

Item 13.4 South Melbourne Town Hall: Outcome of negotiation with ANAM

Question raised by Councillor Crawford on behalf of Adair Bunnett:

In relation to The Emerald Hill Town Hall Act of 1876, Ms Bunnett mentioned the Act requires Council to retain part usage of the South Melbourne Town Hall. Is this something that we have come across before and will that need to be considered as part of this negotiation?

Response:

This question relating to the *Emerald Hill Town Hall Act 1876* impacting the usage of the South Melbourne Town Hall, specifically the 999-year lease (to Robert Stirling Anderson, James Service, Donald Macdonald, Alfred Huges and John Watson, as Trustees of) the Mechanics' Institute.

The Mechanics' Institute and Library was a key part of the South Melbourne Town Hall.

The Mechanics' Institute departed the premises in or about 1937 or 1938 when Council closed the subscribers' library and undertook renovations to the Town Hall.

The Council publication "Town Hall Stories"

(https://issuu.com/copponline/docs/south_melbourne_ths_v6_1_fr=sYWFmNjE2NzE4MTY) contains a section regarding the Mechanics' Institute and library. It provides (among other things) that the 1938 renovation of the South Melbourne Town Hall saw improvements to the library and, "at the same time, the Mechanics' Institute ceased to operate [...]".

Further, a publication titled "The Rise and Demise of the Mechanics' Institutes in Port Melbourne, South Melbourne and St Kilda", notes that:

1. 1937 is the last time the South Melbourne Mechanics' Institute is mentioned in either Council or library reports; and
2. in the following year, major renovations were carried out to the Town Hall and, at that time, all the rooms in the Mechanics' Institute wing, except for those used by the library, were appropriated by Council for other purposes.

A report of F.R.W. Sinclair, Librarian, dated 18 May 1937 ("Librarian's Report"), recommended that the subscribers' library should be dispensed with (see page 2 of the Librarian's Report). A joint report of A E Aughtie (City Surveyor) and H Alexander (Town Clerk) dated 18 October 1937 ("Town Clerk's Report"), also recommended that the subscribers' library be abolished (see page 2 of the Town Clerk's Report). A report of the Library Committee dated 18 May 1937 ("Library Committee's Report") adopted the recommendations contained in the Town Clerk's Report, and further recommended that a sub-committee be appointed for the purpose of giving effect to the various recommendations contained in the Town Clerk's Report.

At their Special General Meeting of December 1903, Members of the Mechanics Institute had passed a resolution (already approved by Council in July 1903):

1. that the Trusteeship of the Mechanics' Institute should be transferred to Council (or its representatives) upon the terms of the agreement to be entered into between the then Committee of the Mechanics' Institute and the Council;
2. consenting to the appointment of the seven nominated members of the Council as Trustees of the Mechanics' Institute until an Act of Parliament is passed making provision for the control and management of the Mechanics' Institute; and

3. approving the vesting of the management of the Mechanics' Institute in the seven nominated members of the Council (or survivors of them) until the passing of the Act of Parliament.

Under the terms of the Agreement:

1. Council took over the management and control of the Mechanics' Institute at the Town Hall Site with effect from 1 January 1904, and was required to continue to carry it on for the purposes of a Mechanics' Institute, Subscription Library, Free Reading and Lending Library; and
2. the name of the Mechanics' Institute was changed to "The South Melbourne Free Library and Mechanics' Institute".

In 1908, the *South Melbourne Mechanics Institute Act 1908 (Vic)* ("Institute Act") was passed by the Victorian Government. It vested the trusteeship of the Mechanics' Institute and the lease in the councillors of Council.

The Institute Act was repealed by the *Local Government (Consequential Provisions) Act 1989 (Vic)* ("LGCPA"). When the LGCPA was passed, the trusteeship of the Mechanics' Institute ceased to vest in the individual councillors of Council, with the effect that the Mechanics' Institute was wound up.

Council has not made any attempts to revive the Mechanics' Institute, either prior to 1989, or at all.

**Please note: answers to any questions in Public Question Time and Councillor Question Time which were answered at the meeting are included in the minutes of that meeting.*