

AMISA Newsletter

Association of Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts NSW, Inc

Volume 3, Issue 1: January 2015

AMISA Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held:

Date:

Thursday 12 February 2015

Time:

11:00 AM

Venue:

Sydney Mechanics School of Arts

Level 1, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney

Q&A No 3:

When did Schools of Arts arrive in Australia?

Quite quickly is the short answer

This was clearly an idea whose time had come. Beginning in Scotland, soon separate bodies with purpose built premises, called Mechanics' Institutes or Schools of Arts, were being founded with the goal of providing scientific and technological education for skilled manual workers.

The Institutes/Schools movement may well have been one of the most successful examples of British educational imperialism. The institutes/schools spread throughout the English-speaking world very quickly. The impulse for greater rationality, the passion for science, the desire for moral improvement, and the thirst for

useful knowledge turned out to be as powerful in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA as they were in the United Kingdom.

- ✓ The first in Australia was the Van Diemen's Land Mechanics' Institute, which opened in Hobart in 1828. However, it only operated for a few years before becoming defunct.
- ✓ The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts was founded in 1833. Its double-barreled name is perhaps a result of dual Scottish origins; the Edinburgh School of Arts and the Glasgow [and London] Mechanics' Institute[s].
- ✓ In 1835, the Newcastle School was formed and in 1861 so was the Wollongong School.
- ✓ In 1839, Melbourne followed suit. The Melbourne Mechanics' Institute later changing its name and to become the Melbourne Athenaeum.
- ✓ The South Australian Literary and Scientific Society was formed in London in 1834 and opened in Adelaide in 1836.
- ✓ The north Brisbane School of Arts was founded in 1849.
- ✓ While in the West, the Swan River Mechanics Institute commenced operations in 1851.

In this edition

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Annual General Meeting

Q & A No 3: When did Schools of Arts arrive in Australia?

Albion Park (NSW): School of Arts / Literary Institute

Website: Update

Membership Renewal

Articles Invited

Website: School / Institute Detail

What is the founding date of your School/Institute?



Dr Roger Morris AM prepared the Q&A Series

Albion Park (NSW) – School of Arts / Literary Institute

Albion Park is situated on the South Coast of NSW, not far south of Wollongong City, but within the City of

Shellharbour. It is on the South Coast Railway between Dapto and Kiama. The main local industry used to be dairying although a lot of land has now been turned into housing estates to accommodate the fast growing population of the district.

The earliest reference to a School of Arts in Albion Park is in the 30 September 1893 edition of the *Kiama Independent* newspaper which reported that a copy of the rules of Albion Park School of Arts and Mechanics Institute had been sent to the Kiama Progress Association to assist in the establishment of a School of Arts and Working Men's Institute in that town. The aims of the new establishment would be to encourage literary and scientific education, discussion of general topics and conduct of social activities.

Where the Albion Park body held meetings has not been established. At the half year meeting of the Albion Park School of Arts and Debating Society in August 1894 reference was made to the existence of a pre-existing institution, but it is unclear if that meant 1893 or earlier. On 27 November 1897 new

council chambers were opened by the Shellharbour mayor on the southern side of Tongarra Road, opposite the showground gates and, on 29 September of the following year, Albion Park School of Arts was granted use of space in the chambers. Following the formal opening ceremony on 22 October a debate took place on the extension of the franchise to women.



Albion Park Town Hall
Shellharbour City Library

In September 1912 a change of name to Literary Institute was approved by the committee following correspondence with the Education Department yet, by the 1920s, there appeared to be little differentiation between calling the body the "School of Arts" or "Literary Institute." So in March 1920 the committee of Albion Park School of Arts planned to erect an up-to-date building on land acquired in 1901. It was not until September 1927 that an increase in membership and funds after a period of dormancy

allowed preparation of plans for a reinforced concrete structure.



Albion Park Literary Institute
(Illawarra Historical Society)

The building opened on the south side of Tongarra Road, a few doors east of the Town Hall, on 30 January 1929 by Mr W Davies MLA showed the name "Literary Institute" in unmistakable relief on a rather forbidding façade. Nevertheless, in common parlance it mostly continued to be "School of Arts."

Constructed of reinforced concrete throughout, the hall measured 54 ft long by 31 ft wide with a stage 31 ft wide and 8 ft deep. A galvanized iron roof covered a fibro ceiling and plastered interior walls. An unraked wooden floor allowed for dancing and other social activities. Ventilation was by means of roof vents. A reading room and library stood on each side of a central passage leading from the street, and above was the film projection room which had been completed according to official requirements. An exhibitor, Mr Juleff from

Berry, had already begun to screen films on 5 January by agreement with the Institute committee for a period of twelve months. Prior to connection of public mains, power was provided by a generator housed in an outside shed. A supper room, ticket box and kiosk were erected on the western side of the building in 1933.

The committee optimistically expected no depreciation in the building's value because of its substantial construction even if it took some years to pay of the outstanding debt of £966. Yet there were exhortations at the opening ceremony for citizens to support the Institute, while one speaker hoped that farmers would rally to assist once the drought was over. Intriguingly the town's oldest citizen, Mr W Brownlee, made a nostalgic reference to "the time when a king and queen held a royal feast on wallaby on the site of the institution" but did not give any details of this event which remains a mystery. The newspaper report of the opening concluded by noting that "the library is a most complete one and the Institute will continue to have charge of the public

library of the Municipal Council as previously."

The Institute became a venue for social events such as balls, flower shows, concerts, public meetings, and wedding breakfasts, but regular lessees were film exhibitors.

Mr O Gear followed Juleff and was the last to screen silent pictures. In November 1929 Mr F Peters "gave Albion Park the talkies," and was followed by George Parkes who remained until the late 1940s despite the Department of Education questioning his extended lease (the department determined leasing conditions for Schools of Arts and Literary Institutes).

Parkes was followed by Wollongong Theatres Pty Ltd, which controlled several cinemas between Coledale and Kiama. When Shellharbour Municipal Council assumed ownership of the premises in February 1955 as a result of decreased interest in the institution, a joint proposal was put to the Chief Secretary to erect a completely new building over the old which would be gradually demolished. The proposal was rejected and Council turned attention to erecting a general purpose hall on the other side of the

road. What was to be named the Centenary Hall to commemorate one hundred years of local government in the area was opened on 10 October 1959.

Pictures continued in the old Institute with Mr H Wallace of Dapto replacing Wollongong Theatres until December 1959. Council did not renew his lease since it wished to demolish the ruinous building in favour of the hall opposite where pictures and other events were transferred. While the concrete walls remained quite durable in terms of the original committee's optimism about the structure's longevity, decreasing community interest meant that interior fittings and equipment were not adequately maintained. A Baby Health Centre was later erected on the site.

The Centenary Hall still stands, providing the community with a venue for entertainmFAent and socialising, but pictures ceased in the mid1960s.

Note:

(i) Information for this article has been taken from *The Kiama Independent* and *Illawarra Mercury* newspapers and *Gauffered*

Velour – a history of motion picture exhibition and picture theatres in the Illawarra district of NSW 1897-1994 by R Parkinson.

(ii) Imperial measures and sterling currency are as quoted in the newspaper.



Author:
Robert
Parkinson
8 Dec. 2014

AMISA Web Page

The construction of our web page is well underway and we will be able to show members a sneak peek at our AGM. We plan to include a directory of Schools of Arts / Mechanics' Institutes with information about member schools. To assist us, we'd appreciate your sending us information via the attached Information sheet on Pages 6 & 7 of this newsletter.

Membership Renewal

We earlier wrote sending detail for renewal of membership. If you haven't renewed your membership as yet, we look forward to receiving the fee.

We attach a membership renewal form with this newsletter.

Articles Invited

Dr Roger Morris AM has been a frequent contributor to the AMISA Newsletter. We thank Robert Parkinson for his article about the Albion Park (NSW) – School of Arts / Literary Institute

We invite recipients of this newsletter to prepare and send us articles of interest concerning Schools of Arts / Mechanics' Institutes and similar organisations

AMISA Committee 2014

President	Dr Roger Morris AM	Roger.Morris@uts.edu.au
Vice President	Winsome Allen	winsome.allen.au@gmail.com
Secretary	Phil Reed	kim-phil@bigpond.com
Treasurer	Carole O'Brien	obriencarole78@gmail.com
Committee	Harold Barnes Kathleen Bearsby Max Johnson Denise Mitford Robert Parkinson	

Membership Application / Renewal

(Please print)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Organisation	(\$20 per year)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Individual	(\$10 per year)

Title _____ Name _____

Position _____

Organisation _____

Address ** _____

Address _____

City / Town _____ NSW _____

Phone (primary) _____ Phone (alternate) _____

Email ** _____

Website _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Method of payment

(By cheque / money order or by electronic funds transfer (EFT))

Cheque / money order

Please make it payable to AMISA

and send to:

The Secretary
AMISA
Sydney Mechanics School of Arts
280 Pitt Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

EFT

Please transfer funds to:

Bank Account **158225**
BSB **032-101**

Please ensure your name / organisation name appears in the reference field

Please email us to confirm the despatch of funds by **EFT**. **Email to:** kim-phil@bigpond.com

We will accept a 'pdf' copy of the Membership Application/Renewal in lieu of an original sent by post.

Please provide your comments and/or an outline of your interests, e.g. community development, heritage conservation, education, libraries, architecture, local government, history, etc.

ABN 36 456 356 023

** Unless you specify otherwise, our preference is to minimize expenses and to communicate with you by email rather than by post.
AMISA is not registered for GST

For more information please contact Phil Reed, Secretary, email: kim-phil@bigpond.com

Website: School / Institute Information Sheet

In preparation for the launch, we invite members to provide us with information that you wish to us to publish on the AMISA Website:

Name of School / Institute

Address

Contact Person

Email address

Link to School / Institute Website

Do you have a listing with social media? If yes, we invite you to provide a link. Here are some examples:

Facebook Page

Twitter Profile

Google +

Pinterest

Instagram

Other

Where you do not have a website we ask you to provide Information about the School, including (for example) a brief history, detail of executive committee, basic services, etc. We ask that information be limited to 50 – 100 words. Please show your information in a bullet point listing.

(Please see Page 7 for comment about photographs.)

By returning this form or providing the information we note your agreement to our publishing these details on the AMISA NSW Inc. website

Photographs:

- We would like to include at least 1-2 of the School of Arts / Mechanics' Institutes included in the directory.
- In supplying the photographs to AMISA, you are certifying that your School of Arts / Mechanics' Institute is the legal owner of the image and you are granting AMISA permission to publish the image on our website.
NB:
 - Copyright for images legally resides with the photographer unless it is out of copyright
 - Certain images that are out of copyright may require formal permissions to publish (for example, those sourced from the State Library or by a commercial photographer).

OK	Not OK **
Archival images owned by the School/Institute.	Images sourced from other archives (e.g. State Library, most images on Trove, etc)
Contemporary photographs owned by the School / Institute or which one of your members has granted you permission to use.	Commercial photography

** unless you can supply written permission from the owner

Options for sending us your photographs:

- Email - Please email your photographs as unresized jpg files (hi-res if possible) to the Secretary.
 - If your files are very large, please contact the Secretary. We can provide easy to follow instructions for sharing them with us.
- CD/DVD or USB key
 - You can also mail in your photos saved as unresized jpg files (hi-res if possible) on CD, DVD or USB key.
 - Auto play or movie DVDs are not suitable.
- Hardcopy - You can send us hardcopy photos to scan
 - If you choose this option, please send us **copies**, not your originals as we cannot guarantee their return.

Description of your photographs:

- It would help us a great deal if you could provide, in a word document, a list of the images you have provided and a description. Here are some examples:
 - Image #1.jpg - 'Exterior of the X School of Arts, c1845. Unknown photographer. Held in the archive of X School of Arts'
 - Image #2.jpg - '100th anniversary celebration at X School of Arts, 2012. Photographer: Mary Smith. Permission to publish granted courtesy Mary Smith and X School of Arts'

Contact detail for the Secretary:

- Email: kim-phil@bigpond.com
- Post: 280 Pitt Street, SYDNEY NSW 2000