

# theage (melbourne) magazine

## Inside the star factory

Natalie Bassingthwaite is leaving Neighbours in search of fame. But does Ramsay Street really prepare young actors for what comes next?

Office politics: Where Melbourne stands in the business world

Other mothers: The women who care when a child's mother can't

Home grounds: What's become of our old footy ovals

Eating out Sicilian style: Northcote's best-kept secret



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## accessallareas

The Museum of Anatomy and Pathology

The human body is exposed in all its glory in this private University of Melbourne museum.

**When tradespeople turn up to work at the** Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology, curator Rita Hardiman always likes to warn them they might find some of the exhibits “confronting”.

To say the least. Hardiman’s domain, on the first floor of the University of Melbourne’s medical building in Parkville, is home to some 12,000 anatomical exhibits, parts of human bodies dissected and preserved in jars to be examined by students in medicine, physiotherapy, dentistry and science.

The bulk of the samples are stored in the basement, to which only Hardiman has access. Each semester she has to lug the exhibits upstairs to illustrate the ever-moving curriculum. Right now, it’s cardiovascular, respiratory and locomotor systems on the floor. A male torso with its skin stripped back stands in a Perspex box filled with formaldehyde; on the next table is a female torso with heart and lungs exposed.

During our visit, though, it is a cross-section of a human head that is probably most disturbing, sliced down the middle from the top of the forehead

to the shoulder to reveal the brain and oesophagus. Peering around the side of the box you can see the face, possibly a man’s, with its one remaining eye shut.

Hardiman says most non-science people worry that they will feel sick or, worse, pass out during their visit. But once over the initial shock, visitors find the museum compelling. “Luckily, we’ve got an area out the front that faces Grattan Street,” she says. “It’s quite a nice place to sit, get some fresh air and look at the trees.”

Taking a goods lift downstairs, past a dissection studio and opposite the embalming room (where bodies arrive to be prepared for dissection) we come to the storeroom. More than 10,000 specimens are kept here on shelves and in a large compactus (a room-sized filing cabinet), arranged according to their place in the body: hearts in the cardiovascular file, lungs in the respiratory file and brains in the nervous system file. Each has a bar code that can provide information right down to who the donor was, although this information is kept private.

The museum was founded by a professor of anatomy and pathology, Sir Harry Brookes

Allen, in 1882. Some specimens date back to the 1860s. In 1906 the disciplines of anatomy (the study of the body) and pathology (the study of diseases) were separated and the museum was split. They were reunited in 2004 when the museum was refurbished at a cost of \$1 million.

Most of the specimens come from between 1950 and 1970, when legislation made body parts much easier to obtain. Today, those wishing to donate their body to science must register with the university’s donor program, must live no further than 60 kilometres from the city centre, and must be free of major infectious diseases.

Samples were once stored in glass bottles. These days they are kept in Perspex containers, preserved in a mixture of water, ethanol, salt and formalin (better known as formaldehyde). The boxes are cleaned once every five years and occasionally minor repairs are carried out; fluid is topped up when necessary.

As well as tissue specimens, the collection includes corrosion casts of organ cavities (such as the interior of the heart) and plastinated exhibits (where the

body’s fluids are replaced with silicon). The latter are quite durable and may be handled. A plastinated head cut down the middle feels oily and heavier than expected and smells of musty candles.

On a shelf nearby stand three small glass cabinets. Inside each is the skeleton of a foetus, dating back to the late 1890s, and most likely obtained by an anatomy professor on a buying visit to Europe, which was a source of specimens that weren’t available in Australia at that time, according to Hardiman.

Although a registered organ donor, Hardiman won’t be leaving the rest of her body to science. “I work here every day. Once I ‘step over’ I don’t think I really want to spend any more time here.”

Nevertheless, she admires and respects those who are donors. “It’s one of the most altruistic things you could ever do. The staff work here as custodians of the exhibits. We want them to be treated properly and be appreciated for what they are, who those people were and what they did ... which means we don’t tolerate disrespect or mistreatment. Working here I think about that every day.”

Bill Shorten, national and Victorian secretary of the Australian Workers' Union, is the new ALP candidate for the federal seat of Maribyrnong.

## the melbourne quiz



**How does it feel to be touted as a future Prime Minister?**

I think it's a complete beat-up.

**Is it your ambition to be Prime Minister?**

No, my ambition is to get rid of the Howard Government.

**Your father-in-law (Julian Beale) is a former Liberal MP. Does that make for interesting dinner party conversations?**

Perhaps on industrial relations. He's pretty laid-back. I think as long as I do the right thing by his daughter he's not going to get too hot under the collar about any of my other views.

**Why do you have an MBA?**

I was a union organiser for several years and I thought, "time to upgrade my economic knowledge". In my case, I think members benefit from having someone who's familiar with reading balance sheets, with how the economy's functioning; someone who's able to put arguments to boardrooms about why they need to change what they're doing.

**Were you the odd one out at Melbourne Business School?**

It was a bit like Sidney Poitier in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*.

**Where did you grow up?**

Murrumbena, Hughesdale, on the border of Oakleigh in Melbourne's south-east.

**Where do you live now?**

Moonee Ponds, in an old 1920s house that my wife and I have made renovations to. It's a nice street with lots of trees, an old church and plenty of families.

**When did you last get drunk?**

At a barbecue at my home with some friends, two Saturdays ago.

**What would you abolish from Melbourne life?**

Traffic congestion in the western suburbs, particularly on Ballarat Road, the West Gate Freeway and the Calder interchange.

**What's the most overrated thing in Melbourne?**

American-style coffee shops and coffee shop chains. We have got unique coffee shops already.

**What's the most underrated thing?**

The Maribyrnong river.

**What's the most expensive meal you have ever had in Melbourne?**

At the Flower Drum. It was my wife, Deb's, birthday. I let Deb put it on her credit card.

**What's your favourite pub?**

The Spencer Hotel, in West Melbourne. It's good for debriefs after work.

**What's your favourite bar?**

Verge (on the corner of

Flinders Lane and Spring Street). It's near Parliament House, so it's a great place to catch up on all the state political gossip.

**Federation Square – yes or no?**

Yes. It's a good use of public space, opens up the city I think. At another level I think it encourages us to open our minds up to different ways of doing things.

**Where did you last spend \$500, and what on?**

An outdoor dining set. It cost about \$480 from Highpoint Shopping Centre.

**Do you belong to any clubs?**

A gym run by Tim Hazell in Boundary Road, North Melbourne; I'm also a member of Collingwood Football Club.

**Which Melbourne person would you most like to sit next to on the tram?**

Cate Blanchett. I think she's smart and would have interesting opinions.

**Which Melbourne person would you least like to sit next to on the tram?**

The people who ran the legal strategy for Esso in the late 1990s after the fatal Longford explosion.

**Where would you have your ashes scattered?**

Down on South Wharf. That's where my father worked, so that would be nice.

**Where do you go on a sunny day?**

My backyard.

**Where do you go on a rainy day?**

The Village Cinemas at Sunshine.

**Have you ever been refused entry to anywhere?**

I've been refused entry at all kinds of places, from the Port Hedland detention centre to non-union factories in Melbourne. I always eventually get in.

**What do you hate about Melbourne?**

Some people in Melbourne ask you, "What school did you go to?" or, "Where do you live?" I see sometimes in companies people believing they're more important than others merely by virtue of their title or their job. I think we've outgrown that.

**What makes you proud to be a Melburnian?**

The number of people who come from a wide range of countries who live together and get along. We've got a formula which seems to work a lot better than other parts of Australia and even the rest of the world.

**What's the most important thing to have happened in Melbourne during your lifetime?**

The rally on November 15 last year: 250,000 people on the streets of Melbourne opposing the unfair workplace laws.

**Describe Melbourne in three words.**

Very friendly people.