

BALLAARAT MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

JUNE 2009

FROM THE PRESIDENT, FRANK HURLEY

BMI NEWSLETTER

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These are crowded days at the BMI, especially for the Committee members. I hope you have noted the establishment of the *Friends of Minerva* group. You can be a *Friend* as well as a library member. Ask Rosemary or Cath about the *Friends* and their activities.

There are many other initiatives afoot. I confine myself to three substantial ones in this Newsletter – our 150 year anniversary, the updating of our Articles of Association and the imminent Stage 2 building re-development works.



President Frank Hurley

150 YEARS OF AGE

ACTIVITIES AT THE INSTITUTE

- **Friends of Minerva** – a volunteer group of interested people, fundraising, tours, research, activities etc .
- **Twilight talks**– now in its ninth year of Friday night talks on varied subjects.
- **Book Clubs at the Institute**– enquire at the library for details
- **Web site**—more info at

www.ballaratmi.com

The 150 year Annual General meeting of the Ballaarat Mechanics' Institute (BMI) will be held on Monday 29 June 2009. A remarkable achievement - 150 years of continuous operation. The BMI is Ballarat's oldest cultural and adult education institution. It has defied predictions over the past 50 and more years that it would "wither on the vine". It is widely recognised as the biggest and best living exemplar of the 4000 or so such community-founded institutions that have existed at one time or another around the English-speaking world. As a grand, heritage, Victorian-era building, as the repository of unique collections and as a organisation with an unbroken line of community ownership, organisation and management, the BMI is a local, State and national treasure.

Rather than celebrate a single "birthday" (the precise date of which is arguable), the Committee plans to mark the "150 anniversary year". It will begin with the 150 year AGM in June and extend to about mid 2010 culminating in the "opening" of the Stage 2 building re-development works that are about to begin. The foundation stone of the first part of the BMI building was laid with much pomp and ceremony in September 1860 so the "opening" of the next stage of works will neatly mark the 150 year anniversary of the building. Through this twelve or so month period, there will be other major events to honour the BMI's contribution to the Ballarat and regional community over 150 years.

Celebrating 150 years

UPDATING OUR ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION

The Institute's Articles of Association as a not-for-profit company with limited liability guarantee were adopted 150 years ago when Victoria was a colony. They have remained largely as adopted. They reflect the era's currency (subscriptions prescribed in £.s.d.), gender roles (women precluded from membership), local geography (special allowance for living more than 7 miles from BMI), the fact that there was then a salaried permanent Secretary of the Institute and other now anachronistic provisions. Over the years, practice and procedure have been modified as change occurred all around but the Articles have only been modified on a few occasions. The most recent two changes seem to have been in 1951 (it is not clear exactly what the change was) and 1998 when a clause was inserted as required by the Australian Taxation Office to enable the BMI to attain tax deductibility for donations.

As one who has been on the Committee for 27 years since 1982, my observation has been that successive Committees have endeavored to abide by the spirit of the Articles while responding in common-sense ways to changing times. For example, library subscriptions have necessarily been varied over the years though annual fee amounts are actually enshrined in the Articles. Women have been elected to the Committee and two have served as President.

Over the last decade, Committees have looked at the anomalies in the Articles on several occasions and considered how best to update them. Consensus among Committee members has been that the heritage of the organisation ought to be retained as far as possible and that the form and spirit of the Articles of Association are an important part of that heritage.

When the BMI was established in the mid 19th. century and for many years afterwards, it attracted many full members because of the range of educational and recreational services it offered. Access to newspapers and a library were only two among many benefits. In later years, these other services and attractions became publicly available and cheap to access elsewhere. The library gradually became the only service that attracted subscribers. The great majority of people who "joined" the BMI or remained as members did so to borrow books from the library.

Under the Articles of Association a "Membership of the Institute shall be constituted by Signature of the Articles of Association" including the limited liability (the sum is £1) obligation. There is separate provision for persons to become library "Subscribers without a voice in the management". In living memory, people have joined the library exclusively as "subscribers". They have not been asked to sign the Articles of Association and thus are not "members" of the Institute in the terms of the Articles of Association. People accepting appointment to the Committee have signed acceptance of this appointment and thereby of the obligations of the Articles.

The current Committee has determined that it is timely in this 150 anniversary year to bring the Articles of Association up to date. The intent is to retain the form of legal entity and general spirit of the Articles, all part of the Institute's heritage, to remove the anomalies and defunct provisions and to clarify the categories of membership and rights and obligations of those categories. If the proposed changes are adopted, new and renewing "members"

after that date will be asked to select full Institute membership or library subscription membership with the attendant benefits, rights and obligations of each category clearly defined on the application or renewal form signed.

A draft showing both the current Articles of Association and the proposed changes has been prepared. It will be posted on the BMI website. Also, several printed copies (a total of 8 pages) will be available at the library desk. If you cannot access the website and would like to read the existing and proposed changes, ask Rosemary or Cath for a copy. The Committee invites any comments and suggestions on the draft proposals. You can email them or pass them on through the library desk. After 150 years, there is no rush to reform in these proposals. Over the next few months, the committee will review any suggestions received and will seek legal advice on any precise wording requirements. Any changes adopted must be approved by the Australian Investment and Securities Commission (ASIC) with which the Institute is registered as a legal entity and to which we must report with audited financial statements each year.

Pounds-shillings-pence
 —
Now dollars and cents
 —
Ladies now accepted
 —
Special provisions for people over 7 miles from Ballarat



THE STAFF.

STAGE 2 BUILDING RE-DEVELOPMENT

You will soon see contractors at work in the building again. What we broadly describe as Stage 2 re-development works are funded by grants from the Victorian Government's Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) and from The Ian Potter Foundation. Primary focus of the works will be refurbishment and reconfiguration of the Old Mining Exchange (present library), Batten, Pound and former Committee Room spaces to create the Heritage & Reading Centre (H&RC). Main constituents parts of the H&RC will be the library operations, transferred to the Batten Room with research facilities in the Pound Room, and the museum in the Old Mining Exchange (OME). The mezzanine gallery that ran around three sides of the OME in its 19th century stock exchange days will be re-instated and the walls will

be lined below and above that gallery with books, journals and selected newspapers from the heritage collection. Within the central area of the room, provisionally, the museum will use items and artifacts from the BMI collection and outside sources to tell stories of the cultural, educational, social and working life of 19th century Ballarat and colonial Australia. We hope to use a variety of media in this storytelling. In coming months the Committee will be consulting widely on museum themes and content and seeking funding for appointment of a professionally qualified curator to establish the museum. The broad aim is to have it ready for opening about the end of next year.

Apart from these ground floor works, Stage 2 will include some works towards

refurbishment of the Minerva Space (the former auditorium and cinema upstairs) and installation of a servery/bar and carpet in the Humffray Room. The floor repair and carpet in the Humffray Room will be financed by a generous grant from Ballarat South Rotary Club.

These works, especially on the ground floor, will impact on operation of the library over the next few months. Elsewhere in this Newsletter, Rex Bridges outlines the large-scale movement of items involved in clearing each room in turn and finding temporary storage spaces. Inevitably there will be disruptions and inconveniences. As Rex outlines, we hope to maintain a library service throughout the works. Your understanding and support will be helpful.



The large painting of Gov. Darling is relocated from the library to the wall outside the theatre.

“We aim to provide a continuous lending library service during relocation and renovation of the library”

BUILDING WORKS AND THE LIBRARY

Over the next twelve months or more, there will be substantial work taking place all over the building that will disrupt our day to day operations.

This includes the library, Batten room, Theatre foyer and the old picture theatre.

A major part of the works entail the refurbishment of the present library. The lending library will end up in the Batten room, with better facilities, more room and an improved service to members.

The present library will be the heritage and reading centre.

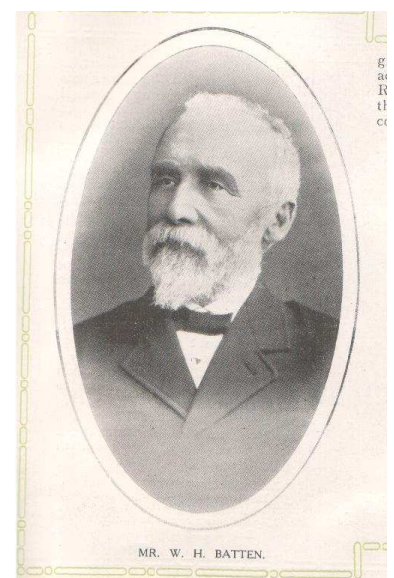
This means that we need to clean everything— all books, shelves and furniture— from the library. The lending library will then be located in the Batten room while the early works are completed.

Then the lending library will be temporarily moved to the theatre foyer on the first floor to allow renovation of the Batten room in preparation of the permanent home for the library. The theatre foyer can be accessed by stairs or lift. Ample signs will let you know what stage we are at when you enter the building.

We ask for your patience and understanding during the works, as when they are completed, the benefits of easier access and a modern library, designed to be user friendly will be evident, whether you just want to browse, research, quietly read in the new member leisure area, or visit the new Mechanics' Institute museum.

There will also be improved research facilities and access to our archives and heritage book and newspaper collection for members of the Institute.

Rex Bridges



Mr. W.H.Batten, former secretary of the Institute.

BALLAARAT MECHANICS' INSTITUTE (BMI)

SUBSCRIPTIONS 2009

Subscriptions for 2009 are now due. The key to a sustainable, successful BMI is a strong, supportive membership. The Committee asks that, if you can,

- you select the Subscription 1 level of **\$35** (incl. GST)

you try to **introduce at least on new member** to the BMI

Please consider adding a donation when you pay. Ballaarat Mechanics' Institute of \$2 and above are tax deductible. You will be given a separate receipt for tax claim purposes.

Thank you for your continued Library Subscription membership and your generosity to the BMI.

Dr Frank Hurley

President

% _____

Name _____

Address _____

Tel: _____ Email: _____

Your Subscription: (Tick **one** of the three subscription rates)

- Subscription 1 (6 books entitlement) **\$35.00** (incl. \$3 GST)
- Subscription 2 (3 books entitlement) **\$25.00** (incl. \$2 GST)
- Student subscription (5 books entitlement) **\$16.50** (incl. \$1.50 GST)

Donation to BMI (tax deductible over \$2) \$ _____

Total (subscription + donation) \$ _____

Payment by Cash Cheque Credit Card (Mastercard or Visa)

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Cardholder's name _____ Signature _____