An absolutely fascinating, (but *very* long article), was published in *"Provenance"*, (the free, On-line Journal), published by the PROV. The Editor certainly hopes that MHS members will find the facts in this also *rather long précis* of that article, relating to the development of the City Morgue and the "different" social customs surrounding death in colonial Melbourne in the 1800s, just as interesting.

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"Provenance Journal" No.3 November 2004:   "Death, Decency and the Dead-House"
                                                                           The City Morgue in Colonial Melbourne
                                                                           Authors: Andrew Brown May & Simon Cooke

By 1898 the Melbourne morgue had become an institution that had a sense of its own past and identity. Medical men dominated the proceedings, with both police and lawyers involved. This précis follows the tortuous path of the *preceding fifty years*, before the colonists of Melbourne finally, if reluctantly, broke away from entrenched British Empire traditions towards a model better suited to the hot summers and rapidly increasing immigrant population of Melbourne.

The colony of Melbourne was an immigrant, largely youthful society attempting to re-create the social bonds of home. The idea of a central "morgue", (a name coined by the French who built the first morgue in Paris), where dead bodies would be kept principally for identification and also inquest, was a "*novelty*" to the urban culture of the British Empire in the mid nineteenth century. Melbourne's earliest colonists followed the traditional practice of keeping bodies awaiting identification in hotels, which was an accepted cultural norm of the British city in the mid-nineteenth century. Bodies awaiting a *Coroner's inquest* were generally stored in outbuildings. Following the British model the Coroner, would also appoint a Jury, (all men), to be present and contribute their own observations. This practice of using lay Jurymen persisted until 1903.

In the far-flung colony of Melbourne the legal position of housing the dead was finally clarified in 1864, when publicans were *specifically required* to house bodies for identification and post-mortems, for which service they received one pound. Whatever the "letter of the law" in 1853 however, the practice of holding inquests in hotels was common, and accepted as the *proper practice.* Crawford Mollison, Melbourne's premier pathologist at the end of the nineteenth century recalled that before the erection of the 1888 morgue, *'post-mortems were made in stables and barns, and inquests were held in hotels'.* This meant that when plans for Melbourne city were drawn up in 1837, no particular provision was made for a morgue. Emotions ran high on changing the "status quo" from the traditional practices of dealing with the dead towards building a central morgue.

By the 1850s, however, the city was undergoing a transformation. The discovery of gold in 1851 led to a huge influx of mainly young, immigrants. Melbourne's population of around 23,000 in 1851 tripled in just three years - and the number of deaths and unidentified bodies, also increased dramatically.   The earliest references to the problem of accommodating the dead awaiting inquest or identification, was raised by the Melbourne City Council, (MCC), in June 1852. The council drew attention to the need for a morgue owing to the growing problem of large numbers of unidentified corpses about the town, and was critical of:

'The present odious system of depositing dead corpses...in houses of public accommodation, while awaiting a Coroner's Inquest'