Rendezvous at the Woolstores

Litsa Ellis, Geelong Regional Group

Members and friends of the ALIA Geelong Regional Group and Victorian ALIA Library Technicians Section gathered at Deakin University's new Woolstores campus in Geelong on Friday 28 February. The evening commenced with refreshments in the Woolstores campus library from where there are magnificent views of Corio Bay. The library supports the School of Architecture and Building which is located at the campus. Also in the library is the University's special collection of rare and antiquarian books and a research collection of almost 4000 titles called the Western Victorian Collection. The collection also makes accessible information related to genealogy, allowing Geelong residents a new avenue to research family histories.

The library services co-ordinator, Peter Macauley, showed the group around the library whilst relating some interesting historical facts about the Woolstores and how it came to be part of Deakin University. The first of the Dalgety Woolstores were built by Frederick Gunnerman Dalgety in 1891. The number of buildings on the site increased as the demand for wool increased. Geelong earned a reputation as Australia's wool exporting capital until a change in the wool industry during the latter half of this century meant that the traditional woolstores were no longer needed.

In 1992, with a view to bringing Deakin University into the centre of Geelong, successful negotiations between the university, the Federal and Victorian Governments and the former Geelong Regional Commission resulted in the University acquiring the Dalgety Woolstores site. A local architectural firm won a design competition in early 1993 and were engaged to design the transformation of the derelict Woolstores to a modern university campus.

The architects managed to create a new campus whilst respecting the links with the past — much of the demolished timbers including red gum, jarrah, and ironbark have been reused as stair treads, handrails, fittings and furniture. Walking around the library one notices the original supporting posts and wooden wool drops.

Sue McKnight, the university librarian, took the group on a short tour of the technical services division of Deakin University Library which has been centralised at the Woolstores.

Litsa Ellis, serials technician, then led the group to the showpiece of the city campus, the magnificent 1500-seat Great Hall. The Great Hall is used for University ceremonial occasions, cultural performances and community functions. The Hall was built at a cost of 4.5 million dollars and gives Geelong a concert and theatre hall of international standards with the capacity to accommodate a full symphony orchestra. Once again the original timbers have been used thus preserving the historical value of the building.

The evening concluded with a stroll down Cunningham Pier and a meal at Smorgy's. All agreed it was a rendezvous worth keeping. ∎