

Breaking old habits

We finally bit the bullet and moved the Environment Centre to new premises.

This might be old news to many, since it happened towards the end of last year. Others of our membership though may still be unaware of the changes, and some we know have gone down to the old premises at the back of the Emporium for a chat or a purchase, and been met by a large vacant space.

We have to apologise for this, and for any inconveniences to members and loyal friends and clients. It becomes more difficult to pass on information promptly by means other than email, or our quarterly newsletter, which lapsed and newly-joined members, and those not on line, might not receive. It's hoped that a full page dedicated to this latest life-changing decision might attract attention enough to bring everyone back into the fold, and into the loop of where we are now

The move was a long time coming. The committee had agreed it needed to happen, but making that firm commitment took time. The place we were in, tucked away at the rear of the Emporium, had become unpleasant, as well as unviable. The rates were much too high for a corner of a leaky, rundown building, where our territory was demarcated only by shelving built and fitted entirely by our own members; ice cold in winter; with no door or running water; a rotting carpet, and bad smells frequently pervading the shop from the garbage bins outside.

Also the entire building was in a constant state of flux, keeping us in a shifting construction zone with nothing actually constructive happening. Our old customers began to stay away; the cafe clientele no longer explored away from the now closed-in cafe, the



shop had become a liability that no one wanted to maintain any longer, and we were fast losing interest in the place. So it was a major relief when a firm date was finally set, and notice given to end our rental on the last day of November. At last, we could move ahead.



Finding a new home for the Centre eventually fell smoothly into place, with two bright little rooms above the South Grafton Post Office offered to us by the New School of Arts management. It was an ideal situation, just a short distance down the road. We were also to have our very own kitchen, and adjoining toilet, and the place would be rent free for a period as we offered to clean it up.

This cleanup had to start immediately. We had two months to pack up and clear away 25 years of accumulated items and junk, and the volunteers doing the work were the same ones setting up the new premises. At some stage the rooms had been occupied by students, who without imagination or



forethought had enthusiastically stapled numerous posters and information to the old plaster walls. Naturally each staple came away with a piece of plaster, leaving holes that along with countless old ones had to be filled and sanded.



Old equipment and furniture also had to be taken out



before the walls could be scrubbed down with sugar soap and prepared for painting. John did much of all this. He then painted around the architraves, cornice and window frames so I could paint the walls more easily, in a relaxing shade of green.

Theo finished the décor with the timber trims in cream, and meanwhile the New School of Arts brought in contractors who took out the old carpet and laid down new timber-look vinyl flooring

Down at the old premises the most daunting task was packing up our major collection of books, documents and papers, generated by every environmental issue

for the Clarence Valley and beyond since the Centre's establishment in 1986. Most of the published material had been labelled and entered in the Dewey Decimal system by volunteer Annette Cook, but packing them all into boxes of various shapes and sizes meant the numbers were instantly jumbled. It also meant that the around 3 dozen boxes ended up in our spare room at home, along with other items waiting for their new home to be ready. Clearing out the library also involved going through ever paper in half a dozen stuffed filing cabinets, and deciding what might be kept to best reflect the Centre's work and achievements over the years. The eventual discarded tonne of paperwork was taken away piecemeal, ending up in far-flung recycling bins, private as well as the Emporium's own.

Meanwhile the shop also had to be cleared out. Steve, Simon and Kurt removed endless numbers of screws from the shelving units, that demonstrated the enthusiasm of the earlier members who had installed them, never intending them to be moved again, and anything that was too bulky or heavy to take with us, considering a steepish narrow staircase and smaller room space, were efficiently sold on line by Theo.



While the whole process seemed like a labour of Hercules, eventually it came to an end. On the last day of November, Friday evening, all pieces of furniture we had decided to keep were stacked in Steve's yard a hop, skip and a jump from the PO. The last saleable piece of furniture was moved away by its new owner, and the final smaller and more difficult items were transferred to the recycling op-shop next door. As evening set in, the last hooks were removed from the units; years of accumulated rat nests were cleared away, and the disintegrating carpet was carefully vacuumed by Kurt. I was proud to be able to

say that we vacated the building without leaving behind so much as a single paperclip.

So now our bright little rooms are office space only, with much of the Centre's work carried out now either by email or landline, mobile, or private phone (please check the newsletter heading for our new contact details).

Anyone, of course, is still welcome, as always before, to call in for a chat, or maybe to use a computer, and even make themselves a cup of tea while working or just relaxing in the new library room.



The place is smaller, and there is still a lot of work to be done in its re-establishment after such an upheaval. But it is perfect for our needs. The NSOA employs a professional cleaner to keep us all neat and civilised, and to date our new premises remain rent free. We do want to talk about this to management, and expect to come to some arrangement. But for now it is all very pleasant, and entirely perfect.

Our sign is on the wire gate on the northern edge of the Post Office, along with Valley Volunteers. If either the gate or our door upstairs is locked, then we are not in at the time of your visit. But we are never very far away, and a phone call will always find us. Our warmest regards and all best wishes. Pat