

# AMISA Newsletter

Association of Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts, Inc

Edition 2, Volume 1: 24 Dec 2013

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## Q and A

All of us are familiar with term **school of arts**. Many of us know at least a couple of alternate terms: mechanics' institute [most common in Victoria] and literary institute [more common in South Australia]. Most of us are very familiar with the story of their origin in Scotland and their early arrival in the Australian colonies. However, many of the people we meet do not know anything at all about schools of arts and their history of service to the Australian community.

Over the next few issues of the Newsletter, I propose to pose and then answer a number of questions, which I find are commonly asked, concerning the nature and functions of the Schools.

### The questions are:

- **What is a School of Arts?**
- **Where and how did they originate?**
- **When did they arrive in Australia?**
- **What other names have they used?**
- **How many were there?**
- **Why were they founded?**
- **What facilities did they provide?**
- **How did the community use their School of Arts?**
- **Why did they decline?**
- **What is their legacy?**
- **What is their future?**

Our first question, then is: **What is a School of Arts?**

But first, it is very useful -- when trying to explain why the name School of Arts was adopted -- to remember that the full title of the first School of Arts to be established in 1821 [the **Edinburgh School of Arts**] was '**The School of Arts of Edinburgh for the Education of Mechanics in such branches of Physical Science as are of Practical Application in their Several Trades**' and that the oldest Australian Institute [founded in 1833] is called the **Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts**. The "**ARTS**" we are talking about here are not "the fine arts", they are the practical arts: e.g. the domestic arts; the manual arts; the industrial arts etc.

Except for the special cases of the very earliest schools, such as the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts [SMSA], which is incorporated under its own act of the NSW colonial parliament, a School of Arts is an institution formed by a group of members represented legally by trustees.

These trustees are responsible for holding a piece of land (often granted by the government or donated by a local

### **NOTICE: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

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*Date: Tuesday  
25 Feb. 2014*

*Time: 12:30 PM*

*Venue Sydney  
Mechanics  
School of Arts  
280 Pitt Street  
Sydney*

citizen or citizens) and for maintaining a building (usually erected by public subscription, often with assistance from a government subsidy) for **public** purposes.

The original purpose, for which the School was formed and the building was built, was to provide for some combination of adult educational and recreational activities.

In NSW, the major piece of legislation that regulates the operation of most Schools of Arts is the **Trustees of Schools of Arts Enabling Act, 1902 as amended**.

Dr Roger K Morris AM  
Ms Winsome Allen  
Phil Reed

President  
Vice President  
Acting Secretary  
(Phil accepted this role on 10 December 2013)



Dr Roger K Morris AM

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<b>Contact us:</b>	Winsome Allen	0416 341 905
	Email:	winsome.allen.au@gmail.com
	Phil Reed	0416 241 114
	Email:	kim-phil@bigpond.com

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## Photo Gallery, Re-launch

Attendees at the Christmas Luncheon came from far and wide. In addition to people in Sydney, attendees came from Cambewarra (near Nowra), Newcastle, Clifton (NSW South Coast, near the Sea Cliff Bridge) and Buxton (near Bargo). We thank the attendees for their time – both in travel time and attendance at the luncheon.

Names read left to right.



*Bruce Turner (Newtown)*



*Winsome Allen (SMSA)*



*Robert Parkinson (SMSA)*



*Gwen Crowe-Mai (SMSA), Ann Gleeson (Buxton),  
Grahame Marks (SMSA)*



*Melanie Ryan (SMSA), Max Johnson (Leichhardt),  
Ken Hall (SMSA)*



*Lyn Thaler and Carol Williams (Cambewarra),  
Maria Townsend (Cronulla),  
Kathleen Bearsby (Clifton)*



*Chris Thaler (Cambewarra)  
Harold Barnes (Newcastle Historical Society)*

*(Where's Phil?... he held the camera. He'll include a 'selfie' in the future!)*

### **ITEMS FROM THE RE-LAUNCH OF AMISA FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE AGM**

*Information: Insurance (insurance is seen as a minefield in costs and questions of liability)  
Department of Lands (offers from them and the terms of the contract)  
Heritage Listing (and 'backdoors' that may allow 'demolition by neglect')  
Potential for bus trips to visit Mechanics Institutes and Schools (and associated groups)  
Trustees versus Incorporated Association  
Schools of Arts Enabling Act  
Grants and Funding (sources)  
History of Schools of Arts  
Tax and GST*

### **Notable Dates mentioned at the Luncheon:**

Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts	2013 – celebrated its 180 <sup>th</sup> Birthday
Leichhardt School of Arts	Soon – will celebrate its 116 <sup>th</sup> Birthday
Cronulla School of Arts	2014 – will celebrate its 100 <sup>th</sup> Birthday
Newtown School of Arts.	Currently 98 years old.

### **If you are not a member ... we invite you to join us:**

Payment of the sum below carries membership through to the 2015 Annual General Meeting.

(Please complete the Membership Application form below and send it to us)

1. Organisational membership is open to any incorporated organisation which is currently or formerly recognized as a Mechanics' Institute or School of Arts in NSW or which has an identifiable linkage to such an institution
2. Individual membership is open to any person who is connected with or has an interest in Mechanics' Institutes and / or Schools of Arts

## Membership Application

(Please print)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Incorporated Organisation	(\$20 per year)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Individual	(\$10 per year)
Title	Name	
Position		
Organisation		
Address		
	Post Code	
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:

c/- Sydney Mechanics School of Arts  
Level 3, 280 Pitt Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

#### **EFT**

**Please transfer funds to:**

Bank Account  
BSB

**Not Yet  
Available**

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

In either case, **please email us** to confirm the despatch of funds. **Email to:** winsome.allen.au@gmail.com

We will accept a 'pdf' copy of the Membership Registration 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

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Unless you specify otherwise, our preference is to minimize expenses and to communicate with you by email rather than by post.  
AMISA (ABN 36 456 356 023) is not registered for GST

### **AMISA is an organisation founded to:**

1. Foster the preservation and restoration of the social, cultural, educational and physical heritage of active Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts in NSW
2. Encourage and facilitate the recognition and preservation of Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts
3. Encourage the revival of inactive Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts in NSW

### **We will:**

1. Develop and maintain a contact network
2. Gather and provide information on Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts in NSW
3. Hold conferences, seminars and workshops that deal with such organisations
4. Publish a regular newsletter
5. Seek contact with and co-operation from relevant governmental agencies
6. Establish and maintain linkages with other organisations with similar objectives
7. Set up and maintain an AMISA website