

# Library a low priority

**'This library is the shame of our city', says the headline of the Shepparton News of Tuesday, February 15. The library in question is in Shepparton, Victoria.**

It is housed in a nineteenth century building which was originally the Mechanics Institute. A few additions have been carried out in this century and in 1957 it was handed over to the municipal authority. Its roof leaks and the foundations are sinking, causing the

## Users have collapsed from heat exhaustion

shelves to lean dangerously. It is not air-conditioned and in the summer it frequently becomes so hot that some library users have collapsed from heat exhaustion.

Conditions in the library came dramatically into the news just before Christmas when an old ceiling fan crashed to the floor. Fortunately no-one was hurt – but it was a narrow escape as only moments before a young woman and her two children had been standing just where the fan fell.

This event led to a temporary closure of the library and a letter from the staff to the

executive officer of the Goulburn Valley Regional Library demanding that the building be inspected by a licensed building inspector, that necessary repairs be carried out and that work should start on a new library building.

## Libraries in their present form are obsolete

In fact a design for a new building was drawn up and agreed to as long ago as 1977; a suitable site was selected but no further progress has been made. And in a recent statement, the Mayor, Cr. Bill Hunter, said that a new library building had a low priority. He considered that libraries in their present form were obsolete and suggested that they would soon be replaced by 'computerisation with its associated technology and micro-film'.

He was disapproving of the fact that on days when the temperature inside the building rose above 35°C, the public section was closed, and the staff worked in the air-conditioned workroom. He complained that people made their way to the library in 40° conditions only to find the doors closed. (He did not mention how he thought such people were going to borrow books when the library had disappeared in the wake of the technological revolution!)

At present the city administration is looking at a short-term solution to the problem, by some upgrading of the building or possibly using alternative premises. In the meantime this long hot summer has made the library unusable on a number of days, there is still not enough room to display all the books properly, and all the other problems remain.

To quote a past chairman of the library committee, 'No other council service has such usage in total numbers than the library and probably no other facility is in worse condition'.



Studying in the library. *Century Magazine*



As these pictures show, libraries are certainly changing but there seems no danger that they will become obsolete! Two version of Studying in the Library: at left from *Century Magazine* an artist's impression, c. 1890. Above in the library at the Australian National Gallery, Canberra.

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