



# THE LIBRARIES OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTES OF VICTORIA

JUNE 2000



INFRASTRUCTURE

# **THE LIBRARIES OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTES OF VICTORIA**

**Report prepared for  
DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE**

**by  
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# FOREWORD

As the Minister responsible for legislation relating to mechanics' institutes in Victoria, I warmly welcome this report, *The Libraries of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria*, by Frances Clancy which was commissioned by the Department of Infrastructure. It breaks new ground in that I believe this is the first time in Australia that a comprehensive report has been written looking at the future of mechanics' institutes collections across a State and does not dwell primarily on their past.

Mechanics' institutes have always played a vital role in their local communities since the first institute, the Melbourne Athenaeum, was founded in 1839, only four years after Melbourne itself was founded. Today, most institutes which are still standing are used as community halls and meeting places, their collections of books and periodicals having been dispersed.

In several places, however, there are mechanics' institutes which still have books on their shelves. At least eight of these continue to lend material to borrowers. Some others are no longer active but have preserved their collections as valuable records of the past.

These resources are of great importance, not only to their local communities, but also to the State as a whole. As Frances Clancy's outstanding report shows, some collections are of great significance. Their preservation and maintenance is a priority.

Where mechanics' institutes are still actively lending materials, opportunities exist to form strategic partnerships with local public libraries to provide even better services to their communities.

Each mechanics' institute is different and each has its own needs. This report analyses eleven mechanics' institutes from across Victoria and makes recommendations for each one.

The Department of Infrastructure is committed to working with mechanics' institutes, public libraries and their local communities to develop new strategies and directions for these important State and local resources.

**Bob Cameron MP**  
**Minister for Local Government**

# THE LIBRARIES OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTES OF VICTORIA

## Introduction

*There are few Mechanics' Institutes which today retain any part of their historic role as providers of library services. Of those still offering library services, some are subscription libraries, some hold part of their old materials, and some do both. This survey looks principally at those institutes still offering lending services as well as those which hold historic materials.*

*Most are small rural bodies, which exist on impossibly small incomes, yet they retain collections of potential importance in terms of community pride, social history, and tourist interest. To survive at all, they need immediate assistance to find out what they have and to store it safely. They also need varying degrees of help with infrastructure [eg access to PCs, aid with software], some advice and support. They will then also need assistance in preserving their collections and making them relevant to all potential users. Finally, they will need a combined voice and forum to plan their future, individually and as members of a group, and to implement those plans. Ballarat is a special case, with its extensive historic collections.*

*It is important that they receive some subsistence aid as soon as it can be implemented. They are doing as much as they can but their collections are suffering continuing damage. The task will be harder and more expensive if it is not addressed now.*

*In the course of researching this report, I have met many of the enthusiastic volunteers who keep their local institutes operating and I am indebted to them for their assistance during my field work.*

*At the Local Government Division, Graham Dudley has overseen the project and has placed his own extensive knowledge of the State's institutes at my disposal.*

*The Committee of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria Inc. made many valuable suggestions at the outset of my work, and three members in particular, Dr Frank Hurley, Dr Julann Meabank and Mr Richard Myers, kindly read the manuscript and made many helpful comments.*

***Frances Clancy***  
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# THE LIBRARIES OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTES<sup>1</sup> OF VICTORIA

This survey concerns the Mechanics' Institutes' [MIs] present role in the provision of library services. A few still offer a subscription library service to members [their traditional purpose]; others simply still have a significant proportion of their old collections.

The focus of this survey is:

- ↪ to identify collections of potential value
- ↪ to commence planning for their preservation
- ↪ to make them more accessible to the community.

***That any collections survive is to the credit of those who first developed them, those who preserved them, and those who still care for them. In particular, the community owes a vote of thanks to those who still look after these collections, with the most meager of resources. Without their energy and devotion, there would be no collections to preserve.***

The Mechanics' Institutes (MIs) played a major part in the life of Victoria until the 1950s, and this role can in part only be understood through their collections. Surviving remnants of materials from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century show what was available in such libraries. Retaining these samples allows us to see what such libraries looked like, what they offered, how they functioned in their communities. Part of this involves the identification of rare books and periodicals, which are properly part of the national heritage. These need to be located, recorded, and preserved for the future. However, materials held in the current lending collections offered by some of the Institutes at best duplicate the ephemeral holdings of the municipal libraries, and are of no archival importance.

<sup>1</sup> Referred to hereinafter as MIs

## A. OVERVIEW

Based on the British model, the Mechanics' Institute movement served Victoria from 1839 until after World War II, when it was overtaken by the development of the public library system<sup>2</sup>. These MIs served as focal points in their communities, offering libraries and reading rooms, opportunities for self-education, and a variety of other attractions such as lectures, meeting rooms, or dance halls. They were central to their communities, and were directly funded by them, usually through subscriptions.

Few of the MIs still survive, and even for these, their role has changed radically. Most of the old buildings are now used by historical societies or as craft halls, some are used for community or social service. Many lie empty. Only a very small number of them still hold any library materials or offer any library services.

Apart from the Athenaeum and the Prahran MI, the few collections which have survived have done so only because they were incorporated in their successor public libraries, or because they have been fervently defended and preserved by small groups of resolute - even quixotic - local residents. In all cases, there was a critical point in time at which the Institutes' collections were under immediate threat, as their role was overtaken by public libraries with mobile services, or as the communities slowly decided that they were no longer prepared to pay for the maintenance of the collections. By the 1970s, the MIs themselves had fallen into disuse. Left without effective governing bodies, most of the collections across the state simply disappeared. The books and shelves were either sold off or left abandoned in the empty buildings, gradually vanishing over time or being simply thrown out when the space was wanted for other purposes. However, in some small rural centres, at the critical point when the collections could have been lost, one or two influential community members persuaded others that the collections should be retained. They saw them as important because they reflect and encapsulate the community's history, the energy and ambition of its earlier residents, and its sense of continuity.

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<sup>2</sup> Education, enlightenment and entertainment : Paul Jones (1994), p.ix.

## Discussions with representatives of the Mechanics' Institutes

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Discussion with present MI board members and local representatives demonstrated their strong belief that their surviving collections are important in their communities. Indeed, they were initially apprehensive that their collections may be under threat of removal to some central point: they found it necessary to emphasize that each Board of Trustees owned their own collections and would not permit them to be alienated from their own community. However, assured there was no such immediate prospect, several indicated they could be prepared to support a regional approach. In particular, Ararat would be willing to exchange suitable materials to assist in developing a special-interest collection in Ballarat, but would appreciate some measure of help with their own problems as a gesture of appreciation.

Where the MIs no longer offer library service, they tend to be spoken of as being unable or unwilling to look after library materials. Indeed, they are seen as the ones who 'lost' the collections, either by deliberate neglect or by disposing of them wholesale. [During preparation of this report, there were various reports of collections still existing in boxes in back rooms, or in the hands of individuals who may donate them back to the community if their preservation were assured. In most cases, these reports could not be confirmed, but they do suggest there is a better chance of finding any further MI materials by enquiring through local historical societies rather than through the MIs themselves.]

The MIs which do still have some of their old holdings exist on impossibly small resources. Their current lending materials are mostly not very current. There are some new materials (often donated) mixed with old but very well-read paperbacks and older fiction. Their staffing levels are barely at subsistence levels, with reliance in many cases on a small band of enthusiastic volunteers. Consequently, it is not possible to ask them to carry an additional burden in terms of either infrastructure or staffing, to implement any preservation or development programmes.

Recently grants have enabled a conservation study at Ballarat, and have assisted in urgent building works, but essential funds are still raised by selling books from their own collections and those of other closed MI libraries. [Ararat counts as its major source of income a shop leased to a barber for \$40 per week.] They levy miniscule subscription fees, and their operation would not be possible but for the time and effort freely given by members of their communities. If these MIs are to implement any action to record or preserve their collections, they must be given the basic funds and resources with which to do it.

## **Relationships with Municipal Public Libraries**

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There are few formal relationships between the MIs and municipal libraries, even when they operate very close to one another : sometimes within 1 km. Each is well aware of the other, and the MIs see the municipal libraries as a potential source of sympathy and advice. However, the MIs are apprehensive that closer contact may have the effect of their losing their autonomy to a more powerful local organization which they feel does not fully understand their alternative role. The municipal libraries are also wary: even limited assistance could lead to public expectations of further support. As they cannot offer full branch services, this could then be interpreted as discriminatory. Nonetheless, there is goodwill between both parties, which could be used in offering assistance in mounting holdings lists [e.g. Prahran already has its holdings listed on the Stonnington Library Service computers].

## **The Collections of the Mechanics' Institutes**

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The collections of those which still exist are either popular materials [current fiction and light reading] or materials held from before World War II. For the purposes of this review, the provision of current reading materials has been considered only as providing examples of the MI in their traditional role. The same materials are held in every public library throughout the country, so that they do not need to be recorded or preserved in the same way as the old materials.

The materials from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century are different. Here again, there are two main areas of concern. Many of the materials are of interest and concern as showing what was available in such libraries. This would include the fiction, travel, biographies, classical authors, etc. Retaining samples of such collections serves the purpose of allowing current students and tourists to see what such libraries looked like, what they offered, how they served their communities. The more important question is the identification of rare books and periodicals which are properly part of the national heritage. These need to be identified, recorded, and preserved for the future.

## **Identification**

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The MIs need assistance in at least sorting through their materials and identifying those of potential value. Where they are not listed or catalogued, this may entail provision of basic portable PCs, clerical assistance in listing their holdings and their condition, comparison of these holdings with ABN listings, and then full assessment and cataloguing of any items identified as significant. Such items should be listed with a suitable successor body, so that if the MI should cease to exist, these items would be recovered and relocated to either that successor body or another suitable organisation, preferably within the same general region of the state.

## Preservation

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All need practical assistance in the maintenance of the items themselves and their accommodation. Simple works such as providing doors for bookcases should be given priority. The findings of the report at Ballarat by Jeavons Baillie should be taken into account and planning for the other MI collections should be along similar lines, where the nature of the materials would warrant this.

## Access

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All items of importance should be listed in databases which are captured by the national network. While they could be lent only at the discretion of Institute trustees, their existence should be publicly known.

## Grouping of the MIs

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The Mechanics' Institutes assessed fall into three major groups:

- Group 1: Those which still offer Lending Services**  
ATHENAEUM, FOOTSCRAY, PRAHRAN; MALDON
- Group 2: Those which do not lend,**  
but still hold some of their old Collections  
BRIAGOLONG, CHILTERN, STANLEY
- Group 3: Those which, to some extent, do both**  
ARARAT, BALLARAT, BERWICK, PORT FAIRY

Section B will look at the libraries and their collections, making some interim comments on recommendations concerning their collections for each. Section C will consider strategies for retaining the surviving collections, maximising access and ensuring their viability. Section D will look more generally at the problems of maintaining individual holdings in their communities.

## B. THE INSTITUTES & THEIR LIBRARY COLLECTIONS






### **Group 1: Institutes offering mainly Lending Services**

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This group of MI libraries continues to lend current materials to subscribers. Generally speaking, they operate on extremely small budgets, drawn from leasing part of their premises and current subscriptions. They hold little archival material except that concerning their own history.

#### 1.1 The Melbourne Athenaeum

The Athenaeum is the principal example of a subscription lending library of current materials. It has a small historic collection consisting of:

-  its own deeds and some old mortgage papers
-  some letter books
-  an old suggestion book from the 1890s
-  a complete set of their annual reports
-  perhaps most interestingly from the statewide point of view, some old hall books, showing when the halls were booked for specific meetings or performances, and when local artists or groups of artists held exhibitions there. These books represent a rich source of basic information on the development of the arts in Melbourne in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Athenaeum has a card catalogue of the current lending collection but the historic materials are not catalogued. There is no external access to lists of their holdings.

It should also be noted that the Athenaeum, along with the library of the Council of Adult Education, provide the only generally accessible lending collections in the central City area.

## 1.2 Footscray Mechanics' Institute

The Footscray Mechanics' Institute operates purely as a lending collection of popular current materials. It hopes to create (mostly by donation) a small specialist collection of feminist history. The Footscray Historical Society already holds most of its historic records, but the Institute still holds:

- 📖 its own annual reports from 1890s to date
- 📖 membership registers and receipt books of the IOOF [Oddfellows Institute], ca.1895, in poor condition
- 📖 some 19<sup>th</sup> century materials (mostly novels), boxed by topic but not catalogued.

The Institute has good but not close relations with the local historical society and with the local public library (Maribyrnong Library Service). The local TAFE branch of RMIT uses the library for student tours and work placements.

## 1.3 Prahran Mechanics' Institute

The Prahran MI specialises in Victorian and local history, but its holdings are primarily of contemporary material rather than historic or archival documents. It has a few rare books and some historic photos (only about half an album). Most materials not required for the collection have been placed in either the Public Records Office or in the Stonnington Archives. The current collection is fully catalogued on the URICA 2000 system owned by Stonnington Public Libraries, with a terminal in the Institute library. Holdings are available through the Stonnington on-line catalogue and therefore also on Internet.

## 1.4 Maldon Athenaeum

Another surviving institution is the Maldon Athenaeum, which functions very much as a Mechanics' Institute Library.

Maldon is still richly served, with the Athenaeum, a Museum, and Archives. All rely on volunteer staff and are run by community-based committees. There appear to be no formal links between them, but overlapping of committee members and volunteers ensures awareness of one another's activities.

### Museum and Archives

The Museum and Archives are beside the old shire offices (which now offer a community bank and a tourist information centre). They hold local historical and genealogical materials, including some photocopied cemetery, school, hospital and church records.

A major part of their resources (rate records, local newspapers, most of the cemetery records) are on microfiche or microfilm, so while they are important local research materials, duplicates are held at the State Library of Victoria. Some, such as partial baptismal registers of the Methodist Church and records of the Barringup Cemetery, are copies of local transcriptions, and may not be held anywhere outside Maldon. There are also records such as a copy of the card catalogue prepared by Miles Lewis when Maldon was first researched as a historic precinct.

## Athenaeum

A block away is the Athenaeum, beside the old Maldon Post Office. The Athenaeum has been active in Maldon since the 1860s, but the present 1930s building replaces one destroyed by fire<sup>3</sup>.

The Athenaeum is funded by subscriptions and the rental of space for meetings and as offices. Opening hours are Fridays from 2-4 and Saturdays from 9.30-10.30. It operates in two rooms, with open wooden shelves holding the majority of the material. Old prints include scenes of explorers and a painted reproduction of a local family photograph. A trophy cupboard hold a collection of polished silver cups, etc., won by fire teams, marching girls, and sports clubs.

There is little contact with the North Central Goldfields Library, though their bookmobile calls at 2 sites in Maldon (the hall and the school) each week. As this serves the needs of children, the Athenaeum primarily serves adults. The collection of some 5600 items includes mostly current genre fiction and biographies, listed in an accession register. There is a small collection of general-interest books and encyclopedias, and bound copies of the *Pastoral Review* (Melbourne) for 1923, 1925, 1926, 1931, 1932, and 1933.

There has been a conscious policy of collecting material about the area and by local authors. When the local newspaper (the *Tarrengower Times*) suspended publication in the 1970s, a small roneoed newsletter – the *Maldon Historic Promotions League Newsletter* – filled the gap with community news and notices.<sup>4</sup>

A small collection of local material includes conservation studies, a study of local gardens and historic houses, and books of old clippings and postcards. Pamphlet boxes hold current materials on land conservation.

The Athenaeum also has a prepared display, used for community events such as the Maldon Easter Fair.

<sup>3</sup> It is on Crown land, supervised from Bendigo (through Bill Dundas, at the Bendigo State Offices. While it seems in generally good condition, the appearance of the roof suggests it should be urgently checked for rust).

<sup>4</sup> I have already suggested to the committee that it would be advisable to have photocopies made of this and of some other small out-of-print publications, and copies lodged with the Latrobe Collection at the State Library. This could easily be a sponsored program.

## **Group 2: Institutes holding a significant proportion of their historic Collections**

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This group consists of one MI, at Briagolong. This still holds a major part of its historic collection, but does not offer any current subscription service. It is of special interest in that it is the only substantial MI collection which has not been altered by use in the last half century. None of the other MIs can present as complete an example of a small MI library, with its original holdings on their original shelves.

### **2.1 Briagolong**

Briagolong MI is still an active community centre. The old material is held on the original shelving, in the original building (though not the original room). The Institute hopes to fit glazed doors to these shelves, to replace the missing solid timber ones, and to preserve the books better. They have indicative quotes from a cabinetmaker willing to replace the doors in appropriate style and timber, at cost.

The collection consists of material from 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, about ¾ fiction. It was fully catalogued, under a Youth Work scheme, some 3-4 years ago and the catalogue is held on cards at Maffra. There are some historic photographs and portraits, of local importance.

Briagolong has good relations with both the Wellington Library Service and with the History Department of Monash University (Gippsland Campus). The MI still serves the community as a Community House, and is in fact extending the building to accommodate this role. The mobile library operated by the Wellington Library stops directly outside.

## 2.2 Chiltern Athenaeum

This building has been continuously used for public purposes since 1866. Initially it was occupied by the Shire and the Athenaeum. The building now functions principally as a local museum, but it still contains much of the old library materials and furnishings.

The Athenaeum operated as a local library here until 1970. When it moved to a new building as part of the Upper Murray library network, the original furnishing and nearly 10,000 books were left.

The furniture is mostly locally made and heritage-listed. There are reading tables, a captain's chair and a librarian's chair, two chest tables. One major piece is a cabinet made locally for the Athenaeum Trust in the 1880s for the display of trophies, etc.

Books are stored in the original glass-fronted cabinets. While the majority are novels, three of the cabinets contain history, travel books, philosophy, and some materials for those learning mechanical crafts. Those in the cabinets appear in reasonable condition, though they are stacked up to three deep in 18 drops. (More are held in boxes in a shed, but these were simply boxed after flood damage in 1961, and may not be salvageable.)

The collection includes works by authors with local connections – Henry Handel Richardson, Mary Gaunt (a local author of the 1860s,) and Wilder Busse (2 published works, *Golden Plague* and *Blue Beyond*, and also a suitcase of unpublished manuscripts including novels and a stage play). A shepherd working at El Dorado – Alfred William Eustace - is represented by a manuscript diary and poetry from the 1840s and paintings on leaves from local gum trees. There are also locally produced items dating from the 1840s to the 1990s, such as embroidery and handcraft, Aboriginal nulla nullas and throwing sticks, a collection of costumes worn by local identities, glass and ironmongery from local factories and foundries, theatre memorabilia and farm implements, and Australian gemstones kept in two cabinets dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The annual Chiltern Art Competition for realist paintings on local historic subjects adds a painting each year.

An archive is being developed and will be housed next door, in a refurbished building recently vacated by the Country Fire Authority. This will accommodate rate books of the 1900s (those of the 1800s were lost at some time), records of three cemeteries from 1881 (some originals were lost in a fire, but they are being reconstituted from other records wherever possible).

The most impressive feature of the Chiltern Athenaeum is the high degree of local interest and support it receives, with a stream of volunteers and a number of citizens who willingly undertake research or locate suitable items from a variety of sources to extend the collection and maintain its local character.

## 2.3 Stanley Athenaeum

The Stanley Athenaeum operated as a lending library from the 1860s till the 1970s. The building has recently received a grant for the repair of the roof, and is also being replastered, so the shelves were mostly under plastic sheeting. In consequence of this, access to the collection was extremely limited. There are approximately 3000 books, in approx. 20 drops of 4 shelves each. The collection has been catalogued by Upper Murray. The majority consists of conventional fiction of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century. 10-20% (2 or 3 drops) would be non-fiction, similar to that held by most of the MIs, including dictionaries, travel books, and classic histories. There are also a few rare items of local relevance (such as a history of Stanley entitled *The Box Seat*, and *The Old Trail*, pub. 1890s, and items of mining history such as *Goldfields and Mineral Distribution in Victoria*, by R. Brough Smith.). There are also records such as the illuminated address of the Stanley Rechabites, 1869. They also hold a considerable number of their old circulation records, which could be a source of interest to genealogists.

The collection here is principally of local interest, and efforts should be directed towards its preservation in the context of local identity and tourism. Immediate advice is needed on preservation, even just wrapping and boxing identified resources in pH neutral materials until restoration can be attempted.

### **Group 3: Mechanics' Institutes with both Current Lending and Historic Collections**

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These Mechanics' Institutes offer subscription services at very small cost, to local subscribers as well as owning collections of historic materials. The subscriptions are their major source of funds. Their lending collections are predominantly recent (post 1970) bestsellers and popular genre fiction: westerns, thrillers, romances. Ballarat still lends much of the old material, which is probably no longer wise. Ararat and Port Fairy have small MI collections held separately from the subscription libraries, in Port Fairy's case as a separate historic holding, in Ararat's in a small storeroom upstairs. Berwick is a large modern lending library which also has important collections of nineteenth century materials and significant material from the estate of Lord and Lady Casey.

#### **3.1 Ararat Mechanics' Institute**

The MI here is occupied by social advice and assistance agencies, with a shop leased to a barber for \$40 per week, which, apart from donations and subscriptions, provides its major source of income. There is a small library of current popular materials on the original shelves. Upstairs, there are some 40 shelves of books from the old MI library, including a range of materials, mostly in poor to fair condition. Some old fiction is held in boxes. As at the Ballarat Mechanics' Institute, some has come from other MI collections now closed.

#### **3.2 Ballarat Mechanics' Institute**

The Ballarat Mechanics' Institute holds a remarkable collection in the historic MI building which is on the Victorian Heritage Register. It still has materials for the use of present subscribers. Much is contemporary, but there are rare and historic items amongst them. Items in the lending collection are identified on a card catalogue. There is no electronic catalogue of any of the holdings, and a listing of the historic material is not available at the Institute but may be recorded in bibliographies of early printed materials. This requires further investigation.

In storage areas upstairs, there are 20-30 bookcases of old material, much of it originally owned by other MI libraries at places such as Clunes, Creswick, etc. This material has been used for a series of booksales to raise funds. It would be strongly advisable to assess what is there before any more is sold.

There are also cellar and basement areas with remarkable runs of newspapers and periodicals, both Australian and overseas, and books from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of these are listed in the Appendix.

The storage conditions are very variable. Urgent assistance is needed to prevent items from deteriorating further, though recent work has improved storage conditions greatly. A conservation report has been compiled which recommends priorities for urgent conservation measures. This report should form the basis for any future planning.

Ballarat draws its income principally from leases and rentals of shops and the notable Victorian-era theatre, and from current members' subscriptions. The funds are barely adequate to keep the doors open, and any cataloguing or conservation measures must be funded from external resources. The MI has no formal liaisons, but holds frequent discussions with Heritage Victoria, the University, Central Highlands Regional Library Corporation and the local historical society.

The Ballarat MI is actively engaged in planning for the development of their collections and their building, in co-ordination with other authorities in Ballarat: the Central Highlands Regional Library Corporation, the Public Record Office Victoria – Ballarat Repository, and local historical societies and tourist authorities. The MI building is located in a lively cultural precinct, being near the Majesty's Theatre and Camp Street, where the University's arts and history departments are now located.

### **3.3 Berwick Mechanics' Institute**

Berwick operates as a subscription library, and also holds part of the personal library of the late Lord and Lady Casey. Other parts of the Casey's library went to the National Library of Australia and the Mitchell Library at the State Library of New South Wales, as well to family members.

Berwick also has significant holdings of nineteenth century material, both print and manuscript. This includes English periodicals, loans registers and visitors' books. The Casey materials should be listed and their details recorded with the other libraries holding Casey materials. Other Casey material held includes original paintings and silk embroideries, with family associations, including works by the noted wildflower artist, Ellis Rowan. These too should be recorded with the National Gallery and the Museum, with suitable successor arrangements in place for all the materials.

### 3.4. Port Fairy Mechanics' Institute

Port Fairy Public Library took over the MI, and the majority of its stock was incorporated in the municipal library collection which is now part of the Corangamite Regional Library Corporation. A representative selection of around 1,000 books was retained in the original shelving in the old reading room. The collections were assessed, and items not required were sold. Funds from the sale of materials were put into fitting glass fronts to the cases, to help preserve the books. Most of the material still held is non-fiction from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is owned by the MI trustees, who are reluctant to let items leave the building. They have been catalogued, and a computer disk of their holdings is available. The few rare books are listed with the National Library of Australia. They have a few original sketches by Hal Gye (1888-1967) and other artists of the *Bulletin* school. There are no old local newspapers. The only major periodical is a bound set of the *Illustrated London News* from the mid 1880s to 1908/9. The local paper is held only on microfilm.

The building represents problems for the collection: the ceilings are ca.20 feet high and the bluestone walls are 2-3 feet thick. Damp in winter is a constant hazard. Current fundraising is being channelled into restoration of individual volumes, but this is at the rate of only 1 or 2 items each year.

## **C. SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTES**

### **Group 1**

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These recommendations relate to those Mechanics' Institutes which offer current lending services to their subscribers. Their collections are not primarily historic in focus.

#### **1.1 The Melbourne Athenaeum**

Apart from building maintenance, largely shared with the Melbourne City Council, the Athenaeum would profit most from assistance in installing a computer-based catalogue and from the recording of their important archival material. The existence of the old records should be recorded with both the performing Arts Museum at Victorian Arts Centre and the Latrobe Collection at the State Library of Victoria. There should also be a 'sunset' agreement that, if the Athenaeum should ever cease to operate as a library, the historic material should be transferred to either of these institutions.

#### **1.2 Footscray Mechanics' Institute**

Footscray MI does not have significant historic holdings. To survive even in its present form, it may need some assistance with infrastructure costs [building maintenance, upgraded computers]. It would probably be best served with technical assistance channeled through an associated body, perhaps the Footscray Historical Society. Assistance channeled through Maribyrnong Libraries could lead to expectations that it should offer services similar to a branch library. It may be difficult to avoid charges of discriminatory treatment if it were to retain its present identity under their auspices.

## 1.3 Prahran Mechanics' Institute

This library provides an effective model for most of the surviving MIs. It is using its partnerships with Swinburne University and Stonnington Library & Information Service effectively to provide its cataloguing and archival requirements.

They are fortunate in that they are in a comparatively sound position compared to some of their colleagues. However the Institute's specialisation in Victorian history and genealogy could be further encouraged, perhaps through strategic alliances with other libraries and organisations.

## 1.4 Maldon Athenaeum

### Suggestion for Specialist Collections

The Athenaeum is already collecting the works of local authors, and this program should continue on a more formal basis.

While Maldon is part of the historic goldfields area, the Athenaeum holds no old material related to gold mining. In discussion with members of the committee, I suggested that, as this may be undertaken by the Ballarat Mechanics' Institute, Maldon should emphasize its own role in the history of the goldfields, but in a specialist area of its own. It should complement the technological bias of the Ballarat collection and offer another defined point of interest for the developing goldfields tourist industry<sup>5</sup>.

The community is very conscious of social history. In addition, the Athenaeum is beside the old Post Office. This was where Henry Handel Richardson's mother was postmistress : it was to their life in this residence that she refers in both *The Getting of Wisdom* and *Myself When Young*.

I have therefore suggested that the Maldon Athenaeum use this as a thematic basis by beginning a collection of books and materials written *for* and *about* children in Victoria, especially prior to 1945<sup>6</sup>. Such a collection could be developed over time, through purchase, donation, sponsorship or exchange.

<sup>5</sup> This suggestion is already an agenda item for the next committee meeting.

<sup>6</sup> This would include materials about children and their lives on the goldfields, works by authors such as Mary Grant Bruce, or Patsy Adam Smith's stories of growing up in Victoria. The material should all be linked wherever possible through the theme of Henry Handel Richardson's childhood experiences, right next door.

## **Future Assistance**

The Athenaeum, the Museum and the Archives need to decide between themselves which records each will hold or collect. The present informal arrangement works well, but needs to be formalized. Both institutions need to establish 'successor' policies, to ensure the permanent security of their materials.

They could also exchange information with the North Central Goldfields Library, so both are aware of the region's resources in the field of local history. This information should also be available to the Latrobe Library.

The Athenaeum is already working on a collection development policy, which is expected to incorporate a specialist collection on the lives of Victorian children prior to 1945, giving an identity and focus suitable to Maldon.

They are also interested in working with the Mechanics' Institutes towards solving their common difficulties. They expressed interest in getting access to common software and training for cataloguing their materials, and are also prepared to make their records available together with those of the Mechanics' Institutes. This could even extend to exchange of individual items between the MIs, if suitable.

They would also like to discuss duplicating rare or out-of-print materials, and finding sponsorship for this.

They too need a glass-fronted bookcase for the security of rare materials.

## **Group 2**

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Mechanics' Institutes which retain a significant part of their old collections, but do not offer any current services. A group of one – Briarolong Mechanics' Institutes.

### **2.1 Briarolong Mechanics' Institute**

Briarolong need access to a computer and appropriate software, preferably capable of creating records that can be integrated with those of the Wellington Library Service. The card catalogue, at present held at Maffra, should be converted to an computer-based catalogue as soon as possible. These records could then be added to the Wellington Library's catalogue with a location code identifying it as a separate non-borrowing collection. The MI should be provided with a terminal in its own building to enable them to access their own records and the catalogue of the Wellington Library Service. Such a terminal would also benefit the Community House activities.

Briarolong would also benefit greatly from assistance in fitting doors on the shelves. Until this is done, they cannot use the room without compromising the security of the historic materials on the open shelves. Glass fronts would also protect the materials from smoke, damp, etc.

### **2.2 Chiltern Athenaeum**

Many of the items held at Chiltern lie outside its role as an MI. However, the books and manuscripts are a different matter. The books need to be sorted and assessed (especially the boxed items, flood-damaged nearly 30 years ago and not since assessed), and catalogued, preferably through the agency of the Upper Murray Regional Library who have already catalogued the Stanley Athenaeum collection. Works by local authors, and unpublished manuscripts, need special consideration, and should probably be duplicated for the Latrobe Collection. Original art works also need to be duplicated for the Latrobe Collections.

### **2.3 Stanley Athenaeum**

The Stanley Athenaeum collection has already been catalogued by the Upper Murray Regional Library. The most urgent need here is therefore for secure shelving (glass doors for the shelves) and for the continuing maintenance of the building.

## **Group 3**

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Mechanics' Institutes which offer both current subscription services and hold significant historic collections.

### **3.1 Ararat Mechanics' Institute**

Ararat MI urgently needs assistance in checking their holdings and would need access to a PC with suitable software to list what they have. They would also need at least one closed bookshelf to protect items identified as having value, and they also need assistance with conservation. In return, Ararat would be willing to offer any suitable materials they hold to a regional MI library at Ballarat [see recommendations in Section E].

### **3.2 Ballarat Mechanics' Institute**

Suggestions for the important Ballarat collection are given separately in Section D.

### **3.3 Berwick Mechanics' Institute**

Berwick Mechanics' Institute could be provided with assistance in forward planning, and also in accessing a computer and suitable software. The historic nineteenth century material needs to be recorded, appropriate conservation undertaken, and secure storage installed. The Casey material should be sorted, identifying items of importance, including association copies signed by the authors or the Caseys and other significant items, and recording them in suitable bibliographies etc. A plan for the long term preservation of this material should be developed.

### **3.4 Port Fairy Mechanics' Institute**

The major requirements here are assistance with the restoration of the old bluestone building, and with the restoration program, setting priorities and increasing the rate of treatment. They perceive their biggest problem as being funds to preserve the collection. The old building has 20-foot ceilings and 3-foot bluestone walls: dampness in winter makes the conditions dangerous for the books. Assistance could be provided in maintaining the building, ensuring that all the cabinets are suitably fitted with glass fronts, and for their preservation programme, as local fundraising can only manage to conserve one or two books each year.

## **D. A SPECIALIST MI COLLECTION AT BALLARAT**

The State's most important Mechanics' Institutes' collection is held at the Ballarat Institute. Here a major MI collection is held in the original building in a developing historic precinct, supported by tertiary and tourist authorities. This MI already holds major collections of historic materials. Much of the material was originally owned by Ballarat, while the upstairs storage areas contain unsorted material salvaged from other MIs at places such as Creswick or Clunes.

There is considerable scope for developing exciting new directions for the Ballarat MI capitalising on both its historic collections and building. A primary focus should be those holdings which may be unique, especially the long runs of bound nineteenth century periodicals.

There is a strong local historic precinct redevelopment program underway in Ballarat, centred on Camp Street, which could incorporate the historic MI collections and building. This would add a further dimension to the overall development and also give strength to the MI itself as a major element in the scheme. It could be used to strengthen the historic and tourist elements, and to offer a special resource by including a collection on goldmining in the area. This could add to the Ballarat University's history of technology focus, build on the strength of Sovereign Hill and add depth to the understanding of mining technology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed this collection could in time assume national importance.

The general collections of nineteenth century materials are becoming more and more valuable as time passes, but are also becoming more fragile. Rather than continuing to lend them, they should become reference collections, housed as a display and research collection, with on-line details of the holdings available nationally.

Ballarat MI would benefit from assistance and computer resources, to list their holdings (books and periodicals) and compare these with national and state holdings. All should be listed as an interim step to full cataloguing, using Kinetica records where available. Those items of which there are few copies in Australia should be accorded special treatment. Their holdings should be fully catalogued, their condition assessed, their accommodation reviewed from the point of view of preservation, and conservation priorities and schedules developed, with reference to the recent conservation strategy report.

## **Suggested Special Collection**

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One of the historic rooms in the building could profitably be developed as a special collection on *Goldmining in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*. Such a collection would be of interest in terms of the strong local history program, socially, for the region and the nation, and also in the history of technology.

Of special interest would be any contemporary (i.e. 19<sup>th</sup> century) technical or historic works demonstrating the theoretical and practical information available to the miners and their interest in the history of mining. The available material should be assessed and all items which were available to the miners in their operations – the contemporary technology within which they worked – gathered into such a special collection. Other items reflecting their wider interest, such as items on the history of mining, should be included. Suitable items on the shelves at present are works such as Sir Richard Burton's *Gold Mines of Midian and Ruined Midianite Cities* (damaged, but in the original edition of 1878), or a 19<sup>th</sup> century copy of *Ore Dressing: Metallurgy of Silver, Gold and Mercury in the United States*. In pragmatic terms, it would be appropriate to include all suitable materials published prior to World War I.

## **Periodicals**

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The long runs of periodicals, both from Australia and overseas, represent a major resource which needs urgent assessment and attention. The periodicals should be sorted, the holdings listed and compared with national holdings, their condition assessed and conservation measures undertaken as a matter of urgency. Again, the conservation report will provide a starting point for this project. It should be stressed that these items are being held in unsuitable conditions, and urgent steps should be taken to at least list and conserve them to prevent further deterioration in the short term.

## **Regional Co-operation**

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Discussions with Ararat MI established that they would be willing to assist in any such development. They would be prepared to offer any suitable materials they hold to such a collection, provided such items were identified as donations from Ararat MI. In addition, the items from Creswick, Clunes, etc. should be sorted through and suitable items added to the collection. It may also be possible to approach the university library to see if they would be willing to donate suitable materials, especially anything which survives from the old School of Mines.

This would give four separate collections at Ballarat MI, but there is room to accommodate them all and to develop their individual potential. The four collections would be :

-  goldmining in the 19<sup>th</sup> century
-  bound periodicals
-  the general-interest 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century holdings [a non-lending collection]
-  the subscription library offering current materials.

On the broader scale, Ballarat Mechanics' Institute is well placed to develop strategic partnerships with both the Central Highlands Regional Library Corporation and the University of Ballarat. Both institutions have an interest in, and collections relating to, the history of the area. As well, the Ballarat Repository of the Public Records Office holds substantial collections of public papers. Though it could be a major undertaking, the possibility of a regional union catalogue of historical material may warrant further investigation.

It is suggested that the four parties come together to explore avenues for co-operation and mutual support. The Department of Infrastructure could play a role here in facilitating discussions.

# **E. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR MECHANICS' INSTITUTES COLLECTIONS IN VICTORIA**

## **Future role of the Institutes**

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It must first be accepted that these institutions must be preserved where possible, and developed with sensitivity to their roles, their resources and their communities. But while they are each important in those communities, they do not have the resources to stand alone. They need an umbrella organisation to protect and advise them, and to seek the continuing resources which they so urgently need. This body must involve representatives and expertise from:

- ✧ State Library
- ✧ Public Record Office Victoria
- ✧ the municipalities in which they are located
- ✧ the regional libraries in whose areas they are located
- ✧ local historical societies
- ✧ heritage and tourist authorities
- ✧ all assisting the local management committees which have been responsible for their survival to date..

Because the institutes are so individual, there can be no one plan which can meet the needs of all. For each, there is a separate role. This must be defined, and then plans must look at immediate preservation and the planning of a long-term role which meets the needs of each situation. While the institutes have been able to stay afloat until now, they cannot be expected to find the resources needed to fill this role. Funding must be found from other sources. Heritage buildings must be the responsibility of the heritage and tourist authorities, state archives and the state library must assume responsibility for the historic collections, and regional libraries must take care of cataloguing the material and making it available for research purposes. All this will need to be co-ordinated by a suitable government agency : probably the Local Government Division.

Scope for development lies in several general areas :

- ✧ heritage/tourist industry
- ✧ archival and museum functions
- ✧ local and social history
- ✧ traditional library service

For those rural institutes which retain a significant part of their old holdings, their future plans must in part depend on their place in the **heritage/tourist** industry. This applies especially to Ballarat, Beechworth, Chiltern, Maldon. These institutes must direct their energies (and assistance to them must be similarly directed) to enhancing their potential as part of the tourist attractions of their areas, with well-presented materials in attractive (heritage) settings. Some combine **archival and museum functions** with their institute libraries, and these will need to act closely with the state's library and archives (Ballarat, Beechworth, Chiltern) as well as with regional tourism authorities.

Some will remain **closed collections with some social-history value**, such as Port Fairy and Stanley. Berwick, which offers a lending service parallel to that of the regional library, needs to discuss its plans with the Casey-Cardinia Regional Library. Ararat, with its limited services, should enter into discussions with the Central Highlands Regional Library Corporation. A few will continue to combine their historic value with **continuous service** to their community (Briagalong as a community centre, Beechworth and Chiltern as centres of local history).

The **urban institutes** require different treatment. Prahran already has in place its role in local history and its support links with Swinburne and Stonnington library. Footscray needs to find a support structure, and the Prahran model seems to offer the best approach : an alliance with the tertiary college and Maribyrnong library which gives the institute some sources of advice and technical assistance. The Athenaeum Library needs a totally different approach, depending on the plans made for city library service, and in co-operation with the CAE library. Until these plans are developed, assistance to the Athenaeum cannot be effectively planned.

## Recommendations

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The various institutions each present individual profiles, with the needs of each quite different from those of the others. There can therefore be no general recommendations which apply to all, except for the umbrella statements that:

- ✧ all need to identify sources of *advice and support*, both at the state level and the regional level
- ✧ all need to be *securely housed*, and need varying assistance to achieve this (including the building and the bookshelves)
- ✧ all need to have assistance in *defining their role* and developing a strategy to achieve it
- ✧ all need to *identify, record and preserve* those elements of their collections which are unique or of local or historic importance
- ✧ all need an adequate *catalogue* of their historic holdings, and will need help in achieving this
- ✧ all need some form of '*successor*' *arrangements*, if their present committees of management cannot continue in their role.

## Advice and support

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The committees of management of the institutions have performed marvels in keeping the institutions alive to date, but they now face complex problems which are, generally speaking, beyond their ability to solve with their present resources. Especially for the rural institutes, isolation and limited resources are constant problems. Because of this, it is strongly recommended that an umbrella body be set up (initially based on the existing MI Association). All identified MIs and similar institutions should be included, and the extended body should include representation from the Office of Infrastructure. This body should develop a broad approach and support structure for ALL the institutions, advising them on setting their priorities, implementing their plans, preserving their resources. It may also be the most appropriate vehicle for the channeling of grants and funds.

**Recommendation : Set up an umbrella body with representation from the institutes, state government, tourist authorities, the state library, and the state archives.**

## Secure housing

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Each institute has specific needs in terms of keeping the old buildings in repair and ensuring that the holdings are suitably accommodated. Wherever the original shelves and furniture exist, they should be upgraded appropriately (especially by the addition of glass doors). The costs for this will probably need to be met by special-purpose grants.

**Recommendation : Give this body the task of advising and making recommendations for funding the upkeep of buildings and furniture.**

## Defining their role

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Again, each institute needs to decide what its role should be, and define its priorities. They should be encouraged to think in regional terms, so that surviving institutes in the same regions can complement rather than compete with one another (e.g. goldmining at Ballarat, a 19th century children's collection at Maldon). This definition of roles should be undertaken under the aegis of the Dept. of Infrastructure and the MI Association.

**Recommendation : Require each institute to write a mission statement, and then negotiate these with the umbrella body.**

## Identify, record and preserve

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It is essential that each institute examine its holdings, ensuring that those of specific local interest or of statewide historic interest are recorded and preserved. This would probably be most effectively handled through the local regional libraries, which could offer a regional view of the holdings and the technical expertise of their cataloguers.

Conservation is an open-ended problem. All institutes need a great deal of help in identifying those items which require most urgent attention, and in arresting the deterioration of others until funds and available expertise can address them.

**Recommendation : That the umbrella body and the regional libraries assess the historic value of each collection and set priorities for preservation and conservation.**

## Catalogue

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As suggested above, the most appropriate vehicle would be the regional libraries. They should include the holdings of the institutes on their catalogues, clearly identifying the items as being held not for loan, in the separate MI collection. The provenance of all items must always be recorded.

Fiction should be listed simply, as (except for local authors, imprints or rare editions) the major interest lies in the overall collection rather than in the individual items. Non-fiction should also be treated lightly except where it has particular claims to historic interest. The histories of Pliny, philosophy of Aristotle, biographies of 19th century English bishops or governors of India, etc., are principally of interest insofar as they show the breadth of interest of the members of the Institute, rather than as individual items. Again, anything by a Victorian author, or with Victorian significance, should be carefully recorded and fully catalogued. In all cases, both the original provenance and the condition of the item should be included in the record.

**Recommendation : Have the umbrella body set up arrangements with the regional libraries, and contract out to them the task of cataloguing the collections (where required). These libraries should also advise on the conservation needs of the institutes.**

## Duplication of unique resources

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Several of these institutes have items which are of local, regional, or state importance, which have not yet been recorded or duplicated. It is essential that these collections (especially those at Beechworth, Chiltern, and Ballarat) be assessed by the Latrobe Collection, to ensure that newspaper holdings, cemetery records, original art works and other historic records are catalogued and duplicated for research purposes.

**Recommendation : That the state archives and the Latrobe Library be asked to set priorities for the duplication and recording of unique materials.**

## Successor arrangements

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It is essential that all the institutions have successor arrangements with appropriate local bodies, with a state-wide overview provided through the Department of Infrastructure. The current committees of management are based on volunteers who have access to very limited resources : they cannot be expected to continue to maintain their efforts without assistance.

It is unfortunately true that in many cases major losses of institute materials occurred when committees of management failed and the collections were simply abandoned or the valuable items simply appropriated by others. This cannot be permitted to happen again.

**Recommendation : That the umbrella body be required to maintain continuous contact with each committee of management and ensure that, if those committees cannot continue in their roles, the collections are not at risk.**

## **Immediate and medium term needs**

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For the institutions themselves

### **Immediate needs**

For all institutions, the immediate needs are :

- ✧ secure the holdings and arrest further loss or deterioration.
- ✧ identify what is held
- ✧ set priorities for its recording and preservation.
- ✧ determine the aims of the institute, and to have these codified and recorded.
- ✧ develop plans to implement this, including arrangements with umbrella bodies and local successor bodies.

To achieve this, there will need to be an immediate subsidy (seed money) to enable the institutes and the local authorities to assess their needs and to cost them. Urgent discussions need to be held with the local regional libraries to establish their willingness to undertake this, and subsequent cataloguing and management of resources, on a contract basis.

If a figure must be pulled from thin air, probably an immediate amount of \$3-5000 each (shared by agreement in each case between the institute, local government as represented by regional libraries, and the tourism/heritage groups) for feasibility studies would permit discussions to commence. Ballarat would need greater resources than this (a minimum of \$10000), as its planning needs are wide-ranging, complex and urgent, and it must also be a leader in discussions with Ararat and Maldon. Where short term plans are already in place (e.g. Port Fairy) it may be possible to replace this grant for study with known urgent needs, such as the glass doors at Brialong and conservation of materials at Port Fairy.

### **Medium term needs**

The medium term needs are:

- ✧ provide secure housing and furniture
- ✧ assistance in developing strategies to achieve their defined aims
- ✧ identify, record and preserve important materials
- ✧ duplicate unique print and on-print materials
- ✧ cataloguing the materials
- ✧ identify sources of advice and support, at state and regional levels

## Successor arrangements

In the case of the institutes at Ararat, Berwick, Briagalong, and Maldon, the most effective regional body which could offer 'patronage' and a succession arrangement is the local regional library service.

The regional library service in each case should be approached and invited to participate in discussions on the future of each institute. This will be complex, as each institute has a series of stakeholders as well as its own management and members. The picture is further complicated by questions such as:

- ◇ ownership and maintenance of the buildings as well as the stock
- ◇ appropriate care of unique state records
- ◇ the constant need to balance local, regional and statewide interests
- ◇ the need for continuing policy development for all the institutes as a group, and for each individually.

## Regional libraries

The regional libraries will have to undertake additional responsibility in the recording and preservation of these collections, and any plans will need to include a package which will compensate them for the costs involved. These will vary widely, as in some cases collections are fully catalogued, while in others none of the materials have yet been recorded.

**Recommendation : Each regional library corporation should be asked to assess the task they face, estimate the work required, and submit a tender to the umbrella body for the completion of the work on a contract basis.**

They will need to act as agents in sorting and cataloguing, and to advise on conservation needs. In some cases the collections have already been catalogued: these records need to be incorporated in the regional catalogue (Briagalong in that of Wellington; Stanley in that of Upper Murray). In others it will be necessary to contract cataloguers to undertake the work, separately from the ongoing needs of the regional collections. All the institute catalogues will need to be recorded as a separate 'branch' collection, not for loan. The load will fall principally on Central Highlands (Ballarat, and Ararat) and Upper Murray (Beechworth, Chiltern and Stanley).

Casey-Cardinia will need to be invited to join discussions on the Berwick MI, and Central Highlands on the future of Ararat and the role of Maldon, as well as Ballarat. The North Central Goldfields Regional Library Corporation will need to be involved in discussions with the Maldon Athenaeum.

## **Casey-Cardinia Regional Library Corporation**

Casey Cardinia will be involved in planning the best spread of services which could be offered using both its resources and those of the Berwick MI.

## **Central Highlands Regional Library Corporation**

The Regional Library Corporation will need to be involved in co-ordinated planning for the development of the Ballarat MI, and the discussions on the future of the Ararat MI. Especially in Ballarat, other bodies will need to be involved from the outset - tourism, heritage, state archives, the local university, and of course the MI itself. At Ararat the MI itself and any other interested stakeholders will need to be involved.

## **North Central Goldfields Regional Library Corporation**

The Regional Library Corporation will need to be involved in discussions with the Maldon Athenaeum and possibly local tourism groups as well.

## **Upper Murray Regional Library**

Upper Murray already has catalogue records for Stanley MI. These should be incorporated in the regional catalogue, and the library materials of Chiltern and Beechworth added to them.

## **Wellington Shire Library**

Briagalong MI has already been catalogued: the reports are at present on a card catalogue. These will need to be converted to electronic format and incorporated in the regional catalogue.

## **The individual Institutes themselves**

### ***Ararat***

On the face of it, the Ararat MI is in terminal difficulties. The level of operation is vanishingly small, funding is virtually non-existent, and the public library operated by the Central Highlands Regional Library branch in Ararat provides a level of service to which this MI could never aspire. Against this, the MI still exists, and there would be a degree of public resentment if it were simply closed.

Peter Mansfield, of the Central Highlands Regional Library, should be invited to meet the present committee of management and representatives of the Office of Infrastructure and the MI Association, to consider what action may be taken. They should assess the level of operation of the two libraries in Ararat, and consider any extended regional library service which may possibly be offered through the MI facilities – e.g. use of the building as a deposit station for the public library, together with a display of local history materials. The viability of such a program could be assessed after two years. Some items may be best transferred to the regional collection at Ballarat, with the catalogue entry identifying Ararat as the donor. The building will also need some degree of repair. The present management of the MI here may be ready to enter into any arrangement which preserves the local heritage involved in the MI, while relieving them of the responsibility of trying to manage on resources which are abysmally inadequate, even by the straitened standards of rural MIs.

### ***Ballarat***

The most immediate need for Ballarat is to suspend all sales of material and to record their holdings.

There is no estimate of the number of items held : the only available estimate is that that there is 1.3 km. of shelving occupied throughout the building. In the absence of better information, it is recommended that initial planning be based on identifying the 5,000 most interesting books<sup>7</sup> published before 1930, including those for inclusion in the proposed goldmining collection. These items should be catalogued, preferably through the agency of the Central Highlands Regional Library. (Some may well be duplicates of items held by Ararat MI.) While the items for cataloguing are being identified, they should also be assessed for their conservation needs.

Newspapers and periodicals must also be examined, catalogued and the holdings identified.

<sup>7</sup> Principally non-fiction. Fiction of local interest, or early Australian fiction, should also be included.

The recent conservation survey undertaken by Jeavons Baillie did not estimate costs, so there can be no informed estimate made. If a rule of thumb is needed, it is likely that 10% of the catalogued items will require some conservation treatment, and 2% will require extensive restoration.

It should be noted that Ballarat MI recently received a Federation Centenary grant of \$20,000 for the restoration of non-book materials, and has also applied for a grant of \$250,000 for restoration of the façade of the building. In view of the importance of the buildings and its holdings, these grants represent only a small amount of the funds which should be expended to enable this collection to assume its appropriate role in the tourist and historic programs of Ballarat.

### ***Berwick***

Berwick MI is already supported by the local Council which, together with the Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation, would be the most effective channel for future support. The survival of the Berwick MI to date demonstrates a need for library services in Berwick, and this will develop as population in the area continues to grow. Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation should be invited to join in discussions to define and rationalize services in the area, with the aim of offering a full range of library services in the Berwick MI building. Given its very strong community support, the MI itself will most probably wish to retain its separate identity, and this will need to be discussed by the individual parties concerned.

The Casey material should be assessed by a representative of the National Library, to ensure that it is catalogued as a part of the overall Casey material, and the sunset clause for Berwick MI should include arrangements for this to be taken over by the National Library of Australia if the MI should cease to operate. If Casey-Cardinia decides to offer public library services from the building, then they would become responsible for the archival of important items from this collection, in consultation with the National Library.

### ***Briaralong***

Briaralong must also operate under the aegis of a larger body, and logically this should be the Wellington Library Service.

Briaralong has a firm quote for wood-framed glass doors matching the existing shelving. This quote is for a completion cost of \$3250. It is from a local firm which does restoration work, and is firm for 3 months from 10th January, 2000.

## ***Chiltern***

Many of the items held at Chiltern lie outside its role as an MI. However, the books and manuscripts are a different matter. The books need to be sorted and assessed (especially the boxed items, flood-damaged nearly 30 years ago and not since assessed), and catalogued, preferably through the agency of the Upper Murray Regional Library. Works by local authors, and unpublished manuscripts, need special consideration, and should probably be duplicated for the Latrobe collection. Original art works also need to be duplicated for the Latrobe Collections.

## ***Footscray***

Footscray is operating at a local level, serving as a recreational library for a small number of members. It must find a niche for itself if it is to continue, even at this basic level. The institute is already contemplating a collection on women's history, but there is no funding and this would be heavily dependent on donations. Even under the aegis of the proposed umbrella body, they need to define their plans and to find some way to implement them. They are reluctant to involve themselves with Maribyrnong City Libraries, or the local tertiary campus, but they may find it necessary to identify a sponsor organisation if they wish to continue. Demographic and social shifts in the Footscray area have made their location a difficult one in which to continue operations, with security for staff and readers increasing in importance as an issue.

## ***Maldon***

Maldon needs to decide on its role and then on the method for fulfilling it. This should be in consultation with the North Central Goldfields Regional Library Corporation. Given that the regional mobile library visits Maldon on one day a week only, the possibilities of a partnership arrangement should be explored.

## ***Melbourne Athenaeum***

The Athenaeum should discuss with the State Library of Victoria the possibility of the Latrobe Collection recording and duplicating its historic material. In addition, it will be advantageous for the Athanaeum to automate its catalogue and its circulation. Before this is done, its future role must be decided, so that the library software selected is compatible with that of any other institute with which the Athenaeum may need to work in future.

### ***Port Fairy***

The Port Fairy collection is already catalogued and separately located. The need here is for assistance with secure housing (ensuring that the internal damp of the building does not further damage the materials) and urgent conservation, which cannot be undertaken on the limited resources available.

The recommended umbrella body should include conservation needs in their overall assessment of the conservation program for all the institutes.

### ***Prahran***

Prahran is a rare case of a successful and fully operational institute library. It will need to be incorporated within the umbrella body and its present arrangements with Stonnington Library and Swinburne ratified and developed over time. It does not need the type of urgent assistance required by the rural institutes.

### ***Stanley***

The Stanley MI collection is already catalogued by the Upper Murray RL. The most urgent need here is therefore for secure shelving (glass doors for the shelves) and for the continuing maintenance of the building.

# APPENDIX

## **Sampling of Unique & Historic Materials held at Ararat**

These materials are in poor to fair condition. While most of the holdings are the conventional material held by MI libraries (history, travel, philosophy) there are some unusual items such as 1870s copies of Lyell's *Principles of geology*, Humboldt's *Cosmos* (vol.2 only), Steven's *Scouting for Stanley in East Africa*.

### **Periodicals**

There are still some bound copies of periodicals, in short runs, such as:

Black and White Magazine .....	1890s
Chambers' Magazine .....	single copies, pre 1900.
Cornhill Magazine .....	1870s/80s
Frasers Magazine .....	1870s
Punch .....	single copies, ca.1890s
Scientific American .....	1880s/90s

## **Sampling of Unique & Historic Materials held at Ballarat**

### **Books**

Many 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century books are held, but not listed. These include some withdrawn from previous collections such as Creswick MI and the Ballarat Public Library. Many such items have been sold as fundraising activities, but there are many still held in the old library upstairs and in the basements.

In the collections for loan, there are still some remarkable items : e.g. one plucked randomly from the borrowing shelves was a copy of Sir Richard Burton's *Gold Mines of Midian and Ruined Midianite Cities*, in the original edition of 1878. Another (held in a small collection behind the desk) was a 19<sup>th</sup> century copy of *Ore Dressing: Metallurgy of Silver, Gold and Mercury in the United States*. While the value of the Burton book as a rare volume is greatly impaired (it is in poor condition and the spine has been replaced by an amateur repairer), materials such as these from Ballarat's 19<sup>th</sup> century collections should be placed in a special collection, demonstrating the Mechanics' Institute's deep interest in both the contemporary science of gold mining and its ancient history.

The lending collection also includes a considerable number of travel books published in the 1870s.

A small collection of historical materials is held behind the desk : this includes some material relating to Ballarat itself. Other material held here ranges from the classic (e.g. Xenophon) to broader 19<sup>th</sup> century Australian materials (e.g. *Aborigines of Victoria* (2 vols.) by R. Brough Smith (1878), an *Illustrated Book of Poultry* from the 1870s, 19<sup>th</sup> century editions of the Voyages of Captains Cook and Phillips, *Myths and Legends of Australian Aborigines* by Ramsay Smith; a 19<sup>th</sup> century Australian *Stud Book*.

## Publications & Materials by Governments & Community Organizations

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**Ballarat Agricultural Pastoral Society** : catalogues & reports from 1875 onwards

**Victorian Municipal directory** : from 1889 onwards

**Victorian Parliamentary Papers** : numerous volumes from the 1860s.

### Periodicals

There are extensive runs of periodicals from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Few (if any) would be complete, and many are in poor condition. The breadth and scope of these periodicals suggests that they should at least be listed immediately and the lists compared against national holdings, so that they can be accessible for research. They should also be urgently assessed for conservation purposes, and at least given protective packaging or other appropriate protection, to arrest their deterioration.

Argus .....	from 1850s to 1920s
Art in Australia .....	1920s and 1930s
Ballarat Punch .....	1860s
Ballarat Star .....	1859? to 1920s
Bankers Magazine .....	1860s
Bell's Life in Victoria.....	1860 to 1865
Berlin University Magazine .....	1860s
British Quarterly Review.....	
Broadway Annual Builder .....	1860s to 1870s
Contemporary Review.....	1880s to 1910s
Courier <sup>8</sup> .....	1860s to date
English Magazine .....	1890s
Fortnightly Review .....	1860s to 1880s
Illustrated London News .....	1850s onwards
Intellectual Observer .....	
Knowledge .....	series from 1890s
Literary Gazette .....	1850s to 1870s
Melbourne Punch .....	1856, 1869, 1872, 1873
Nineteenth Century .....	1877-1900
Popular Science Review .....	some vols. 1860s/70s
Quarterly Review .....	from Vol.1 to 1870s
Saturday review .....	
St James Magazine .....	1850s to 1878
St Pauls Magazine .....	1850s to 1878
Theatre .....	1887-1893
Time .....	1857 onwards
Westminster Review .....	1860s to 1870s

<sup>8</sup> The *Courier*, a local Ballarat paper, is a nearly complete collection, but the editions of the 1900-1910 decade have been damaged by floodwater. The *Courier* itself lost all its own archives in floods 6-7 years ago, so these are the only archival copies available in Ballarat.

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