



# The Morwell Post

Morwell Historical Society

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Mechanics' Institute Morwell



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# Morwell Historical Society Directory 2020

President:	Bruce McMaster Phone: 0428 528 464
Vice-President:	John Willis
Secretary:	Florence Butcher
Assistant Secretary:	Peter Gitsham
Treasurer:	Carolyn Schopp
Committee Members:	Rosalie Davey Shirley Prosser Peter Gitsham
Research Library:	12 Hazelwood Road, Morwell, Victoria 3840
Research Queries:	research@morwellhistoricalsociety.org.au
Public Access:	1st and 3rd Wednesday and last Sunday of each month, 11.00 a.m. – 2.00 p.m. Not open - December & January
General meetings:	3rd Wednesday February to November – 2.00 pm
Annual General Meeting:	3rd Wednesday of March each year
Membership Fees:	Due 1st July each year Single Member - \$25.00 Family Membership -Family living at the same address includes children under 18 years old - \$30.00  Application Forms available on our web site for you to print and send.  For a print copy of “ <b>The Morwell Post</b> ” - \$10.00 per annum
Editor:	email: morwellpost@morwellhistoricalsociety.org.au
Research Fees:	\$10.00 per hour or part thereof, and prices for photo prints on application and postage where applicable.
Facebook:	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/morwellhistoricalsociety">https://www.facebook.com/morwellhistoricalsociety</a>
Postal Address:	12 Hazelwood Road, Morwell 3840 Victoria, Australia

Front page icon is of the old Post Office c1930 which was on the site of the now Commonwealth Bank, corner of Commercial Road and Tarwin Street.

All photos, unless indicated, are from our archives.

## President's Report

During the last couple of months we have been actively upgrading the display of some of the Society's artefacts.

Since my last report we have put up a row of 12 large framed photos on the north wall in the Hare/Campbell room. One of the photos is of Les and Nellie Hare's 1908 wedding photo and another one is Les and Nellie and their two daughters Edna and Una. There is a lovely photo of the Davey family from Melbourne who came up by horse and buggy in 1921 to see the Brown Coal Mine (Yallourn North). This framed photo was donated to the Society by their granddaughter. Another is an excellent water colour painting by Bob Pelchin of the Morwell West Primary School. The site of this school has now been swallowed up by the Yallourn Open Cut. This painting was donated to us by Mary Davis who was a teacher at Crinigan Road Primary School in the 1970s. Another historic photo is of two bullock teams pulling a building on skids up Tarwin Street. Then there is an interesting photo of a visit to Morwell in 1913 by the Victorian Premier Alexander Peacock in a Hupsmobile.

We have also put up two walls of plaques in the passage into the side door. Possibly the most interesting plaque is the one that was on Kernot Hall in Yallourn. This building was opened in 1959 and demolished in 1987. We also put up the plaque that came from the Morwell Library in Hazelwood Road. This building was opened in 1966 and demolished in 2002 to make way for the current Police Station. We have also included the Hazelwood Guides Honour Roll and the opening of Morwell High School in 1959. We have the Kurnai College Student Leaders Board, the Commercial Road Primary School Scholarship Board, the Crinigan Road House Captains Board and the Morwell High School House Captains Board all hanging up. All together we put up 44 plaques and honour rolls.

We also have a shelf of 15 trophies above the plaques. Some from Commercial Road school, a couple from the Technical School, and the Maryvale Football Club Memorial trophy among others.

The Society recently received a box of regional history books from a local identity. Many of these books will be an asset to our Library. We sincerely thank the family for giving the books to the Society. Most of our books may be borrowed by Society Members.

What a year it has been. Here's hoping that we can open to the public by Wednesday 3rd February 2021 and hold a meeting on Wednesday 17th February 2021. I would like to thank all our members who have been in our rooms working during the pandemic and of course those members who have been working at home.

Do you need a quick and easy Christmas present? Have a look at our books and DVDs for sale on page 11.

Enjoy reading our last newsletter for the year and have a very happy Christmas and a virus free 2021.

Bruce McMaster December 2020

*Thank You* 



# **Big Blaze**

## **Morwell's Mechanics' Institute Reduced to Ashes**

### **Talkies Machines Destroyed**

One of the main buildings in the town and an old landmark in the shape of the Mechanics' Institute was destroyed by fire on Thursday 10th January 1935.

Connected to the Institute were the Public Library containing 2,000 books, Clerk of Courts Room in which were files of Government Gazettes for many years past, statutes, legal documents, etc, also Lodge Room in which were honour boards, regalia, etc. Infant Welfare Centre Apartments with equipment. In the main hall were two talkie picture machines, piano, two marble memorial tablets, furnishings and many other things.

The first indication of something unusual had occurred was the ringing of the Presbyterian Church bell shortly before 2 am followed a few minutes later by the vigorous ringing of the fire bell, which disturbed townspeople from their peaceful slumbers and caused them to jump out of bed to ascertain where the fire was. It did not take long to locate the locality of the conflagration for dense volumes of smoke were soon issuing forth while large tongues of flame and showers of sparks were ascending skywards. For a time it was difficult for persons any distance away to say exactly where the fire was. Many at first thought it was Green's Drapery emporium, others believed it was Jenkins' Store but it was not long before they all realised that it was the Mechanics' Hall.

One of the first to notice the outbreak was Mr Hore, who resides close to the Presbyterian Church, and he promptly rang the church bell. About the same time, Mr W Jenkins, who was sleeping on balcony above his general store, across the street from the Mechanics' saw the reflection of a fire, and at first thought the rear portion of the store was alight. As soon as he located the fire he ran to the Fire Station and rang the bell. Two members of the local brigade, who had heard the Presbyterian Church bell, reached the fire station at the same time as Mr Jenkins. Other firemen were also promptly on the scene and no time was lost in rushing to the scene with reel and equipment for fighting the flames.

Although no time was lost by the Brigade in getting to the fighting line, the fire had such a strong hold that it was utterly impossible to save the main hall from destruction. The flames spread very rapidly and in a twinkling the whole place was burning like an immense furnace from one end to the other.

The firemen concentrated their efforts upon a gallant attempt to save the Clerk of Courts room and Infant Welfare Centre Apartments. It was no easy task and considerable risk by members of the Brigade in the strenuous battle.

The heat was intense and the smoke suffocating whilst considerable danger was added by burning timber and walls falling. Another source of great danger was the fact that many electric wires were connected with the building and as there appeared to be no official present to disconnect the current the wires were "alive" and firemen and others might easily have been electrocuted, as the wires fell to the ground and lay about the roadway. Eventually First Constable Gunn, who realised the danger, took steps to "chop-off" the live current.

The firemen, however, worked on regardless of the heat, smoke, wires and other risks and although the flames won the fight for the Clerk of Courts Room, the firemen gained a victory in the battle for the Infant Welfare Centre apartments, which in addition to scales and other equipment (none of which was insured) contained a billiard table.

By about 3 am the fire was over, the hall together with contents being reduced to smouldering ashes.

The firemen, among whom were Capt. Rob Watson, ex-capt. R Noy, Lieut, W Budge, Foreman W Lobley, Firemen H Huguenin, J Huguenin, C Oliver, G Campbell, R Keith, W Uhrhane and L Noy who were tired and drenched to the skin with water, were taken into Jenkins' store where they were kindly supplied with refreshing tea and given something to eat by Miss Jenkins.

The building and contents were insured in the Commercial Union Insurance Company for £2,025 and we understand that Messrs Verey and Cupit had a separate insurance of £600 for the talking plant owned by them.

Among the contents of the Institute that were destroyed were two marble tablets erected to the memory of the late Private G. Bolding [George] and T Rose [Farrier Thomas Joel Rose] who lost their lives whilst serving in the South African Boer War. Also a large photo of the late Hon. T Livingstone, who represented Gippsland South in the Legislative Assembly for some years and to whose efforts is very largely due to the development of immense brown coal deposits at Yallourn.

Practically the whole town turned out to witness the fire, the majority being in night attire. The blaze was seen by people at Boolarra, Yinnar, Yallourn and Traralgon.

The committee of the Institute are Messrs E. Pearson (President), J. Langdon (Vice-President); A. W. Ronald, W. S. Mackenzie J. Sinclair, J. Bolger and P. Brittingham and the Trustees, Messrs A. McDonald, G. P. Evans and G. Watson.

The trustees and some members met the adjuster in connection with claim for insurance, on Friday last when a highly satisfactory settlement was arrived at.

*Morwell Advertiser* 17 January 1935





## NEW HALL

The problem to solve now is the erection of a new hall and the furnishing of the same.

The burning down of the Mechanics' Institute was a golden opportunity for the Shire Council and those interested in the Mechanics' Institute to combine forces in the erection of a building that would suit both the Council and the public generally. Mr E Pearson was President of the Mechanics' Institute and Mr J Rintoull was Treasurer and there were 78 subscribers and if they unanimously agreed the insurance money could be handed over to the shire.

### MORWELL'S GALA DAY – Opening of New Town Hall

On the afternoon of Tuesday 27 October 1936 the Town Hall and Municipal Chambers were officially opened by his Excellency Lord Huntingfield, Governor of Victoria who had arrived by train. A grand ball followed the official opening with music supplied by Hunter's full orchestra. A feature of the ball was the presentation of 20 debutantes to Mrs DJ White, the wife of the Shire President.

Source – *Morwell Advertiser* 29 October 1936

### MORWELL MECHANICS' INSTITUTE.

The annual meeting of subscribers to Morwell Mechanics' Institute, will be held on Tuesday evening next, when the balance sheet and report for past year will be submitted and committee for ensuing year elected. The retiring committee intend to recommend that the Institute be kept open every afternoon from 2 p.m. till 5 p.m. in addition to usual hours, and in order to carry out the proposal will further recommend the amalgamation of the offices of secretary and caretaker. Applications from persons willing to undertake the duties of caretaker, and also caretaker and secretary (combined) have already been received and will be passed on to new committee to deal with. It is to be hoped that there will be a good attendance of subscribers at the meeting so that the proposals might receive full consideration.

*Morwell Advertiser* 26 Jan 1917 - p2

### MORWELL MECHANICS' INSTITUTE.

Representatives of the Morwell Mechanics' Institute and Free Library were introduced by Mr. Livingstone, M.L.A., to the Chief Secretary yesterday, and asked for a grant towards the enlargement of their hall. They stated that they had built the hall at a cost of £500, and had never received anything from the Government. They now proposed to enlarge and improve it at a cost of £600, and as similar institutions in other places had received substantial assistance from the Parliamentary grant, they asked to be considered.

The Chief Secretary said there was only £2000 on the estimates for the purpose, and he expected about 80 applications for a share in it, so that he would not be able to give much. If they would put their application in writing he would consider it when allotting the grant.

The Age (Melbourne, Vic 1854 - 1954) - 8 Sep 1906

Mechanics' Institute facing Tarwin Street



## The changing face of the South West corner of George and Tarwin Streets

Maples Furniture Store  
Complete Home Furnishers

In the distance down Tarwin Street  
are the Hazelwood  
chimneys



Magnum Video occupied the  
corner site in the 1990s. Note  
the RACV in the foreground.  
Then the C of E Op shop.  
Fossick and Find had furniture  
in the shop and the next  
business was a Clothing Outlet  
shop.



The Dollar Shop now occupies the  
corner and it opened in 2010. If you  
look above the word *Homeware* you  
can see the words, *Factory Retail  
Outlet*, as the previous shop was a  
Clothing Outlet shop.



## Morwell Mechanics' Institute.

A meeting of Committee of Morwell Mechanics' Institute was held on Thursday evening last, when there were also present, by invitation, representatives of Morwell Riding Councilors and trustees of the Institute.

Certain information gained regarding Traralgon Town Hall, and the recently erected Mechanics' Hall, at Trafalgar, was submitted and discussed at considerable length.

It was eventually resolved to submit two schemes for consideration at a public meeting to be held on Monday evening, February 18th. One scheme is for the re-building of Mechanics' Hall, on old site with provision for library, lodge room, Clerk of Court Room, supper room, kitchen, etc. The other scheme is for the Mechanics' committee to combine with the Shire Council in the erection of a Town Hall, with Municipal Chambers and other accommodation, on corner of Commercial and Hazelwood Roads, adjacent the Shire Hall, or on old site of Mechanics' Hall.

If the public meeting favors the latter scheme, the Council will be approached about the matter. If, however, the majority are opposed to the suggested combination, the former scheme will no doubt be carried out.

It is a matter deserving the earnest consideration of not only subscribers to the Mechanics' Institute, but of townspeople and the public generally, and it is to be hoped there will be a large and representative attendance at the public meeting on Monday night.

## RE-BUILDING

TO THE EDITOR

Sir,—I wonder if in commenting through your columns on this matter of real public importance, some of my fellow-citizens will consider such comment should be left to those of more mature years? Should that be so, I hope they will at any rate credit me with sincerity in doing what I feel to be a duty rather than a pleasure.

As advertised, a public meeting is to be held on Monday evening next, to obtain the opinion and wish of residents of this town and district in regard to the erection of new public buildings to replace those recently destroyed by fire.

The erection of new public buildings such as these is a thing that ordinarily happens once in 50 years to 100 years, and the plan adopted by us in the course of the next few weeks is going to have a very considerable influence on our town—probably for half a century or more.

The building we erect—whatever its type—should represent the degree of faith of our district, and will be a fair indication of our ambition in relation to the progress of our town, and the surroundings in which we live. It will, as our chief public building, set a standard—high, or lower—for the people to attempt to maintain for their town in other ways. The standard of its public buildings alone, has a considerable influence

on the prestige of a community.

If this opinion is correct, as I believe it to be, then the decisions to be reached on Monday night are some of the most important the people have been asked to make in the history of the district, and command an attendance worthy of their importance.

Can any citizen justly complain of what he considers to be shortcomings in the management of local public affairs if he or she does not give to a meeting such as this the benefit of his presence, his interest, his opinion and assistance?

If a building is to be erected which will give the maximum of satisfaction in the future, it requires the brains, the experience, and active co-operation of our business and other responsible residents to work in conjunction with, and share the responsibility with, our present committee which consists of the usual number appointed to carry on the ordinary business of a Mechanics' Institute.

That last comment must not be interpreted as any reflection on the personnel of the present committee. Sure and I'm one of them, but nevertheless realising the necessity of district-wide co-operation.

Faithfully,

A. W. RONALD.

Morwell Advertiser 14 February 1935

Mechanics Institutes were formed originally to improve the education of working men and to instruct them in various trades, but later, the aim was broadened and the institutes became a popular agency of adult education. The idea came from a class formed in 1800 by George Birkbeck in Glasgow, Scotland, for journeymen mechanics. He also organised the first Institute, in the real name of the word, in London in 1824. The formation of mechanics' institutes spread to Australia starting in NSW in 1826, Tasmania in 1827 South Australia in 1838 and Victoria in 1839. Here, in Australia, the Institute was more recreation than education. The library section, which was always in important section provided the recreation of reading and there was frequently a billiard room and most importantly there was a hall.

There were also billiard rooms and halls built by some hotel keepers as part of the business establishments but the Mechanics' Hall was the public hall and it was bigger and better and built with either government money or subsidy. In Morwell both the Cricketers' Arms Hotel and Murdoch's Hotel had halls.



# Morwell Town Hall

## POLL OF RATEPAYERS APPROVES OF COUNCIL'S PROPOSAL

Keen interest was taken throughout the Shire in the Poll taken on Monday last by which ratepayers were asked to give their approval or otherwise of the Council's proposal to float a loan of £1,000 for the purpose of erecting and furnishing a Town Hall and Municipal Chambers.

The total number of votes on the Municipal rolls for the whole Shire are 1750 and in order to defeat the proposal it was necessary that one-third of that number (583) be recorded against it, and also that a majority of the votes polled be secured. 194 votes had to be recorded against in order to save deposit.

The result of the poll showed that a large majority of the ratepayers are in favor of the Council's proposal. 696 "Yes" votes were recorded and as those who did not vote are counted as being in favor, it is therefore assumed that 1410 were in favor to 333 against (not including 7 informal votes).

The result must be very gratifying to the Council and Ratepayers Committee and those who signed petition asking the Council to proceed with the erection of Town Hall and Municipal Chambers.

A meeting of ratepayers was held at Yinnar on Saturday night last, when Crs. D. J. White, Walker, Quigley, Keat, Ronald and Messrs E. L. Vary, G. P. Evans, G. Watson, J. K. Rintoull, P. P. Kelly and others spoke in support of Council's proposal and stressed the fact that no special rate would be struck on Yinnar, Boolarra or Hazelwood Ridings in the event of there being any shortage of funds in Town Hall account.

Several questions were asked and answered.

Want of space prevents us giving a full report of the proceedings.

Result of the voting at each booth is advertised in another column.

Around 1880, the precise date is uncertain; Morwell gained its own government-subsidised Mechanics' Institute on the south west corner of Tarwin and George Streets (later Maples, Magnum Video, Fossick and Find and in 2010 the Dollar Shop). Therefore the town acquired a library and hall suitable for concerts and meetings. There were additional small rooms which was used as an infant welfare centre and meeting venues of local lodges, council, Court of Petty Sessions and the Morwell brass band met twice a week to practice.

By 1905 there was talk of demolishing the building and rebuilding in Commercial Road. Finally it was decided to retain and renovate the existing building. The opening of the revamped building took place on the 19th December 1907. Talking picture, an improvement of silent movies, were first shown twice a week in Morwell by a visiting company at the Mechanics' Hall on 4th April 1930. In 1931 the Hall was leased to Messrs Gude and Charleston to install talkie equipment. In May the following year Charleston disposed of his interest in the Morwell Talkie Pictures to Harold Verey. A few years later Verey became the lessee of the picture theatre which opened in Yallourn in May 1939.

Source -*Steamhorse to Power* Prue McGoldrick pp 31, 34, 44, 53, 57, 63, 75

*Morwell Advertiser* 14 February 1935



Opening of the new Town Hall on the corner of Commercial Road and Hazelwood Road - known as O'Rourke's Corner - on Tuesday 27 October 1936

*Morwell Advertiser* 28 November 1935

# Correct Hand Signals

**T**HESSE are the new hand signals recently made law. Put them into practise and obey them on all occasions. Hand signals are a major factor in road safety.



No. 1.  
I am going to STOP.



No. 2.  
I am going to Slow Down  
(hand raised and lowered).



No. 3.  
Pass On.

The "Pass On" signal (No. 3) is only advised when it is clear to the driver giving this signal that it is safe for following traffic to pass. Otherwise he should give the "Stop" or "Slow Down" signal.



No. 4.  
I am going to Turn Right



No. 5.  
I am going to Diverge Right

(Issued by The Victorian Road Safety Division of the National Safety Council of Australia)

The number of cases of traffic offences coming before the courts appears to show that a section of car and truck drivers are not familiar with the new signals. The illustrations above indicates clearly the requirements of the law.

Country motorists intending to make a trip to the city will be wise to become familiar with the hand signals laid down in the traffic regulations. These are three in number, and consist of, right arm held horizontally to denote the driver's intention of making a right hand turn, right fore-arm held vertically to show that one is stopping, and continuous movement of the right arm from the rear to the front to signal a following driver to overtake.

Doubtless the first two signals are known to, and in more or less common use by every driver in the State, but the last one is comparatively new and was introduced by the metropolitan Police Traffic Department so that there would be no doubt in the mind of the driver of an overtaking car that the way ahead was quite clear.

Another recently introduced regulation, by the way, also relates to passing. It is now laid down that a motorist wishing to overtake another must give warning of his intentions by sounding the horn. This is a safety measure pure and simple, for if this is not done, the driver ahead may swing suddenly to the right in order to avoid an obstruction on his left and precipitate an accident if there happens to be somebody overtaking him. If the regulation concerning sounding the horn is followed, however, there is little risk of such a happening, provided, of course, that the motorist ahead also obeys the regulations.


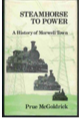






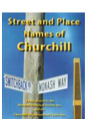
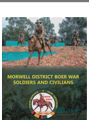



Many drivers put their trust in electrically operated signalling devices, but although some of these are very useful and help to make one's intention plainer to the driver behind, it must always be remembered that such fittings can quite easily fail to operate for various reasons, unknown to the man at the wheel, so that it is the safest course to give the hand signals whether one of these devices is installed or not.



Trove: The Forbes Advocate 25 November 1927

These illustrations began appearing in Australian newspapers as early as 1927 right up to the 1950s even though electric turn-signal lights date from as early as 1907. The modern flashing turn signal was patented in 1938.



TITLE	AUTHOR	COST
 Morwell Past to Present	Morwell Historical Society 2016	\$25 DVD 1 hour
 Steamhorse To Power - A History of Morwell Town	Prue McGoldrick 1979	\$10
 Glimpses of Our Past - Early Morwell and District	Morwell Historical Society 1989	\$20
 Across The Old Bush Track - The History and Story of Haunted Hills, later renamed Hernes Oak, Victoria	Dorothy Squires-Taylor 1992	\$30
 The Morwell and Mirboo Railway - A Descriptive History and Lineside Guide	R K Whitehead 2006	\$15
 Changing Landscapes - A History of Settlement and Land Use at Driffield	Linda Kennett, Meridith Fletcher 2003	\$10
 Yallourn Was... - A Historical and Pictorial record of the functions, life and people of the "deceased" town	Prue McGoldrick 1984	\$20
 A Souvenir History of Morwell - Morwell Centenary Celebrations 31st March to 6th April 1979	I. T. Maddern 1979	\$5
 Street and Place Names of Churchill	Rob de Souza-Daw 2010	\$10 Soft Cover \$60 Hard Cover
 Morwell District Boer War Soldiers and Civilians Significant events, people, places, memorials and items relating to the 51 Morwell District Soldiers and 3 Civilians who enlisted Saluting Their Service 368 pages	Rob de Souza-Daw 2019	\$65
 Morwell District Boer War Soldiers and Civilians - Audio Visual Presentation with photos	Morwell Historical Society 11 October 2017	\$10 DVD 12 minutes
 Morwell District Boer War Soldiers and Civilians – Commemorative Service and unveiling of the Roll of Honour, and Graphic Exhibition	Morwell Historical Society 11 October 2017	\$25 DVD 1 hour 25 minutes
 Jaberanda & Co - Living in the Twentieth Century 1950-2000	Prue McGoldrick 2001	\$20

All these publications are available from our society. Please make enquires regarding postage and packaging for each item.

Phone Bruce: 0428 528 464

Email:

secretary@morwellhistoricalsociety.org.au







## OPEN DAYS 2021

We are closed until further notice.

We will monitor the health professional and government advice and open as soon as we can.

All being well, we will open  
Wednesday 3rd February 2021

Please deliver me to:

If not delivered please return to 12 Hazelwood Road, Morwell 3840

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