good common-sense approach is applicable to any organisation.



“Contacts and bonds with inheritors of the fruits and legacies of the MI movement continue to strengthen and grow.”

Dr Frank Hurley,
MIV President



The Presidential smile has since grown with the announcement of the \$3.5 million State government funded restoration program for the Ballarat Mechanics' Institute..

(Pam Baragwanath Photo)

President's Greetings

GREETINGS to members of MIV and friends of Mechanics' Institutes, Schools of Arts, Athenaeums and kindred organisations everywhere.

On Easter Monday my wife Helen and I enjoyed a great day at Maldon where the town is celebrating the 150th anniversary of the finding of gold there.

The **Maldon Athenaeum** is a lovely building. Their Committee is very active and their library is a credit to them. I was delighted to present an MIV plaque to **Joy Leneaux-Gale**, Secretary of the Maldon Athenaeum established in 1863.

The Maldon plaque is No. 1 in what we hope will be a series growing into many hundreds as committees and local governments take up the opportunity to identify their MI building or the site of it, if the building no longer stands. Elsewhere in this newsletter you can see the design and the wording on the plaques.

Our Secretary, **Jim Lowden** shared the honours with former State Premier **Sir Rupert Hamer** in unveiling an MIV plaque in April on the recently restored **Tallarook Mechanics' Institute**. Congratulations to Libby Webster and her colleagues at Tallarook for their grand work.

Our third plaque will be placed on the **Ballan MI** when they have completed their major restoration and expansion work there later in the year.

The work of MIV Committee member **Paul Permezel** in helping to give substance to the idea of a plaque for MI buildings is very much appreciated.

Our indefatigable Secretary, Jim Lowden is leading the way in preparations for **Mechanics' Worldwide** the First International Conference on MIs to be held in September next year. The program is taking shape. Jim will attend the **US Membership Libraries Group** Annual Meeting in New York in October this year. And we are confident he will enthruse many prospective visitors to our landmark conference in Melbourne next year.

Our Vice-President **Catherine Milward-Bason** represented MIV at the **Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts** 170th celebrations earlier this year and in April Committeeman **Don Barker** travelled up to Bright to open the latest showing of our Travelling Exhibition **Remember the Mechanics?**

Contacts and bonds with inheritors of the fruits and legacies of the MI movement continue to strengthen and grow. I am sure you will find much to interest you in the pages of this Newsletter.

Best wishes to all readers.

Frank Hurley
PRESIDENT

SYDNEY CELEBRATES 170th BIRTHDAY With a Busy Month of Activities

“March was a busy month at the Sydney Mechanics’ School of Arts... There was a program of lectures, the opening of two exhibitions, a birthday luncheon and a bus tour of the Hawkesbury School of Arts.”

MARCH WAS A BUSY MONTH at the Sydney Mechanics’ School of Arts as they celebrated their 170th birthday in fine style.

There was a program of lectures, the opening of two exhibitions, a birthday luncheon and a bus tour of Hawkesbury and Wmndor Schools of Arts.

The month started with an early evening lecture on the *The Bibliotheca Alexandrina*, presently being built near the site of the greatest library in the ancient world, delivered by **Dr Alan Ventress**, Associate Director of State Records of NSW.

This was then followed by the opening of the two exhibitions. The first *Scientific and Other Useful Knowledge: 170 Years of Sydney Mechanics’ School of Arts* opened at the SMSA’s Pitt Street building by author and ABC radio presenter **Alan Saunders**.

The second was held at Sydney’s Mitchell library titled *From Governor Bourke to Governor Bashir: Celebrating 170 Years of Sydney Mechanics, Community Involvement* and was well attended by the wider community.

Two more lunchtime lectures followed: *Governor Bourke Hero or Villain* by Emeritus Professor **Brian Fletcher** and *Utilising Schools of Arts and Mechanics’ Institute Records as a Genealogical Tool* by Dr **Geoffrey Burkhardt** of the ACT Heraldry and Genealogy Society.

The **Birthday Luncheon** was held in line style, and rightly so, at SMSA’s headquarters and the MIV was represented by our Vice-President **Catherine Milward-Bason**.

The following week MIV Secretary **Jim Lowden** flew up to

Sydney and joined the bus tour which meandered out from Richmond for morning tea at the **Comleroy Road SA** (est. 1905).



Sir Richard Bourke (1777-1855)
Governor of NSW 1831-37. Benefactor and ‘Patron of the Sydney Mechanics’ Institution’ the wording carved on the base of his statue outside the Mitchell Library in Macquarie Street, Sydney.
(National Library of Australia lithograph)

The bright sunshine and hillside site overlooking the Hawkesbury River Valley highlighted the renaissance which was taking place in the historic old brick building with its enthusiastic Committee led by **Louise McMahon**.

It was then on to **East Kurrajong SA** (est. 1923) where dancing is ‘big’. They were very well geared up for catering in the supper room and there was a children’s playground beyond the new toilet block.

It was then on to the **Freeman’s Reach SA** (est. 1900) where again dancing was big. The huge oaks and the adjacent reserve with its granite cenotaph provided an ideal space to tether the horse or for a car rally to have lunch at the hall.

We then drove on to the **Wilberforce SA** (est. 192.0s) which has had a massive refit with an outstanding kitchen. The old biobox is still at the front of the hall and you could almost hear a young

‘Strop’ **John Cornel** selling popcorn and lollies whilst his father John screened the movies and his mother ran the ticketbox.

They had the lease on the theatre in the 1940s and 1950s and had considerable flair, for both **Chips Rafferty** and **Douglas Bader** attended screenings there. Indeed underneath the hall were some of the old fixed row theatre seats.

We did a drive past the historic **Windsor SA** (est. 1860), now in private ownership and operating as the **Blake Music Centre**.

Windsor is a visually eye-catching area and we went by the grand **Francis Greenway** designed **St Matthew’s Church** and cemetery, the last resting place of a number of Australia’s founders. It was then back to a sumptuous white napkin lunch in the refurbished Banquet Room of the **Richmond SA** (est. 1857), where committee members of the Sydney MSA and various other SAs joined in.

After lunch we took a tour over the amazing building, including its theatre and library where some of the old minute books and the various building plans were on display.

Richmond SA continues to be the cultural hub of the rapidly growing City of Richmond.

These activities were all coordinated by SMAs **Gail Quirk** and **Ellen Elzey**, with bus tour input from **Ron Rozzoli**, **Louise McMahon** and of course **Professor Roger Morris**.

Unfortunately Roger took a tumble just before the tour and was recovering in hospital, so we all signed the get well card.

Congratulations Sydney on celebrating your 170th in such an imaginative and hospitable way.

Welcome to our new Minister for Mechanics' Institutes

"It was generally felt that Institutes were better positioned to liaise with the new Department of Community Affairs for the maintenance and development of community halls."

FOLLOWING on the November Victorian elections and a Ministry shakeup when the **Hon. Bob Cameron** was appointed to the new Primary Industries portfolio and the **Hon. Candy Broad** became the new Minister for Local Government and of course Minister for Mechanics' Institutes. We wish Ms Broad well in her challenging new role and we plan a delegation to meet with her shortly.

Departmental legal officer **Karen Cusack** has left for greener pastures and Ministerial Adviser **Bernie Dean** went with Minister Cameron so we have some new ground to be hoed, but we most gratefully still have the Departmental Library Manager **Graham Dudley**, responsible for Mechanics' Institutes and libraries, who is an ex-officio MIV Committee member.

It was generally felt that Institutes were better positioned to liaise with the new Department of Community Affairs for the maintenance and development of community halls.

We still have our seven point plan put to Minister Cameron boiling along.

1. Further round of funding by way of Community Partnership Grants for special projects, collection reinforcement and conservation. *Still under consideration.* **2. Assistance in the development of a Master Strategic Development and Business Management Plan for the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria Inc.** *Assistance will be in the form of a facilitator and venue, and a date will set for the meeting shortly.* **3. Reinstatement of Municipal Rate and State Land Tax Exemption for Mechanics' Institutes as previously existed under the Municipal Corporations Act (1867).** *This item is still under investigation. In the meantime if your Institute is paying rates why not approach the Council, cap in hand, chiming widespread community benefit for either a rate remission or refund.* **4. One-off pilot grant to fund a round of Institute strategic building maintenance inspections.** *This item is boiling along quite well with a pilot-program of some twenty Institutes being costed for submission to the Minister.* **5. Assistance with the conduct of Training Seminars on Institute and event management and promotion for Institute staff and officers.** *These will be part of Regional Meetings to be staged in cooperation with the five regional offices of the Department.* **6. Review of existing legislation with a view to making the operation of Institutes more effective and efficient.** *This is in the melting pot and hopefully we will be able to pursue the relevant draft legislation and comment on same. Any move to replace the only remaining single Institute Act on the statute books, The Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act (1899), must be firmly resisted!* **7. Assistance with the conduct of five Regional Meetings of Institutes and Institute Managers during 2002-2004.** *Assistance would come by way of five DSE regional offices in Melbourne and country Victoria.*

... and our New State Librarian



Anne-Marie Schwirtlich Victoria's new State Librarian in the domed Reading Room
(Michael Clayton Jones Age photo)

THE APPOINTMENT of **Anne-Marie Schwirtlich** as Victoria's State Librarian to replace the retiring **Fran Awcock** is now in place.

Ms Schwirtlich comes from former positions at the **National Library**, **Australian War Memorial** and latterly the **Australian Archives** and has a strong technology and collecting background.

The restoration of the **State Library LaTrobe Reading Room** is to be opened in July.

The State library, through their **VicNet** web entity host the MIV website www.vicnet.net.au/~mivic and we look forward to continuing our relationship with them and working with their **Country Libraries Group** in the future.

In the meantime we wish **Fran** and her husband **Chris** well in their retirement.

They were both with us at the Kilmore Conference in 1998 when MIV was formed.

"... we wish Fran and ...Chris [Awcock] well in their retirement. They were both with us at the Kilmore Conference in 1998."

PLAQUES GO UP ON INSTITUTES. How about One for Yours?

“The first batch of the MIV commemorative plaques are now in place... Many are now known as Community or Memorial Halls... the plaques will help to renew the Mechanics' Connection.”

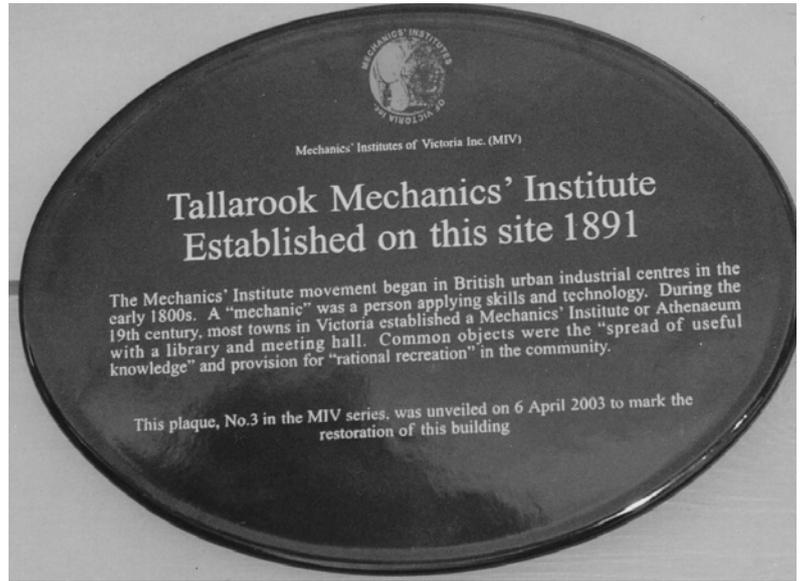
THE FIRST BATCH of the MIV commemorative enamel plaques are now in place. This project takes the dream of former Committeeman **Allan Tonkin** to reality.

It was Allan's dream to set up a trail of these plaques for cyclists and motorists to follow and to give MI buildings a higher profile in the wider community.

Many former Mechanics' Institute buildings are now known as Community or Memorial Halls and their 'roots' as Mechanics' Institutes have largely been forgotten but the plaques will help to reinstate the Mechanics' connection.

Thanks to the dedication of MIV Committeeman **Paul Permezel** this project has come to fruition. Paul has followed the plaque from cradle, through design, to a most satisfactory finish in collaboration with MIV President **Dr Frank Hurley**.

The plaque wording is *The Mechanics' Institute movement began in British urban industrial centres in the early 1800s. A "mechanic" was a person applying skills and technology. During the 19th century, most towns in Victoria established a Mechanics' Institute or*



THE NEW MIV PLAQUE IN PLACE AT THE TALLAROOK MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The distinctive Heritage Victoria blue background sets off the white text reversing through. At the head is a golden Athena reversing through, not only indicating the golden coin from where the image originated but also the value of knowledge. *(Kristina Holdaway photo)*

Athenaeum with a library and meeting hall. Common objects were the "spread of useful knowledge" and provision for "rational recreation" in the community

If you would like a plaque to put on your Institutes building or to commemorate a former Institute site please contact Paul Permezel by fax

on (03) 9499 4267.

The cost will be \$175.00 (inc. GST) and you will need to allow at least eight weeks for manufacture.

Communities may even be able to get sponsorship from local business or service clubs.

MARKETING YOUR INSTITUTE ... DON'T BE SHY

“There is really a need for every Institute to come up with a leaflet promoting itself.”

THERE'S ALL SORTS OF THINGS happening out there that we don't know about. A lot of people are heading bush for the weekend with their car clubs, art classes, bushwalking or environmental groups or some are busy planning family reunions. Real estate agents, Government agencies and funeral directors are also natural hall users. But who would think of regularly using the local Mechanics' Institutes as their base?

We were impressed with **Narbethong Hall's** bold approach, a 'For Hire' sign on the front of their building with a contact number.



Two innovative low-cost trifold leaflets sell the assets of **Pahran** and **Maldon** Institutes.

It may be that an Institute member needs to be rostered on over the period to put out the crockery and check the urn, but for a few hundred dollars that could buy a lot of paint or even crockery.

Then there's events like the hall centenary or 130th. Once the local Shire coordinated the 'Back tos', but the new depersonalised mega Shires' staff no longer consider this task a Council responsibility. So there's an opportunity for the local Mechanics' to make its mark in the community.

An Opportunity to Celebrate Birthdays, Benefactors, Boards and Beyond

“Exactly what form the birthday celebratory cake will take has yet to be determined... But one can be sure it will be a fitting multi-disciplinary affair.”

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of Athenaeums, Literary Institutes, Lyceums, Mechanics' Institutes, Schools of Arts and Workingmen's Institutes will be a great party. And whilst it will celebrate the birthdays of Institutes like the 150th of **Prahran** and **Kilmore** in Victoria, and **San Francisco Mechanics' Institute** and **Birmingham and Midland Institute**, there is the 250th of the **New York Society Library**, Montreal's **Atwater Library** will be 176 and Philadelphia's **Franklin Institute** will be 180, as it will be since the foundation of the **London Mechanics'**.

Then it will also be a decade since *Pioneering Culture: Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts in Australia* compiled by **Philip Candy** and **John Laurent** was published in 1994. Certainly in Australia that was when we all realised that there were many others out there that we could reach out to. Victoria formed the **Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria** in 1998, and elsewhere the **Membership Libraries Group** in the US was formed in 1996, and the **Association of Independent Libraries** in Britain in 1989.

But there will be more, we'll remember the benefactors: Britain's **John Anderson**, **George Birkbeck**, **Leonard Horner** and **Lord Henry Brougham**; and Australia's four brm brms, the Revs. **Dr John Dunmore Lang**, **Henry Carmichael**, **Dr John Woolley** and **Dr John Lillie** and the bigshot, **Sir Henry Parkes**. The USA had their **Timothy Claxton** and **Joshiah Holbrook**, and later **Andrew Carnegie** who funded some 2000 libraries around the world. (In Melbourne a suburb changed its name in the hope of attracting a library grant, but was unsuccessful, just as our application to the Carnegie Corporation to fund the publication of the Papers for the 2004 Conference was unsuccessful *But if anyone out there has influence, it is not too late!*) Canada had their **Joseph Howe** and **Dr Egerton Ryerson**, New Zealand had **Jonas Woodward** and Africa, **Thomas Pringle**. All have made their own distinctive impact on the Institute movement.

However their legacies have been nurtured and expanded by a huge army of generally men who have met together periodically to shepherd resources and manage their individual Institutes. The ladies have always been there in the background fundraising, catering and making doubly sure that their local Institute survived. Latterly ladies have joined the Institute Boards around the world and in some cases chair those Boards. Indeed the Institute movement is a superb example of volunteerism and equal opportunity. However the fact that so many Institutes have survived by scrimping and adapting is a great credit to those individual Boards.

But the whole Institute legacy is far more than just a collection of Institutes around the world, there is a plethora of successor public libraries, TAFE colleges and Universities, not to mention the many local government organisations, scientific and other societies that were sponsored within their walls.

The Institute libraries and halls have all played a great part in the cultural enlightenment of several generations of city and country folk, and will continue do so into the future.

Now all that is the cause for some real celebration and I am sure if Jeremy Bentham can be with us he will be! Otherwise we will save him a seat ...

As the worldwide brotherhood and sisterhood gather in Melbourne it will be a chance to shake hands, slap backs and have a quiet chat of how we have all made our contribution to the movement's continued success, and it is a real success story. And more importantly how we will chart its future.

Exactly what form the birthday and celebratory cake will take has yet to be determined, but its something we will be talking to our venue host the **Swinburne University of Technology** and its **National Institute of Circus Arts** about, but one can be sure it will be a fitting multi-disciplinary affair.

If your birthday date or hero is not mentioned, there is still a chance of having it and/or her/him listed on the roll of honour.



NEW ZEALAND'S MECHANICS' INSTITUTES

- David Verran, Auckland City Libraries/Tamaki Pataka Korero

'Thomson identified ninety-six local Mechanics' or Literary Institutes or Athenaeums, many of which became or formed the basis for libraries... Even in the 1920s and 1930s three more Institutes were formed.'

IN THE LAST NEWLETTER there were specific descriptions of the **Auckland, Leys and Oamaru Institutes**. This is a brief overview covering New Zealand Institutes from the 1840s to the 1930s. When surveying the history of New Zealand adult education, **AB Thompson** came to three conclusions about the roles of local Mechanics' Institutes. Firstly, he concluded that many of the lectures given were scientific in nature, and the role of spreading the word about science was soon overtaken by specialist scientific societies. Secondly, the Institutes provided more of a community focus, rather than being the prime learning institution in a particular population centre. **AL Kidson** described the **Auckland Mechanics' Institute** 'as New Zealand's first institution for free public instruction' and 'Auckland's social and intellectual centre'.



Auckland Mechanics' Institutes on the corner of High and Chancery Streets. The ramp at the right leads to Courthouse Lane. C. 1880s. (Auckland Public Library Collection)

He also noted that the hall was the only public meeting place available for many years. The First Auckland Borough Council met there and New Zealand's first choral society was established there.

Thirdly, the majority were formed to run libraries. For the 1840s to the 1930s period Thompson identified ninety-six Mechanics' or Literary Institutes or Athenaeums, many of which became or formed the basis for libraries. Interestingly he excludes the **Leys Institute**. Over the years another twenty-two organisations applied for funding to establish libraries.

The first Institutes closely followed the first colonists to **Auckland, Wellington and Nelson** in the 1840s. Similarly **Christchurch, Hawkes Bay and Dunedin** in the 1850s. From the 1860s secondary centres formed their own Insti-

tutes. Even in the 1920s and 1930s three new Institutes were formed.

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Auckland Mechanics' Institutes, 1880. For many years the front portion was used as a public hall, and the library attached to the Institute was given to the city as a nucleus to the Public Library. (Auckland Public Library Collection)



Celebrating 250 Years - PROVIDENCE ATHENAEUM

-Jonathan Bengston, Executive Director

"... a healthy library is a symbol of community's faith in itself."

"Indeed, entering the building is not unlike opening a book, you are transported out of the normal everyday present."

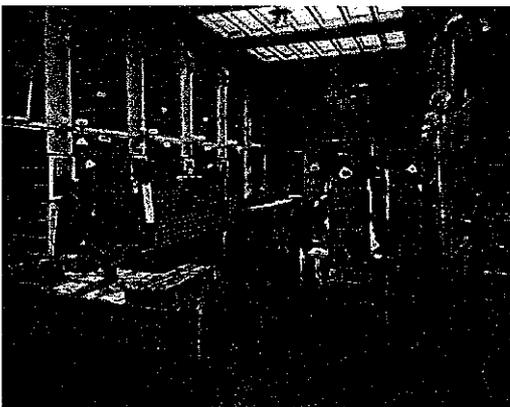
SOME YEARS AGO, when he was Librarian of Congress, **Daniel Boorstin** wrote that a healthy library is a symbol of a community's faith to itself. If so, then Rhode Island, with its superb academic libraries and its nationally recognised public library system is truly blessed. Even more remarkable is that this smallest of American States can claim to be home of two of the four oldest surviving libraries in America. The **Redwood Library and Athenaeum** founded in Newport in 1747 and its younger sister, the **Providence Athenaeum**, which this year is celebrating its 250th anniversary. These two member-supported libraries are rare surviving specimens of libraries formed before the public library movement of the mid-19th century. They both continue to carry on their centuries old mission of providing access to books to all who enter their doors. Their lineage derives an equal measure from ancient European libraries and societies from early American ideals of self-reliance and community service. Writing of the Athenaeum in 1924, Brown University President **WHP Faunce** proclaimed *'The fact that there are invisible roots running deep into the life of this State, roots such as no brand-new institution could possibly possess, should make us... prize very highly this venerable institution, redolent of the life of our State, and we should preserve and maintain it as we preserve and maintain our ancient liberties. This part of our soul-liberty, the expression of the early genius of Rhode Island.'*

In 1753 Providence was a city of about 3000 inhabitants and a growing rival to the populous Newport of more than double its size. At the time, Providence did not have a newspaper or a customs house or a bookshop or a public market or a printing press or even a bank. Nevertheless when 86 citizens of the town (including one who would sign the Declaration of Independence) decided to improve the life of their community they chose to pool their resources to build a library - that Library was **The Providence Library Company**, modelled after the **Philadelphia Library Company** established by **Benjamin Franklin** in 1731. The founders' stated aim was to provide a library that would be both practical and edifying. In the ensuing years the library played a role in defining the cultural, intellectual and social life of Rhode Island - and in its early years, a role in shaping America itself. In Benjamin Franklin's words such libraries *'improv'd the general Conversation of Americans, made the common Tradesmen and Farmers intelligent as most Gentlemen from other Countries and perhaps have contributed in some degree to the Stand so generally made throughout the Colonies in Defence of their Privileges'* (1771).

In the 1830s the Providence Library Company evolved into the Providence Athenaeum and moved into the new building in Benefit Street where it has remained ever since. Upon completion of the building, the Athenaeum's supporters claimed proudly that *'an institution, like the Athenaeum, is powerful for the good, and incapable of being perverted... to the purposes of evil... [in its very foundation lay the power] too diffuse throughout our borders the light of Learning and of Truth.'* The Greek-revival building was the only structure in New England ever to be designed by the great Philadelphia architect **William Strickland**. It reflects the communal dreams and aspirations of Rhode Island in the early 19th century. Today it stands as a testament to the foresight and devotion of those who truly understand the power of the written word to inspire the mind and fire the imagination. One enters the Athenaeum and is enveloped by books above, below and all around. Indeed, entering the building is not unlike opening a book you are transported out of the normal everyday present. It is a transcendent experience - whether you realise it consciously or not - the very act of entering the space and pulling books from the shelves is a reassertion and the affirmation of the best ideals of a civilised society. Curiosity. Inspiration. Wisdom. Learning. Community. Freedom.



Interior of the **Providence Athenaeum** Library.
(Providence Athenaeum photo)



The **Providence Athenaeum** Reading Room, showing Card Catalogue and fixtures in the early 20th century.
(Providence Athenaeum Collection)

OHIO MECHANICS' INSTITUTE'S 175th - Professor Maria Curro Kreppel

'OMI College of Applied Science holds fast to the founding vision... That the opportunity to learn should be available to all those who are able and willing to participate...'

THE OHIO MECHANICS' INSTITUTE was organised on 20 November 1828, joining those in New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Boston. Today, the **OMI** remains the oldest continuing operating Institute in the USA, and its vision remains consistent - that technical education should be based upon scientific and philosophical principles and available to all **19th Century Development**

The OMI's growth mirrored the region's commerce. In 1838 the Institute purchased its first home, The Trollope's Bazaar Building, which housed Frances Trollope's domed department store while she lived in Cincinnati and wrote her classic *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*. That same year, the OMI held its first Mechanics' and Citizens Ball, attracting 700 contributors, and its first annual exhibit of Arts and Manufactures, drawing even larger numbers to marvel at the technological products.

A decade later, aided by the industrialist Miles Greenwood, the Institute built the Greenwood building in the centre of the city. There the OMI engendered Cincinnati's Public Library and Art Academy, and its Apprentices Library schooled the young Thomas Edison. More than 200 students were enrolled in its School of Design before the Civil War.

From 1870 to 1888, the OMI sponsored 14 Grand Expositions of

Manufactures, Products and the Arts in partnership with Cincinnati's Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade. Half a million people attended the 1872 Exposition, viewed entries submitted from thirty States, and brought \$100,000 to the city. In 1888, the Centennial Exposition of the Ohio Valley and Central States premiered outdoor trellises of electric lights for the Commissioners who arrived at Cincinnati's Music Hall by gondola on the city's canal.

The end of the nineteenth century introduced electric lights into the OMI classrooms and Electrical Studies to the Institutes's Artistic, Mechanical and Architectural departments.

A New Century, A New Building and A New College

As the new century began, the Institute opened the city's first full-time technical school, offered continuing education for public school teachers, and boasted a student orchestra. In 1911, classes moved to a grand new structure, the **OMI Building**, a gift of **Mary Emery** in memory of her husband, industrialist **Thomas J Emery**. For 78 years the OMI Building served the Institute. Its roof garden supplied produce to feed the 1400 students, and its state of art auditorium hosted the city's symphony orchestra.

After World War I, a two-year study in Power Laundry attracted students from seventeen States, plus Canada, England and Scotland, bear testimony to the breadth of the OMI's world reputation in applied learning. Evolving undergraduate programs led to reorganisation in the 1950s and a decade later the Institute merged with the University of Cincinnati. In 1978, the new UC College was officially named the OMI College of Applied Science (OMI-CAS). In the 1970s, OMI-CAS offered its first baccalaureate degrees with required cooperative work experience. Since 1986, seniors have publicly displayed their design work at the annual Tech Expo, and on occasion,

seniors' projects have been rewarded with patents.

Entering a Third Century of Tradition and Innovation

Growth sweeps the College today as it did in 1900. Planning is underway to expand the newest campus on Victory Parkway in order to assure that hands-on learning and low student/faculty ratios (Typically 15/1) remain trademarks of an OMI-CAS education.

In its 175th year, the OMI College of Applied Science holds fast to the founding vision of the Ohio Mechanics' Institute: That the opportunity to learn should be available to all those who are able and willing to participate. That liberal learning in the arts and sciences should form the academic core of technical education. That learning is applied, and designs are functional. That technology responds to societal needs and promotes societal well-being.

Selected Sources: Clopper, EN. 'A History of the Mechanics' Institute, Cincinnati, 1823-1953' in *Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio*. 11.3 (1953) 1-15; Craig, JD. *An Address Delivered at a Meeting of the Citizens of Cincinnati Convened for the Purpose of Forming a Mechanics' Institute*. Cincinnati, 1829; Faig, JT. *OMI and the Industries of Cincinnati*. Cincinnati: OMI, 1919; *Fiftieth Anniversary of the Ohio Mechanics' Institute, November 20th, 1828-1878: Historical Sketch*. Cincinnati, 1878; Kendall, G. *A Sketch of the History of the Ohio Mechanics' Institute and a Statement of its Present Condition*. Cincinnati, 1853; Shearer, JL. *A Brief History of the Ohio Mechanics' Institute*. Cincinnati: OMI, 1928.



OMI's College of Applied Science, Victory Parkway Campus, Cincinnati built in 1989.
(OMICAS Collection)

GETTING READY FOR THEIR BIG BIRTHDAYS

OUR HOST INSTITUTE FOR THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE will be **PRAHRAN MECHANICS' INSTITUTE** established in 1854, and it is now the only Victorian Institute left to have its own statute of Parliament, *The Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act* (1899). Prahran will be celebrating its 150th in 2004.



The **Prahran Mechanics' Institute** building in the 1930s. It remains much the same today. *(Prahran Mechanics' Institute Collection)*

Prahran MI has a proud history with the founding of **Prahran Technical School**, which became **Prahran TAFE** and is now part of **Swinburne University** where the Conference will be staged.

Their visionary Board, under President **Alf Lazer**, and dynamic staff are very much in the vanguard of the renaissance of the Institute movement

Their manager, **Cathy Milward-Bason** did a tour of the North American Institutes in 2000 to see how they did it, and her deputy **Christine Worthington** will be attending the **Membership Libraries Group** AGM meeting in New York in October. Their Technology leader **Tim McKenna** has the catalogue online and website in hand

Prahran's Local History Library is well-renowned and they are building on that strength, by acquiring new and long out of print publications. Besides the reinstatement of a very successful ongoing lecture program, Prahran runs genealogy classes for the blossoming family history movement and have recently started Book Clubs.

Prahran extends a warm welcome to all visitors, but if you're attending **Mechanics' Worldwide** in 2004, Prahran MI will have the carpet rolled out. It will be the nerve-centre of conference action and where the tours leave from. Drop by and sign the visitor's book, pick up the newsletter or whatever, make yourself a cup of coffee, and sit down and have a read. And why not ask them for a piece of cake, Prahran has much to celebrate in their long and distinguished history. **Website: vicnet.net.au/~pmi.**



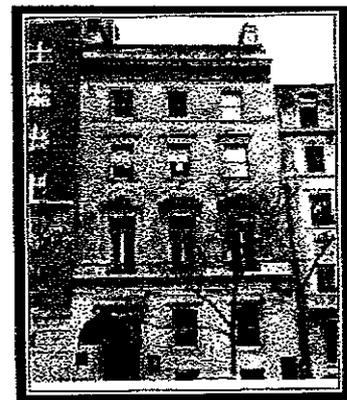
THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY

Established in 1754, this Institute reflects its solid role in New York's and indeed the nation's history amassing a collection of paintings and artifacts that are very much a history of cultural America

Six civic-minded people formed the subscription library which they believed 'would be very useful and ornamental to the City'. It was located in the Old City Hall in Wall Street and King George III granted it a Royal Charter in 1772.

It was looted by the British during their occupation of Manhattan during the Revolution and many of its books were either torn up for gun wadding or were stolen, before the remainder were hastily removed for safe-keeping to St Paul's Chapel. However some of the other books were later returned due to advertising and the library opened again in the Old City Hall in 1789.

The first US Congress initially occupied their building and the New York Society Library became the first Library of Congress.



After two more moves, it finally in 1917 moved into its present Italianate five-storey town-house headquarters, where it is still conducted as a 'home' for its members. It has a significant and large book collection, most of which is housed in the rear of the building in twelve stack levels and as a privilege of membership, you can browse nine levels of these stacks. **Website: nysoclib.org.**

"Our host... will be ...the Prahran Mechanics' Institute ... the only Victorian Institute left to have its own statute of Parliament..."

... "The US Congress occupied their building and the New York Society Library became the first Library of Congress..."

...AND MORE BIG BIRTHDAYS



BIRMINGHAM AND MIDLAND INSTITUTE

Located in Margaret Street in the commercial heart of Birmingham, this Institute was founded by an Act of Parliament in 1854 for 'the Diffusion of and Advancement of Science, Literature and Art amongst all Classes of Persons resident in Birmingham and the Midland Counties'.

The BMI still pursues its own range of cultural and educational activities, including a wide ranging program of Arts and Science lectures, exhibitions and concerts for members and others.

Its range of organisations who use their premises is like a who's who of Birmingham's cultural organisations.

It also has a number of long term tenants who rent permanent space in their building and these include Royal Institute of British Architects, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Birmingham Film and Television Festival, Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies and Midland Co-operative Society. **Website: bmi.org.uk**.

SAN FRANCISCO MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

Established in 1854, it started as a joint stock company with any person able to buy a \$25 share and pay a \$3 quarterly fee. These members had voting rights. Others who joined later paid a \$5 joining fee and \$3 quarterly and had no voting rights.

It started in the wake of the goldrush which saw the rapid growth of this west coast port, but there was no industry other than agriculture to support the region. It was the Institute who led the vanguard of development of San Francisco commerce with Expositions and classes for the up to 50% unemployed population. Its logo aggressively declared 'By hammer and hand all arts do stand'.

The Institute went on to flourish, until it was hit by the 1906 earthquake which levelled the building and destroyed the 250,000 volume library.

So it was back to the start and a new nine-storey building was constructed on the Post Street site in 1910.



Today the Institute is buzzing with activities around its 200,000 volume lending library. Leading the groups is one of the world's oldest chess clubs. There's book and film groups, regular members' lectures and a bi-monthly newsletter *Stereopticon* which is available in hard copy or on the web. This lists activities and new accessions to the library. And if you can't make it in to the library on account of sickness or infirmity, San Francisco has a generous benefactor who funds deliveries of books. **Website: milibrary.org**.



ATWATER LIBRARY AND COMPUTER CENTRE, MECHANICS' INSTITUTE OF MONTREAL

Montreal started in 1828 and it is the sole survivor of upwards of one hundred Institutes that were located across Canada.

Vice-President the **Rev. Henry Esson** summed up their-objectives 'to see to the instruction of its members in the arts and in the various branches of science and useful knowledge'.

But after a short growth-spurt the Institute was closed down in 1835 because of political unrest. However with the 1837 Rebellion past, it reopened again in 1840 with an offer of a free years' membership to former members. It was soon running night classes in reading, writing, arithmetic, English, as well as architectural, mechanical and ornamental drawing.

When it shifted it to its own new St James' Street home in 1855, it had the building adorned with banners 'To Make the Man a Better Mechanic. To Make the Mechanic a Better Man.'

The move to the present site on the corner of Atwater and Tupper Streets came in 1920. Here 'The Atwater' remains and continues to provide a library service to the adults and a branch of the Montreal Children's Library operates from the ground floor.

In 1980 The Atwater Library, as it has been known as from 1962, chose to enter the computer era and decided to run computer courses, which it still does.

The Atwater started its own web site in 1997 and has aggressively marketed its computer courses, the on-line catalogue and the building as an arts venue.

Due to financial constraints it now has a large roster of volunteers to help the Atwater maintain its range of services. **Website: atwaterlibrary.ca**

For 'the
Diffusion of and
Advancement
of Science,
Literature and
Art amongst all
Classes...'
Birmingham

'By hammer and
hand all arts do
stand.'

San Francisco

'To Make the
Man a Better
Mechanic.

To Make the
Mechanic a
Better Man.'

Montreal

180 YEARS OF LEARNING IN LONDON – Catherine Doherty, Birkbeck College

“Birkbeck, University of London has come a long way since the first meeting in the Crown and Anchor pub [in 1823], but the founding mission to extend educational opportunities still drives the college today.”

AROUND 2,000 people flocked to a London pub 180 years ago this year to witness the launch of London’s first ever Mechanics’ Institute. In an era when university education was restricted to a very narrow elite, **Dr George Birkbeck** established the radical **London Mechanics’ Institution**, which was dedicated to the education of working people who could not afford to study during the day and for the first time the world of art and science was opened up to ordinary Londoners.

Dr Birkbeck modelled the institution on the **Andersonian Institute** in Glasgow where he taught science between 1800 and 1803.

Instead of practical education in trades and skills, he was committed to the provision of education ‘without reference to age, occupation or condition’ and early lectures spanned subjects from the science of creation and political economy to language and music.

In 1866 following a major reorganisation, the Institute changed its name to the **Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution**, and to **Birkbeck College** in 1907. It was the first Institution to teach the physical sciences, beating both **Oxford** and **Cambridge**. At a time when teaching mathematics to the lower orders was considered to have been a precursor to the French Revolution, the idea of learning for all sent a shiver down the establishment spines. Some even accused Birkbeck, the son of a Yorkshire Quaker, of ‘scattering the seeds of evil’. The ‘mechanics’, of skilled artisans of the day, were an eager audience.

The belief that every citizen should understand and be able to contribute to scientific, economic and social change is as relevant today as it was in 1823. Part of the University of London since 1920, Birkbeck continues to challenge conventional wisdom by rejecting the narrow viewpoint that education should be linked entirely to employability. Instead we continue to offer students a real alternative to full-time study and a curriculum that is both wide-ranging and intellectually challenging.



George Birkbeck (1776-1841). ‘President of the London Mechanics’ Institution, Patron of the Glasgow Mechanics’ Institution, President of the Meteorological Society, Member of the Astronomical and Geological Societies, etc.’

(Birkbeck College Collection)



Birkbeck has championed widening participation in higher education since it was established and equality of opportunity in education remains a core objective. Today, one in four Birkbeck students come from a black or minority ethnic group, while 14% of undergraduates have no formal education when they enrol.

A commitment to ground breaking teaching and research also remains. Ninety-one per cent of Birkbeck’s academic staff are currently active in research, the highest rate for any multi-faculty institution in London and the fifth highest in the UK. Over 84% of this research is rated as being of international importance. This research feeds directly into our teaching programs, where we have been consistently rewarded with top marks in the Teaching Quality Reviews.

Birkbeck, University of London has come a long way since the first meeting at the **Crown and Anchor Tavern** pub, but the founding mission to extend educational opportunity still drives the college today.

London Mechanics’ Institution, 1826. ‘Established 2nd December 1823 for the purpose of increasing the knowledge, refining the taste and eliciting the Genius of the Artisans of London.’
(From *Register of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 3. From an engraving of J Wesley, after a drawing of L Herbert)

OUT OF AFRICA, INDIA AND ELSEWHERE - INSTITUTES AROUND THE WORLD

THE FOLLOWING is an attempt to do a brief round up of the early establishment of Institutes in the various countries around the world and comments, corrections and/ or updates would be most welcome.

AFRICA

South African Mechanics' Institution, Cape Town (1828), **South African Popular Library** (1834), **Natal and East African Society** or **Natal Society** (1851), **Port Elizabeth Mechanics' Institute** (1849), **Durban Mechanics' Institute** (1850). Ref: PC Candy, 'Mechanics' and Literary Institutes in Colonial South Africa'. Ms.

AUSTRALIA

Tasmania: Van Diemen's Land Mechanics' Institution, Hobart (1827), **NSW: Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts** (1833), **Newcastle Mechanics' Institute** (1835), **Maitland Mechanics' Institute** (1839), **South Australia: South Australian Literary and Scientific Society**, London and Adelaide, (1834), **Adelaide Mechanics' Institute** (1838), **Victoria: Melbourne Mechanics' Institution** (1839), **Portland Mechanics' Institute** (1844), **Geelong Mechanics' Institute** (1846), **Queensland: North Brisbane School of Arts** (1949), **Western Australia: Western Australia Book Society** (1840), **Swan River Reading Society** (1840), **Perth Mechanics' Institute** (1851), **Northern Territory: Palmerston Mechanics' Institute**, later **Darwin** (1880?), **Macarthur River Mechanics' Institute** (1895). Refs: PC Candy/J Laurent. *Pioneering Culture: Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts in Australia*. 1994; P Baragwanath. *If the Walls Could Speak: A Social History of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria*. 2000.

CANADA

St Johns, Newfoundland (1827), **Montreal** (1828), **Toronto** (1830),

Halifax, Nova Scotia (1831) **Hamilton**, Quebec, **Windsor Mechanics' Institute** (1855).

CHINA

Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Canton (1837)

EGYPT

Cairo, Port Said

ENGLAND

London Mechanics' Institution (1823), **Newcastle-Upon-Tyne** (1824), **Leeds Mechanics' Institution** (1824), **Bath Mechanics' Institution** (1825), **Morpeth Mechanics' and Scientific Institute** (1825), **Liverpool Mechanics' and Apprentices Library** (1824), **Newport Athenaeum and Mechanics' Institution** (1825), **Plymouth Mechanics' Institute** (1825), **Portsmouth Mechanics' Institution** (1825), **Stepney** (1826). Ref JW Hudson, *History of Adult Educadon*. 1851.

FRANCE

Charles Dupin reported that there were Institutes operating in 59 towns by October 1825. Ref: C Dupin. *Mathematics Practically Applied to the Useful and Fine Arts*. Trans. G Birkbeck. 1827.

INDIA

Calcutta Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (1839), **Bombay Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge**.

IRELAND

Dubin (1837), **Belfast** (<1825), **Cork** (<1825), **Armagh** (<1825), **Milngavie** (1836), **Clonmel** (1842), **Carriack-on-Suir** (1840s), **Tipperary** (1840s), **Cashel** (1840s). Ref: TEC Leslie. *Inquiry into the Progress and Present Condition of Mechanics' Institutions*. 1852.

NEW ZEALAND

Auckland Mechanics' Institute, **Nelson Mechanics' Institute** and **Port Nicholson**, later **Wellington**

all formed in 1841.

Ref: AB Thompson, *Adult Education in New Zealand*. 1945.

RUSSIA

St Petersburg Mechanics' Institute founded under government auspices (1831)

SANDWICH ISLANDS

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh School of Arts (1821), **Glasgow Mechanics' Institution** (1823), **Kirkaldy Mechanics' Institution** (1825), **St Andrews** (1825?), **Arbroath Mechanics' Institution** (1832). Ref: T Coates, *Report of the State of Literary Scientific and Mechanics' Institutions*. 1841.

USA

Franklin Institute, Philadelphia (1823), **Maryland Institute**, Baltimore (1825), **Boston Mechanics' Institute** (1827), **Milbury Lyceum Society** (1826), **Rochester Athenaeum** (1829), **Salem Lyceum Society** (1830). Mechanics' Institutes stuck to the large cities, whereas the Lyceums chose the small regional towns. Refs: C Bode. *The American Lyceum*. 1956.

WALES

Swansea Tradesmen's and Mechanics' Institution (1826), **Merthyr Tydvil Mechanics' Institution** (1830), **Aberstwyth Literary Scientific and Mechanics' Institution** (1850)

WEST INDIES

Jamaica, Bahamas

Survival of a Species...

'It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change.'

CHARLES DARWIN (1809-82)

This list is an attempt to give establishment dates for the early Institutes around the world and we would welcome corrections and / or updates.

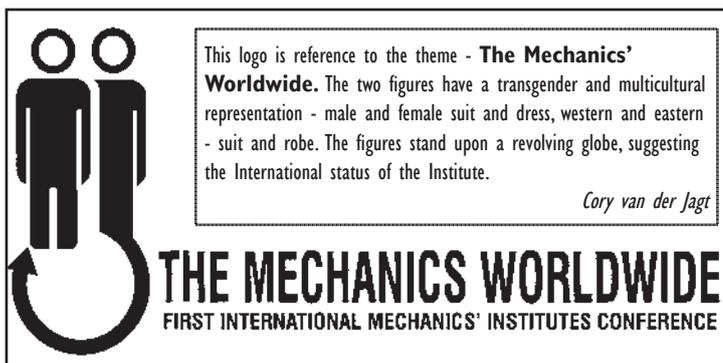
THE GENESIS OF A LOGO – Badging an International Conference

IT WAS ALMOST A YEAR AGO, when it was realised that *Mechanics' Worldwide 2004* really did have legs, and we wondered how we should badge the Conference. Our overall host was **Prahran Mechanics' Institute** and some of their early classes were in technical drawing and design, but that was more than a century ago. Since then their classes evolved into the **Prahran Technical College**, which became the **Prahran TAFE College**, which in turn merged into **Swinburne University of Technology**. We thought it only right that since the Conference was being held on **Swinburne's Prahran Campus** that their graphics students be given the opportunity to design a logo. We put the challenge to the students and we received three entries.

Since then we have been advised that the Swinburne University has generously offered to sponsor its post-graduate students to design the whole suite of Conference stationery and we have recently briefed their design team headed up by **Trevor Streader** and **Stephanie Wong**.

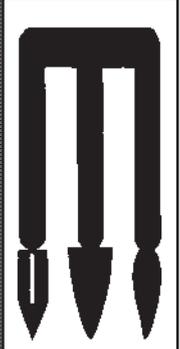
The Committee did consider the entries and it was felt that the outright winner was **Cory van der Jagt**, with **Tan Wah Meng Roi** second and **Nicole van Dijk**, third. We do sincerely thank the students for their work and hope that they will be with us sometime during *MW 2004*.

"The Mechanics' Worldwide. The two figures have a transgender and multicultural representation ... The figures stand on a revolving globe, suggesting the International status of the Institute."
Cory van der Jagt



This logo uses the letter 'M', to represent the title of the Institute as well as referring to columns often associated with places of learning. At the base of the letter are three different references to aspects of the Institute: Literature - Pen; Workingmen - Shovel; and School of Arts - Brush.

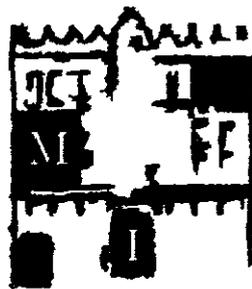
Cory van der Jagt



The logo (bottom right) consists of a person holding a book and he is deep in thought (The thinking person), represents the Mechanics' Institutes which are primarily a place of learning where lectures were delivered. (It also shows facilities of the place: reading room and lending library). I designed an outline of a person who does not have a face to show which race or gender he/she is. This represents the movement that spread throughout parts of the world. And that person could be of any nationality or gender.

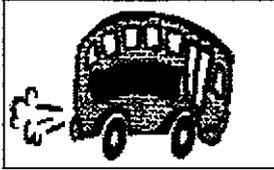
The circle which represents the globe, shows that the Institutes are located around the world. The contrast shows the person coming out of the circle (globe) to involve the people around it. At the same time, it perceives the Institutes as a public place where anyone can join in its activities.

Tan Wah Meng Roi



Nicole van Dijk's entry (at left) came with no notes but one can see the elements of the typical suburban multi-storey Mechanics' hall topped with an ornamental pediment. There appears to be a statue in the middle. The columns coming down from the top of the ground floor could well represent the pillars of wisdom. The letter 'M' representing the Mechanics' is placed at a high level, and the letter 'I' is placed at the centre of the ground floor, where one would expect the entrance to be.





TRAVELLING EXHIBITION MOVES ON AROUND THE COUNTRY

Marshal the troops, book the Travelling Exhibition, Remember the Mechanics? and start planning your cleanup or restoration campaign now.

REMEMBER THE MECHANICS? the MIVs Travelling Exhibition has recently completed its showing at its fourteenth venue at Bright.

Remember the Mechanics? has several more bookings into the future, but if you would like to secure it for your Institute or Historical Society you can book it with the Travelling Exhibition Coordinator, **Pam Baragwanath** on (03) 9876 5164.

The Exhibition can provide a focus for a big push by your Institute or Society to gain more of the history of the Institute and to gain support for a restoration program.

Invite your local MP to launch it in conjunction with a dance, musical or trivia night.

You could even mark the occasion by unveiling a permanent plaque (see page 6 of this newsletter).

It gives you an opportunity to have a working bee and call for pictures, documents and anecdotes in connection with the Institute or it could work as a Back to for your town.

You could even do a pilgrimage to the local cemetery to pay homage to the founders of your Institute which has no doubt played a major part in your community down through the years.

Marshal the troops, book **Remember the Mechanics?** and start planning your cleanup or restoration campaign now.

And please don't forget your local schools, for this will give them an opportunity to find the real meaning of the 'Mechanics' sign painted on the front of their hall. It will also give them some pride in knowing they are a part of a great legacy and heritage.

Naturally we would like to have some feedback so as we can plan future travelling ventures for your community. You're not alone!



MIV Committeeman **Professor Alex Tyrrell** took the above photo in the **Kensal Green Cemetery**, outside London. It shows the **Family Mausoleum of George Birkbeck, MD**.

Alex was checking out the gravestones for his forthcoming book, on the reformers and their final resting places, to be published this year.

The side inscription, from the top is to one of his sons **George Henry** who was a civil engineer.

BIRKBECK'S LAST RESTING PLACE IN KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY

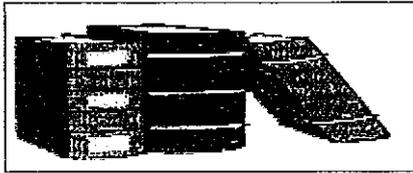
Birkbeck had one son, **William Lloyd** (b. 1807), by his first marriage to **Catherine Lloyd** in May 1806. Catherine was to die shortly after William was born in 1807. William subsequently became President of the London Mechanics' Institution in 1843, two years after his father's death.

George Birkbeck then married **Anna Margaret Gardner** in 1817. There were five children from his second marriage: **Anna Margaret** (b. 1818); **George Henry** (b. 1820); **Charles** (b. 1822); **Frances Georgina** (b. 1824); and **Thomas Brougham** (b. 1826).

Throughout his whole life Birkbeck continued campaigning for the common man. Indeed it may not have been just coincidence that his campaign for universal penny postage, saw its introduction on his 64th birthday, 10 January 1840.

His crusade against capital punishment; saw him participating in a successful petition for the reprieve of seven Chartists who had been sentenced to death for their part in the Newport uprising.

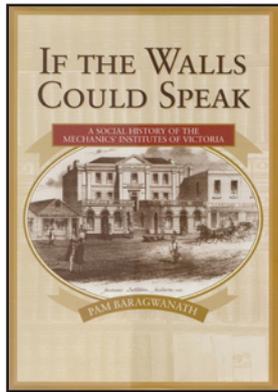
Birkbeck died on 1 December 1841 and the funeral took place on 13 December 'Heavy rain did not prevent the attendance of about a thousand people, the procession from Finsbury Square being headed by members of the Mechanics' Institution walking four abreast...' and so they farewelled 'its [the London Mechanics' Institution's] Father and its Friend'.



MECHANICS' INSTITUTES/ SCHOOLS OF ARTS BOOKSHELF

Ballaarat Mechanics' continues to show the way with its latest publication: Proceedings: Papers Delivered at the Ballaarat Mechanics' Institute during 2002. The Twilight Talks Series deserved a wider audience and their publication will enable that to be achieved.

IF THE WALLS COULD SPEAK: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTES OF VICTORIA - Pam Baragwanath. 2000. 356 pages. Hardbound. \$55.00, plus \$7.00 postage.



This handsome volume is illustrated with over 600 plates, a list of all known Institutes in Victoria, and includes an extensive bibliography and index.

This is a landmark volume in the history of the Mechanics' Institute movement.

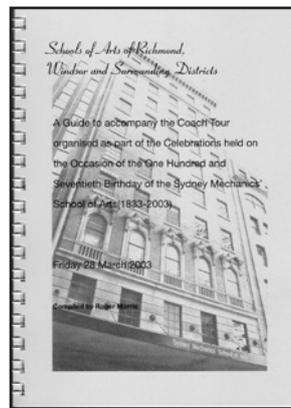
It's appearance has led to a great resurgence of public interest in MIs and several previously unknown MIs have been discovered since it was published.

Available from Pam Baragwanath, 4 O'Neill Way, Waranwood, V 3134. Tel: (03) 9876 5164.

SCHOOLS OF ARTS OF RICHMOND, WINDSOR AND SURROUNDING DISTRICTS - Roger Morris. 2003. 24 pages. Paperbound. \$15.00 Posted.

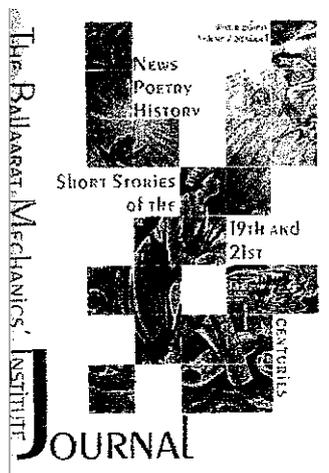
This is the second of the tour guides to the Schools of Arts

produced by the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts and was issued in conjunction with their 170th anniversary celebrations. It includes the oldest area of Australian settlement and covers the 'country' Institutes of Comleroy Road, East Kurrajong, Freeman's Reach and Wilberforce and the 'sub-urban' Institutes of



This is an excellent guide for a most interesting day's drive. **PS. The first volume, SAs of the Sutherland Region is also available in reprint at \$15.00 posted.**

Both are available from: Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney, NSW 2000.



BALLAARAT MECHANICS' INSTITUTE JOURNAL - Ron Southern/Jill Blee, editors. 2003. Vol. 2, No. 1. 56 pages. \$20.00 for two issues posted.

Covers a miscellany of information of News, Poetry, History: Short Stories of the 19th and 21st centuries. Includes an article by MIV Committeeman Don Barker, **Rhetoric and Reality: The Role of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria.**

The *Journal* also showcases the wide range of the pictorial images held in Ballaarat's large library of monographs and serials.

The Proceedings of the Ballaarat Mechanics' Institute



Papers delivered at the Ballaarat Mechanics' Institute in 2002.

This volume takes in all the Papers that were delivered at Ballaarat MI's 2002 Series of **Twilight Talks**. \$15.00 posted.

It also includes the talk on 'Democracy' given last November by **Dr Thomas Mitchell**, former Provost of Trinity College, Dublin.

Both the *Journal* and *Proceedings* are available from the Ballaarat Mechanics' Institute, 117-119 Sturt Street, Ballarat, V 3350.

The Victorian 2000 National Conference Tour and the two subsequent tours from Sydney show there is a real interest in the MISA movement. Regional tours, well advertised, could be a regular occurrence in the future.



AROUND THE INSTITUTES

Contributions are gratefully accepted. If you wish to have your news included in the next issue of this newsletter please post your articles to MIV, Box 1080, Windsor, V 3181 or email to pmiinc@vicnet.net.au by 1 September.

BALLAARAT (est. 1855)

As the members of the Ballaarat Institute stood listening to the launch of **John Brumby's** Regional plans for Ballarat in their hallowed walls, few could have wished for better words.

There was a \$3.5 million package to restore the Institute and its theatre and link it by walkway to the nearby **Her Majesty's Theatre** to make the Institute an integral part of Ballarat's Arts Precinct.

Mr Brumby said 'They are both icons of Ballarat and to see them updated and linked is a wonderful initiative.' A major part of the plan was to refurbish the presently unused 400 seat theatre for smaller and alternative productions.

Now it is up to the Ballarat folk and the Government to 'deliver' on these plans in the hope of having it all ready for a major seminar on the 150th anniversary of the Eureka Rebellion in December 2004. Hopefully we will be able to see the restoration progress on our post-**International Conference Goldfields Bus Tour**. The success of the first series of **Twilight Talks** last year, and their recent successful publication, has meant a further series is being planned for this year.



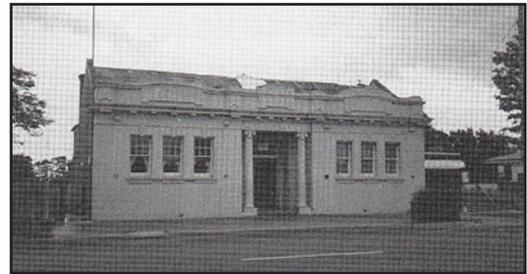
Victoria's Treasurer, **John Brumby**, certainly made the launch of his Regional package for Ballarat 'a hit' just prior to the last State elections. *(Government Media Unit photo)*

The **Ballaarat Mechanics' Journal** is now into its third number and the number of subscribers is increasing with each issue. A subscription is \$20.00 for two issues and it can be sent to: Treasurer, **Clive Brooks**, Ballaarat Mechanics' Institute, 117 Sturt Street; Ballarat; V 3350.

BALLAN (est. 1860)

When Ballan stalwart **Derek Edwards** read that the MIV's plaques were near reality he was on the phone expressing interest. Ballan's having a big restoration program with some \$800,000 for the work. Derek thought it would be great to ensure that the

building would continue to be part of the Mechanics' legacy and what better way to do it than put a plaque on it for everyone to see.



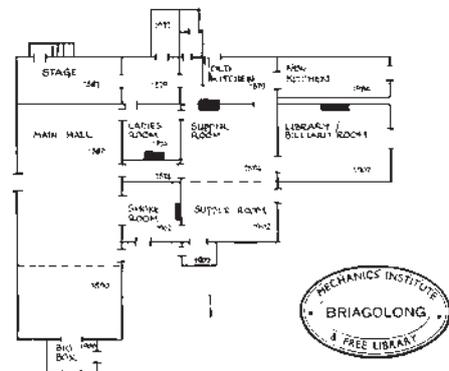
The unveiling is planned for later in the year. And if anyone ever doubts the power of one, then you don't have to look any further than Ballan, but in their case it was really two, Derek and his wife **Marion**.

The Institute dates from 1860, but their current hall was opened in 1887.



BRIAGOLONG (est. 1874)

Briagolong's Secretary **Margaret Anderson**, reporting in states 'We had an extension built in 1999 to house our local Community House as well as general use. We are very proud of our building but it still needs much work on the old section eg. painting, roofing. etc. as being an old building it takes a lot of upkeep.' We know and good luck!



Plan showing the various extension to the **Briagolong Institute** since it commenced in 1874. Source: Linda Barraclough/Dorothy Watt. **Briagolong Mechanics' Institute: More Than a Place of Amusement**. Kapana Press, 1994.

Around the Institutes *continued*

BRIAGOLONG *continued*

The bookshelves have had doors put on them to protect the library collection some of which dates back to the 19th century and it is now all catalogued. (Briagolong was one of the recipients of a **Mechanics' Institutes' Community Partnerships Grant** in 2000.) Their story and determination is a great community example as the oldest surviving Gippsland Institute.



BRIGHT (est. 1886)

This is the second of Bright's MI buildings and it was designed by Wangaratta architect **JE Lindholm** and was opened in 1920. It was the most recent venue for the showing of MIV's Travelling Exhibition **Remember the Mechanics?** MIV Committeeman **Don Barker** travelled up to Bright to open the Exhibition which was staged in the newly renovated Institute and Public Library. It is a great credit to the **Save Our Library Group** who opposed the shifting of the library from the Institute and to those who came to realise that by extending the building everyone gained. Congratulations to all concerned, you can all be justifiably proud.



BUNINYONG (est. 1859)

The photo above was taken by **Frank Thomas of Enviro Heating** of Buninyong. Frank was not so sure of the history of the Institute but thought we would be interested in the picture.

The picture shows the two present uses, that of its tenant **Buninyong Books** and as the **Tourist Information Centre** and it's also the local/ family history centre. The Institute building was donated to the people of

Buninyong by benefactor **Robert Allan**. Allan had migrated from Scotland in the early 1840s and got into flour-milling at Kilmore. In 1853 he sold up in Kilmore, went back to Scotland, but returned to Victoria a short time later and settled in Buninyong and went into business there. He became Mayor and in 1866 circulated a letter 'I have been rewarded by seeing the reading room filled in the evening with the working classes.' He died in 1878. A bequest to the Presbyterian Church for the 'development of curricula and materials for Sunday School classes' and the education of country Presbyterian children, reflected his lifelong interest in education.

It is therefore not surprising that in 1874 a School of Design was started, and evening courses were being held in the Buninyong Temperance Hall.



CASTLEMAINE (est. 1855)

The latest issue of the **Friends of Castlemaine Library (FOCAL)** newsletter *The Flyer* reports that work has finally started on the Library renovations in November and that the extended library is expected to be completed in the coming November.

The newsletter quotes an item from '**Old Codger**' and indeed lessons can be learned from history.

'I recalled the heady days not long after the surprise result of the 1999 State elections, when the incoming Labour government announced it would honour its pre-election promise to provide \$1 million towards the upgrade of our library.

This, together with a somewhat nebulous amount coming from Shire Funds, would/should at last put the library renovations on a firm foundation (pardon the pun). [On the foundations, appears to be where a great deal of the money is going.]

That was over three years ago. The original plans have been revised, spiralling costs have eaten into the funding, and the tendering process has been drawn out, meaning we will be getting less done to our library while building costs, etc. continue to climb - less for more an all-too-modern theme.'

And then '**Old Codger**' gets back to his original topic of airconditioning and fans ...

Secretary **Jenny McIntyre** on a positive note advises 'the library will be twice as big as it was. Also the Theatre people got an Arts Grant that will cover airconditioning for the Theatre and the Library'.

FOCAL's President **Denise Jepson** stood in the recent Mt Alexander Council elections when FOCAL surveyed all the candidates on 'What they thought about Library Services', and their answers were available in the Library for everyone to read!

There's book reviews and more in their newsletter and for an annual \$3 individual, \$5 family membership it's probably worth it just to see how to get up a good news sheet. Send your money to Jenny McIntyre, RMB 2445, Yandoit Track, Yandoit, V 3461. Tel: (03) 5476 4308.

Around the Institutes *continued*

FOOTSCRAY (est. 1856)

One of the best kept secrets in the library world just has to be the **Footscray Mechanics' Institute**, nestled amongst its cluster of buildings on a triangular block of land fronting Nicholson Street.

Secretary/Manager **Lin Scholz** has been silently beavering away there for years and she has built up quite a collection of general reference and recreational reading, with a large print section for the seniors.

The book stacks are well ordered and signed and there is a place for everything with a cosy reading nook where the two daily newspapers are neatly folded on the table. And for a lighter read there's a series of magazines neatly piled on another reading table.

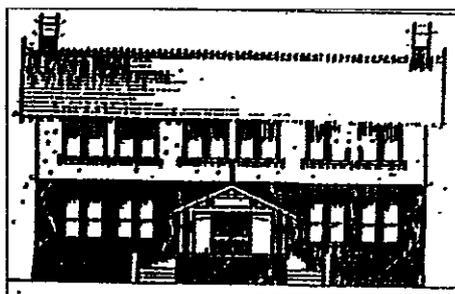
Each book is plastic covered, the spine carries a logo of category and is barcoded on the back for easy wand-swipe borrowing.

On the workstation is the computer terminal and two security monitors which scan what is happening in the back aisles of the Institute building.

There's a welcoming promotional tri-fold leaflet and a booklet detailing a brief history of the Institute for the taking. In the rack is the latest edition of the quarterly 'New Books' news sheet.

There's a friendly atmosphere about Footscray and the members all appear to be Lin's personal friends, chatting away as they drop by to exchange their books. There's the Institute's Board Room out the back and upstairs is the large billiard room, with two full size tables and cues in locked racks.

Now there has to be a possibility of an **Inter-Institute Billiards Challenge between Footscray and Eaglehawk**. Perhaps there are even other Institutes who would also throw their bats into the ring? Most of the two-storey early 1900s Footscray building is tenanted, but Lin has the overall responsibility to look after the fabric and roofs ... and that's no easy task.



Front Elevation of the Footscray Mechanics' Institute building from the architect's 1912 drawings. (Footscray MI Collection)

The fact that Footscray still survives is a great credit to a very canny Board who are to be congratulated on providing such a facility for the community.

Membership is \$3 per year, with a \$1 joining fee, but you don't have voting rights for fifteen years. I did say a canny board, but careful could equally well be used. 'It [FMI] is truly a part of the living history of the west.'



FRANKSTON (est. 1880)

The Frankston Institute's major tenant is the **Mornington Peninsula Family History Society** and my have they been busy. Their hefty newsletter *Peninsula Past Times* arrives quarterly with most interesting items on things local and beyond.

In the Frankston Institute in Bay Street they house their large genealogy library and the banks of search computers and microfiche machines. Their well-used research centre is close to public transport and is open four days a week, including one evening for two hours. Recently they had a very successful 'Scanning Day' when valuable documents and photos were copied for members and others to a personal CD-ROM, complete with a contents label.

Also reported is the transfer 500 boxes of the former records of the Shires of Mornington, Hastings and Flinders to the Public Record Office in North Melbourne. Congratulations to MPFHS Chair **Lynne Emblin** on her being awarded a Centenary Medal for service to the community through history.

Membership of the MPFHS is \$30.00 per year with newsletter, or you can subscribe to the newsletter only for \$10.00. Send your sub to Membership Secretary: **Sue Raso**, 11 Meribil Close, Mt Eliza, V 3930.



FRYERSTOWN (est. 1863)

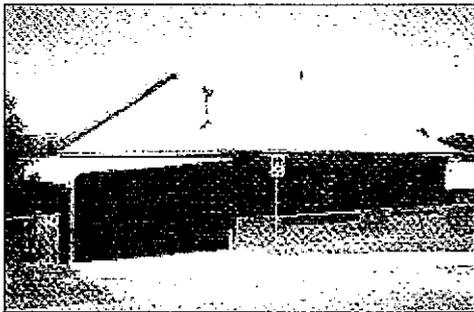
The **Burke and Wills Mechanics' Institute** at Fryerstown is the sire of a huge antiques weekend each year. It is one of only two Institutes named for people, the other being Beechworth's Robert O'Hara **Burke Athenaeum**. A chance meeting with Mrs **Joyce Carter** at the Tallarook Institute brought to light a land grant relating to Fryerstown and she has kindly forwarded a copy to us which states **The Queen to the Trustees of the Mechanics' Institute at Fryerstown** dated 28 January 1888, for 'thirty-nine perches and two-fifths of a perch, more or less'. The trustees listed are **George Levi Carter**, boot manufacturer, **Samuel Hawkins Clark**, accountant, **Mark Amos**, surveyor, **Samuel Hill Howitt**, miner, **James Reid**, merchant, **Samuel Scotson**, collector, and **George Hogg**, carpenter. Interestingly enough it is signed by **Sir Henry Brougham Loch**, no doubt named for that great social reformer and Mechanics' Institute supporter **Lord Henry Brougham**.

Around the Institutes *continued*

HEALESVILLE (est. 1884)

After a couple of bleak years as a hairdresser's shop the Healesville Mechanics' building is to be again become an arts centre. It has been purchased by **Debra MacDonald** and it will trade as **The Artisan's Gallery**. The opening is planned for July after which it will serve coffee and light meals.

An interesting aside to the Healesville MI is that the two billiard tables that were once in the building have been located. One is in use at the Yarra Glen RSL and the other up until a short time ago was under the Shire Offices at Healesville, but since has been taken away for refurbishment by **Alcock and Taylor**, the same firm which had built the table around 1900.



JUMBUNNA (est 1894)

Located 6km from Kommburra, **Jumbunna Hall** is host to a regular **Bush Market** which is held on the first Sunday of each month starting at 10am: It's well worth a visit for the home made jams, knitting, plants, woodwork, bread, vegetables, spinning, weaving ... and a delicious lunch.

Our historian **Pam Baragwanath** was at Jumbunna recently and 'was delighted to see the wonderful mural on the rear wall depicting life in Jumbunna as well as other historical relics, Honour Rolls, etc. Opened in 1894 the hall has been looked after admirably by the small local community'.

If the Market or anything else grabs your fancy you can phone **Mrs M Smith** on (03) 5657 3241 for directions.



KALLISTA (est. 1914)

Built just prior to World War I, the building was unlined and had little use during the War years. The Institute became a school in 1919 and after a few years it was decided to have a major push to finish the hall. These works were completed in 1924 when the Prime Minister, **Mr SM Bruce** came and officially opened it.

In common with many other Victorian Institutes, it holds Honour Boards for both World Wars.

The energetic Hall Committee looked like being lumbered with a huge bill to replace the floor, but the Shire of Yarra Ranges realised the contribution of the Hall and the Committee to the community and agreed to pick up the bill. Kallista stalwart **Venetia Barnard** reports that they have recently received a \$2200 grant to replace the front steps into the Hall and works starts soon.

It is hoped to include Kallista on the **International Conference Tour of the Yarra Valley** next year.



KILMORE (est. 1854)

Kilmore's occasional newsletter, *The Kilmore Mechanic* shows their new President **Graham Holdaway** has taken on his new role with a very business-like approach and has sought an ongoing coordinator for each of the Institute's projects.

The now autonomous Kilmore U3A, Friends of the Monument Hill and Kilmore Celtic Festival, as well as the local Line and Ballroom Dancing groups, continue to have insurance cover under the Institute's policy.

In addition to the annual George Hudson Awards which were this year chaired by *Grass Roots* editor **Megg Miller**, there has been the a **Chalk and Cheese Night** to get ideas for the Institute's future direction from a wide section of the Kilmore community.

After the **Celtic Festival** at the end of June, it's into planning for the **Annual Meeting** on 10 August where the speaker will be the Chief Justice of Victoria **The Honourable Mr Justice JH Phillips, AC** who will talk on 'The Trial of Edward Kelly, Bushranger'.

The **Gardens of Kilmore Open Day** will be held on Sunday 19 October and this year the opening speaker will be **Allan Windust** author of *Waterwise House and Garden*. Proceeds from the day funds their Hudson Awards. Kilmore's also topping up their **Medical Library** which is on permanent loan to the Kilmore Hospital.



LANCEFIELD (est. 1868)

Lancefield's building has just been repainted on the exterior and has had the original urns on the top pediment reinstated. It really looks a much-loved building and indeed it is.

Since the building of the new Youth Centre at the rear, the inside of the Hall has had a substantial makeover in recent

Around the Institutes *continued*

LANCEFIELD *continued*

years and the stage has been relocated to the opposite end of the building.

The Committee has always been on the lookout for money-making opportunities and was involved in a television series a few years back and did quite well from it.

They are at present celebrating 125 years in their present building.



MALDON (est 1863)

Maldon's 150th celebrations since gold was discovered there in 1853 also served as an ideal opportunity to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Maldon Athenaeum.

Since the Bookmobile ceased coming to town library membership continues to increase and they now open on three days a week and the volunteer numbers have grown under the leadership of **Joy Leneaux-Gale**.

Maldon's produced a tasteful new leaflet reflective of 'The charm and graciousness of the Library is enhanced by stained glass windows, antique furniture, Victorian prints and etchings.'

We would be interested to know if any other Institute has stained glass besides Maldon and Leongatha.

Certainly it's 'Old world charm ... catering for the Twenty-First Century' and we're all invited to 'Come and visit sometime.' It does seem appropriate that Maldon has MIV Plaque No. 1, it being Australia's first notable town.



MELBOURNE ATHENÆUM (est 1839)

Manager/Librarian **Lisa Sukkel** continues her massive project of barcoding and converting the card catalogue to the computer format aptly called **Athena**. The extensive Quarterly List is now produced from the database. Still you would have to go a long way to get the read you get from 'The Ath's' shelves, with holdings of

many of an author's titles. You'll probably also find new titles there first. And they still mail into the country and interstate.

The library is now open for extended hours to 8pm on Wednesday nights and 3pm on Saturdays and a number of new faces can be seen behind the borrower's desk.

Following **Leila Winchcombe's** retirement last year, it will soon be missing another well-known face, with the retirement in July of **Margaret Lyons** after more than seventeen years with The Ath and we wish her well.

We all remember the Athenaeum team from the launch of Pam Baragwanath's book *If the Walls Could Speak* prior to and during the **First National MISA Conference** at 'The Ath' in 2000.

Why not drop into 188 Collins Street, Melbourne on the east of the Melbourne Town Hall Go up to the first floor via the historic panelled lift or skip up the grand staircase and enter a whole world of great reading. You can even get a trial subscription!

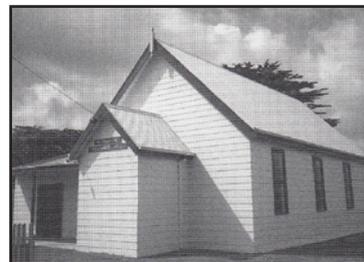


NARBETHONG (est. early 1900s?)

Is there anyone out there who knows the history of the . Narbethong Hall? We are advised by the Hall Secretary **Angela Beckman** that the present hall was built by **Don Lovett** and **Dave Eastaugh** around 1963, but there is belief that another existed before this date, perhaps on another site?

The present Hall Committee headed up by President **Jenny Pullen** certainly care for it well and the small community of 300 use it for all manner of events.

Narbethong are not marketing shy and prevailed on local signwriter **Graham Robinson** to donate the 'For Hire' sign. So if you're in a car club, painting, bushwalking or whatever group why not phone **(03) 5963 7136** and have your next outing at picturesque Narbethong.



NARRAWONG

A gleeful **June Lazelle** writes 'After many years of fundraising/ obtaining a grant/waiting for a builder- our toilet block has been started!!! The Shire didn't mind that the old one was a health risk, but as soon as you want to

Around the Institutes *continued*

NARRAWONG *continued*

build a new one, then you come up against the ‘regulations’!

BUT we’re getting there and we should very soon have a facility that is used even more by the community than it is now. We’re very proud of the support we are receiving.’ And may you receive more. Narrawong, like a number of MIs is reverting to old core activities and has a growing craft lending library.



The Newham Mechanics' Institute Committee at the Newham Institute's 100th Birthday Celebrations. A pram on the right didn't quite make the picture, and we apologise if that also contained a Committee member.
(Bronwyn Lowden photo)

NEWHAM (est. 1903)

We were represented at the two day celebration to honour the role of the community in maintaining and enhancing the Newham Mechanics' Institute. Built on private land in 1903, Newham MI has stood the test of time and has been well maintained down through the years.



The matching porch, added a few years ago, brought you into the sanded and polished floor. But it was not all up front, for out the back there was the newly fitted out kitchen with benches, fridge, microwave and hot-water service, to replace the wood-fired copper.

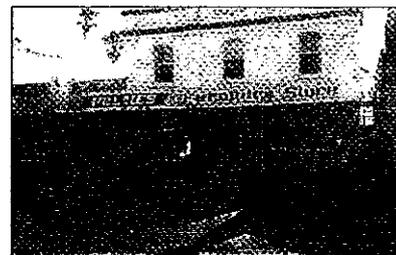


An exhibition of photos and memorabilia was in the hall and you could even add to your family tree or have your picture taken and printed on the spot.

Old families planted a tree each in the hedge fronting the road and then the birthday cake was cut.



Many purchased the snappy hat on sale for \$10 which carried an embroidered picture of the hall, with the wording ‘Newham Mechanics’ Institute 1903-2003’. Well done Newham and congratulations.



NUMURKAH (est. 1882)

The Numurkah Institute building has been in private hands for some time and is now a furniture store. However its memory is kept alive by the proud **Numurkah and District Historical Society** and their Secretary **John Sigley** reports in. And they have reason to be crowing and their letterhead proves it: Joint Winner - Museums Australia (Victoria) MIRA Award for ‘Main Street’ 1997; Winner - Moira Shire Community Event of the Year ‘50th Anniversary of Soldier Settlement’, 1998; and Moira Shire Community Event of the Year ‘Numurkah Back - To 1999’, 2000. Prior to the 1884 Mechanics’ building being handed over to Council in 1938, it had also been used for Church services, Lodge meetings, as a billiardroom, and later as a cinema. The library annexe was added in 1885.

Around the Institutes *continued*



The Pearcedale Hall Committee: **Mary Madigan, Maureen Smollen, Helen O'Driscoll and Beth Murray** (Photo courtesy of *The Independent*)

PEARCEDALE (est.1910?)

There is some doubt about this being an MI building, but the tenacity and drive of the Committee could well be worth emulating. The Pearcedale Public Hall Committee have just won \$6644 State grant to compile the history of Pearcedale, which is located south of Dandenong.

In case anyone out there has any information on Pearcedale or the district's early families you can contact **Mary Madigan** on 0414 624 054.



PORT ALBERT (est. 1875)

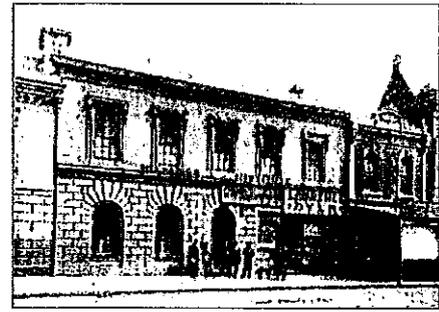
Our historian **Pam Baragwanath** reports. 'From the outside it is impossible to estimate the age of the Port Albert Mechanics' Institute!

But once inside, the lining boards are obviously original and reasonably intact. The whole effect is pleasing within this 120 year old building.

Internal work is being done to make the building more serviceable for the community and the stage area has been dismantled to give more usable open space.

In an item on AUS-VIC-MECH-INST-L@rootsweb.com, **Linda Barraclough** writes that ABC Regional Radio is running items on Gippsland Mechanics' Institutes, and perhaps the ABC's new Ballarat station could do the same for Western Victoria! Port Albert rang in to say that 1882 is on their existing parapet, but on entering the ceiling they found the original parapet with the date 1875 on it. Linda queries 'Is this Gippsland's second oldest Institute? Thus stealing the crown from Rosedale.' We'll keep you posted.

In any case well done Port Albert, we look forward to hearing more of your plans.



The original Prahra Mechanics' Institute building in Chapel Street, Prahra opened by Governor **Sir Henry Barkly** in 1856. (Prahra MI Collection)

PRAHRAN (est. 1854)

The innovation and energy of Prahra knows no bounds and their newsletters are carrying an increasing range of accessions to their Local History Library, but as well there are also increasing numbers of purchases in the recreational reading and general non-fiction collections.



In June, over their quirky cat logo, they launched their **Book Month** with the commencement of **Book Clubs** and a **Writer's Workshop** conducted by journalist, author and lecturer **Garry Fabian**. And it all worked marvellously. Dotted around their promotional leaflet were the symbols: a cup of tea, or was it coffee?; a light globe; an open book; and a couple shaking hands. These are all the trademarks of the modern Mechanics'. When one considers the cat as a logo, it's appropriate, for they too have nine lives!, and some Mechanics' Institutes used to have them. There was one at the Melbourne Athenaeum for years and Buninyong still has a big black one; but does anyone know of other Institute cats? Prahra's August lecturer will be **Michael Challenger** who will speak on his book *Historic Court Houses of Victoria*.

Prahra is also in the process of calling for school entrants for the **Local History Essay Competition** with results to be announced in December.

Membership of Prahra MI is \$9 per year and that gets you some free internet usage at the library as well. Phone (03) 9510 3393 and they will send out a membership form or drop by the Institute at 140 High Street, Prahra for a look prior to joining up.

STANLEY (est. 1863)

The Stanley area was recently ravaged in the huge summer bushfires in northern and eastern Victoria. We don't know of any Institutes being lost but they were all well used as assembly and feeding points. People so often take for granted all those MI and community halls that just happen to be there for such emergencies.

Around the Institutes *continued*

STANLEY *continued*

Stanley is typical of several hundred MIs throughout Victoria all cared for by their individual communities.



Stanley stalwart **Lee Whammond** reports the death of 'Mr Stanley', **Geoff Craig** on 22 January 2003. You will recall in the last newsletter Geoff wrote appealing for our help in overcoming an impasse at Stanley, where his valuable Local History Collection was on loan, for people to use, but were unable to do so because Council could not determine on the type of storage. Stanley had a grant to build the shelving but they were unable to install it. Hopefully that has now been fully resolved and the Library will be an on-going memory to a fine community worker.

Perhaps a few lines from the poem '**The Stanley Athenaeum and Library**' by Stanley's poet laureate WJ Musk would be an apt tribute to Geoff.

*The Main Street passes by
Behind the Oak Tree and yonder,
Of the Stanley Athenaeum and library,
Let us for awhile upon it ponder.*

and skipping seventeen verses to the final stanza

*Our pioneers long since gone to rest,
A reminder of our glorious past,
The Stanley Athenaeum library,
with its history.*

May forever, this Stanley institution last.

Farewell Geoff Craig and may you Rest In Peace!

TALLAROOK (est 1891)



All smiles, Tallarook's **Libby Webster** and **Sharyn McMeikia** at the opening of their restored hall and the first unveiling of an MIV plaque.

(Kristina Holdaway photo)

When one looks at the Tallarook restoration program and what it has achieved you have to give full credit to **Libby Webster** and **Sharyn McMeikin** and **the whole Tallarook community** in how it was done.



The **Carlton Brewery Horse Team** and Delivery Dray added quite a feature to the day as it plodded around town.

(Bronwyn Lowden photo)

Jack O'Hagan's song '**Things is Crook in Tallarook, Me Sheila's Turned Me Down**' contributes to the legend but it takes more than that to make things happen.

Funding was successfully sought from a variety of sources, and they were assisted by a group of Conservation Volunteers who did repairs to the walls and did the painting. The local signwriter then added new livery.



The re-opening of the hall was really a community event with everyone involved in some way, including the children. The school had a fete, the railway station had a display, and the hall had a display featuring aspects of Tallarook's history from the days when the Taungurong tribe occupied the lands to its alienation by the squatter Joseph Hawdon and his naming of his run 'Tallarook'.

There is the settlement history and also the coming of the railway, as well as the police and military connection.

As the plaque was unveiled mention was made of local historian **Jack 'Skinny' Hedley** and his contribution to the day from his vast knowledge of the district's history. Jack's Irish-born forebears had settled at Tallarook in the 1870s. Alas it was to be Jack's last big outing, for sadly he passed away the next day.

Around the Institutes *continued*

TALLAROOK *continued*



Then there was the tram or was it a bus that conveyed people to the two old pastoral properties 'Landscape' and 'Abingdon House'.

The Hall is now booked regularly four nights a week and a playgroup meets there during the day.



The Tallarook team are not resting on their laurels and they are organising another event in connection with their other big cultural connection the film **The Man From Snowy River**, part of which was filmed near Tallarook. Rumour has it you can even see **Kirk Douglas's** teeth marks in a glass at the Tallarook local, no doubt made after his ride. The gala screening will take place on Saturday, 19 July at 7.30pm in the Tallarook Institute. Numbers are limited but try your luck by phoning **Libby Webster** on 5793 8390.



The **Victorian Trades' Hall** in Lygon Street, Carlton. It is presently undergoing major restoration and the Trades Hall Literary Institute Library has been returned to its former refurbished home.

TRADES HALL LITERARY INSTITUTE (est 1859)

It is symbolic that working people of Victoria led the world into an 8-hour working day in 1856, for it was the 'Builder's Union' that had called the first meeting to form the **Melbourne Mechanics' Institute** (now Athenaeum) in 1839.

An acre of land was granted in Lygon Street, Carlton for the building of a Trades Hall and Literary Institute in 1859 and iron roofed and timber building was constructed on the site in the same year.

It was inside this 'farm shed' that intellectual debate and concern for the working men and women of Victoria was conducted. It also provided a library for reading and study.

The rise of the trade union movement saw the immediate demand for larger premises and architects Reed and Barnes were briefed to design a suitable building which was commenced in 1874. Since then it has been added on to a number of times.

In keeping with the massive restoration of the Trades Hall building, the library has recently returned to its former restored home.

This is a very significant library with much of the original collection still intact. Drop by and talk to the Librarian **Sarah Davies**.



TRENTHAM (est 1881)

Trentham's hall is much used by local community groups, its citizens and visiting professionals.

We sadly record the recent passing of long-time President, Secretary and Committeeman of the Trentham Institute, **David Drummond** on 25 April. Like his mother before him, David gave a lifetime of service to the Institute. (David's brother now lives in Melbourne but still takes an interest in the Trentham Institute.)

David was a *Trentham man* and if there was ever a cause going in Trentham, he would be there with brawn and marketing ideas.

It is ironic that his last major project involved the Institute's raising of \$70,000 to replace the floor and other necessary building structural works. It was financed by an imaginative Buy-a-Brick Campaign and the proceeds from catering projects.

Trentham will miss David Drummond and for those that knew and admired him we are the poorer. Our sympathy goes out to his brother **Allan** and the rest of his family. And may he rest in peace, he has earned it!

Ms Sue Bruton has taken on the role of chair and **Tom Sperring** continues as Treasurer and **Bill Patterson** has put his hand up for Secretary.

WALLAN (est. 1865)

The giant eighty-year-old maritime pine tree outside the Wallan Institute was removed by a 4-5 vote of Mitchell Shire Council in April.

The pine was the odd one out in Wallan's notable Avenue of Honour. Some of the wood from its trunk has been earmarked to be used to make tables and other furniture for the Institute. 'It was simply too good to throw away!' said Institute Treasurer,

Around the Institutes *continued*

WALLAN *continued*

David Palmer in a recent interview with the Kilmore newspaper.



The brick and timber Wallan Mechanics' Institute facing the Northern Highway in Wallan, pictured before the maritime pine was removed. Note the cenotaph on the left hand side. (Kilmore Free Press photo)

The Wallan Institute stands on a crown reserve and was built in 1877. Its active Committee of Management have done much to restore and refurbish the hall in recent times. The hall is the epicentre of Wallan's busy monthly market held on the first Saturday of each month and is used regularly by community groups.



WARBURTON (est. 1880s)

After more than a decade of battling, some with the gloves on, Warburton's **Save the Hall Committee** Chair **Julie Gason** reports in with a clip from the *Upper Yarra Mail*.

The hall is one of two remaining weatherboard two-storey Institute buildings in Victoria. The other, Toongabbie, was the subject of a \$300,000 restoration program three years ago.

The original Warburton building also served as the Shire Offices from 1889 until it was burnt down and rebuilt in 1897. It was used as a school in the early 1900s. In 1913 the existing building was shifted back to the rear and a new section was added on to the front.

It's appropriate that ninety years later there is a conservation plan drawn up. It was two years in the

making and Julie says it is the most comprehensive document ever written about the hall and she is happy with its findings.

'Apart from the fact that it will preserve the hall, there will also be restrictions placed on it which will preclude the commercial sale of the hall'. (This was what the State Government had planned to do by making it surplus to requirements and thus for sale.)

'It pretty much precludes anyone building over the car park either.'



It is more than a decade since the historic two-storey weatherboard building was condemned and boarded up and since then there has been no maintenance. In spite of this, the recent detailed Conservation Study on the Warburton Mechanics' says it is in 'pretty good shape' and Save the Hall Committee Chair Julie Gason breathes a sigh of relief. (Upper Yarra Mail photo)

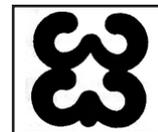
The report described the building as being 'in pretty good shape' despite it being condemned eleven years ago, boarded up and fenced in.

The restoration project requires an immediate \$150,000 to bring the building to a safe condition and further funds will then be required to upgrade facilities.

Julie added 'The people who have called for it to be pulled down won't be able to any more and it also means it won't be left in a state of disrepair - it will be fixed.'

But as a seasoned campaigner Julie stated 'Still, I'm not so naive as to think that just because the report has come out we'll see some action some time soon.'

It's now really over the Shire of Yarra Ranges to make the move, but in the meantime Warburton still has no public meeting place.



WARRANDYTE (est. 1882)

There's big celebrations out Warrandyte way as the community celebrates the 75th anniversary of the present **Warrandyte Mechanics' Institute** building.

There's been a significant write up in the *Warrandyte Diary* under the headline '**Hall has been part of our village life for 75 years**' and the latest edition of the

Around the Institutes *continued*

WARRANTDYTE *continued*

Warrandyte Historical Society Newsletter gives the event an eight page coverage.

The present hall is Warrandyte Mechanics' Institute Mark III, the Institute had previously occupied **Gardiner's Hall** (1881-89) and a purpose built hall on the corner of Webb and Yarra Street (1890-1928).



Warrandyte Mechanics' Institute Mark II (1890-1928) was sold for removal in 1928.
(Warrandyte Historical Society Collection)

In August 1927 the Institute purchased the site of the former **Warrandyte Hotel**, which had burned down, for £250. Working bees were held to level the site and by January 1928 the foundations were in place and the building was completed on 7 April 1928 when it was officially opened by **WH Everard** MLA.

Another speaker **Professor WA Osborne** remarked on the lethargy that had fallen on the Warrandyte community since gold had petered out, but the opening of the new hall 'was the Turning Point' in the fortunes of the community.

The cost had been £800 of which half had already been raised. Yes and the hall was decorated by the country trademark, streamers and gumleaves.



The Warrandyte Mechanics' Institute as it is today. Note the bio-box for the screening of films and used for the present day lighting of theatrical productions.

The *Ringwood Mail and Warrandyte Gazette* claimed it to be the biggest advancement that Warrandyte has made for twenty years. Whilst the men were up front, the ladies were busy organising the opening day fundraising bazaar in the old Mechanics' Hall. At the bazaar MLA Everard

congratulated the Ladies' Committee on the splendid work remarking they must have been preparing for weeks and in true hustling style he added 'You who have come here to spend, keep on spending until there is not a 'bob' left in your pockets.' . . . 'And forthwith he himself proceeded on a spending tour of the stalls.'

The new hall continued the MI role as the centre of community life with its 'glass-like' dancefloor. There were the silent movies, the euchre parties and the annual revues.

In 1956 the **Warrandyte Arts Association** was formed and they sponsored art exhibitions, musical recitals and theatrical productions.

The WAA and the Warrandyte Mechanics' Institute amalgamated in 1986 and a systematic program of building restoration and upgrading has taken place since then, mostly funded from revenues generated.

The Arts Association comprises a number of autonomous groups: Potters; Painters; Craft; Music; and Theatre. They all engage in classes, shows and productions and make the Institute a busy place.

Their regular newsletter details interesting past and future happenings and the most recent issue included WMI&AA President **Ken Virtue's** annual report who has some meaningful words to say.

'The definition of success for us is achieving our charter. This means promoting the Arts within the Warrandyte village community, and making the Mechanics' Institute Hall available for a wide cross section of the community. I think you'll agree that on the subject of Arts promotion we have continued to provide access to a good a variety of artistic endeavour, both for those who have created and performed, and for those who have enjoyed the works. As far as the Hall is concerned 2003 marks the 75th anniversary of activity in its current form... Clearly this is something of which we can feel immensely proud, and that the Hall is indeed a stately, albeit mature, lady of the Arts! ...'

Their able 'Mr Fixit' and Hall Curator **Graeme Beardmore** is singled out for special mention for his assistance with all the users of the Hall, which is now used every day of the week! (We really do need an award for these unsung heroes, the hall keepers!)

In the past year a professional sound system has been installed, the rear and side stairs have been repaired and the foyer has been painted and there's the wish list for next year.

Then follows a summary of the personalities and activities of their five core groups: Potters; Painters; Craft; Music; and Theatre and their successful First, now to be annual, Theatre Festival and he concludes by saying 'It's been a pleasure to work with all of the above, all such great supporters of WMI&AA and our special Warrandyte community spirit. Without them it would be much harder for me to look forward to the next twelve months of more 'good doings at the old Hall...'

Also in the newsletter is the call for nominations for the now annual **The Christie Lawrence & Luke Mayall Memorial Fund Award**.

Around the Institutes *continued*

WARRANTYTE *continued*

Christie and Luke's promising careers in the Arts and Hospitality Industries were tragically ended in a car accident in 1998.



Their families and friends created a Fund to their memory to help the careers of other young people in the district. The Fund awards \$3000 to an applicant showing particular promise or talent. In 2003 the Award will be made to a young person working in the Performing Arts. It alternates to the Hospitality Industry every second year and is open to applicants in the 18-25 age group living in the Warrantyte, Park Orchards or surrounding areas.



WARRENBAYNE (est. 1870s)

Located in a good farming area in north-eastern Victoria, this Hall is not far from the Warrenbayne Primary School.

The Hall is the community gathering point for a wide area with its adjacent cricket oval and tennis courts. There's also a nearby barbecue area for outdoor gatherings and big events in the Hall.

Large water tanks collect the runoff from the roof and there's bottled gas for kitchen use. Regular dances are also held there, with a big night on New Year's Eve. Interestingly enough its Sunday use alternated between the Methodist, Presbyterian and Anglican communities, and when it was offered to the Catholics they declined its use. No Church was ever built in Warrenbayne and perhaps this is why the hall is so well resourced and so much used.

WATERLOO (est. 1880s)

Last year we wrote to the UK-based *This England* magazine which circulates widely around the world. *This England* has a Post Box section with letters from around the globe covering a vast range of subjects. We thought it a good place to float **Mechanics' Worldwide 2004** and get feedback on the Institute movement

The letter appeared in the Summer 2003 edition and it drew a response from **Geoff Moss** of Boronia, V with an interesting photo taken by his wife's father around 1917. Waterloo was a goldmining town in Western Victoria near Beaufort and at its peak there were some three hundred children attending the local State School.



The date on the front of the Hall appears to be 1884, for the Hall was certainly operational in 1890 when two prints were donated for hanging on the walls. A library was also in operation around this time. The Hall continued in community use until a bushfire swept through the area in the 1970s and burnt all the remaining buildings including the old Hall, so as Geoff reports nothing remains today of boomtown Waterloo, except an isolated cemetery.

STOP PRESS



DANDENONG (est. 1863)

The word is out that the grand old **Dandenong Town Hall** is to have additions. However there has been an assurance given that the 1890s section, the upstairs Mechanics' Institute rooms, will remain intact.

The original Dandenong Mechanics' Institute in both its Mark I and II forms stood on the site. It was also used by Council as its offices. In 1889 a deal was struck with Council in that it would allow Council to demolish its building on the understanding that its library and rooms could occupy the second floor of the new building. Its library was later transferred to the Regional Library when that was established.

UK ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT LIBRARIES ANNUAL MEETING

Geoffrey Forster, Association Immediate Past President

THE Association of Independent Libraries (AIL) held its 14th Annual Meeting in Manchester (England) on 21 June 2003 - the first time the Association had gathered in the city since the Association's inaugural meeting in July 1989. On this occasion, **The Portico Library**, a magnificent purpose-built Georgian library and scene of that first meeting, played hosts to a sherry reception on the eve of the main event. The following day eighteen delegates, representing eleven of the twenty-five historic libraries, were present at the Annual Meeting itself at **Chetham's Library** and included amongst them was a representative of the newest Association member, the **Oxford Union Society Library** (founded 1823).



From a portrait of **Humphrey Chetham** (1580-1653) which hangs in Chetham's Library Reading Room.

Chetham's Library was founded in 1853 in accordance with the wishes of the late **Humphrey Chetham**, a Manchester merchant. It shares accommodation with **Chetham's School of Music** in a complex of sandstone buildings, parts of which are medieval. The seventeenth-century book stalls in the library are more reminiscent of a cathedral library than a public one - Chetham's being the oldest public library in the British Isles.



Panorama of the Chetham's Library medieval sandstone buildings

In addition to the wonderful surroundings, the AIL's Annual Meeting provided the usual 'conference' pleasures - lots of tea and coffee, a wonderful lunch with slightly stronger liquid refreshment and the chance for delegates from all over the United Kingdom to meet with colleagues old and new. More unexpectedly Manchester was

generally bathed in sunshine with hardly any rain during daylight hours all weekend.

Three speakers entertained delegates in the same room where **Karl Marx** had previously studied. **Mike Powell**, Chetham's Librarian, spoke of the library's foundation and allowed delegates to handle some of its notable possessions, including Newton's *Principia* and a leatherbound volume that belonged to Henry VIII. **Kathy Whalen** is a cataloguer at Chetham's and also a partner in the private **Incline Press** of Oldham in Lancashire which produces beautifully printed, illustrated and bound limited edition books. She described the work of the press and brought lots of samples for the delegates to examine. **Clare Hartwell** spoke about the longstanding series of architectural guides **Pevsner's Buildings of England** - and of her work on producing the new one on Manchester - the first in a new series of guides to provincial towns and cities. **Fergus Wilde** leader of Chetham's cataloguing project, completed the work of the home team by leading a very informative tour of the library's premises.



The Chetham's Gorton Chained Library

The formal business of the AIL's Annual Meeting is always kept as brief as possible but included important developments. **Dr Robert Anderson** of **Churchill College, Cambridge**, former Director of the British Museum, was installed as the Association's fourth President and the **Bishopsgate Institute** of London (founded 1891) was accepted as the Association's 26th member.

Delegates thoroughly enjoyed their time in Manchester and departed either for home or for the city's famous 'curry mile' in Rusholme looking forward to another year of association, cooperation and activity and to the 2004 meeting at Guildford.

They were also looking forward to closer association with their colleagues in Australia and were delighted to receive the good wishes of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria at their Annual Meeting.

**Geoffrey Forster is also President of the Leeds Library established in 1768.*

MECHANICS'... AND PROUD OF IT!

Exhibition for *Mechanics' Worldwide 2004*

A chance meeting at a lecture at the **Museum of Victoria** led to a fast preparation of a grant application to **Museums Australia (Victoria)** for the **Regional Exhibition Touring Initiative (RETI)** round of **Grants**.

We recently learned that our application was successful and we were represented at the very recent cheque handover function in the **Infozone** of the **Museum of Victoria** by MIV Committee Members **Pam Baragwanath** and **Jim Lowden**. In presenting our cheque Parliamentary Secretary **Bruce Mildenhall** commented that with so many Institutes in Victoria, the exhibition could travel for years after its launch at **Mechanics' Worldwide 2004**. Indeed it could!

After the International Conference, the exhibition will then go on tour, just like **Remember the Mechanics?** which is currently travelling country Victoria and occasionally into metropolitan Melbourne. Like **Remember the Mechanics?**, it is hoped that **Mechanics'... And Proud of It!** will continue to improve our image and awareness in the eyes of the public. Whilst some smart marketers will argue we should change our name to 'Culture World' or the like, we already have the word **Mechanics'**, **Athenaeum**, **Lyceum**, or **Institute** name up on hundreds of buildings around the world, so that already must be a big plus. That in fact is a part of our rich inheritance. It could be said that there is a wide ignorance in the community and even within ranks of councils and government departments of what **Mechanics'** Institutes are all about. We must therefore be seen to be very relevant and an essential part of any vibrant community, but on equal terms.

These community halls just happen to be there, run by local voluntary committees, who scrimp and save to pay extortionate electricity and water/sewerage charges, a large monthly service fee, against a usage of perhaps less than \$10. Added to that there is insurance and for the real go-getter Councils they are now charging the freehold Institutes rates.

It is little wonder that Institute Committees are passing over these valuable community assets to Council who then either sell them or let them fall down, or then call for Committees of Management to be asked again to meet all the outgoings and maintenance.

Meanwhile other government and council funded libraries and community centres are being made available to community organisations for little or no cost.

But when a disaster hits or a large venue is required the local **Mechanics'** Hall is called upon to be made available generally at no or little cost because there is a very real community benefit involved.



Smiles all around. From left **Colin Davies** (Eaglehawk MI), **Hon. Bob Cameron** (Local Government Minister), **Dr Frank Hurley** (MIV President), **Pam Baragwanath** (MIV Historian) at the 2001 launch of **Remember the Mechanics?** .

(Kristina Holdaway photo)

The thrust of the exhibition will therefore be to show the innovation, initiatives, enthusiasm and relevance of individual Institutes and their Committees in recent times that have had a profound effect or have the potential to positively affect their various local communities.

We hope this will then empower and enthuse other local communities to take strength from the various projects shown, to also embark on their own renaissance at their individual Institutes.

Initially, each of Victoria's Institutes is asked to submit a draft 'kit' of 300 words of information detailing a brief history and what they consider to be unique 'happenings' at their Institute, along with up to ten photocopies of captioned pictures or documents. (Please do not send original documents or pictures.)

Please send the draft in an envelope to: Mechanics'...And Proud of It Exhibition Coordinator, 29 Lisbeth Avenue, Donvale, V 3111.

We will then assess these and we will ask you to make a the final submission with text and photos on CD or text on a CD with photo quality copies of pictures and documents.

We will then produce the Panels and for an extra fee of less than \$100, we can duplicate the finished Panel for you to hang in your own Institute.

SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

The venue for *MECHANICS WORLDWIDE 2004*

THE VENUE HOST for *Mechanics' Worldwide 2004* will be the Swinburne University of Technology - Prahran Campus National School of Design.

We are most grateful to the Chancellor and Council of Swinburne University for their support in sponsoring our use of the Prahran Campus and welcome their representative Dr Raj Sharma to the *Mechanics' Worldwide 2004 Conference Organising Committee*. If our most recent meeting is anything to go by, Swinburne's benefactor may well have been amongst us with his universal trademark: of a 'great infectious shout of laughter', for it was a very happy occasion. (Indeed we can recommend **The Mechanix Restaurant** in the **Prahran Mechanics' Institute** building of the Prahran Campus for an excellent meal.)

The bustling Swinburne University of Technology and TAFE with its eight campuses, including those in Sarawak and Thailand, and some 40,000 students started from very humble beginnings.

In 1907 **George Swinburne** endowed the establishment of the **Eastern Suburbs Technical College** with £3000 and in 1913 the College name was changed to that of its ongoing benefactors, **George and Ethel Swinburne**.

Swinburne TAFE College came into being in 1978 and took over **Prahran TAFE** in 1992 after the proclamation of the *Swinburne University of Technology Act* and has developed its **Design, Theatre Arts and Hospitality** Schools there. Swinburne has also established linkages with similar Technology Universities around the world and has developed an Australian first, a course in **philanthropy**.

George Swinburne could well have been a *Mechanics'* man. He was born at Paradise, Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1861 and was educated at

the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle until he was 13. His parents had him apprenticed to chemical merchants, but he wanted to become an engineer like his uncles. So whilst clerking, he enrolled himself in night-classes and occupied his spare time with music, debating, lectures, insatiable reading and teaching at Methodist Sunday School. His daily regime also included the home study of shorthand and German before work.

He became involved with gas and power supply and migrated to Melbourne in 1886 to work for an uncle with whom he set up the Melbourne Hydraulic Power Co. in 1887. George concentrated on the gas side, establishing the Colonial Gas Association which linked and amalgamated small municipal gas facilities around Australia to become Colonial Gas, with George as Managing Director.

His wide interest and knowledge in community infrastructure and services gave Australia an intellect that was utilised by many public companies and government agencies such as being Chair of the Interstate-Commission and the formation of Advisory Council of Science and Industry, the forerunner of the CSIRO. During World War I he was Chair of the Defence Department's Administration Board.

His period in Parliament as Minister for Water Supply resulted in the *Water Act* of 1904 which set up the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission and later, with **Sir John Monash** he was a founding member of Victoria's **State Electricity Commission**.

Then as Minister for Agriculture, he made a significant contribution to the *Education Act* of 1910 and was instrumental in the establishment of the Agriculture Chair at Melbourne University under **Sir Samuel Wadham**.

George's ongoing interest in education was reflected in his membership of the Council of the **University of Melbourne**, its **Queen College**, and the boards of the **State Library, Museum and Art Gallery**.

Along with his close friends, **Sir William McPherson** and **HV McKay**, who were also Nonconformist self made engineering men, they all believed that private wealth should be used for public benefit, with some being used for education. Aply assisted by his wife **Ethel** in all endeavours, they insisted that their four daughters be educated to provide for their own support.

George died at Parliament House in 1928, in the public's service.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

We would like to hear from anyone who is working on research in the following areas: Canadian Institutes and their successors; English Institutes; US Lyceums; Workingmen's Institutes; Irish, and Scottish and Welsh Institutes; and Canadian and UK Institute Associations. We would also like to hear from any representatives of the Birbeck family or of any of the other founding families.

Dr Tim Dolin of Curtin University, Perth, WA is looking for sources of **What was read by Mechanics' Institute subscribers?** Email: tdolin@curtin.edu.au.

Dr Michael Baenen of Eliot, Maine, USA is working on **The History of Libraries and Print Culture in early 19th-century New England (USA)**. Email: michaelbaenen@attbi.com

He who asks is a fool for five minutes, he who doesn't ask is a fool forever.

CHINESE PROVERB

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