

YOUR HISTORY MATE



**The work of a community museum
in Melbourne's western suburbs**

by
Peter Haffenden

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Published by
Melbourne's Living Museum of the West Incorporated,
Maribyrnong.

1994

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Your History Mate ISBN 0 947308 26 1 .

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Published by Melbourne's Living Museum of the West
P.O. Box 60 Highpoint City
Victoria 3032
Australia
ph. (03) 318 3544.

This book was funded by the Australia Council

Front Cover photo: Frank Hecker and 'The Ant' (George Hamilton) at Newmarket Saleyards in 1984.

Back Cover Photo: Nell Garlley and Rose Cinnamond, at a reunion of munitions workers organized by the Living Museum.



A typical view of Melbourne's West from the top of the West Gate Bridge

FOREWORD

Melbourne's Living Museum of the West is a unique regional community museum in the wider network of over 480 museums throughout Victoria.

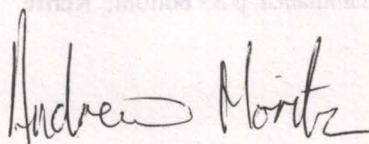
Commencing in 1984, the museum has gained a reputation and acclaim throughout Australia for being innovative in its approach to history and the community. Melbourne's western suburbs which form the museum's community have a rich, long and diverse history of events, people and places. This museum, without a collection, has always focused on presenting to this community both the historical and contemporary issues that it faces.

The museum has taken the ordinary everyday happenings as well as the special events and identities of the region and researched, documented and presented them back to the community. This has raised community awareness that today's events are tomorrow's history and that each one of us has a contribution to make to community life no matter how big or small.

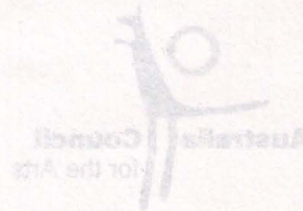
Your History Mate is an in-depth look at history in the making with the story of this unique museum. It provides an interesting insight into the development and philosophies of the museum over the past ten years and opens a window into the diverse communities of Melbourne's western suburbs. *Your History Mate* is a chronicle of the dedication and spirit of the people living and working in Melbourne's western suburbs as much as it is a history of the development of the museum.

The museum will face many new challenges and issues over the next ten years. I am sure that the same philosophies and commitment to community development which Melbourne's Living Museum of the West has shown over the past ten years will guide it to meet these challenges in innovative and exciting ways.

I am very pleased to commend *Your History Mate* to you and hope that you enjoy reading it as much as I did.



Andrew Moritz
Executive Officer
Museums Australia (Victoria)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australia Council, through its Community Cultural Development Board, which provided funding to make this book possible. .

I would like to thank Arts Victoria for supporting Melbourne's Living Museum of the West through its formative years and for contributing to the production of this book. We have especially appreciated the contribution of Roger Trudgeon and Hilary Newton and the Museums Advisory Board. I would also like to thank the group of people, including members of local historical societies, community representatives and especially the then member for Melbourne West, Joan Kirner, who had the vision, commitment and expertise to bring such a concept as a Living Museum into being. Other important input at the time came from David Yencken and Roger Holloway of the Department of Planning. Special thanks to Peter Somerville for always being there.

I would particularly like to thank the Museum staff from the first year for taking a bunch of raw ideas and establishing the ground work for the many innovative projects that have followed in their wake: Stella Barber, Mark Barnes, Anthony Bassialiadis, Teena Cross, Max Dawson, Rod Faulkner, Olwen Ford, Flavia Graziotto, Chris Healy, Chau Minh Ho, Robyn Hollander, Marg Jacobs, Nicola Johnson, Bryan McNamara, Joseph Mastroianni, Jenny Mitchell, Son Thanh Nguyen, Lesley Purcell, Vesna Smilevska, Nerelie Stankovic, Ian Stephen, Lucia Ugoni, Carmen Winter, Don Woods, Judy Xenophou.

Judy Spokes from the Community Cultural Development Board of the Australia Council took a personal interest in this book coming into being, while Living Museum staff, Olwen Ford, Gary Vines, Mark Dawkins and Libby McKinnon and our Museum Studies placement student, Peter Scrivener, assisted with editing, typing and layout. June Laurie helped with proof reading and Kerrie Poliness advised on the cover design.

The Living Museum is also indebted to the hundreds of people who have helped and encouraged us along the way. Past presidents Wally Eacott, Colin Thorpe and Irene Wescott; our current president Fred Maddern; Committee of Management members and staff past and present; Museum members; representatives of local historical societies, government departments and local firms; volunteers, people we've interviewed, people who've lent us photos and shared their information and many many more individuals and groups. These are all part of this Museum.

Peter Haffenden

The photographs were taken by Peter Haffenden except the following:

Lee Davy, p.1; Gary Vines, p.2, p.6 bottom; p.28 top, p.31 bottom; *Western Times*; p.3, p.42 bottom; Elizabeth McKinnon, p.4; p.39, p.53 top, p.45 top and bottom; Kylie Freeman, p.6 top; Peter Scrivener, p. 8 top; John Reed, p. 8 bottom; courtesy of T. Cross, p.12; courtesy of H.V.McKay Archives, Museum of Victoria, p.13; Chris Healy, p.14 bottom; courtesy of Ordnance Factory archives, Maribyrnong, p.15 top; Robert Ricaldone, p.17; courtesy of David Culbert, p.24; Ted Kloszynski, p.35; Bronwen Gray, p.40; Joseph Mastroianni, p.44; courtesy of State Training Board, p.49; Angelo Salamanca, p.53 bottom; Kerrie Poliness, p.55; Barbara Pitman, p.69.

Melbourne's Living Museum of the West is a community museum which actively involves the people of Melbourne's west and others in documenting, preserving and interpreting the richness and depth of the region's social, industrial and environmental history.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

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MISSION STATEMENT

Melbourne's Living Museum of the West is a community museum which actively involves the people of Melbourne's west and others in documenting, preserving and interpreting the richness and depth of the region's social industrial and environmental history.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The purposes for which Melbourne's Living Museum of the West Incorporated is established are:-

1. To establish a permanent ecomuseum within the context of Melbourne's Western Region, a concept whereby the total community, its environment and its heritage are considered as part of the Museum, focussing the main emphasis on the people of the region rather than on artefacts, and operating from one or more fixed bases throughout the region.
2. To develop a greater understanding of the history and culture of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and the environment of Melbourne's Western Region.
3. To record and present the history of working people in Melbourne's Western Region, up to the present day.
4. To involve the people of the region in the collection, research and presentation of this history.
5. To use a wide range of presentation methods, including exhibitions, video, publications, theatre, public events, and other participatory activities.
6. To be a multi-cultural museum.
7. To create a mobile museum service for Melbourne's Western Region.
8. To relate the historic sites and structures of the region to the story of the people of the region.
9. To develop a Heritage Resource Centre for the region.
10. To undertake linking and bridging activities with other groups, projects and institutions in the Western Region.
11. To act as a catalyst to development of ecomuseum activity in Australia.
12. To develop and promote community museum activity which is interactive and innovative.
13. To develop the techniques of presenting exhibitions and related activities as effective communication devices.
14. To undertake pilot projects in a number of areas within the ecomuseum context on an experimental basis.

PREFACE

We couldn't have known in the beginning how it was all going to work out, or guessed how far it would go and in how many directions. There was no precedent in Australia. In 1984 many saw Melbourne's Living Museum of the West as a 'project' and some queried whether it was really a museum. It was a wild and radical idea, an open and flexible concept. Ten years down the track I can truly say it has been an amazing experience.

From my perspective, the 1980s were a crucial stage in Australia's history and the history of Melbourne's western region. There were new ideas on cultural policy, heritage, history and the environment. Local people were making their voices heard on environmental and heritage issues. There were new opportunities for creativity and learning through art centres and further education facilities. At the same time, many traditional industries were dying. Huge industrial sites became derelict wastelands, parks, residential estates. Unemployment was on the increase. Our museum was caught up in all this change, linking government policies to local initiatives, through grants and projects, affirming the very special character of our region and its people, acting as a catalyst and support, enabling people to do things they wouldn't ever have thought of themselves as doing, opening doors, opening eyes, challenging perceptions.

Like its region, the Living Museum, is ever-changing, though there is some basic continuity. Since the late 1980s Aboriginal people have played a major role in our activities, artists have worked on Museum projects, archaeology and radio have been key activities and our work at Pipemakers Park has developed.



Joan Kirner, patron of the Living Museum, with Olwen Ford, Museum Director (left).

The Living Museum has evolved in response to its regional community, involved people from all walks of life, focussed on lifestyles not usually regarded as historic, and raised questions such as 'What is history?' 'Who does it belong to?' The Museum has been re-active and pro-active and - almost unwittingly - has become a case study in the way a museum operates in relation to its community, an example of the dynamic process of community development.

The founders of the Living Museum worked out detailed and ambitious aims and objectives. But the process of involving people created its own philosophical direction. In reality, practice came before theory. We didn't sacrifice thoroughness or an academic approach, but drew on many traditions, skills and local knowledge and experience.

It hasn't all been a bed of roses. There have been fights and ups and downs, as well as incredible adventures and magic moments. We've had to hold in there against a lot of pressures and have persisted despite setbacks and knockbacks. At the same time, the Museum has had input and solid support from many wonderful people and from government, especially from Arts Victoria and Joan Kirner, our patron.

It's especially appropriate that Peter Haffenden has written *Your History Mate*. A local lad, born and bred in Footscray, he once worked at the Angliss meat works, drove taxis, sold salmon, graduated in economics at the University of Melbourne and worked for the *Age* and the ABC as a journalist. Peter has been with the Living Museum since 1984 and has been one of the main exponents and practitioners of its ideas. He has photographed the region extensively and co-ordinated two of its most unusual and innovative exhibitions *Chops and Chimneys* and *Back in Your Own Backyard*.

We chose the title, *Your History Mate*, because it suggests the idea that people could and should be involved in researching, documenting and presenting their own history and also the idea that history is about the everyday lives of people who have often not been recorded or seen as significant. These are ideas that our Living Museum has fostered in many ways. Such ideas are still quite unusual, even ground-breaking. It is good that the ideas and the creative processes are now being documented in this book.

Olwen A Ford

What is a museum?

...a non profit making, permanent institution, in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment.

as defined by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), an agency of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).



Jack Myers, of Bacchus Marsh takes the author, Peter Haffenden for a walk through Werribee Gorge where he explains what he has learnt about the fauna, flora, geology and spirit of the land he has explored since he was a young boy.

THE MUSEUM TODAY

'Kylie will you get the phone, there's a bus coming in for a tour and I have to meet them'. Kylie, the Museum's Koori trainee secretary replies: 'It's a teacher from Sunshine High School on the phone who wants some information on the McKay harvester factory'. 'Get Peter to talk to them. The bus has arrived'.

More than twenty girls from Footscray Girls High School have arrived by bus for a talk on the redevelopment of a local munitions factory into a housing estate. The Ammunition Factory can be seen from the window of the Living Museum offices and you can still hear them testing bullets some days.

The view from the windows of the Museum takes in a part of the lower Maribyrnong River Valley. The offices are only about 100 yards from the river where there is a small jetty to receive visitors by boat. Along the bluestone-lined banks are canary palms from the thirties when they were thought to be both attractive and easy to maintain.

This group however has come by bus down a steep winding road through the small Melbourne Water run Pipemakers Park, recently reclaimed from its former occupation as a pipe factory. Now there are wetlands where concrete pipes used to sit in the mud and dust.

The Living Museum is housed in the old fitters and turners' workshop that used to service the large Hume pipe factory. The lower Maribyrnong River Valley has been the home of industry since Europeans arrived and this area was the heartland of Australia's manufacturing industry until recently.

As the girls are shuffling into their seats for their talk a small red Honda pulls up. It is Joan from the St. Albans History Society. She has arrived to show us the mock-up of a cover for yet another book she is producing. 'What do you think?' Joan asks as she presents an evocative picture of gravestones from the Keilor cemetery. Joan often comes to share some of the things she has found from tireless research in local archives and cemeteries.

There is a 'Toot Toot' and all eyes turn to the window. A couple of us wave. It is the tour boat, *Blackbird*, taking passengers up river. The captain, Peter Somerville, toots everyone along the river and often pulls up at the Museum for an unscheduled stop for passengers who want a look. Peter is fascinated by local history and has been on the Management Committee of the Museum since its inception. His passengers always come away from that boat ride excited by Peter's rich ramblings.



The cruise boat 'Blackbird', taking a tour down the Maribyrnong River.

A ride on Peter's boat is compulsory for any new member of staff and for the many work experience students who come from local secondary schools and some tertiary institutions. This small tour boat that looks something like the 'African Queen' runs from Footscray to the wharves at Williamstown, chugs upriver through the heavy industry lining the banks of Yarraville and Footscray, past parklands established in the nineteenth century, past Flemington Racecourse where they run the Melbourne Cup, and through an almost rural stretch of the valley. It is the entry point to Melbourne's Western Region.

School groups like the girls from Footscray often take these boat trips. Today it is a *Probus* group from the other side of Melbourne who have come to enjoy Melbourne's 'Cinderella' river as Peter has dubbed it. The girls have settled in and the talk is proceeding in a section of the Visitor Centre. The Visitor Centre is all one open space about 25 metres by 16 metres. There are no internal walls except for some cupboards and a shop counter that divides the office space from the display space.

The staff operate in a cramped space that includes a kitchen area which looks out onto the park and the river. Most meetings and discussions take place around the kitchen table which is in view of the shop counter and three feet from the reception desk and phone. It is at the kitchen table that Joan is proudly showing us her graveyard mock-up. Our conversation is unusually quiet because the discussion for the High School is taking place near by.

A man and a woman appear at the counter. 'Excuse me Joan, there's someone else at the counter'. 'Yes, can I help you?'

'Oh hello. We have recently moved into the area on the Newmarket estate and we are interested in the history of the place. We were told you might have something. Actually we were wondering if you had some old pictures of the place?'

'Yes, we do. A couple of hundred on Newmarket I think - we'll just get the files. We have about 20,000 negatives here ranging from early images to the present day. We don't keep many original photographs here as we aren't a museum that concentrates on objects. However we do have thousands of copies of images and people's stories on tapes if you want to listen to them. And there's a library of reference material on history and all kinds of issues relating to this region.'

'Can we get prints done from your negatives?'

'Yes, you can. We can have them made to any size you want. We produce them for all kinds of

things. For interested members of the public like yourselves, for people writing books, for newspapers, for exhibitions we produce and for exhibitions for other people. For example, a local chemical factory wanted an exhibition recently and commissioned us to do it for them. We even go out and take photographs for local organisations if it has something to do with the history and heritage of the local region.'

'Excuse me there's the phone. If you would like to sit down at that table and look through these, I'll be back with you in a few minutes.'



Excavation of the Pinkerton pioneer graves at Melton, an example of the collaboration of the Living Museum and community groups.

It's Gary on the phone. The Museum's Industrial Archaeologist. He is not coming in until later in the day because he has gone directly to Melton where he is supervising the transfer of the remains of members of the Pinkerton family, early settlers of the area. The graves must be moved for an extension to the sewage treatment works and the local council doesn't want to destroy the important historical cairn and graves of these early settlers.

So Gary was called in by the council to ensure the relocation was done in such a way to ensure the retention of the site's heritage. This is a little out of the ordinary for our archaeologist who usually works on industrial sites. However it is very much a job relating to the heritage and history of the local community and involves participating in local issues.

As Gary hangs up, three of the gardening apprentices come tramping in after wiping their muddy boots. 'Have you got a drink?' asks Brett.

'I'll have a coke', chips in Marty. These youths are part of a team of six Koori gardening apprentices set up as a project connected to the Museum and based in the park.

The scheme was set up with the Museum's assistance as part of a broader Aboriginal research and community program operating at the Museum. The idea was to relate the practical gardening training to some cultural context. The practical gardening includes a fair bit of study on indigenous vegetation which is gradually being re-introduced into the park in the form of nature trails.

'You are very busy here' the man remarks, 'people are coming and going all over the place. Are you having a new exhibition?'

'Yes it's called *Daughters of the Dreaming*, it is an exhibition about Aboriginal women in Victoria'.

'We have some permanent exhibitions like that one over there which is about the history of this site and we re-arrange the Visitor Centre around new exhibitions or events that take place here.'

Page 8 - The Western Times, Wednesday, June 23, 1993

Environs



The gardening team which will be working on a Koori garden at the Living Museum of the West. They are (from left) Mathew James, Rob Drayton, Brett Barnett, Matthew Gristwood, Darren Broybom and Darren Writzand.

Attention to local indigenous vegetation is one way the practical training of the apprentices and the cultural studies of the Museum come together and bring a sense of teamwork and involvement in the 'museum' concept. The plants then become part of the Museum's collection which we can use to interpret the region's environmental history.

This scheme also involves extra tutoring for some of the apprentices which takes place, like most other things, in the Visitor Centre.

The visitors looking at the Newmarket photos signal that they have found something. 'Look, we've chosen ten of these, is that all right?' 'Yes that's ok, we can have them for you in a week.'

'We were reading the panels on the history of this site. We had no idea about the significance of some of the industry in this area and we must come back and see that new exhibition when its up.'

Meanwhile Kerrie and Kylie are climbing ladders clutching wire, hammer and nails to hang *Daughters of the Dreaming*. They are going to great efforts to be quiet about it so they don't interrupt the talk or the Footscray Girls High School.

Kerrie is a graduate trainee through a scheme organised by 'Life Be In It' for unemployed people with tertiary qualifications. Kerrie has a background in art and has plenty of experience in designing and hanging exhibitions.



Pouring concrete to create paths for the 'History of the Land Discovery Trail.' A series of historic gardens with art work interpreting the past activities in Pipemakers Park. Designed by Libby McKinnon and created by the Living Museum with the assistance of a Federal training program.

The group from the high school goes outside for a tour of the buildings remaining on this old factory site that has become a young park. One large building, built in 1874, is a magnificent example of early bluestone industrial construction and has a certain charm. It is occasionally used for concerts and as a film set and was once used for 'Mission Impossible'.

As the girls are eventually boarding their bus, a concrete truck comes down the winding path to the river flat. It has brought concrete to pour for an historic discovery trail and series of gardens being built by the Museum in the park. Fifteen unemployed young people from the region have come to work on a Landcare Environment Action Program (LEAP) as a focus for developing a range of skills. Elizabeth McKinnon, mosaic artist, is co-ordinating the project.

Six of these young people come to meet the concrete truck at the site with shovels in their hand. So outside the window there is a bus and a concrete truck. Some students are getting on the bus, several other young people in overalls are moving about on an old concrete slab. Around all this are newly planted red gums in the park and the Canary Island palms along the river bank with the Ammunition Factory in view and Flemington Racecourse in the distance.

Inside the window the apprentice gardeners are drinking coffee with Museum staff while an exhibition is being hung, someone is busy preparing a report on a computer, visitors are looking at historic photographs and the phones are ringing. It is all connected. It is all to do with history, culture and environment in Melbourne's Western Region today.

'Olwen, phone call for you from Footscray Council. They want to know if we have those photographs on sport in Footscray ready to show to the Saltwater River Festival committee meeting tomorrow.'

'Tell them we'll have them ready by tomorrow morning and someone from the Museum will be attending the meeting.'

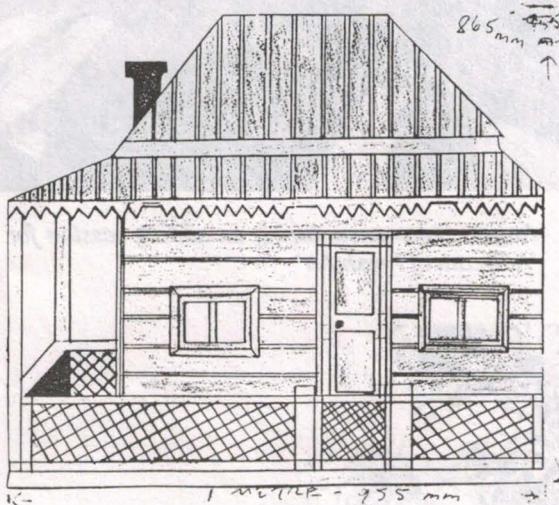
Another call: 'Has anyone seen the venue hire book? 'Greening Australia' are on the phone and they want to hire our centre one Sunday for a seminar on indigenous re-planting. Should be ok, nothing else seems to be booked for that day.'

It's Harry on the other phone from Western Region Group Training. He wants to know if the concrete truck has arrived yet. I told him it had arrived and the LEAP Team were attending to it.'

The project the LEAP Team are working on is taking shape. It is a garden about 100 metres by 50 metres that moves through five historic periods describing different time periods in the region's history. The first section has indigenous plants like kangaroo grass and yam daisy that was once a staple diet of Aboriginal people. Planted by the Koori Garden team of course.

Then more European plants are introduced and the ground marked with hoof prints to represent the coming of Europeans and their livestock. Next is a formal colonial garden setting, followed by Mediterranean plants to reflect the major migrations of the 1950s and the migrant workers who made the pipes here for Humes. Finally a return to indigenous plants shows an example of a garden of the future and a renewed respect for our land and heritage.

Throughout the garden will be mosaic paths and other sections with images relevant to the different time periods. The paths will connect to other nature trails and historic walks through the park.



Example of a design for part of the History of the Land mosaic carried out by LEAP team member Tracey Lessio.

The production of mosaics for this garden has been a focus of several studies for the 15 young people in the LEAP team. They studied the historical context to look for appropriate images. They studied oral history and then asked questions of local people. They studied archaeology to get a feel for the physical remains of history and they studied horticulture. All these studies have a bearing on the mosaics which they pour over intently and on some days the little room they are working in could look like a

workshop in Florence with pieces of tiles and half-finished images everywhere.

Two Aboriginal women artists have been brought in as consultants for design on the mosaics relating to the time of Aboriginal occupation so the LEAP team are also learning more about local Aboriginal culture and how all aspects of Living Museum projects inter-relate.

The concrete is for the paths that will run through the garden and form a base for the ground mosaic images. Concrete laying is one of the many new skills being learned by the LEAP team. There are moans of course and grunts and curses shovelling the concrete, but there is also pleasure because they have participated in the design of the garden, have all produced mosaics with their own ideas, and learnt more about their own region through a museum process. They are virtually producing a museum exhibition in a garden context.

Not all the LEAP team are shovelling concrete. Today David, Deanne and Lily are going to the local radio station. They come running into the Visitor Centre. 'Is it time to go yet?' one of them asks nervously.

'Yes, we are going any minute now', replies Mark as he shuffles through some papers on his desk. He is looking for his notes on current events in the region for the Living Museum's radio show which he has been running for two years. The Museum was involved in meetings and training for a proposed local radio station in Melbourne's Western Suburbs for some years. Then one day it actually came into being. 3WRB was born and the Museum produced a weekly show with guests talking about local history and other local issues interspersed with music.

Today three members of the LEAP team are going to talk about the project they are working on while learning a little about how to produce a radio show. Mark involves young people in the radio shows as much as possible. He plays modern music because the Museum has realized that younger people are not as aware or interested in heritage issues in the local context as they could be. The Museum has found radio to be one of the most effective mediums to reach young people in the region.

As Mark and the three members of the LEAP team hurry out of the kitchen area they pass Angelo and Helen glued to the T.V., watching video footage of disabled people going around the park trails. Angelo and Helen had been waiting for the school group to leave so they could resume their work on making a video about empowering the disabled to enjoy environmental experiences. So now they sit among the hustle and bustle studying the video material they have to work with.

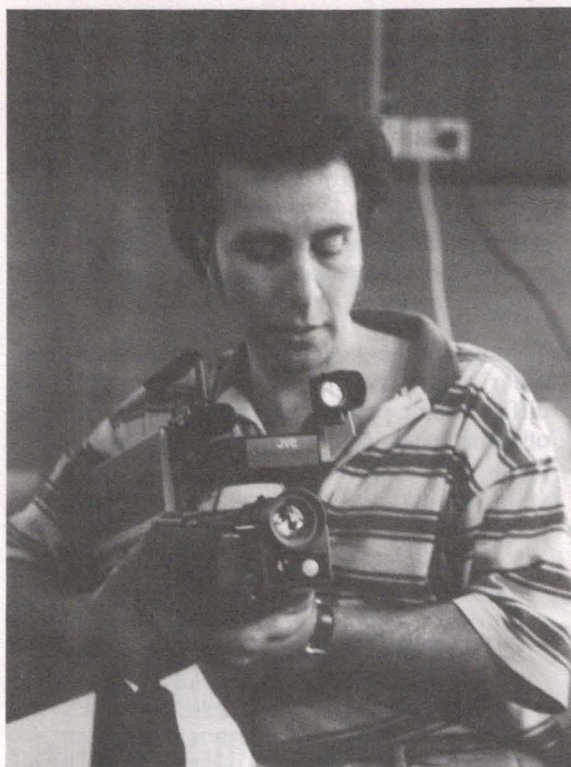
'Have a good time kids', teases Angelo, momentarily looking up from the screen. Angelo has a background in film-making and is on a placement through the 'Life Be In It' training scheme. Helen has a background in social work and does some part-time project work with the Living Museum.

Helen devised a project to look at ways the disabled could be given better access to environmental experiences. A day at Pipemakers Park was devised as a pilot program with three groups: people who are visually impaired, and others with physical and intellectual disabilities. The activities of the day were videoed and a tape was to be produced to illustrate some of the issues involved for workers in the field.

For example, the emphasis on the senses such as the smell of eucalypt and the sound of frogs was important to the visually impaired, while the condition of the tracks for wheelchairs was important for the physically disabled. Emphasising hands on experience and suiting interpretation methods to the individual's ability was important for the intellectually disabled. The project is called 'A Breath of Fresh Air'.

'Now this bit is good, it works visually.' Angelo says to Helen. On the screen one of the blind women is running her fingers around the edges of a leaf, getting a feel for the shape of it and smelling it. Then she feels the trunk of the tree to get a sense of the size of the tree. 'This illustrates one way she can get a feeling and experience of the plants in the park', he adds. 'And can learn to distinguish indigenous plants.'

Kylie and Kerrie come down off their ladders and walk toward the kitchen area. 'How is it going?', Kerrie asks Angelo and Helen. 'We're getting somewhere now', replies Helen. 'Are you coming to listen to the LEAP team on the radio?', asks Kylie.



Angelo Salamanca during an editing session for 'A Breath of Fresh Air'



John Richardson, and Kerry Potter from Northern District Spastic Society, who took part in the planning of a pilot environmental education day at Pipemakers Park.

'We haven't time really', replies Helen 'We have to make use of the video while it's available.'

As Kerrie and Kylie continue to the kitchen area a Nissan Patrol pulls up outside the window. Two men in khaki uniforms with Melbourne Parks & Waterways Ranger badges climb out of the car and head for the door. These are two of the Rangers based at Brimbank Park, who are responsible for managing this park as well.



Brimbank Park staff, John Argote and Rod Hill drop into the Living Museum for a park management meeting.

They are cheerful and chatty. 'How is everybody?' asks John, 'Yes I'd love a coffee thanks'. They have dropped in for one of many regular and irregular meetings held between Museum staff and the Rangers over the year.

Today they have come to talk about providing soil for the LEAP project, a proposed new bridge over the Maribyrnong, ideas for a display about Melbourne Water's role in the region, and hiring our Aboriginal Project Officer, Larry, to give a talk at a coming tree planting day and perhaps organising some Aboriginal dancers.

We find a table out in the Visitor's Centre away from the radio, away from the phones and away from the video. John and Paul, the other ranger have already been on the radio show talking about what they do at Melbourne Water as rangers and explaining how the parks in the region all have some important heritage that links into the historical context of the region.

The interaction between Living Museum staff and the rangers has enhanced their appreciation of the history of the site and expanded our sense of environment. Over the four years the Museum has been at Pipemakers Park there have been many projects on both sides where input has come from the other organisation.

To the credit of Melbourne Water the Museum has been consulted on many levels about the management of the park and our approach as a museum interpreting the site and the region has been taken into consideration on a whole range of issues. There has been some disagreement of course but usually there is agreement.

'Where's Larry?' asks John looking around. 'Oh he's not in yet, but we expect him any moment. He's been giving a talk to a school out in Sunshine and he's been there most of the day. He was talking to the kids at first but the teachers wanted him to stay back a bit and talk to them about Aboriginal content in curriculums'.

Then in strides Larry, holding boomerangs and spears in one hand and lecture notes in the other.

'Hi Larry, we were wondering where you got to.' 'What a day, what a day', complains Larry jovially, which usually means a lot was achieved. 'Those teachers wouldn't let me go. Wanted to know more and more. And I got *that* question again from some kid'

'What question?' asks Paul.

'Where do Aboriginals come from?', replies Larry raising his eyes in semi-mock exasperation. This question arises in a region with a very high multi-cultural population and is a strong indicator of the need for more Aboriginal studies in schools.

Larry co-ordinates an Aboriginal project at the Museum which does many things. He gives talks to schools and other organisations, organizes performers for events and carries out research on past and current Aboriginal issues.

'What's all the noise in the kitchen?' asks Larry. 'It's the LEAP team on Mark's radio show.' someone replies. 'Oh yeah', said Larry who has also appeared on the radio show talking about Aboriginal issues in Melbourne's Western Region.



The Living Musuem's History Hour on Western Region Radio, 3WRB goes to air with Mark Dawkins at the microphone.

More visitors come through the door. They want to see the video about the Maribyrnong Valley, *The Other River*, produced by the 'Friends of the Maribyrnong Valley', so Angelo and Helen's editing is interrupted for half an hour.

Hundreds of people have come to watch this video about the region. It's a good example of community group co-operation because one group, 'Friends of the Maribyrnong', produced the video and the Living Museum provides a venue and context in which it can be seen by individuals or groups. The Museum also sells copies to the public.

The day moves on. The radio show is over, the rangers have left, the gardeners have gone back to the garden, the concrete truck has left and rowing teams are beginning to appear on the river. There are reports to write and future events to prepare for and always, always phones to answer.

Not everyday is like this day. There are quiet days and quiet periods according to season and other cycles. But there are busier days too. There is always variety and there are always people. People are the grist of this Museum. It is about people in Melbourne's Western Region. Who they are, what they are part of, what they have contributed and what they can contribute. It is a community museum that meets the community on as many levels as possible and is defined very much by the people in the community and how they use the museum.



Aboriginal Project Officer, Larry Walsh, talking about uses of indigenous plants at a tree planting day at Buckingham Reserve, Kororoit Creek, Sunshine, organised by Melbourne Water.

GENESIS - HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Melbourne's Living Museum of the West was born in June, 1984. It came into being following a meeting convened by a local member of Parliament, Joan Kirner, in the western suburbs of Melbourne. This meeting brought together local people, state government representatives and others interested in history and museums.

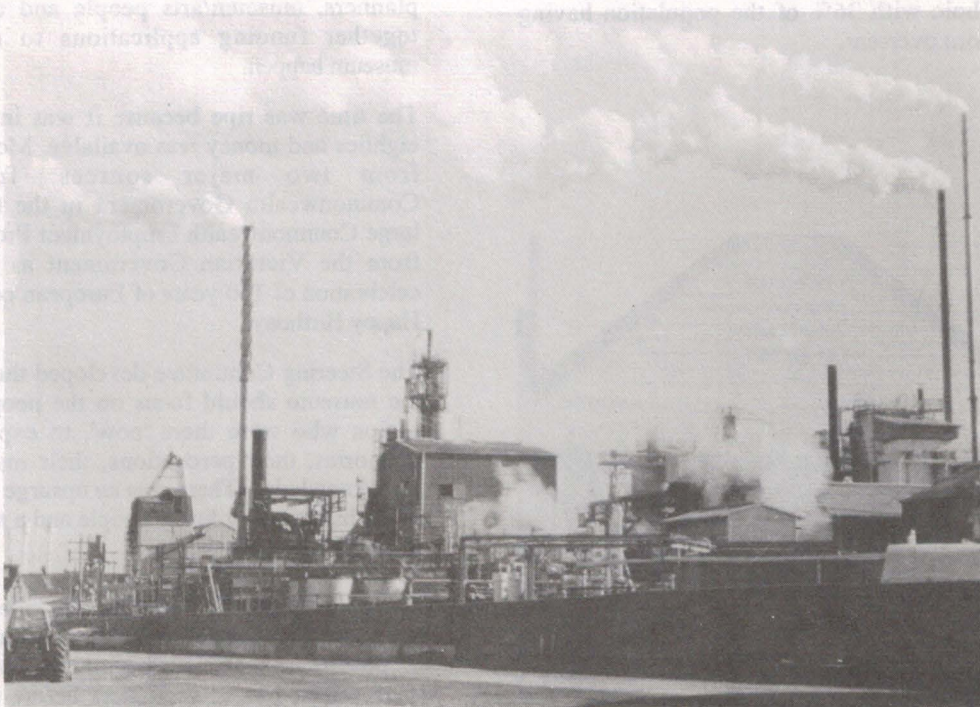
The initial 'idea' and shape of Melbourne's Living Museum came from several directions and it evolved from the political and economic context of the early 1980s.

Some local people and groups were interested in creating a museum about the Maribyrnong River Valley linking several historic sites, including industrial sites along the river because they were significant nationally and because the valley contains visible evidence of different stages of Aboriginal and European occupation.

Museum professionals were interested in the idea of a museum of 'work' based on developments overseas in Sweden, France, Germany and the U.S.A. The industrial areas of Melbourne's west were a suitable context for such an idea.

Three strands of that meeting were crucial in the development of the Living Museum project. One was the interest, enthusiasm and commitment of local people, another was the support and encouragement from government and the other was the input of museum professionals in touch with museum development in a wider context.

Museum professionals brought with them the models of 'ecomuseums' as they had been developed overseas. The ecomuseum is simply where a slice of the real world becomes a 'museum'. An existing industrial community, for example, that is interpreted in a museum context.



Factories on the wharves of the Maribyrnong River in Yarraville. A classic perception or image of the inner western suburbs.

It becomes a mirror for those who live in a particular environment or a window for those outside. For example, a valley in Switzerland has become an ecomuseum, so has a mountain in central France and an oasis in the Sahara.

The pioneering ecomuseum was at Le Creusot Montceau-les-Mines in Burgundy in France. Le Creusot was once one of the most important iron producing and engineering areas in 19th century Europe. The town was linked in a network of museums to a coalmine at Blanzay and an old school at Montceau-les-Mines. There they had an exhibition about a hundred years of schooling developed by the local people.

Le Creusot doesn't house a select collection of art from the distant past but simply contains for the most part buildings and objects that are part of and typical of an industrial community including the immediate landscape.

From the political side came concern for raising what was perceived as a negative profile for Melbourne's western suburbs which had been dubbed 'the deprived west' in the early seventies. The new State Labor Government decided something positive must be done for Melbourne's Western Region.

This Western Region covers about 1950 hectares and had a population then of about 450,000, comparable to the whole state of Tasmania. The population was perceived as being working class and ethnic with 36% of the population having been born overseas.



The small weatherboard house in Footscray from which the Living Museum operated in the first few years of its existence.

This is probably one of the most diverse communities in Australia and the world with some families working in the one industry for generations living in the same street as recent arrivals from Vietnam and Latin America, as well as more established migrants from Europe who came in the fifties and sixties.

Over the years, local people had learned to lobby, to communicate with government, to network with each other and support each other in a range of crises, particularly in some of the environmental issues arising at the time.

So a government idea for something good and positive to happen in Melbourne's Western Region became linked to the concerns and knowledge and experience of local activists and local people and was given a theoretical framework by museum professionals at the meeting convened by Joan Kirner.

There was also a sense of urgency about creating this museum because many of the major industries in the region were dying. Some of the workplaces closing down were the largest of their kind in Australia. Thousands of meat workers and metal workers were being retrenched. Unemployment was also becoming an issue.

A steering committee came together made up mainly of local residents which further developed the idea of a living museum of the western side of Melbourne. Then Joan Kirner's staff, bureaucrats, planners, museum/arts people and others put together funding applications to make the museum happen.

The time was ripe because it was in the early eighties and money was available. Money came from two major sources: from the Commonwealth Government in the form of a large Commonwealth Employment Program and from the Victorian Government as part of a celebration of 150 years of European occupation. Happy Birthday.

The Steering Committee developed the idea that the museum should focus on the people of the region who were there 'now', to explore their memories, their perceptions, their insights and their knowledge. There was an upsurge in interest in the history of ordinary people and a new sense of social history at the time.

Basically the money raised was intended to cover the wages of a sizeable full-time museum team of 22 people. An ambitious beginning. Five of these were selected as co-ordinators before the others and had some background in research. Seventeen were recruited from those registered as unemployed and came from a variety of work and ethnic backgrounds.

This factor is especially important in the founding of the Museum and has had a lasting legacy on the particular brand of community process that has evolved with the Museum.

While the team showed a typical cross section of Western Region cultural backgrounds, it was in fact quite atypical of museum workers or history researchers. Ages ranged from 17 years to 57 and included Italians, Greeks, Macedonians and Vietnamese fresh off the boat who had little English. Some of the team had backgrounds in history and research skills but the work backgrounds of most were notably un-academic. There was an ex-shearer, someone had worked in a florist shop, one woman had stacked shelves as a living, another was a tuba player while yet another had been a metal worker and a couple had worked in the local abattoirs.



The team researching migration in the first year. From left: Teena Cross, Vesna Smilevska, Flavia Graziotto, Chau Minh Ho.

The team chosen to some extent reflected the diverse character of the region - its multi-cultural, multi-lingual character, its diversity of culture and its experience of hard times. This diversity became especially important in a museum designed to be by, and for, the people of the region. It became a wonderful and delightful experiment for most of us. Though there were exceptions.

There was occasional controversy arising from academic-minded people who questioned the capacity of untrained people to be 'objective'. The point was, however, that their subjective status was a valuable asset in their ability to access community history through personal contact and understanding of the region's subcultures. In

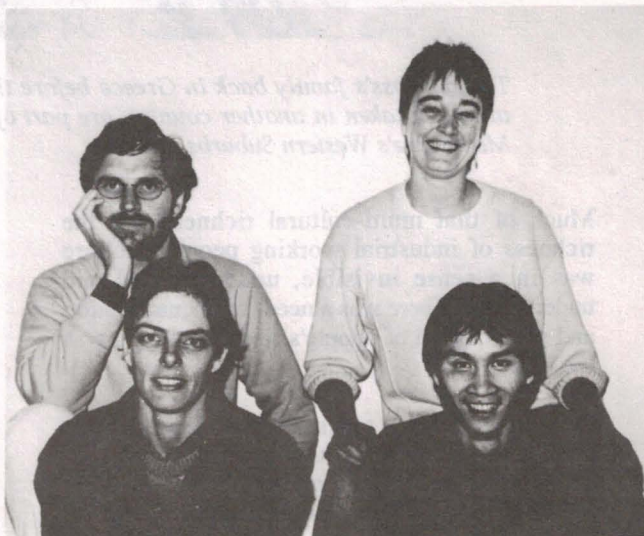
many cases they began researching and recording their own history, particularly those with an ethnic background.

In some ways subjectivity was the preferred option with this experimental museum. Furthermore, the insights and developments of community process that arose out of this diversity far outweighed any disadvantage borne from lack of 'objectivity'.

The new sense of social history and local history was occurring in many parts of the world and being researched and presented in a variety of ways. One appropriate catchcry or metaphor of the movement was 'dig where you stand' which was another way of saying research the place you know best, your own workplace, your own local area and talk to people because they will know things that are not recorded anywhere.

This interest was possibly all the greater in a region suffering from recession, changing patterns of trade, technology and job skills and the effect of all these on community consciousness. The urgency of the task of recording and documenting a changing culture loomed large.

Furthermore the historical significance of the metal trades, chemical industries, meatworks, bluestone quarrying and munitions industries in the area for more than a hundred years employing thousands of people was being recognised as an important part of the total historical picture of a nation. We all know about Gallipoli but where did they make the bullets? They were made on the western front - the western suburbs of Melbourne.



The team researching women in paid work in the first year. From top left: Rod Faulkner, Jenny Mitchell, Marg Jacobs, Son Thanh Nguyen.

Little had been recorded in our region at that stage, in terms of documenting the culture of working people, their work processes, their social life, their language, their humour, their family and friendship networks, their union activities.

Little had been done in a regional context to record the experiences of the thousands of migrants that came and settled in this region over the previous three or four decades. What did they bring with them and what was the impact of their coming? At that time between 160,000 and 170,000 people in the region were born overseas in approximately 70 different nations. That figure does not include the children born here and brought up partly in another culture. This is not Chips Rafferty country.



Teena Cross's family back in Greece before they came to Australia. Photos like this, although taken in another country, are part of the heritage of thousands of people in Melbourne's Western Suburbs.

Much of that multi-cultural richness and the richness of industrial working people's culture was in a sense invisible, undocumented and undervalued. There was a need for documentation and presentation of people's stories before it was too late.

One of the first tasks of the management committee of the new museum was to develop a set of aims and objectives with some of these ideas in mind. The first objective being: *to establish a permanent ecomuseum within the context of Melbourne's Western Region, a concept whereby the total community, its environment and heritage, are considered as part*

of the museum, focusing the main emphasis on the people of the region rather than artefacts and operating from one or more bases in the region.

The region itself contains nine municipalities covering the western side of Melbourne. Its eastern boundary is defined by the Moonee Ponds Creek and Maribyrnong River which carried the earliest European shipping trade to Melbourne. Many of Melbourne's first major industries developed along the Maribyrnong.

The flat treeless basalt plains which swept west from the Maribyrnong were covered with grassland which first attracted the sheep graziers like Batman.

The industries along the Maribyrnong first developed in tandem with the sheep industry - abattoirs, boiling down works, candle works, meat canning, tanneries and bone mills.

Then came engineering works, railway workshops, chemical industries, munitions and eventually oil refineries, many on a very large scale, so that this area was for decades the industrial heartland of the nation.

Not all the region is industrial - it also contains rich farm land, particularly in the river flats, where there is market gardening and orchards. Ironically the region also contains important



Walking to work from Sunshine Station to H.V. McKay's Sunshine Harvester Works early this century. An example of the history of work in the region, (H.V. McKay Archive, Museum of Victoria).

wetlands, pockets of indigenous vegetation and archaeological remains of Aboriginal occupation in the most unlikely spots because of the vast areas fenced off for industry.

It is a unique region full of contrasts and surprises. A typical scene could be black swans swimming in the reeds of a creek. On the banks of the creek are cows or horses in front of the large tanks of an oil refinery across the road from a housing estate. It could be described as a surreal landscape. It is in this surreal context that we research the lives of the people who live and work in it.

The Living Museum was to be a people's museum, a multi-cultural museum, a museum which focussed on the history of working people up to the present and which involved the people of the region in the process of research and presentation. And the first groups of people to be invited in that research were those that were felt to be previously neglected and undervalued.

This was a very wide brief and suggested an awesome research task. Research was to be the first major task of the team. The first step was to structure the group into four research teams and a media team each with a co-ordinator. There were

four themes to be looked at initially - work, women in work, women in unpaid work and migration.

The main method to be used was oral history research. That means research material was to be gathered directly from people talking about their knowledge and their experiences in their own terms so information about a work place or lifestyle could be collected directly from the horse's mouth so to speak.

In practical terms this meant interviewing people with a tape recorder which has a number of associated problems, codes and specialised methodology along with the opportunity for fresh, spontaneous and unique information. The research teams had to undergo some training in this form of research.

Along with the oral history research was a strong visual emphasis. The Museum was to collect images for later presentation in books and exhibitions. It was not the intent to collect images as artefacts to be stored and hallowed as precious items in their own right, but rather to collect images as part of information and research to be processed and used to enhance the presentation of the stories collected in that research.

Your History Mate

Essentially this meant taking photographs of people being interviewed, copying their old photographs and making use of the new medium of video in the course of historical research and recording.

The collection of images was an important function of the new museum because one of the key aims of this community museum with its emphasis on social history was to present the stories back to the community in an accessible form. One of the aims reads: *To use a wide range of presentation methods, including exhibitions, video, publications, theatre, public events, and other participatory methods.*

This determination to make the findings of the research accessible to the community in a range of presentation methods that spoke to people in everyday language was to become a hallmark of the Living Museum. The research got off to an unsteady start as the teams began to try and get a grip on exactly what it was they were doing.

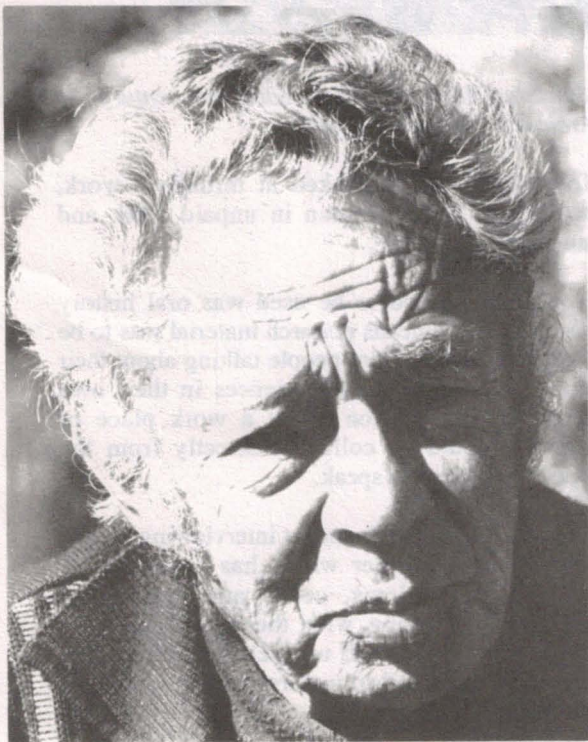


Joseph Mastroianni, the Museum's video cameraman, shooting documentary footage of the Western Region.

There had to be some background and some starting point. Most of the team had not done anything like this before and they had to come to grips with the whole idea of actually sitting down with a tape recorder and asking people questions.

In order to understand what sort of questions to ask and how to ask them, they needed a clearer idea of what would happen to the material and what it was for. There was also a credibility problem with many of the team who were born and raised in the western suburbs and were bemused with the whole idea of asking relatives, friends, neighbours and strangers questions which as far as they knew had never been asked seriously before. Let alone getting them to speak into a tape recorder.

What do we ask, who do we ask and how do we convince them to sit down and talk into a tape recorder became the first concerns of training and group discussion. The first few weeks, if not months, were very much learn as we go.



Bernard Leunig, meatworker for most of his working life, interviewed for the oral history book on the meatworks - The Life Blood of Footscray.



Miss K. Tyack operating the electric crane in the heat treatment of large bombs in Forge No. 2, Ordnance Factory Maribyrnong, during WW II.

The team looking at 'work' started with the meat industry which had been a huge industry in the area since the last century. They looked at one factory in particular, Angliss Meat Works, and interviewed workers they met through personal contacts. The difficult part was first to make a connection and then to convince people they had something worthwhile to say. Once the ice was broken and there was a precedent, people were easier to convince.

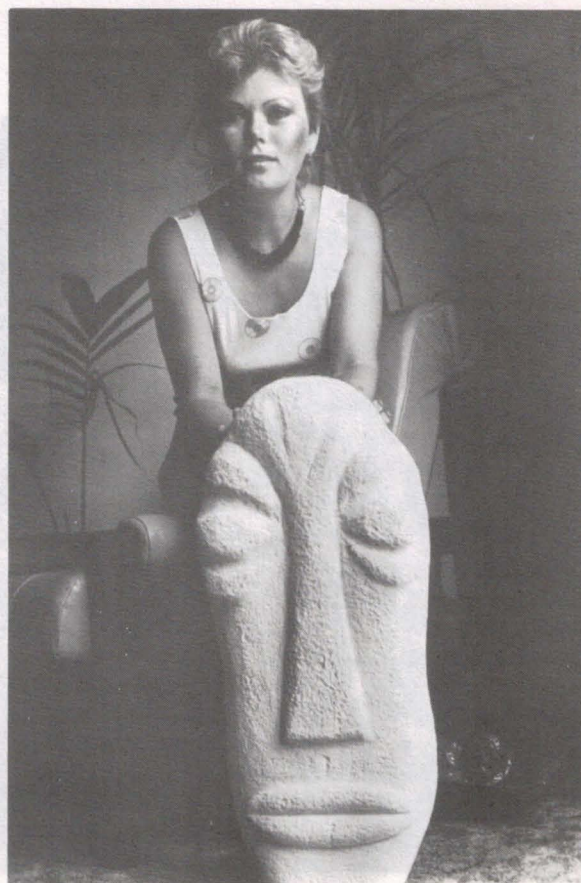
Again and again the researchers came across the credibility barrier they themselves at first felt. Working people, who in many cases had felt just a cog in the machine, found it difficult at first to believe someone really wanted to hear about what they did and what they thought. Such things had never been asked of them before and so naturally they were wary and dubious.

However when the idea of a museum to record history that had hitherto been ignored and undervalued was explained, the response was warmer and the suspicion generally gave way to enthusiasm and pride. This became one of the great pleasures of that first period in the Museum's own history.

The team looking at 'women in work' decided to study the munitions industry where thousands of women had worked during wartime. It had been a time of social change for women because so many of them went to work for the first time during this period and were doing heavy dangerous jobs that were previously done by men.

This team made contact with the women by simply writing an article in a local paper asking women who worked in the munitions during the war to contact the Museum. Some did and from there the team made further contacts and obtained many interviews.

The team looking at migration were able to start with their own families because they were part of the experience they were researching. The Vietnamese researchers brought photos and stories from the refugee camps and migrant hostels. The Greek researcher brought photos and stories of the way her family came out to this country one at a time, each one working to set up a base for the following members of the family.



Eva Enders, born in Yugoslavia of Hungarian parents, took part in a Museum study on creative women in Melbourne's West.

Your History Mate

To emphasise the Living Museum's commitment to outreach, the Museum was launched with a celebration in the nearby Highpoint West shopping centre, on a stage especially set up for all kinds of shows to entertain weary shoppers.

Products coming out of the research were also designed for people who were not likely to go and search library shelves for hidden reports and wordy tomes. For example anecdotes and photos from the women who worked at the munitions were produced in a diary form. Interviews from meatworkers were turned into a radio series, photographs of migrants in factory work became postcards, exhibitions were held in shopping centres.

The general thrust of the work of the museum was to shift the focus of heritage and culture further into the realm of everyday living, to become part of the dialogue and banter of everyday life rather than be set apart as something separate. The museum aimed to make history more accessible and relevant, so it is maintained within the community and is easily owned and recognised. It's your history mate.



The Living Museum's Bands Project was an example of the recording of contemporary community celebration and a cultural institution.



The Newmarket Saleyards presented a remarkable rural scene just three kilometres from the centre of Melbourne, with its own bush ethos. At the same time it was the catalyst for a vast array of abattoirs and meat processing works and a crucial link in the chain of industry in the west.

HOW DID THIS COME TO BE ? - RESEARCH

What exactly is research? Basically research is collecting information, usually with a purpose and/or with an outcome in mind. Research is not the preserve of academics, industry and museums, most of us at some time find ourselves doing some research. Studying recipes to prepare for a dinner party, for example, is research. The Museum's first main tool of research was oral history.

Information also comes in different forms. It does not just come in written or spoken words, it also comes in pictures, diagrams, maps, drawings, film or video, artefacts and other physical evidence. Much attention has been given to copying old photographs and taking photographs of people and places being researched. The Living Museum made a conscious decision not to collect artefacts but rather to take pictures and collect oral, printed and visual information for research.

In the nine years since those first halting oral history interviews the Museum's ideas and forms of research have spread in many directions. This

has included both the nature of the research undertaken and the products produced from it.

Before oral history interviews began, other forms of research were required. We investigated new and innovative forms of museums overseas and studied the make-up of the western suburbs population, for example, finding from the 1981 census that 36% of the region's people were born overseas.

A certain amount of research had to be done initially to develop a framework within which to pursue other styles of research. The 'Work' team had to know something about the meat industry as a background to frame their questions.

Each step in a process threw up the need for research in other areas. When the background research was done and the oral interviews collected, with a view to putting on an exhibition, there was usually need for some research on presentation methods, for example, exhibition or publication forms.



The Museum's Industrial Archeologist, Gary Vines, talks with Joe Bonnici and other workers from the Humes Pipes Company which once produced pipes on the site now occupied by the Museum.



During research on the massive McKay harvester works in Sunshine, Rod Faulkner asks Merv Brooks about his work in the Blacksmiths Shop where he used to work ten to twelve hours a day in hot dangerous conditions.

A museum therefore does not just do research into the subject of history, but it also does research into the forms of presentation of that history. The Living Museum has researched display methods, printing styles, layouts, desk top publishing, business plans and business management to name a few, often working out the cheaper and simpler ways of doing things. It even does research into research methods.

However the first basic task of research the Museum set for itself was to collect people's memories about work, migration and women's art. You have to start somewhere. These areas were seen as under-represented, under-valued, feasible to research and acceptable to those who funded the research.

The choice of an area to research is not always simply a matter of what you would like to research and how much research you think you would like to do or even what you think is most important to research. There are often other factors that partly determine what you can research.

For example, if you could see what you considered three equally important areas to research and one of those areas was considered more important by another party, such as a

funding body or perhaps a potential audience, then most likely this would influence which of the areas you chose.

In the case of a commissioned history of the Richardson Company, which made metal products, the company's concern was for the history of the management and the product, while the Museum was more interested in the social history and the worker's stories. A compromise therefore, had to be reached.

The Victorian Department of Planning commissioned a study of the Albion Explosives Factory site. Their agenda was to identify possible heritage constraints in future planning. This served the Museum's agenda since we were concerned with the study of the historical development of industry in the region.

This is not always the case, it is simply meant to illustrate that more than one factor can be involved in the choice of a research topic. Another factor could be that research in one direction leads more effectively into further research in associated areas. For example, the meat industry connects to the pastoral industry which connects to the Newmarket Saleyards and so on.

The guideline for what should be researched was whether it contributed to building up the interpretive picture of the western region of Melbourne within the ecomuseum concept. The idea was to start with some of the major industries and issues and gradually fill in the spaces in between. The first year of the Museum was very much research-driven and research-oriented with most members of the Museum pursuing a similar style and form of oral history research.

Some of the 'work' team interviewed meat workers and asked them about work and life at Angliss's. Often they would go with the person to the deserted site with its massive, crumbling, industrial buildings to stir the memory. Some of the smells were still in the stone. This all helped stimulate the memory and aided the research.

Brian and his mate Don, formerly a metal trades worker, would go into a familiar pub near the Saleyards with their tape recorder and start talking and yarning with the guys like they normally would at the pub. The result is very living history.

These opportunities that arose through the particular social connections of team members also became a factor in the choice or direction of some research and took the Museum in directions it might otherwise have missed or overlooked. More importantly, the Museum set out with the objective of getting such people involved.

The make-up, background, personality of the researcher will also have a bearing not only on the choice of content and direction but also on the style of the research.



Tony Basiliadis, researching music culture in the western suburbs for the Museum, talks to a member of the Williamstown Dockyards Band during a lunchtime performance by the band for the workers at the dockyards.

Two of the team branched out and researched Newmarket Saleyards mainly because one of the team members, Brian, had been a drover and knew a lot of people at the Saleyards.

As he was familiar with the people and the workings of the Saleyards, he knew where to find them and how to talk to them naturally. They could relax with Brian and not feel they were being 'researched' in an 'objective' way and being put 'under a microscope'.

Brian might not have asked some relevant questions about the Saleyards from an academic point of view but he certainly collected some research material with a feeling for the lifestyle that a more academic approach could miss.

One of many examples was the story of 'Peabody', a legendary figure who picked up work at the Saleyards, and about whom there were many stories of his habit of sleeping among the cattle or on blood-stained clothes in the slaughtermen's drying room.

Which brings us back briefly to the point of the aim or purpose of the research. This is a living museum attempting to collect living memories of people and their lifestyles in a participatory way in order to develop a local version of the ecomuseum idea. With this purpose in mind research like Brian's is invaluable.

Another member of the team, Tony, was a tuba player who happened to play in local brass bands. He was officially assigned to the 'women in work' team but it made more sense to assign him to a project looking at the history of bands in the region. It turned out that the history of bands was an integral part of working people's cultural history in the region. So we learned more of the full story. The need to constantly look at the picture of work in the broader context of life was reinforced.

We learned that the entire train from Williamstown used to be full of bands heading to the city on Anzac day. We learned that many factories had their own bands. We learned about a band heritage which has a strong contemporary thread resulting in local bands winning international competitions. We interviewed these bands, made a video about them and had many of them play at our events. This opportunity made the concept of a living museum far richer than it might have been.

The position of the researcher as 'insider', or even a participant in the area being researched, was seen as an opportunity to enhance the sense of living history. The Museum's experience has

shown it opens new opportunities and directions, adds to commitment on the part of the researcher and perhaps gives an added 'feel' or depth to the subject being researched.

In these two examples the 'insider' status of the researcher is quite specific. On another level there was also a sense of 'insider' for staff members who either had lived or worked in Melbourne's western suburbs and consequently had some emotional attachment or pride in the purpose of the work we were doing.

We have discussed several times how this seems to have an effect on the sense of commitment by staff to the whole idea of the Museum and may be an important factor to consider in the efforts shown to explore the potential of the ecomuseum experiment. However being one of those 'intangibles' it might be hard to measure with performance indicators.

The 'insider' status of the ethnic members of the team was also invaluable. Imagine a trained researcher of Anglo-Saxon background sitting in the lounge room of a Greek family where the parent's grasp of English is halting at best. Imagine this researcher trying to look relaxed and natural while broaching personal questions about an experience so different from their own background. Imagine the family trying to understand the questions. Imagine the family deciding what they think they are expected to answer and what they are willing to answer.



Di Parsons is being given a thorough explanation of what goes on at this quarry in Sunshine during a research project on bluestone and quarrying in Melbourne's west.

In another case one of our Vietnamese researchers obtained interviews with a group of Vietnamese women about their experiences on arrival, including some discussion on the piece work they did discreetly for small clothing manufacturers. Some were even reluctant to talk to him, let alone someone of Anglo-Saxon background.

Many migrant groups who come here have good reason to be careful of what they talk about and who they talk to. Even the 'insider' status of a researcher has its limits.

This first major rush into oral history research was somewhat curtailed at the end of the first year when the C.E.P. funding ran out and the staff was reduced to six.

Industrial heritage, the environment and Koorie culture, coming and going in succession, we have maintained continuous threads of all these issues throughout the Living Museum's work.

A major historical outline of the region provided a framework for a heritage study of the region. We began to look at the natural heritage and began research into the geology and flora of the region to establish the context of the cultural heritage.

Part of the purpose of our research into Melbourne's western region was to change the negative images of the western suburbs and reveal its positive qualities. To do this we had to get away from the perception of the region as a flat treeless landscape and cultural wasteland.



An example of fieldwork in Werribee. Flavia Graziotto contacted John Portogallo who introduced her to the Italian market gardening community, an important part of the district's heritage. It is the role of the Living Museum to identify these aspects of the region's history.

After a period of re-adjustment we became a little more academic and research was re-directed to the background picture and heritage issues. Oral history still played a part, but it became a complementary part of research in some projects. Research runs in ebbs and flows depending on what is fashionable, and therefore what gets funding, Living Museum priorities, staff levels and commitments, how much has already been done and the gaps we perceive.

While we have had individual themes coming to the fore at one time or another, with topics such as migration, women in the munitions industry,

Then we had to recognize the Region's unique qualities ourselves to see how they contributed to the industries and lifestyles that evolved here if we were to really give a full interpretation to our ecomuseum.

This led to research into Kororoit Creek, perceived as a haven for pestilent artichoke thistles and dead cars. It was also part of the story of early treks to the gold fields and the first European settlers in the area. Some of the first bluestone constructions in Victoria sit on its banks and evidence of Aboriginal occupation can be found there.



An early bluesone bridge built across the Kororoit Creek to facilitate traffic to the goldfields. A magnificent example of bluestone architecture. Incidentally, this part of the bridge cannot be seen from the road.

The very bedrock of the basalt plain itself was worthy of research. Quarrying was one of the first major industries in the area and we learnt about the different qualities of this rock and how many of the landmark historic buildings of Melbourne were made from a particular quality of bluestone which has given Melbourne its distinctive look.

Fascinating little stories come from research into unlikely subjects like rock. One of our favourite, but unconfirmed stories, is that the cobblestones of Covent Garden in London come from the basalt plains, west of Melbourne. The story goes that the bluestone which became those cobblestones went back as ballast in sailing ships in the early years of European occupation.

We researched the changing nature of the vegetation over the years and we researched wetlands, bird habitats and wetland education. For research like this the Museum employed professional consultants. The purpose of research like this was not simply to record history or heritage but also to have input to current issues.

The wetland research looked not only into what existed but also into ways that could preserve, enhance and even expand wetland areas. The consultant went to other wetlands in France, Germany, England and Asia and put the wetlands in the western suburbs in an international context.

The Museum was learning that acts of research were not simply exercises to record information but that research could have an impact on current issues.

During the course of this research we discovered that many of the major wetland areas did not just survive despite industry - they existed because of industry. Thousands of birds, including pelicans, black swans, sacred ibis and all kinds of ducks live in wetlands created by factory buffer zones, the sewerage farm and salt works that cover hundreds of acres of the western suburbs.

Information like this was all going towards building up a picture of our ecomuseum as a region of contrasts that were inter-related in ways that were not immediately obvious and which had qualities and stories that were unique and marvellous. It wasn't that many of the things we researched could not be found anywhere else. It was the way they existed here together that gave the place a particular character.

A common thread in the Museum's research has been the continuity between past and present, how an understanding of the processes involved in our environmental and cultural heritage helps us appreciate how and why the present situation developed - and how we should respond to the future.

For example, the cause and effect relationship between an environment and Aboriginal fire stick farming, which created grassy plains that attracted the graziers and sheep, which lead to tallow and meatworks, which progressed into chemical works that have given us a legacy of pollution and environmental hazard.

As the Museum broadened the scope of its research it also looked at some areas in more depth. We employed an industrial archaeologist in the third year who brought his expertise to bear on the industrial landscape. This led to more thorough site documentation and eventually a project that attempted to map most of the several hundred significant industrial sites in the western suburbs. The *Western Region Industrial Heritage Study* was the largest project of its type at the time and became a model for similar projects.

We obtained funding for this project from the Department of Planning, Regional Action Program. This led to the Historic Buildings Council employing us as consultants for a similar study of Northern Suburbs Factories. With the background expertise we are in a position to provide independent assessments of historical sites, for example assessing the significant components of the historic Swallow & Ariel factory, or using archaeological and historical research to assess potential contamination of sites. All of these projects, whether grant or consultancy add to the Museum's knowledge of the region and enhance the skills of its staff. These points are critical in the decision whether or not to take on a consultancy.

As a matter of interest, Gary, our industrial archaeologist, grew up in the outer western suburbs and spent his childhood years wandering and playing around the vast industrial landscape on the edge of the open grassy plains near his home.

Gradually, as the Museum's capacity and expertise for research and creating reports and other products grew, the profile of the Museum rose and we began to be approached as consultants for a number of jobs, including research projects.

This created a philosophical dilemma at first. As much as we needed the money to keep the Museum going, would consultancy work deflect us from our aims and objectives as a museum? This is a real dilemma for any non-profit organisation with 'ideals' as guidelines. If you can earn money when does the earning of money interfere with what you are there to do. This can also be true of pursuing grant money of course.

On the other hand, if the opportunity to earn money arises while pursuing your fundamental aims and objectives, that is all to the good. It is simple enough to outline this dilemma in a few lines but at the time it took a lot of thinking out.

As it turns out, nearly all the jobs we have been approached to do as consultants have fallen well and truly within the guidelines of the Museum's aims and objectives and have in ways opened up new areas to study and new ways to explore the workings of an ecomuseum.

Sometimes priority areas might have to wait for a number of reasons. It was always seen as important to research the Aboriginal heritage of the region. However the management committee of the Museum felt it was not ethical to approach this area of study without Aboriginal input.

In another case of opportunity, a chance meeting with the cultural officer of the Wurundjeri Tribal Council led to a number of meetings with the Wurundjeri and eventually to the employment of the same cultural officer, Robert Mate Mate in 1991.

Since then the Museum has had a constant Aboriginal presence and conducted research through the Aboriginal project officers. As stated earlier the purpose of the research directs the type and amount of research. Some research is specifically product-driven and is not always to do with facts and figures or stories.

One project the Museum did was to produce a promotional poster illustrating a positive and definitive image for the nine municipalities of the western suburbs. This was a specifically visual project and the research in this case was researching images. The research involved exploring typical or classic images for each municipality that were acceptable to the council of the municipality.

It was not simply a matter of taking pictures. It was also an exercise in researching perceptions. The problem meant close discussions with local councils about what images best defined their municipality so that they participated in defining a visual sense of the regional ecomuseum. For example, we saw haystacks in Melton but the local council saw thoroughbred horses.

We also researched 'perceptions' in other ways. The media team at the Museum, Peter and Joe, who were taking photographs and making videos, were interested in how people saw things. Perception is part of our occupation and they pointed out that most of the researchers asked people what they did and what they thought but rarely asked people how they saw the world.

We speculated that there may be unique perceptions linked into people's jobs and lives and were curious to know if this could be researched because it also might throw some new light on understanding and interpretation. It was all a matter of working out how to frame the appropriate questions and providing the tools to access the answer. Eventually an exhibition project developed, *Back In Your Own Backyard* which presented the results of this research on perceptions.

Research has very much to do with how you frame the question for what it is you want to know. Often we have found that even with areas that have been well researched new questions often arise.

A group of young actresses from the Victorian College of the Arts came to look at our oral history material. This led to a project with women who worked at the munitions factories during World War II, because they were developing a play around the lives of the women.

They contacted the women through the Museum because they needed their permission and their involvement and some extra information about personal details. For example, they wanted to know how the women moved their hands when they were doing the jobs they described in the oral history stories at the Museum. Their product was the play *Go West Young Women*.

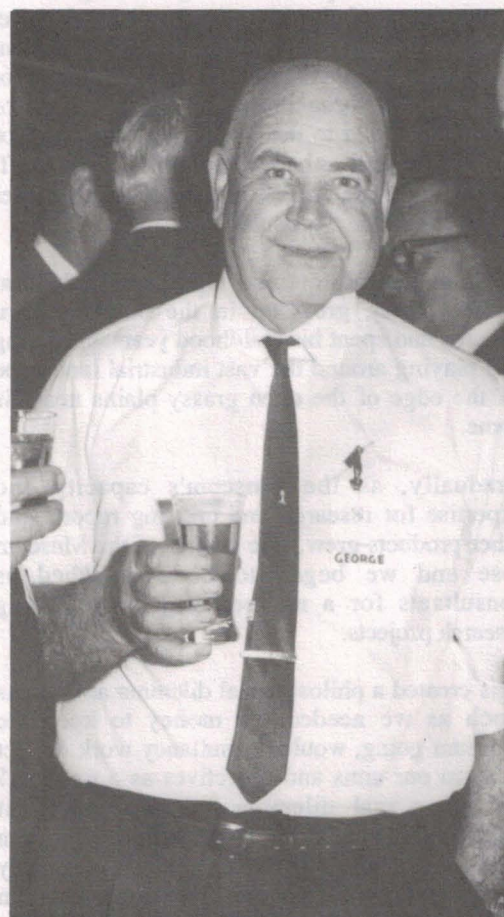
A more personal research project was a study of the way one man touched the lives of many people and had enormous influence on cultural change on a national level. He was George Seelaf, long time secretary of the Meatworker's Union and once dubbed the 'King' of Footscray. George initiated a whole range of things with meagre resources and showed others that where there is a will there is a way.

He set up the first medical clinic that dealt with medical problems arising from industrial work in the 1960's. He introduced art and cultural pursuits into the work place because he believed that workers should enhance their quality of life as well as fight for more money. He was instrumental in preventing the communist party being banned in Australia and lobbied for equal pay for women. He helped Bob Hawke in the union movement and opened doors for his rise to power.

The project was called *Life and Times, the inspiration, work and philosophy of George Seelaf*, and was a research study into how an individual can participate and influence the cultural process and empower others. Museum, staff, Libby McKinnon and Mark Dawkins,

interviewed forty people about George, how he worked and how his influence had helped them and shaped their lives. These included the Hon. Ralph Willis, now Federal Treasurer, Wally Curran, secretary of the Amalgamated Meat Industry Employees Union, the late Frank Hardy, author of *Power Without Glory*, Dr. Moss Cass, who was involved in setting up the Trade Union Clinic and Resource Centre, and Medicare, Andrew Reeves, then Director of Human studies, Museum of Victoria, Deborah Mills, former director of the Community Cultural Development Unit of the Australia Council and Gillian Harrison, a Footscray musician and community arts worker.

The focus of research in this particular project was the dynamics of society on a local level and its permeating effects on the broader society. This kind of research is another dimension in our ecomuseum and points to the endless potential of research in many directions. It is an ongoing process. Hopefully by now we have some shape and depth to our ecomuseum but there is still much work to be done.



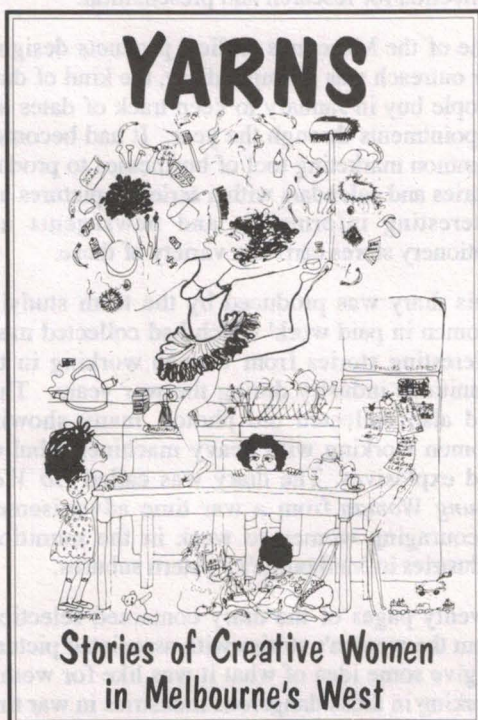
George Seelaf.

SHOW & TELL - MUSEUM BY PRODUCT

The Living Museum was committed to making the findings of all its research accessible to the community. The range of material collected was made possible by the support and participation of the community, particularly the people of Melbourne's western suburbs, and it was intended that this information be given back to the community.

It was to be given back in a wide range of presentation methods including exhibitions, video, publications and other forms. The Museum aimed to develop techniques of presenting these methods as effective communication devices which were more appropriate and accessible to the people of the region.

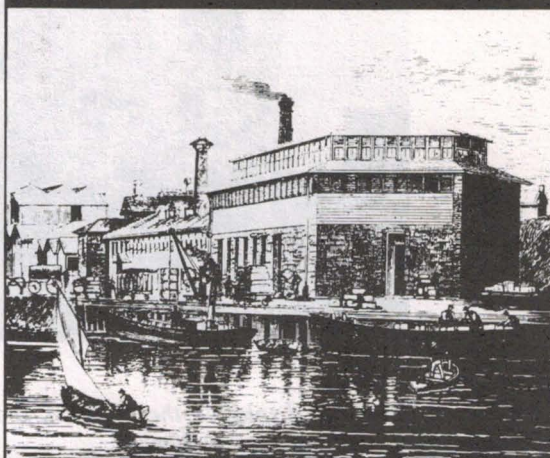
The founders of the Museum anticipated a museum that would blend ideas on history, culture, the environment and heritage into a wide range of forms of presentation. So the 'museum dynamic' expands beyond the limits of four (or even fifty) walls or the narrow perception that history is confined to books and displays of artefacts.



Yarns, one of the books produced in the Museum's first year.

EXPLORE MELBOURNE'S WEST

A Resource Handbook



by

Oiwen Ford and Chrisy Dennis

Melbourne's Living Museum of the West

The first comprehensive guide to conducting historical research in the Western Suburbs, specifically designed for secondary students.

This was not to deny the value of books and museums. It was simply an intention to extend the heritage dialogue into everyday life by extending the possibilities of participation in that dialogue. This required a concerted effort by the Museum staff to reach out to people in the community and involve them in all stages of the museum process. The Living Museum aimed to show history as part of everyday living. It aimed to raise the profile of the role of the people in the western suburbs in the history of their own region, in the history of the state of Victoria and in the history of the nation.

In practical terms this meant taking exhibitions out of the Museum into public places and producing or supporting the production of



A small introductory display to the Museum, sponsored by a large local shopping centre and placed in shopping malls to reach new audiences.

postcards, posters, diaries, calendars, theatre, newspaper articles, videos and live events that carried themes of heritage particularly related to the western suburbs of Melbourne.

At the same time it meant building up a resource centre of primary data from oral history interviews and other research, a photo library of thousands of photographs copied from old photographs or taken by Museum staff and many other reports, books, maps and articles pertaining to history and heritage issues in Melbourne's Western Region that would be accessible to the public.

The Museum developed a collection policy specifically suited to meeting its research and presentation aims. Objects were not to be collected simply because they were old or interesting, but because they could be used to help understand and present the story of the region. People's own words were preferred to second-hand accounts, and artefacts would only be collected where they related directly to one of the specific research themes. Copies of photographs, or documents were to be compiled in preference to originals so that they were not taken from their true owners. This policy also eased some of the storage and conservation problems which bedevil all museums, and so

freed more resources for actually using the collection for research and presentation.

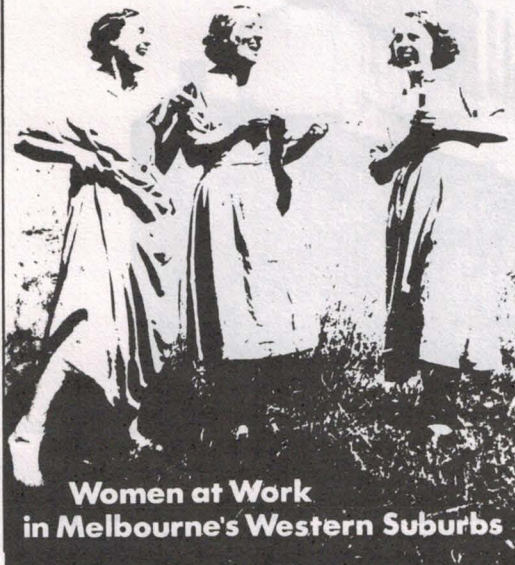
One of the Museum's earliest products designed for outreach was a simple diary, the kind of diary people buy in January to keep track of dates and appointments through the year. It had become a common marketing tool of businesses to produce diaries and calendars with a series of pictures and interesting information and newsagents and stationery stores carried a variety of these.

This diary was produced by the team studying 'women in paid work' which had collected many interesting stories from women working in the munitions industry during the war years. They had also collected old photos, many showing women working with heavy machinery, bullets and explosives. The diary was called *Go West Young Woman* from a war time advertisement encouraging women to work in the munitions industries in Melbourne's western suburbs.

Twenty pages of the diary contained selections from the women's stories with associated pictures to give some idea of what it was like for women working in those dangerous industries in war time Australia. One of the stories for example illustrates the constant danger of the work :

"Go West, Young Woman!"

Munitions Diary 1985



**Women at Work
in Melbourne's Western Suburbs**

An alternative to the history book, words and pictures in a functional package.

And I'd just got to the door to the room next to where I was working. And all of a sudden away it went, and I ended up about half a mile across the paddock. The doctor told me to give it up and go away. He said travel around for awhile to get your nerves back.

The print run of a thousand sold out and the feedback was very positive. Customers liked it and the women who contributed their stories were very proud of it. It was in effect a mini exhibition that was easily transportable in a bag or pocket. It was even used by some teachers as a teaching tool for local history.

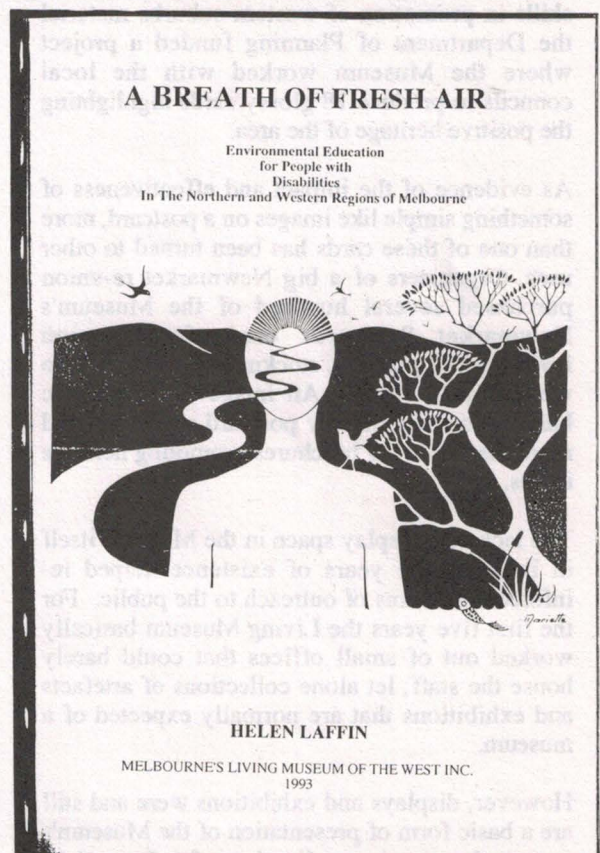
In fact the demand for this product as a teaching tool was such that a re-print was done without the dates. In 1987, a second diary product, *Duty Nobly Done*, focussed on the history of the H.V. McKay Sunshine Harvester Works in Sunshine.

These early products are good examples of the simple way the Museum went about presenting the history collected from the people of the Western Region back to the people of the region and the general public in an accessible form in a normal everyday context. This is one way to take the heritage dialogue into everyday life and reach out past the museum walls, literal or conceptual.

Another simple product is postcards. The Museum has produced several series of postcards. Some of the first set of postcards produced by the media team took a tongue-in-cheek approach to the supposedly negative view of the Western Region by creating cards with 'Greetings from Melbourne's Western Suburbs' overlaid on images of petroleum tanks at Altona, a woman factory worker smiling and waving at her industrial rope-making machine and a group of cattle at the Newmarket Saleyards among others.

These cards were intended to be a humorous response to the view of the western suburbs as a factory town. A simple statement on a card. A reflection of local heritage that does exist. Let's not sweep it under the carpet and deny it, let's put it out in the open and enjoy it. They sold well and people kept coming back for more.

When the Museum moved to its new base at Pipemakers Park in 1989 the staff produced another set of cards in sepia showing old scenes of the site in its industrial phase as a meat works then a pipeworks.



One of the many branches of Museum activity, addressing the issue of access to cultural activities.



The Colonial Sugar Refinery, an example of the Museum's extensive collection of photographs documenting the contemporary environment of the region.

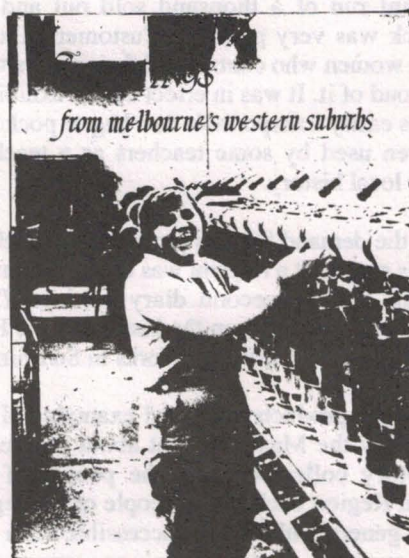
As the Museum itself began to get a name for its skills in promotion of western suburbs material the Department of Planning funded a project where the Museum worked with the local councils to produce 18 glossy cards highlighting the positive heritage of the area.

As evidence of the impact and effectiveness of something simple like images on a postcard, more than one of these cards has been turned to other uses. Organisers of a big Newmarket re-union purchased several hundred of the Museum's Newmarket Saleyards cards for re-union invitations to graziers, stockmen and others who worked at the yards. An image of an historic building on a Footscray postcard was borrowed more than once for brochures promoting heritage issues.

The lack of a display space in the Museum itself in its first five years of existence helped reinforce these aims of outreach to the public. For the first five years the Living Museum basically worked out of small offices that could barely house the staff, let alone collections of artefacts and exhibitions that are normally expected of a museum.

However, displays and exhibitions were and still are a basic form of presentation of the Museum's constantly growing collection of information, stories and images. The first exhibition about the Museum itself was held in a gallery at the local shopping centre, Highpoint, one of the largest of its type. The large photographs in the exhibition were all of people, past and present, to show the Living Museum is a people-focussed museum.

In those first five years the Museum placed exhibitions anywhere and everywhere the public was likely to be. Busy shopping centres in the local areas were a favourite place - Sunshine, Melton, Altona and Werribee. People would stop, often surprised and amused at first, but the important thing was they stopped and looked and talked to museum staff tending the exhibition especially if they recognised a person or place in the images, which they often did.



A greeting card depicting Cveta Krstevska, at Kinnear's Ropes, expressing something of the character of Melbourne's west.

The Museum also placed exhibitions at as many community events and festivals as possible, in council foyers, in factory foyers and lunchrooms, in schools, in community halls and even in pubs. Mostly the exhibitions were drawn from material collected in the research process and produced by the Museum staff themselves, particularly by the media team. For some exhibitions, text was simply typed out and magnified on a photocopier and photographs printed in darkrooms. For others text was sent to a printer to be typeset and larger photographs printed at professional laboratories.

One important aspect to address with outreach in Melbourne's Western Region is the large population from ethnic backgrounds. For the Museum's first major exhibition at the end of the first year, *Chops & Chimneys*, the text for about forty displays was translated into the major languages spoken in the region - Italian, Greek, Polish, Maltese, Croatian, Serbian and Vietnamese.

Work like having translations done on such a large scale needed outside expertise. However, in most forms of presentation the Museum has drawn on the skills of staff members and encouraged training in all forms of production: for practical reasons like cost savings, editorial

reasons like freedom of style and ethical reasons like empowering staff at the Museum.

This improved skill base eventually led to the Museum being approached as a consultant for producing exhibitions and displays in the same way that it had been approached as a consultant for research work. The same philosophical questions arose. Did the work, which could earn much needed income, fit in with the aims of the Living Museum and advance the idea of an ecomuseum?

One prominent job of this nature was a request by the Bacchus Marsh Shire Council to create an historic gallery of its former shire presidents. This job meant unifying the size and style of eighty paintings and photographs, some of which were in bad condition, and creating a high quality permanent exhibition.

It seemed an appropriate thing for a community museum to work with a local council on the restoration of what was core to that council's heritage, its community leaders since the 1850s. The Museum's product skills were serving the community and the Museum's role in that community was more firmly established.



Preliminary work for the History of the Land garden project, another form of product, in this case using landscape and mosaic to interpret the region's history and environment.

Your History Mate

The Museum by this stage had produced a number of books, brochures and research reports. One of these was the book *Lifeblood of Footscray*, a collection of edited oral history interviews, with photographs of the meatworkers who took part. A series of radio programs based on the same interviews was played on 3CR, and has since been re-broadcast several times and sold as a set of audio tapes.

The Museum has produced a number of other exhibitions for local councils and private companies. Interestingly enough, we have often been asked to do exhibitions focusing on employees. In most cases this has brought the Museum into contact with further stories and photographs from the history of the region so in this way the attention to product skills has aided the aims of research while bringing in income.

This was also the case when Sunshine Council commissioned the Museum to write a book about the region of Maribyrnong within the municipality of Sunshine. The Museum had already collected a great deal of material about Maribyrnong but the commission for the book allowed for and indeed required more research, especially oral history research.



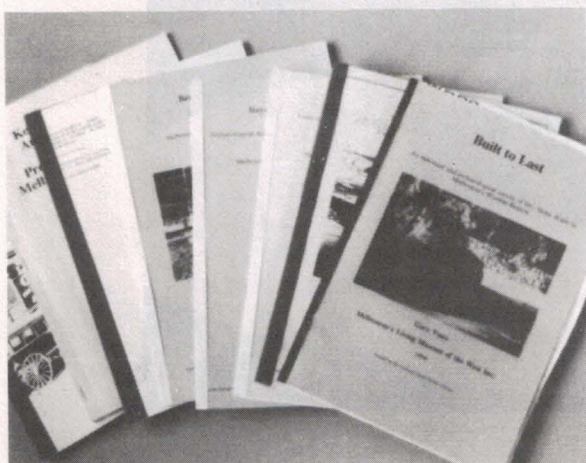
The Living Museum assisted a Keilor cake making group to interpret their own environment through decorative iced cakes, in this case one of the local houses, thus creating a community-derived museum product.

Two staff members produced a book called *Yarns*, which was also a series of edited oral history interviews, about women artists in Melbourne's west and the relationship between their art and their home and work life. Another two produced *Lifelines, stories by women in the western suburbs of Melbourne*, and a further two produced *Changing Places, Vietnamese Women in Melbourne's West*.

The earlier books, cards, brochures, diaries and videos were chosen by the teams as they developed their research and the form of presentation was not tied to the income at that stage. After the first year, with reduced staff and resources, the staff became more conscious of the relationship between income and product expectation.

In the first year staff were conscious of producing something to show the work they had done as a form of accountability for the money spent in setting up the Museum. They were committed to showing it had been worthwhile and they were conscious people needed something to see that showed it was worthwhile.

However, from then on, most projects established what the product would be at the beginning of the project. From a period of broad based funding with broad expectations based on the aims and objectives the Museum moved to a structure where the Victorian Ministry for the Arts



Technical reports and popular brochures, two ends of the scale of Museum publishing.

provided core funding to maintain core operations and other funding was to be raised through grants and earned income.

This meant a sharper focus on the purpose of a 'product' because projects now needed to achieve a balance between satisfying the needs of a funding body or client and contributing to the building of the concept of an ecomuseum in Melbourne's western suburbs. This did not become a problem and in a way turned the Museum's attention to responding to a wider range of community organisations and issues.

In order to ensure that the direction, form and content of products were discussed more fully as part of project design and planning, project steering committees were established or given a greater role in the process.

None of this altered the basic creed of aiming to diversify forms of presentation and aiming to communicate to and involve as many members of the community on as many levels as possible.

The story of the Newmarket Saleyards is an interesting case in point, where a sequence of projects developed from an initial idea.

Originally we did a video on Newmarket Saleyards which covers the basic story and contains interviews with people working at the yards. This was followed by a more elaborate oral

history recording project. Then we produced some heritage panels for the area which was redeveloped as a housing estate.



A group of students from the Werribee Islamic College, learn first hand about the Koorie culture of Melbourne's West from Aboriginal cultural officer, Larry Walsh.



A bus tour with a difference. Based on the Museum's 'Built of Bluestone' brochure, Museum staff lead a group of people on an adventure tour on the theme of Western Region bluestone, looking at the geological origins, and historical uses of bluestone. Sites visited ranged from extinct volcanoes to a bluestone quarry and historic churches and homesteads.



The launch of the Newmarket Saleyards History Panels with former Newmarket drover, Bill Clifton, MCC strategic Planner Jenny Lee, Tjip Faber, from the Major Projects Unit., Libby McKinnon, designer of the heritage panels and Joyce Clifton on the Newmarket historic sub-committee.

Still later a Museum staff member produced a mosaic art work depicting men and stock passing through the lanes. This involved tracking down some of the appropriate people and researching types of cattle and sheep that should be in the picture.

This meant broadening the scope of the material and speaking to local people who lived near the yards for new information.

As can be seen, Living Museum products can be books, reports, brochures, videos, school kits, post cards, audio tapes, radio broadcasts, exhibitions, tours, artworks, participatory events, theatre performances, concerts, gardens, or any medium that can communicate ideas.

The very concept of a product as an expression of the ecomuseum has been a very important means of accessibility and communication between the Museum and its users.

Research into the Newmarket Saleyards identified the right breeds of animal such as this mosaic of 'Kintore Moy,' winner of many sheepdog trials, for historic mosaic project produced by artist Libby McKinnon for the Museum.



5

PARTICIPATION

The key to the idea of a Living Museum is the role of participation. The emphasis on participation shows in several of the Museum's aims and objectives:

To use a wide range of presentation methods, including exhibitions, video, publications, theatre, public events and other participatory activities.

To undertake linking and bridging activities with other groups, projects and institutions in the Western Region.

To develop and promote community museum activity which is interactive and innovative.

We have briefly discussed the participatory nature of the oral history process in chapter 2. Part of this process in the first year meant drawing staff from the region itself. This was one step in developing a sense of participation. A mixed group of people with a diverse range of

backgrounds was to participate in creating a new kind of museum in their own region.

It's worth mentioning again that a common and consistent response to this 'invitation' to participate was bemusement. It was apparently unusual enough at the time to be a difficult concept to grasp and or believe. This applied to some staff and the people they talked to in the beginning.

We therefore had to explain what 'participation' actually was. This required staff to come to grips with what it really meant and so it became a thread of discussion in the Museum from that day to this.

At first the oral history research process involved asking people who worked or lived in areas being researched to help with collecting information by telling the researchers their story on a one to one basis.



Women from ICI in Deer Park watch a video about a re-union of ICI workers that they helped organise and attended. The video became part of a display on the munitions industry in this exhibition, Chops and Chimneys, held at the Victorian Expo Centre in 1985.

Of course we had to find people to participate and this was done in a variety of ways - through personal contacts or articles in the local paper for example. Further ideas of participation developed from there. One event that eventuated from discussions between the 'women at work' team co-ordinator and ex-explosives workers, was a re-union of past workers from the large I.C.I. industrial complex.

This required very active participation by the women and was an indication that members of the community were beginning to get excited about the whole idea of the Living Museum and felt part of the Museum. They felt they really had something to offer and they were going to make a considerable effort offering it.

So a re-union was organised by the Living Museum and a few of the women. About a hundred women and men from past days at I.C.I. packed a small hall in Deer Park. They brought old photographs, mementos and their memories and had a whale of a time. It was lively, there was food and music and everybody talked and talked. They were happy to talk into microphones, television cameras and to each other.

To be in a group of people they all knew brought out all kinds of stories that could otherwise have been forgotten. If one person in a group faltered on a story another picked it up, so the material, from the Museum's point of view, was richer and more comprehensive. It was also lively.

Everyone knew the Museum valued their stories and the nature of the occasion reinforced that sense of value. The Museum had gone to the trouble of organising with them a real sharing experience that they had a hand in. It couldn't have happened without their genuine participation and the sound recordings and video tapings by the Museum could not have conveyed as real a picture of their feelings about their lives at I.C.I. without their participation.

Some lessons about the value of extending the potential of participation happened within the Museum itself, in the process of various projects. As mentioned earlier two members of the team looking at 'work', Brian and Don, had been collecting stories in a very participatory way by sharing yarns in the local pub.

The Newmarket Saleyards were still operating and offered great photographic opportunities with cattle, sheep, dogs, stockmen and buyers everywhere and the constant country noises going on so near the middle of Melbourne. There was plenty of visual drama and it looked like an ideal topic for video, particularly as there was talk of the yards closing down, which they did finally in 1987 after operating for 126 years.



Bimbo Payne, third generation drover, pauses for a break at Newmarket Saleyards, while talking to Don Woods and Brian McNamara about the life of a drover.

This was one of the very things the Living Museum was on about. Capturing an essential part of living heritage in the Western Region while it was still available to record.

Peter and Joe in the media team were called in to work on the video. Here's where an interesting discussion on the whole idea of participation and empowerment developed. The media team had some experience in making videos and writing stories and it would have been all too easy for them to approach the project and take over the production because they knew the tools and they knew how the tools worked.

This was several months into the project and many of the staff were becoming enthused and inspired by their work with the Museum because of the excitement, warmth and encouragement from people who came in contact with the Museum and expressed support in the manner you would normally expect for a football team.

'Good on yer mate. You're doing a great job. Its long overdue looking at this history' was the nature of many responses. The extent and intensity of some of these responses, which occasionally came after initial disbelief that the local history really was regarded as valuable, were a surprise to many staff at first and inspired even the most cynical members of the team.

So it was with the media team who decided it made more sense in terms of the Living Museum's aims and objectives to share their knowledge with Brian and Don, as much as they could in a short time. So these two men who had closer ties with the people at the yards could have more control over the production of the video.

Peter and Joe believed the media team would most likely produce a video with pre-conceived notions from their media experience and consequently miss things that someone without pre-conceived notions might think was important. It was worth the experiment.

Saleyards and it taught us at the Museum not to underestimate anyone. It also taught us the value of empowerment and the value of making the 'tools' of any process more available and more accessible, where we could. It was a valuable lesson on the potential for involvement and participation.

There are many variations on this theme of encouraging input from other staff and other members of the community by de-mystifying the techniques, tools and processes and providing access as far as possible and practical. It is from the philosophy and practice of this principle that many of the Museum's innovations, events and products have sprung.



One of the daily sights along the Maribyrnong River familiar to tour boat operator, Peter Somerville. This photograph was taken as part of an exercise in aiding Peter Somerville to express his perception of what brought the Maribyrnong to life.

Brian and Don laughed heartily at first and dismissed the idea they could do such a thing without talent, training and experience. Peter and Joe persisted because they had grown up in this 'deprived' region and understood their feelings. They also felt that more effective participation and a better product could be achieved by making the 'tools' of production more available to those who were closer to the nature of the industry.

Don and Brian worked out the story as they saw it, wrote the script and sat in on the editing. The result was a logical easy-going story with Don narrating in his casual style. It was a very effective documentary and remains one of the most important records of the Newmarket

It is this principle that has helped to create a diverse range of styles that give colour and character to the face of this unique local ecomuseum.

Another early example involved a display for our first large exhibition, *Chops & Chimneys*. The Maribyrnong River is a crucial element to the story of Melbourne's Western Region and it was important to have a display focussing on the river. Again it would have been relatively simple to get a photographer to take a few shots, mix these with a few historic images and write a few words of text.



A day of heritage workshops at 'The Willows' in Melton, organised by the Living Museum and attended by local historical society members and other interested members of the public. 1986.

However, we had as a friend and member of the Museum, Peter Somerville, the captain of the local river tour boat, the *Blackbird*. He loved the River and he rode up and down it almost daily. It was and still is his home. It seemed a better exhibition could be achieved if his view of the River could be translated into an exhibition. Unfortunately he didn't own a camera and couldn't take photographs.

So the photographer, Ted, was sent to ride the River with Peter and to photograph the things that were important to him from the angles that he saw them and to discuss the feelings of the River with him. In effect both the camera and the photographer became the tools of access to a local person's perception.

The result was a smooth serene series of photographs that really had you feeling you were on a river. It is a beautiful photo story of a cruise on the river and ventures into art photography. The captain is very proud of it and the display has been in many exhibitions and borrowed frequently. The Museum was learning that perceptions are also a form of information and add another living facet to our idea of an ecomuseum. Furthermore people's perceptions are only possible through co-operative participation.

Surprisingly, variations on this principle even became possible with consultancy work earning money for the Museum. The company Humes ARC contracted the Museum to prepare an exhibition for an open day for the public. The Personnel Manager, Dominic Andrearchio, wanted part of the exhibition to focus on the employees of the company.

Humes ARC produce what is called fabricated steel that goes into the framework of large city buildings and roads. It is heavy, dirty and sometimes dangerous work. Dominic wanted photographs of the men at work. The Museum's photographer at the time, Peter, talked to Dominic about the project and asked to be able to speak to the men and women about their work. He also had certain ethics about photographing people at work, partly gleaned from Museum ethics about willing participation.

Peter was conscious that workers on a factory floor might feel they had to do what they were told and so he spoke to each person individually about how they felt about being photographed and what they thought about the project. Some took the option not to be photographed but most didn't mind and really appreciated being asked individually.

Consequently some of their comments were frank and open and a lot spoke about their pride at being able to take the family for a drive and point to buildings they had helped construct with their steel. Others spoke about having a sense of X ray vision when they looked at finished buildings because they could so clearly visualise the metal skeleton inside. Here was a unique insight or perception that was clearly related to the work they did and the way they saw that work. Here was an interesting angle for an ecomuseum.

It was from talking to these men on the dirty dangerous factory floor that the idea evolved for the exhibition *Back In Your Own Backyard*. It was becoming clear that if we delved far enough there seemed to be unique 'perceptions' that grew in people's minds, related to the kind of work they did.

This idea was of particular interest to the media team who saw information mostly in visual form. They felt that verbally-oriented people often saw

pictures as an adjunct to verbal information rather than seeing pictures as having information and messages in themselves.

It is a tribute to the Museum's aims and objectives that such ideas were embraced and the media team was encouraged to pursue this idea further. It was difficult at first because, by their very nature, job-related or personal perceptions seem so normal to people they don't even know they have them.

The challenges were to explain to someone they had a particular way of seeing the world, to work out a way to demonstrate that perception visually and to show how a group of these perceptions could recreate the feel of the western suburbs in an exhibition.

Actually some hard-headed work was done with statistics to try and achieve at least guidelines for a representative sample of people from the western suburbs so that some balance of age, ethnicity, gender and types of jobs was achieved.



Construction workers using Humes ARC reinforcing bar for the 'fabric' or skeleton of Melbourne skyscrapers. The workers explained their sense of X-ray vision they have from knowing the buildings so intimately.

Your History Mate

The project caught the imagination of several funding bodies and we obtained grants from the Bicentennial, the Department of Planning and the Australia Council.

The Museum liaised with the community arts network because the ideas in the project related Living Museum philosophies to community art philosophies and needed a broad net to work out how this could be achieved and how it could work. It was achieved and it did work. The result was an exhibition of 15 displays by fourteen diverse groups and individuals across Melbourne's western region, held at Footscray Community Arts Centre in October 1988.

The interesting part was how different groups participated to varying degrees. Some groups came up with ideas and wanted us to produce them while others threw themselves into the project with vigour taking full 'artistic' control.

We went back to Humes ARC to develop the X ray idea. They were happy to join in as long as we took the photographs and made the displays. We discovered an astute Baccus Marsh farmer and park ranger who watched rocks change through time in the Werribee Gorge as other people watch trees grow.

A group of women from a cake-making class in Keilor came in and wanted to create a local

streetscape, making the houses out of icing with techniques they learnt in class. They took full control, kept documentation of the process and even consulted an architect.

Their streetscape became famous and led to a special evening at Keilor Council offices where the mayor presented them with an award for promoting Keilor. This was a thrill for everyone and the best part was to see how proud their husbands were. This was certainly a new dimension for an ecomuseum and participation. A streetscape in icing that becomes the focus for a formal council event.

A Vietnamese bank teller illustrated in the display that he produced how the bars on his window were like a cage to keep the customers out. They all appeared to have numbers in their eyes that seemed to denote their value in dollar terms. An Italian plasterer wrote on the dignity of plastering and exhibited different kinds of plaster to illustrate his point.

A technician who worked at an oil company wrote of forty-four gallon drums being more numerous than people, in different colours stretching as far as you could see. He created an exhibition of industrial scenes, complete with sound, which you viewed inside the drum with a periscope.



Di Cranston working with Vern Bult, one of the 'Make History Group'. This project assisted people to produce their own ideas in exhibition and book form. This is one of the simplest, most effective and most satisfying tasks a community museum can perform.



The LEAP team getting into participating. Jason Chiller and Danielle Kerkvliedt constructing a dry stone wall. These two designed a part of the 'History of the Land Trail' and carried out the practical task of implementing the design.

All of this and more with the melodic strains of the Essendon Choral Society in the background to emphasise the contrasts in such a region. It was a vivid and telling exhibition and showed that with a commitment to participation and empowerment there is no limit to the ways a story can be told.

The exhibition was opened by Professor Bernard Smith, one of Australia's foremost art historians, who spoke on art being an integral part of people's lives. He commented on how the art in the exhibition caught the atmosphere of Australia in a way that he had been writing about for years - which gave the participants a great sense of pride.

Even more interesting has been a recent report from the Keilor Council Arts Officer, Raelene Marshall, who liaised with the Museum and the cake making class. Raelene says the women who took part in this project told her it has changed their lives and most of them have new confidence and new jobs inspired by their participation in *Back In Your Own Backyard*. Raelene also said the project had been a springboard to many community art programs and projects carried out in Keilor.

Years later another interpretation of Melbourne's Western Region is taking shape with input from many people in a variety of ways. The *History of the Land Discovery Trail* traces changes in the landscape with plants and mosaic images.

The first garden is planted with indigenous plants and grasses that used to dominate this region before Europeans came. A reconstruction of an Aboriginal earth oven sits among the grass next to a large circular mosaic depicting an important

local dreamtime story. The plants gradually change as we move into the era when Europeans arrived and evidence of sheep and shepherds appear.

The more formal colonial garden has herbs, roses and mosaic pictures reflecting this era. The Mediterranean garden representing post-war migration will have olive trees, and grape vines. In the final garden there will be a return to indigenous plants to show more recent awareness of their importance, and the need to conserve water.

Local firms have donated tiles for the mosaics, Melbourne Water has donated soil for the garden, Western Region Group Training has been involved in construction, the Koori Gardening apprentices have been involved in planting, Aboriginal artists have been consulted on design to name a few. The site is in view of the Museum Visitor Centre and is connected to pathways that link sites throughout the Park that are used in one way or another to interpret different aspects of the heritage of Melbourne's western region and act in some ways as a microcosm or an introduction to the larger concept of the ecomuseum.

This project is also intended to enhance the sense of participation of visitors to the Park and the region. For visitors to the Museum are also participants. The very nature of the research carried out on local issues, the accessibility to the research and the type of products produced all go towards encouraging a sense of participation in local history and heritage for visitors and the community. The intention is that visitors also get a sense that this is 'your' history.

To this end, staff are always available to answer questions in the Visitor Centre. All of the Museum's resources, including historical archives, display materials, equipment, staff time and expertise are available to all members of the community. The decision whether or not to charge for services is based on a number of factors; whether provision of the service is regarded as part of the Living Museum's community responsibility, the relative cost of the service, the ability of the client to pay.

The development of specialist expertise in a wide range of fields has established the Museum as a community resource on such varied issues as education, heritage, the environment, planning, site development, tourism, culture and the arts. The community which exploits this resource includes developers, town planners, cultural bureaucracies and the corporate sector as much as residents' action groups, environmental interest groups, community artists groups, historical society members, students, teachers and a wide range of interested individuals.

The Museum's radio program recycles much of this material through interviews and discussions and it also generates participation by an extremely diverse cross-section of the community. The Museum has helped other community organizations to set up their own radio programs by sharing its skills and resources.

One of the simplest examples of providing access to process is to show a community group some basic techniques to display their own material. A local group wants to have an exhibition and they come to see us with a pile of photographs, paper clippings and hand-written stories and a self deprecating manner about their abilities.

A Museum staff member might show the group a couple of simple but effective layout techniques, including how to enlarge photographs, how to write text on a typewriter and enlarge it on a photocopier and how to mount these on mounting board. It can be very simple and inexpensive when a few tricks and 'tools of trade' are explained and this kind of assistance allows participation in the history dialogue.

It is surprising how often this type of assistance is requested when it is available. Staff at the Museum have lost count of the number of times they have provided such help, which is so appreciated and so effective.

So participation is very much a feature of life at the Living Museum. The other side to this process is that it keeps Museum staff in touch with a broad cross-section of the community. People are encouraged to see the Museum as something which belongs to them. This ensures that staff are working with, and are constantly aware of being part of, the community.



The Museum auspiced a project by 'New World Arts' which enabled Alan Young and Bronwyn Gray to produce a book about the experience of Anglo Celtic migrants, 'Ten Quid Tourists'. Here Alan uses Museum equipment to aid in the production of the book.

BREAD & CIRCUSES - MUSEUM BY EVENT

Participation in any museum is probably most evident at live events. Gatherings of people talking, listening, watching, singing, dancing, drinking, eating, taking photographs, clapping, pointing, smiling laughing, engaged in group activity, bring life and meaning to a museum.

Events can enhance projects and celebrate them as with exhibition openings and book launchings or they can be part of the cultural process itself when you consider concerts, plays, re-unions, seminars and tours.

Exhibitions can be both products and events or forums for events. The program of placing exhibitions in shopping centres and other public places was as much an event as a product. It was often an event because it was surprising and entertaining for members of the public to find exhibitions of local heritage and culture in the local shopping centre.

This sense of exhibitions being events developed early in the Museum's history. The first exhibition the Museum put on was a borrowed series of multi-cultural prints. The staff of the

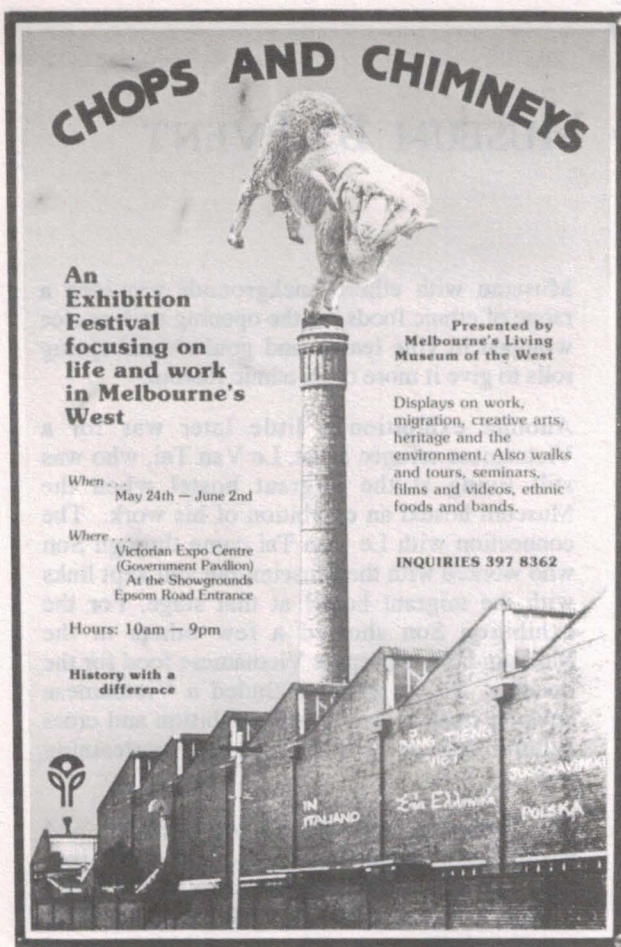
Museum with ethnic backgrounds provided a range of ethnic foods for the opening such as rice wrapped in vine leaves and goulash and spring rolls to give it more of an ethnic flavour.

Another exhibition a little later was for a Vietnamese refugee artist, Le Van Tai, who was still living at the migrant hostel when the Museum hosted an exhibition of his work. The connection with Le Van Tai came through Son who worked with the Museum but still kept links with the migrant hostel at that stage. For the exhibition Son showed a few others at the Museum how to prepare Vietnamese food for the opening. So the event included a Vietnamese cooking class as well as an exhibition and cross cultural links were developed over a steaming wok.

The Museum's emphasis on people and participation meant some thought went into working out how products like exhibitions could become eventful and lively. One idea behind this was the challenge to make an exhibition part of something else rather than a statement in itself.



One effective outreach program of the Living Museum was to take exhibitions out to local shopping centres where people congregated. Here we see shoppers discussing the exhibition with Museum staff attending the exhibition.



The poster promoting the Museum's first large exhibition of fifty displays about Melbourne's Western Region translated in six languages. 1985

During the first year there was some internal debate about whether a static exhibition to show the year's work was appropriate to the concept of a Living Museum. So a good deal of effort was put in to make the exhibition *Chops & Chimneys* more an event-cum-exhibition. It was to run for ten days at the Victorian Expo Centre at the Royal Showgrounds and every day was active.

This exhibition of forty displays was to be a conceptual gateway to Melbourne's Western Region and tours of the region, by boat and bus, left every day so that visitors could see the actual sites of places shown in the displays.

The exhibition included concerts nearly everyday featuring brass bands, the Yarraville Mouth Organ Band, Russian singers and balalaika players, Vietnamese Lion dancing and Yugoslavian poetry recitals. A music competition for schools during the exhibition provided a live extension of the research into the culture of bands in Melbourne's western suburbs. This was getting into the idea of living history. The Museum was not just researching heritage it was hosting heritage, and nurturing it.

As well as music there were seminars on issues relevant to the Western Region. One was held by ethnic social workers about migrant issues which was attended and addressed by the Federal member for Calwell, Andrew Theophanous. There were also art classes with the women who had been interviewed by the Museum and an appearance by the local boxing champion, Lester Ellis. In all an eventful celebration of Melbourne's western suburbs.

The launch of the Museum a year earlier was a unique event. As the concept of the ecomuseum defined the Living Museum as Melbourne's Western Region itself the launch took place symbolically on top of the Westgate Bridge, one of the major links between Melbourne and its western suburbs. One lane was closed to traffic and the Minister for the Arts at the time, Race Mathews, gave a speech on the bridge to launch the Museum. Television cameras came and the launch was on the news that evening, covered by Jennifer Keyte.

The launch continued at Highpoint West, the largest shopping centre in the region, at a stage area especially created for shows, and more speeches were made to hundreds of shoppers who paused curiously to wonder what it was all about. Speeches were also read in Vietnamese and Greek to the shoppers by Museum staff. All these acts and events were part of a determination to outreach and defy the perception of a museum being contained in one building behind walls.



This Russian singer's performance was one of many live events held during the Chops and Chimneys exhibition/festival celebrating Melbourne's Western Region.



The symbolic launching of Melbourne's Living Museum was held at the top of the West Gate bridge. Arts Minister, Race Matthews launches the Museum.

If the Museum is the region then it must act out its events in the region where the people are. Besides that we didn't have a real building anyway.

In 1989, after five years in cramped offices, the base of the Museum moved to a renovated fitter and turners' building on an old industrial site, now owned by Melbourne Water, on the banks of the Maribyrnong River in the City of Sunshine. Here there was room to put up exhibitions and displays but there was concern that having such a base with a display area might distract the Living Museum from its effective outreach program. This hasn't been the case and the Museum is constantly re-shaping itself, so the new base of operations was welcomed.

The new home called for a new launch, another opening event. The Melbourne Water rangers who managed the park dressed up in period costume and rowed the Deputy Premier, Joan Kirner, to the wharf a hundred yards from the Museum Visitor Centre. There she was met by crowds of onlookers and the Historical Re-enactment Society, also dressed in period costume, who fired a cannon to mark the occasion. This panicked the bulldog, a mascot of the Footscray Football Club, and it took off down the path.

At this time Footscray Football Club was in danger of disappearing into a merger with Fitzroy. This was a very serious and very

depressing cultural issue for people in Melbourne and particularly the people of Melbourne's western suburbs. Aware of this threat to an essential element of people's culture, the Museum had invited the 'Save the Dogs' committee to the opening of the new base to support their cause and offer connections with politicians who came to the launch. The fight to save Footscray Football Club was becoming a political issue and there had been calls for the State Government to intervene.



Joan Kirner and Footscray Football Club's mascot at the opening of Pipemakers Park.

Subsequently the news coverage of the launch in most of the local papers had Joan Kirner cuddling the bulldog. This was indeed an event. The club was eventually saved and the Museum helped with the publication of a book telling the miraculous story of how this was achieved when 10,000 determined people on a drizzly grey Melbourne Sunday raised about \$480,000.00 at the Footscray Oval.

Maribyrnong River Festival organised by the Western Region Commission in 1990. This festival opened with fireworks at the Highpoint City shopping centre, higher on the hill. The next day there was a river parade of decorated boats carrying bands and other entertainment while a large puppet event was staged in the park outside the Museum Visitor Centre.



'The Lifeblood of Footscray', a book of oral history telling the story of working lives at the Angliss meatworks in Footscray, is launched by Wally Curran in the Pioneer Hotel.

The new base meant that the Museum had its own display area, measuring about 16 by 20 metres. The Museum could now put on exhibitions for organisations who had no display area, bring other exhibitions to the western suburbs that otherwise would not come to the region and provide accommodation for a range of seminars, concerts and group meetings.

In 1992 the Victoria Archaeology Survey produced an exhibition about shipwrecks along the Victorian coast. The Museum was approached to host the exhibition for the general interest of the local population and because of maritime links through the bayside coast of Williamstown, Altona, Werribee and the Maribyrnong River.

To carry through the maritime theme we had a singer, Tim McKew, who dressed as a sailor and sang the "Codfish Ball" a lively amusing song, while refreshments included crab, baby octopus and sardines.

The existence of the Museum on the banks of the Maribyrnong also provided a focal point for the

The organisers had asked the Museum to put on an exhibition about the Maribyrnong, which we did. The hundreds of visitors could wander into the Museum and look at the displays on the history of the river to gain a better understanding of the purpose of the celebrations.

The Museum used idea is that an event should have an appropriate context long before moving to this park. The book, *Lifeblood of Footscray* was launched in the Pioneer Hotel where many of the meatworkers drank for years and shovelled down those substantial counter lunches you don't seem to be able to find anymore. Many of the people interviewed came to the launch and enjoyed the idea of it being in the pub.

The old Williamstown Rifle Range was chosen to launch a document containing recommendations based on the research into wetlands because ironically the existence of the Rifle Range had protected one of the last stands of mangroves in Port Phillip Bay, habitat to several waderbird species and a favourite haunt of bird watchers.

The *Sunshine Harvester Diary* with stories and pictures about the famous McKay Harvester works which gave the City of Sunshine its name, was launched in the Sunshine Plaza, a shopping centre handy to many of the families who had worked at the Harvester Works and opposite the remains of the factory itself. The book about Maribyrnong, *Action in Tranquility* was launched in the Maribyrnong Community Centre.

The Maribyrnong Community Centre was also an appropriate place for theatre and it was here that the play "Go West Young Woman" had its opening performance. The development of this play was a potent example of the way the work of a museum can satisfy the needs of another group's priorities in a way that makes the aims of both more effective and alive. The group of young actresses, *Time and Motion Theatre*, were exploring material about women who worked in the munitions industry in World War Two. Their basic aim was to make a play that was relevant to current feminist issues.

The group doing the play commented later that one interesting outcome in the working of the play was that the characters they developed, based on real women, were strong enough characters in themselves and they didn't need to overstate the issues they were interested in.

The play was supported by an exhibition produced by the Museum: *We'll Remember, We'll Remember: Wartime in Melbourne's West*. Naturally invitations were sent to women who worked at the munitions and they thoroughly enjoyed the play. Some commented on how real it seemed. This event was a credit to the director, Rachel Fensham and the actors, and was also exciting for the Museum to see another form of outreach created so successfully.



A community events in the region, recorded by the Museum was the Pope's visit to St. Leo the Great Primary School in Altona North, in 1987.



The creators of 'Go West Young Woman', walk along the Gordon Street Ammunition Factory wall to soak up a bit of atmosphere. From left: Lee Kennedy, Michelle Howard, Kate Kantor and Rachel Fensham.

It was also performed with equal audience appreciation to the present day workers at the Ammunition Factory itself.

The Museum videoed the play and it is available for drama groups at schools and other places to see an example of the way historical research can be incorporated successfully into drama. There is an interview at the end of the video where the director and the actors explain something of the process in developing the play.

This form of documentation is invaluable and is an example of how an event can be extended. In this case the event has been packaged into a product or another form of interpreting the munitions story and the regional ecomuseum. The Museum has used video often to record interviews, to document its own events, to make products out of this material, to document other people's events and to use other groups or individuals video footage where appropriate.

For example in the mid eighties the theatre group, *West Theatre* was conducting interesting participatory experimental theatre in the western suburbs and the Museum endeavoured to record most of their productions on video. Then in 1988 the growing interest in public television was coming to a head and there were plans for the first experimental broadcasts. Public television groups had been working for years for this step in a long process towards effective public television.

As fortune would have it, because of technical reasons that had something to do with the placement and range of transmitters, the audience for the first broadcast was to be in the western suburbs. The media team at the Museum had been keeping an eye on the developments of this movement and were attending meetings at the time.

This technical constraint actually caught the committee unprepared as they had been focusing on the inner city areas like Carlton and Fitzroy and like much of Melbourne considered the western suburbs as unfamiliar if not alien territory. In short, it created a debate about suitable broadcasting to a region they were unprepared to broadcast to.

The news team came to the Living Museum offices and had a brainstorming session with the

Museum media team and other Museum staff about a suitable news program and the contacts that could be made. So the Museum experience in this medium as another form of interpreting the ecomuseum became a tool for the first broadcast in the national movement for community television. This was not just recording an historic event but facilitating one.

There was also a shortage of documentary material for the broadcasts and the Living Museum had the honour of one of its documentaries *Looking at Melbourne's Western Suburb* being the first documentary shown on public television in this state. This was a very proud event, a thrill for the media team and justification for the founders of the Museum including video as a tool in the recording and interpretation of history and heritage.

Another case where the value of video came into play was even more unexpected. When a huge chemical fire broke out near the Maribyrnong River the media team happened to be nearby with the camera and rushed to the scene arriving before the Television networks. The video cameraman, Joseph Mastroianni, moved close into the action and recorded the firemen fighting the fire which burst hundreds of metres into the sky.



As part of a program for raising awareness of the significance of extensive and internationally-significant wetlands in Melbourne's Western Region, the Museum produced a plan for education about wetlands, encouraged research and ran tours of the wetlands.



The view from from Pipemaker's Park of the fire at Coode Island further down river. This disaster revitalised debate about the place of hazardous chemicals in the region.

This unexpected event put the Museum in an interesting position with regard to current issues in the region, although the fire was technically not in the Western Region but over the river in the city of Melbourne. Hazardous chemicals and all the issues that surround them are part of the heritage of an industrial area.

This video footage shot by Joseph was later used in a science seminar and a story put together by community groups and was also used for study by a special disaster unit created by Melbourne Water after this major fire. This was a very proactive museum process engaged in an event and is a form of outreach none of us anticipated.

Happily such incidents are rare and a museum's resources are such that it can't attempt to cover all the issues all the time. Events more normally evolve out of a range of selected programs set by other parameters than chance and fortune. The steady work of methodically investigating and interpreting the Region allocates what resources are available to a range of subjects to be studied and products and events to present that material.

One of the Museum's original aims had been to develop a greater understanding of the history and culture of Aboriginal people in the Region.

So he organised a concert for 25 January, 1992, and called it Blackout Day. There were traditional dancers from Cape York who were visiting Melbourne at the time. There was Jackie and Sandy playing the guitar and the steel guitar. There were speeches and poetry readings and there was rock and roll with the Mystery Blues, a mixture of Aboriginal people and Latin Americans. Hundreds of people came to watch to see Aboriginal people dancing on the banks of the Maribyrnong, which probably hadn't happened in more than a hundred years. The metropolitan Melbourne and the surrounding population here is virtually invisible.

As explained earlier this had to wait until the Museum made contact with Aboriginal people and involved them in this research and interpretation. This began in 1989 and has been an ongoing program since 1991.

The Museum's first Aboriginal project officer, Robert Mate Mate, is a story teller. He believes more is conveyed about Aboriginal people by talking to groups and individuals and being there in front of them so they can see him and ask questions. One major issue the Aboriginal project officers at the Museum and members of the associated Koorie Project steering committee have emphasised, is that people understand that Aboriginal history includes the way Aboriginal people live in today's culture, as well as in the time before European contact.

Robert felt one way to get this across to a number of people at once was to hold a concert. He also felt that a concert was a way that people could be introduced to Aboriginal people in a friendly welcoming way and could be more effective in neutralising some of the uncertainty non-Aboriginals felt about finding out more about the indigenous culture.

So he organised a concert for 26 January, 1992, and called it *Blackout Day*. There were traditional dancers from Cape York, who were visiting Melbourne at the time. There was Herbie and Sandy playing the gumleaf and the steel guitar. There were speeches and poetry readings and there was rock and roll with the *Mercury Blues*, a mixture of Aboriginal people and Latin Americans. Hundreds of people came fascinated to see Aboriginal people dancing on the banks of the Maribyrnong, which probably hadn't happened in more than a hundred years. This is metropolitan Melbourne and the Aboriginal population here is virtually invisible.

Groups of excited children, and adults, followed an Aboriginal dancer as he showed them how to dance and mimic the emu and the kangaroo. Everybody loved it. Some of the conversations after the concert showed Robert's approach was more than effective. One man was talking to Herbie about gumleaf singing techniques that his father had taught him and a Greek woman was comparing mythology with Aboriginal people. The mood was infectious and conversations went on well after the concert. It was a real catalytic event for Aboriginal awareness in Melbourne's western suburbs.

The Museum followed this with another concert organised by Robert in July later that year because the first one had been such a success. The second concert, *Nutbroki Ilbijerri* was a more elaborate affair. The name *Nutbroki Ilbijerri* is coined from the local dialect of the Wurundjeri that used to inhabit the Melbourne area and means a celebration in the west. The descendants of the Wurundjeri have an organisation based in Dandenong and the Museum keeps in contact with them and the Aboriginal project officers consult with them on relevant matters.

One significant feature of *Nutbroki* was to translate the brochure advertising the event into ten different languages of major ethnic groups that live in the western suburbs. The rationale behind this was that in the current growing interest in Aboriginal culture and issues there did not appear to be too much evidence of access by non English-speaking people to this material.

With the large number of ethnic people in Melbourne's West, the Museum was in a position to address this and had a history of translating

material to improve access to non English speaking people.

Without going too much into the concert itself at this stage, the response to the translated brochures was remarkable and the concert was an experience that anyone at it will not forget. Vietnamese, Greeks and Italians eating kangaroo with Aboriginals and Aussies while the didgeridoo played and fires kept the cold Melbourne winter night at bay. A pro-active multicultural museum process in the dreamtime.



Herb Patten and Sandy Atkinson play country and western numbers on the gumleaf and steel guitar during the 'Blackout Day' Concert on 26 January, 1992. Probably the first Aboriginal concert on the banks of the Maribyrnong since European arrival and occupation.

WESTERN SUBURBS DREAMING

'Where do Aboriginals come from?' is a question that is often asked of the Museum's Aboriginal Project Officer, Larry Walsh, during question time at school visits. Larry handles questions like this with a sense of humour because he is used to the incredible lack of knowledge about Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture in the non-Aboriginal population of this country.

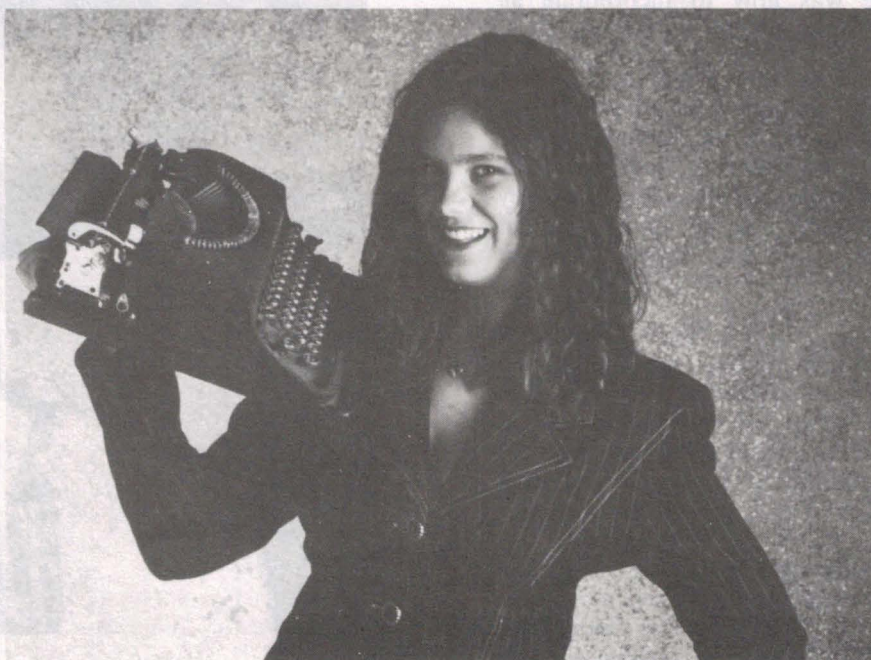
The founders of this Living Museum were aware of their lack of knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture in the Western Region of Melbourne and included as one of the aims of the Museum to develop a greater understanding of the history and culture of Aboriginal people in this region.

However our patron, Joan Kimer, said 'You're not researching Aboriginal people unless you have Aboriginal people doing it.' So we didn't. There were many other things to do and this aim was put on the back burner until the time was right. As far as anyone knew the original inhabitants of the area had disappeared decades ago and there

was no noticeable Aboriginal presence in the region.

This was in fact not the case. There are several hundred Aboriginal people in the Western Region of Melbourne. Interestingly enough, many Aboriginal people were not aware of this. One of the significant acts of Larry Walsh in his role as Aboriginal Project Officer has been to bring the size and scope of this presence in the Western Region to the attention of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike.

Here in Victoria, particularly in a big city like Melbourne, the story of Aboriginal culture from the time before European contact through to the present day is different in many ways from developments in the Northern Territory, for example, where most of the original culture is still visible. The original culture is not so visible in Victoria and much has been lost to the Aboriginal people. But there are elements of the culture very much alive.



Kylie Freeman, secretary at the Living Museum, who won the State Training Board's Koorie Trainee of the Year Award in 1993.



Gary Presland, archaeologist and historian, at the launch of 'First Residents of Melbourne's Western Region' at Footscray Library in 1987.

Too often Aboriginal culture is seen as one culture. There are connections of course, but there are also many differences. Part of the challenge is to develop a greater understanding of the distinct local culture and also to appreciate present day Aboriginal culture. Another part of the challenge was how to incorporate an Aboriginal program into a medium-sized museum.

The Living Museum had made a few tentative excursions into Koorie culture through some of its early projects documenting the region. Gary Presland of the Victoria Archaeological Survey contributed his knowledge of Aboriginal occupation in the region to a video about Kororoit Creek.

The Museum subsequently helped publish Gary's book on the archaeology of Koories in the region *The First Residents of Melbourne's West*. The Museum's archaeologist, Gary Vines, had conducted several archaeological surveys in the region and in the process consulted Aboriginal groups or involved them in the actual surveys.

The Museum's first constructive cultural contact with Aboriginal groups happened at a local primary school, St. Monica's, where a member of staff, Peter Haffenden, and the Cultural Officer of the Wurundjeri Tribal Council, Robert Mate Mate, were both giving talks.

Peter was particularly taken with the way the young Vietnamese and Italian children clustered around Robert Mate Mate, fascinated by his stories and his way of telling them.

The Museum was doing a project on the history of the Maribyrnong Valley at the time and it seemed particularly appropriate to enlist Robert for help on the history of the Aboriginal people of the Valley. Robert wrote text on Aboriginal history for the project. We also talked to Wayne Atkinson at the recently set up KoorieOral History Project and between the three groups we produced a video with Robert talking about Aboriginal history on several local sites along the Maribyrnong River.

The timing was also good because the Wurundjeri people were in the process of making a cultural comeback or revival. The Wurundjeri were the Aboriginal people of the Melbourne area before European occupation. We were never taught about them at school. After decades of being pushed aside and forgotten they were re-grouping and beginning to promote their current presence and their history.

So Aboriginal people produced our first exhibition about their own culture. The question of how to begin was being answered. The elders of the Wurundjeri came to the exhibition and it was opened by the spokesperson for the Wurundjeri, Margaret Gardiner. That year, 1989, they were having a celebration of Wurundjeri Week in August.



Kim Jowett, local Koorie resident who is actively involved in Aboriginal issues, launches 'First Residents of Melbourne's Western Region.'

The Wurundjeri are based in Dandenong, miles away on the east side of Melbourne. The Living Museum offered a space for an exhibition during Wurundjeri Week as a western representative. We maintained contact over the next year and then when Robert Mate-Mate's contract with the Wurundjeri expired in 1991, the Living Museum employed him as Aboriginal Project Officer with funding from The Stegley Foundation and the Lance Reichstein Foundation.

Robert is not a Wurundjeri, he is a Birregubba from Queensland, brought up in tribal ways. He is particularly skilled at story telling and can hold any audience spellbound. Although being from Queensland his son, Free Timbs was born in Mornington, Victoria and this led Robert to research Victorian Aboriginal culture and traditions to pass on to his son. He has also been passing this information to many others. As local schools heard about Robert at the Museum he was soon in great demand.

Robert gave informal talks and lectures, told stories, participated in workshops with school and kindergarten groups, tertiary institutions, teacher in-services and community groups. A condition of the grant for Robert was a project steering committee. This included several local Aboriginal people: Larry Walsh, from the KoorieHeritage Trust, Melissa Brickell, of the KoorieEducation Co-ordination Unit, Cheryl Vickery from the Aboriginal Program Exchange, Wayne Atkinson of the Koorie Oral History Program and Vicky Nicholson of the Wurundjeri. The steering

committee linked the Museum into a wider Aboriginal network.

The project initially had two directions: to develop research and curriculum material for local education and promotion of Aboriginal issues and conduct outreach through school visits and concerts. This is illustrated in the brief descriptions of *Blackout Day* and *Nutbroki Ilbjerri* in the previous chapter.

A significant product of the research is a book of Robert's reflections on the Wurundjeri language as part of the revitalizing of the local Aboriginal culture called *Barn-da-na*, meaning message stick.

One of the working principles of the Museum's Aboriginal program as developed by the Project Officers and the steering committees has been always to show links between the history of the Aboriginal people and the reality of the living culture today. The message Aborigines pass on is that we might have changed but we are still very much here now in the present. This is why the concerts have been considered an important part of the program.

School visits continued and more and more people came to speak to Robert with questions about Aboriginal history and culture. Some had simple questions like the meaning of 'Werribee', a local suburb. Others wanted an appropriate name for a local kindergarten while others wanted to know more about the ways of tribes in the area before European arrival.



The opening of 'The Amazing Maribyrnong', with Robert Mate-Mate and Mrs Meryl Oliver, an elder of the Wurundjeri



'Ilbjerri /Talagon' or Blackout Australia Day, a concert held to teach the Western Suburbs through song, dance, and stories, the lifestyles of the Victorian Koories.

Overall there was a thirst for information about Aboriginal culture on many levels. Many people commented on how they did not know where to begin to look for information. Robert also spoke on several radio programs on 3LO and 3WRB.

Not only was this program a benefit to the public in general, it was and is an ongoing education for the rest of the staff at the Museum as well. This cannot be over emphasised. As explained earlier because of the open nature of the office of the Living Museum all the staff are exposed to everything that is going on in the Museum much of the time. So the staff at the Museum have been getting a broad education and involvement in Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal issues.

This permeation effect has meant staff doing other projects are generally aware of when and where it is appropriate to call in Robert and other Aboriginal contacts to advise on some point or issue. Other staff have attended Aboriginal meetings and visited other Aboriginal projects and are becoming aware of Aboriginal networks. It has also meant Aboriginal networks are becoming aware of the skills and projects of Living Museum staff.

For example, Wurundjeri Elders attended the launch of the Museum exhibition *The Amazing Maribyrnong*, to which they contributed and the Museum has subsequently kept in contact with the Wurundjeri organization.

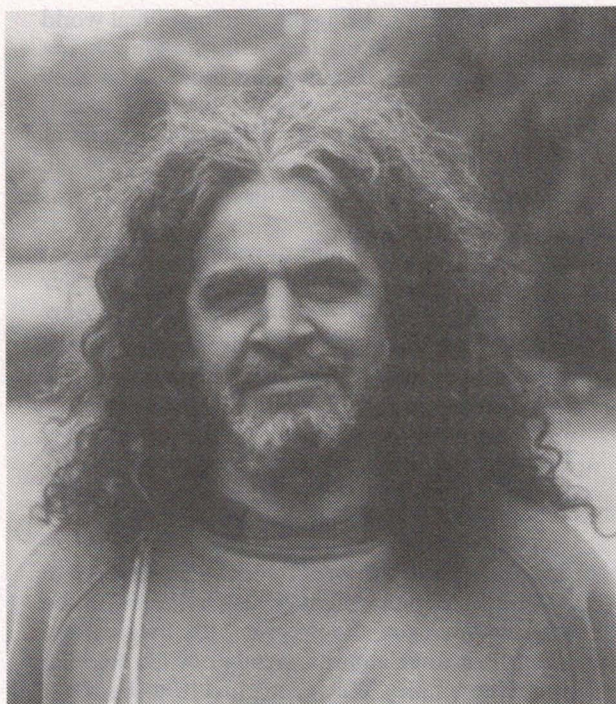
As an extension of this the Rangers of Melbourne Water have also become involved with our Aboriginal Program and have introduced more Aboriginal events and activities into their park

programs. Robert Mate Mate and Gary Vines have been involved in their in-service programs for staff training.

One interesting result of this overall raising of awareness was that Melbourne Water rangers came across a scattering of stones while clearing weeds one day. They were able to recognise it as a pre-European Aboriginal quarry site. They explained that before Robert had come and talked to them about Aboriginal culture they would not have recognised what it was. This is just one example of the 'ripple' effect this program has had in the region.

Larger projects and clear issues are easy to describe. What is harder to describe are the hundreds of phone calls, chats over coffee, visits to other organisations and a whole host of incidentals that create a form of fabric that is crucial to the real success of more definable projects and programs.

Chats over coffee between Melissa Brickell of the Koorie Education Co-ordination Unit and Pat O'Connell of the State Training Board led to the idea of a Koorie Garden Team being established at Pipemakers Park, the home of the Living Museum. With the co-operation of Melbourne Water and Western Region Group Training, six Aboriginal youths began as gardening apprentices under the guidance of a co-ordinator, Jeff Walsh in 1992. The issue was employment and training for Aboriginal youth. The point of basing the project at Pipemakers Park was the connection and cultural back-up of an Aboriginal presence at the Museum.



Larry Walsh is giving a Koorie perspective of history as Aboriginal Project officer at the Living Museum.

Elements of this project include training in mainstream horticultural theory and practice, but also special elements related to Aboriginal culture. Some examples are their involvement in the design and construction of an Aboriginal food plants trail, restoration and management of local archaeological and indigenous vegetation sites and involvement in Museum cultural projects. In 1994 three Koorie girls have joined the team.

The Koorie Garden Team is a wonderful example of the way the Museum not only documents the past but is having a dynamic effect on the present and future by having a hand in steering the process of cultural development.

This project is also a fine example of a form of outreach where a cultural institution can become a catalyst for a form of progressive outreach that actively and substantially deals with current issues in the 'real' world. Furthermore it is an example of where a solution or model is tried so that traditional views of 'museums' being about the past are challenged and museums can also be seen as being guides to the future. Consequently, the living nature of culture is emphasised and the flow from the actions of the past, through the present to the future, is re-enforced.

The separation of culture packaged within a museum and the 'real' world outside is erased and stronger connections are made. This might seem a strong claim but many responses to the existence

of this Koorie Gardening Apprentice Scheme suggest that this is indeed the case.

Three months after the Koorie Gardening Scheme began Robert Mate Mate had planned a more ambitious Aboriginal concert during NAIDOC week in July, *Nutbroki Ilbijerri*., as part of his outreach program. The boys from the Koorie Gardening Team leapt into the organisation of the concert and in a way it became their concert.

The Gardening Team organised the catering, decorated the building with netting, kangaroos, snakes and an eagle. They found tables and chairs for the audience, built a stage, made flaming firesticks to light the way and helped cook the kangaroo.

The concert itself was quite remarkable. Headliners were Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter and Lionel Rose. There was Country and Western, poetry, speeches, traditional dancing, a play for children and rock and roll, all by Aboriginal performers. At the end of night a group of Aboriginal youths jumped up and did a spontaneous rap number



Rigoberto Menchu, Nobel Peace Prize winner of the Quixé Maya tribe of Guatemala, welcomed by Larry Walsh to Victoria on behalf of local indigenous people in front of several thousand Latin Americans at Collingwood Town Hall. Constant contact with indigenous people from other countries has been a feature of the Museum's Aboriginal Program.



Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter performing and singing their stories about Aboriginal life at the 'Nutbroki/Ilbijerri' concert

The concert was held in a large bluestone building heated by two large fires while traditional kangaroo was baked outside for supper. It was a family night. Further to that it was a night for the people of Melbourne's western suburbs to meet the Aboriginal community.

The result was amazing. There were Greeks, Italians, Vietnamese, Latin Americans, Maoris, Yugoslavs and so on. We treasure a photo of a Vietnamese man eating his first kangaroo meat. One direct result of the concert was that the local Vietnamese Community then invited the Museum to find Aboriginal dancers to open the Vietnamese Tet Festival several months later in front of an audience of several thousand Vietnamese in Footscray Park. Later a Macedonian group also contacted the Museum for Aboriginal dancers to open one of their local festivals in Sunshine.

As the Museum's Aboriginal Program was becoming more established, Western Region Group Training placed a young Kooriegirl, Kylie Freeman, with the Museum as a trainee secretary.

Again the purpose being the training of real world skills in a cultural context with the view being that each would enhance the other. And they have. In one year Kylie moved from a raw recruit to one of four finalists for Victorian Trainee of the Year out of 3000 entrants and won the Victorian KoorieTrainee of the Year Award.

During that time, while developing secretarial skills, Kylie has gradually taken on further challenges on her own initiative and is now preparing exhibitions, organising school competitions and arranging performances by Aboriginal entertainers and talks among her day to day duties. So in the course of a training position the Museum has contributed to the overall pool of Museum potential in the region. A very practical museum process.

Soon after the *Nutbroki* concert Robert Mate Mate became sick and after discussions with the funding bodies of the program, the Stegley and Reichstein foundations a member of the steering committee, Larry Walsh, stepped in to build on the program and act as an organiser and facilitator. He called the project *Bren-be-al*, which in the Wurundjeri dialect means 'rainbow', and described it as a Koorie Heritage Networking Project in Melbourne's West.



Vietnamese people enjoying Koorie cuisine at 'Nutbroki/Ilbijerri.'



Carol Fraser, Aboriginal Jazz singer, performs at the opening of an exhibition about Koorie women, 'Daughters of a Dreaming', staged at the Living Museum by the Museum of Victoria's Victorian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Unit in 1993.

The underlying thrust of *Bren be-al* has been to identify the needs of Aboriginal people living in the western suburbs and to work towards addressing those needs initially by creating activities to involve these people. This arose from Larry identifying a larger number of Aboriginal people living in the western suburbs than was realised. He studied census statistics and talked to individuals and groups in the region and recognised a deficiency in addressing this population which, thanks to his research, is recognised as around two thousand. Then he brought this to the attention of Aboriginal organisations and met with local Aboriginal people to discuss ways to deal with an apparent lack of servicing this hidden population.

One result has been two major exhibitions held at the Visitor Centre. One of these was *Daughters of a Dreaming*, about the history of Aboriginal women in Victoria and the other an exhibition of artwork by Sally Morgan.

Another result has been a keen interest from Aboriginal organisations and individuals about these statistics. Larry believes many Aboriginal people need to be re-connected to their culture as a source of strength and support in regaining a sense of identity. This is complicated by the fact that many Aboriginal people in the western suburbs are from different tribal groups but he

believes the more they can be put in touch with each other the more they will be able to access training and employment.

With this in mind Larry sees the cultural education of the wider population of the western suburbs aiding in reinforcing the importance of their own culture and history to the Aboriginal people in the region. It is also one avenue of employment. As the demand for contact with and information about the indigenous culture increases there arises a greater need for more Aboriginal people to deliver that culture in the form of talks, dances, paintings and so on.

The first steps in this long range strategy involve education outreach by providing Aboriginal dancers, artists and lecturers to a range of organisations in the west, such as schools, Rotary clubs, conservation groups and a number of festivals. Larry has also done a lot of in-service programs for teachers. These activities help promote an understanding of Aboriginal culture and gives employment to dancers and artists.

During this period Larry also designed an interesting questionnaire to investigate general knowledge in the region about Aboriginal history and culture. It included questions like: *What language do most Aboriginee speak? Name four important Aboriginal people from Australia's*

history? Do you know the name of the local Aboriginal tribe?

He also had a version for Aboriginal people with questions like: *Do you know the four major countries that non Aboriginal people in your area originally come from? Do you know four famous Australian landmarks by their non Aboriginal name? Do you know what the colours and symbols of the Australian flag signify?*

This simple innovative step proved such a useful tool to identify just how the local population perceived Aboriginal people and to reveal general ignorance about the indigenous culture that has received statewide attention from Aboriginal organisations, including Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.

It is an excellent example of how the challenge of dealing with problems of outreach in a small program can sometimes open up processes that can be applied in a larger sphere where they may have been overlooked in the pursuit of other issues.

The original strategy conceived by Larry has partly been re-shaped and expanded by a remarkable response and demand for information from many directions. Local political groups have called on Larry to educate them about issues relating to the Mabo decision.

The Department of Social Security (Essendon and Werribee) have approached him to advise them

on how they can better address the needs of Aboriginal people in their area. School teachers come regularly for instruction on curriculum development as schools turn rapidly to redress the lack of attention to class work on the indigenous culture, work which is long overdue.

One of the most challenging and satisfying aspects of this whole project for Larry has been on a personal level, helping people discover their Aboriginal background - which includes people who have just discovered they have an Aboriginal ancestry. Some of these may have been adopted or fostered and no one has spoken of their Aboriginal identity. Several people have approached Larry at the Museum about these deeply personal issues.

The very presence of an Aboriginal Project Officer at the Museum has effected so much more than any static exhibition could do and has been a welcome catalyst for many groups and individuals in the region coming to grips with what is probably the greatest cultural revolution in the nation.

By its very nature, this project links the ecomuseum into a national movement with its own brand of local issues. All aspects of the ecomuseum link into national issues in their own way. It just happens to be more apparent with the Aboriginal program because the whole country is re-shaping its understanding of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture.



The Yarra Yarra Dance Group performing at the opening of the Vietnamese Tet Festival in Footscray Park in 1993, attended by about 50,000 people.

JUST MANAGING

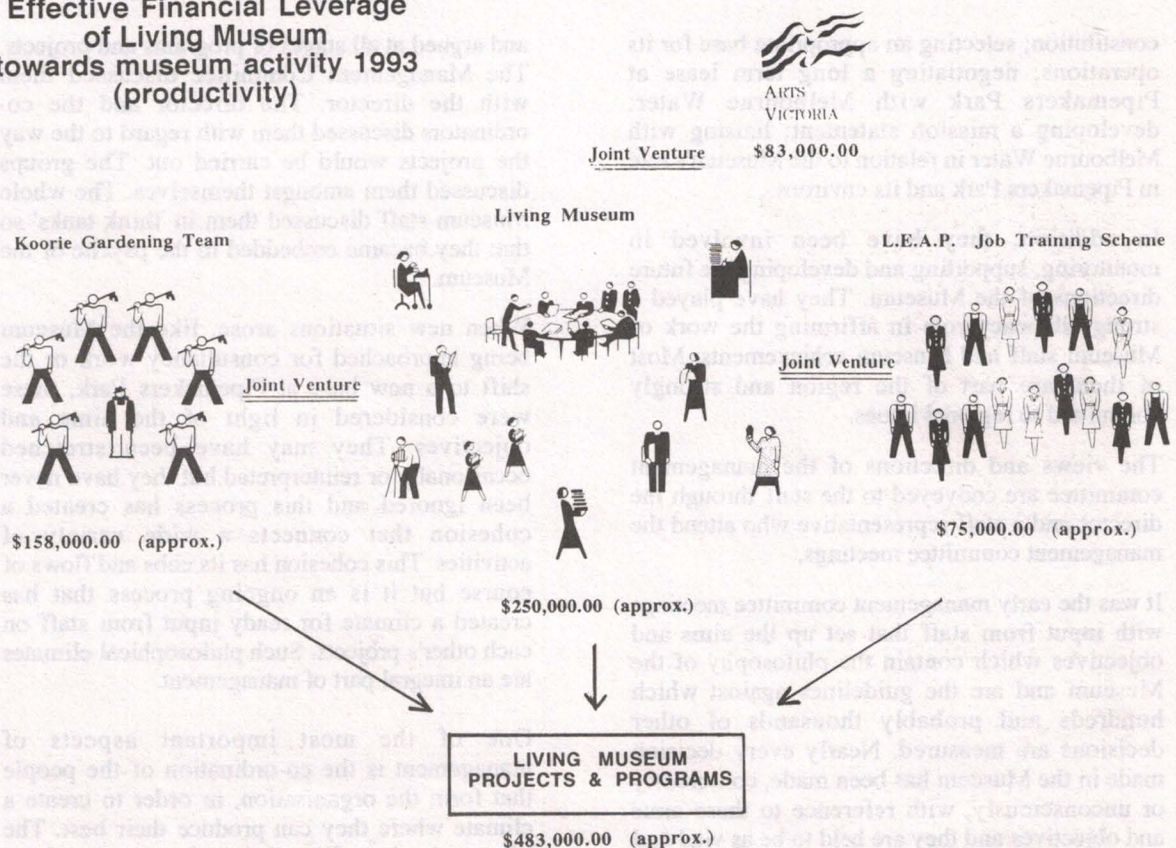
With this Museum, as with any other, there is considerable activity behind the scenes in managing the concerts, the projects, the products, the day to day activities, the staff, the money and all the machinery that makes a museum act as a museum day in and day out.

Management in this Museum is about managing philosophy, managing resources, managing people and managing money. There is a certain structure and particular processes operating to administer resources and facilitate decisions. These are by no means static and have evolved with the Museum and will continue to evolve with the Museum.

The basic policy and direction of the Museum is guided by a Management Committee drawn largely from the Western Region. Several members are elected as community representatives and several come from local history societies and educational institutions. Others are appointed from local councils so the Museum is strongly linked with other bodies concerned with heritage issues in the region and effective networks are maintained.

Over the years the Management Committee has played a decisive role at many crucial points in the Museum's history: formulating the Museum's aims and objectives; developing the Museum's

Effective Financial Leverage of Living Museum towards museum activity 1993 (productivity)



A flow chart depicting by graphic representation the staff activity at the Living Museum in 1993 and two satellite projects of the Museum: the Koorie Gardening Apprentice Scheme and the L.E.A.P. Training Scheme. The diagram shows how core funding from the Victorian Arts Ministry of \$83,000.00 generates approximately \$483,000.00 spent on museum activities.



The Management Committee and staff of the Living Museum planning the future for the fitters' and turners' workshop at the old Humes site. Their efforts at negotiating led to the establishment of the Living Museum Visitor Centre in this building in Pipemakers Park, leased from Melbourne Water who own the park.

constitution; selecting an appropriate base for its operations; negotiating a long term lease at Pipemakers Park with Melbourne Water; developing a mission statement; liaising with Melbourne Water in relation to the Museum's role in Pipemakers Park and its environs.

In addition, they have been involved in monitoring, supporting and developing the future directions of the Museum. They have played a strong advocacy role in affirming the work of Museum staff and Museum achievements. Most of them are part of the region and strongly committed to regional issues.

The views and directions of the management committee are conveyed to the staff through the director and a staff representative who attend the management committee meetings.

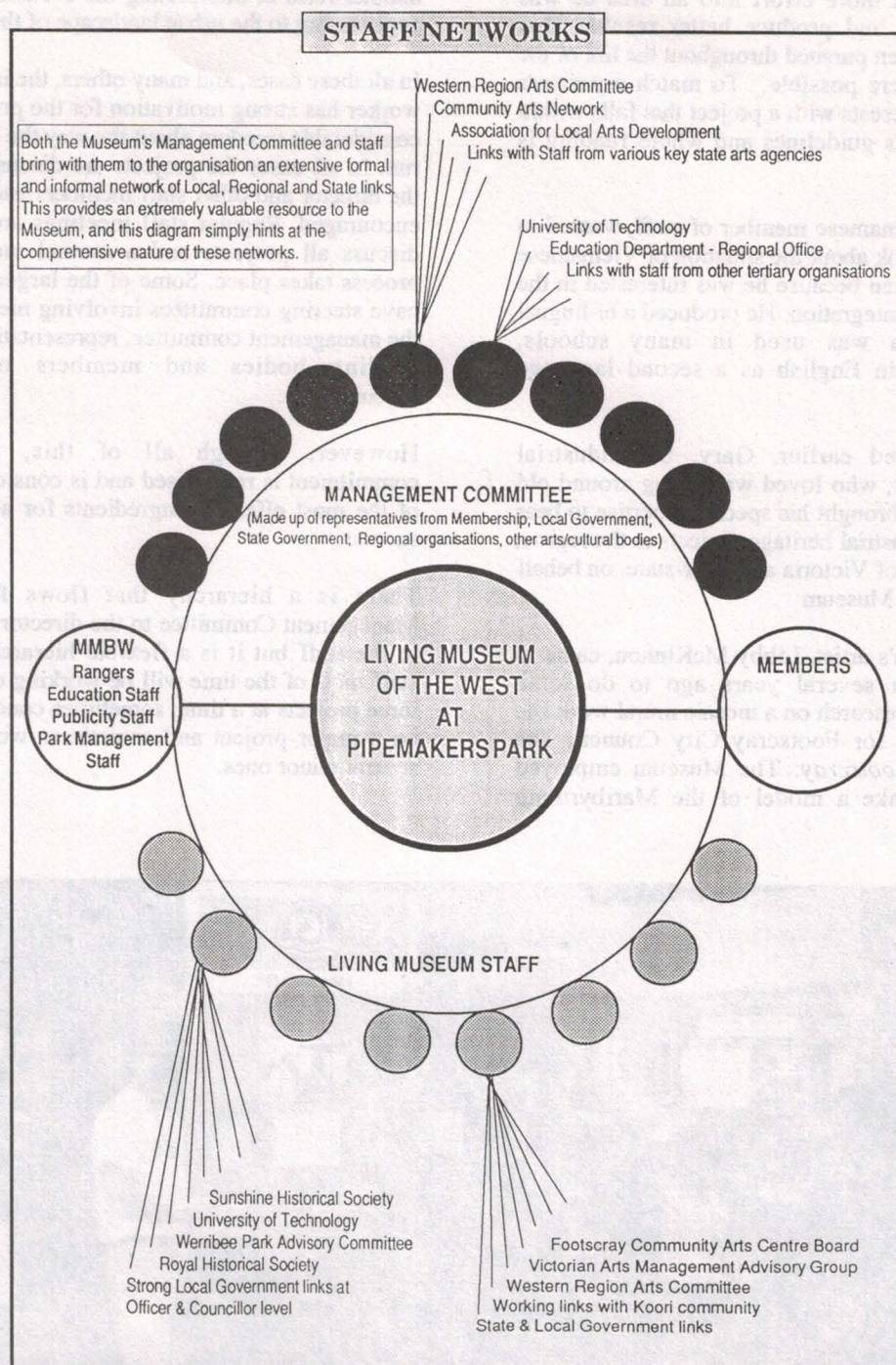
It was the early management committee meetings with input from staff that set up the aims and objectives which contain the philosophy of the Museum and are the guidelines against which hundreds and probably thousands of other decisions are measured. Nearly every decision made in the Museum has been made, consciously or unconsciously, with reference to these aims and objectives and they are held to be as vital and relevant today as they were in the first days of the Museum's own history.

In the first year particularly, interpretation of these aims and objectives was discussed, debated

and argued at all stages of programs and projects. The Management Committee discussed them with the director. The director and the co-ordinators discussed them with regard to the way the projects would be carried out. The groups discussed them amongst themselves. The whole Museum staff discussed them in 'think tanks' so that they became embedded in the psyche of the Museum.

When new situations arose, like the Museum being approached for consultancy work or the shift to a new base at Pipemakers Park, these were considered in light of the aims and objectives. They may have been stretched occasionally or reinterpreted but they have never been ignored and this process has created a cohesion that connects a wide variety of activities. This cohesion has its ebbs and flows of course but it is an ongoing process that has created a climate for ready input from staff on each other's projects. Such philosophical climates are an integral part of management.

One of the most important aspects of management is the co-ordination of the people that form the organisation, in order to create a climate where they can produce their best. The Museum's aim of involving the people of the region in the research and presentation of their own history also influenced the process of management, in that staff at all levels were involved in management and decision making.



An alternative to the typical 'pyramid' model metaphor for staff relationships in an organisation structure. This model, created for the Museum's 'Business Plan' in 1988, shows the interactive process that is the more normal reality of small organisations like the Museum. It also shows that each member around the table is also connected to a series of other organisations hence facilitating networking.

Your History Mate

We have already seen that in the first year one of the Museum staff, Tony, had a background in bands, so he was encouraged to pursue research in this area because it was better for him and more productive for the Museum. Tony was bound to put more effort into an area he was interested in and produce better results. This policy has been pursued throughout the life of the Museum where possible. To match a person's skills and interests with a project that falls within the Museum's guidelines and where funding is available.

Son, the Vietnamese member of staff, wanted to produce a book about the situation of Vietnamese migrant women because he was interested in the problems of integration. He produced a bi-lingual book which was used in many schools, particularly in English as a second language classes.

As mentioned earlier, Gary, the industrial archaeologist, who loved wandering around old factory sites brought his special expertise to bear on many industrial heritage projects in the region, in other parts of Victoria and inter-state, on behalf of the Living Museum

The Museum's artist, Libby McKinnon, came to the Museum several years ago to do some background research on a mosaic mural work she was making for Footscray City Council, *The History of Footscray*. The Museum employed Libby to make a model of the Maribyrnong

River, which she did, and then she applied her artistic mind to ideas for visually representing Museum areas of study. The result has been a series of commissioned art projects, keeping Libby in constant work, giving the Museum another form of interpreting the ecomuseum and contributing to the urban landscape of the region.

In all these cases, and many others, the individual worker has strong motivation for the project and considerable freedom about the way the project is run. In all cases the projects are discussed with the director and other staff members and input is encouraged. Regular staff meetings are held to discuss all projects and a mutual monitoring process takes place. Some of the larger projects have steering committees involving members of the management committee, representatives from funding bodies and members of other organisations.

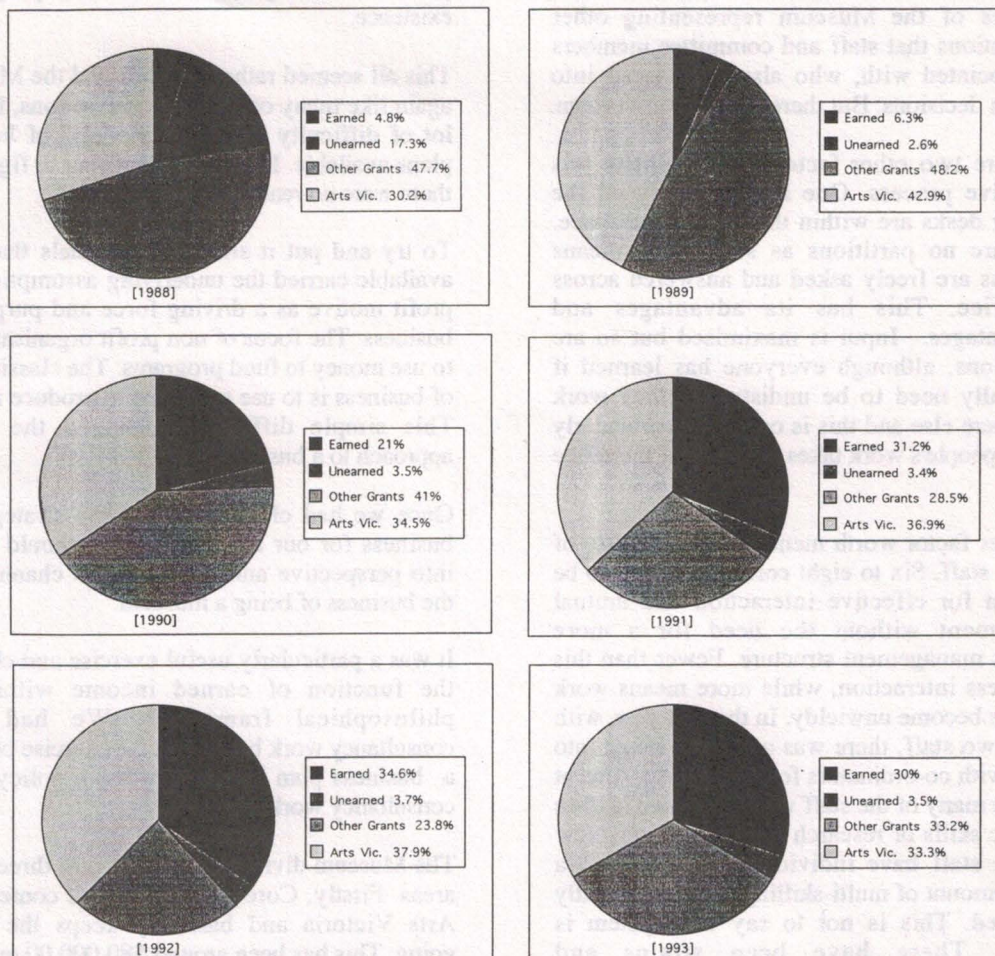
However, through all of this, personal commitment is recognised and is considered one of the most effective ingredients for a project's success.

There is a hierarchy that flows from the Management Committee to the director and then to the staff but it is a flexible hierarchy. Most staff most of the time will be working on two or three projects at a time, sometimes concentrating on a major project and sometimes working on several minor ones.



A display consultancy commissioned by ICI, Deer Park, for an industry open day. On the left, Libby McKinnon, Museum staff member, who helped design and produce the display. On the right, Rob Weaver, personnel manager for ICI.

Breakdown of income - 1988 to 1993.



This series of pie charts shows the growth in 'earned' income as a percentage of total annual income for the Museum since 1988, the year we introduced a business plan. Note that earned income has grown from 4.8% in 1988 to 40% in 1993.

By way of comparison, it is worth looking at how a play is produced. A theatre company would require a play or playwright, a director, stage people, actors, costume and make-up artists and administration staff. The focus for everyone is to co-operate in the alchemy of the performance. Each person has a clear idea of their role and each others' role. By contrast, the Living Museum has about a dozen plays going on at any one time. In most cases they are being written as they go along. Most of us are writing at least one play, helping script someone else's, stage managing here, dressmaking there, and so on. In one production we are the director, in another we are the actor or apprentice.

This analogy can be extended to the financing of the play (or museum project). Some times one play goes over-budget to satisfy the aims of the Museum, but this can be compensated by efficiencies in other areas, for example profit on consultancies, so that there is a limited amount of cross-subsidisation between projects.

In 1988 when the Museum, along with many other arts organisations, began the intimidating task of coming to grips with producing a 'business plan' we had a dilemma with the conventional mode of diagrams that illustrated staff structure in a form of pyramid flow chart. It did not seem to fit the reality of how the interaction occurred at the Museum so we

produced our own model that attempted to more accurately illustrate the way information was exchanged around a table. You will see in the diagram that the Management Committee is also part of this interacting circle.

The logical extension of this 'networking' structure would be to connect other circles to the members of the Museum representing other organisations that staff and committee members are associated with, who also have input into Museum decisions. But there simply wasn't room.

There are two other factors that facilitate this interactive process. One is that nearly all the working desks are within the same open space. There are no partitions as such. This means questions are freely asked and answered across the office. This has its advantages and disadvantages. Input is maximised but so are distractions, although everyone has learned if they really need to be undisturbed they work somewhere else and this is common, particularly as most people's work takes them out of the office anyway.

The other factor worth mentioning is the size of the core staff. Six to eight core staff seems to be optimum for effective interaction and mutual management without the need for a more complex management structure. Fewer than this means less interaction, while more means work meetings become unwieldy. In the first year, with twenty-two staff, there was a need to break into groups with co-ordinators for each group. Also at that time many of the staff were untrained in even the basic skills of research and production. Now the core staff have individual strengths and a certain amount of multi-skilling that is constantly developed. This is not to say this system is perfect. There have been strains and disagreements at times and discussions about different ways to structure staff and co-ordinate management of projects and programs. This current flexible, self motivating, self managing process, based on peer group feedback, does seem to be the most effective and workable structure for an organisation with as many diverse projects operating at once and appropriate for an organisation with its philosophy so rooted in empowerment and self-determination.

In the late eighties, as previously mentioned, the Museum became acquainted with the novel concept of 'business plans'. It was part of a process of tightening up all over as economic ills began to put pressure on arts funding, after a few freer spending years in the early eighties.

The Museum had always had to be accountable and had always had a vision since its inception, but now we were being asked to spell out the nuts

and bolts of strategies to implement that vision. We were also being asked to look towards greater self sufficiency by considering how to earn income. However, the message from funding bodies and particularly the Arts Ministry was that this quest for earned income should not be at the expense of 'being a museum'. We must not let the pursuit of money interfere with our purpose of existence.

This all seemed rather difficult and the Museum, again like many other arts organisations, found a lot of difficulty with the "models" of business plans available. It took nearly a year to figure out there were no real models available.

To try and put it simply the models that were available carried the underlying assumption of a profit motive as a driving force and purpose of business. The focus of non profit organisations is to use money to fund programs. The classic focus of business is to use programs to produce money. This simple difference changed the whole approach to a business plan.

Once we had cleared this up the strategies of business for our arts organisation could be put into perspective and developed to channel into the business of being a museum.

It was a particularly useful exercise and clarified the function of earned income within our philosophical framework. We had done consultancy work before but the exercise of doing a business plan helped develop a policy about consultancy work.

The Museum divides its income into three major areas. Firstly, Core funding, which comes from Arts Victoria and basically keeps the office going. This has been around \$80,000.00 annually for the past few years. Secondly, Project funding is derived from grants from a range of bodies including government departments, philanthropic organisations and councils. Thirdly, Consultancies which can also come from government departments and councils but from a wide range of private organisations as well.

We define consultancies as those projects that come from another body approaching the Museum and contracting the Museum, for a fee, to do a job that require the skills we have to offer. Grant projects involve the Museum asking for money from a funding organisation to do a project that the Museum formulates, to contribute to the research and development of the concept of the ecomuseum.

A consultancy can be a local industry wanting an exhibition done for an open day, a government department wanting an history-based art work for

a building project, or in one case a local council hiring our archaeologist to help shift the graves of early settlers to make way for extension of sewerage ponds. They all fit within the framework of the philosophy of the eco museum concept and so are acceptable and do not distract from the business of being a museum.

The very shift of learning to perceive the Museum from a business point of view, as well as from a cultural organisation point of view, allowed this earning capacity to develop to levels that seemed inconceivable earlier. Diagram 3. in this chapter shows the growth in earned income for the past five years.

While the Business Plan does not itself attract consultancies, the effect of the development of the Museum's skills in both management and production have given it stability, productivity, an accumulation of resources, and an openness to doing such work, has led to a steady increase in the Museum's capacity to earn its own income.

The ability to earn income within the parameters of your philosophy varies with the type of cultural organisation. It has always been understood that theatre groups can earn money from box office takings but not all cultural organisations have box office potential. Earning potential varies from organisation to organisation but this museum was able to expand its earning potential with some hard thinking and the mother of invention, necessity. Sometimes this income has come from the least expected sources, eg. shifting historical graves, rather than the more readily expected source of entrance fees.

In an organisation like this Museum, the management can't simply choose areas of research and study we would like to do. It's a matter of matching priorities with opportunities and building up the interpretation of the region much like making a patchwork quilt, albeit a quilt of several dimensions. The main challenge of management is to keep an eye on the overall design of the quilt while paying attention to the endless fine detail.

In money terms, the annual turnover of the Living Museum has been between \$200,000 and \$300,000 for the last eight years, usually closer to \$200,000. The turnover of the first year was closer to \$500,000 but this was related to particular funding with a large Community Employment Program component.

Money generated through the joint venture projects that the Museum has been involved with, while not directly contributing to its core operations, enlarges the Museum's financial impact. This is also enhanced by the in kind and

volunteer support the Museum attracts. The consequence is that the Museum often has a greater impact than can be measured in financial terms from its own expenditure, because of the effect of money spent by other organisations on what are essentially Museum programs. For example, the Koorie Garden Team (whose wages are not part of Museum expenditure) contribute to the ecomuseum principle by managing archaeological and indigenous sites in the region.

On the surface of it the activity as represented by the turnover figures, or 'productivity' if we are to use financial world terminology, has been remarkably stable and consistent over the last eight years. This is partly true, the number of 'core' staff has been maintained at six to eight in this time. However this does not adequately indicate a real picture of activity.

Before 1992 a relatively normal picture would be six or seven core staff with two or three part timers and occasional work experience students from both secondary and tertiary organisations working at the Museum. In 1993 for a while there were 38 people working on Museum projects one way or another with a marginal rise in turnover figures.

This has been achieved through what we will call a series of joint ventures and training placements. These have come about for several reasons. Partly because of the stability referred to before, partly because of the relationship between the Museum and Melbourne Water with regard to management of Pipemakers Park, partly because of the success of the Aboriginal program and also because of the philosophy and practice of the Museum as guided by its aims and objectives.

One example is the Koori Gardening Apprentice Scheme, set up and based at Pipemakers Park in 1992. The co-ordinator's salary is paid through the Museum but the wages of the six Aboriginal apprentices are paid by Department of Employment, Education and Training through Western Region Group Training.

Later in 1992 Kylie Freeman, the trainee Koori secretary was placed at the Museum and was also paid by D.E.E.T. through Western Region Group Training. Then in 1993 'Life Be In It' organised a scheme to place tertiary educated unemployed in cultural organisations and approached the Museum which accepted two of these people as placements, Kerrie and Angelo, for six months.

About the same time Western Group Training talked to the Museum about managing a Landcare Environment Action Program scheme which involved training young unemployed people in a

horticultural based project with a range of other skills that staff at the Museum could provide with a few hours a week. The advantage of being based at the park with a co-operative relationship with Melbourne Water meant that these various schemes could be adopted and adapted to the Museum's programs with some restructuring and an reallocation of staff resources.

It should be pointed out that although extra staff mean extra work, even if some other body is providing the money, some of the extra staff were able to relieve core staff of many duties. Even though more core staff time went into management and training, the extra bodies and minds meant a wider application of Museum programs. Without the L.E.A.P. team for example the large environmental discovery trail could never have been attempted.

We mustn't forget the volunteers. Francine is a landscape architect student who needed experience in a real work situation to pass her final year but couldn't get a job. The Museum was able to provide her with suitable work for her course and she provided drawings of the *History of the Land* project which were invaluable.

Sharon had a degree in history and had a similar story. She needed work to build up her C.V. and the Museum needed some archival work. It may seem that taking on so much training personnel is overloading core staff and it can be a strain at times but much of the time the skills and abilities

of some complement the needs of others and certain efficiencies can be achieved to balance the strains.

For example, the Koorie Gardening Team were able to show the L.E.A.P. team some horticultural skills. The need to document the work on the *History of the Land* project was met by Angelo who had a background in film making. Kerrie who had a background in art and was familiar with exhibitions was able to teach Kylie the principles of hanging an exhibition.

This briefly describes how resources can be stretched and extended while maintaining a basic core of staff but of course none of this would have or could have occurred without several years of development and experience on the part of the core staff themselves and the substantial annual operating grant from Arts Victoria.

This experience of the core staff has evolved from the way the workings of the Living Museum relate to the aims and objectives, the structure of funding, the way projects and programs are carried out, the type of projects and programs carried out and decision-making processes. It has also developed from the inter-relationship of the types of skills various members of staff have brought with them to the Museum and the projects and programs those skills have been applied to. It has been a constant learning experience for all and looks like continuing that way.



Back in Your Own Backyard' Steering Committee, 1988: (left to right) Di Beevers (Living Museum Committee of Management), Bill Psarras (Department of Planning), Chrisy Dennis (Living Museum staff), Greg Marginson (Bicentennial Authority), Peter Somerville (Living Museum Committee of Management).

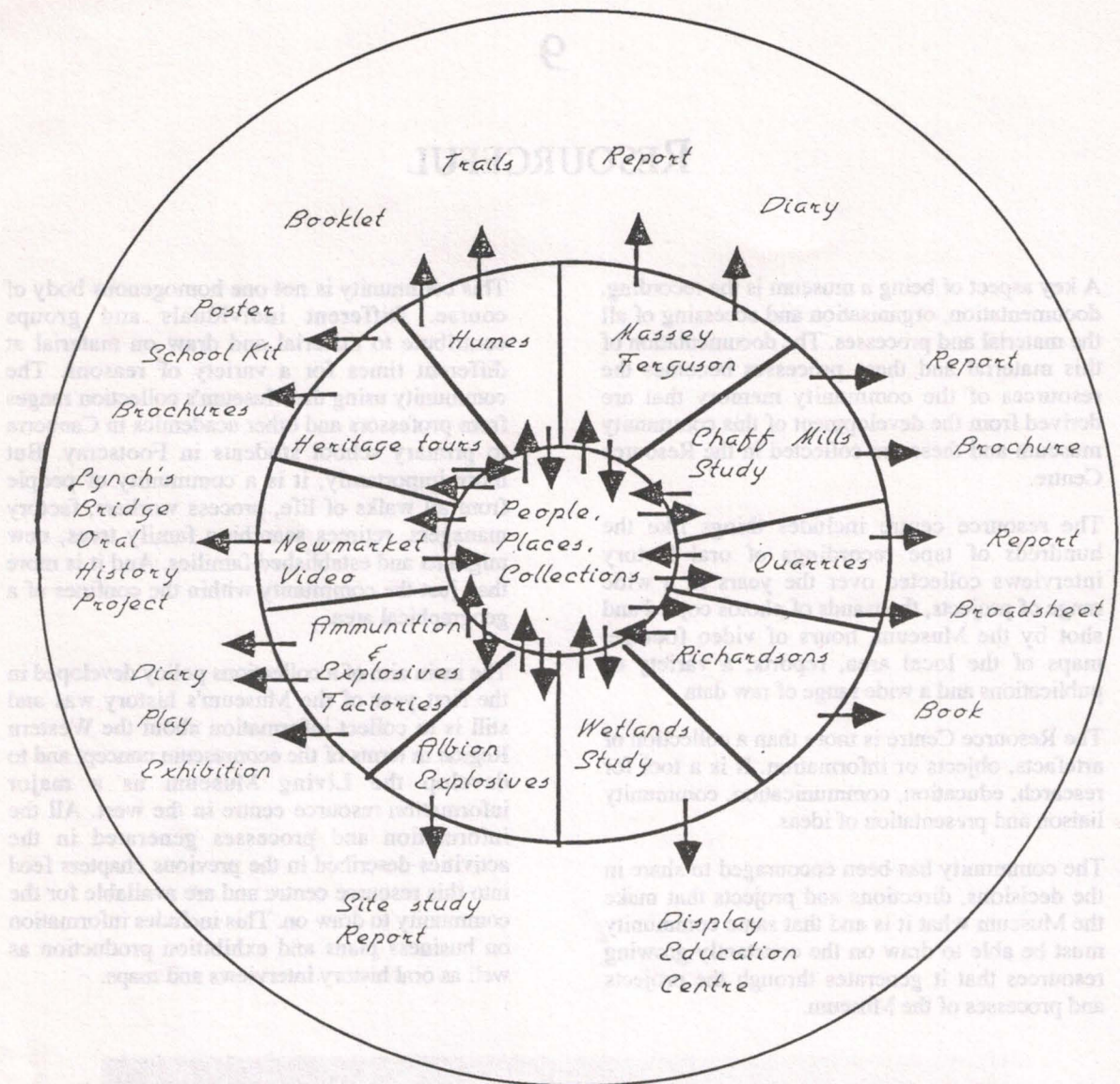


Diagram of the function of the Resource Centre as the 'Powerhouse' of the Museum in 1987. Resources and collection items provide the basis for the whole range of Museum activities and products.

The whole point of the initial aims and philosophy of the Museum was an emphasis on people and their environment and not on artefacts. This focus was reinforced with a collections policy that discouraged the collection of artefacts. One reason for this was that attention to artefacts could distract from the purpose of the museum and draw limited resources away from the development of other programs. Furthermore the Museum operated out of a very small office space in Footscray and there simply wasn't any room to store artefacts.

When artefacts have been collected, it has been because they provide a crucial insight into a particular aspect of the region's history or culture, for example, the special anti-spark shoes worn by munitions workers, or the hand tools of one of the last boat builders on the Maribyrnong River.

But this is kept to a minimum and is still more the exception than the rule.

Sometimes there are compelling reasons to collect artefacts because they fit into a bigger picture of a particular research project. For instance, when recording oral history on the history of the meatworks, an informant might produce old photographs and indenture papers which we then copy, and offer a branding iron or butchers knife. As the artefacts, photographs, documents and oral history are so tightly linked, they are best collected together, rather than split up so that one or more elements lose their context.

Copies of original photographs are an important focus of the Museum's collection policy. A simple copy-stand set-up enables photographs to

be copied on the spot, so the owner of the photographs doesn't even have to let the original photos out of their sight. In some instances the Museum has taken the copy-stand to people's homes so their photographs don't even have to leave the premises.

At time of writing, the Resource Centre contains more than 20,000 photographic images on negative and contact print which includes copies of historic photographs, photographs documenting historic sites, contemporary events and Living Museum projects and photographs produced for publication and display purposes. The Museum's photographic collection is now seen as an image bank for the region, used by newspapers, historical groups, commercial firms and Government departments on a small scale.

Following this same principle other important documents, including newspaper cuttings, old maps, private writings are simply photocopied because it is the information that is important to the Museum rather than the artefact itself.

This approach has several advantages in that the owners of the documents and photographs don't have to part with them and time, energy and money do not have to be expended on preserving precious and fragile artefacts. Although in some cases originals are donated and accepted.

From one point of view we can see the Resource Centre as the key concept of the Museum and the engine' of the Museum - a kind of driving force. The Resource Centre is an engine or a powerhouse in the sense that it is the flow of information and elements of the community memory in many facets and forms going in and out of the Resource Centre that drive the Museum as a museum.

This process of interaction has developed as a mechanism which generates in turn new resources. For example the group of women who came to research the stories of women who worked in the munitions industries held at the Museum for their play generated more material. The play re-arranged the stories in the context of a script, further details were researched so that a new product and new resource was developed. This material now includes a resource for those interested in the history of munitions and theatre form based on oral history.

The early work the Museum did in researching the Newmarket Saleyards led to a video telling the story of what were the largest sheep and cattle stock markets in the world. The work also generated many photographs and oral history tapes. When the yards were pulled down recently

the developers came to the Museum proposing the Museum produce durable heritage signage to commemorate the history of the site. This led to more research, paid for by the developers, another product and more contacts.

The use of one of the living museum's postcards to help promote a reunion of Newmarket people is just one example of an ongoing involvement that constantly generates new research and new products with a momentum of its own.

The stockmen are just one group that have come to the Resource Centre for something to do with the heritage of the western suburbs. In their case it was something simple like a postcard with a picture of cattle on it from an era that had all too recently disappeared. This was just one example of part of the purpose and urgency in setting up the Museum to capture the local heritage before it disappeared. As far as we know the video about the saleyards is the only video or film about the place which describes how the place worked. Now it's gone.

Many students come to the Centre of course to do research for essays on the local area or some aspect of history of the environment. Others come for postgraduate work. Some come for five minutes to simply find out a fact or two while others have sat researching for days. Through this Resource Centre the information collected by the Living Museum has had an impact on thousands of people, raised the profile of a unique community and contributed to a broader picture of a sense of national heritage.

This contribution to the sense of a broader heritage has extended beyond the information collected to the ideas and innovations developed in the evolution of the Living Museum. Several organisations have sent representatives to talk to staff at the Museum about the way work with the community in the sense of being a community museum has been carried out so it can be applied elsewhere. Several members of Museum staff have been invited to conferences and seminars to talk about the methodology of the Museum and the way it works. Inquiries have ranged from small community groups to State and Federal Arts bodies.

During a period of revising its museum policy in 1991, the Western Australian Arts Ministry sent representatives several times to talk to Living Museum staff about the way the Museum worked, followed by a visit from the Minister herself. This was particularly exciting for this small community museum which had as one of its aims to act as a catalyst for ecomuseum activity in Australia.



Kay Hallahan and Olwen Ford discussing museum developments. Ms. Hallahan later commented: 'I very much appreciated hearing first hand the achievements of the Living Museum of the West and its success in building awareness of the lives of working women and men. Your pioneering work is an inspiration, particularly during this year when Western Australia is undertaking a major review of museum policy.'

Later, the South West Development Authority visited the Living Museum to discuss plans for their own ecomuseum and invited Olwen Ford to give a paper on our ecomuseum at their community development conference in Yallingup, Western Australia.

Although Melbourne's Living Museum of the West focuses on a regional area - Melbourne's Western Region - it consciously operates in a national and international context. Over the years we have had visitors from every state in Australia and from overseas - Denmark, Greece, Britain, Canada, South Africa, Germany, New Zealand, the United States. They have come to see us because we are an unusual museum and because the apparently simple task of being a community' museum is really quite complex.

The Museum fulfils its function of providing a resource to the community in all kinds of ways, by taking notice of its community and responding to the needs and questions of that community. Many people have commented on the large amount of work that seems to have been done by so few. This has been possible because most of the work done is visible and accessible. This Museum is not an iceberg where most of the work done and resources collected are hidden under the water line. The resources are used and used constantly and extensively. Consequently they grow.

The move to the new site with a Visitor Centre and display space at Pipemakers Park in 1989 created quite a shift in the concept of the Museum as a Resource Centre, particularly for the staff. The constraints of having so little space previously had actually been a positive force in the maintenance of the philosophy and practice of being an information-processing museum.

The shift to this particular site was the result of years of thinking and searching and negotiating by the Museum. The site at Pipemakers Park is a significant resource in itself and was partly chosen because it was such an appropriate context for the Museum, in that its history was in sense, a microcosm of the development of the region and many of its features brought together the major threads of the ecomuseum concept.

The Park is on the banks of the Maribyrnong River which was the point of entry to the Western Region in the days of early European occupation. Within the Park is one of the oldest industrial sites in Australia where several industrial processes were pioneered. These included a boiling down works, one of the largest and earliest meat canneries in Australia, the first meat freezing works and one of the first concrete pipe works.

The original bluestone buildings on the site make a suitable physical, historical and visual context for tours and interpretation of Melbourne's Western Region as an ecomuseum. The jetty in the Park provides for tour boats to pull in and for trips along the River from the Museum to link up with bus trips across country. The walking tracks lead to wetlands

The very location of the Museum's base makes it a resource. Highpoint shopping centre is opposite the park's entrance, a major munitions factory is next door to the site, the Flemington Racecourse can be seen from the window. Smoke from the latest large chemical fires could be seen billowing over the hills.

Through the policies of Melbourne Water and the work of the Koori Garden Team, environmental issues can be worked out and studied in a real context. Indigenous plants can be seen, restoration can be explained, ecology can be studied and food plants collected for showing how Aboriginal people used the land historically.

Living in a park has allowed the Museum's ideas of participation and community involvement to expand and evolve. The Koori Gardening Team became possible because of the context of the Park. Outdoor concerts, indoor concerts and work with the disabled became possible because of the Park. The training program, involving young people working on a project that brought a concept of history together with horticulture, was possible because of the Park.

In effect the Museum's situation at Pipemakers Park has added another dimension to the idea or concept of a Resource Centre. The very context of the Park is a form of resource centre or an extension of the resource centre. It has allowed the Museum to work more towards being a gateway to the Western Region, in the way of being able to more effectively introduce the idea of the ecomuseum, through the information in the Resource Centre itself, and the elements of the Park as being representative of many of the elements in the whole region.

The Museum, in conjunction with the management and staff of Melbourne Water is continually exploring ways that the Park can be a kind of forum for interpreting ecomuseum ideas and involving community participation. The Museum has been particularly fortunate that Melbourne Water has been so willing to see the Museum's tenancy as an opportunity for a partnership to promote the aims of both organisations and to respond to community input.

In many ways the Museum of today is dramatically different to the Museum which stumbled naively into the western suburbs with tape recorders in hand ten years earlier. Yet it has held steadily to its first aims and objectives, maintaining links with the community, always involving the people of the region in interpreting their own heritage, constantly keeping alive the guiding principle that it's your history mate.



The Living Museum as a resource: Peter Haffenden (in the hat) and Paddy Garritty in Darwin on an Australia Council travel grant exchange. Peter was invited to document a Trades & Labour Council May Day Community Parade as part of a national program to share and exchange community development skills.

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'Your History Mate is an in-depth look at history in the making with the story of this unique museum. It provides an interesting insight into the development and philosophies of the museum over the past ten years and opens a window into the diverse communities of Melbourne's western suburbs. *Your History Mate* is a chronicle of the dedication and spirit of the people living and working in Melbourne's western suburbs as much as it is a history of the development of the museum.'

Andrew Moritz, Executive Officer,
Museums Australia (Victoria)

