

Silverton School Educational Museum

Marlene Bettes

Two thousand and nineteen was a rather up-and-down-year for the Silverton School Educational Museum, what with a great deal of much-needed renovation work taking place and with what felt like a year of endless dust. While dust and wind make it very hard to maintain a garden and keep things clean, as always, the interest, enthusiasm and admiration from our many and varied visitors for a unique Australian museum constantly sustains our volunteers and our work.

Visits from schools and other groups in 2019

Visitor numbers were a little bit down, but that's not surprising given weather conditions during the year. Nevertheless, there were some real highlights, some with overseas visitors particularly.

During 2019 the museum Coordinator and volunteers gave a lot of sample 'classes', set back in the early period of the school, to many school children and, a little bit surprisingly perhaps, to a number of adult groups.

Adult classes were given to bus tour groups, the Probus Club, and various other women's groups locally and from away, who all enjoyed them immensely.

Schools who visited and had a lesson back in time included Irymple South Primary School, Mildura; Central School, Broken Hill (Kindergarten through to Year 4) and Railwaytown Primary School. Children were horrified at the thought of having to sit and write most of the day, with no talking in class, and incurring the kind of punishment meted out in earlier times, but they also took great delight in pretending to learn as their grandparents or great grandparents may have.

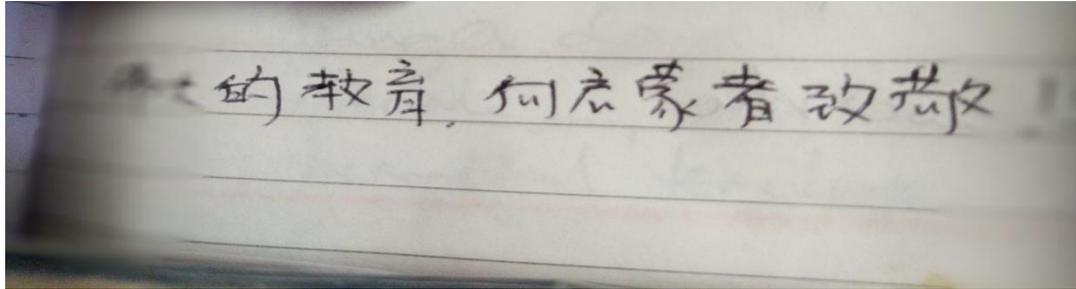
One visitor who came from France spent hours looking through all the exhibits, while taking photos, and also spent time in the grounds of the school itself. He commented that while France had one such school museum, it simply did not have the Silverton School Museum's collections of items for visitors to see and touch. He said their museum only had furniture and blackboards, so he was going back to make suggestions to the museum coordinator for collecting more items and putting together many more exhibits.

Another visitor from Spain, brought to the museum by two Australian visitors, spent hours looking around, stating that Spain simply doesn't have a school-based museum like the Silverton one. He also wanted to see an Australian snake, so checked the museum playground out, while quickly being told that if he found one he was to take it with him!

A further visitor from France, whose husband had visited some years previously and had taken no photos on his visit to Silverton, came back with a friend and took photos of just about everything in the School Museum, and Silverton.

We were also visited by three people from Japan, two women and one man, who acted as translator to the women. One of the group wrote in the Visitor's Book, which was

much appreciated, until we realised the comment had been written in Japanese. (We are working on finding a translator.)



A comment in Japanese in the Silvertown School Educational Museum Visitor's Book

My thanks go always to the volunteers at Silvertown School Educational Museum. Given the fascinating and amusing things that happen with our many and varied visitors, who said volunteering couldn't be fun as well as entertaining?

Renovations

The past year has been a very big and successful one for renovations at the School Museum.

At the end of 2018, scaffolding was placed around the whole school, getting ready for replacing the roof. The scaffolding was finally taken down after the roof had been replaced in August 2019.



The Silvertown School Educational Museum displaying new roof

Once the work on replacing the roof had begun, the museum had to be closed for a few months, not only because of safety issues, but also because all the exhibits were completely inaccessible, hidden under dust sheets and tarps!

Just *preparing* for the protection of collections and exhibits that would follow replacing a roof hiding years of dust, with some additional work on sealing and painting ceiling and walls, was a mighty big task.

Every wall exhibit, such as maps and charts, had to be taken down, and rolled up. We had to push the cupboards into the centre of the room and stack the desks on top of them. The pile almost reached the ceiling! And then everything had to be completely covered with sheets and tarps to keep them dust-free.

Part of the renovation included vacuuming the dust from above the ceiling—just 130 years worth! It also included re-aligning and re-sealing the cornices. Every board making up the ceiling was individually sealed, as were the cracks in the stone walls.

As well, the inside of the museum was completely painted and the floor was tongue-oiled, along with some of the furniture.



Inside of the School Educational Museum room after renovation

Exhibits were then placed back on view, with some still to find homes, as re-organising after the renovation continued for the remainder of the year.

Acknowledgments in memoriam

This year some former pupils and teachers of Silverton School and the sister schools of Umberumberka, Acacia and Thakaringa, have passed away. It is always sad to lose people who have been marvellous friends and sources of such valued historical information and exhibits for Silverton School Educational Museum.

About the author: Marlene Bettes is the Coordinator of the Silverton Educational School Museum. She has been a member of Broken Hill Historical Society since 2002 and is a Life Member of the Society. She has a long history in the Silverton area. Marlene and her sister Maxine's grandparents attended Silverton School in the 1890s and 1900s with their siblings. Two of the oldest of the siblings also attended Thakaringa School. Marlene and Maxine's father, Jack, with his siblings, Rex and Joyce, attended Umberumberka Reservoir School until it closed in 1936.