



USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
MECHANICS' INSTITUTES OF VICTORIA INC.

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MIV HAPPENINGS

DIARY DATES FOR 2010

Next MIV Committee Meeting:
8 May at 10am Melbourne Athenaeum
Library, 188 Collins Street, Melbourne

Annual Bus tour:
A tour of Institutes in the Casey-
Cardinia area, see inserted brochure for
details.

Regional Meeting:
Wimmera-Mallee, 9-10 October
(Tentative)

History - Mechanics Week -
23-31 October

NEWS PLEASE

To make Useful Knowledge a viable and comprehensive coverage of the activities of Victorian mechanics' institutes and also to provide a forum for discussion of relevant issues, we need members to regularly update us on news at their institutes and more particularly of details of forthcoming events. Please email this news to the Editor, Donald Barker at donhel14@bigpond.net.au

MIV presently receives a number of

institute newsletters in hardcopy. If your institute publishes a newsletter it would be appreciated if a copy could be mailed to: MIV, Box 1080, Windsor, Victoria. Alternatively if you distribute your newsletter electronically, send a copy to mivenquiry@live.com.au. By having your newsletter, it not only keeps us in touch, but MIV can promote your activities, and circulate your good ideas for the benefit of others.

NEW MIV OFFICE BEARERS

At the February 2010 MIV committee meeting Judith Dwyer was appointed as the new Honorary Secretary of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria Inc. Judith has acted as Minute Secretary in the past and we all wish her well this vital and most interesting role. The Mechanics' Institute Resource Centre Coordinator Linda Aspinall was also co-opted onto the MIV Committee.

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NEWS HEADLINES

OPEN CHANNEL OPPORTUNITIES

Open Channel is a non-profit screen resource organisation based at Melbourne's Docklands. Their slogan is 'Tell your story...Make your film...Create your future' and they provide new filmmakers with production information, advice and support, events, equipment, facilities and professional development.

INSURANCE PROBLEMS?

It has come to our attention that Bendigo-based Adroit Insurance Group can negotiate cover for your public risk via a large international insurance company (QBE). The contact point is Wes Daly on (03) 5442 1900 or email wes@adroitig.com.au and he will arrange a quotation based on your existing

SHARED FACILITIES INQUIRY

The final report into the shared facilities inquiry together with the government

BOOK COLLECTING COURSE

The Melbourne Athenaeum Library is conducting a course of lectures for the budding and experienced book collector featuring Kay Craddock, AM and Jonathon Burdon and a guest specialist. Kay Craddock has been a key player in the Melbourne antiquarian book scene for some forty years and is a former President of the International

HISTORY – MECHANICS' WEEK – 23-31 OCTOBER 2010

Start planning a lecture, exhibition or an open day for your MI during History – Mechanics' Week 23-31 October. This is an

VICTORIAN COMMUNITY HISTORY AWARDS

A new round of Community History Awards has been announced.

Entries close on 30 June 2010 and entry forms can be downloaded at infovic.vic.gov.au

The Centre also stages a range of short courses covering all phases of production. For further details see their website: www.openchannel.org.au.

If anyone is interested in making a film about Victoria's Mechanics' Institutes please let us know and you can be assured of full co-operation.

coverage. We would be interested to learn of your 'insurance' experiences so as we can place these matters before Government as an example of costs faced by our vital institutes and community halls.

response has been released. It can be accessed at www.vcec.vic.gov.au

League of Antiquarian Booksellers. The sessions include: Basics of Book Collecting – 17 March 6-8pm; Caring for Collections 19 June 1-3pm; Aspects of Book Collecting 18 August 6-8pm. Bookings are essential: (03) 9650 3100 or library@melbourneathenaeum.org.au.

opportunity to showcase Institutes across Victoria and please let us know about your impending event.

marketing@diird.vic.gov.au or you can call 1300 366 356 and an entry form will be sent out.

FOUNDATION FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL RENEWAL GRANTS

The Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal has been established as a partnership between philanthropy, governments and business to stimulate rural and regional renewal in Australia. Based in Bendigo it makes a range of public benefit grants available for the purpose of

promoting rural and regional renewal and regeneration and development in social, economic, environmental, and cultural areas. More information can be found on their website www.frrr.org.au. They also have provision for sending email alerts regarding grant announcements.

MORE ON GRANTS

Committee member Brian Foley contributes details of other grants available for your information

1. **Volunteer Grants 2010** is now open and closes on Friday 16 April (See advertisement P 13 Age Sat 13 March). Details at www.fahcsia.gov.au Max grant \$5000. The MIV could use this grant to fund equipment to capture records and other information from MI's. Mechanics' Institutes could apply in order to purchase equipment see list and what has previously been approved

2. **Grants via Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (1800 170 020) or www.frrr.org.au**

Designed to provide funding for rural communities (Max population 10,000) but may vary between grants

2.1 **Small grants for small rural communities**

Closes on 29th March and 30th September

with a maximum of \$5000

2.2 **REACH - Rural Early Childhood Program**

Maximum grant is \$20,000, it closes on 14th May 2010. A local hall committee could work with young mothers in the community

2.3 **Gardiner Foundation working in Dairy Communities**

Maximum of \$5000 with a closing date of 26th March 2010. Applicant must be located with in a dairy community.

2.4 **McEwen Foundation Grant**

Maximum of \$15,000, closes on 9th July. Applicant must hold DGR and be located in the Goulburn Valley, Victoria

2.5 **Bush Fire Renewal Funding**

Closing dates are 24 May, 23 Aug and 22 Nov. The maximum grant is \$30,000. Applications must be from areas impacted by the 2009 Bush Fires.

STORING COLLECTIONS IN HIGH BUSHFIRE RISK AREAS

When preparing for the onset of a possible bushfire, you may want to consider shifting precious valuables off-site to a location less vulnerable to bushfires. Otherwise, choosing the right kind of storage furniture may make a significant difference in the event of a fire. In general, wood and glass provide better protection against heat and soot than plastics and metals. Closed and sealed containers provide better protection than open shelving.

Storage furniture

- Choose furniture that can be well-sealed, for example wooden boxes, trunks and heavy wardrobes, rather than using open shelving for storing items.

- Furniture made of thick, old, seasoned hardwoods are best as they take longer to ignite and burn and are less likely to discolour paper and textiles. This discolouration is caused by the acids released in freshly cut timber.

- Similarly, wood products like chipboard, Masonite® and MDF are fire resistant but emit formaldehyde and other damaging vapours in storage and during a fire.

- Position storage boxes low to the ground but slightly raised, about 10cm above the floor to avoid water damage.

- Aim to create as many layers of protection as possible between your precious items and the external environment. For example,

store items in acid-free cardboard or paper pockets, folders and boxes. These can then be placed within a wooden enclosure and kept in a heavy cupboard.

A note on fire-proof safes

Fire-proof safes may provide some degree of protection in smaller, less intense fires.

However, in extreme bushfires and at very high temperatures, the materials stored inside tend to burn, char and even vaporise – even if the safe itself remains relatively intact. As fire-proof safes are often made of metal, during intense heat they conduct heat to the interior. For this reason we do not recommend that you rely on fire-proof safes to protect your collections. If you choose to use a fire proof safe, look for one meeting the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) standards. UL standards specify the external temperatures safes can withstand and the internal temperatures and relative humidity they can maintain.

UL-rated safes can maintain safe temperatures from half an hour to four hours in environments of up to 1093°C. Different models are rated specifically for the protection of paper (UL 350), tapes, cartridges, microfilm and microfiche (UL 150), and computer diskettes (UL 125). Model numbers specify the temperatures in Fahrenheit, just below the temperatures at which these materials melt, scorch or burn. To be UL-rated, safes must meet or exceed their test standards. Bear in mind that bushfires can reach temperatures of up to 1200°C.

Storage materials

- When enclosing materials within a crate or trunk, use cardboard and paper-based boxes, folders and pockets where possible.
- Use the best quality material you can afford – acid free materials will provide better long-term protection to your collections.
- Archival plastic storage material (polyester, polypropylene, polyethylene) has many advantages, but in a fire most plastics melt at relatively low temperatures, lower than temperatures that char paper. Different plastics melt at different temperatures. PVC is harmful as a storage material and it melts at 80°C, well below archival plastics. Paper and cardboard tend to char before

they burn. Polyester (Mylar®), used in high quality photo pockets, melts at roughly the same temperature at which paper ignites, making it the most heat resistant archival plastic.

Frames

- Use wooden frames. Even though they become charred and will need replacing, wooden frames have been found to provide the best protection to the art work inside. Often, the art work will remain relatively unharmed.

- Metal frames may warp or distort, allowing protective glass to fall out and thus expose the contents to soot and fire.

- Use 3mm or thicker glass for protection within frames, and use it for as many works as you can. Combined with wooden frames, glass provides much better protection than acrylic (e.g. Perspex®), which melts. Glass will become soot-covered and may even crack, but can sustain higher temperatures than acrylic.

- Be aware that glass is heavier than acrylic and shatters on impact. Make sure framed works are secured in a manner appropriate to their weight.

- Use cardboard back boards, rather than plastic – 3mm or thicker, where possible.

- Seal frames with gummed paper tape to protect the artwork from dust and soot.

Remember that fire is only one type of risk your collection will face. Fire fighting measures may cause water damage to items already charred and soot damaged and increase the risk of mould. There are many good reasons to choose plastic and metal storage furniture and enclosures, including cost and ease of access. You may decide that the benefits of using plastics and metals outweigh the potential risk from fire damage. If you would like more advice about storing collections safely, please contact your local AICCM Division or contact the Conservation Department of one of your State collecting organisations.

www.aiccm.org.au

Prepared by the AICCM Victorian Division Based on information from Kim Morris of Art & Archival, Queanbeyan; and 'A Burning Issue' by David Thompson, History Victoria e-news no. 4 July 2006 <http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/rhsvstate/web/issue4a.html> Last updated November 2009.

MIRC NEWS

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR MIRC VOLUNTEERS

In 2009 the Mechanics' Institute Resource Centre at the Prahran Mechanics' Institute at 140 High Street, Prahran became fully operational. Thanks to the efforts of MIRC Coordinator Linda Aspinall and a band of volunteers considerable progress has been made with filing and copying documents and assigning more than a thousand emails to their respective Institute folders.

A start has also been made in updating Institute entries from an electronic version of *If the Walls Could Speak*, Pam Baragwanath's landmark book on the social history of Victoria's Mechanics' Institutes. The individual sections will then be loaded into the Institute's electronic file. This is a huge job which has been started by Terry Rule.

This project reinforces and amplifies the individual files held on each Institute and in the case of electronic material it immediately becomes part of the database searchable by Institute.

MIRC Coordinator Linda Aspinall is the former Footscray Mechanics' Institute librarian, Linda became MIRC Coordinator after our Vice-President Dr Donald Barker stepped down to handle the extra workload of *Useful Knowledge*. Our volunteers have notched up almost one hundred and fifty hours and we are most grateful to: Sun Young Baik (54 hours); Pam Baragwanath (58 hours); Yasmeen Doost (25.5 hours) and Terry Rule (11.5 hours) for giving of their time. Thank you one and all.

A TRIBUTE TO PAM DARLING by Edward Vaughan

"The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there". Those opening words of L.P. Hartley's novel *The Go Between* probably sum up accurately the feeling that most people have when they read histories of earlier times or look at old photos of people and places. Although the Australia of 1962 might not yet be so far in the past that we think of it as a foreign country, it was certainly a very different country from the one we live in now. The joke runs that if you can remember the 1960s, then you weren't there. There are nevertheless some things about the Australia of 1962 that stand out as memorable.

Robert Menzies was Prime Minister of Australia in that year, and the White Australia Policy still described government thinking on immigration (it was not abolished until 1973). Australians in 1962 counted their money in pounds, shillings, and pence, and only a third of women of working age were employed in the workforce. In Victoria, Henry Bolte was Premier, and men

crowded at bars to order their last drinks before six o'clock pub closing. I was twenty-one. John F. Kennedy was President of the United States in 1962, and Australians waited fearfully while he and soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, confronted each other during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In South Africa, Nelson Mandela was jailed for anti-apartheid activities, and he remained in prison for the next 27 years. In the same year, in Berwick, Pam Darling was appointed as the Berwick Mechanics Institute librarian, and she remained in that position until just a few months ago. She had been the BMI librarian for a record forty-seven years.

Forty-seven years is a long time by any reckoning, but Pam Darling's durability in office seems all the more remarkable when we reflect on the number of Australian and world leaders who have come and gone in that time: 11 Australian Prime Ministers; 10 U.S. Presidents, 9 British Prime Ministers, and 5 Popes. The only person who comes immediately to mind as having bettered

Pam Darling's forty-seven years in office is the Queen.

Even if there were no other reason to honour Pam Darling's service to the BMI, then her forty-seven years as its librarian would be reason enough. She has set a record that will probably never be equalled. This is not the only reason we honour her, however, for she brought to the position a number of personal qualities that were precisely the qualities that the library needed. I must be careful how I speak about them because Pam insisted that I make her a promise.

Pam became very agitated when I told her about the committee's plan to include a tribute to her in the AGM. She insisted that the plan be scrapped and that someone be invited to speak on another topic. I explained that there was no Plan B, but she still insisted that she did not want to be the subject of attention, least of all the subject of a eulogy. It would make her squirm with embarrassment, she said, not least because the library volunteers had been the people most deserving of praise because they had made her job easy and enjoyable.

Pam eventually agreed to a tribute, but only after she had made me promise that I would not praise her too much or too obviously. I protested that it would be a strange kind of tribute if there were no praise in it, but she made me promise that I would say nothing that would embarrass her and make her squirm. Would it be alright, I asked, if I mentioned in it that she could sometimes be obstinate and difficult to deal with? Yes, that would be perfectly alright, she said, but added that it would surprise the library volunteers to hear this because it was a side of her character that they had never seen.

So, rather than risk breaking my promise by speaking about the awards and recognition Pam has received over the years, I shall speak instead about something I consider no less important, namely, the way that she and the library gradually became inseparable in people's minds because they reflected each other's character so perfectly.

The poet W.H. Auden wrote a poem in memory of W.B. Yeats in which he said of Yeats that, in the end, 'he became his admirers'. Identity can be fluid, and things that appear initially to be separate and distinct can later become closely linked in people's minds so that mention of one always evokes thoughts of the other. For example, if I mentioned 'Collingwood' to any resident of Melbourne, or even to any of you, it would most likely evoke (even if reluctantly) thoughts of the Collingwood Football Club. You could say, therefore, that 'Collingwood' has become inseparably linked in people's minds with the Collingwood Football Club. I believe a similar connection would have formed in the minds of many long-time users of the BMI library. For them, any mention of the library would automatically have evoked thoughts of Pam Darling. The reverse also applied: mention of Pam Darling would have evoked thoughts of the library. The two had become inseparable.

What I have just described is a very unusual thing. I mean no offence to librarians when I suggest that, for most library users, librarians – particularly those in charge of libraries -- are an anonymous group. I have been a member of many libraries here and overseas, and have had a close professional connection with some of them during my career as an academic. I must admit, though, that I never got to know any of the people who managed them. I rarely encountered them, and can hardly now recall any of their names or faces. This is not a criticism. People who manage modern libraries are professional administrators, and therefore much more likely found in offices and committee rooms rather than chatting at the loans desk or stacking books on shelves.

The BMI library was different from other libraries in this respect. Pam Darling was not your usual sort of librarian. She has been a well-known figure in Berwick for at least half a century, in fact Graham Hughes, our present treasurer and former president, described her recently in a newspaper interview as a "Berwick Icon." One must doubt if there have ever been many iconic

librarians! It was not only fame and adulation that made her an unusual librarian, however, for she scarcely conformed at all to the usual image people have of the professional library administrator. She was always at the centre of things, bustling about, carrying books, greeting people, herding volunteers, sorting through boxes of stuff, and expressing her opinions audibly. One never had to guess for long what Pam was thinking; she was always forthright even when being charming. In short, she was impossible to ignore or overlook. She treated the library as an extension of her own home, and it is therefore not surprising that it came to reflect her character and her taste. She also happened to be exactly the sort of librarian the library needed.

The BMI library is almost entirely dependent on Casey council funding for its survival, and its budget is very modest compared with the budgets of other libraries. In some ways, this has been a good thing. If a great deal more money had been available, then there could well have been pressure to expand and modernise the BMI library to make it more like others. There would probably have been social changes as well, with unpaid library volunteers being replaced or supplemented by professional library staff. In other words, it would likely have become a different library from the one we know today.

While budget constraints helped preserve the character of the BMI, Pam Darling's old-fashioned conservatism helped a lot too. Pam is not the kind of person who is easily swayed by fads and fashions, or for 'moving on', 'going forward', or similar mad obsessions of this chaotic age. She did not equate change with progress. While this probably proved frustrating to those with a more progressive outlook, I believe we should thank Pam for having got the balance between change and preservation right. Her natural conservatism made her cautious about embarking on changes without good reason, and this, combined with the financial restrictions, meant that the BMI library was able to preserve much of its distinctive character and charm while

everything around it was changing rapidly. Compared with the changes we have seen in the appearance and character of other organisations over the years, the BMI library has not changed much at all.

This is not to suggest that Pam was opposed to changes of any kind. She was in favour of those that would add usefully to library services, and, likewise, those that would add to the convenience of library users and volunteers. The BMI library has an extensive and nicely balanced collection, and it offers computing, Internet, and photocopying services just like any other modern library. It nevertheless retains its distinctive charm and character, as must be obvious to anybody who enters it for the first time.

Pam Darling loved her library and the things that distinguished it: the balance of sensibilities in its mix of heritage and modern; its tasteful displays of paintings, photographs, commemorative plaques, and artefacts; its historically important research collection of books and journals from the library of Lord and Lady Casey; its regular book readings for children; its free delivery service for old and infirm local residents; and, above all, its staff of loyal unpaid volunteers who work for the cause of the BMI rather than for career, status, or money.

The 150th anniversary of the BMI since its foundation will be marked in 2012. There cannot be many organisations in Australia that can boast such a continuous history. As Richard Myers' history of the BMI informs us so well, the history of the BMI tells us much about the history of Berwick and its most notable past citizens, and it therefore has a special place in the history of the town. As well as providing a useful library service to the community, the BMI provides a valuable link with Berwick's past. Pam Darling has devoted a large part of her life to promoting and preserving both.

Time passes and things change. There will inevitably come a time when the Australia of today will look like a foreign country to future generations, and then it will be our turn to appear like strangers from an

antique land. We cannot know if the BMI library will still be operating in one hundred years from now, but there are two things we can be sure about in the foreseeable future. First, we can be sure that Pam Darling will have a place in the BMI library for as long as it stands. A commemorative plaque will be installed soon that will tell of Pam Darling, and be a permanent reminder of her to those who knew and admired her during her time as librarian. It will inform those who did not know her of her great contribution to the library and to the citizens of Berwick over nearly half a century. Second, we can be sure that the library will remain in good hands. Our present librarian, Lyn Wyatt, is just as dedicated to the library as Pam had been, and she was Pam's own choice to succeed her.

It has been a year of change for the BMI Management Committee, of which Pam Darling was part. As well as having lost

Pam, it is losing other members who have served it well. Judith Dwyer, Joy Studd, and Ian Good will be missed, and I am sure I speak for the Committee, the volunteers, and BMI members when I thank them for the good work they have done. The Committee is also losing its president for the last ten years, Joyce Hayes. The office of president is an onerous one, and Joyce has carried out her role with great grace and dignity. It would have been a difficult job at times. Chairing Management Committee meetings is by no means an easy or relaxing duty. Debates can sometimes be noisy and intense. While we can sympathise with Joyce for thinking that she has earned a rest from them after ten years, we can also hope that she will look back on her time as president with pleasure, and also with some pride for having been the last president to serve with the remarkable Pam Darling.

NEWS FEATURE

ESSENTIAL SERVICES SAFETY MEASURES

This important information is of relevance to all mechanics' institutes and community halls and has been contributed by Brian Foley from the Ballan Mechanics' Institute

1. Background

There have been fires in places of public entertainment and other venues where people have lost their lives and consequently governments have acted to improve the safety of these buildings by changes to building acts and regulations. In Victoria these requirements are set out in the Building Act 1993 and the Building Regulation 2006. The regulations change over time; for example the changes brought about by the Royal Commission in to the 2009 bush fires.

2. Power to Inspect

The local Council's Municipal Building Surveyor has power to carry inspections to ensure a building complies with the essential services requirement of the Building Regulations. Often these inspections will be done together with the Delegated Officer of

the Chief Fire Officer.

The power to inspection comes from section 227E of the Building Act.

Section 227(a) relates to the equipment installed and services provided in building or place of public entertainment to determine if they are performing and being maintained as required by the building regulations or any relevant occupancy permit.

Section 227(b) relates the records and reports for the operation and maintenance of the above, how they are kept and displayed as required by the building regulations or any relevant occupancy permit.

3. Post 1994 buildings

Buildings constructed since 1994 are divided in to two sections pre and post 1st July 2004. For these buildings a building permit will have been issued by a qualified building surveyor together with an occupancy permit with conditions attached on completion of the works. The difference between pre and post July 2004 are items which can be included as essential

services safety measures which have to be maintained and reported on by the owner.

The occupancy permit will set out the essential services that are to be inspected or tested together with the Australian Standard or Building Code of Australia with respect to installation, performance and ongoing inspection, testing and frequency.

Each year the owner must prepare and display a report in the form as set out in the act and regulations. The date being that set out in the occupancy permit or as directed by a building surveyor.

4. Pre 1994 buildings

For pre 1994 buildings the items which a building surveyor may request to be included as essential service items are set out in the “Essential Safety Measures Maintenance Manual” published by the Building Commission. The list of items is set out in Part 3 – Buildings constructed before 1st July 1994. Owners must ensure that items perform to the requirements specified in the manual and meet the expectation of the inspecting authorities.

The owners of pre 1994 buildings are also required to maintain essential safety measures installed within the building. Essential safety measures means any measure required for the safety of persons, using the building or place of public entertainment including equipment, construction or safety strategies.

It needs to be noted that a building surveyor can add additional fire safety matters required by the act or regulations in writing if there is not an occupancy permit for the building.

From the 13th June 2009 the owner of a pre 1994 building must prepare and display a report on what testing and maintenance has been carried out on the essential safety measures within the building and in some cases the reserve during the past 12 months. This means that the owner of a pre 1994 building on the 14th June 2009 could have been contacted by the council building surveyor and an inspection of compliance carried out the next day.

The Mechanics’ Institutes of Victoria Inc is interested in find out if your local council sent any correspondence to your institute or hall prior the 13th June 2008 with respect

to the updated requirements from the 13th June 2009 and what was expected of you.

5. The Process of Inspection

The local council will advise the facility that an inspection will be carried out and that records of service will be inspected as well. The building surveyor, often together with the Fire Safety Officer for the CFA Regional Headquarters, will inspect the building and any records held to ensure to compliance with the regulations. If an extreme and immediate risk to the public was found a direction to immediate to close the facility could be issued.

Otherwise the Building Surveyor will prepare a report listing the issues requiring correction and a Building Notice under section 106 of the Building Act setting out the items to be corrected together with the section of the Building Code, Australian Standard or Building Regulation applicable will be issued to the OWNER of the property. The Building Surveyor is required to follow the act so will not be able to issue advice or guidance to the owner when conducting an official inspection.

The owner must SHOW CAUSE IN WRITING with in thirty days why the owner should not carry out the works required by the building regulations. The Building Surveyor will consider your written request and then issue a Building Order under section 113 of the Building Act which will include specific completion period such as with in 60 days.

If the work is not completed with in the time specified then an EMERGENCY ORDER will be placed to vacate the premises until the works are completed

6. What Next

If the notice is delivered to the Committee of Management, the Committee should immediate contact the OWNER of the BUILDING about the notice and ensure a copy is sent to them from the council. Be prepared to ask questions of either the Building Surveyor or the Director of Building Services at your local council about any thing you do not understand about the notice especially if a section of a regulation or part of the Building Code is referred too.

Write letters to tenants and users if any part of the notice relates to their use of the

facility.

Be proactive – arrange for additional fire extinguishers to be purchased or have the existing ones serviced if they comply with the regulations include this in your letter of response to the notice

Contract your local ward councillor and local members of Parliament for assistance. It needs to be noted that many councils will be facing considerable expenditure to upgrade building for which they are responsible.

If your building is heritage listed or has a heritage overlay then the advice must be sort from the experts in this area at your local council or Heritage Victoria.

7. The Unexpected

One of the problems for older facilities is that compliance may result in additional costs. An example of this could be the installation of emergency lights and exit signs. The electrician carrying out the work could find that the switch board needs to be upgraded or replaced to ensure compliance with the Regulations.

In a heritage building it may not be possible to carry out the work required at the lowest cost while ensuring compliance with the both the Heritage and Building Acts and associated Regulations.

This is a major difficulty facing community facility owners as they do not have the financial resources to engage interdependent advisors in the fields of Heritage and Building Compliance.

8. On going Costs

A major issue for the managing committee on behalf of the owner is the ongoing cost of ensuring compliance. This will include the electricity to power the exit signs and emergency lights which has to left on 24/7; Servicing, testing and replacement costs to ensure compliance with the Regulations. Purchase publications such as the BCA Manual and Australian Standards so the owner can ensure compliance with the Act

and Regulations

9. How to Fund the Work

One of the major issues is the likelihood that when a Building Notice is issued grants that could be accessed for the work required are not available within the time frame required.

Possible sources of funding

- Local council – community grants, capital grants or from local ward community facility development fund
- DSE stewardship in action grants or emergency grants
- Department of Planning and Community Development
- Department of Sports and Recreation
- Local Service Clubs
- Local Courts
- Local Community Bank
- Local Community Foundation
- Heritage Victoria
- Commonwealth Government grants
- Trusts
- Our Community – Grants Advice (Does cost to subscribe)

10. Further Information

Building Commission – Essential Safety Measures Maintenance Manual can be purchased or download from the web site at www.buildingcommissssion.com.au

Acts and Regulations can be purchased from Information Victoria or downloaded from www.legislation.vic.gov.au

Your local council can provide advice about grants or other funding that may be available

Department of Planning and Community Develop offices can be contacted for advice. Their web site is www.dpdc.vic.gov.au then go to the grants link.

Commonwealth Government grants can be accessed via www.grantslink.gov.au. Your local Federal Member or State representative should able to assist as well.

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

Now that the Institute's library has moved to the second floor theatre foyer, stage two work has commenced in the former Mining Exchange where a range of 1935 newspapers were found under the floor. The former mezzanine floor is also being reconstructed to house book stock into the future.

Restoration and refurbishment work is also progressively taking place in the theatre, which with another grant or two, will enable the complete fit out of this valuable regional performing and exhibition space.

Indeed, under Minerva's watchful gaze, the building is buzzing with activity and Dr Frank Hurley and his dedicated team can now see the restoration advancing rapidly to finality.

Meanwhile membership of the Institute's Friends of Minerva increases and their activities gain momentum with members taking part in rosters for various functions in the MI building. The FOM also plan a number of fundraisers, with a recent picnic in the Botanical Gardens being the first for the year.

The University of Ballarat TAFE College is celebrating 140 years of existence and commemorated the occasion by presenting an address by Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Blainey AC. (The mechanics' institute resolved to establish the Ballarat School of Mines and Industries in 1870, an action that was to decisively affect the development of mining and heavy industry across Australia.)

The well attended address was titled 'When Ballarat was more important than Canberra'. Dr Hurley in his introduction, mentioned the speaker's past reference to

the lighting of the candle of knowledge across the nation, of which the Mechanics' Institute movement was a vital part.

Professor Blainey started his address with an off-the-cuff reminiscence of his youth in Ballarat where he cycled around and townscape 'spoke' to him, and his later 'return' as the first Chancellor of the University of Ballarat.

The address detailed the lives of two people who had connection with Ballarat and a profound effect on the development of the Australian nation – Alfred Deakin, 'the Member for Barry's Reef' and Robert Gordon Menzies. Both were very able orators.

The address was the first event to be held in the Institute's fully refurbished Humffray Room, resplendent in painted ceiling trimmings. The floor is mostly carpeted, with the remainder being a functional wooden dance floor. A food and drink service area at the eastern end, adjacent to the lift, will enable catering for events that will be staged in the area.

BEECHWORTH

Community consultation on the future of the Robert O'Hara Burke Museum has come to an end and Indigo Shire Council has been unequivocal in their support for retaining, resourcing and strengthening the Burke Museum into the future. We commend both this very positive approach and to those who made detailed submissions. We look forward to seeing significant future funding being directed towards making this unique mechanics' institute collection into a major regional tourist attraction and cultural resource.

Indeed Beechworth's Burke Museum collection is one of the very few institute collections left in the world along with: the Workingmen's Institute in New Harmony (Indiana), the Franklin and Wagner Institutes both in Philadelphia, in the United States; the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society and Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution in England; along with the Smith Institute at Stirling and Chambers Institute at Peebles, both in Scotland.

BERWICK

This year Berwick is celebrating its 147th Annual Meeting in conjunction with a tribute to long-time former librarian Pam Darling. Pam was Berwick's librarian for forty-seven years 1962-2009 until ill-health forced her retirement. Pam has also been the recipient of a number of awards recognising her valuable community work: Rotary Award, 1975; Berwick Citizen of the Year, 1990; and Australian Government Centenary Medal for Community Service.

CARISBROOK

This hall has recently been repainted, thanks to a BEST work for the dole crew. In its new livery it looks well cared-for and used by the regional public.

CENTRE FOR THE BOOK – MONASH UNIVERSITY

The Centre for the Book staged a very successful seminar on 'Book Towns and Writer's Festivals' in December. This was followed up with 'Book Publishing, E-books and the Production of Literatures of Social Reform' a lecture by Dr Per Henningsgaard in January. A call for papers has been made for a forthcoming conference: 'To Deprave and Corrupt: Forbidden, Hidden and Censored Books' which is to be held on 14-16 July 2010 at the Wheeler Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas, State Library of Victoria. The theme of the conference evoked memories of the Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928) and Spycatcher (1997) trials, but recent campaigns against Enid Blyton for sexist and racist content and the Harry Potter (1997-2007) and Twilight (2005-08) series for their dark or occult themes. Then there are issues surrounding the

possession and library access to terrorism and euthanasia handbooks. It will indeed be an interesting conference. Register your interest with Simone.Murray@arts.monash.edu.au.

DEAN

Dean Committee is ramping up to celebrate the Institute's 120th anniversary next year (2011). The Committee now have a well-established annual round of events: Ring of Roses Easter Show; Dean Spring Daffodil Show and Open Garden, art classes, and the Farmers' Auction. They also produce a very good quarterly Dean and District News. And there's more and you can check out events at their website www.deanhall.org.au.

DIGBY

In addition to its community hall and meeting place role, the Digby Institute is also conducting a growing community library which continues to attract regular patronage as the collection continues to increase.

ELMORE

The survival of Elmore Memorial Hall complex is another great news story achieved by a relatively small community with a population of around 900. A decade ago part of the complex was in danger of demolition and a group of local citizens formed a 'Friends' group. Today with planned and gradual upgrades it has largely been restored, the last major work being a kitchen makeover at cost of almost \$40,000. The dedicated Committee, led by President Brian Chirgwin and Secretary Bill Comer co-ordinate catering for the Elmore Field Days and this is their major fundraiser each year.

A recent 'bolt from the blue' saw the Committee served with a thirty day show cause safety upgrade notice. The proactive Committee have achieved an extension of time to determine just what work and type of equipment needs to be installed. However with a heritage listed buildings there are also other considerations which come into play. They did receive a valuable tip to

install LED safety lights, although more costly to install, they save a large amount on the power bill.

FRANKSTON

Restoration and conservation drawings have been prepared for the consideration of the Frankston Community Committee to workshop and for the public comment. Issues of compliance have to be addressed and hopefully work will commence by mid-year.

The Mornington Peninsula Family History Society newsletter always contains something of interest and you can visit them on the internet at www.mpfhs.org. Access to their large library, based at the Frankston South Recreation Centre, and available to specialists makes the \$35 membership very affordable and worthwhile. Or if you only want to receive the quarterly newsletter it is \$15 within Australia. Send you subscription to Ian Sinclair, 7 Sandgate Avenue, Frankston, V 3199.

GISBORNE

The Gisborne Institute pictured below recently celebrated their 150th anniversary with events which attracted patrons in period costume. The Gisborne Institute is used as Gisborne's community hub with a whole range of social, cultural and educational activities taking place in the redeveloped precinct. Gisborne's bard, Ed Gardiner, had the following printed in the *Gisborne Gazette*.

Gisborne Mechanics' Institute,
Since very early days
Has played a part in town events,
In many different ways.

Every generation since
Has memories of the Hall,
The concerts, parties, weddings,
Hours dancing at a Ball.

Ladies in long dresses,
Gents dressed up to the hilt;
Dinner suits and bow ties,
The odd Scotsman in his kilt.
For nowhere else in Gisborne

Had the freedom or the space,
Where the simple 'joy of living'

Was reflected on each face.

The Gazette promised a fifty stanza poetic tribute to the Institute in its next edition! Would that be the longest poem written about an Institute?



KYNETON

A usage and conservation consultancy on the landscaping and future use of the historic Kyneton Mechanics' Institute has been carried out by Ray Tonkin who consulted widely in the community. The landscape consultancy has proposed that much of the grassed area on the north side of the Institute be converted to bluestone shades of concrete, asphalt or granitic sand. The main grassed area will be in the region of the children's playground which will have a picket fence street frontage, with a hedge planted against it. His report was recently presented to an audience representing a wide cross-section of community organisations. The meeting was advised that the Senior Citizens would not be returning to the Institute. He also flagged that the Historical Society was to be a temporary occupancy only with the Shire to find a new home and record store for the Society.

The well-attended Open Heart Day staged by KMI Inc – Friends of the Kyneton Mechanics' Institute on Australia Day was welcomed by all. The impromptu concert put together at short notice highlighted the main hall's excellent acoustics for music and voice and showed the diverse range of talent in the area. The tours of the building taken after the concert also attracted good numbers and gave local residents an opportunity to view the inside of the building and its intricate roof support

structure.

LANCEFIELD

With the 140th anniversary celebrations behind them, the new Committee are looking forward. One of the things they are looking at is their remnant library which has been housed in a back room for years. Recently Pam Baragwanath visited and met with Secretary Inge Nieman-Edwards for an initial inspection of the library's contents and a more detailed specialist assessment will take place later based on a listing of the books.

LITTLE RIVER

This mechanics' institute is repositioning itself in the community under the leadership of Peter Jones and a hardworking Committee. The institute has three main components: a community hall, which is being promoted for regional usage' a recently re-established library which is receiving good and increasing patronage and a record centre for the Little River Historical Society. Peter visited the last MIV Committee meeting to report on Little River happenings. This year is the Little River Institute's centenary year and a Centenary Ball is planned for Friday, 6 August and a printed history is being prepared. If you can help with text or photographs or would like to attend the Ball contact Peter Jones on (03) 5283 1939 or 0437 193914.

MALDON

The Melbourne Athenaeums offer of a surplus magazine rack was taken up the Maldon Athenaeum and this is now installed at Maldon complete with a range of magazines. This is a good example of the work of the MIV Library Group in action. Whilst book exchanges have taken place in the past between Berwick and Maldon and the Melbourne Athenaeum and Newstead Library, with Little River and Digby now running community libraries there is greater scope for such support activity.

MELBOURNE ATHENAEUM

Work is progressing on a major upgrade to the theatre and staging facilities at the Athenaeum. President Kevin Quigley recently staged a soiree in the library where invited guests had a chance to meet

his hardworking board and library staff. The opportunity was used for Secretary/ Manager Sophie Arnold and Librarian Jill Bartholomeusz to promote 'The Pleasure of Words' through membership, internet café use, forthcoming author lectures and a course on book collecting to be conducted by Kay Craddock, AM and Jonathon Burdon.

Regular archive and library tours start in April and a valuable insight can be gained into the history of Victoria's oldest public organisation. The Melbourne Mechanics' Institute and later the Athenaeum was the leading cultural institution in early Melbourne, holding classes, lectures and with a well stocked library. For book collectors there is also the opportunity to obtain signed copies of books by a number of high profile authors who have given lectures at The Ath in recent times. Copies of The Melbourne Athenaeum: A Journal of the History of a Melbourne Institution are also still available at \$29.95. Drop by the Athenaeum for a look to see what books are available. For further information on any of the above check out their website. www.melbournethenaeum.org.au.

MONTROSE

This Mechanics' Institute was established around 1874 and the present hall was established around 1915. Today the hall is well used and cared for by the community.

NATTE YALLOCK

Built around 1906, this substantial hall (pictured below) and public toilet facility forms part of the large recreation reserve which has a cricket/football oval, along with three tennis/ netball courts and a substantial children's playground. These well cared for facilities aggregated on the same site make much sense for a recreational complex which serves the region.



NEWHAM

Although the opening by Joanne Duncan, MP of the new kitchen and toilet complex at the Newham Mechanics' Hall (pictured below) took place on Friday, 4 December, some minor work is still proceeding. The official opening was preceded by a drum roll provided by the Newham Primary School and they also concluded proceedings with singing. With some \$453,000 expended the works include solar panelling on the roof, rainwater harvesting and grey water use. It also has a public toilet component, with vandal proof fittings, to serve the adjacent reserve. When we visited, there appeared to be a family reunion or picnic in progress with a sit-down lunch in full swing in the main hall and the children were kept entertained outside with an inflated jumping castle and games in progress.

This is all a long way from a visit of several years ago, but it goes to show with clear plans and determination much can be achieved. Committee member Sally Stabback noted: this took almost 3 years to the day to achieve and not only are we thrilled, but are also very proud of our achievement.



PRAHRAN

Prahran's Victorian History Collection continues to expand and the catalogue can be found on their website www.pmi.net.au. You can either visit the library to obtain a title or for a small fee most can be had via inter-library loan through your local library.

In keeping with their commitment to local history a call for submissions to the Short History Prize has recently been made. Entries are to: be non-fiction, be up to 15,000 words, cover the history of

a place or aspect of a place in Victoria, Australia and be written by a member or members of a Victorian historical society or similar organisation. Why not contribute a previously unpublished history of your local mechanics' institute? A prize of \$1000 (\$500 for the author and \$500 for the associated historical group) is available. Entries close on 27 August 2010.

In the meantime output of the PMI Press expands and a list of their publications, including those for sale can be accessed on their website.

SORRENTO

Author Ann Blainey spoke on Dame Nellie Melba the subject of her latest book *I am Melba*. It is noted that Dame Nellie sang in the Sorrento Institute so it was a very fitting subject. A very successful community day was held at the Quarantine Station and former Officer Cadet School in December. This area will form part of the expanded Point Nepean National Park. The Sorrento Museum in the Institute building is well worth a visit.

TALLAROOK

The monthly tantalising recipe is featured on the email notice for the regular Tallarook Farmers' Market. Staged on the first Sunday of each month at the Tallarook Mechanics' Institute from 9am-1pm, it promises a rollicking fresh time. You can check out the website for what they sell be it brewed, canned, fermented, grown, pickled or smoked. In the meantime if you are looking for great meeting facilities in Central Victoria at the very reasonable rate from \$3.85 per hour for regular non-profits Tallarook provides just that. Catering as an extra can also be arranged. Telephone: Libby Webster on 0407 522 597.

WAREEK

Located on the edge of the Mallee, this institute pictured below was established about 1915. It has recently had a new paint job thanks to a work for the dole crew and awaits new sign writing. The hall has also recently been rewired and ceiling fans have been installed. External plastic tanks and a store shed to complete the most recent works.



WARRANTDYTE

After a couple months of inconvenience the Warrandyte Institute returns to normality with a gorgeous new foyer and swish new toilets linked to a new water tank, a display space to showcase work from our different groups, a safe new entrance via our new back deck, and an impressive new entrance for Follies audiences and other Hall users. It is a fitting way to herald in the 55th anniversary of the Warrandyte Mechanics' Institute Arts Association. Congratulations and happy birthday to all concerned on this landmark. For what's happening click on www.warrandytehallarts.asn.au.

OVERSEAS INSTITUTES

UNITED KINGDOM

MORAZION

A newly discovered Institute which still serves the community is the Code Institute at Morazion in Cornwall. Claimed to be the third oldest chartered town in Britain, Morazion was an early market town a tradition which still continues. Given its strategic seaside location, it is also the starting point for those visiting St Michael's Mount via the causeway at low tide.

The Code was gifted to the community by Theophilus Code (1808-89) and his family in 1883 as a library and recreational facility. Morazion Mayor Sydney Trudgen, who is the Institute's President and one of its trustees, advises that besides continuing its community hall role, it hosts a thriving snooker club with two full-size tables, one on each floor. It is also home for a very successful and long-running Cancer Research op-shop which has raised several hundred thousand pounds over the years.

One stipulation of the trust is that no alcohol is allowed in the Code. The benefactors were teetotallers. They also stipulated 'that the said premises shall not be used for any meeting or discussion of a religious denominational or political character or for any other than secular and non-political purposes'.

CONISTON

Can anyone provide any information on the Coniston Mechanics' Institute and Literary Society establishment or founding about 1852? It may have been initiated by the Beever family. Located in Cumbria's Lake District this is now the home of the Ruskin Museum. More in the next newsletter.

SCOTLAND

STIRLING

The Smith Institute, the endowment of eccentric artist Thomas Stuart Smith (1815-69) survives today as the Smith Museum and Art Gallery. It was built in 1874 as a gallery to house his contemporary art collection, museum, library and reading room. It was a successor to the Stirling School of Arts which had been established in 1825.

Located on a two acre site out of town free from the noise and bustle and free from the dirt, dust and smoke, so the students of art, science and literature could pursue their studies there unmolested and free from annoyance, it is still a beacon for learning and culture. The Smith has been the aggregation point for other collections over the years.

The building was used a military billet during World War I and during and after World War II and was returned to the public in 1948.

Today the Smith hosts an aggressive exhibition and lecture program in partnership with its sister museum and gallery in Galway, Ireland. Its well resourced meeting rooms are used regularly by some forty community organisations. The Gallery Café and Bookshop provide extra valuable revenue and interest. Its extensive grounds or Alie's [sustainable] Garden, named for a Smith benefactor and supporter Alie R Maclaurin (1913-2000), feature public art installations, a story telling circle, an outdoor chess board, and a woodland. These works

have been largely achieved by the Friends of The Smith.

The gallery and museum entrance feature tableau pavement mosaics by Maggy Howarth. Click on the website www.smithartgallery.demon.co.uk for a tour of the gallery and grounds.

WALES

CWMAMAN

Like the phoenix, the Cwmaman Institute (pictured below) rose from the wreckers hammer in 2000. Established in the Welsh Cynon Valley in 1868 as a Miners' Institute it was much used and loved by the regional community. The closure of valley's mines started in the 1960s and by the 1990s institute membership had dwindled, maintenance declined and the century old building was showing its age. In the mid-1990s Cwmaman was designated a 'Communities First' area by the Welsh Parliament and the institute was determined to have a key role in any community redevelopment plan. The ambitious £3.8 million project was developed in two stages, with the second stage being opened in 2001 by the Prince of Wales.

Today with a membership of over 4000 the Institute is a pivotal community property, providing convention, meeting and exhibition spaces, a theatre, a state of the art gymnasium, and a licensed restaurant and dining room. Forty community organisations including a choir and band call the institute home.

Financial success has seen the institute take control of the community library. It has also recently purchased the neighbouring Shepherd's Arms Hotel which was refurbished and continues to operate as a

neighbourhood hostelry. To further add to cash-flow it also purchased the local betting shop to keep profits in the town.

The main annual event at the Cwmaman Institute is the Music Festival held in September. Check out their website at www.cwmamaninstitute.co.uk.

USA

LA JOLLA ATHENAEUM

La Jolla's Barbara and William Karatz Chamber Series is a great way to empower and enrich the community and bring external talent into the area. Performers are single artists or groups. This is the enduring aim of the Athenaeum team and generous sponsorship is provided by philanthropic members.

(We know of one such event in Victoria, held at the Leongatha Mechanics' Institute, which is an endowed annual lecture featuring a notable Australian personality.)

Like all successful institutes around the world, the La Jolla (pronounced 'La Hoya') Athenaeum has found its niche markets in music, particularly jazz, as well as a sound recording and sheet music library, art in all its forms, and a library including an acquisitive artists' book collection, a superb recreational reading library and a challenging lecture program in which invited specialists participate in addressing contemporary community and/or regional planning issues. There are the refurbished and enlarged exhibition and meeting spaces which provide ideal social venues, not the least being their annual themed extravaganza and fundraiser. Finally there are the dedicated staff that live and breathe their indulgence. Look in on their website for inspiration www.ljathenaeum.or.

PEOPLE & PLACES

La Jolla Athenaeum Music and Arts Library (San Diego, USA) Board member John Messner and partner Barbara recently visited the Melbourne Athenaeum Library. John passed over a copy of the US Membership Libraries Twentieth Anniversary booklet from La Jolla's Joan and Irwin Jacobs Executive Director Erika Torri. The Athenaeum's Librarian Jill Bartholomeusz reciprocated with a copy of their recent history for La Jolla's library. A fair cultural exchange and may there be many more between the institutes of the world.

Professor Roger Morris is recuperating from a nasty tumble taken around Christmas time. He has had to relinquish his duties as the capable President of the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts and one of the most respected figures on the world's adult education scene. We all wish Roger well in his recovery and a speedy return to the helm at the SMSA.

Krystyna Smithers, the long-time General Manager of the Ipswich Mechanics' Institute and Secretary of the UK Association of Independent Libraries has just switched 'horses'. After leaving the Ipswich Institute, Krystyna has most recently been employed as General Practice Manager of Jackaman, Smith & Mulley, solicitors who had offices in the Ipswich Institute building. In November 2009 Krystyna took up the position of General Manager of the Suffolk Punch Trust (www.suffolkpunchtrust.org) which is repositioning itself in the tourism market. A purpose-built visitor's centre is being developed and will be open in March. We all wish Krystyna well in her challenging new role and if you are going Suffolk way drop into to see some gentle giants that once drove agriculture and commerce. You can then visit the Ipswich Institute for a coffee or lunch.

Dr Richard Wendorf, formerly Stanford Calderwood Director of the Boston Athenaeum and art historian, has taken

up the position of Director at the American Museum in Britain at Bath. Located beyond Bathwick Hill, the Museum occupies Claverton Manor and a 120 acre site. The commanding view of the Avon River valley gives it a particularly spectacular setting. Established in 1911 the museum has numerous static exhibits, stages re-enactments, conducts a restaurant and shops and has a significant library. Richard's immediate task will be to organise celebrations for Museum's 50th anniversary and to establish a new Centre for American Culture Studies.

We note the appointment of Lyn Wyatt as new librarian at Berwick Mechanics' Institute, following the retirement of long-time librarian Pam Darling due to ill health. We welcome Lyn to the wonderful world of mechanics' institutes and trust she will have a long and happy term at Berwick. In the meantime we have heard from Pam Darling that she is now back at home and enjoying her well-earned retirement. Pam Darling was the Berwick Mechanics' Institute librarian for 47 years, from 1962 to 2009. She was the recipient of a Rotary Award in 1975, was Berwick Citizen of the year in 1990. She received an Australian Government Centenary medal for service to the community in 2003 and has been recognised by the local council for her contribution to the Berwick Community. A tribute to her service was given at the Annual general meeting of the Berwick Mechanics' Institute on 17 March (See article above).

Narre Warren Mechanics' Institute volunteer, Judy Owen JP, was recognised as the 2010 Casey Citizen of the Year at a ceremony on Australia day.

Tom Whinney a committee member of the Footscray Mechanics Institute passed away in December. His family has had a long association with FMI. His daughter has recently been elected to the committee to follow the family tradition.

HISTORY PAGE

Classes and lectures were designed to fulfil the common goal of mechanics’ institutes to “disseminate useful knowledge”. The last issue of Useful Knowledge discussed classes held on Victorian mechanics’ institutes in the nineteenth century and concluded that they were neither widespread nor particularly successful. However lectures held in mechanics’ institutes attracted greater success. More institutes held lectures than conducted classes and the number of lectures indicates their popularity. However there are some similarities with educational classes. Lectures tended to be held in the larger metropolitan and provincial institutes and they declined in number as the nineteenth century progressed. The following analysis identified 328 lectures held in mechanics’ institutes from the Argus Index, SLV catalogue and Prahran Mechanics’ Institute records, undoubtedly there are more and many that will remain unidentified. However those that were identified are sufficient to allow a number of conclusions to be drawn.

Table 1 shows an inconsistency in the number of lectures offered each year, pointing to difficulties associated with obtaining qualified lecturers for suitable topics. This trend was also noted by Dr Stephen Herrin. His analysis of published lectures in Victoria in the 19th century – not just those held in mechanics’ institutes – shows that the number rose steeply until the 1880s and then slowly declined. Herrin’s research confirms that the lecture was a popular form

of entertainment and communication during the 19th century.

Lectures as an activity of Victorian mechanics’ institutes was very much a metropolitan activity as Table 2 illustrates. Of the 328 identified lectures, 239 were held in 12 metropolitan institutes, 35 were held in the provincial centres of Geelong, Ballarat and Sandhurst and 54 were held in 14 country mechanics’ institutes.

The majority of lectures given at mechanics’ institutes were designed to entertain rather than educate. Table 3 demonstrates that the ostensible aim of mechanics’ institutes of promoting scientific and technical knowledge was sacrificed to an expediency dictated by the availability of lecturers and the need to attract audiences, and income.

This analysis concludes with a case study of the experience of the Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute in conducting formal lectures from its inception until the early 1860s. Their experience may illustrate the difficulties other institutes had in providing a viable programme of lectures.

In 1847 the Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute offered nine lectures, none were offered in 1848, and 13 were delivered in 1849. It was noted that there was less difficulty in procuring the delivery of lectures in 1850 when 14 were offered, than in 1851 when the institute was ‘unable to obtain on all occasions the scientific knowledge and talent for popular lectures which would draw large audiences and excite the public’.

Lectures held 1840 to 1899

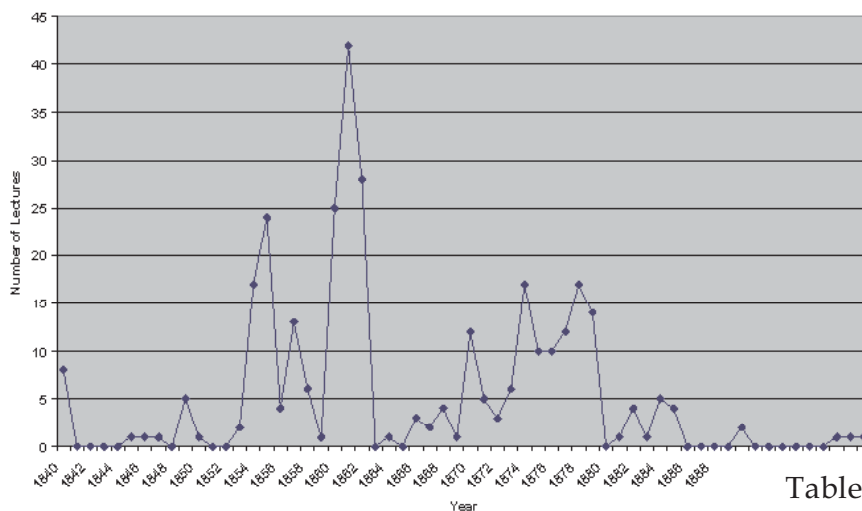


Table 1

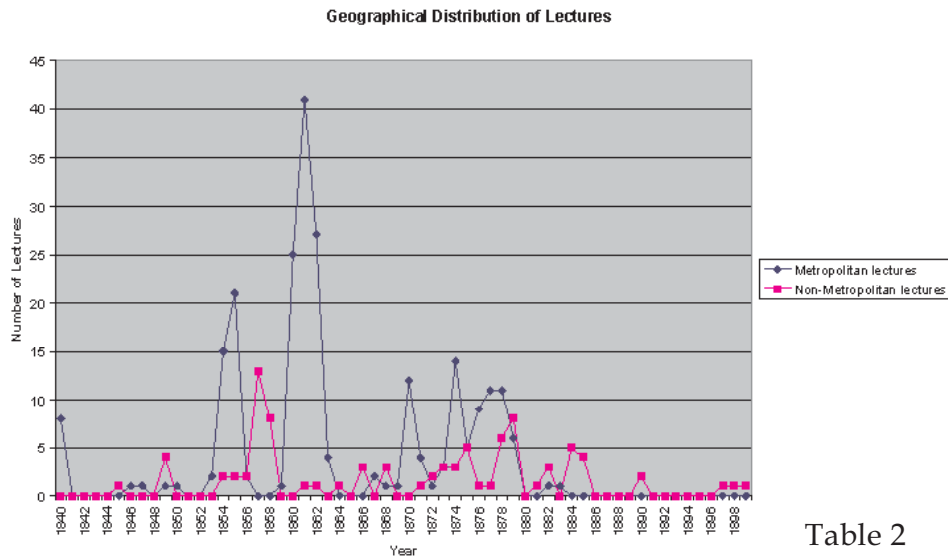


Table 2

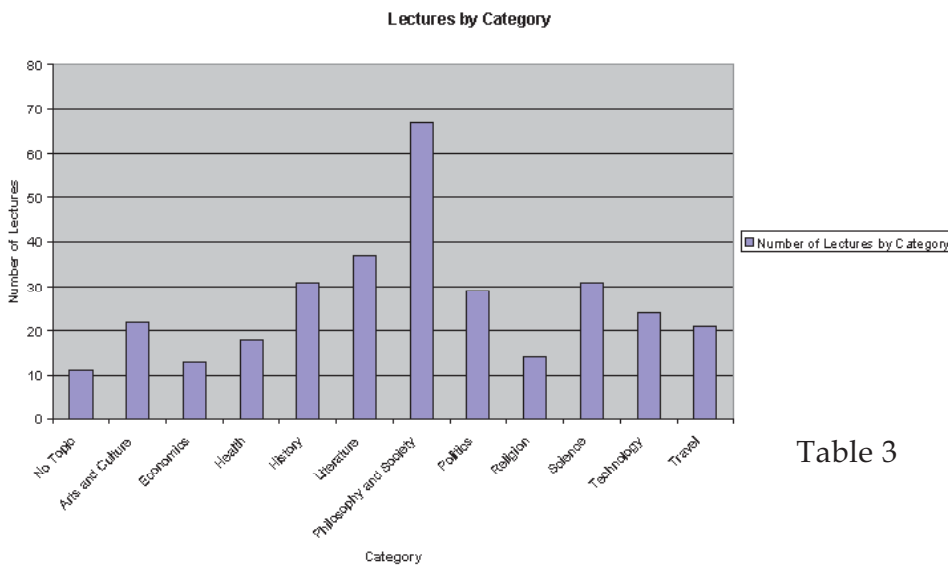


Table 3

Each year between 1852 and 1855, the annual reports noted the lack of interest on the part of the public and the membership in the lectures that were being offered. In 1852 it was found that ‘lectures were not supported by members generally’, and in 1853, ‘that scientific lectures were not appreciated’. The gloom continued in 1854 when lectures delivered on *Wit and Humour* and *Ninevah* failed to excite attention. The annual report commented that ‘members and the public have not accorded their support to lectures’. Similarly, the 1855 offerings of *The stellar heavens of Mohomadism*, *On exhibitions and gatherings together for the good of all* and *Physiology and digestion* drew little attention, the committee noting that ‘lectures were regarded with indifference by members and the public’. The offering of more entertaining lectures in 1857 – the annual report for that year does not mention their subjects – resulted in a total of 16 lectures

being held and the programme was regarded as generally successful. Interest rapidly fell off in 1858 and in the following year it was announced that ‘lectures would cease apart from offerings by members free of charge’. A comprehensive series of lectures were resumed in 1860 when 15 lectures were held followed by 21 lectures in 1861, 18 in 1862 and 3 in 1863. Substantially fewer lectures were held in ensuing years. Interestingly, regular series of lectures resumed in 1930 and continued until 1943.

¹ Herrin, Stephen.J. 2004, *Printers and Printing in Australia to the early 20th century: personal and business pursuits*, PhD Thesis, Monash University, p.178.

² Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute, Annual Report, 1851.

³ Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute, Annual Report, 1852.

⁴ Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute, Annual Report, 1853.

⁵ Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute, Annual Report, 1854.

⁶ Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute, Annual Report, 1855.

⁷ Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute, Annual Report, 1859.

⁸ Suter, Geraldine (comp) 1999, *Indexes to the Argus*, v 1-3, Argus Index Project, Melbourne.

⁹ Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute, Annual Reports, 1862-1943.