

No. 65 Spring 2025

The magazine of the
Mechanics' Institutes of
Victoria



Useful Knowledge



Cora Lynn Hall in the December 1934 flood.

This was not the first flood that the Hall suffered; it was to have been officially opened on June 13, 1911 however it had three feet of water through it, so the official opening was postponed until the August.

The building was demolished in the 1980s.

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2024-2025 MIV Committee

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Cover image: Cora Lynn Hall and War Memorial, December 1934. Photographer: E. Boord.
 Museums Victoria <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/768357>



**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 Victorian History Library.

Note from the Editor – Heather Arnold

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition.

I am happy to accept articles and photographs for the *Useful Knowledge* magazine - email them to me at mivnewslettereditor@gmail.com. Has your Mechanics' Institute received a grant, had some building works, celebrated a significant birthday, held some great events? Feel free to send me a report. The next newsletter is a Summer edition, I am aiming for the end of January.

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM is on November 22, 2025 at 10.00am at the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Victorian History Library. All welcome. A plethora of AGM related forms are included with this newsletter or have been emailed to you.

Wesson Lecture

We are thrilled that author, Robyn Annear, has agreed to be our guest speaker at our Wesson Lecture. Put this date in your diary now - Sunday, February 8, 2026 at 2.00pm. Venue: Prahran Mechanics' Institute Victorian History Library. More information and booking details on page 9.

Website

We are working on it and hope to have a new website for the New Year. In the meanwhile, you no longer get a dire security warning when you try to access the website, as we have had that annoying issue fixed.

Facebook Page

You can find our Facebook page here- <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61554953512575>

When we were talking to the computer man about our website, he said we should be doing 4 to 5 Facebook posts per week. My goodness, that is very ambitious and quite frankly, very unlikely!

Mechanics' Institutes Australian Bicentenary, 2027

A small committee has been formed to organise events to commemorate the 200 years of Mechanics' Institutes in Australia. The committee, which is formally known as the Mechanics' Institutes Australia 2027 Bicentenary Committee, will organise events in Melbourne and surrounds on the weekend of March 13 & March 14, 2027. This will take the form of an all day conference at the Melbourne Athenaeum and a bus trip to look at some Mechanics' Institutes.

We are working closely with our Tasmanian colleagues, who are planning a series of bicentennial events in Hobart and Launceston from Friday, March 19 until Sunday, March 21, 2027.

We are in the planning stage and more details will be published in future *Useful Knowledge* magazines. We will also provide information about any events in other States. In the meanwhile, save these dates for two week-ends of interesting events to celebrate 200 years of Mechanics' Institutes in 2027.

Mechanics' Institutes Australia 2027 Bicentenary Committee

President: Ellen Coates (PMI Victorian History Library) ellen@pmi.net.au

Secretary: Heather Arnold (MIV) mivnewslettereditor@gmail.com

Treasurer: Gary Bester (MIV) treasurer@mivic.org.au

Marketing: Ellen Becker (Ballarat Mechanics' Institute)

Committee: James Baker (Melbourne Athenaeum)

Koo Wee Rup Memorial Hall in the December 1934 flood.



The Hall was a Mechanics' Institute and later became a Memorial Hall.

Image: Koo Wee Rup Swamp Historical Society

Stories from the Melbourne Athenaeum: Digital Access to 186 Years of Melbourne Cultural Experiences

Story and images by Dr Fiona Moore, Archives Manager, Melbourne Athenaeum.

Commencing in the earliest stages of the European settlement of Melbourne, the Melbourne Athenaeum provided the city with its first lending library and museum as well as a hall that over time was remodelled and rebuilt to become a theatre that has hosted significant musical, theatrical and cinematic events. It also displayed the first art exhibition held by a solo artist in the Port Phillip District and for over 60 years operated an art gallery exhibiting the work of some of Australia's most well-known artists.

Founded in 1839 as the Melbourne Mechanics' Institution, the Athenaeum has been operating in the same Collins Street location since 1842. The institution's Founding Committee set out the objective of the organisation as the 'diffusion of scientific, literary and other useful knowledge amongst its members and the community generally'. The Melbourne Athenaeum has thus played an important role in the wider establishment of other 19th Century cultural institutions in Victoria that sought to educate the public and provide access to opportunities for self-learning.

Central to the history of the Melbourne Athenaeum is its Archive. It documents the institution's operations from inception to the current day and reveals how its premises became a central meeting place and arts hub for the Victorian public. Most notably, the Archive provides a unique insight into the city of Melbourne from the time it was a fledgling village to the present day. The Archive documents the Athenaeum's membership – both the luminaries and the everyday people. It tells us about people's reading habits, their hobbies, entertainment and leisurely pursuits, as well as their artistic, theatrical and cinematic interests. It reveals the stories of the people who were tenants in the building, booked the halls and the theatres, exhibited at the art gallery, worked for the institution and served on the Committees that have kept it operational for 186 years.

The Melbourne Athenaeum Archive is wide-ranging and consists of annual reports and minutes of meetings dating back to its formation as well as newspapers, books, cinema and theatre posters and programs, exhibition catalogues, architectural drawings, inward and outward correspondence, ephemera, paintings, works on paper, photographs, objects and furniture. The collection is housed on-site with some items on display in the Melbourne Athenaeum Library.

In 2023, the Melbourne Athenaeum was fortunate to receive a grant from the Public Records Office Victoria (PROV) through its Local History Grant Program to digitise its archive with a view to making its contribution to Melbourne's cultural history more accessible and well-known. Funding from the grant allowed the Melbourne Athenaeum to purchase equipment to set up a dedicated digitisation work area including a Canon EOS R5 camera, studio lights, copy-stand and two computers with editing software.



Digitisation Equipment,
Melbourne Athenaeum Archives.

The *Stories from the Ath* digitisation project, as it is titled, is a three-year project that will culminate in significant items from the Archive being digitised and searchable online through the Melbourne Athenaeum Library website as well as on Trove in 2026. It is hoped that online access to the Archive will generate new research opportunities and enhance interest in the collection by introducing new audiences to its unique holdings. It will allow for the discovery of new material and the creation of new stories. The Melbourne Athenaeum is committed to preserving the Archive it owns while also sharing its history. Providing digital access to its collection is a central tenet of these objectives.

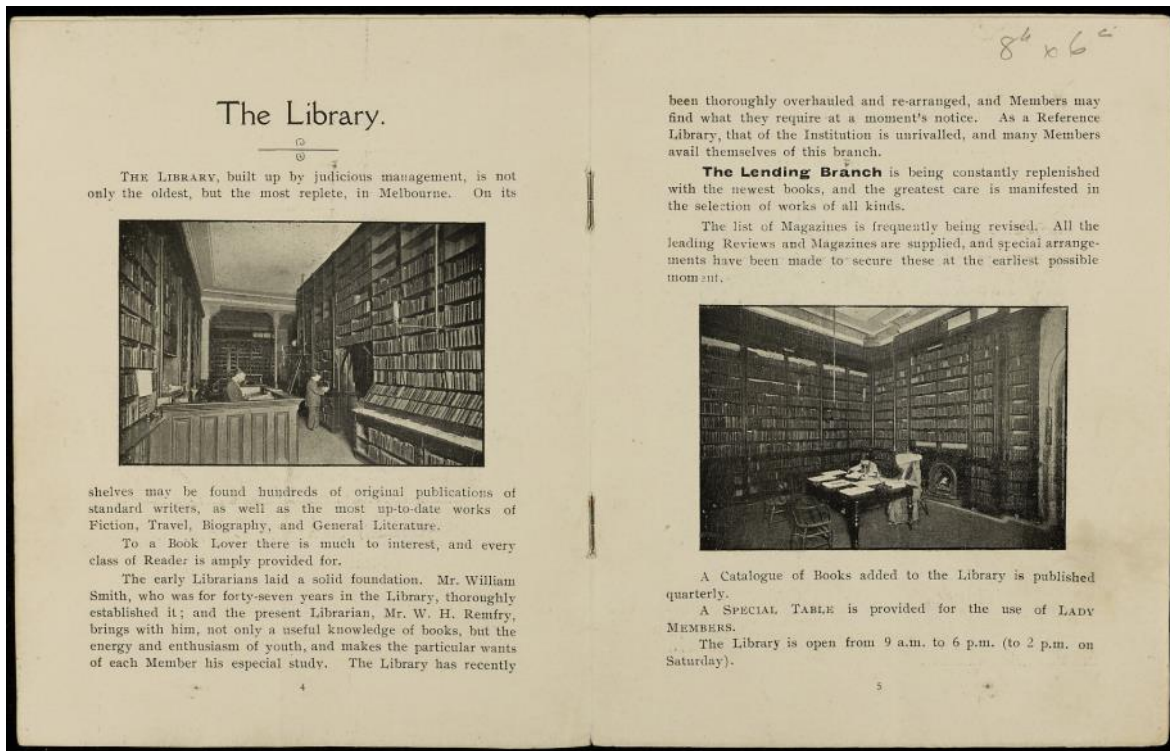
A wide range of items from the Melbourne Athenaeum Archive have been digitised to date. A Significance Assessment undertaken on the Archive in 2022, which found it to be of historic, artistic, research and social significance, has assisted in prioritising items for digitisation and evaluating their connection to the cultural development of Melbourne.

Stories from the Melbourne Athenaeum: Digital Access to 186 Years of Melbourne Cultural Experiences

Much focus has been given to items that reflect the history of the Melbourne Athenaeum Library, which is the city's oldest continuing lending library. This includes a suite of brochures promoting the library and the benefits of being a member dating from 1918 onwards.



Above: Silk Program, Fundraising Concert, Melbourne Athenaeum Hall, 1884.



Melbourne Athenaeum Library Brochure c. 1918.

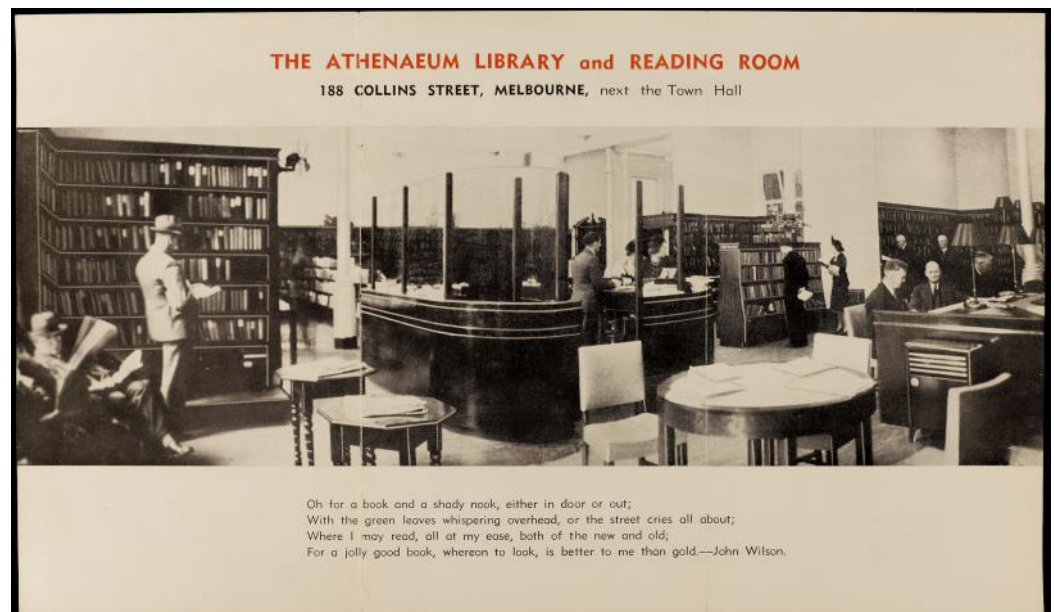
Stories from the Melbourne Athenaeum: Digital Access to 186 Years of Melbourne Cultural Experiences



Clifford Orme

In the Reading Room, page from Melbourne Athenaeum Library Brochure, c. 1936.

Melbourne Athenaeum Library Brochure, 1940.

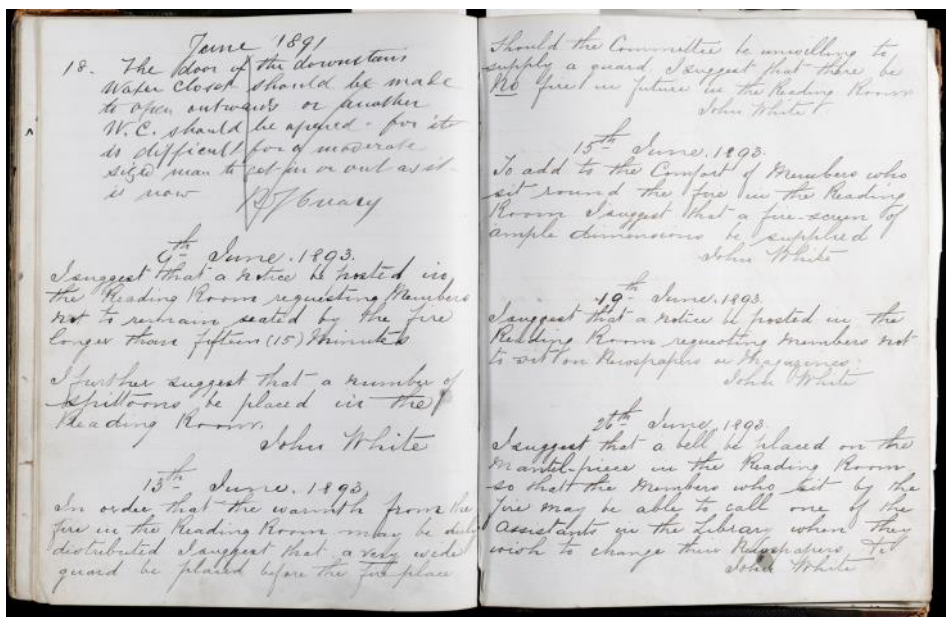


Pair of Grey Metal Parcel Post Tags used by the Victorian Railways Postal Service for delivery of library book loans to country members of the Melbourne Athenaeum Library. The Melbourne Athenaeum Library provided a postal service to country members commencing in the 1920s.

Stories from the Melbourne Athenaeum: Digital Access to 186 Years of Melbourne Cultural Experiences

One of the most significant items to be digitised is the Melbourne Athenaeum First Library Suggestion Book from 1871 to 1892. This book provided members with an opportunity to interact with the Institution by recommending new books, newspapers and magazines for acquisition. The suggestion book provides an excellent insight into the reading tastes of the time, covering subjects such as travel, history, art, architecture and theology.

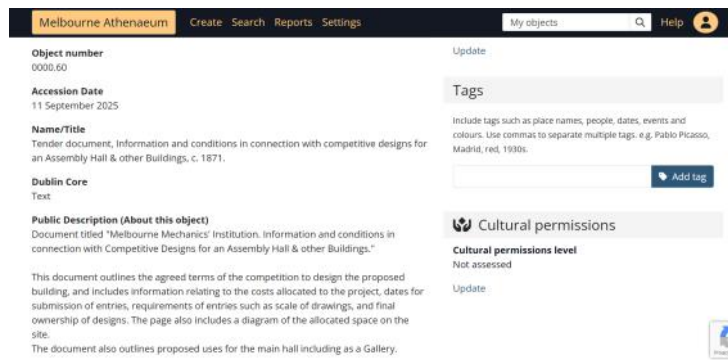
Members also used the book as a means of providing feedback and helpful hints on how the library could be better set up for patrons. Members such as John White (who seems to have been a regular contributor to the suggestion book throughout June 1893) were very free with advice as to how members could be better served. This included that “a bell be placed on the mantle-piece in the Reading Room so that the members who sit by the fire may be able to call on one of the assistants in the library when they wish to change their newspapers”.



Page from First Library Suggestion Book, showing comments made by library member John White. The book covers the period from 1871 to 1893, consisting of 85 pages.

The *Stories from the Ath* project is taking place at the same time as a new collection management system, eHive, has been acquired to administer the Melbourne Athenaeum Archive. eHive is a web-based cataloguing system developed by Vernon Systems that enables collections to be published and shared online. It is used widely across

the Gallery, Library, Archive and Museum sector both in Australia and internationally. e-Hive was chosen to manage the Athenaeum Archive as it provides comprehensive cataloguing and collection management fields across five different modules. Its built-in publishing capabilities also mean that material from the Melbourne Athenaeum Archive can be searched online using eHive. This search function will be available from 2026 once a sizeable collection of the Archive has been catalogued and digitised.



Above: Excerpt, eHive catalogue entry, Melbourne Athenaeum Archive.

have been possible without this funding. As the Melbourne Athenaeum heads towards its 190th anniversary, the cataloguing and digitisation of the Archive will continue to be a major focus for the Institution and we are extremely grateful to the PROV for the opportunity to be able to make the collection accessible to a worldwide audience.

News from the Stanley Athenaeum By Chris Dormer

Repair and Restoration of Athenaeum Furniture

The display case and readers stand are two of the original Stanley Athenaeum's pieces of furniture, and have recently been repaired and restored to their original condition. They are important examples of the vernacular furniture that was built locally from materials that were readily available and at hand. Both had at some time in the twentieth century been painted with white enamel paint and had suffered significant wear and tear. Recently the display case and readers stand have been transported to Clarelle Restorations in Albury for repair and restoration. Now safely returned to the Athenaeum, the display case again displays the Athenaeum's geological collection and the reading stand has been reinstated and houses the euchre related collection and other objects from the collection.



Stanley Athenaeum display case before and after repair and restoration



Home Sweet Home Exhibition

See the new Stanley Athenaeum exhibition that traces the development of houses in NE Victorian village of Stanley. The Home Sweet Home exhibition begins with the response of Aboriginal people who lived on the plateau that was heavily forested with a plentiful supply of fresh water and rich in resources, the early housing of the 'fortune hunters' searching for gold in the 1850s followed by the houses of the settlers who chose to stay and develop the land and the town.



Left: Jackson House - Boswell Road Back Creek, Stanley

As Stanley evolved and developed more substantial dwellings were constructed, the new 'Home Sweet Home' exhibition focuses on the houses of Stanley showcasing house photographs from the Athenaeum collection. There are houses that are still lived in today, houses that have been abandoned and others that have totally disappeared. The exhibition features historic photographs of local houses, stories of the houses and the people who lived in them. This exhibition is supported with funds from Victorian Government Local Library Funding through the Mechanics' Institutes Victoria.

See the 'Home Sweet Home' exhibition at the Stanley State School/Community Hub.

The exhibition is open Post Office hours - Open Monday - Friday 8.30- 10.30 am & 3.30 - 5.30pm, Saturday 9.00 - 11.00 am. Closed Sunday, Public Holidays and Red Code days or by appointment, contact: 0458 606 922 or 03 5728 6702

Stanley Athenaeum is open for visitors

Every Friday 10am – 12.30 pm and the 4th Saturday 10am – 12.30 pm or by appointment.

Stanley Athenaeum and Public Room, 2 Mount Stanley Road, Stanley. Enquiries: Chris 0458 606 922

E: stanleyathenaem@gmail.com www.facebook.com/Stanley-Athenaeum

Wesson Lecture 2026

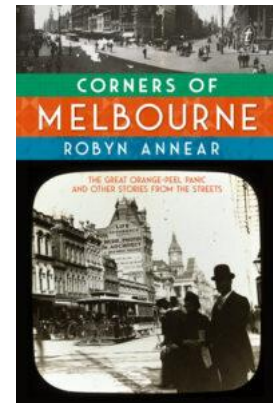
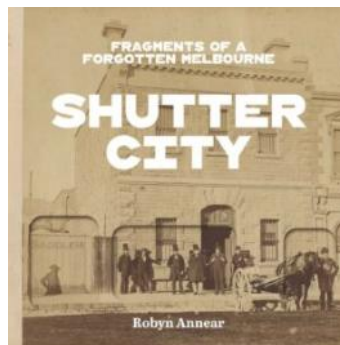
The Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria is delighted that author Robyn Annear will present the 2026 Wesson Lecture on Sunday, February 8, 2026 at 2.00 pm at the PMI Victorian History Library.

Robyn, describes herself as a Troubadour Historian and is the author of ten books including

- Shutter City: Fragments of a Forgotten Melbourne
- Corners of Melbourne: The great orange-peel panic & other stories from the streets
- Adrift in Melbourne: Seven Walks with Robyn Annear
- Nothing New: A History of Second-hand
- A City Lost and Found: Whelan the Wrecker's Melbourne
- Bearbrass: Imagining early Melbourne

It's free, all welcome and bookings are open now on Eventbrite -

[Wesson Lecture 2026 Tickets, Sun 08/02/2026 at 2:00 pm | Eventbrite](#)



Robyn Annear and two of her publications. You can read more about Robyn on her website - <https://www.robynannear.com/>

Wesson Lecture

The Wesson Lecture was established in 2015, and named after Alf Wesson who did much early valuable work to document and photograph Institutes during his decade with the Council of Adult Education from 1962-1972. They were held annually until 2019, then with Covid lock-downs, and some *sturm und drang* at the MIV, it hasn't been held since. We are very excited that the Wesson Lecture is back, with such a wonderful speaker.

The previous lectures were

2015 How We Achieved Victorian Grass Roots Culture with Professor Weston Bate, OAM.

2016 In Search of the Mechanics' with journalist Gideon Haigh

2017 Vision 2020: Transitioning Victoria's State Library into century 21 and beyond with Kate Torney, CEO of the State Library of Victoria

2018 Libraries in Victoria over the Past Sixty Years with a World Sampling with Christine Mackenzie

2019 The Case for Space with Professor Alan Duffy

Alf Wesson was born in 1925 in England, served in the Royal Navy during the War and later came to Melbourne where he completed a Bachelor of Arts with Honours, a Diploma of Teaching, and later a Master of Arts and then a Master of Education. From 1962 until 1972, as noted above, he was with the Council of Adult Education as the Director of Discussion Groups. The collection of photographs of Mechanics' Institutes produced during this time are part of the MIRC collection at the MIV. Alf was married twice, the first marriage to Gwen producing five children and he died in South Africa in 1993.

Events: Past and Future

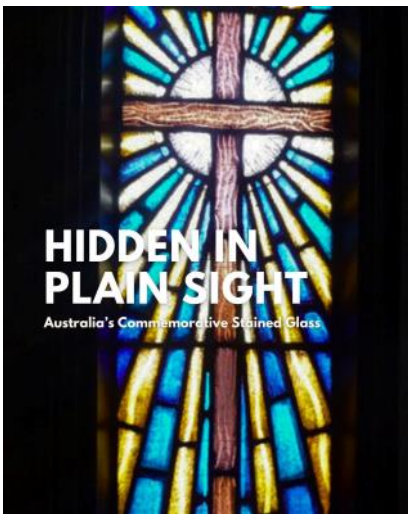
Past event - Jim Lowden supplied this unexpected MI connection

During Rare Book Week in July, Dr Andrew Lemon gave a Lecture on Harry Harbord 'The Breaker' Morant at the Royal Historical Society in Melbourne. The Lecture was very well attended.

Breaker Morant and Peter Handcock were executed in South Africa in February 1902, during the Boer War, for shooting nine Boer prisoners. Another fellow member of the Bushveldt Carbineers was Lieutenant George Ramsdale Witton, who was initially sentenced to death, but had this sentence commuted to a life sentence goal term in England. There, following the brilliant advocacy and intervention of Isaac Isaacs, and even a petition from Winston Churchill, he was released from Lewes Prison in August 1904.

On arriving back in Melbourne in November 1904 he shortly after went to live at 'The Elms' in Lancefield. There he wrote the book *Scapegoats of the Empire* which was printed and published by DW Paterson of Melbourne in 1907. For whatever reason: Government suppression; a fire at the printer/publisher's warehouse; or simply lack of sales, few copies of the original exist today. One source gives that seven known copies exist, either in State libraries or in the possession of the Witton family. This rarity made them worth perhaps several thousand dollars, the Angus & Robertson 1982 reprint regularly sells for over one hundred dollars.

However, the title page of the original printing that Dr Lemon flashed up the screen carried the library stamp of the Lancefield Mechanics' Institute! (No doubt Witton had given the copy to LMI.) It was explained that it came from the book collection of the late Professor Weston Bate which had been gifted to the RHSV. Exactly how Professor Bate acquired it, I guess will never be known. However, the LMI copy has survived. Much has been written and published on the Morant saga, particularly since the Bruce Beresford film *Breaker Morant* was released in 1980 and Dr Lemon canvassed this in his excellent lecture.



Coming Events at the PMI Victorian History Library

Hidden in Plain Sight

Australia's war memorial stained glass, which stretches across more than a century from the Boer War to Vietnam, holds a rich artistic, technological and architectural history. While stone soldiers were erected in suburbs and country towns across the country, churches, schools and civic buildings installed stained glass to remember those who fought for God, King and Empire. Despite artistic excellence many windows largely unknown, forgotten or in danger through continuing church closures.

This short talk, followed by the documentary *Let the Light Shine*, aims to reveal the diversity of commemorations in glass – from grand multi-lights to modest lancets - all of which increase our awareness, enjoyment and knowledge of Australian art, history and society.

When: November 11, 2025 6:30pm – 7:30pm.

Bookings: <https://brushfire.com/pmivictorianhistorylibrary/stainedglass/598056>

Family History Workshop: Become an Ancestry Pro

Join us for our Become an Ancestry Pro workshop, designed to help you dive deep into your family history with confidence. Whether you're just starting out or have hit a roadblock in your research, this hands-on session is perfect for anyone eager to explore their roots. Led by Wendy, a practical and experienced facilitator, this workshop goes beyond theory. Wendy will guide you step-by-step through the powerful tools and features of Ancestry.com. Bring your laptop or device and initiate your search on the day—Wendy will be there to provide personalised guidance, answer questions, and help you uncover hidden gems in your family tree.

When: November 26, 2025 10:30am – 2:30pm

Bookings: <https://brushfire.com/pmivictorianhistorylibrary/ancestryfamilyhistory/598038>

Little River Mechanics' Institute Commemorative Service

On July 27 2027, a commemorative service was held at the Little River Mechanics' Institute to recognise the outstanding commitment of Service men and women during the First World War, especially two local nurses Catherine 'Kit' McNaughton and Sarah 'Sadie' McIntosh. An additional World War One Honour Board was also unveiled.



Left: The Nurses Memorial at the Little River Mechanics' Institute. It was originally unveiled in 2015.
Above: Secretary, Les Sanderson, speaking at the service.
Images from Cr Susan McInyre's Facebook page.

The Little River Historical Society website <https://littleriverhistoricalsociety.com/> has biographical information about Sarah 'Sadie' McIntosh (1885-1970) and Catherine 'Kitty' McNaughton (1884-1953), who were both born in Little River.



Left:
Sarah 'Sadie' McIntosh
(1885-1970)

Image: Little River Historical Society



Right:
Catherine 'Kitty'
McNaughton
(1884-1953)

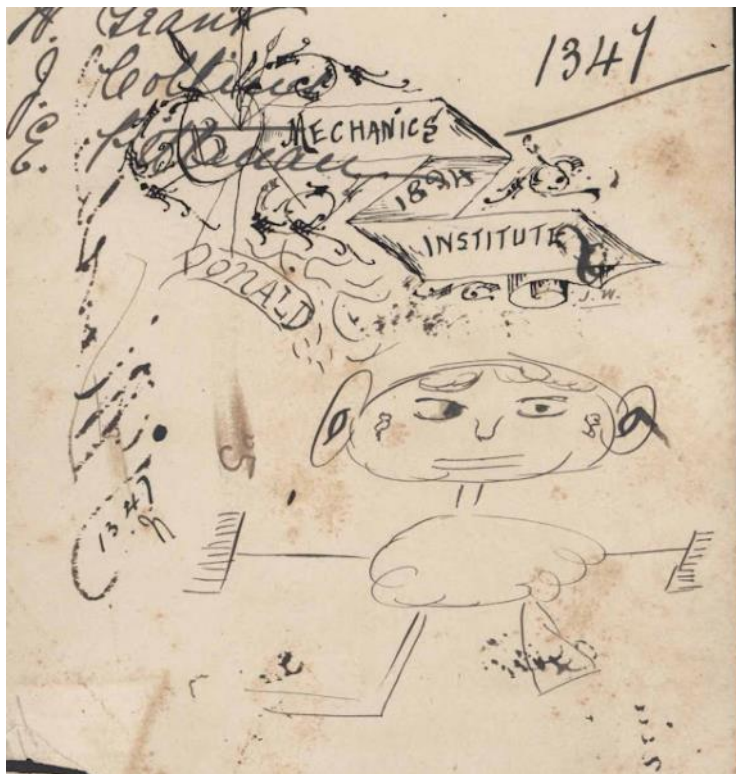
Image: Virtual War Memorial <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/269558>

The mystery of the Quietly Club, Berwick By Heather Arnold

When I was the Local History Librarian at Casey Cardinia Libraries I had an email from the Dandenong & District Historical Society asking if I knew anything about the Quietly Club in Berwick. They had received an email on this subject from Maurice Mishkel from Canada, a collector of stamps and envelopes. Maurice had purchased this envelope, below, addressed to Horace Bennett, Tarcoola Station, River Darling, via Wentworth, New South Wales.



I passed the query onto Judith Dwyer and Corinne Brewis of the Berwick Mechanics' Institute and Free Library (BMI), in High Street, Berwick. The BMI have scanned their Minute Books and Attendance or Visitors Registers and Judith immediately recognized the art work.

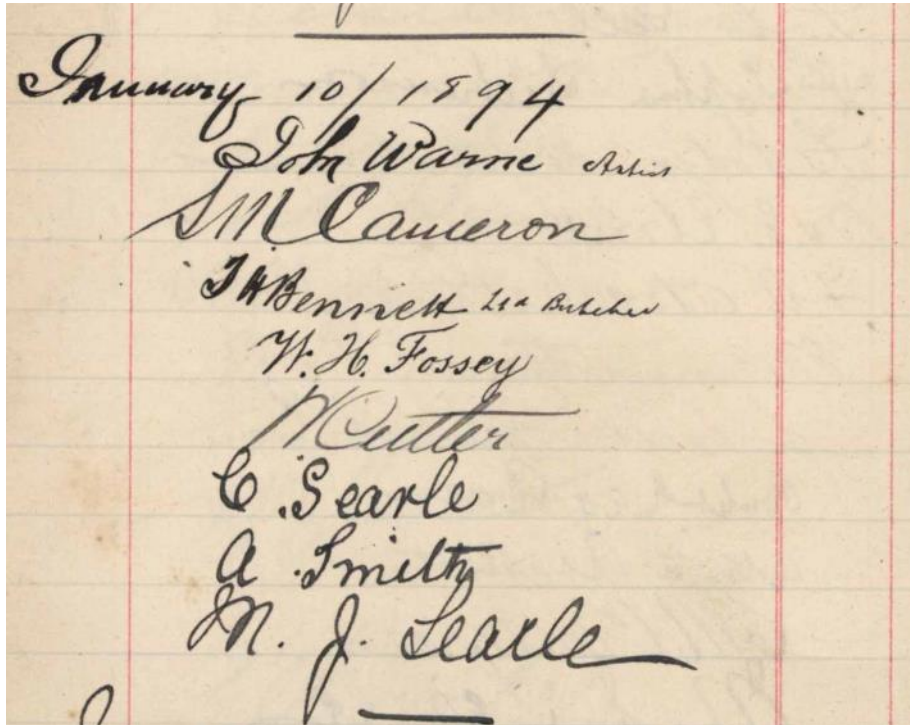


Left: John Warne's illustration from the Attendance Register of June 18, 1894. Image: Berwick Mechanics' Institute and Free Library

The artist was John Warne (1867-1941), a Berwick painter and decorator, who with his brother Charles, a plasterer, had started a business in Station Street (now Gloucester Avenue) Berwick in the late 1880s. In 1901, John married Sarah Henrietta Searle, the daughter of Henry and Jane Searle. Henry had operated a blacksmiths on the corner of Wheelers Street and High Street (known as Searle's Corner) in Berwick from around 1860. Sarah and John had four children - Joseph Thomas (known as Tom) b.1902; Marian Hilda (known as Hilda) b.1904; Jack, b.1907 and Samuel Charles, b.1910. Tom followed his father and also became a painter and sign writer. (1) From 1893, until she married John Warne, Sarah Searle was the Librarian at the BMI (2).

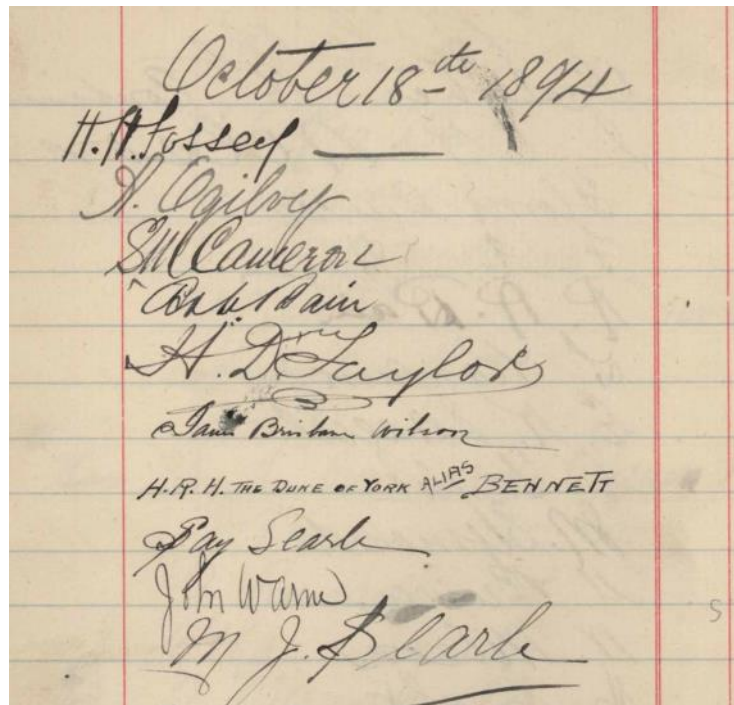
The mystery of the Quietly Club, Berwick

From the attendance books we know that both Horace Bennett and John Warne were regular visitors to the BMI and that John frequently 'annotated' the attendance book, whereas Horace seemed to make jokes about his occupation.



Horace signs in as T.H. Bennett Ltd Butcher, on January 10, 1894. Was he actually a butcher?

Image: Berwick Mechanics' Institute and Free Library

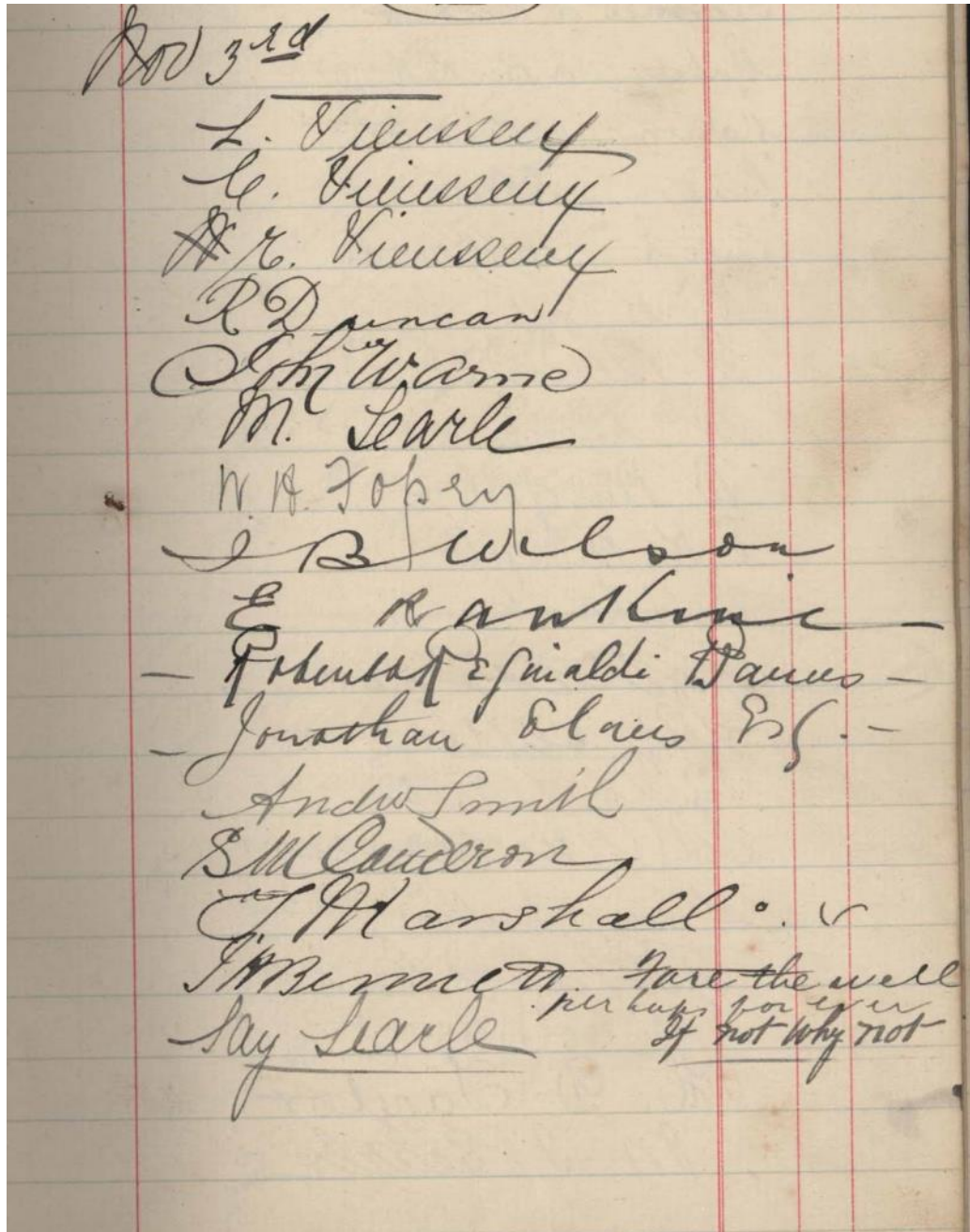


Horace also signed in as H.R.H The Duke of York October 18, 1894

Image: Berwick Mechanics' Institute and Free Library

The mystery of the Quietly Club, Berwick

So what was the Quietly Club? We don't know but can only surmise it was a bit of an in-joke with John and Horace and the other lads. Perhaps it was to do with Libraries encouraging silence or the Library may have been quiet after Horace left.



Horace's last visit to the BMI was November 3, 1894, where he added Fare the Well after his signature.

Image: Berwick Mechanics' Institute and Free Library

The mystery of the Quietly Club, Berwick

Tarcoola Station is near Pooncarie on the Darling River and was firstly occupied by William Campbell. It was taken over by Charles Nicholson in 1851 and at the time consisted of around 30,000 acres. A series of amalgamations with other properties saw Tarcoola having over one million acres in the 1880s, with 21 workmen employed as well as Managers, cooks, maids, grooms, stable hands, a black smith and Chinese gardeners. Tarcoola was broken up in 1918 into ten leases. We don't know what Horace's role was at Tarcoola. An entry in the Attendance Registers lists Horace as a butcher, so may be that was what he also did at Tarcoola, nor do we know when he arrived at Tarcoola. (3).

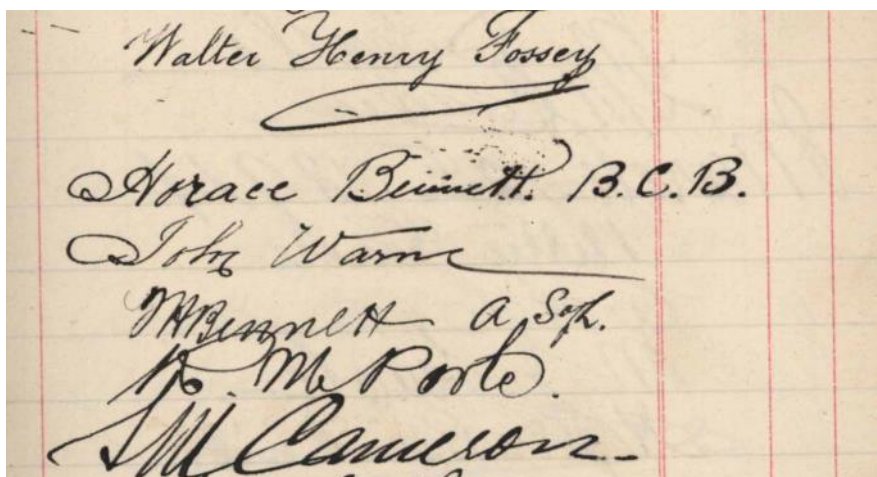
What do we know about Horace? He was T.H Bennett, and that it is likely his father was also called Horace. I can't find any Bennetts in the Rate Books in Berwick in the 1890s; I can't find a reference to a birth of a T. Horace Bennett in Victoria or New South Wales nor a death, that I can say with any certainty would be him; and the same with the Electoral Rolls. Essentially, I know nothing about him, but that he had a sense of humour.

The Horace Bennett Quietly Club mystery brings up a few issues – firstly, the importance of networks. There are hundreds of Local History and Heritage Societies in Victoria, many of whom keep in touch through regional networks such as the South Eastern Historical Association. It's good to know that if you can't answer a query, then you can pass it onto someone who may be able to help. Secondly, it brings up the issue that the role technology now plays in Local History – without email we could never have passed around this query so quickly and if the BMI had not decided to scan all their records would Judith and Corinne have had easy access to the original registers and recognized the art work? Scanning has made all these old Registers immediately available at the click of a mouse button and another click can have these images whizzing around the world.

Thanks to Maurice for sharing his envelope and giving Horace Bennett and the Quietly Club a place in our history.

Footnotes

- (1) *Early Days of Berwick and its surrounding districts*, compiled by Norman E. Beaumont, James F. Curran and R.H. Hughes (3rd edition published by Rotary, 1979); Indexes to the Victorian Births, Deaths and Marriages; John Warne's obituary *Dandenong Journal*, March 26, 1941.
- (2) *Berwick Mechanics Institute and Free Library: a history* by Richard Myers (Berwick Mechanics Institute and Free Library, 1999)
- (3) *The history of Pooncarie and District* by Rob Lans, Thelma Smith and Bill Smith. (Pooncarie School Centenary & Historical Committee c. 1988.)



The entry from March 6, 1894 - there's John Warne's signature, with T.H. Bennett's underneath - and A Sop?
Above John's signature is that of Horace Bennett, possibly the father of young Horace.

What does B.C.B stand for? Berwick Cricket ??, Berwick Cycling??

Image: Berwick Mechanics' Institute and Free Library

Mechanics' Institutes - Local and International News

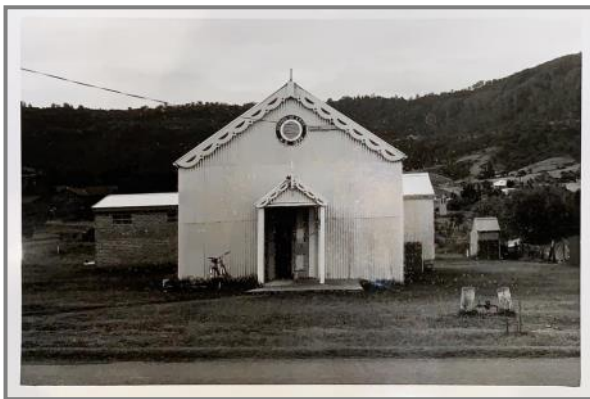
By Jim Lowden

New South Wales

Cambewarra

Cambewarra, situated 11km north-west of Nowra, has a population of 250. The Cambewarra School of Arts was established in 1873 and its Hall was built in 1879. The Hall is still going strong and is very much the community's hub.

Recently the hardworking Committee completed a works program which has stretched over several years. The makeover finished at the 'front' door with a new distinctive sign made which carries the wording 'School of Arts. AD 1873' and this was centrally placed under the gable, which has been topped with a new wooden finial. Yet again it has been proved that 'slow and steady wins the race'.



Cambewarra School of Arts, 1979

Image: Cambewarra Community Hall - School of Arts Facebook page

Warren

Located in the vast Orana Region of the State, Warren population 1400, lies within the traditional lands of Ngiyambaa People.

The Warren Mechanics' Institute was formed around 1873 and it built its premises in 1877 in Dubbo Street, the main street. The Institute closed in 1963 and the building has since been mostly vacant. However, in very recent times it has again been occupied for educational and social purpose by the indigenous Warraan Widji Arts group and has become the base for youth vocal group Jirri Ones and a senior band the The Dreaming Drifters. Warraan Widji Arts is also leading the revival of the traditional Wayilwan language and its songs and the group has recently produced a CD of songs.

South Australia

Yaninee

Centrally situated in the Eyre Peninsula, on the busy Eyre Highway, is the Yaninee Institute established in 1916. After concerted fundraising, in 1917 a temporary pre-fabricated building arrived by train and it was erected and was in use within the week. A more substantial stone building was erected in 1924 and in more recent times a toilet block and kitchen facilities have been added. The Hall and its surrounds, including beds of geraniums and chrysanthemums are very well maintained.

The Institute celebrated the centenary of its main building early this year with a district family reunion, and people came from across South Australia and from interstate. To promote this the Hall Committee ran a 'Dear Yaninee' collecting stories and tales. They also sought pictures and printed memorabilia for the 'Hanging our History' to decorate the Hall's interior walls.

They also plan another Project 'Commemorating the Chrysanthemums' to again stage annual Chrysanthemum Shows, which had once been a feature of the Institute's year. No doubt, the Hall Committee will also be entering specimens from their garden.

The Hall Committee have set a number of projects for completion by 2036 and have costed the works to around \$60,000. On two corners of the building are noticeable cracks, and in those cracks are pieces of paper, with '\$15,000 will repair this crack!' Yaninee may only have a population of eighty, but they intend to live up to the slogan on their letterhead 'Our buildings are our legacy, they will speak for us long after we have gone'. Well done and Good Luck with achieving the target.



Yaninee Institute, 1925

Image: <https://www.yaninee.com/home/>

Mechanics' Institutes - Local and International News

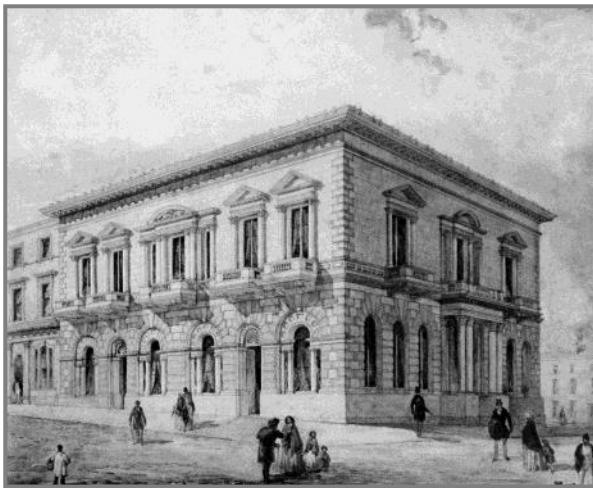
Britain

Burnley

The historic Burnley Mechanics' Institute building has just celebrated its 170th anniversary and to underpin the event Burnley Town Council commissioned Mechanics' Institute historian Dr Martyn Walker to research the rich history. The words were then incorporated with a series of pictures from the Burnley Civic Trust Heritage Image Collection.

The Civic Trust introduction reads: 'We, like so many other Northern towns owe our Mechanics' Institution to the foresight and zeal of a group of local workingmen in this case true mechanics, for they were foundry workers'. The establishment of Burnley in Lancashire dates back to 13th Century with on a monastic settlement, and initially depended on wool, then coal, followed by cotton, and finally iron foundries. Today with a population of 80,000 the area still relies on industry.

The Institute began in 1834 and completed in 1855. The building was sold to Council in 1961. It underwent a major redevelopment in 1986 and again in the mid-1990s. The latter included retractable seating which enabled seating for 400 people, and the area could be converted to an exhibition space within minutes.



Burnley Mechanics' Institute

Image: [https://www.bcthic.org/Articles/Burnleys Mechanics Institute Part 1](https://www.bcthic.org/Articles/Burnleys%20Mechanics%20Institute%20Part%201)

Calverley

Calverley, located near Leeds, was once the home of the Caverley Mechanics' Institute, established in 1850. It built its own premises in 1873 and the Institute continued to operate until 1935. The building and library was then passed to Council and the library continued to

operate there until 1973, when it was relocated to a new building in Thornhill Street. In recent times the old Institute building has operated as an arts and entertainment centre. However, early this year Leeds City Council resolved to relocate then Library back to the Institute building and Council have recently called for submissions on the £200,000 proposed floor plan and refit of the 'new' library to service its population of 4500 people.

Huddersfield

The University of Huddersfield, successor to the Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute, has a student cohort of about 20,000, of which about 4000 are postgraduates. The University recently won an award for design excellence for its latest building.

The six-storey Daphne Steele Building is named for the first black National Health Service matron. Born in 1927 in Guyana, Daphne trained as nurse and midwife and migrated to Britain in 1951. She worked in the US from 1955-60 and in 1964 was appointed Matron of St Winifred's Hospital at Ilkley, West Yorkshire. She retired in 1987 but was still approached in the street to provide help and health advice. Daphne died at Keighley in 2004. The building, designed by architects AHR, is part of Huddersfield's National Health Innovation Campus, which comprises teaching, research and community health care services.

Nottingham

The Nottingham Mechanics' Institution, in central Yorkshire, was established in 1837. Just three years after its foundation it staged the first ever art exhibition in Nottingham and over a period of five months attracted 224,000 visitors and netted £2,996 in admission charges.

Nottingham MI built its first home in 1845 on Milton Street. It burned down in 1867 and was replaced with a new building with double the seating capacity in 1869. This then attracted diverse speakers such as Charles Dickens and Ernest Shackleton. The building was redeveloped on the same site in 1964 and named Birkbeck House.

Following the sale of Birkbeck House, Nottingham MI built a new commodious home in North Sherwood Street which it occupied in 2003. There, diminishing membership numbers and high utility costs have forced a rethink to downsize to smaller premises hopefully to have an historic façade which its previous homes had.

Mechanics' Institutes - Local and International News

By Jim Lowden

Nottingham continued

In the meantime, the Institute building has been purchased by Nottingham Trent University who plan to use it for additional teaching and office space. Nottingham Trent can trace its history back to the Nottingham School of design in 1843 and it achieved University status in 1992. Today, as the UK's seventh largest University, Nottingham Trent has a student population of around 39,000.

St Agnes

St Agnes, located in Cornwall, was once a thriving mining centre. In 1899 philanthropist John Passmore Edwards funded the building of the St Agnes Miners' and Mechanics' Institute. Today, as the beating 'heart of the village', the MMI is indeed a busy place with: arts classes; trapeze yoga; toddlers groups; a writer's club; a book club; youth club, cinema nights; live music; and the recently established Memory Café, which is proving very popular. It also has studios and workspaces for hire.

However, like all Institutes costs have risen rapidly since pre-COVID and with eight part-time staff to run its programs and manage its facilities, and a growing maintenance bill for then aging building, the SAMMI finds itself cash-strapped.

To meet the shortfall, the St Agnes Institute has launched a £50,000 fundraising drive. Their fundraising barometer has been segmented into £10,000 segments: This will help cover our waste removal for a year; This will help cover our utilities for a year; This will help cover our staffing costs for a year; This will get us out of deficit for the year; and this will help us to start working on plans for the future. There is also accompanying wording 'Save the MMI! Help us to keep the doors open for generations to come! Donate Today!'

Canada

Cobourg

The Cobourg Mechanics' Institute was established in Ontario in the 1830s and ceased to exist after the 1895 Library Act. However, its Library legacy lives on and after being at a number of sites it moved into a new two-storey building in Ontario in 1995. Recently it celebrated thirty years of being in that building and a general invitation was advertised to all to pick up a passport, visit eight locations, have your passport stamped at each. Then, those with 'full' passports could pick up a Kawarth Dairy ice cream and be entered to win a gift bag.

Sault Ste Marie

Located on the St Mary's River in Ontario, Sault Ste Marie was a Hudson Bay Co. town and its largely affluent residents maintained their own libraries. Consequently, a Literary Society was not formed until 1873 and this was joined by the Methodist Sabbath School Library in 1878.

The Sault Ste Marie Mechanics' Institute was finally formed in 1890 and it had an annual subscription of one dollar. It itinerated around various premises and finally finished up in two small rooms in the second floor of the Town Hall.

The Library Act of 1895, and the establishment of a local free library, sounded the death knell and the Institute passed over its 967 book collection to Council in August 1896. Sault Ste Marie later had a Carnegie Library built in 1903 and when that burned down in 1907, Carnegie uniquely funded the building of a replacement in 1909.



The 1903 Library.

Image: <https://www.sootoday.com/columns/remember-this/remember-this-the-time-andrew-carnegie-built-two-libraries-for-the-sault-185464>

Rebuilt in 1966 as a Centennial Project for Sault Ste Marie, the now James L McIntyre Library, has been the subject of legal investigation, as in 1896 Council did not pass the required bylaw to establish a library. The Library serves a population of around 72,000. Local employment includes steel manufacture, tourism and the health and education sectors.

Mechanics' Institutes - Local and International News

Ireland

Galway

Strategically located in the commercial centre of Galway, population 86,000, the Galway Mechanics' Institute has been a centre of cultural life for more than 180 years. It was established in 1838 as the Galway Trades Temperance Society and in 1840 was rebadged as the Galway Trades Mechanics' Institute and Morality Association. It moved into its three storey Middle Street premises in 1844.

Earlier this year Galway Council hit the Institute with an €11,000 commercial rate bill. Since then there has been a public relations campaign to show the real cultural face of the Institute. In August Dr John Cunningham of the University of Galway gave a talk on the 'History of the Galway Mechanics' Institute' which traced its changing priorities over the decades from the 1840s. The University also occasionally uses the Institute for in-town events,

Wexford

Wexford Town, in County Wexford, abutting Wexford Harbour, has a population of 22,000. Despite its size it has considerable spread of manufacturing enterprises and retail. One of the features of Wexford's cultural life is the annual Opera Festival.

The Wexford Mechanics' Institute was first started in 1843, but it was short-lived. A second attempt was made in 1849 and this was successful and library and museum was formed and it opened in its distinctive large terraced two bay three-storey premises in 1859.

Over the years the building has had many used and the ground floor many tenants. One long term tenant was

the newspaper the *Wexford People* which occupied the second floor of the building from the early 1970s until 2000.

Wexford Council spent €1 million on urgent structural and stabilization works in 2023-24 and the supporting scaffolding was removed. Since then some €150,000 has been spent on refurbishment works. The new tenants will be three theatre groups: Wexford Pantomime Society, Oyster Lane Theatre Group; and Wexford Drama who will use the building for rehearsals, meetings and the storing of props and costumes.

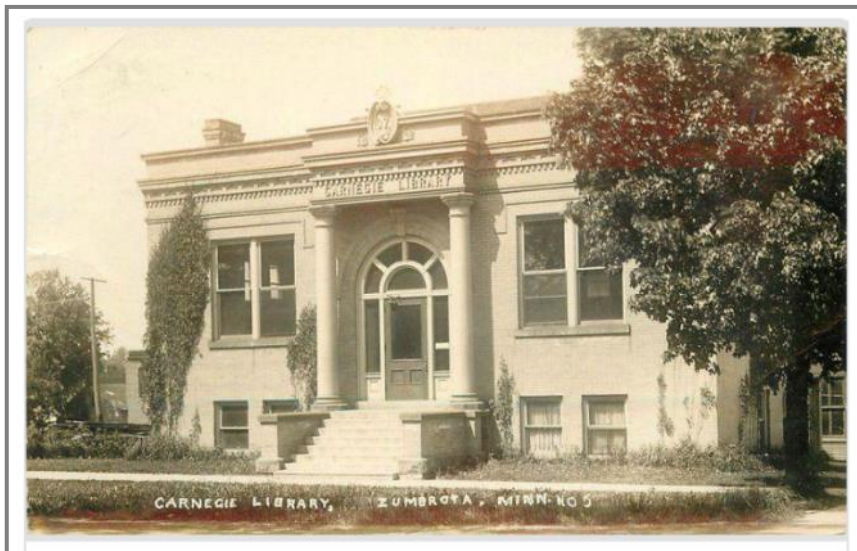
USA

Zumbrota, Minnesota

In Minnesota's Goodhue County, there has been annual Goodhue County Fair, conducted since 1859. They have been staged by the Goodhue County Agricultural Society and Mechanics' Institute. The first Fairs were held in Redwing, then briefly in Hader and since then at Zumbrota, population 3,300. There they leased land until, in 1915, when a 16 acre site was acquired for \$3270.

There it has developed an array of facilities including the large 4H (Young Farmer) Building with an extensive range of teaching facilities and resource. The Fair's Board is also supported by a a long-running Junior Fair Board. (A number of present Board members 'cut their teeth' on the Junior Board.)

During the annual August Fair, when in the evening the grounds light up like a city, fairgoers not only see livestock on parade but also sideshows, carnival rides, a wild west gunfight, and in recent times car racing.



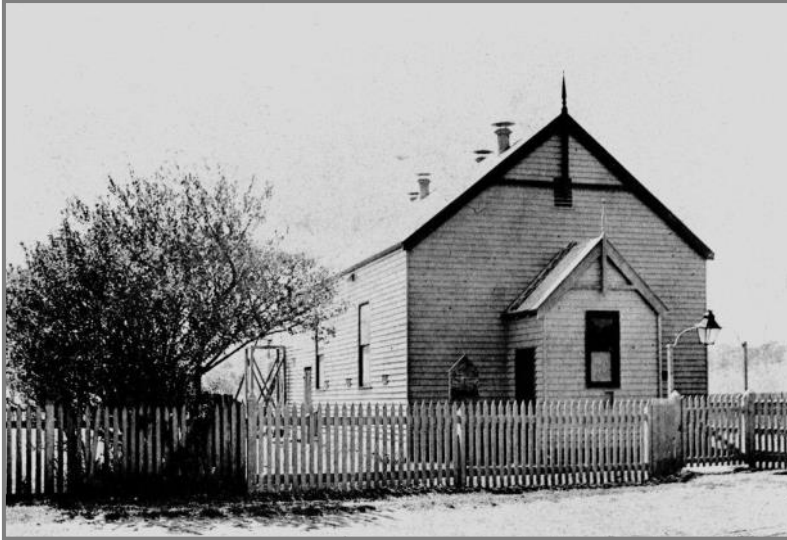
Carnegie Library,
Zumbrota, Minnesota

Image:
[https://
crossingszumbrota.com/](https://crossingszumbrota.com/)

Beaconsfield Hall

By Penny Harris Jennings

A group of local residents met in 1904 with the vision of building a public hall in Beaconsfield. A committee was formed for the management of the hall, which was to provide a gathering place for recreation and education. The agreed location was a prominent position on the Princes Highway opposite where the War memorial now stands.



The hall with a free library would be most advantageous for the community and fundraising for the hall proceeded. The local builder James Adamson was the carpenter of choice and the construction of the building commenced. In July 1906 the Premier of Victoria, Thomas Bent attended the opening. He gave praise to the community for the enthusiasm of such an important public building to service all the residents' communal activities.

During the First World War there were many functions in support of the district soldiers, there were numerous occasions of fundraising and the hall was the venue to welcome home all that returned from war service in 1919.

The hall provided for the residents a multipurpose functional building which included a free library. Over the years there were many different uses including weddings, balls, bazaars, a place of worship and one of the rooms was used for a time as a baby health centre. In the 1930's the hall had a cinematographic machine, which was a welcome entertainment. After 1937 the hall was sold to the "Crown", the reason given was that it allowed the committee to apply for government grants.

The Country Roads Board in the mid 1940's began its deliberation regarding the widening of the Princes Highway, the predicament of the hall position was continually discussed over the following years. Despite this, in 1957 the hall committee received a subsidy for extensions to the supper room. The robust discussion on relocation continued, in 1963 the Beaconsfield Progress Association continued the discourse during the March meeting, numerous committee members, councillors and concerned local residents debated the future possibilities for the building. A popular view during this time was the possibility of moving the hall to the Recreation reserve. A motion was passed that a letter be sent to the Country Roads Board requesting the future planning regarding the highway and its impact concerning the hall.

Despite community protest the hall in the 1970's was sold by tender to Mr H D Allen of Arthurs Creek. This unfortunately meant the hall was demolished instead of the original preferred choice of moving the hall to another location, as desired by the residents. The hall committee received a cash payment to build a new Beaconsfield hall to better service the growing town.

Without a community venue the obvious need was recognised by the local council. The old Pakenham Library was subsequently moved to Beaconsfield next to the scout hall in Beaconsfield Avenue. This provided a necessary place for local groups, which included the Beaconsfield Progress Association, Neighbourhood centre classes, and a crèche. A new hall was not built on the previous model, instead the new Beaconsfield Community Complex was built in O'Neil Road in 2004.

This article was first published in the Beaconsfield Banner <https://beaconsfield.org.au/beaconsfield-banner-autumn-2018-beaconsfield-hall/>. The Hall photograph is from the Wesson Collection, MIRC.

Newport Mechanics' Institute

On July 6, 1935 *The Herald* reported on the opening of the Newport Mechanic's Institute and Free Library – With the assistance of the Williamstown City Council, a fine building has now been completed on the reserve, and was officially opened today. Incorporated in it is a public reading room, subscriber's library, children's free library, and reference library, together with a small hall. The building, which is of concrete, was designed by Mr J. W. Parry, architect, and was erected under the supervision of Mr H. Rose, Williamstown City Engineer. Complete with all appointments, the total cost is estimated at more than £2000.

The institute's committee of management is: - Cr. W. Roberts, president; Messrs G. Young, J. Carroll, J. Adam, G. Paine, S. Wookey, Cr. W. H. McDonald and Mr L. J. Harrigan, who is honorary secretary

The history of the Mechanics' Institute

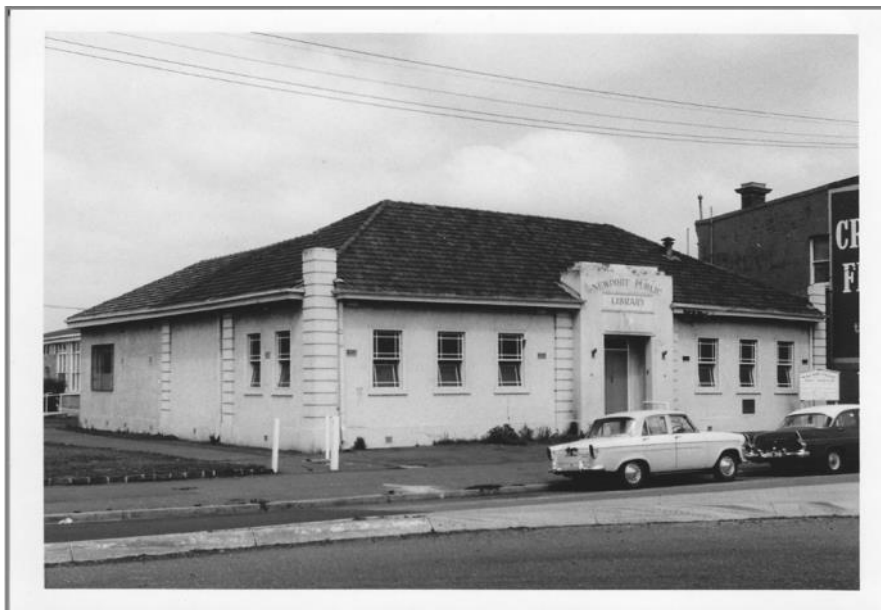
The erection of the building had been a long process and the *Williamstown Advertiser* of October 14, 1933 reported on this issue in the following interesting article, under the headline - *Long Deferred Hopes. History of Newport Movement. Mechanics' Institute and Free Library Proposal*. The report was of Mr L.J. Harrigan's speech. Leo John Harrigan was born in Newport in 1900 to James Edward Harrigan and his wife Mary Margaret (nee Durkin). James Harrigan was an early committee member of the Newport Mechanics' Institute as was Michael Durkin, Mary's father. Leo worked for the Victorian Railways, as did his father and grandfather and he is the author of the book *Victorian Railway to '62*.

Long Deferred Hopes. History of Newport Movement. Mechanics' Institute and Free Library Proposal.

Speaking at a public meeting at Newport on Monday evening Mr. L. J. Harrigan said:— "In outlining the history of the movement to establish a Mechanics' Institute and Free Library at Newport from its inception in 1886 to the present day, the fact must be emphasised that a period of nearly 48 years is covered, disclosing a series of blighted efforts and unrealized hopes for the promotion of the welfare of the community. In February 1886, inquiries were made of the Lands Department, on behalf of the residents of Newport, for the reservation of certain land in Mason street as a site for a Mechanics' Institute and Free Library. In March 1886, acting on the advice of the Secretary for Lands, a meeting of the Newport residents nominated five trustees, and their names were duly gazetted, and the site definitely reserved for the purpose, on March 26, 1886. The trustees were: James Dickson, James Horsley, George Paine, Samuel Rawley Peel, and James Styles.

Money Received and Broken Promises.

The first recorded meeting was held at Grindlay's Hotel (now the Junction Hotel) on April 26, 1886. A general committee was elected, consisting of the usual officers. Mr. S. R. Peel, foreman of the Newport workshops, was the first president, Mr. James Styles, of the Strand, was treasurer, and Mr. John McCraith, station master at Newport, the secretary. A set of rules for the Institute was drawn up by a special committee and later adopted. Less than one month after the first meeting, Mr. Horsley, one of the trustees, died, and his place was filled by Mr. Michael Durkin (after whom Durkin street is named), one of the very early residents of the district.



Newport
Mechanics'
Institute.

Image: Mechanics'
Institutes Resource
Collection (MIRC).

Newport Mechanics' Institute, continued

The committee was very active during 1886, and Mr. J. E. Harrigan was, in November of that year, elected secretary in place of Mr. McCraith, who had left the town. Various ways and means were discussed for raising funds with which to erect the Institute, and a sum of £60/8/6 was received in donations. Meetings were continued at fairly regular intervals during 1887, and efforts were made to achieve the object of a Mechanics' Institute. Plans for a building, submitted by a Mr. Jones, a Melbourne architect, had been selected, but lack of funds prevented the work being proceeded with. At June 30, 1887, a balance of £53/11/ was on deposit in the Commercial Bank. Promised financial support never materialized, and this is substantiated by the fact that over £210 was listed on subscription sheets, but only the £60 mentioned beforehand was received.

Incident of Bank Failures in Land Boom.

From August 26, 1887, to January 9, 1893, research has disclosed no record of any active interest in the matter, but tradition mentions unsuccessful attempts to stimulate public support. On January 9, 1893, at the offices of the now defunct Newport Gas Company, a revival was brought about, but no definite results eventuated. During the period of the early 'nineties history records the financial upheaval and depression which came as the aftermath of what is known as the "Land Boom," and which probably accounts for the lack of success in the attempts to erect the Mechanics' Institute.

Among several banks which failed at the time was the Commercial Bank of Australia, in which the Institute funds were on deposit. On the reconstruction of this Bank, six £10 preference shares, of a face value of £60, were allotted on behalf of the Newport Mechanics' Institute on May 1, 1893. These shares were listed in the names of James Dickson, James Edward Harrigan, George Paine, and Samuel Rawley Peel. The shares are still in existence at the present time, 40 years after, and their accumulated dividends have considerably increased the funds of the Institute.

Flux and Re-Flux.

From the attempted revival in 1893, no progress was made, and interest again lapsed. More than seven years passed before any further action of note was taken. In this period, the discovery of the Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie goldfields in Western Australia caused a general exodus of Victorians to those locations and, no doubt, many residents of this district were included, thus being the probable cause of some loss of support for the Institute. On November 19, 1900, a meeting was held, and nine new trustees for the site were appointed. A new committee was elected, and Mr. J. E. Harrigan re-appointed secretary. On February 7, 1901, a public meeting was held in the Jubilee Hall (where the Salvation Army Hall now stands) in North road, at which the mayor of Williamstown (Cr. George Bevis) presided.

Subscriptions were solicited at the meeting, and the sum of £20/9/ was promised, but only £3/3/ was actually received. During the course of the next few months, further donations were acknowledged from well-wishers in other districts, and two or three entertainments brought in small sums, the combined results adding £16/8/6 to the funds of the Institute.

At this time, the Lands Department had been endeavoring to revoke the reservation of the site, but strenuous efforts made by Mr. Harrigan and Crs. W. E. Treganowan and H. J. Carter prevented such action. At one stage, the land had actually been sold by the Department, as it was claimed that the site was not being used for the purpose for which it had been granted. Also, by this time, 15 years after the inauguration of the Newport Mechanics' Institute movement, death had removed many of the active members of the original trustees and committee, and others had left the district.

Despite the election of new trustees and committee, no practical action was taken. Perhaps the events of the time exerted a depressing influence. The Boer War was in progress, and the death of Queen Victoria in January, 1901, reacted against the Institute by causing a postponement of the public meeting from January 31 to February 7, as mentioned. It is sufficient to state that the Newport Mechanics' Institute and Free Library again passed into obscurity.

Mr. Lemmon's Activity.

Another ten years passed. Early in 1912, the Lands Department again attempted to revoke the reservation of the site, desiring to make a sale, as the land was not being applied to the use for which it was allotted. Mr. John Lemmon, M.L.A., in conjunction with Mr. Harrigan, was successful in retaining the site for the citizens. In March, 1912, a new group of five trustees was appointed by a public meeting, and later officially gazetted. Their names were: Cornelius Bishop, J. P. Carroll, R. H. Drew, Rowland Walker, and W. G. N. Young. At present, only Messrs. Carroll and Young remain, the other three gentlemen being dead.

About this time, the Newport Progress Association joined forces with the trustees and the remnants of the committees in the hope of bringing about the desired result. In 1913, after strenuous efforts, the site was fenced by a working bee of local enthusiasts. A sum of £14/14/3 was raised for the purpose by public subscription, and the Williamstown Town Council donated £15, enabling the cost of £29 to be paid without further anxiety to the committee.

The outbreak of war in August 1914, evidently put the matter of the Institute again into the background, and nothing was done till 1917.

Newport Mechanics' Institute

On July 5, 1917, the mayor of Williamstown (Cr. H. J. Neal) presided at a public meeting in the Masonic Hall, Newport, and which was attended by Mr. Lemmon, M.L.A. A new committee was appointed to consider ways and means of raising sufficient funds with which to commence the building of the Institute, and to report to a future meeting. Such meeting never eventuated, and sixteen years passed by without further action in so far as the actual objective of the Newport Mechanics' Institute was concerned.

Events had long since made it apparent that dissension among the various committees as to the suitability of the site was a strong factor in retarding the progress of the Institute. One of the sources of disagreement was the contention that the site was in too close proximity to an hotel, but the objection of those years is now overruled by the six o'clock closing law. Many suggestions had been made that the land should be sold and a new location selected. In June, 1914, a motion was passed by a majority of the committee that the Minister for Lands obtain a valuation of the site and offer it for sale at an enhanced price on account of the fence. Probably the idea was to then obtain reservation of another site and utilize the money received from the sale of the original towards the erection of a building. However, there is no evidence of any further action in that regard being taken.

Mr. Harrigan's Splendid Pertinacity.

In March, 1931, Mr. Harrigan again successfully intervened against the Lands Department's suggestion that, as forty-five years had passed after the original reservation, and the land was not being used for the purpose for which it was granted, it be offered for sale by public auction. At this stage, a record must be made of the services rendered to the citizens by Mr. Lemmon, M.L.A., for it was only by his strenuous support of Mr. Harrigan that the site still remains available for public use. And thus 1933 is reached, and the purpose now is to detail a statement of the Institute funds in the Commercial Bank, and to give citizens an opportunity to express their wishes as to how this money shall be applied.

These funds consist of the six £10 preference shares already mentioned, together with an accumulation of share dividends, deposits of additional small donations, etc., and interest. For many years, Mr. Harrigan was the sole surviving member of the four in whose names the shares were allotted. Messrs. Dickson and Peel died about 1901, and Mr. Paine died some years later.

With the passing of time, Mr. Harrigan desired to be relieved of the guardianship of the fund on account of his advancing age, and failing health, but he was unsuccessful in this regard, though he was approached on many occasions with suggestions to apply the funds to some other public scheme or organization. There existed, however, no authority for such action, and the necessary proceedings to obtain such authority were not taken by those interested.

Sole Survivor's Demise.

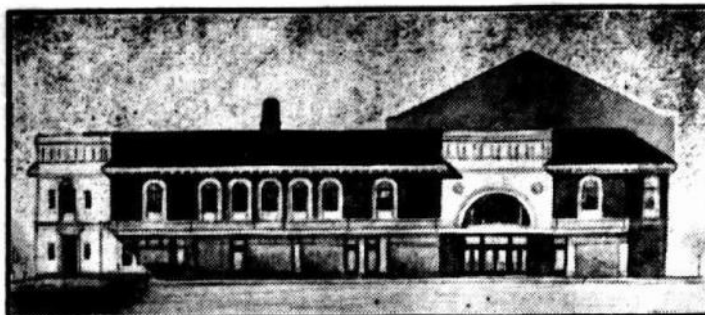
After the death of Mr. Harrigan in December 1932, his family communicated with the Attorney-General and placed the subject of the Institute funds under that Minister's jurisdiction. After lengthy consideration and enquiry, the Attorney-General instructed the representative of Mr. Harrigan's family that an opportunity be given the site trustees to proceed with the erection of the Mechanics' Institute. From this direction has eventuated the public meeting of October 9, 1933. The value of the Institute funds in the Commercial Bank at the present time amounts to £212/14/6, comprising £60 as represented by the six preference shares, and the sum of £152/14/6 in cash.

Remember the Pioneers.

It may be here mentioned that the donors to the original fund, from which the shares were obtained, and which, by its accumulations, constitutes the greater part of the money in the bank, are all now dead. It is to be sincerely hoped that the intentions of those early residents of Newport are not lost sight of, and that their memory may be honored in any action taken by the present generation, for it was their generosity which now places a large sum of money at the disposal of the citizens.

NEWPORT MECHANICS' HALL.

COUNCIL'S COMPREHENSIVE SCHEME



FRONT ELEVATION OF PROPOSED INSTITUTE.

A 1925 illustration of a proposed Mechanics' Institute for Newport. The locals had to wait another ten years before they had their own building.

Image:
Williamstown Advertiser
December 12, 1925.

Mechanics' Institutes - a Name that is Anachronistic and Undemocratic

The *Williamstown Advertiser* of July 13, 1935 in their report on the opening of the Newport Mechanics' Institute had the following paragraph –

NAME THAT IS ANACHRONISTIC AND UNDEMOCRATIC.

We cannot help thinking that a common mistake is perpetuated in the name "Mechanics' Institute." Are we so unimaginative as to be unable to see that the title is a misnomer?—that, descriptive of such a building, it is quite inappropriate? In truth the name-has a lineage that is distasteful. In the old world Mechanics' Institutes were founded by a concession of superior people "for persons of the artizan class," in order to rescue them from ignorance. By means of approved lectures it was desired that workers— using the word in its narrowest connotation—should be kept on traditional lines of conservative thought and taught the restraints due to their station in life. In other words, such institutes stood for the recognition of a lower class. This is all foreign to the Australian atmosphere. To us, "class" is anathema. We all rank as working citizens— though material possessions are diversified by unequal economic conditions—and an artizan or any kind of worker resents patronage by any man.

How stupid it is, then, to go on speaking of Mechanics' Institutes where, eligibility to membership has nothing whatever to do with the nature of anyone's occupation. The People's Institute would be a simple and literally correct appellation, and certainly one worthy of adoption, in Newport; where mechanics or artizans or manual and brain workers are not a class apart from other denizens of the locality. Mechanics did not by any means monopolise Saturday's proceedings, and we may be sure that the membership will, embrace people generally, without distinction. It could be wished, therefore, that the democratic fibre of the residents will assert itself in the adoption of a name in which it is implied that equality and fraternity have a comprehensive application.

In October 1936 at a public meeting attended by 200 people the name of the institution was changed from "Newport Mechanics' Institute and Free Library" to "Newport Public Library"



The Newport Library in March 1987.
Image: Mechanics' Institutes Resource Collection (MIRC).