

No. 59 Winter 2023

The magazine of the
Mechanics' Institutes of
Victoria



Useful Knowledge



London Mechanics' Institution, later Birkbeck College.
Story page 14 and 15.

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Chris Dormer supplied this wonderful photo of a recent wedding at the Stanley Athenaeum. See page 12 for the rest of the Stanley report.

Cover: The London Mechanics' Institution at 29 Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London.

Image: <https://victorianweb.org/history/education/ulondon/15.html>



**PMI Victorian
History Library**

Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria, P.O Box 1080, Windsor, 3181.
 ISSN 1835-5242

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The MIV would like to acknowledge the support of our 'home' the Prahran Mechanics' Institute.

Grants

Mechanics' Institutes may wish to explore available Victorian government funding programs and we've been advised the following website provides information on a variety of programs that may be of assistance
www.vic.gov.au/grants

Report from the President—David Berry

The mooted resumption of the annual Wesson Lecture (cancelled a number of times owing to COVID restrictions), with its history of impressive speakers, will not take place at the end of this year as foreshadowed, but is planned to take place earlier next year to provide some balance in the timing of our annual program of activities.

The Prahran Mechanics' Institute held a Victorian History Showcase at the end of August which was very successful. The MIV participated in the event.

It is my intention to visit a couple of our active institutes before the end of the year to experience first hand the diverse activities and approaches of our member institutes. Such learnings should be helpful in providing useful advice and assistance into the future.

In the interests of efficiencies and effectiveness we are updating our records of both our individual and institute members. For example, email addresses were not as ubiquitous when the MIV started at the end of the nine-ties. It would be appreciated if members would provide the MIV with as much contact information as possible. Having email addresses will minimise our mailing costs and mobile phone numbers may be useful in sending the odd text message, especially in advising such items as a late postponement of an event, etc. Please advise of any changes to or confirmation of your contact information to treasurer@miv.org.au

I hope to see most of you at our AGM in late November. Best wishes, David Berry.

Mooroopna Mechanics Hall—from disaster to recovery

Story and image by Christine Parnell, Treasurer Mooroopna Hall

The Mooroopna Mechanics Hall was making a steady recovery from three years of restricted trading once the COVID 19 situation relaxed, with the halls being consistently booked every weekend from April to mid-October, 2022. During this short season, the halls played host to such varied events as wedding celebrations, engagement parties, birthday parties, gender reveal parties, a rifle club meeting, caravan village tenancy meetings, pop-up shops, and a fund-raising concert. As well, the halls' regular users included a martial arts club, line-dance lessons, puppetry classes and a church group. All this activity came to a screeching halt on 16th October when the Goulburn River broke its banks and Mooroopna was inundated with flood waters. At the river' height, the Mooroopna Mechanics Hall complex, consisting of the Mooroopna Hall and the M.G. O'Brien Hall was encircled by a metre of water raging past and through it. The water level inside the halls reached 40cm and sat for a week before receding.



The damage done to the halls included the ruining of the kitchen cupboards, submersion of the refrigerator and gas heaters, swelling of the hardwood floorboards, as well as extra damage to the ceiling in the Mooroopna Hall due to leaks in the roof during the preceding rain event. By the time the water receded enough for people to inspect the damage, mould could be seen forming on the ceiling in the M.G. O'Brien Hall, and there was a centimetre of silty mud covering the floors!

The committee of management was very grateful to receive immediate assistance from the local Kiwanis club and other community members, cleaning the floors and clearing out the damaged vinyl flooring and Masonite under-flooring in the kitchen, office and storage room. Many trips to the tip were made. In the months following the event, the committee members continued to gather to demolish the kitchen, clean up the tables and chairs and get ready to begin the restoration process.

Because our halls are owned by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), they were not insured. The committee explored the suggestion of getting financial assistance from the Small Business Flood Recovery scheme, but soon found we were ineligible to apply for their grants because historically, when our committee registered for an ABN back in 1999, it did not register for GST. This made sense at the time, and even now, because we don't make a lot of money hiring the halls, but no GST registration meant no access to up to \$50,000 in grants! It was pretty devastating!

However, we continued to explore funding elsewhere and managed to successfully apply for a \$22,000 grant from the Greater Shepparton Foundation in conjunction with the Shepparton Lighthouse Project (each organisation contributing \$11,000). This was to sand back and re-finish the oak hardwood floors which had been badly damaged by the flood. DEECA also granted us \$7680 to replace the vinyl flooring to our kitchen, office and storage room.

Article continues overleaf

Mooroopna Mechanics Hall—from disaster to recovery, continued

DEECA encouraged us to gather quotes to begin the flood restoration as they were planning on making grant funding available to repair and restore the halls. At first, all we thought we might be able to do was repair the floors and maybe paint the walls and ceilings to harness the mould situation, but DEECA workers encouraged us to think big, dream big and begin the process of building back better, to future-proof the halls. One DEECA worker looked up at the ceiling in the Mooroopna Hall and commented that it would be a great shame to spend a lot of money on repairing the floors and painting the walls only to have the suspended ceiling collapse, as it was in poor condition due to the leaks. We were asked to gather quotes to replace the worst of the tiles, as well as quotes to replace all the tiles in the suspended ceiling and while we were at it, to find out how much it would cost to replace the plaster in the original ceiling covered up by the suspended ceiling, as that might need to happen.

When we took down one of the tiles to measure it for the quote, we discovered that the plaster from the original ceiling had indeed collapsed in six different spots and there was no longer any ability to salvage the suspended ceiling as it was compromised and could no longer be considered safe. Demolishing the suspended ceiling took a week, but uncovered TREASURE!!! The hall was built in 1932 and the suspended ceiling was installed sometime after 1994 and covered up the original ornamental cornice work and proscenium arch of the stage! The cornice work was totally intact and in beautiful condition!



The c.1933 Proscenium Arch and ornate plaster cornice were uncovered during renovation works.



This story is huge, and there is so much more to tell, but suffice it to say, DEECA encouraged us to dream big and so we did! We gathered quotes to paint the walls and ceilings, install reverse cycle air conditioning in both halls and replace the kitchen with a stainless-steel kitchen. We received grant funding in excess of \$270,000 from DEECA, jointly funded by the Australian and Victorian governments under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements and have been steadily seeing the restoration of our halls unfold.

So far we have had the roof repaired by removing the redundant ventilation flues and putting new sheets of zincalume in their place, with approval from the Heritage department of our local council, as the flues were the source of the catastrophic leaking and no longer served their original purpose (another story in itself!). The gas heaters and hot water service have been removed and the gas service discontinued to the property. The painted brick walls of the kitchen have been sand blasted back to brick to enable cement sheet to be affixed to the walls in preparation for the stainless-steel wall panelling (to comply with council food safety requirements). The concrete hearth in the kitchen has been trimmed level with the rest of the floor, ready for the new vinyl flooring to be installed, some floorboards have been removed and replaced in the storage area, and the ceiling in the Mooroopna Hall has been demolished and replaced with acoustic plaster. We are ready to commence painting and soon will be able to install our new kitchen. Reverse cycle air-conditioners have been fitted to both halls as well. This was something we had been fundraising to achieve over the past nine years, but was only possible because the flood damaged our gas heaters. We will have to wait until after the summer months to do the sanding and refinishing of the wooden floorboards as the ground under the halls has not dried sufficiently, so full restoration is still months away.

In summary, it is an ill wind that blows no good. Dreams do come true. Hard work is rewarded. We are exploring more grant money to continue doing more work to bring our halls up to a wonderful standard. Our committee is excited and energised by the restoration work being accomplished. We plan to have a huge celebration when we are able to re-open our doors, hopefully by Easter 2024!



Above left: old suspended ceiling, viewed from stage.

Above right: suspended ceiling removed.

Right: New ceiling installed, before painting



Mount Gambier: an idea that grew

By Joeline Hancock <https://institutessa.com/>

It was the Rev Pitt Corbett, a visiting Episcopalian minister, who in 1862 convinced the people of Mount Gambier that they should have an institute in their town. He had delivered a lecture to the local book club in the Mount Gambier public school on *Prince Albert*, Queen Victoria's consort. Within a year sixty people had registered their interest. They set about organising lectures and a library and raising funds for an institute building.

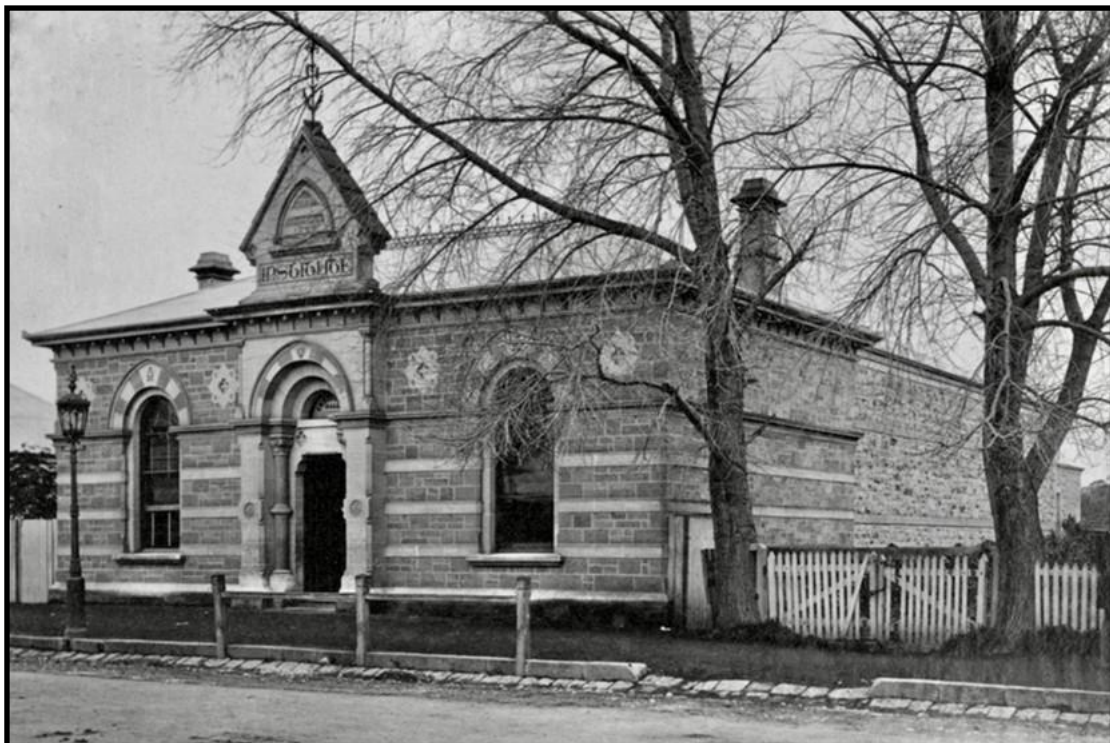
They soon had a library that was kept at A.K. Varley's office in the Mount Gambier West Council Chambers and monthly lectures were organised. In 1863 the Mount Gambier Institute was affiliated with the central SA Institute. This body was funded by the state government and provided support in organisation, lecturers and books.

Two temporary weather-board rooms were opened in 1865 at a cost of £157. Lectures and evenings of recitations, readings and entertainments were held every month from 1863 to 1867 but there was no room at that stage to run classes.

In 1866 the South Australian Government granted the institute a site on the Cave Reserve and a building grant of £1,000. This was only the second building grant to an institute made by the Government. Its first building grant was to the Burra Institute eight years before and its last was in 1887. A further £300 was later added to the Mount Gambier grant.

The foundation stone for the new permanent building was laid in 1868 by John Riddoch, pastoralist, parliamentarian and cultural benefactor. The designer was W.T. Gore and the contractors George Avey and Henry Hale. The total cost was £1,150. Later that year the first part of the building – a reading-room and a museum – was available for use. By this time the library had 950 books. The reading-room was open for twelve hours a day from 10.00am to 10.00pm.

The official opening of the ground floor library, reading-rooms and a lecture hall was in 1869. The South Australian Governor was guest of honour at the soirée that followed.



Mount Gambier Institute building, 1880.

Image: State Library of South Australia

The Institute was going from strength to strength. By 1872 the Institute had a Philharmonic Society, drawing and German classes and monthly lectures that were attended by up to 200 people.

The Institute soon outgrew its premises. In November 1885, John Riddoch gave £1,000 towards an enlargement fund. A second storey, a gallery for 150 people, a deepening of the stage and an ante room on either side of the stage were added. The Riddoch Art Gallery funded by Riddoch opened in the Institute building in 1887. That Gallery continues to have exhibitions in 2023.



Mount Gambier Institute

Image: Joellie Hancock

Classes in literacy and technical education were added to the Institute's offerings in the 1880s and later the School of Mines provided courses there. Picture shows began in the building in 1897 and a Choral Society was formed in 1902. The Institute again required more room.

In 1904, land at the centre of Mount Gambier with a further 54ft frontage on Commercial Street was granted by the Government and a new large hall was added to the Institute building. This 1,000-capacity hall adjoined the first building and was opened in August 1907.

Further alterations and additions in 1915 created a spacious public reading-room that was decorated with fine statues. By this time the library held some 9,000 books and had 590 subscribers. Special attention was given to the juvenile section, which was housed in its own alcove.

The building was renovated in 1933 and the old building let for roller skating and dancing. After several years of negotiation the Institute property was taken over by the Mount Gambier City Council on October 9 1939.

The Institute building then became the nucleus of the Mount Gambier Town Hall. The library remained under the control of the Institute with support of some funding from the corporation. Part of the agreement in the transfer was that when the new building was erected, suitable rooms would be provided for the art gallery, the museum and the library.

By 1955 the total number of subscribers was 731 of which 247 were juvenile members. Just seven years later there were 400 junior members. As well as providing the space for reading-rooms, a library, a museum and art gallery, the Council continued to give the Institute a substantial grant each year.

Mount Gambier: an idea that grew, continued



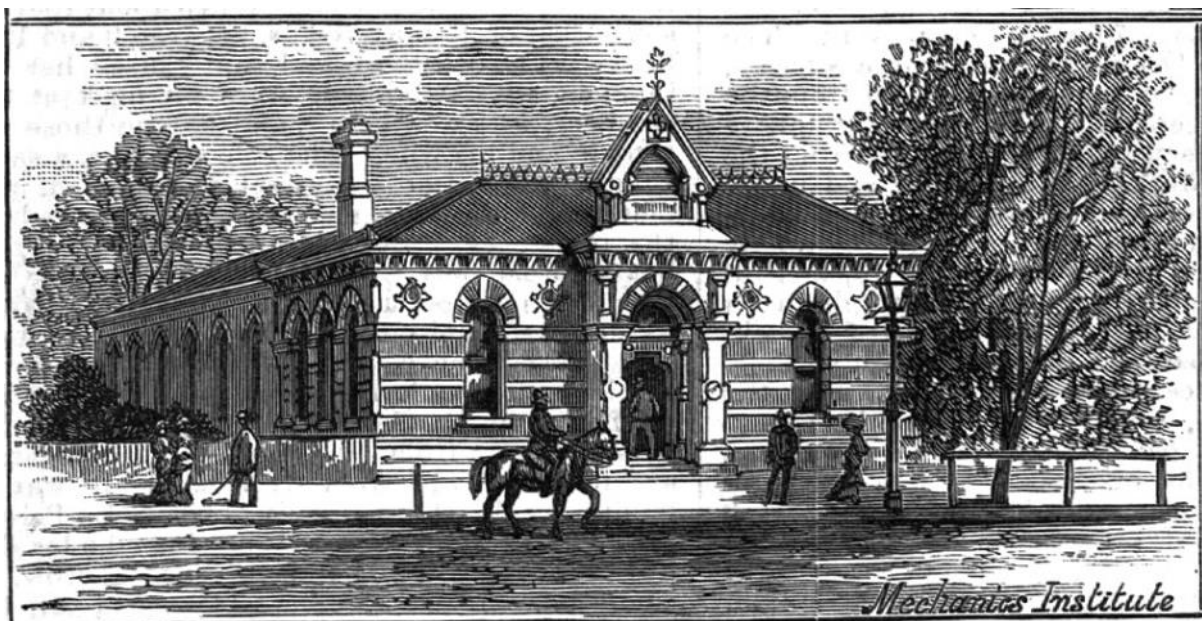
During the 1960s the number of subscribers decreased – from 1,143 in 1963 to 580 in 1968, due it was thought to the introduction of television. As part of the state-wide phasing out of Institute libraries in 1978-1979 the members of the Mount Gambier Institute dissolved their Institute in favour of a new free public library in what is now called the South East Regional Cultural Centre.

Major alterations and additions to the City Hall were completed in 2003-2004 at a cost of \$3.5 million and there was further site redeveloped in 2011.

Left: Mount Gambier Civic Centre, 2022.
Image: David Fleay

In 2023 the Mount Gambier Civic Centre complex still houses the Riddoch Art Gallery which in 2017 initiated the 'Riddoch Institute'. This Institute is committed to research in visual and performing arts, cultural studies, political sciences, psychology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, literature, and art history.

The James Morrison Jazz Academy and the Riddoch Art Gallery now occupy a large part of the City Hall complex, that began as the Institute. The Mount Gambier Library is in a new large building around the corner from the Civic Centre in Watson Street.



Mount Gambier Institute

From: Views in Gambier town, South Australia; first published in *The Australasian Sketcher with pen and pencil*, November 18, 1882.
Publisher: Alfred Martin Ebsworth. State Library of Victoria image

Fawcett Hall and the Furniture History Society Australasia

Story and images by Sam Hicks, President of the Fawcett Hall

The Furniture History Society Australasia was founded in 1996. The main aims of the society are the appreciation of furniture and to ensure its preservation and documentation. Fawcett Hall was lucky to receive the Furniture History Society grant for 2022. The grant was for the restoration (repair and stabilisation) of the three original long-seated timber forms with backs, purchased by the hall in 1888, and the timber form without a back, which was inherited by us when the Fawcett State School moved to its new location in 1905.

Prior to their repair, the forms were unstable and really should not have been used but thanks to this grant our original forms are sturdy again and ready for many years of further use.

We are thankful to the volunteers of the Alexandra Community/Eildon & District Woodworkers Guild for the wonderful job they have done. All the forms were taken apart, repaired where necessary, and reassembled.

Without this grant and the “Woodies” to help us out our original forms would have deteriorated to the point where they could not have continued use. Many of our hall groups and hires love these forms – our pew-like seats for gatherings.

A big thank you to the Woodies and the Furniture History Society <https://www.furniturehistory.org.au/welcome> . Also, thanks to the Royal Historical Society of Victoria for alerting us via their newsletter.

Fawcett Mechanics' Institute reserve is located at Fawcett, 14 kilometres out of Alexandra in the Shire of Murrindindi in the North East of Victoria. www.fawcethall.org.au is our website and we are on Facebook and Instagram.



Above: The newly restored seating and committee members including Project manager and secretary - Ian; Treasurer - Sandra; President - Sam and committee - CC and Joy.

Left: On-site at the Eildon and District Woodworkers Guild / Alexandra Community Shed is Fawcett Hall Committee member Les Perry and John Zerafa from “The Woodies”.

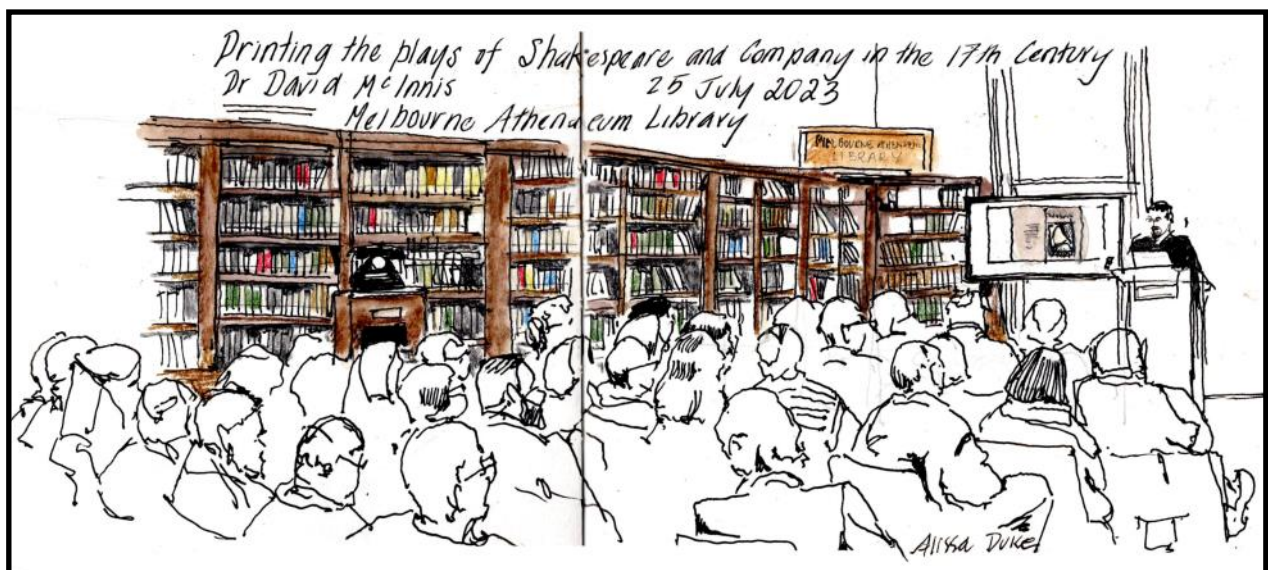
Melbourne Rare Book Week, July 2023

Sophie Arnold, from the Melbourne Athenaeum, provided us with this review of the Melbourne Rare Book Week (MRBW) held in July 2023. The report was written by Chris Browne and the other members of the Rare Books Melbourne Committee. Two of the events took place at the Melbourne Athenaeum and one at the Prahran Mechanics' Institute and these reports are published here, along with the opening function report (held a month before) and some concluding remarks. Alissa Duke, was the official sketch artist for MRBW and two of her illustrations are reproduced here. Alissa wrote about her technique on the Melbourne Urban Sketchers Facebook page— *As the official "sketcher on location" at Melbourne Rare Book Week I have sketched at 12 of the talks. Each sketch takes about 45 - 60 minutes. I sketch in pen and my watercolour pencils.*

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MRBW2023 was officially launched at a function kindly hosted by Roy Morgan and Michele Levine at Tonic House, 386 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, held on 21st June 2023. More than 65 friends and supporters of MRBW gathered to celebrate the launch, where they enjoyed a lively and informative address given by our guest speaker, Jane Sullivan, the long-standing literary writer and commentator from "The Age". Jane spoke of her lifelong love of books, and shared with us some special memories, including getting Christopher Robin (Christopher Milne) to sign her copy of Winnie-the-Pooh, albeit with his signature upside down. She spoke of her book, "Storytime", in which she revisited the treasured books of her childhood and considered why they were so important to her. All who were present agreed that it was an outstanding address.

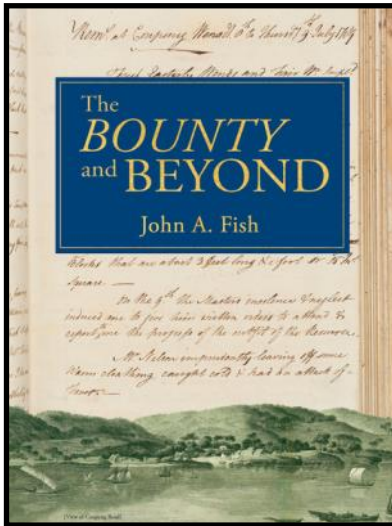
On Tuesday, [July 25] more than 70 people attended a fascinating talk that was held at The Melbourne Athenaeum Library to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the publication in 1623 of the First Folio of William Shakespeare's plays. The talk was presented by Associate Professor David McInnis from the University of Melbourne, who spoke on "Printing the Plays of Shakespeare and Company in the 17th Century". David started by discussing the First Folio of Ben Jonson's plays, which predated Shakespeare's First Folio by 7 years, and established the model for such a publication, while differing from the Shakespeare by being published with direct input from the "still-living" author. The link between Jonson and Shakespeare was further strengthened by David's references to Jonson's dedicatory verse to Shakespeare's First Folio. We were shown many examples of textual variations in different copies of the Shakespeare First Folio, of which about 230 of the 750 or so original copies survive today. It is our most important source for the 36 canonical plays of Shakespeare. David gave us an interesting account of some of the difficulties in interpreting 16th and 17th manuscripts and composing them into print. A lively question and answer session followed the talk, after which many members of the audience walked up Collins Street to view a copy of the Shakespeare Second Folio (1632) that was on display in Kay Craddock's bookshop.



At the Melbourne Athenaeum event.

Illustrator: Alissa Duke.

At the Prahran Mechanic's Institute (PMI), on July 25, the Collections Librarian, Ellen Coates, presented a talk called *All stories are shaped by the documents that survive to tell them*. She used items from the library archive and rare books in the PMI collection to tell the history of the library. 41 tickets were booked for the event and 24 people attended on the day. The event was also livestreamed and a recording was made available, which has had 32 views in 13 days. The audience in attendance was delightful and really engaged, asking several interesting questions. They were obviously interested in the collection and its history, as well as the broader story of the PMI. Staff were pleased to see such enthusiasm and Ellen sincerely enjoyed revealing the PMI's history and treasures for Melbourne Rare Book Week



On Wednesday evening, [July 26] The Melbourne Athenaeum Library generously hosted the launch of a new book on a major new study of Bligh's journals by John Fish. This crowded and sold-out event provided a welcome opportunity to honour author John Fish, whose book *The Bounty and Beyond*, co-published by Ancora Press and Australian Scholarly Publishing, reflects a lifetime's passion for collecting and researching the events relating to William Bligh's Bounty voyage. The book was formally launched by Paul Brunton, former curator at the Mitchell Library – and himself an authority on Bligh – with an informative talk that paid tribute to John Fish's meticulous work in editing and annotating Bligh's two variant journals of the voyage. Professor Wallace Kirsop also spoke briefly, remarking upon his long friendship with the author; and, finally, John Fish spoke to round out the evening, generously acknowledging the many people involved with this major publication.



The Bounty and Beyond launch at the Melbourne Athenaeum event.

Illustrator: Alissa Duke.

The culminating event of MRBW is always the Australian Antiquarian Book Fair, presented by the Australian and New Zealand Association of Antiquarian Booksellers (ANZAAB). This year saw the 51st iteration of the Book Fair, held once again at Wilson Hall at the University of Melbourne from July 27th until July 29th. The organiser this year was again Tim White, of Books for Cooks, and the Fair presented a large and diverse range of books, prints, manuscripts, photographs and ephemera shown by 25 exhibitors, who included two visitors from London.

The Rare Books Melbourne committee has been delighted by the public's enthusiastic response to the successful return of Melbourne Rare Book Week. We wish to thank all our partners, presenters, patrons, supporters, donors and sponsors for their vital contributions to this success. I also wish to thank Alissa Duke, our very talented sketch artist, for her evocative drawings of the events.

Chris Browne, Honorary Secretary, Rare Books Melbourne August 2023.

News from the Stanley Athenaeum and Public Room

Story and images by Chris Dormer, Co-ordinator

George Peach: Photographs focusing on 60 years of Stanley Life.



When George Peach was given a camera by his mother, this started a lifetime of recording the world around him. George left Stanley in 1928 to work in Melbourne, returning regularly to visit his family and took to chronicling life in Stanley; the Peach family, everyday life, local places, events and activities. This exhibition features a selection of George's photographs with a focus on children, fashion, transport, work, leisure and life in Stanley across 60 years of the twentieth century, displayed with George's original captions.

Above: At the launch of the Peach exhibition. Visit this exhibition at the Stanley Post & Community Hub (old Stanley School), Main Street, Stanley. Open from 1 July 2023 - June 2024. Open Monday - Friday 8.30- 10.30 am & 3.30 - 5.30pm, Saturday 9.00 - 11.00 am or by appointment.

6th Geoff Craig Memorial Lecture

The Friends of Stanley Athenaeum will be presenting the 6th Geoff Craig Memorial Lecture with speaker Tony Rinaudo AM presenting 'The Forest Underground.' Tony will talk about some of the influences that took him to Africa, the discovery of 'the underground forest' and the technique which has become known as 'Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration' (FMNR) – what it is, its history, impact and spread. He will also talk about the challenges ahead in terms of tackling climate change, land degradation and deforestation.

Tony Rinaudo served as an agriculturalist and missionary with 'Serving in Mission' in Niger Republic from 1981 to 1999. He is widely recognized for his influential contribution to heightened international awareness on the impact and efficacy, and uptake of, simple, low cost, scalable methods of reforestation known as FMNR. Among major awards Tony and FMNR have recently received are the 2018 Right Livelihood Award "for demonstrating on a large scale how drylands can be greened at minimal cost, improving the livelihoods of millions of people", and the World Future Council Agroecology Award. In 2019, Tony was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia. The lecture will be held at Stanley Memorial Hall, Stanley on Sunday 17th September 2023 at 2pm.

Publications Available from Stanley Athenaeum

- *A Hearty Vote of Thanks: Christina Muter - First Woman President of the Stanley Athenaeum* \$8
- *Hearts of Gold and Minds of Mettle* (2021). Robyn Harcourt, Helen McIntyre and Valerie Privett. \$35
- *Fire on the Plateau: A History of Fire and its Management in Stanley* (2019). Dr Jacqui Durrant, \$3
- *Stanley Times and Mining Journal* (2018). By Geoff Craig. Now in its 4th Edition. \$30.
- also local cards and bookmarks - various prices

Research Enquiries Welcome.

The Friends of Stanley Athenaeum undertake requests for research from both individuals and community groups, the research fee of \$30 per hour for the first hour and \$20 per hour thereafter. Stanley Athenaeum and Public Room, 2 Mount Stanley Road, Stanley. Open every Friday & 4th Saturday each month from 10am to 12.30 pm or by appointment, Enquiries: Chris 0458 606 922 / stanleyathenaeum@gmail.com. Also on Facebook and Victorian Collections.

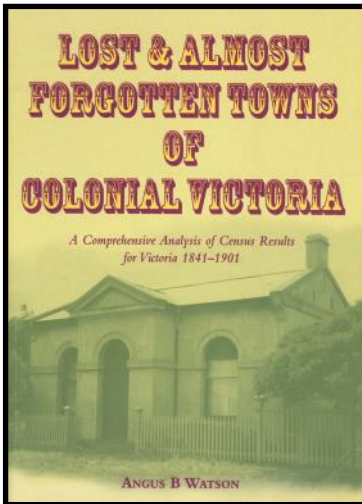
<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~mivic/stanley.html>

Useful resources for local history

By Heather Arnold

I am a local history enthusiast and own many individual books on Victorian towns, but here are two general resources you might find useful if you are researching your town or if you are a family historian, the town where your relatives lived.

Lost and almost forgotten towns of Colonial Victoria : A comprehensive analysis of Census results for Victoria, 1841-1901 by Angus B. Watson (published by the author in 2003)



Many people tracing their Family history, come across a town which cannot be located on a modern map. This may be because the town no longer exists or that it has changed its name. To help locate these "missing" towns you could consult *Lost and almost forgotten towns of Colonial Victoria: A comprehensive analysis of Census results for Victoria, 1841-1901* by Angus B. Watson. Mr Watson has listed all the towns and villages and their population, as defined by the Government Statist, for all Victorian censuses between 1841 and 1901.

Perhaps your ancestor attended Tobin Yallock State School or Cannibal Creek State School or a family document lists Irishtown or Belvoir as an address. These won't be found on a modern map but this book will tell you that Tobin Yallock later became Lang Lang and Cannibal Creek State School was renamed Garfield; the Emerald Goldfield diggings were listed on the 1871 Census as Irishtown and that Wodonga was known as Belvoir between 1856 and 1869.

Vision and Realisation: a centenary of State Education in Victoria, edited by L.J. Blake (published by the Education Department of Victoria, 1973)

This is a three volume history of State education in Victoria and consists of over 4,100 pages. It includes a history of education in the colony of Victoria from the denominational schools onwards, a history of secondary schooling, technical schooling and teacher education. The most interesting part for family and local historians is a short description of each state school established before 1973. Many of these schools no longer exist, but were created to fill a need at the time. For instance there may have been an influx of children due to gold mining or timber milling or a soldier settlement sub-division so a school was established as a result and when the mine or mill closed, the school also closed.

What sort of information can we find in *Vision and Realisation*? As an example for Tynong North School No.4464 we can find the school was opened on June 8th 1930, but the residents had been petitioning the Education Department for a school since 1922. The School building had come from the Nar Nar Goon North School, No 2914, which had a new building erected in 1929. The first Head Teacher was Samuel Bromberger, who served there until 1938. The School closed in December 1951 and the pupils and building were transferred to Pakenham Consolidated School.

I also have an interest in place names; and school names can reflect the fluidity of town names in the early days. For instance, Pakenham Upper School, No.2155, was called Gembrook South from 1879 until 1916; Modella School, No.3456, was known as Koo Wee Rup East until February 1905 and Iona State School, No.3201, was known as Bunyip South. So if you are wondering why your relatives seemingly moved from Gembrook to Pakenham Upper; or Koo Wee Rup to Modella, then it is possible that they actually stayed put but the name of the area changed.

If you are interested in local history generally or the history of education it is well worth tracking down the three volumes. Time Booksellers at Somerville (who I use all the time, can well recommend them) currently have the set, all you need is a spare \$500 (plus postage) and a spare 23cm of shelf space!

An on-line source for the history of towns in Victoria is **Victorian Places**

<https://www.victorianplaces.com.au/>

This is a website containing the history of all the places in Victoria that have now or once had a population over 200 at any time since the establishment of Victoria as a British colony. The project is a joint initiative of Monash University and the University of Queensland. Great website for a quick overview of the history and population of your town.

Birkbeck, University of London, celebrates its bicentenary

By Jim Lowden

The year of 2023 has been one for great celebration at Birkbeck, University of London. Few Mechanics' Institutes have survived for two hundred years, albeit progressing through various stages of growth and reflected by name changes. Birkbeck started out life as the London Mechanics' Institution on 11 November 1823, from a meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern at which two thousand people attended. Dr George Birkbeck was elected as its first President. (He had started to successfully conduct evening classes for mechanics' at the Andersonian Institution back in 1800.)

It blazed the way for adult education in London and was to be shortly joined by University College, London's first University in 1826. It's name was changed to the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution in 1866 and this was shortened to Birkbeck College in 1907. Birkbeck progressed to University status in 1913 when it became a constituent College of the University of London. It was renamed to simply Birkbeck, University of London in 2002.

It has not forgotten its original mission and today hosts the Faculty of Lifelong Learning. With new technologies it continues to reach out across the world delivering 'hands on' distance education. It also has recently collaborated with the University of East London to open the new Birkbeck Stratford Campus in 2013.

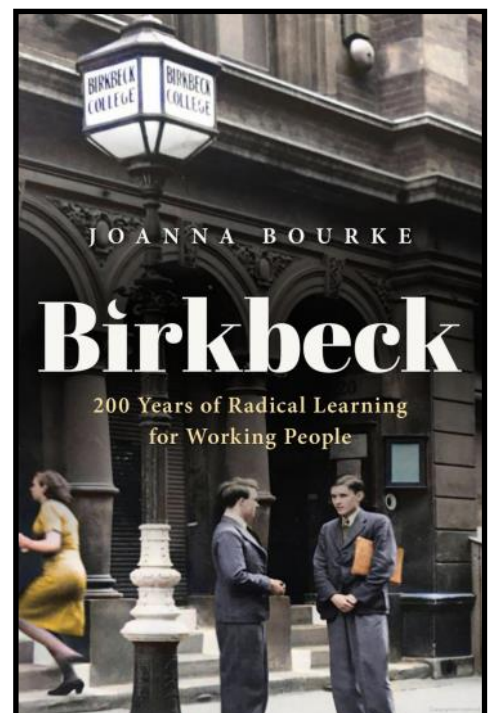
Its alumni, besides providing four Nobel Prize winners, has also graduated a Prime Minister and several politicians. Other alumni range from authors, educationists, historians, industrialists, journalists, scientists, and one William Joyce, Lord Haw-Haw who was executed for high treason in 1946.

The history of Birkbeck has been written by Professor Joanna Bourke who has been on its teaching staff since 1992. Born at Blenheim in Newland, Professor Bourke graduated firstly from the Auckland University and then the Australian National University. Before Birkbeck, her teaching posts included then Australian National University and Emmanuel College Cambridge. Previous to *Birkbeck: 200 Years of Radical Learning for Working People*, Professor Bourke has authored fifteen books.

While the 'i' in Birkbeck continues to be topped with a crescent moon, Birkbeck, University of London will carry on its round-the-clock role in shaping British higher education by way of innovation and research. The recent Baby-Lab and ToddlerLab, opened in the Henry Wellcome Building in 2018 are but exemplars.



Left: Professor David Latchman, Birkbeck President, handing over a copy of Birkbeck's bicentennial history to Jim Lowden for the Mechanics' Institute's Resources Centre (Photo: Jonathan Woodhead)



Dr George Birkbeck (1776 –1841)



Dr Birkbeck, the father of the Mechanics' Institute movement, died on December 1, 1841. The first report of his death in an Australian newspaper was in April 1842. This obituary, which had first appeared in *The Times* was published in the *Sydney Colonial Observer* of May 11, 1842. Image is from the National Portrait Gallery, London.

The grave cannot be permitted to close over the remains of this estimable man, without some tribute of respect for his worth being paid in the columns of a public journal. He was a Liberal in his politics ; - but science is of no party - over it and its votaries the storms of party war and civil strife should alike roll innocuous. The subject of this sketch never allowed party motives to influence the exercise of his beneficence ; and those who have exerted themselves to ameliorate the condition of their fellow-men are entitled to commemoration, whatever be their political or religious creed.

Dr. Birkbeck was the son of a merchant and banker of considerable eminence at Settle, in Yorkshire, where he was born in the year 1776. After receiving the usual rudiments of education at a village in the neighbourhood, during which he displayed a strong inclination for those mechanical pursuits to which he afterwards became so devoted, it was determined by his friends that he should embrace the medical profession. This choice was perhaps to be regretted, for such a pursuit was undoubtedly unsuited to his natural bent. Had he been encouraged to follow his inclination, he might have rivalled the discoveries of Arkwright or Watt. But unhappily at this period, and for nearly half a century afterwards, it was customary for every man who had three sons, to bring up one as a lawyer, a second as a medical man, and a third for the church ; as if the mental, physical, and moral state of the community could ever be in such a lamentable condition as to afford employment to such a disproportion.

After studying his profession in the first instance at Leeds, he removed to London, where he had the good fortune to become a pupil of the celebrated Dr. Baillie, whose friendship he retained until death put an end to that illustrious man's career. Afterwards he removed to complete his education in Edinburgh, then in the zenith of that fame as a school of medicine, which, by means of nepotism, mismanagement, and conceit, it has subsequently lost. Here also he had the happiness to form a friendship with Brougham, Horner, Jeffrey, Scott, and others of the race, who were then beginning to blaze in the northern capital with a splendour such as its past annals had not seen, and its future are not likely to see. But while cultivating this brilliant society, he did not neglect his scientific pursuits, and in these he had made such attainments, that before the twenty-second year of his age he was appointed Professor of Natural Philosophy in the Andersonian Institution of Glasgow.

It was while in this situation that Dr. Birkbeck laid the basis of those mechanics' institutions, in association with which his name has chiefly attracted present notice, and will engage future remembrance. With a liberality rarely evinced in such quarters, he invited the mechanics of the city to a gratuitous attendance on his lectures; and it was in consequence of their grateful acknowledgment and the benefit that flowed from the practice, that he was induced, on his removal to London, to project the foundation of mechanics' institutions in the metropolis and throughout the country. Nor was it his time alone that was devoted to this laudable object - his purse was not less freely bestowed. We believe he lent £3000 to establish the London Institution in Chancery Lane; and by a singular coincidence, the members of that body were to meet for the purpose of celebrating its eighteenth anniversary within a few hours of the period when its founder had ceased to exist.

As a medical man, Dr. Birkbeck enjoyed considerable practice, much more so than is generally bestowed on those given to scientific or literary pursuits. In personal appearance, Dr. Birkbeck was a man between sixty and seventy years of age, with a quiet, reflective, beneficent countenance, a venerable and very unpretending aspect. In his disposition he was mild, and in his deportment unassuming. As a public speaker he acquitted himself with credit ; his ideas were always sound and practical, conveyed in appropriate language. These remarks have been drawn from one not accustomed to bestow undue praises on a member of the faculty; but in the language of Junius, " the panegyric will wear well, for it has been nobly earned."— *Times*.

The Matildas came to Warrandyte

Story and image by Pat Anderson, O.A.M.

After the Matildas' exciting win over Denmark to advance to the quarter finals in the FIFA Womens' World Cup, one of our members decided to stream the match against France live on the big screen at the hall on Saturday (Aug 12th). What a great idea to share the excitement with a group of locals.

Not that many people got to hear about it in time, but some 20 people went along, with drinks and nibbles and enjoyed the group atmosphere in the comfort of the hall. There were moments when the internet threatened to deprive us of critical action – something we wouldn't have had on tele at home - but how much more fun to share the squeals, sharp intakes of breath and camaraderie with other people, as the match extended from nil all to the end of 15 minutes extra time each way! Even the penalty shoot-out was a nail biter.

I hope others are able to enjoy such events in their local hall as much as we did with this one.



Pat's article made me think about the connection between Mechanics' Institutes and sport and the only sport I could think of that was played in a hall was badminton. In fact, it appears from this article in the *Weekly Times* of August 13, 1932 that Mechanics' Institutes and other halls were instrumental in the establishment and popularity of Badminton in Victoria.

BADMINTON MAKING RAPID PROGRESS

The presence in Melbourne this week of a team of Badminton players from Tasmania draws attention to the growing popularity of this old English game. In recent years it has enjoyed a boom in Tasmania, where every little country centre has its club or clubs. The fact that Badminton can be played in almost any church hall or mechanics' institute has been a big factor in its progress. The court measures only 44 ft. by 20 ft.

As the shuttle has to be hit on the full, the game is fast and exhilarating. In fact, many men who have played both Badminton and tennis declare that Badminton is the more strenuous. Like tennis, it is a good social pastime, mixed doubles playing a prominent part. It is estimated that there are now 600 regular Badminton players in Victoria, and new clubs are being formed every week. Twenty-five clubs are affiliated with the Victorian Badminton Association, 19 of them playing in the central association and six in the northern association. In the country, clubs have been formed at Bendigo, Ballarat, Bairnsdale, Maffra and Portland. As there are few counter-attractions in country towns in winter evenings, it is expected that the game will soon be established all over Victoria.

The high cost of shuttles, due to heavy import duties and exchange, is the only handicap to the progress of badminton. At present the shuttles cost 22/6 a dozen, tariff and exchange amounting to nearly 100 per cent. Efforts are being made by the Association officials to have the tariff reduced. As the feathers come from a type of goose bred only in France, it has not yet been found possible to make the shuttles in Australia. Consequently there seems no justification for such a heavy duty.

News from the Moonambel Mechanics' Institute

Story and images from Jill Hunter, Secretary/Treasurer

The Moonambel Mechanics Institute Reserve [hall] have a very supportive Council Pyrenees Shire. They recently gave us a grant of \$5,562.00 with which to erect a Colorbond Fence which has completed the 'look' of our lovely little hall. Unfortunately, the fence was almost double our grant!



Our Moonambel Community Theatre Company also have just produced a wonderful Pantomime 'Jack and the Beanstalk.' It was their 16th production since forming the company in 2009 - this was the first show since Covid put a halt to almost everything as we knew it!

This Pantomime is very loosely based on the fairytale "Jack and the Beanstalk", which like many tales the origins are lost in the depths of history, but the story of a simple country boy who defeats an Ogre, Giant or other terrible creature and save his family certainly dates from before the first Century AD. The specific version we now know seems to have evolved from a moralised story "Jack Spriggins and the enchanted bean." In 1734 and throughout the 18th and 19th Centuries, many versions of the story, with and without morals attached, were published in the form we now call Fairytales. Finally, in 1890, a version under the title "The history of Jack & the Beanstalk" by Joseph Jacobs was published.

Many adaptations of this have since appeared in print, cartoons, movies and theatres and has been (or should I



say bean) used as the theme of countless pantomimes, usually including various characters from other stories since fairytales rarely have more than 3 or 4 characters. The MCTC are no exception!

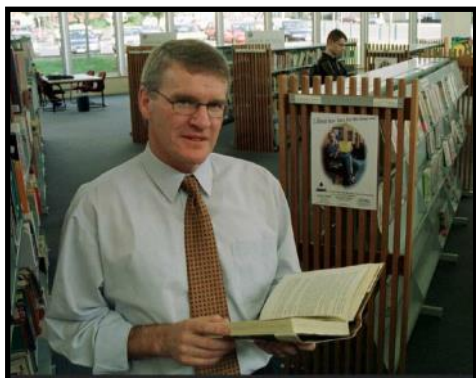
Moonambel, as a small rural community, was fortunate enough to have a Soprano, a Baritone and a Tenor [all close friends] choose us as their "tree change", and thus began the Moonambel Community Theatre Company. Two of the above have become members of our hall committee, and very hard-working I might add!

Left: The cast of the Pantomime. Image courtesy of the *Pyrenees Advocate*.

The Theatre Company usually produce two shows a year which brings the township together. Because of the pandemic we all thoroughly enjoyed this pantomime which was filled with much laughter and was very well attended both Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon. With splatterings of Gilbert & Sullivan and various other famous operas etc it was a most enjoyable evening with a lot of audience participation, such as booing, hissing at the con man and the giant! It really does one good to have a good old-fashioned 'belly laugh'.

Vale

These tributes were supplied by Jim Lowden



Peter Mansfield

We note the passing of former Mechanics' of Victoria Committeeman and Member, Dr Peter Gerald Mansfield at Geelong on 9 May 2023 at aged 72. Peter was born at Warrnambool in 1950 and grew up at Ararat. He spent his working life as a professional librarian, with postings in Adelaide; Central Highlands Library Corporation, at Ballarat, as Chief Executive and Librarian from 1979-90s; Corangamite Regional Library, Geelong Regional Library, finally Deakin University as Historian from 2011-15. He served on the Boards and Committees of a number of groups, including: Sovereign Hill Historical Parks Association; Ballarat Historical Society, President; Central Highlands Historical Association, Convenor; Public Record Office of Victoria; Geelong and District

Historical Association, Convenor; Geelong Historical Society; and Geelong Cemeteries Trust. He was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in 2018, 'for services to community history and heritage preservation'. He was also recipient of the Prahran Mechanics' Institute's History Prize in 2011. His publications included: *Graham Berry; Geelong's Radical Premier* (2006); *Generous Providers and Stern Custodians: The Development of Libraries in the Colony of Victoria* (2008); *Here Where all Troubles Cease: 175 Year of Service of the Geelong Eastern Cemetery 1839-2014* (2014); *St Mary of the Angels* (1979), with Ian Wynd; and edited: *Spielvogel Papers* (1982), of two volumes; *Ballarat and District 1920-1940: An Oral History* (1983), of seven volumes. Our deepest sympathy goes out to his wife Marianne, and sons Tim and Richard and their extended families.

Image: Peter Mansfield in the Ballarat library in 2001, courtesy of *Ballarat Courier*.

Alistair Urquhart

Alistair Buxton Urquhart passed away at Geelong on 16 July 2023. Born in Melbourne, he was educated at Scotch College, Geelong College, and Walt Whitman High School, Bethesda, Maryland. Later he took his Law and Commerce degrees from the Australian National University. Alistair was a true friend of the Mechanics' Institute Movement and was supportive of MIV being granted its first Government digitisation grant back in 2003 and often mentioned Mechanics' Institutes in his publication *Letter From Melbourne* over the years. He founded the WISE Scheme for the employment of disabled youth in 1992, an operation which has now spread worldwide to employ a staff of nine hundred people, and chaired it until his passing. Staunchly proud of his Scottish heritage, he played the bagpipes and wore the kilt at many community events and when travelling overseas he took them with him and played at many notable places, including his ancestral home Urquhart Castle on Loch Ness. Some will remember his stirring farewell bracket at the Mechanics' National Conference at Ballarat in 2018. Over three hundred people, from the young to ancient, attended his funeral service at Barwon Heads, with a number seen wearing his trademark red socks. We watched snapshots of his varied life on the screen as his anthem 'Chariots of Fire' played in the background, reminiscent of the great race he had ran in his very full life, forever networking people. Our deepest condolences go to his wife Mary.

Robert Draper

Robert 'Bob' Draper passed away on 21 May 2023. He was born and educated at the University of Bath and was a true Bathonian. He was a key figure in the renaissance of the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution from the 1990s until he 'absconded' to the Dorset seaside in 2020. Bob attended the First Mechanics' Institute World-wide Conference in 2004 and was instrumental in the conduct of the second MIW at Bath in 2009. Ever the crusader for science he drew youth into the BRLSI for his numerous science projects and demonstrations. For his longstanding contribution as President and committeeman to the Institution, he was elected a Life Member of the BRLI. In real life Bob was a much respected member of the Physics Department of the University of Bath and led the initiative Bath Taps into Science. We will miss his sage advice and occasional emails when England would win the cricket. One of nature's true gentlemen and may he rest in peace. Our deepest sympathy to his wife Cindy.

Collections at the Prahan Mechanics' Institute

By Ellen Coates, Collections Librarian <https://www.pmi.net.au/>

There are two big exciting collections development for 2023 at the PMI Victorian History Library. Our first big news is that we have a new collection policy. This policy will drive the direction of our incredible collection into the future. The emphasis is on collecting all the small voices that make up Victoria's history. By doing this we ensure that as complex a picture of Victoria is collected and understood. Our Collections Librarian wrote the policy over twelve months, in between a lot of other things, and with collaboration from the Board we have created a policy we're proud of. It will ensure a dynamic and growing collection into the future. You can view the policy <https://www.pmi.net.au/about-our-collections/>

The other key development in Collections so far in 2023 is an extraordinary map donation from Greg Eccleston. Greg has not only donated an incredibly detailed and multifaceted map collection, he has also donated the cabinet to hold them in. We are in the process of cataloguing the maps and they will be available for viewing in the library to all our members. So, thank you Greg, we are incredibly appreciative of your donation.

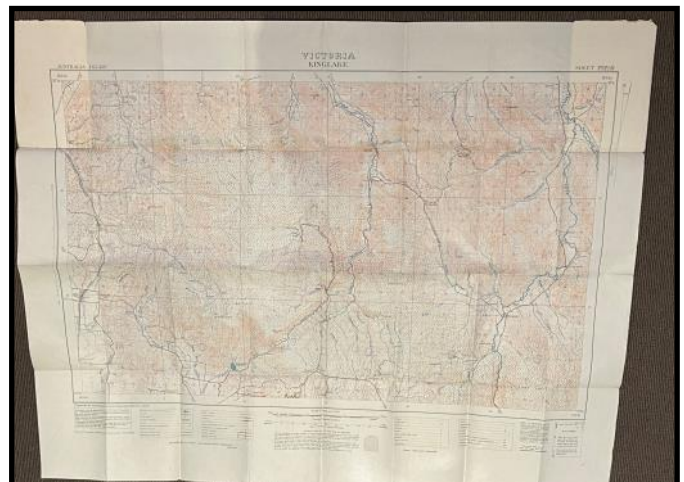
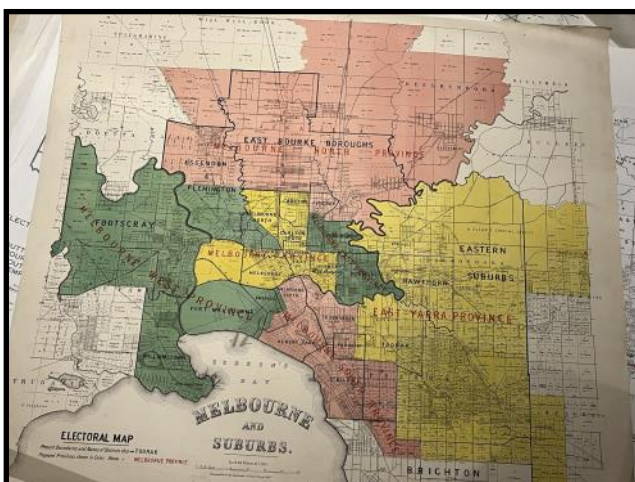
We have been sorting the whole collection by location to reflect the structure of the rest of the library collection, and because we believe this is the most likely way that the maps are likely to be used by our members. The sorting was quite a process, because there are a lot of maps of obscure bits of mountain, that we then had to look up and determine the broader region they were part of. The work has been worth it though. The earliest maps in the collection are WWI sketch maps, and the collection also includes hydrographic and geological maps. The collection covers most areas of Victoria and they are available for viewing in the library.

While this collection is incredible, they are not the only maps we hold. We also have an extensive collection of street directories including Melways. Melway began its life in 1966 as a hand drawn street directory and was created by Merv Godfrey (a former RAAF radio operator) and Iven Mackay. Merv drew the highly coloured highly accurate maps, and Iven took the maps and drove thousands of km in his old Morris Minor to test every road and detail in the field. When the first Melway came out in 1966, it wasn't the first Melbourne Street Directory - we already had Morgans, Collins, Robinsons and Universal (you can find examples of all in our collection) but it was the brightest, and quickly the most comprehensive.

If you are interested in the history of mapping in Australia check out the article in our March newsletter, or if you want more detail read *Australia On Paper: The story of Australian Mapping* by John D. Lines, available in our Library.

References:

<https://www.melway.com.au/pages/melway-history>



Two of the maps donated by Greg Eccleston—a Melbourne Electoral Map and a 1930s King Lake are military survey map.

Events at the Prahran Mechanics' Institute

By Jade Koekoe, Marketing Officer <https://www.pmi.net.au/>

This year, as most organisations, the PMI Victorian History Library has put a lot of effort into developing a roaring events calendar for members and the public to enjoy. After the ups and downs of COVID lockdowns, it was nice to get back to some sort of normalcy in this regard.

But not many people realise the mammoth number of tasks that goes into developing such a calendar, and the amount of things that can just go wrong! I'm sure every Mechanics' Institute can sympathise, and have their own tales of woe when it comes to events. This got me thinking, maybe we can learn from some of the PMI Victorian History Library's misadventures?

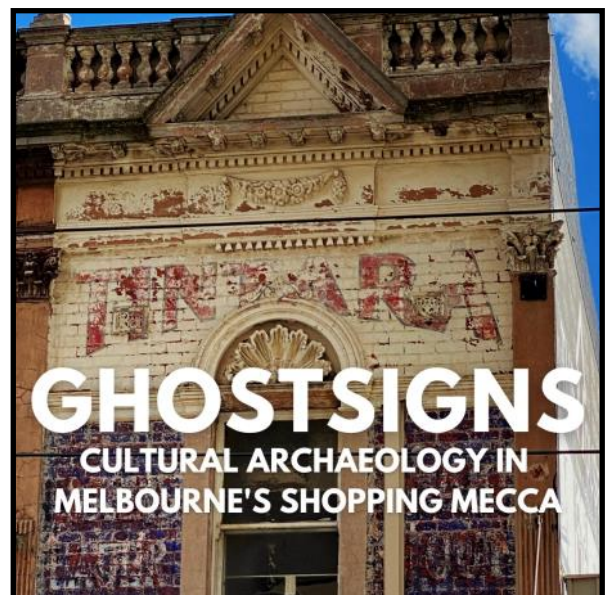
For example, **make sure you give yourself enough time to promote an event!** Since being at the Library, I have noticed that booking speakers in the first week of the month doesn't give me enough time to promote them. The main way we connect with our members is by email and we send our monthly events email at the end of every month for the next month. Now if your next event is in the first week of the month, you can see how that is not enough time. There is no use having a roaring event calendar if you don't give people enough time to decide to book themselves to attend.

This year we also decided to record as many events as possible. This is to reach more people, and to give our members who have moved to rural areas a way to still feel connected with the Library. The lesson here has been: **Always have a backup.** We have a decent sound system at the library, and we do sound checks before each event. But for a good portion of events we've done this year, the room's mic decides to stop working. We have a back up amp we use for emergencies, but it is good advice in general to always have a backup.

And lastly, **plan ahead.** As we mentioned before, there are a mammoth a number of tasks that need to be managed to have a successful events calendar. I've created a checklist to help me manage all those tasks. I'm sharing it here today, in the hope that it helps someone else as well.

Events this year have included a talk on the Rivoli Theatre in Camberwell with Royce Harris from the Cinema and Theatre Historical Society (CATHS) and Ghost signs around Melbourne with Sean Reynolds. Other events include Chapel Street Walks, a History Showcase and Book Sale. For details on any of our events follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [Twitter](#). You can also subscribe to our Newsletter: <https://www.pmi.net.au/newsletter-archive/>

Speaking of event calendars, we are already putting together ours for 2024, and the library is always looking for event partners or ideas. We would love to hear from you, come collaborate with us for an event in 2024 at the library!



Events at the Prahran Mechanics' Institute

Jade's Checklist for Events

Action	Responsible	Due Date	Completed
Plan Events: Organise date (NEVER in first week), time and guest speakers	All staff	Start of the year	
Email guest speakers to ask if they would speak		3 months before	
Email agreeable speakers for their photo/bio, event content and social media handles		2 months before	
Ask speakers for talk title, summary and photos for promotions		Month before	
Create graphic, poster and hashtag for promotion and post to socials		Month before	
Place event on website, event calendars, and do events e-newsletter		Month before	
Post event reminders on socials and email		2 weeks before	
Email MC and speakers a running sheet and ask if speaker is doing a PowerPoint or has props.		1 week before	
Do a THIS WEEK or TOMORROW post on socials		1 week before	
Live tweet, take photos and video		On the day	
If recorded add SEO, thumbnail to YouTube		1 day after	
Post on socials a summary/wrap up post of event or share the YouTube video		1 day after	
Thank you email to speakers with YouTube link to recording		1 day after	

Tooradin Mechanics' Institute and Free Library

By Heather Arnold

The original of this article with references can be read here

<https://kooweerupswamphistory.blogspot.com/2023/08/tooradin-mechanics-institute-and-free.html>

The Tooradin Mechanics' Institute was opened on Boxing Day in 1882. Local Historian, David Mickle*, recorded the establishment of the building -

Tooradin had been in need of a meeting place for some time. It was on the 21st June, 1882 that a public meeting was held to form a committee and raise funds. Mr J.F. Rutter had offered a good site for the hall free of charge. Mr Jobson chaired the meeting and the following Trustees were appointed: J. F. Rutter, A. Dunlop, M. Evans, C. Moody, with J. Sill (Secretary). A vote of thanks was passed to Mr Rutter for his gift. The site is on part of William Lyall's Lot 9, Parish of Sherwood. Mr Sill's request to the Council for a donation was refused, but undaunted, the committee had their Mechanics' Institute Hall and Free Library erected and ready for the Grand Opening on Boxing Day 1882. An old business partner of William Lyall, John Bakewell, then living in London, had donated 100 pounds to the building fund.

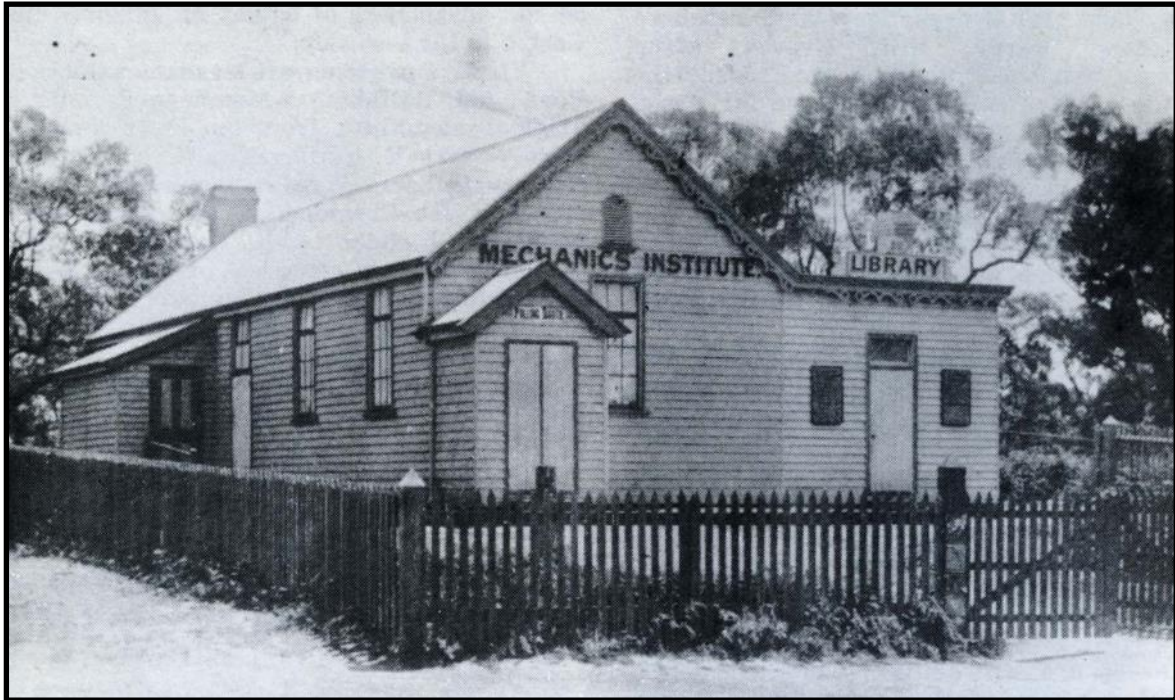
John Francis Rutter (1842-1906) was a local land owner, he had married Elizabeth Hemphill in 1877 and they had three sons Joseph Edward, John Hemphill and Hubert. The donation of land for the Mechanics' Institute was not the only gift the Rutter family gave to the Tooradin township. In 1928 it was reported that *Messrs. Rutter, of Tooradin, recently presented the Committee of the Tooradin Mechanics' Institute with some blocks of land adjoining the hall.* Later, the estate of John Hemphill Rutter (who died 1944) donated land to the people of Tooradin for a park, which is named the Rutter Memorial Park.

The *South Bourke and Mornington Journal* reported on the opening of the Tooradin Institute - *The opening of this new building took place on Boxing-day with a bazaar and concert. The attendance was far greater than the most sanguine anticipated, upwards of five hundred people being present. Mr Lyall had kindly consented to open the Hall, and much regret was expressed that owing to ill health he was unable to be present. A letter, however, expressing his interest in and good wishes for the success of the Institute was read and the Hall declared opened. Mr Gibb, M.L.A., was present, taking a lively interest in the proceedings. Too much praise cannot be given to the ladies for their exertions, both in sending fancy goods to and selling them at the bazaar the proceeds from which and from other sources amounted to nearly one hundred and twenty pounds. A ball terminated the proceedings, and was so well attended that the building was quite crowded. The Hall was prettily decorated with evergreens and the stalls containing the fancy goods presented a most attractive appearance. The building, designed by Mr Crook, architect, of South Yarra, is an excellent and handsome wooden structure prettily situated in a slight rise by the side of the Inlet, overlooking the Bay and French Island.*

In the early days, Mechanics' Institutes had to send in a return to the Government and these returns were published in the annual *Statistical Register for the Colony of Victoria compiled from official records in the office of the Government Statist*. Tooradin appears in the years 1884 until 1894, and here are some of the statistics -

Tooradin Mechanics' Institute			
Year	Government Grant £/s/d	Number of books	Number of visits
1884	17/7/2	163	419
1885	3/16/5	219	520
1886	24/2/2	389	822
1887	20/0/0	447	1243
1888	20/0/0	522	1563
1889	27/13/9	464	1391
1890	-	464	1391
1891	23/13/2	620	845
1892	19/5/8	539	1600
1893	13/4/1	695	810
1894	5/0/0	622	600

We will turn again to David Mickle to tell us of the early days of the Mechanics' Institute - *Mr Lyall was President and Mr Sill Secretary, there were Vice Presidents Messrs Moody and Timms, Mr Rutter, Treasurer and Messrs Dunlop, Evans and Lyne, Committee. A small booklet printed by the Dandenong Advertiser outlined the 49 rules and regulations of the Institute and its objects which were for the moral and mental improvement and rational recreation of members. The means to be employed were: a Library of Reference and Circulation, the delivery of Lectures, Discussions, the formation of classes, but no political or religious controversy would be allowed. Membership was 2/6 per quarter.*



The original Tooradin Mechanics' Institute and Free Library

Image: Tooradin: a history of a sportsman's paradise and the first 100 years of State School No. 1503 compiled by D.J. Mickle and the Tooradin "Back to" Committee (Tooradin 'Back to' Committee, 1975).

The Mechanics' Institute hosted the usual range of activities such as meetings, dances, concerts and a lending library until disaster struck on June 17, 1937, when the hall burnt to the ground. *The Age* reported - *Fire at Tooradin. Mechanics' Hall Destroyed. The mechanics' institute hall and library were completely destroyed by fire early this morning. Erected in 1882, they were in splendid condition. It is understood the Royal Insurance Co. have the building and library covered for approximately £1150. Approximately 1500 books were lost in the fire.*

The *Weekly Times* also reported on the disaster - *Tooradin Library Destroyed. Three thousand books, forming one of the most comprehensive country libraries in Victoria, were burnt in a fire which destroyed the 75-year-old [sic] Tooradin Mechanics' Institute building. Blazing fiercely when first discovered at 4.30 am., the fire quickly gutted the building, while townspeople looked on helplessly without any water supply, with which to combat it. Insured for £1000, the building contained the library, a hall and supper room. All the furniture, including a piano, was destroyed. At midnight, when members of the local table tennis club left the hall, everything appeared to be safe. Koo-Wee-Rup police are investigating the fire, the cause of which is unknown. As the institute was 50 yards from the nearest building, other premises were not endangered.*

It is interesting that the two reports of the fire have such a large discrepancy in the number of books - three thousand in one, 1500 in the other and both figures still much larger than the number reported in 1894, which was 622.

Article continues overleaf

Tooradin Mechanics' Institute and Free Library, continued

The locals acted quickly to have a new hall built and less than a year later the replacement building was opened on March 16, 1938. The *Koo Wee Rup Sun* had a comprehensive report of the opening, here is an edited version.



Wednesday, 16th inst., proved to be quite a gala night at Tooradin, when the opening of a new public hall to replace the old edifice destroyed by fire in June last year was the principal attraction. Mr A.J. Kirton, M.L.A., for Mornington, had the honor of performing the opening ceremony, and with the interior brightly lit by powerful electric light globes and enhanced by varied colored and pretty dresses of the ladies, the scene was one of beauty and one long to be remembered by justly proud residents, who are now the custodians of the largest public hall in the shire. Dance music was rendered by the Rhythm Swingers' Orchestra of four players, and things were kept merrily going until close on

milking or, should we say, fishing time. Close on 300 persons sat down to a much appreciated supper, catered for by Mr J.H. Scott of Kooweerup.

The builder was Mr. L.C. Williams, of Balwyn, the outside walls being of wood and fibro plaster with iron roof, and the interior white plaster sheets with a six foot three-ply dado round walls. The dimensions of the various rooms are as follows: - Dance hall, 36 ft. x 56ft.; stage 20ft. x 9ft.; passage, 5ft. wide, 23 ft. long; entrance hall, 12 ft. x 12 ft.; gents room, 10 ft. x 8 ft.; ladies' room, 14 ft. by 8ft.; library, 12 ft. by 8ft.; supper room, 22 ft. by 28 ft.; kitchen, 12 ft. x 8 ft. Mr A.J. Kirton, M.L.A., [said the] present building had cost a little over £1000, and he congratulated the committee and residents on their enterprise, adding that same was fitting to such an ideal holiday resort as Tooradin, and if developed further, would become a tourist resort. He was confident that Tooradin had a future, and he had pleasure in dedicating the hall to the public for future use.

The report tells us that the building had a room for a Library. It does not appear that a library was installed as in 1943 the *Dandenong Journal* reported -

Tooradin - Prior to the destruction by fire of the old Mechanics' Hall, local folk enjoyed the benefit of a circulating library of 1300 books. Owing to the dearth of funds at the erection of present hall, no provision was made to recover some semblance of a nucleus of a library. Some action should be taken by the hall management committee to bridge this disability, by application to the Government and the Carnegie Institute.

Notice that this article states that the amount of books held by the old Mechanics' Institute is now 1300. In 1945 it was reported that the government had granted the Hall Committee £100 for a new library.

In April 1946, the following letter appeared in the *Dandenong Journal* -

Library Wanted at Tooradin - The Government is ready to assist Tooradin on a basis of £2 for £1 to re-establish the burnt out library lost some years ago with the destruction of the old hall. The present Hall Committee are anxious to facilitate the earliest completion of a Public Library and help with £50 donation. I suggest the public will generously respond if appealed to, when the proposed library is made one of a memorial character as a first objective (a very practical form to remember the great deeds of our gallant lads); and as a No. 2 objective, a Youth Movement, to provide physical and mental uplift, occupation, and entertainment in pleasant surroundings, instead of allowing the drift of wasted leisure, so soul-destroying in most small country centres, now enforced on youth - a neglect, that has tragedy stamped in every link for some unfortunate lads in later life. A fresh committee will be elected by public meeting on May 6th. At that meeting the public could be invited to co-operate with the Hall Committee and endorse a Memorial Library and Youth Movement, and launch an organising committee and plan accordingly. J.D. Singleton, J.P. (Tooradin)

Despite all this local action, the Memorial Library was never established, however the Hall remains and is well-used by the community.

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 *Tooradin: a history of a sportsman's paradise and the first 100 years of State School No. 1503 compiled by D.J. Mickle and the Tooradin "Back to" Committee (Tooradin 'Back to' Committee, 1975).