



USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
MECHANICS' INSTITUTES OF VICTORIA INC.

Newsletter No 22 – Spring 2009

PO Box 1080, Windsor VIC 3181 ISSN 1835-5242

NEWS HEADLINES

MERRY XMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL

MIV ELECTIONS

The Annual General Meeting of Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria was held on 14 November last. Both the President and the Secretary indicated their desire to step down after many years of dedicated service, but have agreed to stay until their positions are filled. The executive and committee members and their responsibilities are listed below.

President Pro-Tem: Wallace Kirsop

Vice President: Donald Barker, Newsletter Editor

Secretary Pro Tem: Jim Lowden

Treasurer: Graham Hughes

Committee:

Jill Bartholomeusz, Libraries Group

Bruce Draper

Graham Dudley

Judith Dwyer, Exhibitions and Tours

Brian Foley

Lorraine Huddle, Architecture

Frank Hurley, Plaques

Bronwyn Lowden

Peter Mansfield

Peter Pereyra, Scanning / SLUOC

NEXT MEETING OF MIV

The next meeting of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria will be held at the Melbourne Athenaeum Library, 188 Collins Street, Melbourne on Saturday, 13 February 2010 at 10am. All are welcome to attend.

MECHANICS' WORLDWIDE 2009 - BATH, UK

Delegates from the USA, Australia and from around the United Kingdom gathered at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution for this second landmark event on 24-28 September 2009. The Poet-in-residence Simon Tyler summed it up.

And what a BRLSI

Hosting the occasion!

With Sense and Sensibility

Good humor and Persuasion!

It is hard to imagine the splendid two-storey BRLSI venue, which the Trustees generously turned over to the conference as being derelict just two decades ago. Now it is a hive of activity displays, meetings, lectures and collection tours. And it is the home of a caring membership who extended to us

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

News Headlines	1
MI Resources Centre	6
Comment	7
Around the Insitutes	11
People & Places	20
History Page	21
Book Reviews	24

courtesy, friendship and fantastic food. The World Heritage listed city was highlighted by the opening evening reception held at the torchlit Roman Baths where an ethereal vapour rose from the central pool as we chatted and made new friends. A walk of the city with members of the Mayor's Corps of Honorary Guides and a Civic Reception by Bath's 782nd Mayor at the Guildhall further reinforces that sense of history. The significance of the conference was further acknowledged with the presence and address by the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, the Queen's representative, at a conference luncheon.

Papers centred on the theme of 'Self-Help' and we participated in the day-long Annual Meeting of Association of Independent Libraries. Special communiqués were issued from the Conference in connection with the saving of the Burke Museum at Beechworth directed to the Shire of Indigo and MPs and others supporting the community's plans for

the saving of the New Swindon Mechanics' Institute.

After the Conference the Australian delegates went on tour, some visiting other active Institutes around the UK including the Salisbury Mechanics' Institute building, Stonehenge and Salisbury Cathedral. It was resolved to hold the next Mechanics' Worldwide in the USA with possible sites as Philadelphia or New England. However that will be the decision of the US Membership Libraries group.

We can all only extend a hearty thank you to Bath, the BRLSI and all its membership and staff, particularly to MW 2009 organisers Dr Peter Ford and Bob Draper. Dr (An honour duly smitten on him with a copy of Samuel Smiles' *Self Help* and on documentation carrying Sam's signature from the University of Self Help). A summary of the Conference and vision footage can be seen on Bath's website www.brlsi.org where there is also a full version of The Conference Ode.



*Mechanics' Worldwide 2009
– Bath Evening Reception at
Roman Baths*

BEECHWORTH'S BURKE MUSEUM

Following on from the report in the last issue of *Useful Knowledge*, the Friends of the Burke newsletter reports that history may be about to repeat itself if recommendations from a public meeting are adopted by the Indigo Council.

Indigo Shire Council is to be congratulated for accepting its responsibility as the custodian of the Robert O'Hara Burke Memorial Museum by appointing consultants

to review the museum's operations and for holding a public forum in response to that review. The overwhelming public support at that forum for Council to sustain and improve the museum was reflected by many speakers from the seventy or so persons present.

Following the meeting, Mayor Peter Graham reported that "all five Councillors present indicated that closure of the museum was not one of their considerations at this

time". Council is to consider the consultants' recommendations at its December 8 meeting.

The principal recommendations for consideration are that Council appoint a qualified museum manager and establish a Museum Management Advisory Committee.

Twenty years ago at a public meeting the United Shire of Beechworth set up a steering committee to draft a Deed of Delegation for a proposed Committee of Management to assist and advise Council in the direction and development of the Robert O'Hara Burke Memorial Museum. The steering committee was firm in its advice that the Committee's role should be an advisory one with no authority to "directly alter or change the management of the museum". Council accepted the steering committee's advice and draft Deed of Delegation and established the

Advisory Committee. One of the committee's founding members was Friends of the Burke current Vice-President, Lillian Hollands.

It is hoped, in the event that Indigo Shire Council adopts the consultants' recommendation to establish a Museum Advisory Committee, that it too will appoint a steering committee to advise it on the composition of the Deed of Delegation.

The Indigo Shire Council meeting on 8 December is expected to reaffirm its support for the Burke Museum and the cultural and heritage significance the Burke Museum brings to Beechworth and the Indigo Shire as a whole and also support the formation of an overarching advisory committee to advise Council on the future directions and policy for a combined Burke Museum and Beechworth Historical Precinct.

DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT REPORT

Janette Hodgson from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Public Land Division (Historic Places) Group provides the following information which will be of interest to mechanics' institutes seeking grants.

Department of Sustainability and Environment Public Halls Pilot Program

The Department is carrying out a pilot project to review the 130 public halls (including mechanics' institutes) on public land in the DSE North West Region. The review will be looking at the physical condition of the halls, statutory requirements for asset management, and risk management. As part of the exercise, the study will identify maintenance and works required to meet current regulatory and service standards i.e. building and fire regulations and priorities for funding. The pilot project has two main components: to address public safety issues associated with public halls and to update DSE data on public halls and increase DSE knowledge on existing facilities. The project will involve developing a process for auditing the halls, identifying halls that have a high risk for public safety, and determining what resources and funding is required to mitigate the risks. Funding will then be made available for risk mitigation works. A total of \$100,000 is available for the pilot project which will provide funding for any urgent works required over 2009/10. Funding for other public halls from the department's Public Safety budget will be made available to other

halls in subsequent years.

Stewardship in Action grants: DSE is seeking ongoing funding

The Department is seeking a continuation of the Stewardship in Action (SIA) Grant Program. The SIA program assists committees of management to improve assets and public infrastructure on Crown land reserves, and may be able to assist managers of mechanics' institutes and public halls.

Restoring Community War Memorials Grant Program

Many Mechanics' Institutes and public halls have war memorials of some kind and provide a safe home for important local honour boards. The Victorian Government has a *Restoring Community War Memorials Grants program* which assists organisations to repair and upkeep community war memorials and honour rolls and this is potentially available to mechanics' institutes. Under the program, Victorian ex-service organisations, local government, school or community organisations can apply for up to \$10,000 to help repair, protect, restore and enhance war memorials and honour boards. This year, thirty-seven grants have been awarded for projects across Victoria, including several at Mechanics' institutes and public halls (former mechanics') Information about the Program can be found at the following web site:

<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/web16/>

veterans/dvcveterans.nsf/
headingpagesdisplay/victorian+war+
memorials

The 2009-10 funding round will open in October. Guidelines and application forms will be available from the DPCD grants website.

DISABLED ACCESS TO HERITAGE BUILDINGS

An Access for all to Heritage Places' technical leaflet provides information on disabled or universal access to heritage places. This may include buildings and their setting such as gardens. Its aim is to show that it is possible to modify a range of heritage buildings so that they are accessible to people with a disability while maintaining the heritage values of the place. The leaflet includes examples of practical modifications to heritage buildings such as addressing steep gradients and providing access through ramps and lifts. The leaflet can be obtained by addressing the website listed

SHARED FACILITIES ENQUIRY

We have recently been advised that the Final Report of the Commission was sent to the Minister on 14 September 2009 and he has six months to review it. When it is finally released

ESSENTIAL SERVICES COMPLIANCE

As noted in *Useful Knowledge* #20, public halls erected before 1994 were required to comply with amendments to Regulation 1214 of the Building Regulations of 2006 by 13 June 2009. This issue was addressed at the last meeting of the Municipal Association of Victoria where the following resolution was passed:

That the Municipal Association of Victoria call upon the State Government to undertake its obligations under the Victorian Building Regulations in relation to essential safety measures on buildings located on Crown land, or provide financial assistance to Councils to undertake the works required. The background to this resolution is summarised below:

Changes to the requirements under the Building Act and Regulations have been made

Hamilton Mechanics' Institute listed on the Victorian Heritage Register

Hamilton Mechanics' Institute was added to the Victorian Heritage Register for its state level heritage values, in October (2009). This means that there are now at least 25 mechanics' institutes and free libraries on the State register.

below:

DiVine www.divine.vic.gov.au - the first website in Australia for and by people with a disability- was launched by the Victorian Government on International Day of People with Disability.

Brian Foley FROM Ballan mechanics' Institute has drawn our attention to the recently published *Grassroots Grants – A resource kits for community organisations seeking grants*. Issued by the Municipal Association of Victoria it can be downloaded from the MAV website at www.mav.asn.au/e cd/rrd/smalltowns.

it will appear on the Commission's website www.vcec.vic.gov.au. We thank all those Institutes and individuals who contributed material to support the MI case.

which affect councils as the manager of public buildings on crown land. Many such areas have buildings used for public purposes that are affected by the more onerous standards and require upgrades to comply. For some councils with extensive numbers of buildings on crown land in need of upgrade the implications are significant, particularly for smaller councils. All councils are affected but the larger councils better able to manage impacts.

The changes to the Building Act and Regulations have been underway for many years and an extension of time has been granted to the compliance date. Not only does this affect councils but often buildings (improvements) on crown land are the responsibility of the tenant who may be a small not for profit community group.

For those councils and groups unable to

Moorabool Shire Policy for Support of Community Halls adopted September 2005**Public Hall Classification**

Item	Class One	Class Two	Class Three
Electricity	\$2,000.00	\$500.00	\$ 350.00
Water	\$300.00	\$250.00	\$220.00
Gas	\$1,000.00	\$350.00	\$250.00
Telephone	\$1,200.00		
Building and Contents Insurance (1)	\$6,000.00	\$1,500.00	\$900.00
Cleaning	\$4,200.00	\$1,000.00	\$500.00
Consumables	\$100.00	\$50.00	\$50.00
Committee Expenses	\$200.00	\$150.00	\$100.00
Minor Breakages & Repairs	\$500.00	\$200.00	\$100.00
Administration Cost (including Staffing)	\$6,500.00		
Emergency Equipment Servicing	\$1,000.00	\$750.00	\$500.00
Public Liability Insurance	\$1,100.00	\$1,100.00	\$1,100.00
Maintenance Cost	\$ 2,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$1,000.00
Total (2)	\$26,600.00	\$7,350.00	\$5,070.00

- (1) These insurances paid directly by council so funds not given to COM's
- (2) The total amount allocated to each hall may vary depending on level of use and other factors as well as how the allocation is used by each hall.

Additional recurrent funding was made available in the 2008-2009 budget to ensure compliance with the Building Regulations for all buildings for which the Shire has responsibility.

comply the political ramifications for councils having to force compliance would be damaging. For councils to have the public continue to use non-compliant council facilities, again the political ramifications are damaging.

Given the additional state and federal economic stimulus funds, councils will currently be perceived as having additional capacity for capital works and hence able to redirect funds internally to meet obligations. Where the asset is community owned however the problem is exacerbated. Many of the assets belong to the crown or default to the crown at end lease term.

In May 2008 the State Council of the MAV resolved that the Victorian State Government enter into a cost sharing arrangement with all councils on a 50% - 50% basis to enable the requirements of the (*Essential Safety Measures implemented by 13/6/2008*) to be met. The compliance date was extended.

The Moorabool Shire Council has adopted a strategy to ensure that community groups have affordable access to their Hall; without regard to who owns the hall; eight of the sixteen halls within the Shire being crown land reserves. This information was provided by Brian Foley of the Ballan Mechanics' Institute and Free Library and he may be contacted at brianf@itaus.net.

Full details of the council hall policy can be viewed at the adopted minutes of the council meeting of 7th September 2005 on the council web site at www.moorabool.vic.gov.au.

Moorabool have identified three hall categories which require differing levels of financial support.

Category 1 halls are larger facilities which service a significant urban population and also act as a venue for a number of activities. They may incorporate a community house, commercial kitchen, and meeting rooms and be able to host significant events such as community cabinet. They may also employ part time staff of either a council employee whose duties include facility management or a COM employee. Since the 2009 bushfires these centres will play a significant role in the Shire's response to future emergencies or extreme heat days.

Category 2 halls are co-located with other facilities serving as a local focal point for that community. They could act as neighbourhood safe places under the new guide lines

Category 3 halls are the typical stand alone rural halls which will have main hall, kitchen and perhaps supper room. In some cases the toilets will not be connected to the building. The level of support is outlined in the table above.

(cont. next page)

Capital works could be funded under programmes such as Community Support Fund, Victorian Small Towns Development Fund, Shire Small Towns Capital Improvement Program or Council Community Grants depending on the size of the project.

There are external legislative and compliance factors that could determine the level of funding required. These include: Building Acts and Regulations as a large number of halls need to be up-graded. Disability and Discrimination Act (Commonwealth) - as amended mid 2009 means significant upgrade requirements will come in to effect when building or planning permit is issued for a hall. Some exemptions are allowed when a permit is required for a heritage building such as external signage. The economic hardship argument

under the act is not available for buildings owned by local and state governments.

The following example illustrates the complexity of this issue.

A hall decides to install an accessible ramp because it is heritage listed. The COM requires a planning and/or building permit. This triggers compliance with other sections of the accessible building standard such the provision of accessible toilets and modification of existing toilets to allow access for those who use aids. This will most likely trigger a review of the sewerage system and if the existing facility is a septic tank it could mean that a mini sewerage package system will have to be installed to comply with current EPA standards.

Brian Foley

MECHANICS' INSTITUTES RESOURCES CENTRE NEWS

The MIRC volunteers are also busy sorting through the Wesson/Badger photographic collection. Alfred Wesson through the Council of Adult Education carried out research into mechanics' institutes in Victoria in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Unfortunately a number of these photographs of mechanics' institutes are unidentifiable and it is hoped that they will be able to be placed on the MIV website in the near future. This exposure may allow for a proper identification of those that cannot be placed. The photographic collection is the partial result of Wesson's research, the other being the publication of an article "Mechanics' institutes in Victoria" in the Victorian Historical Magazine of August 1971.

Unfortunately due to the pressure of study Yasmeen is no longer volunteering with the MIRCC, however Sun Young is continuing to scan the collection.

The new scanner has been purchased and is now in use and a draft collection policy for the MIRCC has been developed.

Accessioning is still proving a problem and I am continuing to tweak the system. I am not sure that the official system will suit the MIRCC. The documents have been linked to the place names for ease of location because of this the MIRCC is very closely linked to the PMI cataloguing system. As of the 30th November 2009, 214 items have been accessioned.

Conservation work is also continuing as

well as accessioning documents to Horsham. I am looking for an archivist that I can go and talk with or have that person come and look at the current collection and make some suggestions. This has been put on the back burner as I am trying to complete my museum studies certificate and continuing to do extra reading on archive management.

Linda Aspinall, MIRCC coordinator

The MIRC volunteers in 2009 contributed almost 150 hours of work to a whole range of tasks for this very important collection, held at the Prahran Mechanics' Institute. Along with other volunteers at the PMI, the MIRC volunteers were issued, on International Volunteer Day (Dec 5), certificates of appreciation denoting their individual contributions this year. On behalf of the PMI staff I would like to sincerely thank Pam, Sun Young, Yasmeen and Terry (who joined the team in October and has been preparing material for display on the web) for their cheerful hard work and commitment throughout the year.

If you are interested in contributing some of your time to the MIRC in 2010 please don't hesitate to contact the PMI on 9510 3393 or library@pmi.net.au

*Christine Worthington,
PMI Volunteer Coordinator*

COMMENT

INTERESTING TIMES FOR PRAHRAN MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The decision at a recent special general meeting of the Prahran Mechanics' Institute to sell the building at 140 High Street Prahran in which the institute is located has provoked considerable debate. In the last issue of Useful Knowledge, Pam Baragwanath criticised the proposed sale on the basis of the importance of its heritage value. In this issue Christine Worthington discusses the issue in detail and contends that the 99 year lease of the building had the potential to put the library service and the heritage building in serious jeopardy.

As a librarian at the PMI Victorian History Library for almost 10 years, I feel compelled to respond to Pam Baragwanath's piece in *Useful Knowledge* 21 entitled 'Economic Rationalists Win the Day: A Sad Event for Prahran, Victoria and Australia'.

Pam is a highly regarded advocate for the preservation of mechanics' institute history, and it is very unfortunate that she relegates the PMI to a 'slippery slope to obscurity'.

I hope this story of 140 High Street, Prahran will help people to understand that although it is a devastating thing for the PMI to relinquish such a wonderful building, the decision the members made should be seen in its historical context.

I write not on behalf of the PMI committee, but as an MIV member and a PMI staff member who has thoroughly researched the history of the PMI in the course of my work. During my time at the PMI I have organised the PMI's 150th anniversary celebrations and created the 150 Years Gallery launched on that occasion (which now appears on our website); I organised a big celebration for the 90th anniversary of the High Street building and wrote a series of articles about the building in the six PMI newsletters issued that year. With the consent of the PMI committee, I filled in the Heritage Register application myself and was involved in every step of the 140 High Street registration process. Very few people would have more knowledge and appreciation of, and fondness for, 140 High Street than I do.

I would like to share some of that history with readers to shine a light on the impossible position that the PMI has been in over recent years.

The PMI's Original Building

A letter circulated recently about this issue describes 140 High Street as the PMI's 'original building', which of course it is *not*. The PMI has resided in *three* different buildings on *two* different sites! The PMI's original building, opened in 1856 by Governor Barkly, stood at

what is now 259-261 Chapel Street, Prahran, a site the PMI still owns. A picture of it can be seen on the PMI website.

The original building was in a poor state after the 1890s depression. By 1899 the PMI had little money, about 10 members and a building which had been in the custody of an elderly and unmotivated secretary for years. One of the first actions of new Secretary Furneaux in 1900 was to have the building demolished and rebuilt on the same site. That second building – though it has no heritage value to speak of – still stands at Chapel Street and has undergone little refurbishment as it has been leased since 1915 to provide income for the PMI.

Furneaux clearly felt no duty to resurrect and preserve the original Chapel Street building, and he felt a duty to move the PMI forward.

He was looking both forwards and backwards when he established the Prahran Technical Art School (registered as such in 1908), as he had re-examined the original objectives of the PMI in order to find a way to better serve the community of Prahran and surrounding suburbs. When the school began to outgrow the Chapel Street premises, Furneaux looked to finding a new property. He wanted to purchase the High Street land and at first looked to selling Chapel Street, but found that was not so easy to do. The PMI's 1899 Act of incorporation does not allow the PMI to buy and sell real estate indiscriminately – it needs an amending Act of Parliament. What eventuated were amending acts in 1912 and 1914 – one for the purchase of the High Street land and one to allow the PMI not to sell but to *mortgage* Chapel Street to fund the High Street venture.

140 High Street

The High Street building was designed by architect, Prahran councillor and PMI committee member Ernest Horatio Willis, and built by local builder James Simpson Green Wright. The foundation stone was laid by Alexander Peacock in February 1915 and the buildings

were opened by Donald McKinnon in October the same year. The buildings were fitted out by the PMI and the running of the school handed over to the Education Department. The buildings were leased then for 33 years to the Minister for Education at a peppercorn rental of twenty pounds.

When the lease ended in 1947, the PMI seems to have had every reason to feel optimistic. The PMI had just finished paying off the mortgage, its library was operational, and the school was doing very well and playing a significant role in post-war soldier retraining. The PMI committee was well represented on the board of the school, as it always had been, and each of the bodies had a vested interest in the success of the other. The PMI and the PTS were close partners. The arrangement had been working so well that a new lease was signed for 99 years at an annual rental of only one shilling.

Unfortunately, in this action, the then committee had unwittingly placed the PMI and its future and self-determination in the hands of the Victorian government.

The first sign that anything was wrong occurred in the 1960s when the senior section of the school became affiliated with the Victorian Colleges Association, becoming something of a tertiary entity. Soon after this the PMI was advised that the college wished to have only educationally qualified people on its board, and so the PMI's representation on the school board ended.

The government moved the last of the junior boys' classes to the girls' section of the school at nearby Hornby Street in 1971. The junior Prahran Tech was over the next two decades amalgamated with Windsor Tech, Prahran High and Ardoch Windsor and eventually closed.

The senior school that remained at High Street became the Prahran College of Technology, Prahran College of Advanced Education, Prahran TAFE, Victoria College and finally Deakin University which took the art school to the VCA in the early 90s. Throughout the 1970s and 80s came various demands for the PMI to simply hand over the title to the buildings without prejudice. The PMI stood its ground but there was little it could do about the long term situation because TAFE was still administered by the Victorian Government. The PMI library was moved from the rear to the front of the High Street building in 1974 at the request of college, and was granted some further space by the Minister for Education in 1984 (much to the college's dismay) to accommodate the Victorian history component of the library.

When Swinburne University took over the campus in the early 1990s it acknowledged that as a university it might not fall within the usage of the buildings stipulated in the lease. Indeed the PMI committee served a notice to quit at that time on the grounds that a university is not a technical school. But the Crown Solicitor was adamant that the buildings were not being used any differently than before and that a cooking class is still a cooking class whether it be run by a mechanics' institute, a TAFE or a university. The PMI was warned off further legal action by a government which indicated that it would not support the PMI in its action. We now know that if court action had proceeded at that time the PMI would have had a good chance of success but hindsight is a beautiful thing and at the time the committee felt it would be too much of a gamble to take with the few resources it had.

Not long after, the PMI sanctioned the university's \$150,000 restoration of the façade of the building (previously the whole building was painted mission brown from top to toe). Further, around 1997 the PMI gave its permission for the university to build its hospitality training kitchens and restaurant at the rear of the High Street building. It did not follow-up when it discovered that another entity, Gymnastics Victoria, was residing in the building apparently rent-free. The university also carried out occasional minor maintenance and provided facilities to accommodate some of the PMI's activities that could not be held at the library. If the PMI had gone to court in this most recent action, these factors would have contributed to a likely unsuccessful outcome for the PMI. And in the unlikely event that the PMI had regained control of the buildings, the university would expect to be reimbursed for the money it had spent on them – some two million dollars.

When the committee took this recent action its aim was not to sell the buildings, but to have the Minister for Education relinquish the lease so that the PMI could have a lease with Swinburne and ask a commercial rent in order to properly maintain the buildings, and also to obtain an extension of the library space. It became clear in the formal mediation process that the government would not terminate the lease unless the PMI sold the buildings to the university.

The Other Option

The other option would have been to say 'no deal' and attempt to see out the next 37 years of the lease so let's look at that scenario.

The buildings are deteriorating. The heritage High Street building is water damaged and the verandah continues to leak furiously

outside the library every time it rains. Inadequate guttering in need of repair also causes leakage inside the library. Some classrooms upstairs are so water damaged that classes are no longer held in them. We are told that some of the work to be done is of a scale that would require High Street traffic and trams to be blocked off for the duration.

The Minister for Education does not and will not maintain the building because the Minister no longer administers the campus. The university has resisted carrying out major maintenance works because it can't justify the cost as it did not own the buildings and was not named on the lease. And the PMI could not afford to maintain the buildings.

If the current situation were to continue for another 37 years I fear the buildings would suffer very serious damage.

I personally have applied to Heritage Victoria for funding for a conservation management plan without success. When you spend hours on these things without being able to extract even \$10,000 for a building assessment and schedule of works (including one time when my application had not even been inspected – I think it had been misplaced) you do become very disillusioned. As a librarian I am not qualified for this sort of thing, but I did do a lot of research and spoke to Heritage Victoria staff a number of times as well as a heritage architect for advice and quotes and all to no avail.

I have been asked several times why we didn't just sell the Chapel Street site to pay for the maintenance of 140 High Street and that is a fair question. There are two main reasons. The commercial rental from Chapel Street constitutes at least 90% of the PMI's annual income and proceeds from the sale of that site would not have even come close to seeing the PMI through 37 years of building maintenance and library operation. Also, the Chapel Street site is the original land that was donated by Prahran citizen James Mason and it has such a strong connection to the PMI's origins. It may not have a heritage building sitting on it, but this doesn't exclude it from being a special place for the PMI. The PMI Act was created to incorporate the PMI and vest that particular piece of land in the PMI, i.e. when the original trustees created that legislation I don't think they intended for the PMI to ever dispose of it.

If we were to stay for another 37 years at High Street the Victorian History Library would be lucky to survive. As a research collection we do not have the option of selling off books and turning over the collection as other libraries

do. Items added to the collection stay in the collection. Without the space to accommodate this already amazing and continually expanding collection the library would be in danger of becoming irrelevant. Storing books off-site and transporting them to and fro as needed is not a workable option as many of our regular library users work on various projects with deadlines and often need access to resources quickly. There are things we could perhaps have done with our current space to allow more room if we'd had the money.

We currently don't have enough space to fulfil some of our other objectives. We can't accommodate more than about 30-35 people at our lectures. Each time we have a lecture staff has to rearrange the furniture and equipment to accommodate people. Members are always telling us that they wish that we could hold more lectures throughout the year, and if we had a room especially set up for that purpose then we could fulfil this request.

Additionally, when interested groups visit or hold meetings at the library we have to try to organise these outside the library's opening hours or in another space because we don't have our own meeting room and there is already so little space within the library for people to sit, read and research. We would love to have more space for our fantastic and growing team of volunteers to carry out their work also.

Out of necessity we already rely on the university for meeting rooms for our partner organisations and for use of a lecture theatre in which to hold our annual Historic Picture Show. It would be better if we could have our own space for *all* the PMI's functions. Mechanics' institutes were intended to be multi-functional.

Members who visit the library regularly may have seen some evidence that the situation the PMI has found itself in is a most unpleasant one. I can tell you that the minute books and correspondence of the PMI tell a story of endless staff and committee hours spent on this issue – and every meeting, considerable research, thousands of bits of correspondence and piles of reports have diverted staff and committee alike from the library, publishing and other activities of the PMI for decades.

Is This Really the End?

So does the sale of the High Street buildings spell the end of the PMI? Only time will tell, of course. But I would not be too quick to write off the PMI just yet.

Of the members eligible to vote at the recent special meeting, 61% voted for the sale (the vote was nowhere near as close as Pam

indicated in her article) and in all fairness I don't believe any one of them want to see or believe they will see the end of the PMI. I think also that many of them have had to come to the somewhat bitter realisation that the resolution put to the members on 16 September did not appear out of nowhere, but was the culmination of events and decisions occurring in 1947, 1966 and the 1990s.

The way forward will no doubt be the subject of discussion at the 2010 Annual General Meeting and I look forward to the PMI's future with great anticipation. I would very much like to see the PMI rebuild at Chapel Street and return to the original site of the PMI, right in the heart of Prahran. This would be an action completely consistent with the tradition of mechanics' institutes everywhere.

What Have We Learned?

The Prahran experience raises some questions for all mechanics' institute devotees. Pam indicated in her article that the PMI is staring into the abyss without its heritage building. Is this really so?

Buildings have always been a big part of the MI tradition but, in my opinion, not for their own sake but as an expression of people's community spirit and desire for their own special and, where possible, customised community spaces 'by the people for the people'. Much of the architecture was a direct reflection of the character of the community and the available resources. Some were very grand; some were decidedly over the top, and others more modest and functional than glamorous. Many mechanics' institutes have lost more than one building over time, whether by accident, natural disaster or by design. Many of the buildings that have survived have long lost their libraries and the organisations that built them, and now serve no other purpose than as halls for hire. The truth is that the PMI would not be the first mechanics' institute to have resided within more than one building or buildings on different sites – many have done this out of choice or necessity. Indeed the PMI itself has *already* resided in three different buildings on two different sites. We can mourn the loss of the PMI's original building all we like, but that was 1900 and it is time to think about today and tomorrow.

Dare I ask what may seem like such an obvious question: When we refer to a mechanics' institute what exactly is it that we are referring to? Is it the building, the people or the function? I would say all three.

Pam asks, 'How many subscribers will be willing to use a totally different building, with no heritage component?' That is also a very

interesting question, and again only time will tell.

But such a question does appear to ignore all of the hard work over the last nearly thirty years by the staff to build up probably the most comprehensive collection of Victorian history available for loan in Australia. It discounts the wonderful help the PMI receives from the City of Stonnington in the form of the online catalogue and loans system and countless donations of books. It doesn't acknowledge the part the PMI plays in enabling its partner organisations to accomplish their objectives (and we would like to help more historical organisations in the future). It doesn't see the 11 books already published by PMI Press, and the first-time authors the Press has assisted. It doesn't see that membership of the PMI has been steadily on the increase since the Victorian history collection was established, with an accelerated growth in membership over the past five years. Pam's question does not address the tremendous increase in usage of the collection in recent years. We have a strong and growing team of volunteers. Every time we have ever been able to help someone find the information they need for their work, their writing or their recreational pursuits; every time we have held a free lecture, film night or family history seminar for members and the broader community; every time we celebrate our heritage by special events and through literature in our newsletter and website and through faithful upkeep and digital preservation of the PMI's archives and relics; that is the PMI fulfilling its objectives, every single day.

No – apparently none of this counts, according to Pam. Without our High Street building there is no heritage component to the PMI and she implies the PMI now has no history, no future and probably no support. It is a 'slippery slope' for us brought about by a cynical economic rationalist grab for cash by a committee displaying what she calls a 'deafening secrecy'. But PMI members interested in this issue will know that the lease problem has appeared on the agenda of every AGM at the PMI for years, often as the very first item.

Even though Pam's article is a personal view and not an editorial, the MIV does need to consider exactly what its aims are with regard the nature of its advocacy, because the PMI is not just a former, past, deceased, ex-mechanics' institute, but a fully functional, living, organic, autonomous, purposeful mechanics' institute interested not in mere survival but in growing and better serving its members, partner groups and the wider Victorian community of today.

AROUND THE INSTITUTES

The editor would be pleased to receive reports from members relating to happenings and activities at their mechanics' institute or hall.

Items of interest could include historical snippets, meeting reports, news of functions or events held or grants received and improvements made. Contact Donald Barker at donhel14@bigpond.net.au or telephone 03-9762-4149

BALLAARAT

Australia Post's temporary postmark commemorating Ballaarat Mechanics' Institute's 150th anniversary went into use for a period of six weeks commencing Monday 27 July. This commemoration is probably an Australian if not an international first for a Mechanics' Institute.

Meanwhile the library has been relocated to the upstairs Theatre Foyer and this has involved an operation co-ordinated by librarian Rosemary McNerney and a band of volunteers. The move has allowed work to commence on the restoration of the former library, the Old Mining Exchange which will become a display and information area and the Batten Room. Much is happening in the Ballaarat Institute and inspection is invited on a building tour which must be pre-booked. Ballaarat's 150th celebrations gather pace for Dr Frank Hurley and his hard-working team. A lecture on 'Democracy' given by Trinity College, Dublin Provost, Thomas Mitchell, held at the Institute a few years ago has had local impact with the recent launch of the Australian Centre for Democracy. The Friends of Minerva are actively recruiting new members. Check out activities at Ballaarat by clicking on their website www.library.org.au.

BEECHWORTH

The headline article pointed to the progress on the future direction of the Robert O'Hara Burke Museum. A communiqué was sent to the Indigo Shire Council from Mechanics' Worldwide 2009 Conference held in Bath (UK) affirming the importance of Beechworth's significance as a world-class Mechanics' Institute collection, ranked with the Wagner Free Institute in Philadelphia and New Harmony Hall in Indiana. Former

British Museum Director, Dr Robert Anderson, gave a Paper on Mechanics' Institute Museums at MW 2009 in Bath and covered the Burke Museum.

BERWICK MECHANICS INSTITUTE & FREE LIBRARY

Life continues to be busy as usual at the Berwick Library. Lyn Wyatt has been carrying out the role of Librarian in the absence of Pam Darling who has been ill. Lyn has done a sterling job. The Committee met on Wednesday 18th November to formalise the process for the appointment of a replacement for Pam. The following Wednesday afternoon saw the pre-Christmas annual afternoon tea to give the Committee the opportunity to thank the volunteers for the work they have done during the past twelve months. The afternoon tea was held in the grounds of the heritage listed site "The Old Cheese Factory". Berwick Mechanics' Institute featured in the Home Supplement of the Herald Sun on 9 September 2009. Under 'Land for Living' in an article by Kamahl Cogdon titled 'Past Matters' we find: 'History is everywhere in this charming outer suburb, from the 150-year-old Berwick Inn and old Mechanics Institute hall/library to the old Cheese Factory and Springfield Homestead built in the 1870s'.

CROYDON

The Croydon Mechanics' Institute (now known as EV's) celebrated their 100th anniversary on 29 October. This account of the celebrations by Erin Bull appeared in the Maroonah Journal on 27 October.

The Croydon community is ready to celebrate one of the biggest milestones in its history. This Thursday will mark the 100th year since the Croydon Town Hall, then known as the Croydon Mechanics Insti-

tute, opened its doors. Since its opening in 1909 by the then premier of Victoria, John Murray, the building has been used for many things and been known by many names, including Croydon Hall, the Croydon Entertainment Centre and now EV's Youth Centre. Croydon Historical Society president Les Hutchinson said mechanics institutes, like churches and schools, were important facilities for the early white settlers throughout Australia. The institutes were used to educate working people, including housewives, to provide a library and serve as a hall for lectures, concerts and other meetings." Mr Hutchinson said the Croydon Hall hosted the welcome home to service men and women after the First World War. The Croydon Dance Committee conducted regular dances after the war and silent movies began to be shown in the hall in 1926. Croydon's first movie with sound was held there and the Merry Makers Amateur Theatricals performed regularly. A baby health centre opened at the hall on February 4, 1927, operating on Mondays and Fridays. It continued there until the Tudor-style baby health centre cottage was built on the west side of the hall, opening in July 1930. In 1937, the hall was extended, the brick front was built and the name changed to Croydon Hall. EV's Youth Centre team leader Adam Cooper said everyone had their own story to tell of the hall, from past dances and movie sessions to today's local band competitions. To celebrate the hall's 100th birthday, students at Croydon Community School interviewed older residents for a news documentary on the hall's history. A film on the project will screen at the hall during the celebrations. The students learnt how the hall is basically being used the same today as it was 100 years ago, apart from the natural growth and change of the generations. As part of the hall's 100th birthday, a series of events will be held from tomorrow, including a Children's Week concert, historical walk and displays, a Battle of the Bands event and a

classic film cinema experience. Mayor Peter Gurr said the hall was a place of many fond memories" and encouraged people to take part in the celebrations. A part of those celebrations was the unveiling of an MIV plaque shown below.



FRANKSTON

It has been reported that Frankston's Advisory Committee have had their first meeting to discuss proposed plans and the future restoration and use of the institute building. We congratulate Frankston City Council on this community-based initiative. MIV has provided Council with letters of support for funding applications which hopefully may bear fruit in the future.

Below: MIV plaque for Frankston Mechanics Institute



FRYERSTOWN

A Bushfire Safety Meeting was held at the Fryerstown Mechanics Institute Hall on Wednesday 4th November at 7.30pm with a free BBQ beforehand. This was a very important meeting given the concerns about fire this year. The meeting learnt about the bushfire risk in the area, how to prepare there house, how to protect yourself, information

and warnings during a bushfire, and much more. The 35th Annual Fryerstown Antique Fair will be staged over the period 22-24 January. All the proceeds are used for the improvement and maintenance of the historic institute building. No doubt 2011 will also be a year of activity with the Burke and Wills 150th Anniversary.

GISBORNE

The Gisborne Mechanics' Institute recently celebrated their 150th anniversary by recreating the grand opening ball. The Great Gisborne Gazette commemorated the occasion by publishing a brief account of that event and also of the early history of the institute.

Established around 1856 the Gisborne Mechanics' Institute Committee met at the local Telegraph Hotel. Fundraising was started for a building and this was completed in 1859. The Gisborne Express of 15 November 1859 reported on the grand opening ball staged on 8 November 1859 which commenced at 9.30pm with the building 'very tastefully decked out with flowers and ornamental shrubs'. Dancing started at 10pm because of the 'inefficiency of the band' and 'Quadrille, polka and waltz followed each other in rapid succession 'til 1 o'clock when the supper was announced'. 'The good things that had been provided disappeared rapidly: fowl, sandwiches, tarts, jellies, custards, all vanished before the formidable array of black coats and crinolines that laid siege to the table.'

But 'nor was the bottle without its admirers. Provided were lemonade and ginger beer for the ladies, sherry and port and a suspicion of something harder for the gentlemen. A continued fusillade occasioned by the drawing of corks told what was going on in the corner of the room'. Dancing then continued and the reporter noted 'not a single accident happened to mar the enjoyment of the evening and certainly it has seldom been our good fortune to witness a gayer scene that presented to our view on this occasion'. 'The ladies (bless them) were decked out in the very best taste uniting the beautiful with the elegant in dress. Some of the young gentleman had done their best to look killing'. Daylight was breaking when the 'Sir Roger de Coverley' was announced and 'at 5 o'clock on Wednesday morning they

sought their various homes'. The institute flourished and by 1861 they had a library with 1800 books. The membership fee of £1 remained unchanged for thirty years.

Kristina Holdaway

GOORAMBAT

Located 18km north of Benalla, the Goorambat and District Hall, began life as the Goorambat Mechanics' Institute and Free Library, built with a government grant. The bricks for the hall were fired locally on the property of James and William Hall, two of the institute's founders. The hall was built over an eight month period in 1887 by Artie Erwin and Bob Foote for £400. A library was assembled in the room at the rear of the stage and this served the community up until the 1920s. Interestingly several books from the original collection still exist and we were sent photocopies of two of the title pages: No. 257, Joints in our Social Armour – James Runciman (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890); and No. 415, The Covenanters: January to December, 1876 – Volume IX – New Series (Londonderry: Bible and Colportage Society, 1876). The Institute served as State School No. 3123 from 1891-1908. We are grateful to Committee of Management President Bill Burdett for providing the above information.

HEALESVILLE

The Healesville Mechanics' Institute building was sold by auction on Saturday, 31 October. The building was constructed in 1892 and had a mezzanine floor in the front section. The rear hall had dimensions of 10x7 metres. It closed as an Institute in 1924 and has served variously as an art gallery, cafe and private residence.

KILMORE

The latest Kilmore Mechanic newsletter, No. 47, brings news of a busy year. The Annual Carols in the Park on 4 December featured an additional event 'Scaretactics' staged by the KMI's affiliate, the Anam Cara Women's Group. This will be in the form of a series of scarecrows. The carols will finish with a sound and light show. The catering is done by the Kilmore Guides and proceeds from the night go to the Kilmore CFA. Anam Cara was formed earlier in the year and they meet fortnightly and enjoy lectures,

workshops and 'explore different means toward personal health and happiness'. The Bi-annual Garden Walk this year took on a new dimension with a series of walks to Monument Hill and a look at the gardens of Kilmore's five schools and its kindergartens. KMI sponsored the formation of the Kilmore Men's Shed opens every Tuesday at 10am. With a membership of eighteen the group have embarked on a number of projects post-bushfires and have built nesting boxes and chook houses, repair bikes for the Chamber of Commerce, do the gardening at Caladenia Nursing Hostel, fabricated a set of skittles for Dianella Hostel, built their own self-composting toilet, helped building fences with Blaze Aid. Thanks to a group of community minded personnel electricity was recently connected to 'The Shed' and a suitable cake was cut to celebrate the occasion which will widen their activities. KMI have also flagged two forthcoming Workshops on: Beginners Patchwork; and Drumming, with tutoring from an African Group who will also provide drums. If any of the above interests you contact KMI Secretary, Ruth Collins on 0414424693.

KYNETON

The Macedon Ranges Shire recently appointed well-known heritage identity Ray Tonkin to conduct a community consultation on the future use of the Kyneton Mechanics' Institute. Ray has also been asked to prepare a Business Plan to support the ongoing development and use of the institute building by the community.

LANCEFIELD

Volunteers from the Lancefield Community Planning Group (LCPG) are sorting and collating the remnant library collection held in the mechanics' institute hall. The collection has not been used for 20 years and the LCPG are seeking funding to properly restore the collection. The hall also contains heritage items and other artefacts. It is used for a variety of community activities including a dance group, the CWA, balls and social functions and meetings.

Lancefield Mercury December 2009

MACEDON

The Jubilee Hall was built on land donated by Mr Nicolls in 1897 as a tribute to Queen

Victoria's fifty years on the throne. It served as a library and later operated as a picture theatre. It was managed by the Macedon Jubilee Hall Club, a set of whose printed rules exist from 1932. The Hall was burnt down in the Ash Wednesday bushfires in 1983 and with local fundraising and Council support it was rebuilt in 1990. Today it is widely used for all types of activities in the community and is ideally suited as theatre having a roll-out stage. Its large commercial kitchen means that it can cater to sit down events and it has crockery for 120 people. Macedon recently received funding to improve disability access to their well-cared for hall. Read more at jubileehallmacedon.org.au.

MELBOURNE ATHENAEUM

It is not every day that an Institute celebrates its 170th birthday and the Athenaeum certainly did it in style with a smorgasbord of activities. Their celebratory week was capped off with the book launch of *The Melbourne Athenaeum: A Journal of the History of a Melbourne Institution* by Cr Ken Ong. The Melbourne City Council's Arts Program, the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, State Government Community Support Fund and the Public Record Office provided finance. This project was put together by Chief Executive, Sophie Arnold, Librarian, Jill Bartholomeusz and archivist Marjorie Dalvean and team. Also present at the launch were Athenaeum President Kevin Quigley and His Excellency the Governor of Victoria and Athenaeum Patron Professor David de Kretser. The Athenaeum has also been the recipient of a \$13,000 Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation grant to upgrade the public access (computer) and the children's library space and work was started on this in late November. Earlier in the year the Athenaeum received a very welcome \$800,000 Federal grant to undertake building refurbishment.

You can order your copy of *The Melbourne Athenaeum* by phoning (03) 9650 3100. The cost is \$29.95 plus \$5.00 postage.

RUSHWORTH

The Rushworth Mechanics' Institute is now the home of Rushworth Historical and Preservation Society's museum. Established around 1970 the Society has assembled some 4500 items, some of which are over 150

years old. Pride of place is the magnificently restored 1890s one horse gig. This is an interesting collection which is well worth a visit.

SHEEP HILLS

Located in the Wimmera near Warracknabeal this institute was started in June 1887 with a public meeting. The institute was built on land donated by Samuel Moreton and it opened in 1888 with 'The Bottle' an entertainment provided by the 'Amateur Talent of Sheep Hills'. The library which appears to have started in and operated from a private house in 1885 was duly installed. Two rooms were added in 1891 as rooms for the Shire of Borung. The four churches in the town also used the institute for tea meetings. In 1901 artist Walter Childs painted a drop scene and 'decorations were painted on the front of the stage'. The institute survived the massive fire which burnt seven nearby shops in 1908. It was then used as shop for a time. In 1909 the old hall was sold by tender and in 1910 was built and opened. Notable features of the hall include a marble World War I Memorial enclosed in a glass case. Later it was to receive the Honour Boards and a framed photograph of Sir John Monash and various kitchen appliances on the closure of the Sheep Hills Primary School. In 1935 a new jarrah dance floor was installed and opened with a grand ball, with a piano recitation because the band were late, having gotten bogged on the way.

This heralded a new dance era for the Hall which continued on into the 1990s. The proceeds of these dances have contributed to many improvements including connection to electricity grid in 1961 which was turned on by the grand old man of Sheep Hills, JJ Stainthorpe, who had served the Committee for more than fifty years. The other main source of Hall funds was proceeds from the catering from the Sheep Hills race meetings. In recent times the hall has had internal toilets installed, been reclad and the interior has been painted by a Work for the Dole program. Today the main annual event is the memorable and well-attended Anzac Day dawn service, the cenotaph for Sheep Hills being located across the road from the Hall. This is a red letter day for long-time Secretary Joyce Clark and her Committee member husband Alf and all the residents of Sheep

Hills who have kept their much-loved Hall.

SORRENTO

The Nepean Historical Society newsletter The Nepean always throws up interesting items. One of their most recent guest speakers was Ann Blainey who spoke to her latest book I am Melba. Melba sang at the Sorrento Mechanics' Institute and the piano that accompanied her at that time is still in the building. We were also advised of the passing of Dr Marjorie Tipping (1917-2009) who spent most her life probing the lives of 308 convicts who settled briefly at Sorrento. Starting from her teens her unrivalled research finally appeared as *Convicts Unbound* in 1988. Marjorie's warmth and genuine interest in people has left many fond memories for those with whom she had contact. The Collins Settlement is one of the 'watches' of the Society and they are arguing for full public access to the historic site be written into any subdivision plans. In the meantime visitor numbers improve, grants approached \$20,000 for the year and a surplus of around \$7000 resulted. The adjoining Watts' Cottage continues to attract groups and the occasional fire is stoked up for young visitors to make their own scones. Nepean's website is www.nepeanhistoricalsociety.asn.au.

TALLAROOK

The Tallarook Mechanics' Institute held a Christmas Craft Night Market on the Friday 11 December from 6pm til 9pm. On sale were wine food and items of craft, all ideal for Christmas shopping needs. Given that it is cherry season, institute secretary Libby Webster contributes the following recipes for using this delightful fruit.

Cherry Pancakes: Mix chopped, pitted cherries with Meredith goats cheese and yogurt, caster sugar and cinnamon. Make thin crepes to your own recipe. Fill crepes with the mix. Sauté in pan with butter until crisp on the outside and filling is oozing. Serve immediately.

Pickled Cherries (perfect with turkey, ham or your favourite Christmas platter): 300ml rice vinegar, ¼ cup Avenel honey, two tablespoons of soy sauce, two tablespoons of Chapman Hill olive oil, one thinly sliced Yellow Box onion, four cloves of Mayor's Garden garlic, one tablespoon of freshly grated ginger and 300 gm pitted cherries.

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and simmer gently for 1 hour.

*Libby Webster, Tallarook, Ph: 0407 522597,
www.lyndalepark.com.au*

WARBURTON

The Warburton Mechanics' Institute is offering for sale a selection of books. These books date from the 1950s onwards with some from the 1920s and are mostly fiction. Interested buyers may contact Sue Mann, 03 5966 2805 or warbywomen@gmail.com

WARRANTDYTE

In a recent edition of *The Artful Dodger* under the heading 'Bendigo Bankrolls New Loos' we are advised that Bendigo Bank's community support fund has provided \$50,000 to upgrade Warrandyte Mechanics' Institutes 'more drab than fab' toilet facilities. The versatile Jock MacNeish has been enlisted to prepare plans for a new foyer and a comprehensive suite of toilets. As mentioned the Warrandyte Institute has been re-stumped, re-floored, re-lined, re-roofed and renovated from top to bottom' and is a tribute to all concerned. Now the end is near thanks to the Bendigo Bank. We are also told audiences love the current production 'Love Song', which is at the end of its season. The Theatre, Pottery, Painting, Craft and Music groups welcome new participants and you can check out the website: www.warrandytehallarts.asn.au.

WHOROULY

Sue Bromilow reports in with some information on the library at Whorouly. Unfortunately there was a fire at the Secretary's house many years ago that destroyed institute's records and any catalogue of the books which may have existed. However Sue advises that the institute's minutes of 1 June 1961 records a motion 'that the library books be sold'. Some books were returned during the Hall's centenary celebrations in October 2007. A few of these books carry the Wangaratta Free Library stamp and are over stamped with Whorouly [sic] Public Library and have borrowing dates from 1922. There are also some other books which carry the stamp Whorouly [sic] Public Library but there are no borrowing dates on these. Perhaps someone out there can add to the story. In the meantime the hall next door to the

Primary School is well used. In fact a section of the school has taken up permanent residence in the hall while their classrooms are being renovated. Whorouly has its Honour Roll on the back of the stage, a rare feature.

Many thanks for your interesting note Sue and best wishes to all at Whorouly.

YARROWEYAH MEMORIAL HALL

Joan Gordon of Yarroweyah in the Shire of Moira has provided an update on happenings at their Hall. The hall was greatly enlarged in 1962 and was later taken over by the Shire of Moira and is now under a Committee of Management. They have a smorgasbord of regular happenings in the hall. The Spinners and Weavers meet weekly and the Cobram River Rockers, teach rock and roll and stage dances weekly. It is also the monthly meeting place for the Cobram Quilters, who also stage occasional weekend tutorials. Moira Health meets twice a month with an activity and lunch for the district's seniors. Council also conducts periodic meetings there and there is wide community usage of the facility. It is a busy and happy place and best wishes to Joan and her hardworking Committee.

OVERSEAS INSTITUTES

UK – ENGLAND

ARMITT LIBRARY AND MUSEUM CENTRE, AMBLESIDE

One of the best kept secrets of the Lake District is the Armit Library and Museum and its collections some of which was assembled by spinster Mary Louisa 'Louie' Armit in the early 1900s. The library opened in 1909 and today comprises some 10,000 books mostly on the Lake District and personalities who have lived there. One specific collection of around 1000 books is dedicated to mountaineering and climb sites, with a heavy emphasis on the Lake District as well as the Pennines. The other significant collection is some 400 of Beatrix Potter's original drawings of fungi. Static exhibitions include the life of Kurt Zwitter, a German refugee who settled in Ambleside to work and paint before World War II. Playing during our visit was a documentary containing footage of those who knew Zwitter. (This could well be a challenge to all institutes to get those stories before it is too late. Engage your local schools

to get their media studies students recording the stories of the 'people' of your Institute on file for future use.) Heritage Lottery funding enabled the construction of a new building around 2000 and volunteers have continued to mount static and special exhibitions since then. The Armitt had been closed for a time, but recently reopened to a seven day a week schedule with a welcoming banner outside. They also have active Friends of the Armitt group who stage lectures and excursions. The Armitt is a treasure house for the Lake District. Check out their website www.armitt.com for a lot of information about the Lake District, its places and its people.

Below: The welcoming stone at The Armitt's entrance in Ambleside.



BIRKBECK COLLEGE, LONDON UNIVERSITY

A recent visit to Birkbeck showed that a massive refurbishment was happening to the administration building of the College. Birkbeck's Master Professor David Latchman showed us around and proudly pointed out an historic piece of memorabilia to which MIV historian Pam Baragwanath had made a financial contribution some years ago. It was a snuff or cigarette case engraved 'Presented/ to/ Mr Birkbeck/ by/ his Mechanic Class/ Glasgow 1801'. Now it is solidly secured in a display case for posterity having found a fitting home.

Birkbeck College was represented at Mechanics' Worldwide 2009 – Bath by

Richard Clarke who gave a Paper 'Birkbeck after (George) Birkbeck'. A quirky touch is added to its logo, with the dot above the 'I' in Birkbeck shown as a crescent moon, indicating that many courses are held at Birkbeck in the evening.

Below: The snuff case presented to Dr Birkbeck by his 1801 Mechanic Class. (Reproduced by courtesy of Birkbeck College, University of London)



PLYMOUTH PROPRIETARY LIBRARY

This library will be celebrating its bicentenary in 2010 and they hope that membership will again reach 200 by the year's end. Certainly their participation in the 'Plymouth Heritage' open day provided an opportunity to show off this real gem of a library which spreads over five rooms namely: Issue; Reading; Committee; History; and Travel. They have a large run of titles particularly those which have an association with the region. Given that Portsmouth is a leading maritime centre it also has a substantial section on marine engineering, ships and shipping, and seashore natural history.

The Librarian on duty the day we visited was Chloe Adams and we were later joined by the dynamic President Muriel Horton for her Committee's inspired vision for the Proprietary's future.

The Proprietary's John Foulston designed town centre building in Cornwall Street, Plymouth was flattened in the bombing of 1941 and their collection was destroyed. The Society then moved to its present Victorian house in Alton Terrace, North Hill where its 17,000 volume collection is held. With tea and coffee facilities and a small secluded outdoor terrace to eat your sandwich, membership is increasing in

this home away from home. There is also a program of evening and lunchtime lectures. We wish the Proprietary every best wish for their bi-centenary and their campaign to reach 200 members in the year, knowing that everything is possible with drive and determination.

Below: The entrance to one of Plymouth's hidden gems which celebrates its bicentenary in 2010



ST AGNES MINERS' & MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

St Agnes stalwart Keith Atkinson gave an overview of the Institute's history and restoration at MW 2009 – Bath and the following is a further part of the Institute's story. It was established in 1841 at Churchtown in the heart of the Cornish mining community; it went into recess in 1876 but reactivated in 1882. In 1893 philanthropist John Passmore Edwards gifted land and a new building to the citizens of St Agnes for use 'in perpetuity, for literary and scientific purposes as an institute or reading room for the public benefit and to known as the Miners and Mechanics Institute'. By the late 1990s the building was in need of refurbishment and then President Keith Atkinson set himself the daunting task of fundraising £500,000. Finally work started in 2007 and then the builder went into liquidation. Funding then became very tricky but Keith persisted and finally the Institute opened in September 2009 to a party which with JP Edwards would have been pleased.

It was a massive job creating a functional and sympathetic interior around a central light well and install a lift. After some £970,000 has been spent the result is truly amazing. We were shown around the by current President Dawn Brown and Keith Atkinson who had thought through future uses and synergies with neighbouring educational institutions. These include: an alfresco coffee area at the

front in the better weather, a snooker for the older 'children' and a play area for the young, computer centre and a bar and lounge where light meals are served, a history and display area and meeting spaces. St Agnes is a member Institute of MIV.

Below: St Agnes' Champion Keith Atkinson (left) and current President Dawn Brown with Jim Lowden



NORTHERN IRELAND

The Lurgan Mechanics' Institute is supposedly the only one carrying the Mechanics' name in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. Prominently located on a Market Street corner in the main commercial centre the Institute is an imposing building, painted in light blue. It has a bar on three levels, including the basement, but presently no food is served, except for functions when caterers bring food in. A nightclub operates in the basement on weekends. With 2000 members, the Lurgan Institute maintains strong darts and billiard teams which compete in local competitions. They celebrated their 150th anniversary in 2007.

Below: Lurgan: The last of Ireland's named Institutes.



SCOTLAND

THE WESTKIRK LIBRARY

The Westerkirk Library at Bentpath, Langholm, Dumfries is something that you must not miss if you are in the region. It was established by the Jamestown miners in 1791 and has been in continuous operation since then. Located in a valley close to the River Nid it is in an idyllic setting next to the former Parish School. For scholars the Westerkirk is a large knowledge resource and haven of peace and inspiration and they come from around the world to 'work' in this postcard setting. Thomas Telford (1757-1834) would be proud to see his endowed Library in such great shape, thanks to a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. The collection is catalogued by the National Library of Scotland. Many of the leather-bound books carry the gold stamped wording 'Telford Legacy'. We were welcomed by Chair of the Westerkirk Trust Ann Murray and were shown around by enthusiastic volunteer Margaret Richardson who placed before us some of their gems which we were most privileged to see. Westerkirk still has the original Telford endowment intact, and they spend the interest on new books relevant to the region.

Below: Westerkirk, a remote Scottish library endowed by engineer Thomas Telford.



USA

WORKINGMEN'S INSTITUTE, NEW HARMONY, INDIANA

One of the papers given at MW 2009 – Bath was by Dr Robert Anderson and it concerned early Mechanics' museums which still exist. New Harmony is one of a few. The Harmony community had its start with George Rapp, a German religionist, in 1814. In 1824 the 30,000 acre site and its buildings were sold to Welsh-born utopian thinker Robert Owen and a partner William Maclure. Owen changed the name of the community to New Harmony, but after a few years the community was largely dispersed, but in the meantime a legacy of science and learning had been established. In 1837 Owen's son David Dale, who had qualified as a medical doctor returned to New Harmony and took up the study of geology and made it his base. He undertook the first official geological survey of Indiana (1837-39) and established a huge collection of some 85,000 geological specimens in New Harmony by the time of his death in 1860. Interestingly it was RD Owen, then as a member of the US House of Representatives, who introduced the Smithsonian Institution Bill into Congress and he later served on the Smithsonian's Building Committee. The Workingmen's Institute at New Harmony was established at New Harmony in 1838 by William Maclure. Their museum still exists along with the oldest continuous operating library in Indiana. New Harmony continued to develop into an influential centre for science and education and its records are held the vaults of the New Harmony Library.

PEOPLE & PLACES

We learnt of the sudden passing of Helen Brooks, the wife our esteemed long-time Treasurer Clive on 11 November. Helen had been in poor health for some time but could always manage a cheery greeting and chat on the phone. Our heartfelt thoughts and deepest sympathy go to Clive at this very sad time.

We note the 'retirement' from the MIV Committee of our first Fellow of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria Pam Baragwanath. Pam's work for the MI movement in Australia and indeed around the world is legendary. Pam has indicated she will still continue to assist at the MIRC and will continue to follow up information on mechanics' institutes. Pam's latest publication was a chapter in The Melbourne Athenaeum. Thank you Pam for your contribution to MIV and for your well reasoned and most welcome advice over the years.

We recently received a note from Berwick's Pam Darling and the good news is that Pam is out of hospital. Whilst she intimated she was stepping down from the Librarian's role at the Berwick Mechanics' Institute she was looking forward to doing a stint of volunteering at the library. With a span of memory at Berwick of some fifty years, and a significant slice of that with the late Dr Noel Stephenson, a book is indicated. Thank you so much Pam for all you have done and for those Institutes that you have buoyed up and saved with your contagious enthusiasm. Indeed we all wish Pam a relaxing time with good and improved health.

Some things just happen. Bath RLSI dynamo Bob Draper was sitting on a stone at Stonehenge in Wiltshire, as one does. The Association of Independent Libraries'

President and Leeds Library Librarian, Geoffrey Forster remarked 'That's surreal, Bob Draper's sitting in direct alignment with a fence post, Stonehenge and the sun'. It just happened like that.

Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts President Professor Roger Morris was prominent at Mechanics' Worldwide 2009 – Bath visiting the various venues. He was also briefly seen at the Melbourne Athenaeum's 170th birthday just prior to flying out for the Adult Education Hall of Fame announcements in Philadelphia. So much for Roger and his retirement!

We know there is one person who will be more careful where they change their clothes next time. The occasion required a quick change and an underground car park seemed just the place. Successfully changed it was found that the car park grille had come down. Ho hum! It was sheer luck that half an hour later someone came to get something out of his wife's car parked in the basement that our intrepid adventurer was freed. The rescuer laughed heartily wondering how it would all show up on the CCTV footage. Superman also advised that had he not come to the rescue it probably would have been the next morning before someone else motored in. Lucky escape for our inveterate traveller!

Anne Cleveland Walker has recently been appointed as Director of the Charleston Library Society (South Carolina) to replace Dr Eric Emerson who has taken up the post of Director, Archives South Carolina. We wish them both well in their new appointments. Anne likens her new appointment as being likened to 'a kid in a candy shop' amongst the treasures of the third oldest surviving US library, being established in 1748.

HISTORY PAGE

CLASSES IN MECHANICS' INSTITUTES

The rules and objects of any mechanics' institute usually contained the words 'The aim of the institute is the diffusion of literary, scientific and other useful knowledge and the literary advancement and recreation of its members and the community generally', or words to that effect. However classes were a short-lived part of the activities of mechanics' institutes established in Victoria. A review of the sorts of classes that were held by mechanics' institutes in Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Sandhurst demonstrates the difficulties they encountered. Indeed one may speculate that if the largest institutes in the colony could not offer a viable educational programme then smaller institutes would have even greater difficulty.

The Annual Reports of the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute demonstrate the sporadic way in which classes were held and the lack of sufficient demand for them. A drawing class was established as early as 1846 and in the following year a French class was added to the curriculum with the committee expressing the hope that 'before the end of the present year, they will be enabled to establish classes having for their object the diffusion of adult education in its various branches'.¹ This was a pious hope. In 1848, a lack of attendance at the drawing class saw it discontinued, but a music class was established. It was the only one still operating in 1849 when the committee announced that 'attempts at the holding of other classes had proven unsuccessful'.² Again in 1852 the committee was obliged to announce that 'classes had hitherto proved not very successful apart from the mutual improvement classes'.³ The committee were nothing if not persistent, and a writing class and a series of classes offered by the Philharmonic Society were held in 1853.⁴ A note of despondency crept into the Annual Report of 1856 when the committee noted that 'the experiment in the holding of classes showed initial enthusiasm but later interest fell away'.⁵ The following year classes in English, Latin, Geometry, Algebra, Chemistry and Physics were being offered but 'fewer people than we wished

availed themselves of this opportunity'.⁶ In later years the vocal music class was still popular, attracting 191 students in 1859, but attendance at the formal classes were still marginal. Although the elementary class in 1859 attracted 60 students, the English class had only 19 students, French 13, Latin 8, and Hebrew 5.⁷ Classes in mechanical and technical subjects were notably absent from those offered by the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute, the programme was based more on attracting students than on any coherent educational programme. Adult education in Melbourne was confined to the Mechanics' Institute, but on the part of the residents, there was a demonstrated lack of interest in formal education classes. Those who wished to enhance their social skills provided the support for classes in music, elocution and in the Philharmonic Society classes.

The Geelong Mechanics' Institute experienced a similar pattern of disinterest. In 1856 an attempt was made to offer courses in the serious subjects of Mathematics and Latin. As with the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute, these were also short-lived and were virtually redundant a year later. Popular courses in drawing, elocution and vocal music were more successful as were the chess and discussion groups initiated by enthusiastic members.⁸ The failure of mechanics' institutes in Victoria to provide scientific education to working-men was noted by one of the original founders of the Geelong Mechanics' Institute, James Harrison. In 1860 he wrote:

Among the most notable failures of the age must unquestionably be classed the attempt to work educational wonders for the masses by means of mechanics institutes . . . the mechanic has not been the individual who has to any great extent benefited by the working of the mechanics' institutes. There have been very few if any instances of real labouring men having been developed into scholars by the appliances furnished at such institutions.⁹

Even less effort was made at providing formal classes of instruction at the institutes established on the goldfields. Classes in

Arithmetic, French, Drawing and English were not commenced at the Ballarat Mechanics' Institute until 1864 and appear to have had a brief existence.¹⁰ At the Sandhurst Mechanics' Institute, the problems being experienced by the institute in attracting members were attributed in part to lack of classes and lectures and in 1866 a serious attempt at promoting a series of classes was made. Advertisements were placed in local newspapers announcing that: 'Classes in the following subjects viz arithmetic, book-keeping, geometry, English, Latin, French and drawing are being formed at the mechanics' institute under experienced teachers'.¹¹ Problems relating to the payment of fees to teachers and a lack of success in attracting interest in the classes contributed to their discontinuance within the year.

Mechanics' institutes were associated with forms of education that were separate from their direct participation. Mechanics' institutes were often used as classrooms for both denominational and non-denominational schooling. For example, the rooms of the Ararat Mechanics' Institute were used for the conducting of classes by the Presbyterian denominational church.¹² The Berriwillock Mechanics' Institute was the venue for State School No. 3250 from 1895 until a school was built in 1907, and the Education Department rented the Koonwarra Mechanics' Institute for use as a primary school from 1893-1913.¹³

The absence of any form of technical education by the few mechanics' institutes that conducted classes has been noted above. An opportunity to return to the ideal of an earlier time appeared in 1868 with the establishment of the Commission for Promoting Technological and Industrial Instruction. A questionnaire was circulated by a prominent member of the Technological Commission, John Ignatius Bleasdale DD, a priest, wine-maker, member of the Royal Society and an advocate of technical education.¹⁴ It surveyed 51 mechanics' institutes and found that 'not one possessed instructional models, only three conducted practical instruction in some aspect of trade and only nineteen possessed useful volumes for trade study'.¹⁵

The Technological Commission subsidised Schools of Design based on the number of students attending classes. Students were

required to pay fees varying from 2/- to 5/- per quarter for one lesson per week at schools near Melbourne, and from 5/- to 10/- at schools in provincial centres.¹⁶ By 1883, 39 Schools of Design had been established and nine mechanics' institutes took the opportunity to be involved, those being at Ballarat West, Brunswick, Castlemaine, Echuca, Footscray, Long Gully, Maryborough, Sandhurst and Warrnambool. Other Schools of Design were held at the Melbourne Trades Hall (2), in Town Halls and at State Schools.¹⁷ Schools of Design received a quarterly capitation grant from the colonial government of 2/6d based on attendance, but in 1885 only 2,000 students attended sufficient classes — at least eight times a year — to qualify for the subsidy. The government grant was applied on the same principle as the mechanics' institute book subsidy. It was based on the fee income received from students. Unsurprisingly, the sorts of classes offered were those that attracted the greater number of students, and these tended to be art and drawing subjects. In 1885, 1,077 school children, 1,054 young women, 112 artisans and 314 apprentices attended classes.¹⁸

As the name implies, Schools of Design were intended to offer courses of study in practical subjects including geometry, mechanical drawing, freehand drawing, perspective, and drawing from models and nature.¹⁹ The following example illustrates the activities of the School of Design carried on in conjunction with the Berwick Mechanics' Institute.

Local residents were fortunate to have at their disposal, Thomas Cornelius Camm, a qualified art teacher, who conducted classes between 1883 and 1887. Camm was also the secretary of the Mechanics' Institute and the driving force behind that institution as well as the School of Design. In 1886 the subjects taught were Freehand, Perspective, and Geometrical Drawing. Twenty-four students were enrolled and the income from fees was £5-5-6, and from the government, £5-10-0. The salary of the teacher was £8-8-0.²⁰ These classes lapsed, along with the institutes' lecture programme, with the departure of Camm in 1887. The Technological Commission was abolished in 1890 and its functions taken over by the Education Department, a move that also ended the involvement of mechanics' institute with technical education.

While it may be considered that mechanics' institutes failed in their aim of providing adult education, they had much more success with popular lectures. This activity will be discussed in a future issue of *Useful Knowledge*.

¹ Melbourne Mechanics' Institute, *Annual Report*, 1847.

² Melbourne Mechanics' Institute, *Annual Report*, 1848.

³ Melbourne Mechanics' Institute, *Annual Report*, 1852.

⁴ Melbourne Mechanics' Institute, *Annual Report*, 1853.

⁵ Melbourne Mechanics' Institute, *Annual Report*, 1856.

⁶ Melbourne Mechanics' Institute, *Annual Report*, 1857.

⁷ Melbourne Mechanics' Institute, *Annual Report*, 1859.

⁸ Askew, Marc 1993, 'Conflict consensus and culture: The Geelong Mechanics' Institute to 1900' in *Pioneering Culture: Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Art in Australia*, Candy, Philip & Laurent, John, (eds), Auslib Press, Adelaide, p.108.

⁹ Askew, p.110.

¹⁰ Davison, Keith 1993, *The Ballarat Mechanics Institute 1859-1951 and the influence of Henry Cole Batten 1911-1951*, M Lib Thesis, Monash University, p.3.

¹¹ *Bendigo Advertiser* 15 June. 1867, p.4.

¹² *Argus* 10 July. 1860, p.6.

¹³ Baragwanath, p.71, 170.

¹⁴ *Australian Dictionary of Biography* – Online edition, www.adb.online.edu.au/biogs/A030175b.htm

¹⁵ Blake, L.J (ed) 1973, *Vision and Realisation: a centenary history of state education in Victoria*, Education Department of Victoria, Melbourne, v1, p.607.

¹⁶ *Statistical register for the colony of Victoria*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1884, Moral religious and intellectual progress, public libraries, mechanics' institutes, etc.

¹⁷ Myers, Richard 2000, 'Schools of design at the mechanics' institutes' in Baragwanath, Pam, *If the walls could speak: a social history of the mechanics' institutes of Victoria*.

¹⁸ *Vision and realization*, v1, p.609.

¹⁹ Myers, Richard 1999, *Berwick mechanics' institute and free library*, Berwick Mechanics' Institute and Free Library Incorporated, Berwick, Victoria, p.39.

²⁰ Myers, p.88.

Contributed by Donald Barker

ROMSEY MECHANICS' INSTITUTE IN 1887

MIV members who attended the seminar on Mechanics' Institutes organized by RHSV's History Victoria Support Group at Kyneton on 6 September 2008 were shown a photocopy of pages from *The Romsey Annual 1887* concerning the Romsey Mechanics' Institute by representatives of that town's Historical Society. It was obvious that an effort had to be made to obtain a copy of the material for the MIRC collection. Apparently the original volume is not held by the State Library of Victoria, but it is available in the National Library of Australia and in the British Library in London. With the help of Andrew Sergeant of the NLA we were able to acquire a photocopy of the relevant section of the *Annual*. The volume was edited by Charles J. Jones, "Librarian to the Mechanics' Institute" and printed by H. C. White at the Office of the *Romsey Examiner* in 1887. White was, in fact, the Honorary Secretary of the Institute. Pages 17–34 are given over to a list of the Institute's office bearers and committee, to a brief description of its operations, to a summary history of a past partly "veiled in obscurity" and to a detailed catalogue of the books held. The collection was not a large one: just over 800 volumes in all. The subject divisions were: "Historical, Political, and Biographical Works" (pp. 19–21), "Scientific Works" (p.

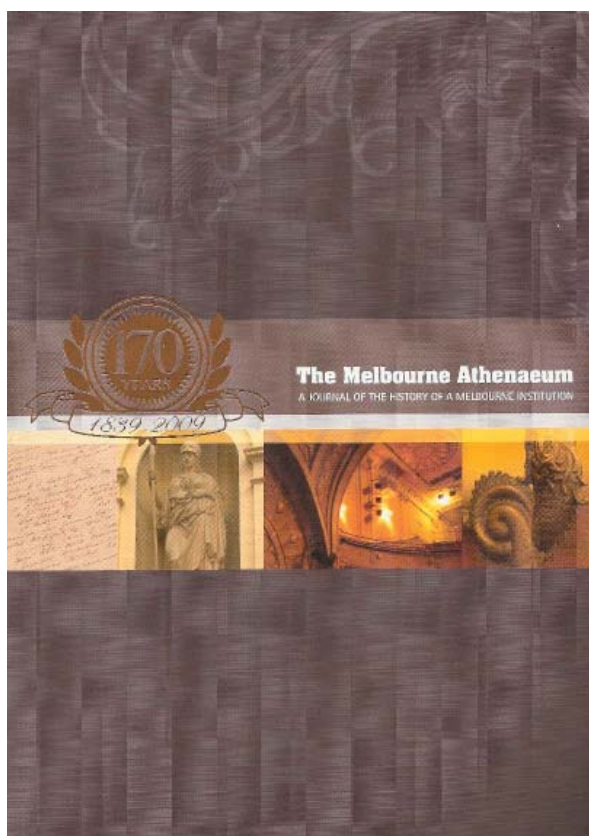
21), "Tate's School Series" (p. 22), "Natural History and Agricultural Works" (p. 22), "Poetry and the Drama" (p. 22), "Ancient and Foreign Classics" (p. 23), "Books of Reference" (pp. 23–24), "Miscellaneous Works" (pp. 24–26), "Voyages, Travels, and Geographical Works" (pp. 26–27), "Works of Fiction" (pp. 27–34). It is hardly surprising that the last section is by far the most substantial, with a solid representation of canonical writers (Scott, Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, Disraeli, Thackeray, Dumas, Trollope, George Eliot, Charles Reade, Charles Lever, Wilkie Collins, Henry Kingsley, Harrison Ainsworth, Marryat and Mark Twain) alongside more popular successes (Miss Muloch, Miss Braddon and Mrs Henry Wood) and a crowd of now more or less forgotten authors. The entries are effectively limited to titles and authors, with other bibliographical details missing. Was number 243, "The Origin of the Species ... Darwin", an early edition or a later reprint? Number 636, "Chemistry of Agriculture ... M'Ivor", which is listed in two places, poses fewer problems. Ralph Waldo Emerson MacIvor had a local connection, having been brought to Australia in 1876 by Sir William Clarke to lecture on scientific agriculture. Clarke had laid the foundation stone of the extension of the Romsey Mechanics' Institute on 29

May 1884. MacIvor's book was published in Melbourne by Stillwell and Co. in 1879. His career is treated in a recent article by David J. Collins and Ian D. Rae, "R. W. E. MacIvor: Late-nineteenth-century Advocate for Scientific Agriculture in South-eastern Australia", *Historical Records of Australian Science*, 19, 2008, pp. 125–159. Their Table 2

(pp. 148–152) sets out a list – not claimed as exhaustive – of the lectures MacIvor gave between 1876 and 1883, not infrequently in Mechanics' Institutes. The fact that Romsey and Lancefield were both venues is reason enough for the presence of the book in the library of the former town.

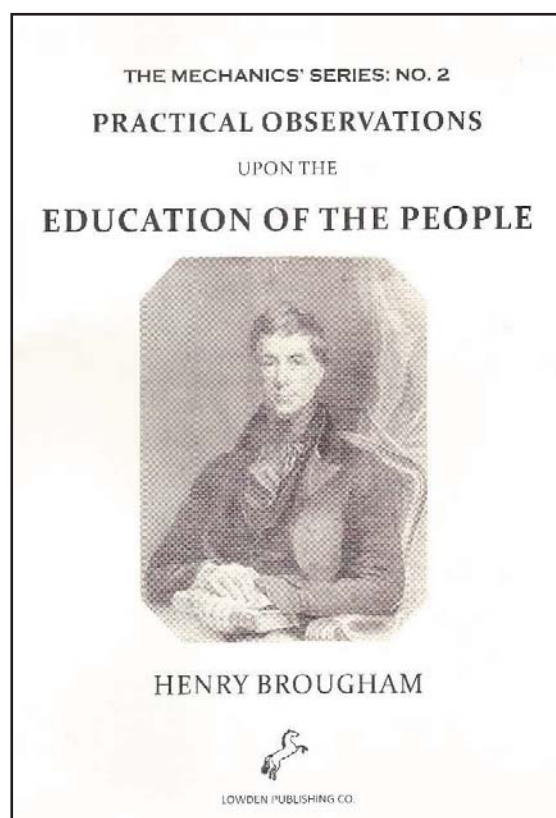
Contributed by Wallace Kirsop

BOOK REVIEWS



The Melbourne Athenaeum: A Journal of the History of a Melbourne Institution. Melbourne Athenaeum Library Inc., 2009. Paperback. 158p, illus, bibliog. 175x250mm. 9780646522852. \$29.95, plus \$5 postage. Melbourne Athenaeum Library, 188 Collins Street, Melbourne V 3000.

This volume, the first of several, highlights the various components of The Ath's rich story – library, lectures, theatre, film and art. Several contributors gave specific segments of the story. Elegantly produced, well priced and full of snippets about one of the world's significant extant Mechanics' Institutes.



Practical Observations upon the Education of the People - Henry Brougham. Lowden Publishing Co., 2009. Paperback. 107p, intro, illus, index. 150x210mm. 9781920753153. \$29.95, plus \$5 postage. Lowden Publishing Co., Box 1080, Mitcham North, V 3132.

This slim volume is a reprint of the 20th edition of 1825 which looks at library and Institute development in various communities up to that time. The chronology, brief biographical note and index add much to the context of the original document. Brougham was a life-long political strategist for education and the Mechanics' Institute movement.