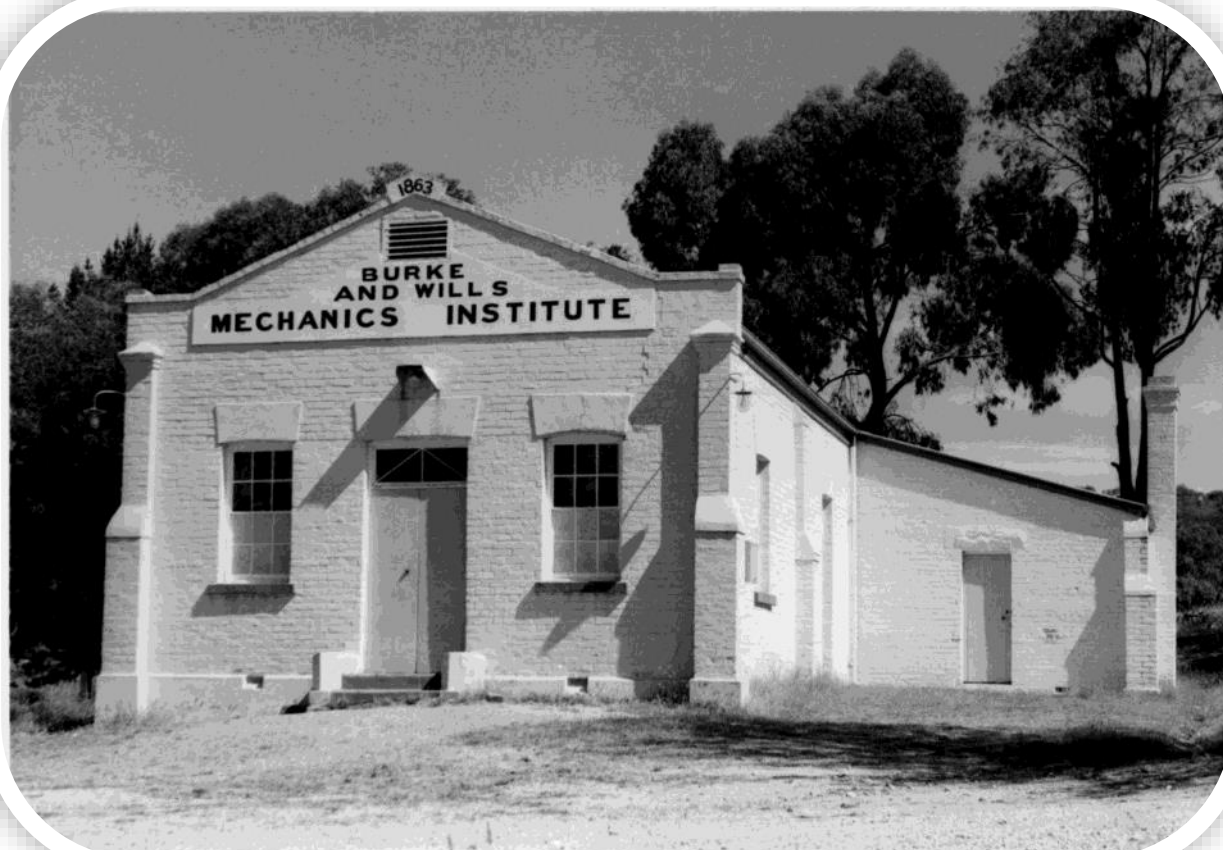




Useful Knowledge



Fryerstown Burke & Wills Mechanics' Institute taken November 20, 1966 by John T. Collins.
See page 24.

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2024-2025 MIV Committee

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Minutes Secretary: Pat Anderson, O.A.M.

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Useful Knowledge Editor: Heather Arnold

General Committee members -

Corinne Brewis

Denys Correll

Peter Nankervis

Peter Pereyra

Robert Shackleton

Cover: Fryerstown Burke & Wills Mechanics Institute (1863); taken November 20, 1966 by John T. Collins. J.T. Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria image H96.210/297



**PMI Victorian
History Library**

Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria, P.O Box 1080, Windsor, 3181.

ISSN 1835-5242

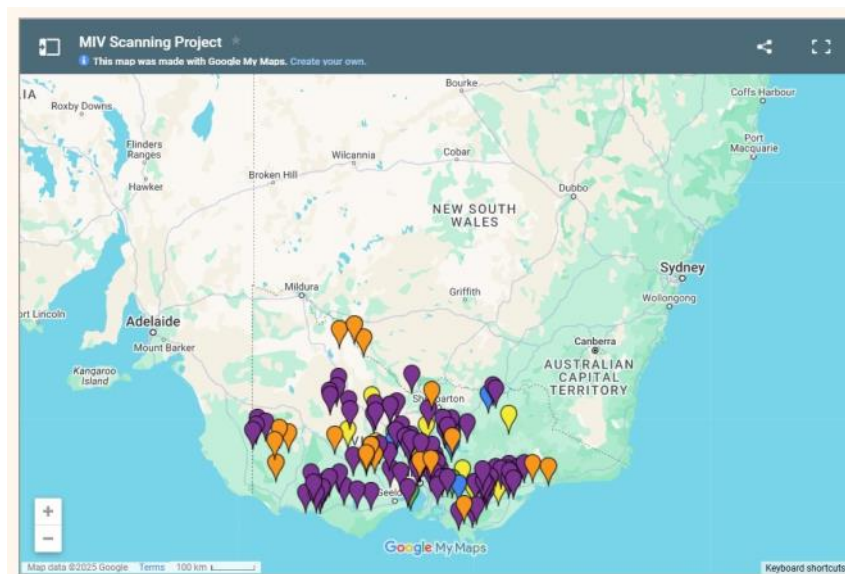
Reg. No A0038156G ABN 60 337 355 989 Price \$6.00.

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

Mechanics' Institutes Resource Centre (MIRC)

Established in 2004, MIRC comprises a comprehensive reference collection of Mechanics' Institute related resources, relating to Victoria, Australia and International Institutes. These range from the digital records of some 130 Victorian Mechanics' Institutes, to various photographic images, to a growing donated and purchased collection of monographs. The collection is housed at the Prahran Mechanics' Institute.

One of the MIRC projects is the scanning project, where records of Victorian Mechanics' Institutes are scanned and preserved in digital form. If you want to know what work has been completed, check out the interactive map on our website <https://mivic.org.au/scanning-project.html>



Report from the President, David Berry, as presented at the AGM in November 2024

Although the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be mostly behind us, this year has not seen any major initiatives other than providing our ongoing services. However, the MIV, over the past year, has presented a plaque (No. 68) to the Lancefield Mechanics' Institute, which is very active and is much sought after for private, business and community functions and activities. The very valuable scanning project has completed its work with both the Mooroopna and Shepparton Mechanics' Institutes. Thank you one again to Judith Dwyer for her great efforts in this activity.

Our MIV website had been unable to be updated with contemporary information owing to the lost access codes, but this had now been essentially remedied in the short term. We are examining what sort of modern website would be better in providing more useful information in perhaps a more attractive format and making it easier for additions and changes to be made.

Our Editor of *Useful Knowledge*, who is also our Secretary, is doing a great job with the newsletter and we continue to look forward to her further contribution by way of news and articles in coming issues.

My thanks also for the tireless efforts of Treasurer Gary Bester who also coordinates a lot of our activities. Many thanks to all our committee members, especially Pat Anderson, our able Minutes Secretary, who give a lot of their time in various essential roles and provide much sage advice in our decision making on our way forward in providing a useful service to our members.

The MIV has a loyal supporter base and we are appreciative of the support and patience that has been shown by all over the past couple of years.

MIV Annual Report for 2024, to be included in the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Report

2024 was a year of consolidation for the MIV with a relatively new Committee, but we feel it was a successful year in many areas.

In April a very productive meeting was held with Colin Morrison, [Director Sector Investment, Local Government Victoria, Department of Government Services], our Treasurer Gary Bester and Corinne Brewis, the Co-Ordinator of our Libraries Committee. The purpose of the meeting was the on-going funding of the eleven remaining Mechanics' Institutes Libraries and the MIV. Sadly, there was no funding available this financial year, but we are hopeful for the next year. The MIV appreciate Colin's on-going advocacy in this matter.

Judith Dwyer represented the MIV at Casey Cardinia Heritage Festival, held in April. This is part of our new initiative to promote and raise awareness our organisation at Heritage and other events. For this reason, we have also established a Facebook page and the number of followers is slowly growing.

We reviewed and updated our Strategic Plan at our August meeting and now base our meeting Agenda on this document to keep us focussed. Thank you to Denys Correll, for his professional expertise in this exercise.

Useful Knowledge, our newsletter, is sent to the National Library of Australia and the State Library of Victoria in an electronic format and the recent editions, produced under the editor, Heather Arnold, can be viewed here <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3179681849>

The issue of our out of date and partially inaccessible website preoccupies us; we have made some progress in this regard, but there is still much work to do. We recognise that a fully functioning website is vital for our organisation in terms of promotion, access and education.

At our Annual General Meeting held in November, there was no change to the Executive however three Committee members Robert Kingston, Les Sanderson and Felix Meagher did not seek re-election and we thank them for their contribution to the MIV. We especially acknowledge Robert Kingston who was our President from 2014 until 2018 and Vice-President for a time before that and are grateful for his leadership, advice and input over many years.

The MIV appreciates the vital support given by the PMI Victorian History Library Inc. Committee and staff; they host our meetings and activities and provide both physical and virtual storage space for our hard copy and digital collections.

Heather Arnold, Secretary

Jim Lowden - a tribute by Kay Craddock

Jim Lowden has made a enormous contribution to the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria over the years—an inaugural member from 1998 and still a prolific contributor in many ways, including supplying many articles for the newsletter. This lovely tribute to Jim, the MIV's Living Treasure, was published in the newsletter of Kay Craddock, the Antiquarian Bookseller, in January. It was kindly supplied by Denys Correll.

Marginal Notes 31: My Friend Jim Lowden

<https://www.kaycraddock.com/pages/marginal-notes/42/marginal>

Monday, Jan 06, 2025

Late last year I had the pleasure of lunching at Melbourne's Swiss Club with my old mate, Jim Lowden – we spent an enjoyable two hours reminiscing.

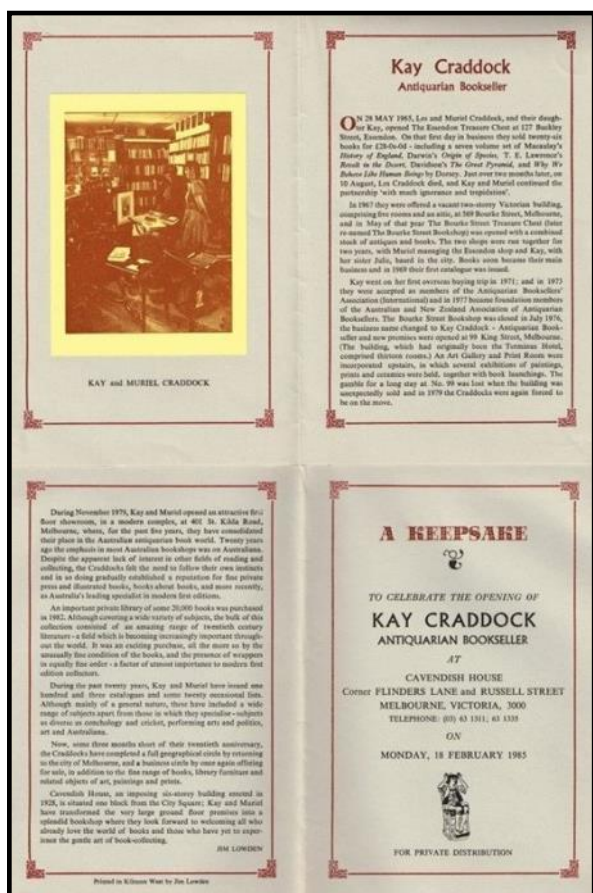
Jim and I met in the early 1970s, when I was a fledgling bookseller and Jim was a fledgling printer/ publisher. We had several adventures together when Jim was promoting his output of books under his Lowden Publishing Co., Kilmore, imprint, and I got to know Jim and his family by attending their annual Kilmore Highland Games and Celtic Festival. (Jim was named Citizen of the Year Shire of Kilmore in 1984). His innovative approach to the use of coloured papers and inks for his publications was impressive and I admit to being influenced by his use of colour when I began issuing commercially printed catalogues in the 1970s, with varying degrees of success and failure.

In 1973 Jim was awarded a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship 'To study methods, material and equipment used by scholarly publishing houses and to contact trade leaders in the printing industry throughout the world', and his anecdotes of his experiences when travelling abroad on the Scholarship are fascinating. In fact, Jim's life is one of fascination (and surely deserving of being recorded). Jim was the inaugural secretary of Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria Inc. [MIV], and, as a life member, he maintains this interest in the stories behind the founding, and continuing history, of Mechanics' Institutes throughout the world. Jim's daughter, Bronwyn, has

also been involved with the MIV, and in 2006 she was the compiler of *Mechanics Institutes, Schools of Arts, Athenaeums, etc.: An Australian checklist*, Lowden Publishing Co., Melbourne.

Jim produced several keepsakes for me – usually as a surprise. The first was after I had relayed an anecdote about a meeting with a celebrant prior to my marriage to John Menesdorffer, in 1977. Jim arrived at our wedding with a package of Keepsakes to mark the occasion. The second was a keepsake for our bookshop Christmas Party in 1978. Jim's rather wicked sense of humour came into play with both keepsakes, as he issued one of each with a 'mistake' in the heading, referring to these as 'the joker in the pack'.

The wedding keepsake changed the heading for an extract from Kahlil Gibran's 'The Prophet' from 'Marriage from The Prophet' to 'Miscarriage from The Prophet' and the Christmas keepsake from 'A Christmas Keepsake' to 'A Christmas Mistake'. A third keepsake was issued for the opening of our new premises at Cavendish House – I have no record of a 'spoo' copy – perhaps it was unintentionally distributed to a customer! In 2012, Jim anonymously published a keepsake to celebrate the one hundredth birthday of my mother, Muriel Craddock, entitled 'MRC A Tale of a Century', this time with no 'joker in the pack'.



The Maldon Athenaeum Library's archiving and history project

By Lynda Achren, Maldon Athenaeum Library committee member and project coordinator

Behind closed doors on Monday mornings a team of Athenaeum Library volunteers is busy archiving our historic documents. For the past six months, with input from an experienced archivist, we've been meeting to sort, organise and catalogue such things as old (sometimes mundane, more often fascinating and occasionally hilarious) correspondence, newspaper articles, borrowing ledgers and financial records.

About fifteen years ago, three volunteers embarked on a similar project which was sadly abandoned, but not before they stored, somewhat randomly, many documents in an antique mahogany cabinet we have on permanent loan from the former Royal Mint in Melbourne. A previous Library President, Joy Leneaux-Gale, and Treasurer, Winsome Strickland, significantly contributed to this when they photocopied historic correspondence between the Maldon Athenaeum and the former Department of Lands and Survey held in the archives of what is now the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. More recently, a former library volunteer, intrigued by some photographs on the library's walls began looking into their history and in so doing found old minute books and other documents stored in one of our sheds.

Thanks to their work, our current team inherited a treasure trove, albeit a jumbled one much in need of attention. We're still collating a mountain of correspondence, we're still sorting through financial records, but we have an almost complete set of minutes dating back to 1863 now housed in two drawers of the old Royal Mint cabinet. Another drawer holds chronologically-ordered Athenaeum-related newspaper clippings dating back to 1926 (it took weeks to read through all the old newspapers that had been kept whether or not they contained anything about us). Then there's a draw for the handwritten records of books borrowed by members before the days of computerisation.



When we've finished, this will be a permanent archive as well looked after as our book collections because, like our books, the historical records will be catalogued so that everyone, volunteers and interested researchers alike, will know where to find them.

But the driver behind this archiving project is its sister history-writing project for which our archives are an invaluable source of information not available elsewhere. Again, this is not the first time there have been attempts to write a comprehensive history of the Maldon Athenaeum (the first we know of was in 1969). But for various reasons previous attempts have foundered.

So what makes us confident we will succeed this time? Firstly, we now have access to technology not available before – so, rather than a hard copy publication, we will publish the history on our website in the form of a series of short evocative vignettes. Not only is this much cheaper than printing hard copies, but it makes the history accessible to a wider audience.

Secondly, we are fortunate to have within our current membership the right combination of skills to pull it off: we have people with backgrounds in research, writing for publication and editing; we have people who are adept at managing our website and uploading finished vignettes. So far we have written and uploaded close to 20 vignettes, each contributing to a chronological history or paying tribute to the Athenaeum's connections to the local and wider community. More are in the pipeline. We aim to launch the history vignettes on our website later in the year. In itself, it will be an historic event!

Image above: Volunteers working on the Maldon Athenaeum Library's archives (supplied by Lynda Achren)

Mansfield Mechanics' Institute

By Corinne Brewis

On 30th August 2024, community members, kindergarten staff and volunteers, contractors and dignitaries gathered to celebrate the grand opening of the refurbished and extended Mansfield Kindergarten and the beautifully restored Mechanics' Institute which now forms part of the kindergarten complex. This project represents six years of hard work driven by a pressing need to expand the kindergarten's capacity to accommodate the increasing population of Mansfield and also to bring back into use the empty and neglected Mansfield Mechanics' Institute. Mr. Andrew Setchell, project manager, spoke of the financial assistance given by Mansfield Shire Council, Bendigo Community Bank and the State Government in making this project achievable. Mansfield Shire Council Mayor, Steve Raby mentioned in his speech that the Mechanics' Institute was a much loved icon in the town and he was pleased to see that it had been restored to its former glory.



The newly restored Mansfield Mechanics' Institute

Image: Corinne Brewis

Libraries have a long history in the town. It is recorded in the Victorian Government Gazette that one rood of land was reserved for the purposes of a public library in Ailsa Street, Mansfield' on 7th September 1866, although the library was subsequently established in rooms in the shire council building (now demolished). In 1870 it is recorded that Mrs. Leticq was paid two pounds as caretaker/librarian.

In 1874 the Mansfield Public Library had 700 books and its opening hours were 10.00am-10.00pm although it is not recorded how many days the library was open. Over that year it is suggested there were approximately 5,280 visits.

Although many books were borrowed, some were never returned and the council decided to lock them away in cupboards with glass doors that could only be opened by a committeeman. This enraged Isaac Kelson, Mansfield's first violent protester. He marched into the library room, smashed the glass doors, pulled the books on to the floor and marched out. He said 'The library should be for the people, not locked away in meat safes and bird cages and kept for a favoured few who could well afford to pay for the books themselves.' Mr. Kelson's plea fell on deaf ears and the matter was heard at Mansfield Police Court before the police magistrate Mr. George William Frederick Paterson. Mr. Kelson was charged by the Secretary of the Mansfield Free Library with wilful damage to the property of the library, in breaking a case in which books were locked up. The defendant pleaded his own case, stating that he had broken open the case in the interests of the public, as he considered that public money had paid for the books and a certain portion of the community had no right to lock up what belonged to the residents at large. The police magistrate held that Mr. Kelson's action bore no malicious intent and dismissed the case. (5th August 1889). The decision was apparently met with universal approbation.

Mansfield Mechanics' Institute

By Corinne Brewis

A public meeting was held to reorganise the library away from the shire council offices and in 1891 tenders were called for the erection of a two roomed building (*Mansfield Courier* 5th March 1892). The building was designed by Charles Hardy, Architect and Shire Engineer and it was constructed in Ailsa Street, Mansfield after a tender by William Paul Crockett was accepted. Charles D. Hardy was the son of John Hardy, Lands Officer for Alexandra and Mansfield. John Hardy surveyed vast tracks of land for the State Government after his arrival from Northumberland, England in 1856 and was also long-term president of the Mechanics' Institute Library in Alexandra. There seems to have been an ongoing interest in Mechanics' Institutes at that time by the Hardy family.

The official opening was held on 18th July 1892 and it was recorded that the rooms were comfortable and a cheery fire gave a homelike appearance to the place. Mrs. Dickens was appointed librarian. The community donated books, money and games to the library. In 1894 the Mansfield Free Public Library had 1,054 books and its opening hours were 2.00-3.00pm Saturdays and 7.30pm – 10.00pm Mondays and Wednesdays. It is recorded that a local well known storekeeper, Henry Hambleton Kitchen presented 16 volumes of Ancient Classics for English Readers in February 1896, there were two exchanges of books with the Yea Free Library in 1897 and a Mansfield Solicitor, Alfred George Davidson left two hundred and fifty pounds to the library in his will in 1910. The Library was also the recipient of various amounts of funding from the Victorian State Government over the years, in line with many other libraries.

Originally, it was intended that the library would use one of the rooms for library activities and the other would house a museum displaying rock specimens, fossils and natural history. The area surrounding Mansfield had seen much gold and crystal mining activity from the 1850s and there was great interest in the topic. In 1933, the Library Committee offered the CWA the use of one room as their Rest Room.

In 1952 the joint Yea, Alexandra and Mansfield Library Service began and the Mansfield Free Library was merged into this service, operating from the Ailsa Street building until moving into new premises in Mansfield about 1985. After 1985, one of the old library's rooms became an annexe for Mansfield Pre-School which continued until 1988. In 1985

Mansfield Historical Society used the other room for meetings and the storage of files. In 1990 the Society was given the use of the whole building. In June 2006, Mansfield Historical Society moved its main activities to Mansfield Railway Station but continued to use the Ailsa Street site as a store for some years.

From 2006 the old building became increasingly neglected and dilapidated. By 2013 there were concerns that it could be demolished. The Mansfield Historical Society Secretary of the time wrote in the *Mansfield Courier* (13th March 2013) that the roof was leaking, and gutters were overflowing causing water to enter the building and place any remaining contents and the building itself at risk. The Shire's Heritage Advisor, Ivor Nelsen recommended that the concrete floor be removed and replaced with stumps and boards as had been constructed in the original building. MIV wrote letters to the Mansfield Shire Executive Officer in support of the renovation and preservation of the building.

The building managed to survive until 2018 when plans were mooted by the Kindergarten Committee to expand and incorporate the Mechanics' Institute in its complex of buildings. Now the Mansfield Mechanics' Institute has not only been saved but will continue serving the community as it has done for the last one hundred and thirty two years. The original ethos of Mechanics' Institutes was learning and now in Mansfield this will continue with the very youngest members of the community.



The official opening August 30, 2024

Early East Adelaide Institutes

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

By 1879 about a third of South Australia's population of 250,000 (exclusive of Aborigines) was in Adelaide. Across the state 118 Institutes had been formed, 15 of them close to Adelaide's CBD. Those that chose to affiliate with the central SA Institute when it was formed in 1856 were supported with the purchase of books, organizational structures and lecturers.

At that time six of these first Institutes were in the eastern part of Adelaide – in Glen Osmond, Stepney, East Torrens, Magill, Norwood and Payneham.

The Glen Osmond Institute was unusual in having been established by a single person (Arthur Hardy) for his workers 'to avoid the inducement to pass their evenings at the public house.' Hardy was a pastoralist and barrister who owned a quarry in the Adelaide foothills. The 'Glen Osmond Mechanics Institute' was instigated in 1854 with a room built for it by Hardy but two days after its inaugural meeting it had an elected committee. By 1865, as well a library, the Institute had a Mutual Improvement class, a Debating Club, musical entertainments and soirées.

In 1877, 23 years later, the Glen Osmond Institute building was erected by the members on the corner of Portrush and Glebe Roads on land they had bought from Hardy. Over the years the Institute held lectures and formed a Boys' Institute with its own library and gymnasium. The community used the building for picture shows, concerts, dances, socials and sports meetings. The Burnside Council supported it with grants from 1938 and took over the library fifty years later. At that time the Institute was dissolved as part of the government's policy to have Councils run the libraries.



Glen Osmond Institute, 1904
State Library of South Australia image B 24264

Two other Institutes began soon after the Glen Osmond Institute but were short-lived. Their stories are unusual and are somewhat of a mystery. The Norwood & Stepney Institute began in 1855 and the East Torrens Institute started the following year – both before the State Government Act designed to support the Institutes.

Early East Adelaide Institutes

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

Both of these Institutes began in schoolrooms. They held well-attended and highly publicised lectures given by prominent members of the Adelaide community. Many of the organisers and speakers were politically active in gaining support for the Act. These two Institutes petered out soon after the government committed funds for the central Institute building. By then, too, there were other successful Institutes operating nearby in Glen Osmond and Magill as well as in the City.



South Australia Institute, c. 1865.
State Library of South Australia image B 6556

Magill Institute began strongly with a library, lectures and soirées. In 1858 it had its own building on the local School Reserve. After only three years it had over 1,000 books and was out of debt.



It had a Mutual Improvement Society in the 1870s and 1880s and occasionally organised debates. The Institute disappeared from the records in 1882 when the school buildings on the Reserve were demolished. But it reappeared 19 years later in 1901. This time the Magill Institute erected a substantial building that became the social centre of the community – for balls, fêtes, concerts, movies, dances and meetings as well as a library. It must have been well used and supported because a large addition was erected behind it in 1928.

When the Institute dissolved in 1976, the building was purchased by the

Campbelltown Council. For many years it was the Magill Cinema and it now houses the Hibernia Café.

Above: Magill Institute, 2019. Image: Joelle Hancock

Early East Adelaide Institutes

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



An Institute in Norwood began in 1872 halfway between where the East Torrens and the Norwood & Stepney Institutes had met 15 years before. Edwin Smith (later Sir Edwin Smith) was its driving force. Its building became one of the 'palatial' institute buildings with a library and reading room, committee rooms, a basement to let, and rooms for a caretaker to live at the back. An Art School with James Ashton opened there in 1894.

The library flourished. In 1912 the Institute had 580 subscribers, over 12,000 books and more than 200 periodicals and newspapers. By 1960 there were over 1,500 subscribers, more than half of them children. The local Council supported the Institute with grants until 1977 when the building was transferred to the Council. The Institute was dissolved in 1986 and its building became the Norwood Library.

Left: Norwood Institute. State Library of South Australia image B 10609

A Mutual Improvement Society formed the Payneham Institute around 1865, meeting in a chapel. It erected its own building with a hall and two smaller rooms in 1872 and affiliated with the central SA Institute. It leased one of its rooms to the Payneham Council. Many of its lectures provided useful information to the local market gardeners. Additions to the building and the library allowed for four different lodges to meet there and attracted over 500 subscribers by 1953. In 1962 its property was transferred to the Payneham Council which had been renting rooms from the Institute for over eighty years.



Payneham Institute, 1907.

(image from Norwood Payneham and St Peters website)

Of these six Institutes, two had a very brief life, while three of them operated for well over a century. Four erected substantial buildings that were well-used by their communities. Three of these Institutes were eventually strongly supported by their local municipalities and their libraries were developed into their local Council's library.

You can read more about these Institutes and the other 346 Institutes that were in South Australia on the website institutessa.com

Merrigum Mechanics' Institute Heritage Plaque

The Merrigum Mechanics' Institute is the recipient of one of 62 Heritage plaques installed by the City of Greater Shepparton. This good news was reported in the *Shepparton News*, on December 17, 2024 p. 2 Article supplied by Judith Dwyer.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2024

Plaques celebrate heritage of region

By Taylah Baker

Forget nights at the museum, Greater Shepparton has been transformed into a living museum.

In partnership with the Greater Shepparton Heritage Advisory Committee, Greater Shepparton City Council has installed 62 heritage plaques throughout the region, celebrating the rich history of buildings and structures in Dookie, Mooroopna, Undera and beyond.

This milestone stems from efforts that began in March 2021.

The HAC Signage Committee realised that Greater Shepparton, compared to other regions, lacked sufficient recognition of heritage buildings within the municipality.

The new plaques provide a prominent way to celebrate the region's diverse historical environment, including buildings, landscapes, gardens, archaeological sites and places of worship, highlighting the importance of these places in shaping the region's identity.

Each plaque also features a QR code for sharing and updating information, graphics, maps and more.

Cr Fern Summer noted that this ensured the



A heritage plaque has been installed at the Mechanics' Institute and Memorial Hall in Merrigum.

plaques remained interactive, allowing them to evolve with contributions from the community.

"Heritage is more than a connection to the past, it is a reflection of our history,

our present and our future," she said.

"It is great to see our heritage recognised and celebrated, and I encourage our community to visit these plaques, share their stories and suggest

new locations to continue this legacy."

• To share your stories or suggest a new location, call council on 5832 9700 or email council@shepparton.vic.gov.au

The Theft of the Glover Medal

By Prue McCausland

John Glover (1767-1849) was already a well-known and established artist when he arrived in Tasmania in 1831. Among his belongings and mementoes of his former life, was a gold medal awarded to him by Louis XVIII of France.



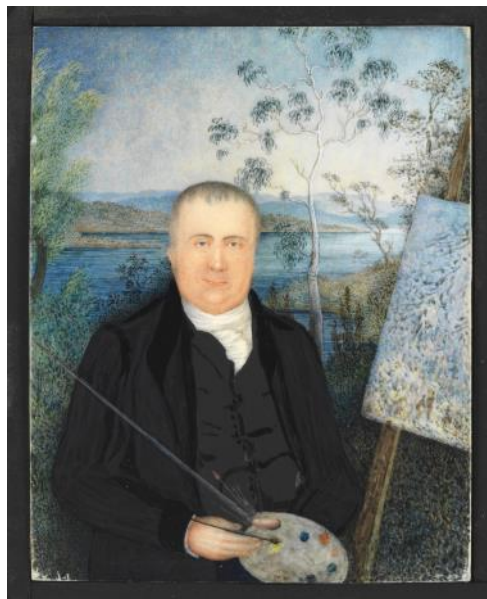
In autumn 1814, after Napoleon's abdication, Glover had gone on a 'grand tour'. He travelled along the Rhine in Germany and through Switzerland. He explored the Alps and from there went on to Paris. While in Paris, he painted a large canvas (six feet by four feet/183cm x 274cm) *The Bay of Naples*. The painting was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1814 and Louis XVIII ordered a gold medal awarded to its creator.

The painting is now owned by Cardiff Corporation. Before Louis XVIII had presented the medal, Napoleon had returned from exile in Elba and Louis VIII had fled France. Napoleon later sent the medal to Glover in England.

Bay of Naples, 1814. Artist: John Glover

Art Uk website <https://artuk.org/>

The medal awarded to Glover was bequeathed to the Launceston Mechanics' Institute by the executors of the will of John Glover's eldest son, John Richardson Glover, in 1868. John Glover Junior (1790-1868) came with his parents to Tasmania. He was a farmer and also an artist in his own right. He painted and drew many Tasmanian scenes, particularly of the family farm *Patterdale*, and of the nearby small towns of Evandale, Nile and Deddington.

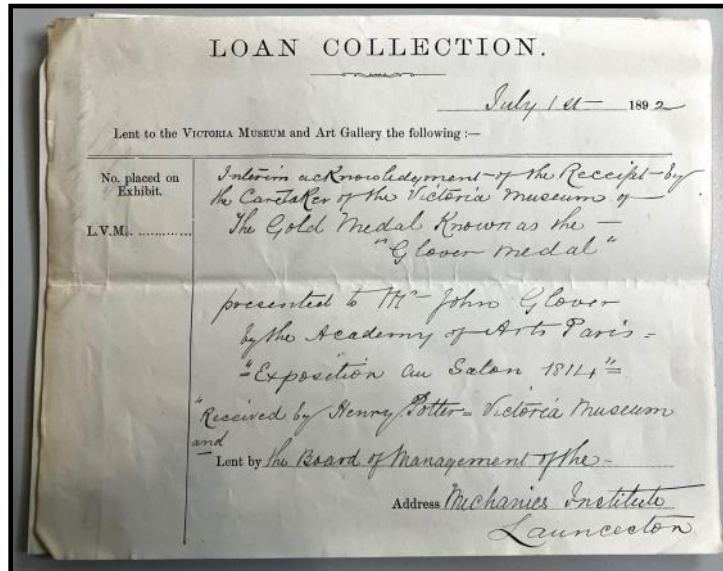


John Glover, 1832. Artist: Mary Morton Allport.

Libraries Tasmania image

The Theft of the Glover Medal

In 1892 the Launceston Mechanics' Institute lent the medal to the newly-established Victoria Museum. The Victoria Museum, which opened in 1891, was largely set up with the art and museum collections of the Mechanics' Institute. Documentation shows that the medal however was definitely on loan and not given to the Museum at the time.



Receipt of the loan of the Glover Medal to the Victoria Museum

Image: Prue McCausland

It is not known for how long or how often the medal was on display in the intervening years but it was stolen from a display case in the Museum on 20 January 1904 in what the *Examiner* in its report, called 'an impudent robbery'.

The Curator at the time, H.H. Scott, reported that he was distracted by helping patrons and that a group of men must have been watching his movements. It seems the robbery was meticulously planned and the locks picked. There were six locks and four catches protecting the medal. A number of medals were taken, but the Glover was the most valuable, the gold being worth about £15.

The theft was reported in the *Examiner* the following day: 'Three of the locks were picked, but not broken. The case and its contents were intact at 10 o'clock, and the robbery was carried out at about 11 o'clock. The case, which was about 12 ft long, had to be moved out from the wall in order that the work of opening it might be more easily managed.'

The loss of the medal was keenly felt by members of the Mechanics' Institute. In April the Mechanics' Institute wrote to the Council requesting the return of the medal. The Town Clerk, Percy Claude Rocher, wrote in reply '... your letter was considered by the Museum Committee on Monday last when I was directed to convey to you the expressions of their regret that the medal presented with others to the Museum had been stolen from the institution'. In May the Mechanics' Institute made a claim to the state government for compensation but the outcome of the claim is unknown.

On 31 May, Rocher again wrote to the Mechanics' Institute 'while deeply regretting the loss of this medal, the Museum Committee do not agree with the view expressed in your letter of 27th ultimo and cannot recognize any liability on the part of Council in the matter'. Rocher did later confirm that the medal had been on loan and remained the property of the Mechanics' Institute.

It seems most likely that the medal was stolen for the gold it contained. Despite police being involved, no-one was charged over the theft and the fate of the medal remains a mystery.

Rare Book Week

Rare Book Week will be held from July 24 to August 2, 2025. As part of this festival, Prahran Mechanics' Institute is hosting an event on July 24, where Librarians from the Prahran MI, the Athenaeum, Ballarat MI and Footscray MI will talk about how they collect and protect rare books. There will be more information about this event closer towards the date.

You can find more information on Rare Book Week on their website <https://rarebooksmelbourne.com/>

To get you into the groove as to what you might expect this year, this is a look at an event held last year at the Footscray Mechanics' Institute, supplied by their secretary Liz Balfour.

Footscray Mechanics' Institute - A Rare Opportunity During a Rare Week.

The Footscray Mechanics Institute were fortunate to be approached by Christopher Browne, Program Director of Melbourne Rare Book Week. Not having participated in this event before, the FMI Library Manager Cameron Borg and the Committee eagerly accepted his invitation and planning began. We are very fortunate to have a wonderful and historic collection of which we are very proud, and Cameron agreed to host and present a talk during the 2024 Melbourne Rare Book Week showcasing a few of these gems.

So, on Friday July 26th, a very interesting and well attended event occurred in our beautiful historic library- the likes of which our members had never before had the pleasure to participate in.

We had welcomed the exposure provided by the Melbourne Rare Book Week network and had also offered our own marketing and social media and newsletter resources to promote this talk and unsurprisingly, Cameron stepped up to the plate and treated some 30 attendees to a wonderfully proud and passionate presentation outlining the significance and intriguing backgrounds to the work of authors C.E.W. Bean and Ethel Mannin. These represent some rarities housed in our library and our wonderful, expert speaker Cameron's description of their lives and works kept our visitors engaged and amused during the one-hour duration. Guests were also treated to a potted history of Mechanics' Institutes and their aims and objectives and the specific story of the FMI and it's place in western suburbs life for more than a century.

Our speaker rounded off his talk with a short description of his personal background and interests and his passion for all things literary, historical and library related was more than obvious. Cameron's love of his job, the collection and opportunities to improve the experiences of our library members warmed the room and this was reflected in the guest's applause and their positive appreciation expressed afterwards.



Bean's volumes of the *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* were displayed in our Legends Reading Room display case along with some of our Mannin collection, including titles like *Curfew At Dawn* and *Land of the Crested Lion* - to name a couple. It was indeed a difficult choice, given the wealth of unusual, rare and unique books we are fortunate to own in our collection.

Our vintage crime collection sparked lots of excited conversations after the event, when guests happily stayed to enjoy a tour of the FMI building and it's legendary, recently renovated Douglas Clymo Billiards and Snooker Room. Refreshments were enjoyed and some very complimentary comments were welcomed from attendees who were excited by the physical

improvements to our property, as well as the upbeat vibe and atmosphere of our much-loved library.

The Hume and Hovell Bicentenary and the Stanley Atheneum

By Chris Dormer

The 200th anniversary of the Hume and Hovell expedition passing through this country was commemorated at the Stanley on the 24th November 2024. The bicentenary was marked with a special event starting at the Hume and Hovell Centenary cairn on the Stanley Myrtleford Road on Sunday 24th November at 10 am. The event was well



attended with Chris Dormer introducing the story of how the local cairn was built, followed by former Stanley resident Greg Absler, who has had a longtime interest in the Hume and Hovell history and he spoke about the 1824 expedition and its significance to Victorian and Australian history.

The Commemoration November 2024. Photographer: Sophie Price

Indigo Shire Council Mayor, Sophie Price then laid a wreath at the cairn as had been done by in 1924. Guests then moved on to the Stanley Atheneum to see the 'They Passed This Way' exhibition and share morning tea. Hume and Hovell and their party of six men trekked south from Appin to Lake George in New South Wales and then on into Victoria, keeping west of the Great Dividing Range

and ending up at Corio Bay, on the Victorian coast, where present day Geelong is situated. They returned in a much shorter time, taking by a route west of the outward journey hence avoiding the mountains that had delayed their journey southward. The journey through this area is generally described as having passing through Back Creek, Stanley and down to the Murrumgee, these sites were marked with cairns which were erected in 1924.

Building the Stanley Cairn

Plans for the Stanley cairn started with a meeting of the Stanley Committee at the Stanley Atheneum in July 1924. It was decided to build a cairn and that the stone would be hauled from Bald Hills and a fundraiser would be held to raise the funds to erect the cairn. The fundraiser was a school concert held at the Temperance Hall on 17 November 1924, this was reported in the OMA as 'being well attended and splendidly rendered'. The cairn was later constructed by David McKenzie and B. Beard and as there was no stone on the site, 'working bees' were held to quarry and haul the stone from Bald Hills. The cairn was unveiled on the 17th November 1924. At the foundation of the cairn lie two buried sealed bottles, one containing a copy of 'The Ovens and Murray Advertiser' in which are reports of the celebration, and a copy of 'One and All,' a school periodical, which then circulated throughout the Beechworth inspectorate; also a report of the school committee meeting with the names of the teachers and members of the committee. In the other bottle is a slip of paper on which is written the names of the workmen who erected the cairn, and the name of the dog on the job.

Discovery of local publication

In 1924 the Department of Education in Victoria coordinated and promoted the celebration of 100 years since the Hume and Hovell expedition. In the Beechworth Inspectorate, anticipating the centenary, a small booklet 'All and One' was published to celebrate the event. An original of this booklet was located at the Orbost Historical Society and copies have been made and are now available at Stanley Atheneum for \$15 a copy.

"They Passed This Way' Exhibition.

"They Passed This Way' exhibition was developed by the Friends of Stanley Atheneum to commemorate the bicentenary of the Hume and Hovell expedition in 1824 and tells the story of the expedition of Hamilton Hume and William Hovell and the building of the Stanley centenary cairn. It is on display at the Stanley Atheneum until June 2025.

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

News from the Prahran Mechanics' Institute: A new era of Library Management

If you've been exploring our catalogue recently, then you'll have noticed some changes. At the end of July 2024 after months of deliberation, we switched library management systems.

The process of changing systems is never without complexity, but we've been working closely with our new system provider- Prosentient- to iron out bugs and to ensure that our collection is as accessible as possible, both for members and for staff.

We wanted to write this article for any other MI's who might be considering a similar change, to look at what it takes to move systems. The key ingredient for us, was working together with the PMI community to ensure everyone knew about the upcoming change and, once training was complete for the staff, to ensure that our volunteers were also comfortable with the new system so they could aid members. We also had to ensure that our members were aware of the shift, and they knew how to access the new system.

This all meant a close working relationship between our Marketing and Communications Officer, and Collections Librarian and Volunteer Coordinator to make sure that all the moving parts came together. The process was not without difficulties, especially in data conversion from the old system to the new, but it's a process that have been 100 % worth the effort.

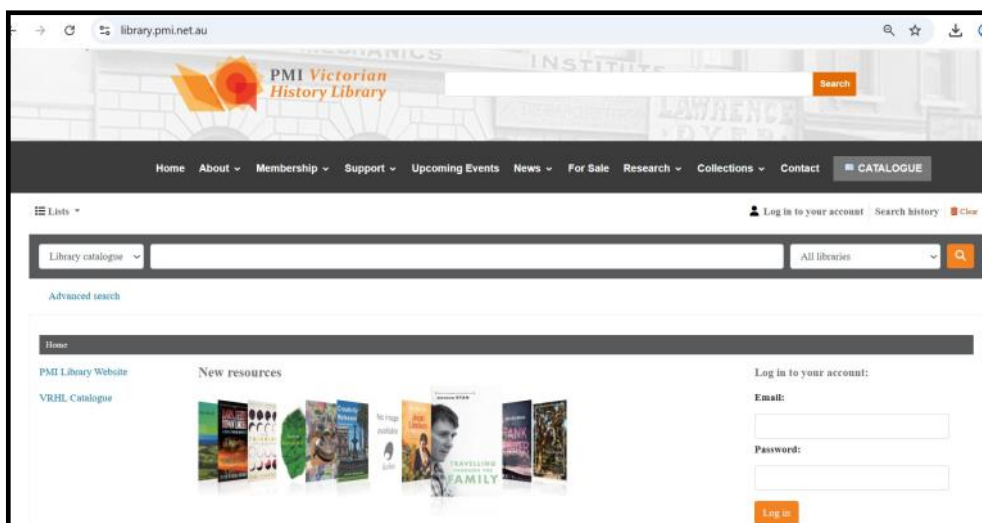
The system we have moved to, Koha, is open source which means that our data can not be siloed away by a private company and that we will always have access to it. Additionally, the back-end processes for our staff are significantly more streamlined which will eventually (we're still ironing out a few things) mean a must faster process for cataloging material so we'll have more material available for our members more quickly.

The front facing part of the catalog is also more responsive, and the member experience is enhanced by a much-simplified process for renewing and reserving. Our members have been amazing, as we've made this transition. And for those of you have identified issues- especially with the periodical indexing- we are working hard to fix them, and we appreciate the feedback.

The most exciting thing for us is that Koha enables us to also use D-Space, which is an online document storage and management system. Which means that we will be able to make a significant proportion of our over 6000 electronic items available to members from home through our catalogue. Deciding what we can make available, especially within copyright, has really been a process, copyright law and libraries is not uncomplicated. We will hopefully have this up and running by the end of the year, and as more and more material is born digital, it's

becoming more important than ever. Most of the delay has been due to material digitized from old CD-Roms, which just highlights the inherent difficulties of digital preservation and obsolescence.

So, we hope this have been a good introduction to moving systems and to our new LMS. Please jump online and explore.



<https://library.pmi.net.au/>

News from the Prahran Mechanics' Institute: From Our Shelves to Your Home: Welcome to the PMI Library's Online Bookshop!

We're thrilled to announce that the PMI Victorian History Library has expanded its horizons into the digital realm! Our beloved library now offers an online bookshop, making it easier than ever for history enthusiasts to access our incredible collection of second hand books.

Late last year, at the suggestion of our Library's Vice President, we embarked on an exciting journey to create an online presence for our bookshop. After careful consideration, we found the perfect solution using Square, our existing point of sale system. If you're curious about setting up something similar, our Collections Librarian Ellen would be delighted to share her expertise.

With the help of our dedicated Friends of the Library, we've been busy populating our online shop with an impressive array of books. They've been working tirelessly to create listings, scan book covers, and set prices. The result? A staggering nearly 1700 books are now available at your fingertips, with new additions every week!

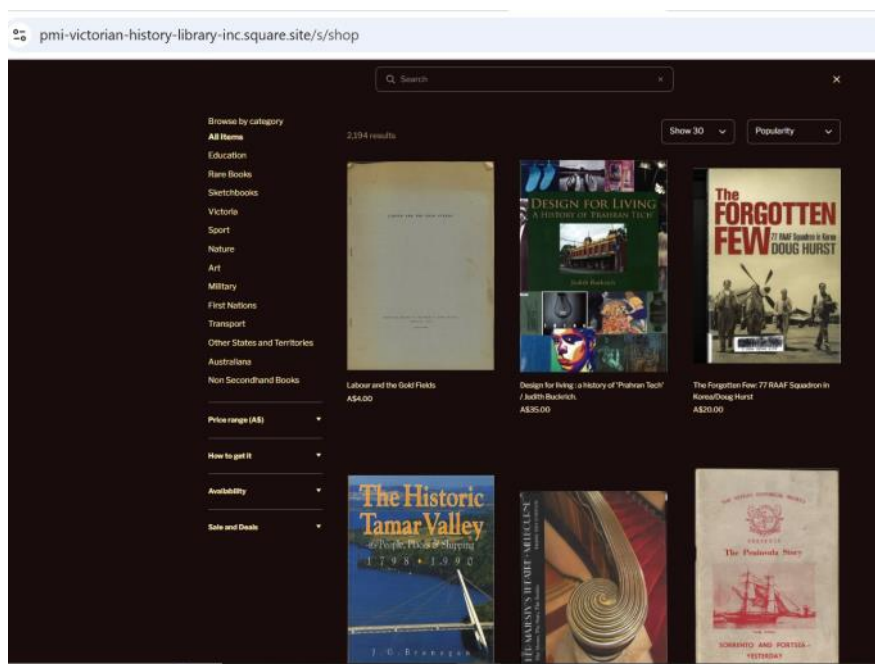
Our online bookshop covers a wide range of fascinating topics that reflect Victoria's rich history and beyond. You'll find sections dedicated to local history, sports, nature, and art. We also have an extensive collection of military history books, classics, and works on First Nations culture. For those interested in transportation or other Australian states and territories, we've got you covered too. And of course, there's a treasure trove of general Australiana waiting to be explored.

We're incredibly proud of this new chapter in the PMI Library's story. It's been a labour of love, and we're so excited to share it with you. Whether you're a long-time member or a new friend, we invite you to explore our online bookshop. Who knows what historical gems you might discover?

A huge thank you to our amazing Friends of the Library - Sam, Joe, and Aerial - who manage our online bookshop. Their dedication and hard work have made this project a reality.

Remember to check back often, as new books are added regularly. Happy browsing, and here's to many more years of preserving and sharing Victoria's fascinating history!

Here's the link to our shop: <https://pmi-victorian-history-library-inc.square.site/s/shop>



Two Interesting Women

By Jim Lowden



Catherine 'Kate' Baker, O.B.E (1861-1953)

An interesting snippet about a daughter of Williamstown Catherine 'Kate' Baker OBE (1861-1953) appeared recently. Born in Co. Waterford, Ireland, Kate arrived in Melbourne with her family in October 1870 and they settled at Williamstown. She attended Otter P. Blom's large private school in Williamstown which became the Williamstown North State School in 1874. 'Kate haunted the Williamstown Mechanics' Institute [WMI] and was often the first to arrive and last to leave.' Generally, also present was author Ada Cambridge, the wife of the Rev. George Cross, who was Rector of Holy Trinity, Williamstown for a time.

At WMI Kate also came to know the poetry of Adam Lindsay Gordon and other Australian writers. Kate went on to become a teacher and returned to teach at Williamstown for several stints during her long career in the classroom. She also became a longtime member of the Old Williamstownians' Association. In later life Kate was presented with a plaque by the Australian Literature Society for what she had done to

promote 'the cause of Australian literature'. Catherine Baker passed away at her residence, 38 Athelston Road, Camberwell on 7 October 1953, aged 92. Indeed a life well lived.

Image: Portrait of Kate, painted in 1949 by Pauline Ikin <https://maribymonghobsonsabay.starweekly.com.au/news/a-distinguished-daughter/>

Elsie Frederica Barlow, nee Hake (1876-1948)

Artist Mrs Elsie Frederica Barlow, née Hake (1876-1948) was born at South Melbourne. She was educated privately, and under established artist Jane Sutherland; and from 1894 at the National Gallery of Victoria School, under Frederick McCubbin and Bernard Hall. She worked mostly in water colours, with occasional renderings in pen and ink. Her exhibitions included: Castlemaine Mechanics' Institute, 1912, where she hung ninety paintings; Castlemaine, Loan Exhibition of Fine and Applied Art, 1913; *Exhibition of Australia Art* at the Royal Academy, London 1923-24; several other exhibitions prior to 1948; and retrospectives at the Castlemaine Art Gallery in 1977 and Duvance Gallery, Melbourne in 1978, from which a catalogue exists.



Elsie's 1913 Castlemaine exhibition led to the establishment of the Castlemaine Art Gallery. She authored: *Gum Trees of Australia* (Melbourne: Osboldstone, 1913), which consisted of a number of pen and ink sketches. In later life she resided at 7 Collins Street, Mentone. She married widower Arthur Barlow (1855-1917), a Police Magistrate, in 1901, and they had three children. Elsie Barlow died at Holmsby Nursing Home, Cheltenham, on 15 November 1948, aged 71.

Image: Elsie Barlow at her solo show at the Castlemaine Mechanics Institute Library in 1912.

<https://engage.vic.gov.au/project/womens-public-art-program/page/the-first-women-of-castlemaine-art-museum>

Vale

These obituaries were supplied by Jim Lowden

Dr Cyril Curtis Curtain was born at Williamstown in 1928. He was educated at: Williamstown Primary School; Williamstown High School; Melbourne Boys' High School; and University of Melbourne, where he graduated in Chemistry and from where he obtained his PhD in 1953. He spent his distinguished working career in biophysics and biomolecular technology mostly with the CSIRO. In private life he relentlessly campaigned for 'things' Williamstown. In his youth Cyril organised the Williamstown Industries Exhibition in March 1947 and later successfully led a campaign to stop the filling in of Port Phillip Bay from Point Gellibrand out to the main Shipping Channel. Consequently, a section of the Bay foreshore is named the Cyril Curtain Reserve. It was because of his involvement with the Williamstown Historical Society, who was a tenant of the Williamstown Mechanics' Institute building, that he actively participated in the campaign to retain and restore the Institute for community use. Cyril authored *A Window on Willy: The Williamstown Mechanics' Institute and Free Library 1854-1968*, a well-documented record of the Institute and its people. Cyril Curtain died at Western Health Hospital, Footscray, on 8 September 2024, aged 98. He leaves a legacy of fond memories of a man passionate for his community. (A copy of Cyril's Williamstown book is in the MIRC Collection.)



Dr Ernest Lindsay 'Lindsay' Francis was born at Hamilton in Western Victoria in 1925. He interrupted his University of Melbourne medical course to serve in the Royal Australian Air Force during World War II. On graduation in 1950 he briefly practised at Lilydale before moving to Romsey in 1952, where he practised until he retired in 1995. At Romsey, with his wife Josie, they were like 'pepper and salt' in everything. Lindsay played the organ for the Anglican Church and the Masonic Lodge and they were both keen gardeners. Like all country doctors, he was on duty 24/7 and when Kyneton and Kilmore was without a doctor he also filled those positions. Lindsay was a Committee Member of the Romsey Mechanics' Institute and it was there that the Romsey community gave Lindsay and Josie a 'thank you' gathering on their retirement from practise on 25 June 1995. The Institute was packed to standing room only, a fitting testimonial. They then alternated living between Cowes and Romsey, finally moving to Cowes in 2004, where he died on 4 May 2024, aged 99. Lindsay bequeathed

\$1000 to the Romsey & Lancefield Districts Historical Society. Lindsay Francis' was a life well lived in community service.

George Gerald MacCallum Swinburne was born in 1944 an eldest son. He was educated at Camberwell



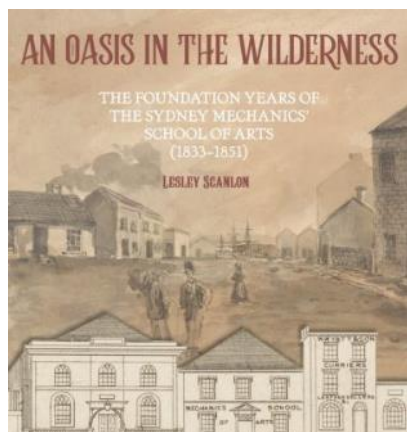
Grammar School, Scotch College, Hawthorn and Ormond College, University of Melbourne where he studied law and later practised with great success. He had a long association with Tarnagulla, where his grandfather had been a storekeeper, and he became the authority on the history of Tarnagulla and its Mechanics' Institute and sourced out information on surrounding Institutes. In his wide travels to international law conferences and annual pilgrimages to Royal Ascot, where he donned his top hat and tails, George sought out overseas Institutes and often provided photos and other details for use in *Useful Knowledge*. He died suddenly at Hong Kong on 3 December 2023 and a Memorial Service was held at Scot's Church, Collins Street, Melbourne on 31 January 2024. Our deepest condolences are extended to his wife Maureen and his family.

Book Reviews

Supplied by Jim Lowden

An Oasis in the Wilderness: The Foundation Years of the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts (1833-1851) – Lesley Scanlon. Hardcover. 143 pages, illustrated, sources, lectures delivered 1855-50, index. 9781875684175 (Halstead Press, 2023). \$49.95

This is an account of the foundation of Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts described as an 'oasis in the wilderness' and 'university of the people', for its activities extended far beyond the intended mechanic artisans. The SMSA was established at the behest of Irish-born Sir Richard Bourke and Scottish-born Rev. Henry Carmichael and driven by the Rev. Carmichael under the presidency of Surveyor-General Sir Thomas Mitchell. The early years however were a struggle. Besides conducting lectures and establishing a library



collection the SMSA also set about establishing a museum from 1838 and a listing of its holdings which included 34 skulls, remains. There was however no formal effort to display the museum collection and the idea, like the collection,

disappeared from the records after 1850. A valuable and fascinating appendix is the list of lectures delivered between 1833-1850. This list is a guide to the varying contemporary reports that appeared in the press of the day. Dr Lesley Scanlon's well researched and produced work gives us a reasoned understanding of the Mechanics' Institute Movement in colonial Australia and is a most valuable addition to Australian Mechanics' Institute literature.

Manchester Minds: A University History of Ideas – Stuart Jones, ed. Hardback, dustcover. xviii, 374 pages, 9781526176325. (University of Manchester Press, 2024). \$95.00

The University's slogan 'Creating Communities since 1824' sets the agenda, and editor Stuart Jones has been Professor of Intellectual History at Manchester since 2008. The chapters on: Patrick Blackett, physicist and Nobel prizewinner; Brian Cox, physicist; Dorothy Emmett, philosopher; Eva Gore-Booth, poet and suffragist; Sir Arthur Lewis, economist and Nobel prizewinner; Lewis Namier, Zionist; Michael Polanyi, poly-

math; Sir Henry Roscoe, chemist; Enriqueta Rylands, benefactor of the Rylands Library; WG 'Max' Sebald, writer and academic; and Alan Turing, mathematician and computer scientist, reflect Manchester's march of the intellect from Cottonopolis to an industrial engineering and chemical powerhouse. The University of Manchester is the result of the 2004 merger of two earlier institutions: the Victoria University of Manchester, established as Owens College in 1851; and University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, established as the Manchester Mechanics' Institution in 1824. This is a truly fascinating study of the march of thought over two centuries at Manchester and how its scientists and scholars have impacted the wider world.



The University of Adelaide: 150 Years of Making History. 202 pages, illustrated, 9781763538702 (University of Adelaide, 2024). \$40.00

The foundation of the University of Adelaide (UA) in 1874 is largely one of Scottish-born philanthropists: Sir Walter Watson Hughes, Sir Thomas Elder, Robert Barr-Smith and later Peter Waite, who were all imbued with Scotland's belief in the importance of education. Adelaide was the first of the Australian university to admit women to degree courses. This is an enthralling read tracing the University's pioneering educational role spread over a plethora of disciplines. UA has produced five Nobel prizewinners: the Braggs, father Sir William Henry and son, Sir William Lawrence; Howard, Lord Florey; Dr Robin Warren; and John M Coetzee. The last chapter 'Preserving a Legacy' is a cornucopia of 'Museum' items including the letters of the original Angry Penguin, Max Harris, who started the innovative Martin Martin Bookshop. The collaborative committee who compiled this truly fascinating work have produced a fine book which takes a university and its education to the general public, showing how it, as a University, has made real impact upon Australia and indeed the world. It was a truly memorable read.

Bungaree Mechanics' Institute - destroyed by a Tornado!

On June 19, 1927 Bungaree was hit by a tornado and the Mechanics' Institute was totally destroyed, apart from the piano which survived. This is the start of the report in *The Argus* the next day -

Tornado at Bungaree. Many buildings wrecked. Mechanics' Hall blown down.
House Lifted and Turned Round.

Ballarat, Sunday - *Although it has fortunately not accompanied by loss of life, a tornado caused tremendous damage when it passed through the Bungaree district at 4 o'clock this afternoon. The Mechanics' Hall was blown to the ground, the Morning Star Hotel was partially wrecked, Tinney Bros chaff mills were ruined and the blacksmith's shop of Mr W. Chisholm has completely shattered. A remarkable instance of the force of the cyclone was provided by the shifting of the home of Mr and Mrs E. Bennett's on the Millbrook road. The building was lifted from its foundations and the house changed from its eastern aspect to face in a southerly direction. Mr and Mrs. Bennett were in the house at the time, and its rockings gave them a terrifying time. The duration of the wind was just under two minutes but it blew with terrible intensity and caused wreckage in its path. It was followed by a heavy hail storm and rain.*

Right: Remain of the Mechanics' Institute.
Weekly Times, June 25, 1927
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article222616423>

Below left: The Bungaree MI on the front page of the *Sun News-Pictorial* June 21, 1927.
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/31223505>

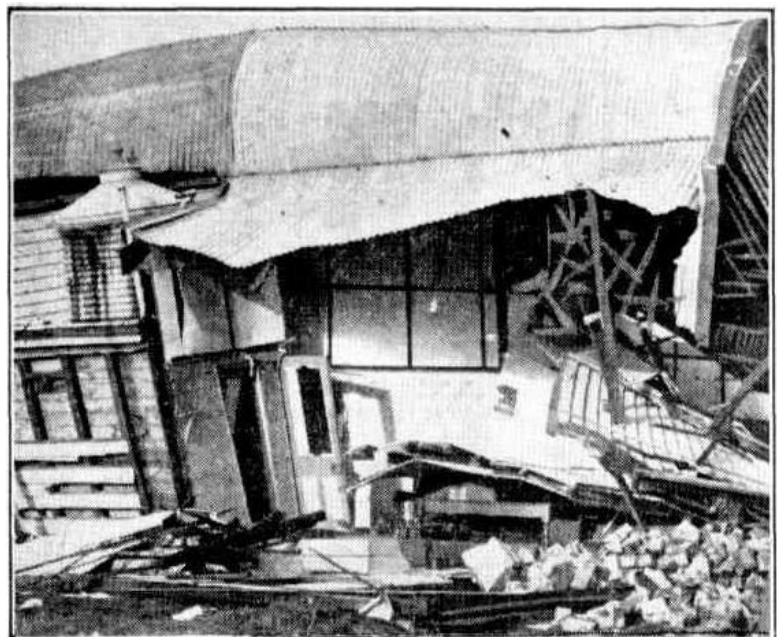
Below right: The Bungaree MI - you can see the piano which survived.
Sydney Sun, June 21, 1927
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article223618576>



All That Was Left By The Raging Tornado



REMAINS OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE IN THE TRUCK OF THE TOWN OF BUNGAREE, VIC. (Left). The picture shows the remains of the Mechanics' Institute building in the village. It has been blown down and is now a mass of twisted metal, wood and corrugated iron. The piano in the left foreground is the only one that has survived. (Right) The piano which survived the destruction of the Mechanics' Institute building. It has been blown down and is now a mass of twisted metal, wood and corrugated iron.

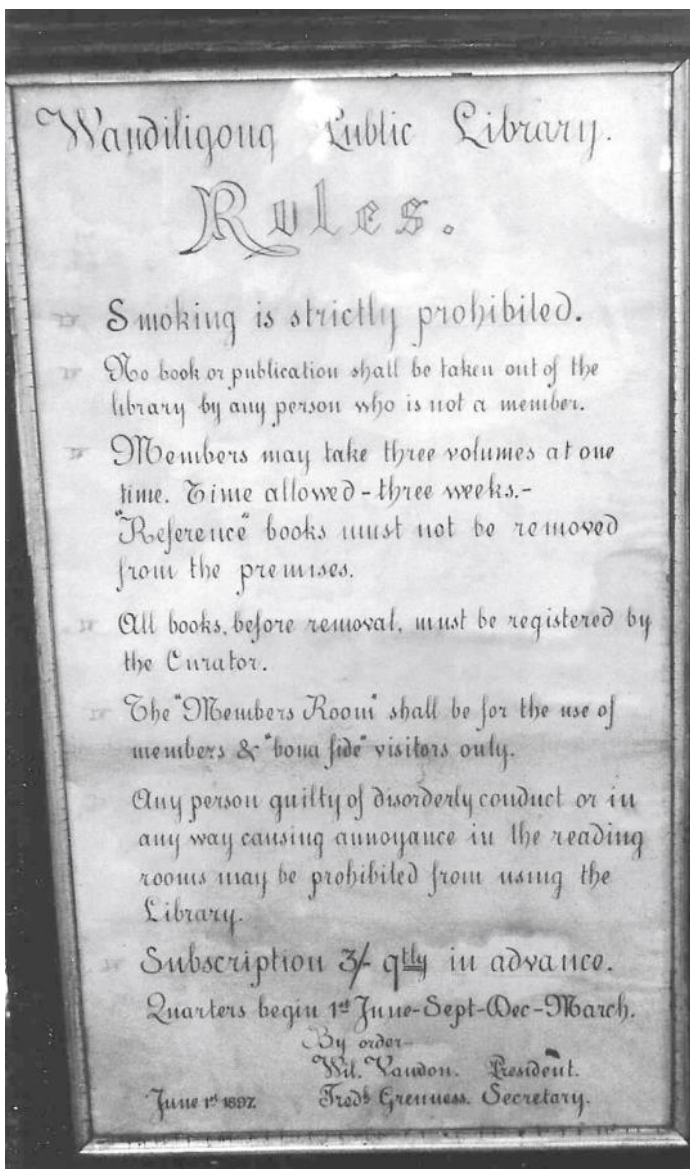


Seeking a definition of a mechanics' institute/Mechanics' Institute

By John Anderson

The article by Ken James entitled “Campbelltown Mechanics' Institute?” in the Number 61 issue of *Useful Knowledge* asks the question whether the first (or all three?) of the halls at Campbelltown in central Victoria was a mechanics' institute.

This had me wondering about a definition of the term “mechanics' institute”. In doing so, I was reminded of a conversation I once had with an acquaintance I met in London in the 1960s who addressed me in what I regarded as an American accent. When I enquired where he came from in America, he replied, rather testily, that if I was asking him if he came from the continent of America, then yes, he did, but if I was asking if he came from the United States of America, then, no, he most definitely did not. He informed me that he came from Canada. Thus, I learnt that the word “America” is used in two different senses - one to refer to the continent of America and the other to refer specifically to one of the countries on the continent, namely USA.



Ken's article begs a similar sort of question: when is a hall or building to be regarded as a mechanics' institute and what is the definition of a “mechanics' institute”? The introductory pages viii-ix of Pam Baragwanath's book *If the Walls Could Speak* leads me to understand that the term mechanics' institute is used in two different senses and, perhaps without realising it, we use them interchangeably. In one sense the term is used generically to refer to any community organisation that aims to assist individuals to get together to further their knowledge and education by the provision of materials and/or books and/or classes in a building constructed using funds raised by the general public, though often with financial assistance or the provision of land from the local council/state government. Hence the multiplicity of names by which mechanics' institutes are known – viz “Free Library”, “Atheneum”, “Agricultural Hall”, with the title “Mechanics' Institute” being by far the most common.

On this note I often heard my mum talk with some pride about her dad's role as the secretary of the Wandiligong Public Library and when I visited the library with my sister in January 2000, we were delighted to discover a framed public notice stored away behind a cabinet with the rules of the library under the name of the secretary, her dad, Fred Grenness, dated 1st June 1897 (see image left). I never heard my mum speak of the Wandiligong Library as a mechanics' institute and so it came as a surprise to see it listed in Pam Baragwanath's book (incidentally note mis-spelling of Wandiligong). So, in the generic sense a building and the associated organising body is regarded as a mechanics' institute

if it serves to help individuals further their knowledge through the provision of books and/or arranging learning activities.

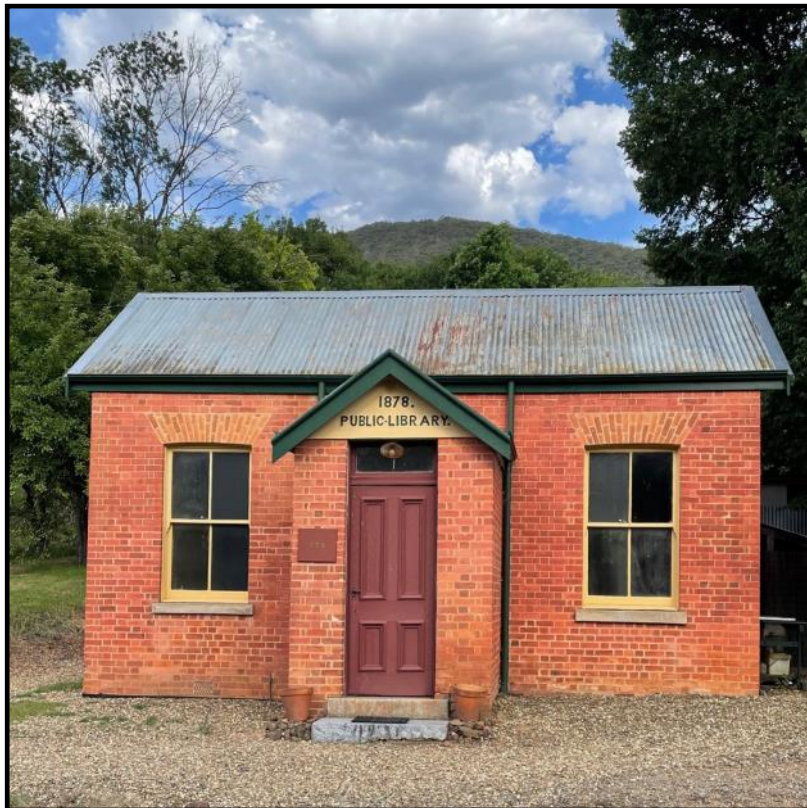
Image above—Rules of the Wandiligong Public Library listed on a wall plaque which was found behind a cupboard on a visit in January 2000 and photographed with a film camera by John Anderson..

Seeking a definition of a mechanics' institute/Mechanics' Institute

By John Anderson

The term Mechanics' Institute (note capitals) is used in the more restrictive sense when it is used in the title of a building and the accompanying organising body. It seems that the use of the Mechanics' Institute title was entirely at the discretion of the local organisation and there do not appear to be any rules or regulations governing the use of the term "Mechanics' Institute". In this sense it is no different to a group of people with an interest in, say, tennis, horse-riding or debating getting together to establish a local self-contained Tennis Club, Pony Club or Debating Society. Although many Mechanics' Institutes were established with assistance from a state land grant and/or financial assistance from a local council this was not a precondition to the use of the term "Mechanics' Institute" in the title. Further, it seems that there was no public registration or listing of organisations that officially called themselves Mechanics' Institutes that set themselves apart from say a Free Library or Agricultural Hall. It just seems that the use of the term in the generic sense became adopted because the majority of them incorporated the term Mechanics' Institute in their title. Whilst there are overarching organisations that seek to represent the interests of specific interest groups, be they tennis or horse-riding clubs or mechanics' institutes, it is entirely up to the individual clubs or mechanics' institutes to register with the relevant central body. In the case of mechanics' institutes this is Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria (MIV).

So then, what sort of public hall or meeting place does not qualify to be called a mechanics' institute? Clearly halls and buildings associated with a church, sports club or a specific interest group do not qualify as their membership is restricted to particular interest groups but these limitations would not seem relevant to halls that are publicly owned and are available for the welfare of all members of the community. Therefore, the question of whether a building such as that at Campbelltown can be regarded as a mechanics' institute (in the generic sense) would seem to rest on whether it was constructed and used to promote the communication of information/knowledge to members of the community though whether such a definition would be widely accepted is a matter for conjecture.



Wandiligong Public Library as it stands today, December 2024. Image: John Anderson

Fryerstown Burke & Wills Mechanics' Institute.

To be honest, what attracted me to this article was the photograph of Mrs Cole with the tea cups laid out and surrounded by plates of sandwiches. How many cups of tea have been made in Mechanics' Institutes over the years? Surely the number would run into millions. This is from *The Age* of January 23, 1999 page 121 - 26 years ago.

The Mechanics Institute in Fryerstown has a history that goes all the way back to Burke and Wills, writes **Mary Ryllis Clark.**



History's custodian: Jessie Cole tends the supper room in the Mechanics Institute at Fryerstown.

Hub of the diggings



Historic Victoria

FRYERSTOWN, like so many of the smaller gold rush towns of central Victoria, has a surreal quality, especially in the silent heat of summer. It comes from the scarred landscape of old diggings, the gnarled trunks of ironbark and the shapes and shadows of mature European trees.

In the midst sit a scattering of historic timber and brick buildings, of which the most important to the town is the Mechanics Institute. The philosophy of the Mechanics Institute movement was based on self-improvement, especially for manual workers, through "the diffusion of scientific and other useful knowledge". The movement began in the United Kingdom in the 1820s and spread all over the English-speaking world.

In 1863, it reached Fryerstown. The town was nearly 10 years old by then. It developed from a tent city that sprang up not long after gold was discovered at Fryers Creek in 1851. Squatter Peter Fryer gave his name to the creek in 1840, when he settled with his sheep.

George Brown, author of *Reminiscences of Fryerstown*, tells a story that his father, Edward, born in Fryerstown in 1876, told him.

When he was young, Edward Brown met a man called Dyer, who built a dam for Peter Fryer in the 1840s. When it was finished, heavy rain fell. Dyer noticed a yellow substance in the red clay on the bank of the dam but did not know what it was. Fryers Creek proved to be rich in both alluvial and reef gold and had a population of about 15,000 by the end of the 1850s.

By the early 1860s, residents were well served by stores, hotels, businesses, churches, schools and a courthouse. But they

did not have a public meeting place. According to George Brown, social functions and meetings took place in one of the 25 hotels.

Early in 1863, the residents of Fryerstown discussed not only the need to have a community gathering place but also one that would improve their minds. A Mechanics Institute was the obvious solution. It would also provide Fryerstown with the ideal memorial to the hero of the day — Robert O'Hara Burke.

Fryerstown was part of Burke's area of responsibility when he was superintendent of police at Castlemaine between 1858 and 1860, when he set off on his ill-fated

Loddon Masonic Lodge, Haut Wyatt, washed the stone with wine, sprinkled it with corn and anointed it with oil, according to Masonic custom. As it was lowered, the All Saints choir sang *Gloria Patria*. The proceedings were followed by what George Brown refers to as "an excellent luncheon" at the Cumberland Hotel. When the building was completed four months later, 163 dignitaries sat down in the new institute to a "sumptuous banquet" and a series of speeches in honor of the occasion. The Rev Watkin, a local minister, said that "Fryerstown might be proud that, while others had talked, it had acted and given unmistakable evidence of its

love of noble worth' and musical performances and, above all, dances. Local author Robyn Annear recalls the monthly dances as one of the highlights of living in Fryerstown.

"We first went because our landlord played the trumpet," she says. "They were great fun. You'd bring a plate and, at supper time, the trestle tables would be brought in laden with food." Inevitably, the educational use of the institute has declined and, sadly, the dances ceased when Jimmy Cole, the band leader, retired three years ago.

But some traditions continue. Pat Cubeta, a member of the committee that manages the building, explains it is still used for wedding parties, reunions, meetings and even band practice for local youngsters.

But the biggest event of the Mechanics Institute year is the annual Fryerstown Antique Fair. The first fair was in 1975 after the health inspector threatened to close the building to the public because of its inadequate toilet facilities. To avoid this, the community had to raise enough money to replace the outside dunny with a proper toilet block.

"You're always going off to those antique fairs," Mrs Cubeta's mother said to her. "Why don't you have one here. The women will help." And they did. Mrs Cubeta organised three stalls selling antiques and her neighbors provided dozens of cups of tea and delicious country cakes and scones. This year, there will be 105 stalls both inside the building and outside under the trees. The CFA will be selling icecream and the local ladies, in a tradition going back 136 years, cups of tea. All the money goes to the upkeep of the hall.

GETTING THERE

The Burke and Wills Mechanics Institute is in Camp Street, Fryerstown. Contact Mrs Pat Cubeta, tel: (03) 5473 4373. The 24th Fryerstown Annual Antique Fair is on today from 9am to 6pm and Sunday 24 February from 9am to 4pm. Admission \$2.

“Fryerstown might be proud that, while others had talked, it had acted and given unmistakable evidence of its love of noble worth”

expedition with William John Wills to cross the continent from south to north. Some months after the remains of the two explorers were buried in Melbourne, in January 1863, Castlemaine erected an obelisk in honor of Burke.

Not to be outdone, the people of Fryerstown decided to dedicate their Mechanics Institute to both Burke and Wills; it was the only town in Victoria outside Melbourne to honor the two together.

The foundation stone of the building was laid with great ceremony in April 1863, commencing with a service at All Saints Church. The newly formed Fryerstown Brass Band led a procession of local children and the various Masonic lodges of the district.

The Reverend Worshipful Master of the

love of noble worth'.

Apart from some extensions to the back of the building and a reading room added to the side in 1864, the Burke and Wills Mechanics Institute is relatively intact. It has the traditional library, complete with some of the original books, meeting place and hall with a stage at one end.

A collection of historic honor boards hangs on the walls. These come both from the institute and elsewhere and bear the names of local families, some of whom still live in the district.

Membership of the institute in the early days cost 10 shillings a year. Reading hours were from 7.30pm to midnight. During the evenings, the institute was also used for lectures, meetings, Masonic services, theatri-