



USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
MECHANICS' INSTITUTES OF VICTORIA INC.

Newsletter No 28 – March 2012

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

This issue of *Useful Knowledge* has the usual contributions from MIV and from its individual and institutional members. Without these contributions there would be no *Useful Knowledge*. News from individual institutes is particularly important as it demonstrates the vibrancy of the mechanics' institute movement and also provides a forum through which institutes can be made aware of the activities and initiatives of other institutes.

The feature article on this issue lists the MIV inwards and outwards correspondence



The well stocked library at the Little River Mechanics' Institute, and the MIV plaque installed there for the Institute's centenary in 2010.



since last December. The intention of the article is to demonstrate the breadth and variety of the activities of MIV in advancing the cause of mechanics' institutes and halls in Victoria.

History and heritage is an important part of MIV's activities and the activities of the MIRC are an important contribution in preserving the history of mechanics' institutes and in disseminating that information to researchers and historians. The historical research interests of individual members is also important and this issue has a further important contribution from our President, Peter Pereyra updating his list of library collections in mechanics' institutes, sadly many of which no longer exist, or only as remnant collections.

The forthcoming conference later this year - see the section 'Forthcoming Conference' - also provides a forum for those interested in the history of mechanics' institute and similar institutions to present their research, or outline the history and activities of their own institute.

Donald Barker – Editor *Useful Knowledge*

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MIV NEWS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the Annual General Meeting of November last a number of changes were made to the composition of the committee. The office bearers were unchanged. A full contact list for office bearers and committee is given below.

President:

Mr Peter Pereyra
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Vice President:

Ms Jill Bartholomeusz
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Ms Bronwyn Lowden
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Mr Bruce Stubbs
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Mechanics' Worldwide 2012: MIV reps:
Jill Bartholomeusz, Bronwyn Lowden

FEBRUARY MIV MEETING

At the committee meeting held at the Little River Mechanics' Institute on 11 February it was decided to continue the highly successful program of regional committee meetings. The venues for forthcoming MIV committee meetings in 2012 are: May 12th - Footscray Mechanics' Institute at 10.00am, and on August 11th - Elmore Athenaeum at 11.00am.

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCE

Mary Carroll has provided the following update on the *Buildings, Books and Blackboards: Intersecting Narratives Conference* to be held at RMIT University Melbourne, Australia and which is scheduled for November 28th to December 1st 2012. MIV members should take particular notice of the second paragraph which points to the wide range of opportunities available for MIV members to make a presentation on their particular institution.

Combining the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society, Mechanics' Institutes Worldwide (under the auspices of MIV) and incorporating the tenth library history forum this conference will have something for all those interested in history, libraries, books,

A bus tour of the region that includes Footscray, Little River, Anakie, and Ballan is now organized. It will be held on Sunday, 27th May, 2012. See enclosed brochure, and book early to avoid disappointment. There will also be a comprehensive tour of the Mechanics' Institutes of the Inner North-East on Tuesday 27th November.

reading and education!

This conference will provide a wonderful opportunity for people across a number of disciplines, states and countries to come together and talk to others with similar interests and to hear and enjoy a range of speakers who are experts in their field. International guest speakers, Prof. Adam Nelson, Prof. Alastair Black and Dr Martyn Walker will provide conference delegates with insights into their areas of expertise and other speakers and participants will provide a wide ranging and exciting programme.

Everyone is encouraged to participate and present in a wide range of presentation formats including individual papers, panel discussions,

a picture and a thousand words and digital historical narratives. If you have not previously presented at a conference check out the blog buildingsbooksandblackboards.blogspot.com to find out more about these options. Of particular interest may be the latter two options as they provide for short presentations and an opportunity for you to promote for example the history of your organisation, collections or buildings.

There are many options for attendance at the conference and delegate's fees are reasonably priced especially if you are a MIV member and take advantage of the early bird rates! You can even attend for a single day or if there are a

number of you from one organisation you can share an institutional registration allowing different people to attend on different days. Concession rates also apply for students and concession card holders!

The organisers hope you will take full advantage of what we believe will be a fantastic event and the participation of as many of you as possible will make the event even better. We are looking forward to your submissions (due by August 3rd 2012) and the pleasure of your company. Check the blog for full details or contact Jill Bartholomeusz jillbarth@gmail.com or Mary Carroll macarroll@csu.edu.au

NEWS REPORTS

OAM FOR FRANK HURLEY

MIV and Ballarat Mechanics' Institute stalwart Frank Hurley was awarded an OAM for services to Education and the Community in the Australia Day Honours list. A major part of the nomination, which was supported by Jim Lowden and the MIV, related to his exceptional

work on behalf of the Ballarat MI and as MIV's foundation President. His work during the first decade of MIV has been documented in the MIV 10th Anniversary booklet copies of which are available from the secretary.

INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DAY 2012

International Museum Day 2012 will be held on 18 May on the theme Museums in a changing world: new challenges, new inspirations. Visit the official website to get posters, postcards and information on how you and your museum can participate in IMD 2012: <http://network.icom.museum/imd2012.html>

Today, the world is changing faster than ever. New technology delivers new ideas, gigabytes of information, news of an increasingly unstable climate, all shared by social media. Modern museums must compete for an audible voice against the furious pace of this background.

Museums in a Changing World is recognition that institutions are faced with interpreting, and existing in, a field that is becoming increasingly fluid. Each may face a unique set of goals, interests and audiences. But the necessity to thrive in the face of these changes is something that binds all institutions, large and small. Thus, IMD2012 is as much about museums growing and shaping their future, as it is about displaying and interpreting issues like climate change and new electronic media.

To assist you in connecting meaningfully with the theme, here are five topics on which

you can build your specific programming.

The topics are: The role of museums in a "new" society. Museums face unique challenges related to their social, political and ecological environment. They play a key role in development through education and democratisation, while also serving as witnesses of the past and guardians of humanity's treasures for future generations.

Environmental sustainability. Museums are constantly developing and refining what they do to reduce their draw on environmental resources. As such, they are well placed advocates for environmental sustainability, as well as being examples of best practice.

Using the past to build the future. Museums ensure they are the intergenerational guardians of the world's heritage and create an ongoing link to the past thanks to universal messages.

New media. Museums rapidly learn to use some of the new communication opportunities associated with new media and show a strong ability to react in this respect.

Innovation. To respond to the social changes and adapt to their visitors' expectations, museums innovate.

Contributed by Vicki Court

BUSH FIRE GRANTS

The foundation for rural and regional renewal has a grant open to all Victorian communities impacted by the 2009 Bush Fires. Applications for grants of between \$100 and \$30,000 close at end of April 2013.

The grant is called STEP (Skills, Training, Engagement and Practical Support).

Application can be made for the following grants:

1. Training and Skills development
2. Strengthen community networks

3. Mentoring
4. Practical Human Resources Support
5. Community leadership

Application forms can be downloaded from web site at www.frrr.org.au

Some grants are for a specified region or other limitation. Also in most cases population is limited to less than 5000 or 10000.

*Contributed by Brian Foley
Ballan Mechanics' Institute*

MECHANICS' INSTITUTES IN THE MEDIA

It would seem in the 1840s in New York, USA, that the Mechanics' Institute was a very well known and favoured place to visit. On p.104. of Irving Wallace *The Fabulous Showman* which is the story of Phineas T. Barnum - an American showman, entrepreneur, and salesman, the paragraph reads: "He concentrated all his energies on making the American Museum the city's foremost landmark. How well he succeeded in the next decade may be realized by consulting the leading tourists' guidebook of the period, *New York*, by E. Porter Belden, published in 1849. While its chapter headed 'Entertainment and Amusement' makes mention of Castle Garden, the Lyceum Gallery, the Mechanics' Institute, and the bathing resort of Coney Island, the place of honour is given to Barnum's showcase."

The Saturday *Age* of October 22, 2011 -

Traveller Section, p. 20. had an article headed "Pocket Guide to Kallista", it read in part:

"Originally known as South Sassafras, a competition was launched and it was renamed Kallista, a derivative of the Greek Word for "most beautiful". From 1867 the area was extensively logged, with most of it exhausted by the early 1900s. The land was released for agriculture and settlement. This tree-filled pocket has drawn some notable artists. Poet C.J. Dennis camped out in an old horse-drawn tram to complete *The Songs of the Sentimental Bloke*. Meanwhile infamous Heidelberg School painter Tom Roberts resided at Kallista for almost a decade. Originally built as a community hall in 1900 the Kallista Mechanics Hall has been a multi-purpose venue, including the site of the township's first school classes".

FEATURE ARTICLE

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE MIV SECRETARY

The holding of quarterly committee meetings and the publication of Useful Knowledge along with the occasional bus tour is just a small part of the activities of Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria. MIV secretary Judith Dwyer, ably assisted by a dedicated support group are constantly dealing with a myriad range of issues ranging from matters affecting the administration of mechanics' institutes to government relations to requests from researchers. The correspondence list from the February meeting gives an indication of the different ways in which MIV is advancing the interests of mechanics' institutes in Victoria.

1. Annual Statement by Public Officer.

Outwards 12/11/2011:

Consumer Affairs Victoria Copy of Annual Statement by Public Officer and Financial Statement as at 30 June 2011.

2. 2012 Conference.

Inwards:

Pam Baragwanath 16/11/2011, Asking if any member has expressed an interest in presenting a paper on the MIRC, including the work on the Scanning Project.

Peter Pereyra. 18/11/2011, Noting that the call for papers has only just gone out. He is preparing a paper on Melbourne's circulating libraries.

Mary Carroll, Conference Organizing Committee 25/11/2011, Outlining the funding needs for the Conference and asking who will organize the launch.

Graham Hughes, Treasurer MIV 26/11/2011, Outlining his calculations for the MIV contribution to the Conference.

3. MIV Historical Plaques Program.

Outwards:

Secretary, Mt. Egerton Mechanics' Hall 18/11/2011, Information about the MIV Historical Plaques Program a brochure enclosed.

Inwards:

W.M Comer, Sec., Elmore Athenaeum Hall 21-22/11/2011, A thank you note, and letter, for the delivery of the plaque. And hoping we enjoyed the visit to the Elmore Hall complex.

Sue Mann, Warburton 11/1/2012 and 13/1/2012, Seeking information on the Historical Plaques Program. A brochure was sent, plus examples of recent plaques.
Chris Dormer, Stanley Athenaeum

28/1/2012, Advising that committee has agreed to go ahead with a plaque but are awaiting the wording.

4. MIV Scanning Project.

Outwards:

The Hon. Ted Baillieu MLA, Premier & Minister for the Arts 19/11/2011, Thank you for the grant for the MIV Scanning Project.

Mr Clem Newton-Brown MLA, Member for Prahran 19/11/2011, Thank you for his assistance in obtaining the grant for the Scanning Project.

Inwards:

Simon Troeth, Principal Media Adviser Premier of Vic 21/11/2011, In response to my email thanking him for his guidance of the application. He expressed his pleasure in assisting the project and noted that the Premier could be involved when the project is completed down the track. Information about the project was mailed to: Glenmaggie MI, Lardner Hall, Neerim Junction MI, Williamstown Historical Society, Stratford MI, Stratford and District Historical Society. Email contact with Dean Hall and Tynong Hall. Responses received to date from: Lardner and Neerim Junction.

5. MIV Committee Resignation.

Outwards:

Graham Dudley 23/11/2011, With thanks for his many years contribution to the MIV.

6. Frankston Mechanics' Institute.

Inwards:

Jim Lowden forwarded emails from J.P.Laverack 24/11/2011, Peter outlined the decisions being made re the management of the refurbished Frankston MI. The alternatives are direct management by the Council, or management by a Section 86 Committee of Management. Is there any guidance that MIV can provide?

7. Mechanics' Institutes – Insurance.

Inwards:

Rebecca Mathews, Claims Administrator, DSE 30/11/2011, Seeking information on insurance arrangements for Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria. She is trying to find low cost alternatives for one of their committees.

Outwards:

Rebecca Mathews, Claims Administrator, DSE 30/11/2011, Forwarded Graham's response that outlined different options available,

including the RHSV insurance package.

8. Shepparton Mechanics' Institute.

Outwards:

Mr Lance Woodhouse, Chairman, Trustees of Shepparton MI 5/12/2011, Follow up his phone call, that was prompted by Pam Baragwanath's interview on the local ABC radio. He was sent a selection of back numbers of the MIV Newsletter, and an outline of the MIV Scanning Project. He was also invited to submit an article for the Newsletter.

9. Hall Hire Rates.

Inwards:

Bronwyn Lowden. 9/12/2012, Article outlining the hall charges at the Huon Valley Hall, Tasmania especially the emphasis on special rates for community groups. Refer to website: <http://www.huonvalley.tas.gov.au>

10. MIV Support for Grant Application.

Outwards:

Bonnie Doon Community Group. 20/12/2011, Requesting MIV support for a "Your Community Heritage" grant application for a grant to produce the booklet: "A Tale of Two Libraries, Bonnie Doon, Victoria".

11. Community Heritage Grant 2011.

Inwards:

CHG Coordinator, National Library of Australia. 22/12/2011, Enclosing CHG Certificate for the grant awarded to the MIV, CATHS and ARHS (Vic.)

12. Clonmel Mechanics' Institute, Co Tipperary, Ireland.

Outwards:

Molly Daly, Ireland 1/1/2012. Letter following up an earlier contact about her thesis on the Clonmel MI, and notice about the forthcoming conference.

Inwards:

Molly Daly, Ireland. 11/1/2012, Expressing interest in the conference, and requesting further details of costs, including accommodation. Some information was provided, plus referral to the conference blog. <http://buildingsbooksandblackboards.blogspot.com>

13. 2012 Directory of Public Library Services.

Inwards:

Nada Bagaric, Vic Grants Commission, Local Govt Victoria. 11/1/2012, Requesting details for the next Directory.

Outwards:

Nada Bagaric, Vic Grants Commission, Local Govt Victoria. 23/1/2012

Updated details provided for the MIV, Maldon Athenaeum, Footscray MI, and Prahran MI. It is presumed that any changes for the Melbourne Athenaeum, Ballarat MI and Berwick MI

entries were provided directly by them.

14. Mechanics' Institutes Research.

Outwards:

Ken James, author, Victorian history 12/1/2012, Following up a request for information that was received, and responded to by Prahran MI. The author is researching MIs that were located in the former Metcalf Shire.

Inwards:

Ken James, author 13/1/2012, Letter promising to pass on any information about records that they find.

15. Heritage Grants Victoria.

Inwards:

Media Release from The Hon Matthew Guy MLC, Minister for Planning, outlining grants to local communities, ranging from \$8,000 to \$200,000 for a total of \$1.13m.

16. MIV Meeting, Little River Mechanics Institute.

Outwards

Invitations to MIV members in the region 25/1/2012, Invitations posted to MIV members at Anakie, Beech Forest, Birregurra, Inverleigh, Truganina.

17. OAM Award to Frank Hurley.

Outwards:

Dr Frank Hurley 30/1/2012, Letter from Peter Pereyra, President, MIV congratulating Frank on receiving the OAM Award in the Australia Day Honours. On file is a copy of the confidential letter provided by the MIV to support the nomination.

18. Mechanics' Institute book request.

Inwards:

Geoffrey Johnston 7/2/2012, Requesting details of the book on Victorian Mechanics' Institutes.

Outwards:

Geoffrey Johnston 7/2/2012, Details of *If the Walls Could Speak* by Pam Baragwanath were provided.

19. Community Halls.

Inwards

Jim Lowden 7/2/2012, Outlining a proposal for a state-wide uniform approach to Community Halls and identifying insurance as the big concern of managers of Community Halls, but there are also issues of hall charges and maintenance.

20. MIV Travelling Exhibitions.

Outwards:

Deb Milligan, Regional Arts Officer, Wellington Shire. Outlining the details of the two Travelling Exhibitions. Details will be circulated to local venues, including libraries.

21. Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts.

Inwards:

Notice of AGM Tuesday 13
March 2012. 9/2/2012.

22. Royal Historical Society of Victoria Inc.
Inwards:

Notice of Seminar Saturday 3 March 2012.
“Standing Your Ground” – Understanding
your lease, occupancy agreements, new
opportunities for old buildings and the
importance of keeping excellent records for the
management of your building.
MIRC enquiries (email enquiries
to mivenquiry@live.com.au)

The following Mechanics’ Institute
enquiries were received:

23. Edenhope Mechanics Institute.

Geoff Langsworth, Sec., Edenhope & District
Historical Society sought assistance in
researching the history of the Edenhope MI.
He was sent preliminary information from
Pam Baragwanath’s book and provided with
information from the MIRC files. Also provided
with details of the information at Prahran MI
and an outline of the MIV Scanning Project.

24. Kyabram Mechanics’ Institute.

Inwards:

Ranine McKenzie, Senior Planning Officer,
Goulburn-Murray Water. As part of her
course on Heritage Planning, she is preparing
a Conservation Management Plan on the
Kyabram Mechanics’ Institute. She requested
information on its original construction in
1891 and the extensions in 1908 etc. She has

already accessed the newspaper articles from
the local historical library that outline the halls
events and milestones. The information from
the MIRC files was forwarded.

25. Newsletters Received

By email:

Malmsbury Historical Society.
November 2011, February 2012.
Maxus News. February 2012.

By print:

RHSV. Victorian Historical Journal.
Vol.82, No.2, November 2011.
RHSV History News. No. 295. Nov/Dec 2011.
What’s On at RHSV. Nov-Dec 2011 – Feb 2012.
Peninsula Past Times : Journal of the
Mornington Peninsula Family History Society.
No. 124, November, 2011.
Artful Dodger. (Warrandyte MI &
Arts Association) November 2011.
Athenaeum Music & Arts Library, La Jolla,
California. November/December 2011.
Mornington & District Historical Society
Inc. Newsletter. November 2011.
The Nepean. (Nepean Historical
Society) December 2011.
Community Newsletter (delivered to
Arthurs Creek, Strathewen, Nutfield
and parts of Doreen and Cottles
Bridge) No. 86, November 2011.
Artful Dodger. (Warrandyte MI &
Arts Association) December 2011.
RHSV History News. No. 298. Feb-Mar 2012
What’s On at RHSV. Feb-March 2012.

AROUND THE INSTITUTES

BALLARAT MECHANICS’ INSTITUTE

The OAM award to Frank Hurley was mentioned above. Confronted with an ageing and dilapidated building which was rapidly deteriorating he set about finding supporters who would help him restore it to its former grandeur. He harangued council officers and government ministers and pleaded for the case for the preservation of the institute as an icon of Ballarat history. The hard work paid off and the members now have a magnificent building with a fantastic theatre. The Batten room has been restored as the library and the Heritage and Reading room was officially opened last November by Emeritus Professor Weston Bate. The popular twilight talks will resume on April 20. A new website has been provided and all the happenings and events at the Ballarat Mechanics’ Institute can be found at <http://www.ballaratmi.com.au>

BERWICK MECHANICS’ INSTITUTE & FREE LIBRARY

Our team has completed the cataloguing on to the Libraries Australia database all of the institute’s collection of general non-fiction and Australiana books, a time consuming project. The draft of our revised Heritage Collection Policy is under review, as is the Emergency Procedures manual and action plan. We were fortunate in July to receive funding by way of a grant from the Department of Planning and Community Development through the Mechanics Institutes of Victoria Libraries initiative. These funds will be used to purchase a much needed new computer, upgrade some software, replace the photocopier coin collector, replace some worn furniture and make an improvement to the heating for the benefit of the volunteers. The committee of BMIFL is most grateful for the work of the MIV

which has resulted in these funds being made available.

In July we received a draft of a Funding and Services Agreement from the City of Casey. The agreement provides a certain fixed amount of funding for the operations of the institute over the next five years. The wording of some of the clauses in the Agreement does not seem to fit a community organisation such as ours, we are trying to have one or two clauses changed. We are also hoping to have an increase to the base amount of funding offered. Some members of Berwick MI attended, with a display, the Local History Expo held on Saturday 22 October at the Narre Warren Library.

On Wednesday 7 December at the Old Cheese Factory at Berwick a very pleasant afternoon and pre-Christmas celebration was provided by the committee to thank the volunteers who work in the library for their past year's contribution. Over fifty volunteers and partners attended. The institute eventually received from the City of Casey the annual allocation of grant Funds, which, although welcome, did not include the major increase which had been sought to balance the budget.

The Berwick Mechanics' Institute A.G.M. will be held on Wednesday 14 March at the Berwick RSL Hall. Guest speaker will be BMI's own Edward Vaughan who has a BA (Hons) and Masters Degree in Psychology and a PhD in economics. Planning is continuing for the celebration of Berwick Mechanics' Institutes' 150th Anniversary, which includes a dinner to be held late October this year.

FRANKSTON

The official opening of the refurbished Frankston Mechanics' Institute hall took place on 19 October last. The opening was attended by the Hon Alex Chernov, Governor of Victoria who unveiled a plaque commemorating the occasion. Also in attendance were representatives of both the federal and state local members of parliament and the local Mayor along with MIV icon Jim Lowden who agitated tirelessly for the restoration over many years. Anne Ringer from the Mornington Peninsula family History Group also agitated tirelessly for the restoration.

The renovations to the hall include a stunning timber floor polished to perfection; light cream walls and paintwork giving an attractive light atmosphere. The toilets and kitchen have also been upgraded. Lighting suitable for drama productions are yet to be installed and the front two rooms, one of which was occupied by the Mornington Peninsula family History Group is

still to be completed. The original internal walls have been left exposed and will be protected by heavy duty protective screens thus exposing part of the original 1880 building.

*Peninsula past times –
November 2011 pp12-13.*

GLENGARRY MECHANICS INSTITUTE

Glengarry Mechanics Institute has received a \$93,000 grant for restoration works which will enable the hall to again be used.

Contributed by Janette Hodgson

LITTLE RIVER MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The local history collection is growing and some local primary school groups have attended readings at the library. An excess of books in the romance classification on the shelves is to be remedied. Three book-plated volumes formerly from the Lismore Mechanics' Institute & Free Library have been donated.

*Contributed by Sue and Peter Jones
Little River MI librarians.*

MERRIGUM HALL

Janet Sullivan represented the Department of Planning and Community Development and Heritage Victoria at the official re-opening of the Merrigum Mechanics Institute and Memorial Hall on 25 November.

"This celebration reflects the importance of local meeting places for communities and highlights the impact the closure of this hall for the past 18 months has had," she said. "The refurbishment of the hall, supported by a heritage grant, will enable it to again play an important role as a community centre and meeting place.

"Having undergone extensive refurbishment largely funded by a Heritage Grant, including roof replacement, restumping, electrical works, replastering and repainting, the hall is looking wonderful and will now play an even greater role as a vital community centre," she said.

Heritage Council of Victoria Newsletter #52

MALMSBURY MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The Malmsbury Historical Society meets at the Malmsbury Mechanics' Institute on the 3rd Wednesday of each month. Their room at the front of the Mechanics' Institute is generally open for research enquiries between 9am and 2pm on Fridays (but not during school holidays). To make sure it will be open (especially if you have to travel any great distance), please check first with Sue Walter (phone 5423 9383).

Some time ago, the historical plaque was wrenched off and stolen from the door of the Mechanics' Institute. It briefly outlined

the history of the Caroline Chisholm Shelter Shed and the Mechanics' Institute. We plan to replace it with a new plaque sourced through the Mechanics' Institute of Victoria (which we hope to mount more securely).

Sue Walter is well advanced on another new book to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Malmsbury's Mechanics' Institute. This body met in the old Shelter Shed, until it was progressively replaced by the present building from the mid-1870s. It organised lectures and adult education courses and established a lending library, remnants of which still exist in our collection. Sue is still looking for any old photos of the Mechanics Institute or old records relating to it (especially if anyone knows of any old minute books, etc, that might have survived). We hope to launch the book on Saturday 28th April at the Mechanics' Institute.

Contributed by Ian Thomas

PRAHRAN MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The committee are still in the planning stages for works to the new building, and plans are now ready to go to the architects. A completed architectural plan will then go to the local council for approval.

In the meantime, we have been able to use the 39 St Edmonds Road premises to store stacks of low-demand material from the historical collection, taking some pressure off the library shelves at High Street.

The Australian Railways Historical Society (Vic. branch) library has now moved from the High Street building to St Edmonds Road, allowing it more space for organising and cataloguing.

The PMI is in receipt of 1600+ Australian history items from Whitehorse Manningham Regional Library Corporation, and processing these items into the collection will keep staff and volunteers very busy for some time.

*Contributed by Christine Worthington
(Promotions & Publications Librarian)*

TALLAROOK MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The regular and popular monthly farmers markets continue to be held at the Tallarook Mechanics' Institute on the first Sunday of each month.

The 2012 theatre season kicks off on 5 May with Josh Earl vs. the Women's Weekly Children's Birthday Cake Book. This is not a kids show, but rather a parody on the cakes we all had to make for our children for so many years. This performance will feature an opportunity for you to bring your favourite cake to be judged by Josh during the show!

TARADALE

Planning Minister Matthew Guy inspected two recently completed Heritage Grant projects in Taradale earlier this month. The first project was the recently restored Mechanics Institute where restoration works, largely funded by a \$42,000 Heritage Grant, will enable the hall to be more fully utilised and help the Taradale Historical Group share its collection with visitors and researchers.

Mr Guy said Mechanics Institutes were historically educational institutes, particularly aimed at adults, to improve knowledge and skills.

"In its reincarnation, the institute will continue to provide education about our heritage and local history," he said.

The project included conservation works to internal rooms (sub-floor partial replacement, stripping of brickwork, plastering, and carpeting, joinery, electrical and painting), exterior drainage and ventilation.

The former Mechanics Institute was formally re-opened on Friday, 9 December along with another project by the Historical Group, funded by a History Victoria grant - a series of interpretive signs located throughout the town.

WARRANTYTE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The Warrandyte Mechanics' Institute has a number of active sub-groups namely, Craft, Painting, Pottery and Theatre. The final performance of the theatre group in 2011 was *Already Maine*, performed in November. The first production of 2012 will be *Follies: A Space Oddity* and the first performance is scheduled for 22 March. In other news, the stage floor has been completely replaced in preparation for *Follies*.

Contributed by Allan Cornell via edodger.



HISTORY PAGE

SOME FURTHER NOTES ON THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE LIBRARIES. (CONTINUED) *by Peter Pereyra*

In the last issue of *Useful Knowledge* I contributed an introduction to what I hope will be a consistently maintained index to the libraries of the Mechanics' Institutes. It will be noted that much of the information contained in the list, below, is now somewhat dated but I am confident that hall custodians, MIV members, and historical societies will provide some updates which I will submit to *Useful Knowledge*. I was pleased to hear from Sue Mann of Warburton MI, and Yvonne Deering of Nagambie MI, following my last article and their reports have been included in the details in the list. To avoid the use of footnotes, and for ease of reading, acronyms for the various publications and other referenced material will be used. A legend, of sorts, of those references appears at the end of this article.

Amphitheatre. One library book held in the Learmonth Historical Society Collection. [PM, n.d.]

Ararat. [FC2000]

Bagshot. A review of Barry Clay's book, Bagshot Public Hall, indicates that the book contains a list of books still held from the Hall's Free Library days. [UK No. 21, p. 24.]

Ballarat. [FC2000] See also the various articles by Dr Frank Hurley in *Useful Knowledge* on the progress of the restoration program, and the activities, of the Ballarat Mechanics' Institute.

Bendigo. The Bendigo Mechanics' Institute was formerly the Sandhurst Mechanics' Institute, and the collection consists of 5,500 volumes. Librarian, Ms Jenny McIntyre, reported to Pam that the cataloguing would require considerable work and that the collection included a 'dilapidated book catalogue dated 1884'. Apparently the collection includes materials from other mechanics' institutes including Eaglehawk, Long Gully, California Gully, Golden Square, White Hills, Kangaroo Valley, and the Bendigo School of Mines. [PM and FC2000].

A very comprehensive report on the library collection was prepared by Peter Thompson whilst he was the Heyward Librarian at the Latrobe University, Bendigo. The report can

be found at: <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/about/publications/thompson.pdf>

Berwick. [FC2000] See also the various reports made by Judith Dwyer and Graham Hughes in the MIV minutes and articles in *Useful Knowledge* on the activities of the Berwick Mechanics' Institute.

Bonnie Doon. Corinne Brewis submitted an article on the history of the institute for *Useful Knowledge*. [UK No. 25, pp. 10-12.] Corinne has been sorting and cataloguing books from the library collection and showed me several at a recent MIV meeting which bear the stamps of circulating libraries. I hope to have a closer look at the collection when time permits.

Boolarra. The Boolarra Mechanics' Institute opened in 1905 and the community library operated from the MI until the 1960s. [UK No. 18, p. 7.] There is no evidence of any of the books from its collection.

Briagolong. [FC2000]

Budgeree. It is clear that the Budgeree Mechanics' Institute had a library early in the twentieth century as some letters, one dated 2 October 1913, are still held in the Narracan Mechanics' Institute collection. The letters indicate that Budgeree MI was inquiring as to whether Narracan MI had books for sale. It would appear that Budgeree does not hold any books from a collection that it might have had but the recent cataloguing of the Narracan MI collection might uncover material that will shed light on this matter.

California Gully. The California Gully Mechanics' Institute is still in operation but its library closed in 1950. [UK No. 17, p. 7.] There is no evidence of any of the books from its collection.

Carisbrook. A very comprehensive article

Chiltern. [FC2000] Chiltern Athenaeum Trust Historian, Rex Fuge, replied to the Pam's correspondence and provided a list of part of the Athenaeum collection. [PM, n.d.]

Corack. One library book held in the Learmonth Historical Society Collection. [PM, n.d.]

Cressy. A correspondent from the Colac and

District Historical Society reported that the Mechanics' Institute was constructed in about 1907 and a local landowner donated books for the library. The library closed and books were disposed of in 1939. [PM, n.d.]

Eaglehawk. The Project MIS-sing register only records one piece of correspondence from 2005 which enquires as to the future of the collection at the Eaglehawk Institute. Apparently there is a large collection of books at the Institute which require assessment and cataloguing.

Echuca. The secretary of the Echuca Historical Society, Ms Dot Hammond, reported that the society holds no mechanics' institute archival material but they do have one library book (1887) which has a copy of the library rules on the front. [PM, 11 March 2005]

An article in Useful Knowledge provides further information on the Mechanics' Institute and its library, and a photograph was obtained of the book held by the institute. That article also mentions that Pam had located another volume from the collection. [UK No. 21, p. 10.]

Eddington. One library book held in the Learmonth Historical Society Collection. [PM, n.d.]

Evansford. A remnant library collection held in the Learmonth Historical Society Collection. [PM, n.d.]

Footscray. [FC2000]

Fryerstown. In correspondence with the Fryerstown Burke and Wills Mechanics' Institute, it was reported to Pam that that there are no archival materials of any kind still extant. However, there were about 740 books in the library collection which had been removed from the shelves, cleaned, sorted and replaced after all the books had been listed. Of interest is that, like many books held in MI collections, a number of them had previously been in use in circulating libraries. Some of the book stamps listed are: The Book Lover's Library; Brabazon's Hygienic Lending Library; Linger Longer Library, the Myer Library, Pedler's Circulating Library; F. Owens New Hygienic Library; Mullen's Library; and Burwood Modern Library.

Gisborne. An article in Useful Knowledge suggests that the Institute, established in 1856, had, by 1861, a library of 1800 books. [UK No. 22, p. 13.] Pam's book shows that the library lending library and reading rooms were in use until the 1950s but closed at some

time after that. [ITWCS, pp. 146-147]. It is not known if any of the volumes survive.

Goorambat. An article in Useful Knowledge provides a snapshot of the history of this Institute which indicates that the library was in use until 1920 and that several books from the original collection are still held. Photocopies of two title pages were sent to the MIRC from books published in 1876. [UK No. 22, p. 13.]

Huntly. It appears that the Huntly Mechanics' Institute was established around 1880 and received a single library grant in 1900. There seems to be no other information available in relation to the Institute or its library. [UK No. 20, p. 11.]

Kyneton. Ms Larina Strauch of the Kyneton Historical Society reported to Pam that there are about 1800 books from the M.I. library collection. [PM, n.d.]

Laanecoorie. One library book held in the Learmonth Historical Society Collection. [See Learmonth]

Lancefield. A remnant library collection is still held at the institute and Pam inspected the content which was then awaiting a specialist assessment. [UK No. 23, p. 14.]

Learmonth. Mr Peter Cox of the Learmonth Historical Society reported to Pam that a catalogue of their collection was completed and that books from other Institutes were represented, including Amphitheatre, Corack, Eddington, Laanecoorie. [PM, n.d.]

Lexton. A remnant library collection is held in the Learmonth Historical Society Collection. [See Learmonth]

Maldon. [FC2000]

Malmsbury. Sue Walter of the Malmsbury Historical Society reported that she had commenced cataloguing the remnant library collection. [UK No. 18, p. 8.] Sue also contributed an article to the same issue entitled 'There's bound to be some something interesting in a remnant library' and states that there are 290 volumes in the collection. [UK No. 18, pp. 21 – 23.] Sue provides further details about the curiously bound books in a further article. [UK No. 25, pp. 5-6.]

I can shed a little light on a couple of the matters mentioned in Sue's article. Of the 23 books in the collection that have a curious binding, published between 1862 and 1892, Sue notes that they bear a stamp of 'T. Craig & Co., Post Office Place, Melbourne.' Craig and Company is first listed in the directories as the

bookselling company of Craig and Brandt at 276 Post Office Place, Melbourne from 1890 to 1891, moving to the corner of Post Office Place at 268 Little Bourke Street to conduct the business in 1892. Craig then continued the business at the latter address as 'T. Craig & Co.' until 1901. Sue further notes that five of the volumes were previously held by A.H Kenyon's circulating library in Richmond. Kenyon had a long association with Richmond both as a bookseller and circulating librarian. The directories list his businesses:

As a bookseller at 77 Bridge Road from 1882-1884;

As a bookseller at 63 Bridge Road from 1885-1891, and a circulating librarian at the same address 1885-1892;

As a bookseller at 107 Bridge Road from 1892-1914, and a circulating librarian at the same address 1897-1898

As a bookseller at 125 Bridge Road from 1915-1921, and a circulating librarian at the same address 1915-1916.

Mardan. See Stony Creek

Meeniyan. See Stony Creek

Melbourne Athenaeum. [FC2000]

Milawa. Mr John Brown reported to Pam that the Minute Books and the library collection are held in storage. [PM, email of 19 March 2007]

Nagambie. On 10 February 2012 I was contacted by Yvonne Deering, Secretary of the Nagambie Mechanics' Institute. Yvonne reports that there are about 600 books in the library holding and she has commenced cataloguing the collection. So far over 230 have been listed, predominantly published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Institute has purchased two glass-fronted cases to shelve and display part of the collection and they will be sited in super room. I will certainly maintain contact with Yvonne and report further as her cataloguing proceeds, and make a visit to the MI as I believe that some of the items already catalogued will add to my research.

Narracan. A report prepared by Linda Barraclough and her team, "Researching and Preserving the Library Collections at Old Gippsdown" formed the basis of a Community Heritage Grant. At least 2000 books form the collection. Linda's team also found a timber Travelling Library book box which the State Library of Victoria used for many years to ship books on loan to rural libraries from about

1860 until the 1970s. There is considerable correspondence in the MIRC, scanned from the Narracan collection, relating to the movement of the book boxes.

Port Fairy. [FC2000]

Portarlington. Pam reported that a collection of 35 books from the former Portarlington Mechanics Institute; Portarlington Free And Circulating Library had been given to her and those were entered into the MIV collection. [PM, n.d.]

Prahran. [FC2000]

Stanley. [FC2000]

Stony Creek. Pam received a number of responses regarding the Stony Creek MI including one from Graeme Rogers of the Foster and District Historical Society which indicated that the a collection of the institute's books dating from the 1800s are in their collection. [PM, 27 March 2005]

Pam further reported that she had assisted Rosemary Crawford of the Foster Museum to assess the book collection held there. Included were:

154 books with Stony Creek MI library stamp;
14 books with Melbourne Athenaeum Library stamp;

5 books with Mardan Public Library stamp;

1 book with Mardan M.I. and Free Library;

1 book with Meeniyan MI and Free Library stamp.

[PM, November 2005]

Thorpdale. A letter from Linda Barraclough stated that the Thorpdale MI library collection was being housed in the Cobb and Co Inn building at Old Gippsdown. [PM, n.d.]

Walhalla. The Institute Board has recently reported that it has discovered a copy of the library catalogue of its collection in the 1890s. Several books have subsequently been located which bear the stamp of the institute. [UK No. 25, p. 8.]

Wandiligong. It was reported to Pam that the Wandiligong Athenaeum still had a small library collection. [PM, n.d.] The MIV tour of the north-east of the State, conducted on 11 and 12 October 2008, visited the Athenaeum and inspected the collection. [UK No. 19, p. 2.]

Warburton. A letter from Sue Mann, Secretary of the Warburton Mechanics Institute And Free Library informed that plans had been prepared for the restoration of the Hall, and a number of minute books and other documentation, as well as the original library

books, were still preserved. [PM, n.d.] Following my article in the last *Useful Knowledge*, Sue wrote to me on 11 January 2012 and stated that a number of books were still in the collection, mainly fiction from the 1950s. It seems that the Institute managed to sell some of the books to raise funds for the building restoration and those that remain are in relatively poor condition. Sue has also offered to make the Warburton MI records available for scanning so I will be able to view the library collection in the near future and report further.

Warrnambool. The extensive library collection of the Warrnambool Mechanics' Institute library was being stored in less than ideal conditions when Pam received correspondence in May 2007. [PM May 2007] A grant from Heritage Victoria allowed for a significance assessment of the collection, [UK No. 20, p. 17.] and the assessment was published in February 2009, which contains considerable detail about the remaining library holdings. The document can be found at: <http://www.flagstaffhill.com/media/uploads/SignificanceAssessmentfebruary2010.pdf>

Wedderburn. A letter from Campbell Holmes, Secretary of the Korong Historical Society, advised that the Historical Society holds the Wedderburn Mechanics' Institute's collection of library books at their room 26 High Street, Wedderburn. He further states that there are "some beautifully bound Dictionaries, Bibles and Encyclopaedias". [PM, 17 March 2007]

Whorouly. Sue Bromilow's report in *Useful Knowledge* provides information on the loss of the institute's records but the surviving minutes show that the library collection was sold around 1961. Some of the books survive, however. [UK No. 22, p. 16.]

Yackandandah. Holds a large collection of library books and some uncatalogued items. [PM, n.d.]

Yallourn. A number of items are held in the Sunny Creek school building at the Old Gippstown complex. (FC2007, p. 8) This article suggests that there are items from other libraries in the area but no details are provided.

Legend for the reference sources:

Baragwanath, Pam, *If the Walls Could Speak: A Social History of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria*, Windsor, Victoria, Mechanics' Institutes Inc., 2000. (Referenced within the report as ITWCS followed by the relevant page number)

Baragwanath, Pam, notes arising from the 'Project Mis-sing' correspondence which Pam collated from about 2005 to 2008, along with a considerable body of notes from her personal collection. (Referenced with within the report as PM, and followed by a date, if it is known)

Clancy, Frances, *The Libraries of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria*, Melbourne, Victoria, Local Government Division, Department of Infrastructure, 2000. This report can be found on the web at: http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/37918/LibrariesMechanicsInstitutesVictoria.pdf (Referenced with within the report as FC2000)

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Lowden, Bronwyn, *Mechanics Institutes, Schools of Arts, Athenaeums, etc.: An Australian Checklist*, 2nd ed., Donvale, Victoria, Lowden Publishing Co., 2007.

Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria, Inc., *Useful Knowledge*, Melbourne, Australia. (Referenced within the report as UK followed by the edition number)

Note also Geoffrey Burkhart's list of publications containing specific histories of institutes around Australia at the end of his article in *Useful Knowledge*, No. 26, Winter 2011.

THE CHRISTCHURCH MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

Mechanics' Institutes were established in Europe and America in the early nineteenth century as educational organisations for craftsmen and skilled workers. Institutes aimed to disseminate knowledge from trade to trade, and provide education for members through lectures on science and a variety of self-improvement topics. Subscription libraries for the use of Institute members and for the public usually formed part of the organisations. These libraries included works of fiction and non-fiction, a reading room for newspapers and magazines, and a venue for lectures, classes, book and play readings, and light entertainment.

In New Zealand, Mechanics' Institutes were formed very early in the European settlement period. The Auckland Mechanics' Institute was established in July 1841, and a Wellington Institute in April the following year. The Wellington organisation took over the collection of the Port Nicholson Exchange and Central Library, a subscription library set up in 1841 with Dr. F. J. Knox as librarian. Although the Wellington Institute was in abeyance for 4 years after 1844, it was revived again in August 1848. The Dunedin Mechanics' Institute was founded in 1851 by the Rev. Thomas Burns.

In Christchurch, a Mechanics' Institute was first proposed in March 1852 by Charles Joseph Rae¹. Rae, who was a painter by trade, had arrived in Canterbury in 1851. He wrote to the *Lyttelton Times* (20 March 1852), suggesting "could we not get up a Working Men's Literary and Scientific Institution, where working men and their wives might wish to enjoy 'The feast of reason / And the flow of soul'...". A public meeting was held in July and an Institute founded but the venture failed, largely because of hostility from the Colonists' Society, which saw it as encroaching on its preserves. In 1859, however, Rae tried again, calling a meeting on 26 May where he proposed that a Mechanics' Institute and a Book Club be established in the town. This time his proposal was received more enthusiastically; a committee was elected, which included the provincial superintendent as chairman, and Rae as secretary, and rules were drafted. The Institute's objective was laid down as "the mental improvement and recreation of its members by the establishment of a library and reading rooms, the delivery of lectures, and the formation of discussion and other classes". Subscription fees were set at one guinea per annum or seven shillings and sixpence per quarter, and Frederick Thompson

was appointed as the first librarian². Temporary premises were found at the Town Hall, and the Institute was officially opened on 4 August 1859 by Sir John Hall. There were 112 members.

Within days, lectures on such diverse subjects as the poetry of Robert Burns and English constitutional history were being offered, as well as classes in arithmetic and writing. A successful Conversation, attended by 230 persons (including a number of ladies) was also held³. From the beginning, however, the most important element of the Institute's work was considered to be the library. The *Lyttelton Times* noted when a Mechanics' Institute was proposed in May that "the most important desiderata to be first attended to would be the Library and the Reading Room", supported by the "undivided attention of a clerk" to order books, catalogue and care for them, check them in and out, and to file newspapers and supervise the reading room⁴. The newspaper reiterated this view in June, recommending that those pushing for the establishment of an Institute devote most of their attention the library and reading room; only in this way could the largest possible number of subscribers be attracted⁵.

Although the average nightly attendance in the reading room during its first year was only nine, the Institute stated in its first annual report in July 1860 that it had taken "a wholesome and firm root" in Christchurch society, despite opening during a period of economic depression. The money raised from subscriptions, however, was already proving insufficient to meet the goals of the organisation. About 30 local and British newspapers were available for readers, but the report noted the "want of books is seriously felt". Only 79 volumes had been purchased during the year, though a further 20 had been donated and 69 lent⁶.

The inadequacies of the Town Hall site were also discussed, and over the next 3 years, the Institute focused its efforts on acquiring its own building. With the assistance of a grant from the Provincial Council in January 1862, half an acre (sections 405 and 406) was purchased on the corner of Cambridge Terrace and Hereford Street, at a cost of 262 pounds. At the end of the year, the Institute announced a competition for the best building design⁷, and the following year, they accepted the design offered by Samuel Farr of Christchurch as the "least costly and affording the greatest amount of convenience, besides possessing a pleasing

architectural appearance”⁸. The building was completed in October 1863 and the new library and reading room opened for business on 2 November⁹. The total cost of the venture was 1485 pounds, which, despite the generosity of local residents and subscribers, left the Institute with a debt of over 700 pounds. This was somewhat reduced the following year when the Provincial Council gave the Institute a further grant of 250 pounds, but a request for more money was declined in 1865 (annual report, 28 June 1865), and the remaining years of the Institute’s independent existence were shadowed by severe financial burdens.

In 1864, however, the future looked reasonably bright. Membership had increased to 435 subscribers, and a number of lectures were held. The library, which now held some 1500 volumes, remained the major focus of the Institute’s work, and the librarian, Charles Reader, created the first catalogue of books, newspapers and periodicals (“very ill-arranged”, according to the *Lyttelton Times* on 24 Sept 1868). By 1873, the book collection numbered nearly 3000 volumes.

Nonetheless, problems remained. The number of subscribers continued to fluctuate wildly, dropping to only 140 in 1870. Many subscribers paid quarterly and often let their subscriptions lapse in one or more quarters of the year, so that income barely met the expenses of running the Institute. In a bid to attract more support, a name change took place in 1868. The Mechanics’ Institute became the Christchurch Literary Institute, with a soiree being held to mark the event. As the *Lyttelton Times* had pointed out as early as 1862, the Institute was “supported not by mechanics only, but by representatives of every profession, and every class in the community...”¹⁰. According to a newspaper letter writer in March 1869, however, the organisation remained “fairly drowned in the maelstrom of debt and unpopularity”¹¹. Earlier, a newspaper editorial suggested the library was “anything but a cheerful place”, full of ancient tomes and too few magazines, cold and gloomy. To succeed it needed to provide intellectual amusement for the public, with up-to-date stock made readily available in rooms offering a greater degree of comfort¹². Accordingly, a series of popular entertainments, including a circus, was organised to raise funds, new books and magazines were ordered, and a new entranceway, chairs, a writing table, a smoking room and a meeting room, and gas lighting were installed. Chess and debating clubs were inaugurated, and an area was set aside for the

exclusive use of lady visitors from 10am-5pm each day. The book shelves were reorganised for ease of access so that borrowers could select their own books, and Reader updated the catalogue. He made his own contribution to cost saving by accepting a 25% cut in his salary, and by moving out of the upstairs apartment in the library, where he and his family had lived since his appointment in 1863, so it could be rented out to other local organisations like the Musical Society and the Philosophical Society for their meetings. These measures had some effect, with subscriber numbers doubling, but the financial difficulties still remained.

As early as 1867, the Institute’s shareholders considered a proposal that the Provincial Council should buy them out, and open the library and reading room to the general public. This proposal fell through when the Council refused to vote the necessary funds but the idea remained at the forefront of the minds of the organising committee. Thus, when matters became so desperate in 1873 that the Institute, having reviewed the struggles of the last 14 years, was prepared to close (except for an hour each evening), committee members welcomed the overtures of the promoters of a free library scheme under Council auspices, and recommended the transfer of Institute property to the public library trustees. This proposal was put into effect in September by the Canterbury Public Library Act (1873), with the deed of transfer being signed on 15 December 1873. Its most important conditions were the maintenance of the reading room and of a circulating library, for which purpose the Council voted 5000 pounds. At the same time, the Provincial Superintendent gave the control of the library to the Board of Governors of Canterbury College, through the Canterbury Museum and Library Ordinance Amendment Ordinance (1873). It was thus the College, rather than the Council, which took over the running of Canterbury Public Library in February 1874.

The first 15 years of public library service in Christchurch were difficult. With very little capital on which draw, the Mechanics’ Institute was dependent on income from subscriptions for much of its work, and this had proved quite inadequate to meet its ideals. Nevertheless, the Institute had done much to lay the foundations of public library service in the city. Perhaps most important was its acquisition of the site in Cambridge Terrace which remained home to the library until 1981. The Institute also pioneered the library as both an educational and recreational resource, and established the importance of providing current periodicals

and newspapers for the reading public. Sadly, it also established the principle of paying to borrow books; a free public library service did not come to Christchurch until 1952 and a borrowing charge for popular fiction remained in place until the 1990s.

Footnotes:

1. Charles Joseph Rae in *DNZB*
2. *Lyttelton Times*, 16 June 1859, p. 4
3. *Lyttelton Times*, 10 August 1859, p. 5
4. *Lyttelton Times*, 21 May 1859, p. 4
5. *Lyttelton Times*, 18 June 1859, p. 4
6. *Lyttelton Times*, 7 July 1860
7. *Lyttelton Times*, 17 Dec 1862, p. 10d
8. *Lyttelton Times*, 8 Sept 1863, p. 3a-b
9. *Lyttelton Times*, 31 Oct 1863, p. 1a
10. *Lyttelton Times*, 2 August 1862
11. *Lyttelton Times*, 9 March 1869, p. 3a-b
12. *Lyttelton Times*, 24 Sept 1868, p. 2b-d

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Megget, R. M. *Canterbury Public Library: an historical report and photographic survey on the architectural development of the library.*

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Sourced from the website of the Christchurch Library who celebrated their 150th Anniversary in 2009

BOOK REVIEW

Adkins, Keith 2010, *Reading in Colonial Tasmania: The history of the Evandale Subscription Library*, Ancora Press, Monash University, Melbourne. ISBN 978-0-7326-2422-4

This book is a valuable addition to the history of reading in Australia – an area of book history which would benefit from additional research. The disappearance of records and library collections from mechanics' institutes and similar institutions over the years has not been beneficial but fortunately the work of the MIV and the Mechanics' Institute Resource Collection has contributed greatly in locating previously unknown records.

Luckily the borrowing records of the Evandale Subscription Library have survived and their availability has allowed Keith Adkins to provide us with a detailed account of the reading habits of colonial Tasmanians in the middle of the nineteenth century. We therefore know not only which books and periodicals were held in the collection but also the names and occupations of the subscribers and donors and what they borrowed or gave to the library. Adkins has also placed his account of the Evandale library and its readers firmly in the context of the social and cultural life of colonial Tasmania thus demonstrating how the history of reading can tell us more about the life of local communities.

Reviewed by Donald Barker