

No. 62 Spring 2024

The magazine of the
Mechanics' Institutes of
Victoria



Useful Knowledge



Croydon Mechanics' Institute.
See story page 21.

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Report from the Editor

Well here we are at last—another edition of *Useful Knowledge*. What can I say, didn't quite make Autumn or Winter, but it's Spring and so this newsletter encompasses three seasons!

What's been happening? We are still investigating the website—it needs updating, but is it worth it or do we look at a new website?

The Wesson Lecture—this will be next year, we will let you know when we have a date, location and more importantly, a speaker.

Our AGM is on Saturday, November 9, 2024 at 10.00am at the Prahran Mechanics' Institute. All welcome. There are three forms with this newsletter— membership renewal, AGM Agenda /Nomination form; and AGM notice/proxy form.

Thank you for your contributions to this newsletter and I do appreciate stories and photos—please email them as a Word doc and as Jpegs.

Best wishes from the MIV Committee,

Heather Arnold, Editor
 mivnewslettereditor@gmail.com

The history of the Nagambie Mechanics' Institute

Story by Traci Stumer, Secretary Nagambie Mechanics' Institute

The history of the Nagambie Mechanics' Institute tells the story of the history of the Nagambie District. The hall shared in most happenings and events since it was built in time for Christmas 1873.

At a public meeting on May 16, 1873 attended by 21 citizens, it was revealed that the building would cost £900 - and 420 shares at 2/6 each in the form of debentures was suggested. A building committee was formed and Purbrick and Orgle were selected to build the hall for £817. 11,300 bricks were purchased and carted to the site on September 5, 1873.



Prior to the building of the Nagambie Mechanics' Institute hall, entertainment, meetings and concerts had been held in a room at the Valley Hotel in town. The new hall became a busy centre for every occasion.

The main hall was erected in 1930 and a Gala Ball was held to celebrate.

Left: Opening night of the new section of the Nagambie Mechanics' Institute Hall in 1930.
Image supplied by Traci Stumer

On November 25, 2023 another Ball was held to recreate that event and celebrate the 93rd anniversary of the halls opening.

The original section of the Institute houses an Opportunity Shop whose sole purpose is to fund ongoing maintenance, upkeep and improvements to the building.

We are so proud to be able to provide the improved hall to the people of Nagambie to use and appreciate.



Above: The 2023 re-creation ball. Image supplied by Traci Stumer

We are currently in the process of raising funds to build a better kitchen facility within the hall. This will allow better usage of the hall for everyone to love and enjoy.

Our goal is for the people of Nagambie to have a hall that can be celebrated for many years to come.

News from the Stanley Athenaeum

By Chris Dormer

Heritage Books Treated and Returned

The Friends of Stanley Athenaeum were successful in securing \$9,945 funding through the Local History Grants Program 2022-2023 for the project 'Caring for the Collection of Stanley Athenaeum and Public Room'. Fifteen volumes of non-fiction books from the Stanley Athenaeum Heritage collection affected by mould were sent to the Grimwade Conservation Services at Melbourne University for professional treatment and have now been returned. The books had been withdrawn from the shelves and isolated in 2022 when they were found to be affected by mould due to the high relative humidity in the building. Nine volumes from the Stanley Athenaeum Library had active mould present. Without appropriate treatment, there was a risk of contaminating other volumes and spreading mould. The presence of mould also puts the users of the library at risk.

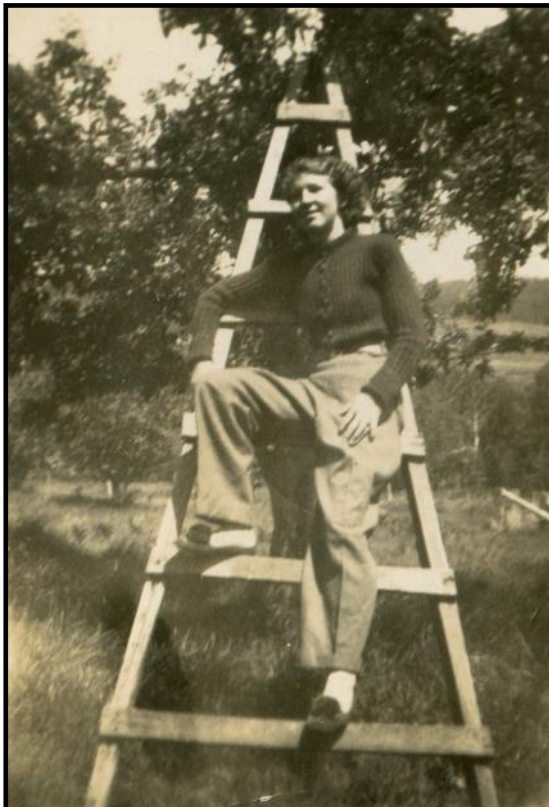
The treatment included the box containing the mouldy items being stored in the fume hood throughout the duration. Individual books were then placed upon a book sofa and all pages of each volume was brush vacuumed to reduce mould spores and after each volume was cleaned, they were placed in a new storage box to avoid recontamination. Stanley Athenaeum gratefully acknowledges the Local History Grants Program and Public Record Office Victoria, supported by the Victorian Government through the Community Support Fund that enabled this work to be done, securing the future for these important books

Book Care & Repair workshop

The Friends of Stanley Athenaeum secured funding for a two day Book Care & Repair workshop for their volunteers to build skills and support the work of cataloguing the Heritage Book collection at the Athenaeum. The workshop was held on Monday 4 and Tuesday 5 March 2024 by Peter Mitchelson, paper conservator from Grimwade Conservation Services at Melbourne University. The volunteers at the workshop learnt general skills for book care included appropriate handling, cleaning, minor repairs, book enclosures and even making a simple small book.

'Apple Days of Stanley' Exhibition

Friends of the Stanley Athenaeum have been talking to local



Stanley apple growers, collecting stories, objects and making preparations for their new exhibition 'Apple Days of Stanley'.

Installed at the beginning of July and launched at the Community Hub space at the Stanley State School on Friday, July 5 with an enthusiastic gathering with talks by local orchardists Peter Chambeyron and Henry Hilton, relating the changes they have experienced growing apples in Stanley.

See the 'Apple Days of Stanley- The Story of Apple Growing in Stanley' exhibition that tells the story of over one hundred years of apple growing in Stanley; the orchards, architecture, varieties, growers and their trials and tribulations.

The exhibition runs until June 2025.

Left: Noreen Seddon on picking ladder in Sinclair Orchard 1930s.

Stanley Athenaeum and Public Room
2 Mount Stanley Road, Stanley.
Enquiries: Chris 0458 606 922
or email stanleyathenaeum@gmail.com

News from the Stanley Athenaeum

By Chris Dormer

Harry Could Still be Found

While researching the Boswell family and their apple growing in Stanley, Henry Boswell was famous for the 'Boswell Beauty' apple, this article came to light about his son, John 'Harry' Henry Boswell (1895-1916)

Harry was born on August 16, 1890 in Stanley. Harry was a poet and won 2nd prize in South Street competitions in Ballarat, for 'original poem, "Australia— the grandest of the grand". Like many Victorians struck by the depression in the 1890s, some of the extended Boswell/Enright family made the long journey from Victoria by ship to Western Australia to join the gold rush. Harry was still living in Stanley in 1913, working as a labourer, but by 1914 he was living with his uncle Alfred Enright at 23 Union Street, Subiaco, WA.



Alfred and his family, who had moved to WA much earlier was working for the WA newspaper. Harry's uncle Thomas was a gold miner in Boulder, Kalgoorlie. Harry found work as a tram conductor in Perth. He must have been an interesting fellow to ride with, as one of his mates in the Army called him "the Tramway Poet".

He enlisted for the First World War and was killed at Fromelles. The Fromelles Association are currently seeking family of this soldier, with a view to the identification of suitable DNA donors for the specific purpose of identification. We welcome all contact in this regard. We also urge any family members to contact and register with the Australian Army.

Left: Harry Boswell

Even more than 100 years after the battle, soldier identification efforts are still going on. In 2008, a German grave was discovered that contained the remains of 250 soldiers from the battle. As of 2024, DNA testing from

relatives that have been able to be located has been successful for the identification of 180 of the bodies in the grave. Forty one of these identified soldiers were from the 32nd Battalion.

Harry may be one of the yet unidentified soldiers. Please contact the Fromelles Association if you know of any family connections for possible DNA donors. DNA samples are being sought for family connections to Parents - Henry James Boswell (1860-1928) b. Mt Eliza and Isabel Honora Enright (1867-1920) b. Hobart, and d. Beechworth. Siblings - Myrtle Isabel (1891 -1975) married Stephen Edwin Weldon; Stanley James (1893 -1975) married Bridget Evelyn Breustedt. Grandparents – Paternal Henry George Boswell (1836-1901) b. Mt. Eliza, and d. Melbourne and Jane West (1837-1925) b. Northamptonshire England, and d. Camberwell. Grandparents – Maternal John William Enright (1844-1918) b. Old Beach, Tasmania, and d. Stanley and Caroline Smith (1845-1884), b. Launceston, and d. Walhalla.

If you know anything of contacts here in Australia, please contact the royce@fromelles.info or Unrecovered War Casualties army. UWCA. Phone: 1800 019 090 Email: army.uwc@defence.gov.au.

The Melbourne Athenaeum - 185 years of history

By Sophie Arnold

On November 12, the Melbourne Athenaeum – originally the Melbourne Mechanics' Institution and School of Arts – will celebrate its 185th anniversary. Manager, Sophie Arnold, looks back over the history of this beloved institution.

Since 1839, the Melbourne Athenaeum has provided a unique social and cultural hub in the heart of Melbourne. Originally known as the Melbourne Mechanics' Institution and School of Arts, the Collins Street location housed the city's first official library, art gallery, museum, and exhibition space. Even the town council meetings were hosted here until the town hall was completed.

As Melbourne gradually became a more complex city, the organisation and its building evolved to accommodate the changing needs and sophisticated pastimes of the people of the city. Something that it has consistently done ever since.



Melbourne Athenaeum—1842 facade

Our early days

European settlers arrived at Port Phillip in 1835. Soon after the first settlers, there came merchants and “mechanics” – an umbrella term used for the colony's first builders, stonemasons, carpenters, tilers, and other workmen. A Union Benefit Society was formed by colony leaders and, at its first meeting on November 12, 1839, the society's members discussed the need for a mechanics' institute to provide opportunities for education and self-improvement.

In 1839, the Melbourne Mechanics' Institution and School of Arts opened its doors in rented premises as Victoria's first adult education provider and library, with its aim being the “diffusion of scientific and useful knowledge”.

In *Long may Minerva reign from her niche overlooking Collins Street*, author Pam Baragwanath discusses the role mechanics' institutes played in supporting the development of new settlements such as Melbourne. The first President was Captain William Lonsdale, and the first Patron was the Superintendent of Port Phillip, Charles La Trobe – names synonymous with Melbourne.

Within a year of establishing the Institute, the Founding Committee had devised a program of public lectures, had begun amassing a collection of books to form a lending library, and appointed a librarian as well as a curator to oversee its growing collection of objects, which were to form a museum.

Although originally begun as a Mechanics' Institution for skilled workmen, anyone could join. A yearly subscription of one pound entitled the whole family to use the Library and Reading Room, visit the museum and attend lectures organised by the Committee of Management. Women were able to be individual members and the first to do so was Mrs Anderson in 1848.



Melbourne Athenaeum—1860s

The Melbourne Athenaeum - 185 years of history

A cultural hub

The building was well-used from the beginning, with areas rented out to people needing a place to meet, discuss, lecture or entertain. Sir Redmond Barry gave lectures. Teachers rented space for classes such as drawing, music, languages and science.

Rowdy political meetings were held, many regarding democratic rights. Scientific and musical groups and associations also now had a place to meet. Philosophical Institute discussions around inland exploration led to the decision to mount the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition. Concerts by the Liedertafel and the Philharmonic Society were popular.

The Institute's first art exhibition was held in April 1847, displaying works by artist and drawing teacher George Alexander Gilbert. Gilbert was appointed as the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute Secretary and Curator of Fine Arts in 1844. He went on to establish the colony's first art school on the premises.

The organisation had over 700 members by this time and the library over 5000 volumes.

By 1851, the annual report showed that the need for a larger lecture hall was being discussed because the existing hall could not accommodate the increasing number of people wanting to attend lectures, classes and entertainments. It was common for people to be turned away at the door. There was also a need to store the growing collection of donated museum objects. Establishing a museum had been identified as an important part of meeting the organisation's purpose.

The Committee raised enough money to buy a small piece of land at the back of the building and finalised plans for a large hall and additional wings on both sides at the front of the building. However, insufficient finances prevented the project being completed for a further two decades.

The *Melbourne Athenaeum* a better reflection of the organisation's progress

By the early 1870s, it was decided that the organisation had sufficiently developed to need a new name – the aspirational Melbourne Athenaeum. The institution was no longer a 'mechanics' institute' in the same way it had been when formed.

Among the early office bearers of the institution was author Marcus Clarke, who took on the role of chairman of the library committee in 1877. By this time, membership was 1680 strong. In 1879, there were 30,000 visits to the library.

The new hall was an instant success, with an extraordinary variety of events held there - everything from sporting exhibitions and social occasions to musical and theatrical performances and banquets.

The last significant changes to the building led to the "new Building" being formally opened by the then Governor in 1886. With a completely renovated façade and large hall, the Melbourne Athenaeum continued to be a cultural hub in the city. Dances and balls, musical and theatrical performances, exhibitions, flower shows and meetings were held.



Melbourne Athenaeum—1886 façade

Photographer: Charles Rudd

In 1890, the Athenaeum introduced Melburnians to the wonders of Mr Edison's talking machine; Henry Morton Stanley lectured here in 1892; and Mark Twain in 1895. *The Story of the Kelly Gang* by the Tait Brothers, the world's first dramatic feature film, was shown at the Athenaeum in 1906.

Continued overleaf

The Melbourne Athenaeum - 185 years of history

By Sophie Arnold

The Ath brings a new style of theatre to Melbourne

In 1923, changing cultural interests and the prevalence of other venues led to the large hall being transformed into an intimate 880 seat theatre by Frank Talbot. The theatre opened on December 23, 1924 with a performance of Sir James Barrie's comedy *Dear Brutus* by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre Company.

The Argus wrote that it "seemed incredible that such transformation could have been wrought in so brief a period".

On February 2, 1929, the Athenaeum introduced Melbourne to the 'talkies' with the first screenings of Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*, before it became the first "all-British theatre in the Empire" in 1932. *Pygmalion* ran for 25 weeks.

1939 – The Athenaeum celebrates its first 100 years

To celebrate its centenary, a history of the institution written by Secretary Reginald Wilmot was published and a grand dinner held in the Myer Mural Hall.

The Committee of Management had considered modernising the building as part of the celebrations, but finances only allowed renovations to the library. The dividing wall between the then library and reading room was removed and the new combined space remodelled. According to the 1940 annual report, the cost of the improvements was £2,639/0/9 and the amount received from subscriptions that year was £3,279/3/9, a record for the Institution.

Cinema or theatre – the Ath has always been popular with audiences

The theatre remained a cinema for some four decades, with Sir Laurence Olivier and his wife, Vivien Leigh, in the Ath audience in 1948 for the Australian premiere of Olivier's *Hamlet*.

In 1977, the space again became a live theatre when the Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC) moved in and installed new technical equipment and reworked the proscenium to enlarge the stage. The MTC's first offering was *The School for Scandal*, with other performances during its nine-year occupancy including *Breaker Morant*.

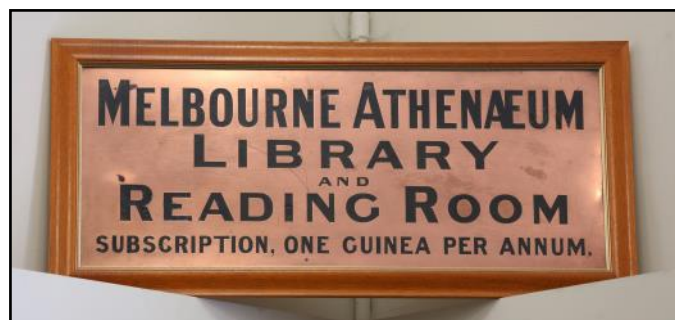
The MTC also transformed the original art gallery space into an upstairs studio theatre, still in operation today and affectionately known as Ath 2.

After the MTC moved to the Arts Centre in 1984, the two theatres came under the management of A.T. Management, which remains the leaseholders today.

Today

The library today remains the only part of the Ath which has operated continuously since the earliest days. It is Victoria's oldest continuing lending library and was opened well before the Melbourne Public Library (now known as the State Library of Victoria) in 1854.

It continues to contribute to the social and cultural life of Melbourne with a robust program of events including musical and theatrical performances, poetry readings, book clubs and lectures. It has for several years also run an artist-in-residence program, with some of the works produced by these artists currently on display in the library.



Reading Room sign

Photographer: Janine Eastgate

Some of the city's most highly regarded musicians have noted the Athenaeum Library's remarkable ambience and acoustics for intimate live performances.

It is regularly referred to as one of Melbourne's best kept secrets. The RACV rates it one of the "*best libraries in Melbourne and regional Victoria*".

Our around 1000 members are custodians of the Athenaeum's rich living history and ongoing story, and we rely on the contributions of members, supporters, and partners to ensure we remain a vibrant cultural institution for the people of Melbourne.

This is an excerpt from a history to be released at the 185th celebrations in November. Images supplied by Sophie Arnold.

Risk and insurance – matters for committees to consider

By Denys Correll.

Denys is Secretary of the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Board and on the MIV committee.

Risk and insurance – matters for committees to consider

Committees of not-for-profit associations need to undertake an annual review of their insurances.

In doing this the committee examines the association's level of risk and buys sufficient insurance to cover the assessed risks.

Justice Connect has a wonderful resource of downloadable materials to assist committees in understanding risk and insurance.

The two documents

- Insurance and risk management for community organisations
- Indemnity for office holders of Victorian incorporated associations

are located at <https://www.nfplaw.org.au/free-resources/insurance-and-risk#insurance>

The types of insurance a committee should consider are:

- public liability
- directors' and officers'
- asset or contents insurance
- event-specific insurance, and
- volunteer protection

Indemnity for office holders of Victorian incorporated associations

The Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic) includes an indemnity provision that requires an incorporated association to indemnify its office holders for liabilities they incur in good faith while performing their duties.

The Justice Connect fact sheet covers the issues that Victorian incorporated associations should consider including:

- what is the indemnity?
- does the indemnity mean you need to take out insurance?
- the risk that indemnity creates and how to manage this risk, and
- directors' and officers' insurance

Events

Associations inevitably hold events. Justice Connect provides information on legal considerations when holding an event and at the following website has a guide to holding events in Victoria.

<https://www.nfplaw.org.au/free-resources/fundraising-and-holding-events/holding-events>

The information in this article is intended as a guide only and is not legal advice. If you or your organisation has a specific legal issue, you should seek legal advice before deciding what to do.

Kyabram Reform Movement

Kyabram Town Hall, the former Kyabram Mechanics' Institute.

By the Kyabram Historical Society

The Kyabram Town Hall, today a gallery and arts and culture centre, was once the centre of social and civic life and learning in the town and district, established in 1898 as the Mechanics' Institute. An important and somewhat forgotten political happening took place in this building 121 years ago – which may have involved some of your ancestors.

You know the Australian colonies federated into one nation – the Commonwealth of Australia – January 1, 1901. The promise was a more efficient, fairer and less costly style of government across the land. However, this promise did not transfer well to State level. The Victorian Government, led by Premier Alexander David Peacock, Member for Clunes and Allandale, was particularly over-represented, and incompetently and wastefully run by too many well-trothed, overpaid self-serving politicians. The people became restless and disgruntled, and they communicated their grievances publicly in the neighbourhood, the street, the pub, in letters and articles in newspapers and magazines.



Left: A Kyabram Reformer, based on a Punch cartoon of the time.

One day in early November 1901, Mr George Bishop, a politically savvy timber and iron merchant of Kyabram, was venting about politics to Mr Charles H. Wilson, the owner of the *Kyabram Free Press* newspaper. Mr Wilson suggested Mr Bishop convene a public meeting to do something about these injustices. Mr Bishop agreed, organised some friends and invited all the concerned citizens of Kyabram and district, as well as the Deakin and Rodney Councils, to a public meeting on November 13, 1901, in the Kyabram Mechanics' Institute in Allan Street.

Names of attendees – like Bishop, Wilson, Lancaster, Goddard, Edis, Dowling, Richards, Day, Wilson Bryce, Mcleod, Dooley, Tahan, Ising, Archibald, Hanson, and Allen – can be found in the historical records, and, these days also as street names and public place names. Many of their descendants still live in these parts. Perhaps you are one of them?

The first meeting of ordinary local folks, the beginning of the Kyabram Reform Movement, passed a number of resolutions that were to eventually tip the corrupt and capacious Victorian Government out on its ear! Indeed, the repercussions of the Kyabram Reform Movement eventually influenced governmental reforms in all other states as well as the new Commonwealth Government. The movement's motto was 'retrenchment, reform and prosperity'. Eleven months of activity followed. Letters were sent, articles written in newspapers and magazines. Meetings held across Victoria and in Melbourne stirred the people to form the 210 branches, and the movement was formally named the National Citizen's Reform League, though widely referred to simply as the Kyabram Movement.

A charter of demands to improve the people's lot was written and presented to the Peacock administration – and rejected. A vote of no confidence in the government finally brought it down, and October 1902, a state election voted in the leader of the opposition, Hon. William Hill Irvine, member for Lowan, in a landslide.

The new government endeavoured to bring about many of the reforms initiated by the Kyabram Movement – a glorious victory for justice for the people. Thus, the Kyabram Reform Movement became the first organised attempt by the people of Australia to compel parliament to accede to their wishes. And it was achieved democratically – through exposing dishonesty, public debate, and the ballot box.

This local historical phenomenon has not been totally forgotten. Many people will remember the Centenary of the Kyabram Reform Movement in 2021. The Kyabram Town Hall this year acknowledges the 121st anniversary of the birth of the Kyabram Reform Movement in this very same building.

People and Mechanics' Institutes in the News

By Jim Lowden



The Honourable Patricia Forsythe AM has recently taken up the appointment at Australia's University of Newcastle as its Chancellor. Chancellor Forsythe was born in Newcastle and is an Arts graduate of the University of Newcastle. Following a teaching career, she entered State

politics and was a Member of Legislative Council of NSW from 1991-2006. Then followed an extensive period as Executive Director of the Sydney Business Chamber and finally, the Australian High Commissioner to New Zealand from 2019-22.

In January 2024 veterinarian **Professor Liz Mossop** took up the position of Vice-Chancellor at Sheffield Hallam University in Yorkshire. Professor Mossop is a graduate of the University of Edinburgh and has previously held posts at the: University of Lincoln, where she was Provost and Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor; and the University of Nottingham, where she was Professor of Veterinary Education and a leader in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. (A namesake is Professor Elizabeth Mossop currently Dean of the University of Technology Sydney's School of Design, Architecture and Building.)

Industrialist, **The Right Honourable, Swraj, Lord Paul of Marylebone** this year notches up a quarter of a century as the University of Wolverhampton's Chancellor. Now in his nineties, Lord Paul took his science and engineering degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This was established as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Boston Society of Natural History in 1861, but did not open until after the Civil War in 1865 in the Boston Mercantile Library building.

Wolverhampton is a 'Mechanics Institute' University which dates back to 1827 as the Wolverhampton Tradesmen's and Mechanics' Institute. Lord Paul has given much time to the University over the years and plans to erect a new building on the Wolverhampton campus to the memory of his late wife Lady Aruna Swraj Paul. Lord Paul's record of service is only surpassed by The Princess Royal, Princess Anne who has been Chancellor at Birkbeck, University of London since 1981.

Sheffield Hallam University, which was created in 1992, stems from a Mechanics' Institute lineage. It has recently received acclaim for its apprenticeship program through its National Centre for Excellence for Degree Apprenticeships. SHU has 31,000 students of which 24,000 are undergraduates. The 7,000 postgraduate students engage in serious research, with a speciality of cyber crime. Its four faculties include: Development and Society; Health and Wellbeing; Business, Technology and Engineering; and Social Sciences and the Arts. Its motto is 'Learn and Serve' and its mascot Roary 'Roar' McTaverstock is celebrated in jubilant song.

Manchester Metropolitan University, (pictured below) established in 1824 as the Manchester Mechanics' Institution by way of the Manchester Polytechnic to achieve University status in 1992, is in the course of celebrating its bicentenary. There Professor Malcom Press has been Vice-Chancellor since 2015. Professor Press propounds 'Since we formed in 1824, we've grown to become the future-facing modern global institution that we are today. We're creative, confident, passionate and proud – just like the city we call home – so our 200-year anniversary is a great chance for us all to come together and celebrate'. MMU's motto 'Many Arts, Many Skills' is indicative of the large range of subjects taught.



University of Newcastle was established as a campus of the New South Wales University of Technology back in 1951 and achieved its University status in 1965. Today it has 37,000 students, with 24,500 being undergraduates. It's current Vice-Chancellor is Professor Alex Zelinsky AM, and since coming to office in 2018, he has taken the University forward in accord with its motto 'I Look Ahead'. The UN website stridently states 'This strategic plan [2020-2025] is of our regions and for our regions'. Currently ranked as No. 173 in the top 200 of the world's universities, it is in the Top 8 in Australia for research 'well above world standard' and 95% of their research is 'at' or 'above world standard'. Its mascot is the true blue Hunter the Hippocarpus.

Mechanics' Institutes of the Highways and Byways—Narrawong and Hallston

Story and photographs by Jim and Ros Lowden.

Rare does one get a chance to have an inside inspection of a Mechanics' Institute by way of a drive-by, but a well-ordered noticeboard, prominent signage and a walk around the outside of a building can tell you much. Such was the case of a recent visit to the Narrawong Mechanics' Institute. Located in the main Princes Highway thoroughfare of Winstan Street, the Hall sits back on a large deep block.

Largely built in 1906 and opened in 1907, a kitchen was added in 1926 and the building had a major upgrade in 1989. A more recent playgroup installation and shaded barbecue area is at the rear of the Hall as is a large area that could be used for a market, swap meet or show and shine. Newly installed front and side gates, courtesy of a grant from the Glenelg Shire Council, provided a welcoming touch.



The Narrawong Mechanics' Institute

The front of the Hall proudly proclaimed 'Narrawong Mechanics' Institute', with another large lineal sign with a prominent 'Hall For Hire' and a phone number, easily readable from the street. The large glass fronted Notice Board on the street frontage provided all the information one could wish. The six regular Hall users were featured with their specific nights. Posters were in place for upcoming events, including an eye-catching one for the upcoming 'Trivia Night at The Hall'. There was a thoughtful montage of pics of the Hall interior spaces. Again, there were contact numbers and email for Hall hiring and finally a 'Free Wi-Fi' sign.

The Institute's Facebook page carries images of past events with well designed and colourful posters which all carry the all-important sponsor acknowledgements recognizing their generous support of the particular event.

The Narrawong Mechanics' Institute folk are to be congratulated on the presentation and upkeep of their Hall and their 'out there' promotion. Their efforts and thoughtful promotion deserve bookings and sponsorship.

From the Highway to the Byway is at the Hallston Mechanics' Institute, just off Grand Ridge Road in Gippsland's south. Now eminently placed on a rise, and on its third site, Hallston's evolution has truly been a 'moving' experience, with present building dating from 1933, with a more recent annexe store. The Hall has been reclad in synthetic 'weatherboards' in very recent times, when windows were replaced and some new ones added. Ramps provide wheel chair access.

It had been almost ten years since we were last there, when a car was sighted outside and we took the opportunity for a possible look through. We had only just pulled up when about ten other cars pulled up behind us. It was the Women's Wednesday Coffee/Tea Afternoon at 2pm. This event has been running weekly for now more than thirty years.



The Hallston Mechanics' Institute working bee, June 2024

Like all Halls, COVID hit Hallston hard, so membership was waived and they maintained an occasional email feed to all former members and correspondents and have recently ramped this up with a most informative newsletter, now in version two. Things are now back on the road and we responded to an invitation for a Working Bee, with a barbecue 'tempter'. It was a glorious day as we wound along the ridge road 'floating' above the deep valleys with memorable vistas.

Mechanics' Institutes of the Highways and Byways—Narrawong and Hallston

We finally arrived at the road frontage where there was a large steel-framed box sign, with the header 'Hallston Mechanics' Hall' and an artistic line rendering of the Hall underneath. The six line plastic lettering signage prominently advised of yoga on Mondays, the Working Bee and the Facebook page.

The working bee was in full swing with two parties 'at it'. One was transferring wood chips from a large pile created by Council from trees and branches that had blown down in the February storm to a newly created bed around the centennial cairn. This was erected in 1987 to celebrate the forming of the Institute and was now being surrounded by the planting of shrubs. The other party was replacing the spouting on the rear of the Hall.

Morning Tea and Lunch was provided by the generous donation of pastries, pies, pasties and sausage rolls by the Meeniyan Bakery. (Meeniyan is another Institute worth a visit for example and action!) Interestingly around the Hall there are a number of plaques recognising the funding sources for various works.



Hallston Hall Interior

Clearly the COVID lockdown provided opportunity for work in the Hall, for its was spotless, with new equipment in the kitchen and a new suite of crockery and fresh painting. The most recent major event held in the Hall was the unveiling of the World War I photographic Honour Roll created by former Institute President Avenel Jane. Local MP Russell Broadbent ably did the honours on November 11, 2023 unveiling the large wall-mounted glass fronted case in front to the large crowd, which included descendants of some of the featured soldiers. To enable information to be added to the service and life record of each soldier a

nearby cabinet contains a separate dossier on each soldier. This project was financed by way of a grant from the Department of Veterans Affairs' 'Saluting Their Service' funding program.

Hallston's big annual event (and Fundraiser) is the Trivia Night in July, which is always booked out. This is again generously supported by professional people who donate their services. The Institute owns the Hall and also manages the nearby Council-owned tennis courts. They also opened a 24/7 community library in a fridge at the rear of the Hall. With a stunning view, plenty of parking, and resourced kitchen this Hall is very much up 'For Hire'. There is also the handy B&B in the Old School House next door for those planning courses, a wedding or other event.

Jim has also supplied us with news of two other Mechanics' Institutes— Bordertown and Stawell

The Bordertown Institute is now part of a larger civic complex, which also comprises the Tatiara District Council, Offices. The original building was part of the largesse of the Riddoch family which also built Institutes at Mount Gambier and Penola. The original Institute building is now used as a well-resourced 'raked' theatre with the more recent building being used for gallery and office space, This was opened in 2011 by former Prime Minister Bob Hawke, Bordertown's favourite son, with a stirring rendition of Waltzing Matilda. His story is well told in the Bob Hawke Gallery.

We were much taken by the exhibition in the Walkway Gallery 'Material Girls'. This was superbly created by loaned, mostly 1940s-50s comprehensive range of items used in the household and worn by women. The imaginative display of dresses and coats hung from roof-based tracking made for an easy walk through of the individual items. There was also a gratis illustrated catalogue with lender stories to guide you through the exhibition. This exhibition was most deserving of an award!

The Stawell Mechanics' Institute was established in Main Street in 1860 and built its two-storey Hall in 1875. Since the Library was relocated from the building in 1960 it has had a number of uses along with gradual decay. In recent times it has been purchased by Gordon Williamson, his brother Andrew and his wife Michelle and they are currently restoring it to ultimately house three apartments, a café and restaurant.

Institute Affiliation in South Australia

Story and photos supplied by Joelle Hancock <https://institutessa.com/>

Twenty years after South Australia's colony was proclaimed, an Act was passed for the SA government to support institutes. Already thirteen institutes had been formed around the state but most of them were struggling. Accommodation and a steady supply of books were hard to maintain. The Act committed the government to promoting the 'general study and cultivation of ... art, science, literature and philosophy' by uniting them in the South Australian Institute.

This legislation passed in 1856 provided for a Board of Governors and a general secretary who together had the task of supporting all the institutes that chose to affiliate with the central body. Also promised was a building that would house not only a central library and the SA Institute but also the Public Library, the SA Society of Arts and the Philosophical Society.

When the Institute building was opened in 1861 it was the first public building on North Terrace. By then the Public Library had almost 10,000 books and the Board and its secretary had already laid the foundations of a strong supportive system for its affiliating institutes.



South Australia Institute building on North Terrace, 1866

Image: SLSA B 5245

To affiliate, the separate institutes agreed to a set of rules which included the requirements to:

- appoint trustees
- elect a committee annually
- maintain a library and reading-room
- keep financial records
- send in statistical records twice a year
- protect their assets

Once affiliated, each institute was eligible for a government subsidy of their subscriptions, which at first was pound for pound. The subsidy was to be spent on reading material. Other funds needed to erect, furnish, maintain and staff an institute were raised by each institute's committee except for some subsidies provided for buildings. Affiliated institutes also had access to support and advice.

Institute Affiliation in South Australia

Over time the Board developed procedures such as those for the bulk purchase of books and journals, the circulation of boxes of books, the payment of government subsidies and the dissolution of institutes. Any variations in an institute's rules, sale of property or its dissolution required the Board's approval.



South Australia Institute building, 1880

Image: SLSA B 62414/1/7.

Two of the Board's first initiatives were particularly helpful. One was the system for circulating boxes of books and the other, procedures for providing lecturers to the institutes.

The boxes of books, all paid for by the central Institute, began circulating in 1859. Each wooden box, 46 by 30 and 25 centimetres deep, contained thirty books. The individual institutes paid for freight costs and sent their box(es) to the next institute after three months. Institutes could request specific titles and the genres their readers wanted. By 1895 there were 199 boxes in circulation, with 17.5% of the books in German to cater for South Australia's large number of German migrants. The circulating boxes of books were essential to many libraries' survival, as they provided new titles every few months. At first the boxes held a mixture of nonfiction and fiction. Later the institutes could pay an annual fee for extra boxes of fiction. By 1951 the fee for fiction boxes was £15 for the larger institutes, £10 for less than 25 members and £15 for extra boxes. The scheme was a great success for 130 years.

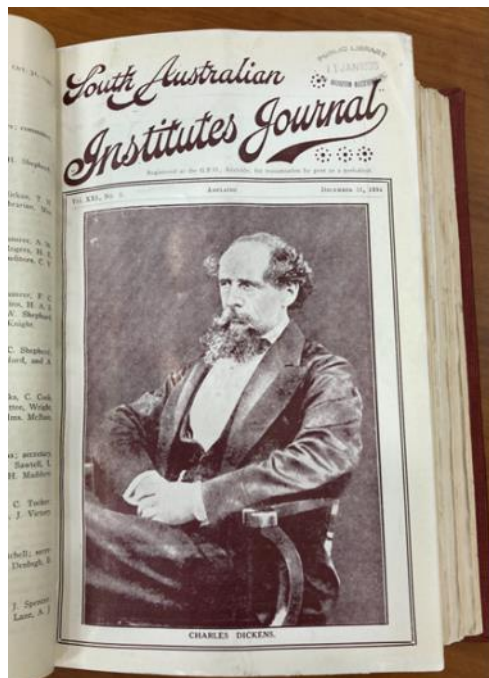
The list of lecturers for institutes was first formed in 1861 after an advertisement seeking 'applications from gentlemen willing to deliver lectures in Adelaide or the country' had been placed in each of the daily papers. Most of the lecturers were clergymen and their topics were frequently biographical, literary or related to travel. The local institute paid half the speaker's travel costs and half his fee of two guineas and the government paid the other half. The scheme lasted into the 1870s and was revived after 1910 for a time.

Continued overleaf

Institute Affiliation in South Australia

Story and photos supplied by Joeline Hancock

The Board governing the institutes also looked after the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery until 1899. That year the SA Institutes Association was formed so that representatives from the many affiliated institutes (then 158) could work together for their mutual benefit. The Association began publishing its own journal and held an annual meeting at which delegates from the separate institutes heard reports, aired concerns and made recommendations to its governing body, the Public Library.



Far left : Institutes Association Annual meeting 1921
(Image: *A Chance to Read*, by M.R Talbot)

Left: Cover of South Australian Institutes Journal, December 1934

Four times a year the South Australian Institutes' Journal published reports from the Public Library Board, from individual institutes and from the Association's Secretary along with book reviews, institute histories, articles about authors and lists of popular books.

In 1933 the number of institutes affiliated with the SA Institutes Association at 309. The Association's Secretary visited and reported on each of them to the Public Library Board and in the Journal at least once every two years. He gave encouragement and advice and gauged the needs of the institutes as a whole.

For almost 150 years affiliation with the central Institute brought stability, legitimacy and support for the institutes in South Australia and their buildings. The SA Institutes Association assisted the government and its Board in phasing out institute libraries by 1989 in favour of free, Council-managed libraries. Many of these became School Community libraries.

Some 90% of the institutes erected a building and today, in 2024, most of these buildings are used by their communities. Some other community buildings were called institutes but never had a library and did not affiliate with the central Institute.

Altogether 352 institutes affiliated with the central Institute. Some of them lasted for only a year or two; some neglected their affiliation for a decade or more but were revived; a few, such as the institutes at Gawler, Glen Osmond and Macclesfield, were affiliated continuously for well over a century.

Did other states have similar organisations? Please let me know through the SA Institutes website, <https://institutessa.com/>

Clyde Mechanics' Institute



The Dandenong Valley Regional Library Service Mobile Library bus outside the Clyde Mechanics' Institute Hall, late 1970s.

Casey Cardinia Libraries photograph.

This is a short history of the Clyde Mechanics' Institute from *These Walls Speak Volumes: a history of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria* by Pam Baragwanath and Ken James. (published by the authors in 2015). It was written by Joan Vanderhorn who runs the Clyde History website

<https://www.earlyhistory4clydevic.com/index.html>

It was during the 1920's that fund raising for the building of a public hall began in Clyde, on land donated by A. Wenn. By April 1928, the hall was completed and officially opened by Mr Walters, M.L.A. It was built by Edward Thomson of Cranbourne. During the early years, it was regularly used for euchre, parties and dance nights and fortnightly silent picture shows. Music for these shows was provided by a hand operated gramophone. In the 1950s films were also shown for pupils of both Clyde primary schools. Community services that have operated in the hall include Baby Health Centre, Country Womens' Association, Mechanics' Institute meetings and its Library, Clyde Klub, and ballroom dancing classes.

In 1935 the mechanics' institute library boasted of owning 1200 books. In the 1940s and 1950s the library was very active and one of the trustees, Phil Dawson delivered books by bicycle to the locals. He faithfully came to the hall each Saturday to supervise the library. Funds for restocking the library were not available and the library closed in 1965. In the late 1970s the Dandenong Valley Regional Library Service used the hall's facilities as a depot for their mobile library. Regular dances, cabarets, balls, including fancy dress balls, and official community farewells to residents leaving the district have been conducted on numerous occasions since 1928.

Throughout the years improvements have been made to the hall. A modern kitchen, a large foyer, improved cloak rooms and modern toilet facilities are among these alternations. Fencing and car parking improvements were also added. The Clyde Hall Committees over the past years have maintained the interest of local people to ensure that a community project begun over 85 years ago does not lapse. The present hall is a credit to all previous committee members and deserves the future support of the residents of Clyde.

Malmsbury Bluestone

In the last edition of *Useful Knowledge* we had an article by Dr Susan Walter about the Malmsbury Mechanics' Institute, which is made of local bluestone. Susan also noted that Malmsbury Bluestone has now been recognized as a Global Heritage Stone Resource. This prompted John Anderson, husband of Pat, our treasured minutes Secretary, to write to Susan about this matter and what follows is their informative conversation about Malmsbury Bluestone. It would be interesting to know how many Mechanics' Institutes were constructed of this material. I have included two photographs of bluestone Mechanics' Institutes (not saying they are made of Malmsbury bluestone, just bluestone)

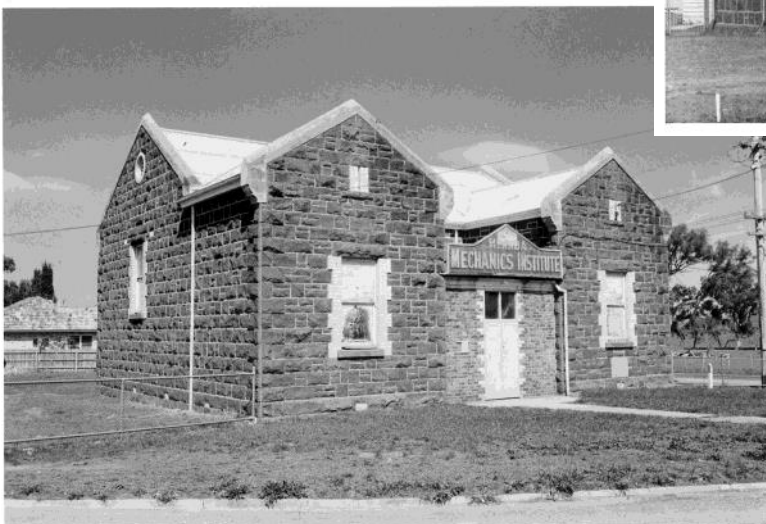
Hello Susan

My wife Pat is the minute secretary for Mechanics' Institute Victoria and on that account receives their magazine *Useful Knowledge*. I read your article on Malmsbury Stone in the latest issue with great interest. I would like to extend my congratulations on the role you played in having Malmsbury bluestone recognised as a Global Heritage Stone. That is a considerable achievement. I understand that your investigation into the use and properties of the stone was the subject of your PhD. What a great topic – I always warm to topics that cross boundaries and embrace both history and science.

I am curious to know whether Malmsbury bluestone differs in any significant way to the basalts that cover much of Western Victoria and whether it has properties that make it especially suitable/desirable for use in masonry – some subtleness in colour or crystallinity or some physical property that makes it easier to work with? Something like this might justify the expense of conveying it to building sites located a long way from Malmsbury when other sources of basalt could be found much closer. Or maybe the quarry masters at Malmsbury were just very successful in promoting their products or employed stonemasons with superior skills.

I will bring your article and the walks to the attention of my son Tom who holds a degree in history from La Trobe and works as a stonemason at Pyrenees Quarries in Castlemaine. He worked on heritage restoration projects at St Pauls Cathedral, Melbourne and St Marys Star of the Sea in West Melbourne before moving to Castlemaine where he now lives in his stone fronted home in Harcourt.

Sincerely,
John Anderson



Above: Inverleigh Mechanics' Institute, 1977.

Left: Mernda Mechanics' Institute, 1973.

Photographer: John T. Collins.
Images from State Library of Victoria

Malmsbury Bluestone

Hi John,

Thank you very much for your email and response to the news of Malmsbury's Global Heritage Stone designation. It has certainly been a labour of love for nearly a decade now, though with the designation comes the responsibility of sharing the news and ensuring all who should be concerned get the message. I am grateful the MIV has been part of that, but I hadn't quite anticipated that getting the designation would mean I couldn't put my pet passion to bed, for a little while at least.

You ask some really good questions.

In terms of basalt, most of the basalts used for masonry purposes are similar in nature - mostly what were/are referred to as Olivine basalts, Tholeiitic basalts and Transitional basalts (sitting on the transition/dividing line between one type of basalt to another). They can have subtle differences between them, even with the naked eye, and while I learnt to recognise what wasn't Malmsbury bluestone, but it can be hard to tell it from Lethbridge and Port Fairy bluestones.

The matter of the colour of the stone comes down to the presence or absence of various core minerals. Some of the darker bluestones (for which Melbourne gets its reputation for being dreary, drab or sombre) contain Titan Augite, which gives it an almost purple to black colour. This is not present in Malmsbury bluestone, so it is a much lighter grey colour. It does have a high percentage of plagioclase which is an almost colourless glass-like crystalline mineral, which contributes to the lighter colour.

I was not quite able to pinpoint why, but Malmsbury bluestone was easier to work by hand which meant that it cost less time in labour to quarry and process the stone than other bluestones. The completion of the Malmsbury viaduct on time and under budget is mostly down to the Malmsbury stone's properties. This "softer" characteristics also meant it could be carved for ornamental work, not quite as well as sandstones and limestones, but moreso than many other basalts and granites. The former Colonial Bank doorway in Melbourne, rescued from Whelan The Wrecker and installed in University of Melbourne (now the entrance to the underground carpark) is a magnificent example of this. It was also the reason that it became the stone of choice for processing in Footscray by the Footscray Stone Sawing Co in 1867, which was then able to mass-produce and market sawn (and cheaper) bluestone flagging, kerbs, lintels, door steps and gravestones.

But as you have suggested, without some keen marketing it may not have gone much further than rural VIC and metropolitan Melbourne. A couple of intercolonial and international exhibitions helped with the marketing, and saw its exportation to NSW, TAS, SA, WA and NZ as well as a couple of shipments of flagstones to Calcutta. It was also known as the "Standard of Excellence" among AUS building stones, and this offers an explanation for its wide use despite the transport costs and other bluestones sources closer to Melbourne. Of its few faults, the workability of the stone meant it was not as suitable for road making or railway ballast purposes (which the Footscray district bluestones on other harder ones like Axedale were good for) and the quarries that had been described as being "inexhaustible" were in fact a finite resource. It might just have been a coincidence, but as Malmsbury bluestone grew in popularity elsewhere, the use of it in local domestic and commercial structures declined, suggesting the locals could not compete with the prices paid from further afield.

If your son has worked at St Paul's he will no doubt have worked alongside the Malmsbury bluestone in the interior of the church. It is another marvellous example of the value placed on this stone.

Kind regards
Sue Walter

You can listen to a talk by Sue on Malmsbury Bluestone on Youtube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_SQnGeN488

Gormandale Mechanics' Institute



An unnamed wedding party at the original Gormandale Mechanics' Institute, c. 1910.

Museums Victoria <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/773912>

This is a short history of the Gormandale Mechanics' Institute from *These Walls Speak Volumes: a history of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria* by Pam Baragwanath and Ken James. (published by the authors in 2015)

In 1885 a group of residents met in a private house to discuss the advisability of erecting a public building at Gorman's Crossing. The elaborately printed tickets for the opening of the hall in July 1886 read 'Grand Ball at Willung South Mechanics' Institute, Gorman's Crossing.' Books were purchased for the free library in compliance with the government grant and a caretaker/librarian was appointed. In 1889 the Gormandale Mechanics' Institute and Free Library had 82 books and opening hours were 9.00am-9.00pm. Over the year there were approximately 200 visits. In 1894 there were 300 books and the opening hours were 10.00am-6.00pm. Over the year there were approximately 150 visits. Grants were received between 1888 and 1898.

The new hall which replaced the original timber hall that burned down [on May 18, 1931] on another site nearby, was opened in March 1932. In approximately 1951 a new supper room was added and in the early sixties the stage was removed to allow more room for dancing and for the building of indoor toilets. A storage garage was built in the late 1960s. Also that year a cypress hedge and war-time aeroplane spotter apparatus were removed to make room for an enlarged car park. In the 1970s the eastern side of the hall was enlarged, which allowed for improved catering and a modern kitchen area. At this time the roof was replaced and a new concrete water tank installed. With funding received from the 2009 Black Saturday bushfire fund, the stage has been replaced, the kitchen upgraded, a new storeroom erected and solar panels installed. A preschool centre was established in the hall and operated up to 2012 when it was transferred to Gormandale Primary School. Current uses include private functions, Karate, badminton and hall committee meetings.

The Croydon Mechanics' Institute

By Heather Arnold

You can read the original of this article, with footnotes, here

<https://victoriaspast.blogspot.com/2024/09/croydon-mechanics-institute.html>

The Box Hill Reporter in November 1905 reported on the beginnings of the Croydon Mechanics' Institute - The Croydon people of late have been considering the matter of establishing a mechanics' institute in their district, and it is probable that in a very short time the project will be carried to a successful issue, judging by the interest the residents are displaying in the matter. At a recent meeting of the Croydon progressive league, a sub-committee was appointed to deal with a site on which to erect the institute. Various sites were considered, but none decided upon, principally on account of their unsuitable position and high price. At a later stage the larger matter of a recreation reserve presented itself, and the committee thought that if land for a sports ground could be secured, the building could be erected on a portion of it. With this object in view two sites were taken into consideration, when one was very favorably received, seeing that the position was so central and suitable, and the price asked for it (£15 an acre) reasonable. On Saturday last the matter was brought before the Lillydale council by a letter from the league, asking the council to assist the residents in their efforts by purchasing for recreation purposes a block on the corner of Oxford road, opposite the Croydon state school, and pointing out that the proceeds from the sale of frontages on this road might be utilised in this direction. After a little discussion the council decided, on the motion of Cr Taylor, to make the matter an order of the day for next council meeting. Oxford Road is now known as Mount Dandenong Road.

Cr Taylor, who features in many articles connected to the Mechanics' Institute was Arthur Bertram Taylor, of *Meadowbank Farm*, Lillydale. He was elected to the South West Riding in 1896 and resigned from Council in November 1909; he was Shire President on two occasions. Arthur was a teacher and had founded Camberwell Grammar School in 1886, and was their first Principal.

As it turned out there protests against the sale of some of the Oxford Road frontage, where it was proposed to reduce the width from 3 chains to one chain. The Minister of Lands also refused to allow the road to be reduced to less than a chain and a half.

S H I R E o f L I L L Y D A L E .

The council of the Shire of Lillydale invite **COMPETITIVE DESIGN** for suitable buildings in timber for Mechanics' Institutes for Ringwood and Croydon. Cost in each case not to exceed £500.

Designs to reach the shire secretary at Lillydale, not later than 10 o'clock a.m. on the 23rd instant.

Conditions may be inspected at the office of the Municipal Association, The Exchange, 360 Collins-street, Melbourne, and at the Shire-hall, Lillydale.

By order.
J. H. M'COMB, C.E., Shire Secretary.
 Lillydale, 10th November, 1908.

In September 1907, Mr Taylor announced that arrangements had just been completed for the purchase by the shire council of six acres of land in Croydon for the use of the residents as a recreation reserve and a Mechanics' Institute. A month later Trustees were appointed : Messrs T. H. Gwillam, A. B. Taylor, J. Broadley, Grey-Smith and A. Hall

It wasn't until July 1908, that the Lillydale Council announced they intended to borrow £1900 for various projects including the purchase of land for a mechanics' institute and recreation ground at Croydon - £103, and

the erection of mechanics' institutes at Croydon and Ringwood (£500 each). In November 1908, the Shire issued an invitation for designs for both the Croydon and Ringwood Mechanics' Institutes.

Continued overleaf

Croydon Mechanics' Institute

By Heather Arnold

Ward and Carleton of 341 Collins Street were the Architects selected to design the building. It appears that the Architects did design a building that could be erected under the £500 budget, however due to Trustee, Mr Gwillam asking for modifications of the original plans the cost had increased to £700. Thomas Henry Gwillam is listed in the Electoral Rolls as a Contractor of Croydon. He was President of the Croydon Progress Association and the Croydon Arbor Day Association, Secretary of the Rifle Club and later Secretary of the Mechanics' Institute.

In May 1909, the Architects advertised for tenders to erect the building. In June, the *Healesville Guardian*, reported on the results of the tender process and the article also includes a description of the building -

A special meeting of the Lilydale shire council was held last Friday to deal with tenders for the erection of a mechanics' institute and public hall at Croydon...Eleven tenders were received and considered. Cr Taylor moved that the tender of T. Rolfe, at £587, be accepted, subject to the alterations in the specifications proving satisfactory, the work to be completed within three months from the signing of the contract.....Certain alterations and excisions in Messrs Warde & Carleton's original design have been made in order to reduce the cost of building to something like the amount available from the loan. The design as it now stands shows an imposing building of architectural beauty. On either side of the front vestibule entrance are provided ladies and gentlemen's cloak rooms ; next are a lodge room and library, and then the entrance to the main hall, which is 45 x 32ft. The stage extends practically the width of the hall, and outside are the ladies and gentlemen's anterooms. A verandah also runs along one side of the building; and ventilation and lighting are provided for according to the Board of Health regulations. The new building is to be erected on the Croydon reserve, on the original site of the tennis courts.



Croydon townspeople about 1909 after hall opened.
At rear: Miss Schuhkraft, Mr Grenness, Miss E. Money.
Miss M. Dabb, N. Sellick.
Mrs Davis, Mrs Kerr, Mrs S. Styles.
Mrs F. Yde, Miss Jackson, Mr Brock.
Standing: (From left) Mr G. F. Yde, a Schuhkraft son, Mr. Langley, Mrs Bishop,
Mr S. Styles. Sitting: Mr P. Hotton, Mr Gwillam. Standing next to them: Mr Cam-
eron, Mr Painter, Mr Schuhkraft, Mr H. Styles.

The building was essentially finished in three months and was officially opened on October 27, 1909 by the Premier, Mr Murray, accompanied by Mr. Evans, M.L.C., and Mr. E. H. Cameron, M.L.A. Cr Taylor was also there in his capacity as Shire President together with a large gathering of other officials and townsfolk.

A *monster* bazaar to raise money for the Mechanics' Institute to be held over the four days of the opening was organised by the Ladies Committee, headed by Miss Clapperton, with Mrs Yde as secretary. One novel idea was a bachelor's stall, to be presided over by bachelors.

Croydon townspeople at the newly built Mechanics' Institute, 1909

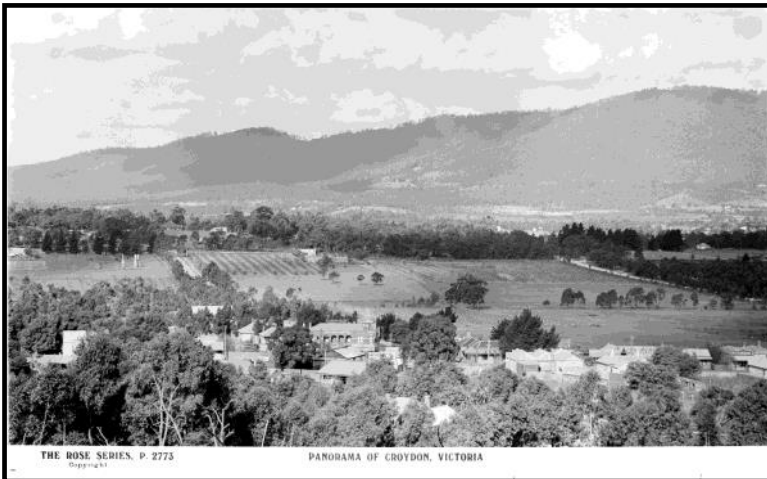
Image: McGivern, Muriel A *History of Croydon* (Victor Publishing, 1967), p. 201.

Croydon Mechanics' Institute

The building was used for the usual range of activities - a Strawberry Fete in aid of funds for St John's Church of England; performances of the Croydon Comedy Club; a farewell to Mr Hooton, the popular school teacher on his transfer to Mitcham; a ball to raise money for the Relief of Belgium widows and other patriotic functions during the First World War; a concert to celebrate the anniversary of the Presbyterian Church and a bazaar to raise money for St Joseph's Catholic Church. A function was held in the hall in October 1919, after the unveiling of the Croydon War Memorial where returned soldiers were 'welcomed home' and presented with an illuminated certificate.

The Mechanics' Institute was also used to show films and the first reference I can find to this was in 1911 when the picture drama, *For the Term of his Natural Life* was shown in aid of the Football Club. From the mid-1920s films were presented every Saturday night and in July 1931, Mr Gray Edmeston took over the operation and installed a sound system and thus could show 'talkies.' The first 'talkie' film exhibited was *The trial of Mary Dugan*, with Norma Shearer. More of Mr Edmeston and his involvement with the hall, later.

The building also housed a Library, the first books for which arrived in February 1910, supplied by the Melbourne Public Library. In 1956, a children's library was established in the hall, with free membership to any child. However, there was limited space in the hall with all the other activities it supported and funds were raised to build a new Library. On May 18, 1961 this new Library was officially opened.



In 1924, the Croydon branch of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) was established. Muriel McGivern, in her book, *A History of Croydon*, wrote that *in 1928 they desired to join forces with Hall committee dividing the work and responsibility and in consequence sharing the management and control of both Hall and grounds, including the use of the Hall for their activities. They also desired to alter the name to Memorial Hall and Mechanics' Institute.* After various discussions, including the fact that the

Mechanics' Institute constitution required all committee members to also be guarantors and the fact that some of the Committee felt the RSSILA were trying to control the Committee, the amalgamation attempts proved to be *fruitless*.

In 1933 the hall was extended and the new works were opened in the December. The *Fern Tree Gully News* reported -

On Thursday evening the president of the Lillydale Shire, Cr R. Blair, officially opened the new extensions to the much improved Croydon Mechanics' Institute. The sum of £400 had been spent in improvements and extending the hall, the interior of which had been lined with a special sound carrying preparation, while the hall had been extended 12 feet. A new stage 20ft. deep had been erected. The building will now hold an extra 120 people, and 150 new tip chairs have been purchased. In introducing Cr Blair, Mr R. Jansen, president of the hall committee, thanked the citizens of Croydon for their interest and support. He wished to particularly thank Mr A. Pretty, architect, and Mr Allan, builder, for the splendid way in which the work of extension had been carried out.

A few years later more extensions were added in the *Streamlined Moderne* style, also designed by Architect Arthur E. Pretty. These works had been discussed at Council meetings from June 1936 onwards when the issue of renovating and extending the Croydon Mechanics' Hall with the object of converting it into a modern picture theatre was raised and eventually given the go ahead, with a budget of £2000.

Continued overleaf

Croydon Mechanics' Institute

By Heather Arnold

The conversion was at the behest of Mr Edmeston, the afore-mentioned the picture show operator, as the existing hall was too small for his shows and patrons were being turned away on some nights. As part of the negotiations, Edmeston would have the right to show pictures on a Saturday night and one weekday night for a term of fifteen years, at a rental of £7/10/- per week for the two evenings each week. In connection with these works, the original committee, who also acted as guarantors, was annulled; the council took over any financial liabilities and a new committee of councillors and community members was established. Tenders were advertised for the new work in December 1936.

Months later in May 1937 there was a progress report in the Lilydale Express - *The contract was signed at the tender fee by the successful tenderers Messrs Pepper and Chenoweth, of Alphington and Ormond, and a start was made on the same day. The contractor states that the work will be completed in 16 weeks...The plans provide for an imposing brick veneer finished front, with four massive folding glass doors, The hall will be widened 8 feet, and extended 30 feet, with a sloping floor on the new portion. There will be a complete new fibro plaster ceiling throughout, and the inside lining it will be of "Insulite"—a new sound proof material. The new supper room will be 32 feet by 23 feet, and the kitchen will be enlarged to 12 feet by 10 feet. an imposing foyer will contain a curved sweet counter and two modern ticket boxes. The right side entrance will contain the cloak rooms. A new modern bio box will be erected. The new building will present an attractive appearance, and will combine the convenience of picture theatre and a public hall...It is estimated that this building will meet the requirements of the district for many years to come, and the hall committee have to be congratulated on the successful outcome of their efforts.*



The 'new' hall, which ended up costing £2,300 was officially opened by Cr H. Jeeves on September 9, 1937. The month before in August, the name of the building had been changed from the Mechanics' Institute to the Croydon Hall, and this new name was proudly displayed on the new facade, as you can see from this 1967 photograph, at left.

In 1956, the hall became the venue for the newly established Croydon Film Society. It appears the building was then referred to as the Croydon Theatre or the Croydon Hall Cinema. The building continued to be used for community activities until 1991. Here is a random selection of events held at the Croydon Hall during this time - An exhibition

to celebrate the Shire centenary in November 1964; an Art & Craft Show in December 1974; Sewerage was connected to the building in 1979; the Croydon Community School used it as a venue for their performance in November 1981; the Croydon Horticultural Society held a Spring Show in October 1985; in 1987 it was the venue for the auction of seventeen Main Street, Croydon retail properties; The Angels played there in December 1990; a Garden Show was held there in March 1991.

From 1992, the building became a Youth Centre, known as EVs and is used as a meeting place, a source of information and education and as an entertainment venue. It is operated by the City of Maroondah. 115 years after it opened the Croydon Mechanics' Institute is still used for community purposes.