A special musical event celebrating the International Year of Astronomy

Music &
the Cosmos

Wednesday 6 May 2009
6:00pm - 8:00pm
The Great Hall, University of Sydney

featuring special guest compere
Robyn Williams

A Sydney Conservatorium of Music Ensemble
and astronomers
Professor Bryan Gaensler
Professor Tim Bedding
& Professor Geraint Lewis

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KNOW THY NEIGHBOUR

The portrayal of the creation of the Department of Indonesian Studies (Indonesian Visions, Summer SAM '08-'09) is revisionism; in defiance of records contained in the University’s own archives.

In June 1955, the Federal Government’s Commonwealth Education Office (CEO) sought to establish Departments of Indonesian and Malayan Studies at various Australian universities. The CEO at the direct behest of the External Affairs, Defence and Prime Minister’s Departments, all of whom wanted “Indonesian and Malay ... taught to under-graduates, the Services and persons needing limited courses”.

At a subsequent inter-departmental meeting, the DEA expressed its concerns about the future hostile intentions of Indonesia and wanted undergraduates who could speak the language and understood Indonesian culture. The Defence representative told that the Air Force was dropping Russian and picking up Indonesian, thereby having Chinese and Indonesian as its two chief foreign languages because these were our two most likely future combatants.

Indeed, Frederick Shedden, then Secretary of the Department of Defence, strongly supported the creation of Indonesian Studies, on the basis that “there should be a reserve pool of linguists who would be available in an emergency”. The urgency was considered so great that the government wanted courses running the following year (1956) if possible. Because of their proximity to defence and DEA officials, the initial departments were set up in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. Moreover, the Federal Government met the full cost of running the Sydney University department for the next 14 years.

Thus, the creation of Indonesian and Malayan Studies had nothing to do with “making Australia the most Asia-literate country” or “to open the region” for businessmen, lawyers and artists.

It was not created to further understanding of our nearest Asian neighbour, but to create a cadre of future intelligence, military and External Affairs officials versed in the language and customs of a country that was widely considered to be an “enemy” nation and one which we would be at war with within the foreseeable future.

In that respect, it was no different to another earlier, government-inspired intervention in the affairs of the University. The Chair of Oriental Studies, established in 1917, was nominally supposed to promote scholarship about Japan, but its real purpose was to provide language instruction to the officer cadets at Duntroon, and to provide a flow of undergraduates skilled in the language and customs of Japan who could be conscripted should war between Australia and Japan eventuate.

(All this information can be found in my thesis Australia, International Diplomacy and the West New Guinea Dispute, 1949-1963, pp.215-216, in Fisher Rare Books)

Dr Peter Phelps [BA '90 PhD '97]
Queanbeyan, NSW

The “vision” was not the author’s but in the editing. – DS

DESIGN BY CHANCE

The review of Roy Williams’ book God, Actually (SAM, Spring 2008) says it “will stir ferocious argument and debate.” This need not be so if approached with an open mind as asked for by Williams. Then the debate can only be good and beneficial. It suggests that intelligent design, one of Williams’ important arguments, has become “debased and degraded” by being associated with “ignorance, stupidity and various attempts” to show that the Earth is young. However, few people today, including scientists without an axe to grind, cannot see that the universe and our world simply shout design.

The argument and debate should then be over two questions: is a designer necessary and if so, who is it? With so many variables having to work together the probability of any design occurring by chance is infinitesimally small. It is an oxymoron. As to the second question, many of us find the best answer in the book provided by the Designer Himself.

Don Nicholson [BSc ’49]
Atherton, Qld

AMEN TO ALL THAT

Colin Maynard’s letter (Summer SAM ’08-09) requires some response. He states, “I understand that orthodox paradigms, particularly in powerful academic and professional circles, are very hard to publicly question or dispute”. This sort of statement requires unpacking as to its implied assumptions. Firstly, Maynard seems to assume that if he labels certain attitudes as part of established
“orthodoxy” (whatever that may entail) then inevitably those who challenge this “orthodoxy” will be ridiculed or dismissed without any serious consideration. This assumes rather uncritically that the established orthodoxy (as broad and as undefined as Maynard has used this term) has not come about from a rigorous and long history of critique and debate.

Maynard is correct that any “orthodoxy” held by any establishment should always be open to further critique. However, this should not mean that we throw away “established thinking” which has a long and rigorous history of analysis unless substantially new evidence better supports an alternative theory or model. If, therefore, one decides to reject the creation or young earth view held by Maynard, this does not necessarily mean that critical thinkers are simply refusing to examine new evidence, or just supporting establish orthodoxy. If Maynard wants to challenge his implied assumption that “established orthodoxy” uncritically supports evolutionary theory about origins he needs to show substantially new evidence that would call this orthodoxy as he calls it into question. Being critical and open minded does not imply that we necessarily rate all theories and arguments equally. The extent and weight of evidence is what is critical, not some sort of egalitarian approach to accepting all arguments as if they have some degree of equal measure.

Secondly, Maynard seems to assume that an underlying reason for the perpetuation of orthodox paradigms is because of the influence of powerful academic and professional circles. I consider this assertion to be highly judgmental in the first instance because it assumes that people in such circles (whatever they may be) do not or cannot think critically about the positions they hold. Where is the evidence for this assertion? It seems almost that Maynard is accusing these circles of influence of deliberate dishonesty and ignorance and more interested in maintaining their “power” base. May I add that established “orthodoxy” can take on many different forms and reflect numerous beliefs within the framework of that “orthodoxy”. For instance, within conservative Christian church circles, the established orthodoxy may be a vigorous defence of creationism or young earth theory. To oppose creationism in these circles would also go against the orthodoxy of these particular religious groups. Would we not also want to accuse these circles of not being open minded and refusing to consider alternative evidence? To be fair, Maynard should criticise all established orthodoxy that is not open minded and not merely the orthodoxy that opposes his passionate support for belief in a divine fiat creation of a world that is only a few thousand years old.

Finally, Maynard further assumes that those who reject creation theory are on the whole simply conforming to orthodoxy, to long established beliefs and not willing to consider the evidences for creation theory. The same sort of judgment could be applied in reverse so that we could also label many creationists as being conformists, but only to a different orthodoxy.

Rodney Enderby (PhD ’98)
Albion Park, NSW

MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

The explanation for the origins of the universe and in particular life on this planet is continually being theorised and questioned by scientists. Unlike Colin Maynard’s beliefs (Summer SAM ’08-’09), which appear remarkably similar to Intelligent Design or Creationism, scientific theories can be tested. Maynard’s beliefs fly in the face of science. This matter came to a head in the case of Tammy Kitzmiller et al v. Dover Area School District et al brought in the US federal court in Pennsylvania, where Kenneth Miller, a biology professor from Brown University, for the plaintiffs, argued that “Intelligent Design is not a testable theory and as such is not generally accepted by the scientific community.” Michael Behe, professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University Pennsylvania, for the defence, conceded that “there are no peer reviewed articles by anyone advocating for intelligent design supported by pertinent experiments or calculations which provide detailed rigorous accounts of how intelligent design of any biological system occurred.”

Scientific theories and research
on the origins of the universe are not orthodox paradigms as Maynard states as they are continually changing and evolving. For instance the “big bang” theory of the origins of the universe displaced the “steady state” theory, although not without considerable dispute, until the 1960s when the discovery of cosmic microwave background radiation was considered to establish the “big bang” theory as the best theory of the origin and evolution of the universe.

It is those who believe in Intelligent Design or Creationism that are anti-intellectual, relying on ancient religious texts as the basis of their beliefs without first examining the background, time and context in which those texts were written.

Rodney (Birtles-)Crute (BArch '74)
Hunters Hill, NSW

WELL PROCESSED

Regarding the controversy in the Letters (Summer SAM ‘08–’09) over medieval/medieval that threatens to bring down civilisation. Forget about the spelling. What about the script? Far too word processed to be archaic. How about mediaeval? Or perhaps that is too bastardised or script? Far too word processed to bring down civilisation. Forget medieval/mediaeval that threatens...

Gadzooks! Methinks he doth jest!

John Daffy (BE ’57)
Coffs Harbour, NSW

PLEASINGLY BEWILDERING

It will always puzzle me that religious writers so facilely ignore the concept of infinity in creating their god(s). Infinity is defined as “The quality or state of being infinite, boundlessness; perfection. Something, as space, regarded as boundless …”. Living, as we do, on a planet where everything is measurable and finite, it is beyond the capacity of the human brain ever to comprehend or explain the concept. Boundlessness, obviously negates a beginning, which in turn logically, negates the existence of a creator - call Him/Her/It/ Intelligent Design, or whatever.

Religions, throughout the centuries, have ignored the concept and avoided the question who created God and when he came into existence. Apparently, Man, the God-Creator, regards his contemporary God(s) as having come into existence just before the “Big Bang” which created the Universe(s) from matter which has always been, infinitively, present to form the inexplicable mystery of life and its evolution into the multiplicity of present forms.

Can we not just accept the fact, bewildering as it is, that life is, and will always be, an inexplicable mystery and that we float about in a meaningless void? If man must have a mystery to worship, let it be the mystery of nature itself rather than some megalomaniacal man-made creation.

Clyde Philip Long (LLB ‘40)
Castle Cove, NSW

OMNISCIENTIOLUS OR …

Barrel (Barry) Badham is right to correct SAM (Summer SAM ’08–’09), and in doing so could have pointed out that correct usage dictates alumna for single female graduates and alumnus for more than one female graduate.

Andrew Woodhouse (MLitt ’91)
Potts Point, NSW

... NIMISOLLERS?

“Mediaeval”. Surely that is a spelling mistake and should read “media-evil”?

Susan Boden Parsons
(Mother of two graduates, wife of a graduate and freelance journalist)
Swinger Hill, ACT

INCALCULABLE ANSWERS

I appreciate the nuanced view of the VC, Dr Michael Spence, on investment in education (A Dangerous Half-Truth, Summer SAM ’08–’09), especially where he mentions questions that “the natural sciences … cannot” answer. That’s my story.

I first finished two science degrees at Sydney majoring in maths, before turning to philosophy and those questions that the natural sciences “cannot” – such as the incalculability of economic interplay.

Dr Michael Eldred
(BSc ’74 MSc ’75, PhD ’84)
Cologne, Germany

Dr Eldred is one of a number of correspondents who appreciated Dr Spence’s contribution. We’re looking forward to more – see page 5 – DS

WHEN PERFECT IS NOT

Having suffered from anorexia as a teenager I found Lucy Howard-Taylor’s book Biting Anorexia (Spring SAM ’08) an amazing account of exactly what does go through the minds of sufferers of this awful disease. I too excelled academically trying to live up to the high expectations that I believed were placed on me, and saw gaining weight as a failure in my never-ending quest for perfection.

Lucy captures this so poignantly that after all these years it’s almost a relief to know that I was not the only teenager (and won’t unfortunately be the last) to go through this. Anorexia takes over your whole life and I felt like I lost a year or two of my life. But I was one of the lucky ones and managed to recover from the disease after realising that the skinny girl I saw in the photo took of me at the height of the disease was not perfection. She didn’t have curves, she didn’t have a chest, and she looked like a ghost.

For me that photo was the inspiration to fight back against the disease. I am very glad to hear that Lucy has fought back too.

I am so glad I did because now at the age of 36 I have two beautiful children, a loving husband, a beautiful home and a wonderful career. None of this would have been possible if I hadn’t fought back. So thank you Lucy for bringing your story out in to the open. Anorexia is a very real and all-consuming disease that must be recognised and managed, but most of all prevented, before more lives are lost.

Cilla de Lacy (MEnv Law ’04)
Nedlands, WA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor should include: full name, address (not for publication), degree(s) and year(s) of graduation where applicable, daytime phone number and/or email address. Please address your letters to:

The Editor
SAM
K6.06 Quadrangle A14
University of Sydney NSW 2006

Letters may also be sent electronically (with full contact details) to:
d.simmonds@usyd.edu.au

Opinions expressed in the pages of the magazine are those of the signed contributors or the editor and do not necessarily represent the official position of the University of Sydney.

Space permits only a selection of letters to be published here. Letters may be edited by the editor for space or other reasons.
In my inaugural address as Vice-Chancellor, I referred to the University as a “federation of self-governing academic communities”. It was interesting to see what people made of the concept!

For some it seemed to mean the radical decentralisation of activity in the University: the move of decision-making authority to the faculties with only a skeletal central administration. There are those in the University committed to the rights of the “states”. For others, however, it seemed to mean a strong central University administration by which activity between the faculties is carefully coordinated. There are those in the University who would support the federal authority at the expense of the states.

But the strength of federalism as a political system is, of course, that it honours the importance of both the regional and the national. It recognises that we are simultaneously members of smaller and larger political communities, and that decisions of different types are best taken at, and services best rendered by, different levels of government. In learning constitutional law I was constantly reminded that the Australian federal parliament was a parliament of “enumerated and specific powers” and while few would in these days see that as the most important feature of the federal Constitution, none would doubt that our system of government requires the courts to balance the authority of the state and federal parliaments.

The key to a successful federation is, of course, a notion beloved by European politicians and commentators, the notion of “subsidiarity”. Decisions ought to be taken at the lowest level appropriate to them, recognising that many decisions in a complex organisation, and far more a nation, can only be taken at the centre. Similarly, administrative services ought to be delivered as close as possible to their eventual consumers, but efficiency and coherence of practice sometimes means that their provision should be centralised.

For the past six months I have been working with a new decision-making forum in the life of the University. It has appropriated the rather ugly name – SEG – from a historical antecedent (Senior Executive Group), and involves primarily the Deans, Deputy-Vice-Chancellors, and Chair of the Academic Board, coming together fortnightly to think across the business of the University as a whole. We discuss matters that have the potential to impact on the business of more than one faculty, or upon which a University-wide view ought to be taken. It is different from the Academic Board in that, while the Academic Board draws from a wider constituency and acts as a guardian of academic standards, SEG focuses upon questions of University strategy, management and operational policy.

In chairing SEG, I have been humbled by my colleagues’ understanding of the principle of subsidiarity and of their ability to balance the interests of their own faculty with the interests of other individual faculties and the University more broadly. I have been impressed by their ability to identify those things, both policy and process, that ought appropriately to be controlled within the faculties and those others that ought appropriately to be controlled by the University.

Of course all institutions, all federations, go through centripetal and centrifugal stages in the distribution of authority. At Sydney we are working hard to avoid these two extremes. We want to release the creative energy of the faculties and also run a lean system that avoids the costs of chaos. Our new SEG gives me the confidence that we may just get it right! 

SAM
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Vanessa Buggé, Bachelor of Commerce (Liberal Studies)
Majors in Maths, HRM and IR, and Management. Vanessa graduates in 2009, and is focused on a career in Learning & Development.

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Kabir Dhanji (BA Media&Comm ’07) is based in Nairobi, Kenya and over the course of the past year, he has been documenting the lives of those who have fled the conflict in the Darfur region in a unique feat of photo-journalism.

With the support of Amnesty International Australia, the Australia Council for the Arts, Victorian Multicultural Commission, the City of Melbourne and the Darfur Australia Network, this body of work is now a touring exhibition – Far to Here – which is visiting Melbourne, Parliament House in Canberra and Sydney over the course of the next few months. Full details at www.fartohere.com.

Kabir Dhanji will talk about his life and work since graduation and we will publish a mini-exhibition of his photographs in the Winter issue of SAM. Make sure your contact details are up to date so you don’t miss out!

Darfur to Oz

For most alumni, the card will be included in a University fundraising letter that will be sent to you directly (the combined mailing is a cost-saving measure). Some alumni will receive the card in a separate mailing.

“While offering a range of services now and into the future, more importantly, this card represents the distinctive bond that ties alumni to one another and to the University. It signals to the world the uniqueness of belonging to the Sydney network,” said Tracey Beck, Director of Alumni and Community Engagement.

The Alumni Card will be a lifelong affinity card that confirms your status as a University of Sydney alumnus/a. It will give you access to a new Alumni Web Community (working title: SydneyOnline) which will offer a range of professional and social networking facilities. (See story on page 10 for more details).

The Alumni Card may also be used whenever you are purchasing reduced price tickets to University and alumni-related events, such as the Sydney Ideas lecture series, alumni theatre groups at the Seymour Centre, CCE alumni reductions and so on.

It will also provide you with automatic entry into the University of Sydney Alumni Centre when it opens in the near future. More services and benefits will accrue over time and we will advise you as they are rolled out.

Your login to the Alumni Web Community is the ID number beneath your name on the card (perhaps it will bring back memories? It’s your student ID!).

All alumni who graduated in 2008 (and some overseas students who graduated in 2007) and beyond should have received their alumni cards in their graduation packs. If you did graduate in 2008 and have not received your card, or have any enquiries about the card, please advise the Alumni Relations Office: (02) 9036 9222; fax (02) 9351 6868 or alumniadmin@vcc.usyd.edu.au.

Your future calling card

Child refugee from Darfur – Kabir Dhanji

© Kabir Dhanji 2008
It was a combined love of statistics and politics, and a bit of serendipity, that propelled Madura Wijewardena (BEc '95 LLB '97) above, on to the year-long campaign trail for US President Barack Obama. From June 2007 until election night in November 2008, Wijewardena worked in Chicago to help the Obama team identify and recruit Latino voters. A chance allocation of a project during a public policy course at the University of Chicago set the ball rolling.

Wijewardena and three colleagues were assigned to devise a media plan for Obama. Wijewardena went further, completing a weeklong training course with the campaign, after which he became part-time assistant to the Illinois director of Get Out The Vote.

For Wijewardena there was a special connection. He had migrated to Australia with his family from Sri Lanka and settled in Wollongong when he was 14 and spoke little English when he started at Wollongong High.

"The reason I was attracted to Obama was that I could instinctively see where he was coming from," says Wijewardena. "He has a definition of America that is probably not shared by 95 per cent of America – not African Americans or white Americans – nevertheless it is an identity of America. I was born overseas and I have a similar impression of..."
Australia. It’s like looking at a picture from a different angle.”

Wijewardena’s other part-time job, working with a firm that specialised in demographic analysis of Latino communities, dovetailed neatly with his role in the Obama campaign. “Latinos have very low [voter] registration, just under 60 per cent in 2004,” says Wijewardena. “Asians have even lower registration. But once they are registered their turnout rate is the same as the rest of the population.”

Wijewardena’s first task was the Iowa Primary, a contest Obama had to win to become a serious contender. The number of Latinos in Iowa is small and they are widely dispersed. Obama’s victory in Iowa shook up the race. He had talked of changing the electoral map, and that meant finding every vote in every state – even those seen as safely Republican.

“Latinos can tip a state if others are finely balanced. In Indiana Obama got 77 per cent of the Latino vote - the highest of any state – and won it by 26,000 votes,” Wijewardena said.

After such a thrilling experience, the question is what to do next: stay in the US, return to Australia with his campaigning experience, or something else. He says he has not yet made up his mind.

By Anne Davies first published in the Sydney Morning Herald

“Head of Hathor, from the temple of Bastet. University of Sydney collection.

“I’ve nearly as long back to when Herodotus was in Egypt (2500 years ago) as it was back from Herodotus to when the Pyramids were built (4500 years ago). So the Pyramids were already 2000 years old when Herodotus saw them!” says Michael Turner, curator of the Nicholson Museum and of its forthcoming exhibition on the author and his classic text.

The Penguin Classic edition of Herodotus’s Historia is on Turner’s desk. He dives into it to quote vivid passages that make the ancient Greek travel writer the ideal guide for Land of Wonders: Herodotus in Egypt (opening at the Museum in March).

The exhibition was nearly titled “Egypt on 10 obols a day: travels with Herodotus”. Unfortunately it was considered a bit too flippant for an event that will see one of the University’s most walked-past and overlooked treasures finally reach its intended place in the Nicholson.

“You’ve probably passed the head of Hathor every day,” Turner says of the enigmatic stone statue in the Quadrangle portico. “It’s from the temple of Bastet at Bubastis [in the Nile delta] and Nicholson had it shipped over. They got it as far as where it is now and it wouldn’t fit through the door, so there it’s stayed.”

The wondrous thing about the piece is that Herodotus writes of his visit to the temple – and would have seen the statue. The connection is spine tingling and is what Turner is aiming for.

“I’m not an Egyptologist but we have this amazing collection and I wanted to find a way into it to make it approachable and different. The words of Herodotus will be the entry point and the objects will illustrate his text.”

Egyptophiles can look forward to a select array of precious and fascinating objects – including the always-popular mummies.

“What we know of mummification comes from Herodotus,” says Turner. “He described the entire process, which sounded far-fetched, and it’s been replicated: we have an account of that too!”

Watch the University website for dates and ancillary exhibition events.

And if you’re wondering what an obol is: it’s the small coin that was placed on the closed eyelids of a corpse in ancient Egypt. – DS
A

lumni will soon be able to access their local and international networks from anywhere in the world, thanks to a new online community currently being implemented.

“The Alumni web community will enable alumni to stay connected and be involved with the University and with each other in unprecedented ways,” says the new President of the Alumni Council, David Turner (BArch ’71 MDesSc ’97). “This is an essential service our alumni increasingly expect and require and we are very excited about the benefits it will bring.”

Likely to be called SydneyOnline, it will offer interactive facilities enabling alumni to sign up for a lifelong email address, update contact details, easily find a fellow alumnus/a, post profiles, images and resumes, search and join social and professional networks, including 45 alumni associations worldwide, mentor a student, access the online discussion forums, noticeboards, blogs and chat; import your Facebook, LinkedIn or other social networking profiles.

Alumni cards (see page 7) will be mailed before the launch of SydneyOnline. Make sure we have your updated contact details.

Any questions: (02) 9036 9222 or alumniadmin@vcc.usyd.edu.au.

David Turner left, Ann Stephen right.
Photos by Ted Sealey

Online – on the way

New girl on the Quad

By Oscar Ware

A

s an extensively published author with three degrees in art history and almost 25 years as a respected curator at Sydney’s Powerhouse Museum, you might think Dr Ann Stephen has everything she wants. But the art historian has recently taken up a new challenge: Senior Curator of the University Art Gallery.

“The position offers three great attractions,” Stephen says of her new role. “I was most interested because of the collection, which is an exceptionally fine one. I’m also very keen on doing regular exhibitions, and of the possibility of building a new museum to bring all the University’s wonderful collections together.”

Stephen’s particular interests lie in Australian art, modernism and international contemporary art. A Sydney University Masters graduate (1990), she completed her PhD at Queensland University of Technology in 2003. Her most recent Powerhouse exhibition, Modern Times: The Untold Story Of Modernism In Australia is touring to Melbourne and Brisbane over the remainder of 2009.

Stephen is also a trustee of the Dictionary of Sydney, an internet-based multimedia project (www.dictionaryofsydney.org) combining documents, audio, film, maps and images to create an encyclopaedic history of the city.

“I was invited to become a trustee because of my own interest and involvement with Sydney’s cultural history,” she says.

Stephen has also worked freelance as a curator for various galleries, including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney and Melbourne’s Monash University Art Museum. She plans to use those experiences in her role at the University Art Gallery. “I’m interested in developing a number of long term projects,” she says. “I hope that the kind of exhibitions that we do would bring the broader university community into the gallery.”

The Sydney collection currently numbers more than 3000 works from Australia, Europe, Asia and the Americas; works which have been collected, donated or acquired through bequests since the gallery was founded in the 1860s. “I will need to get familiar with the collection,” Stephen said. “I’ve known of the collection for years because from time to time it has been used and exhibited, but it’s like an iceberg. Most of it remains hidden and I don’t yet have an insider’s knowledge.”

Maintaining and building on the collection will be one of Stephen’s primary roles as Senior Curator. “One of my interests is bringing contemporary art into the university through exhibitions and hopefully some major acquisitions.”

The University of Sydney Gallery is open Monday to Friday, 10am to 4.30pm; and on Sundays from noon to 4pm. Entry is free.
Representing

Nicholas Blowers
Tim Burns
Deidre But-Husaim
Peter Callas
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Vincent Fantauzzo

April 2 – 25
Teo Treloar
Deidre But-Husaim

April 30 – May 23
Andrew Nicholls
Regan Tamanui
Ship ahoy!
By Diana Simmonds

The University’s sailing club was founded in 1964, says Tom Mallet, one of the driving forces behind its recent resurrection.

“As far as I can tell there were about 50 members, mainly engineering students,” he says. “Activities were based around Woollahra Sailing Club at Rose Bay, and Balmoral. It was quite relaxed, the key to the boatshed was kept in a letterbox and you picked it up.”

Students come and go, however, and when he and friends Daniel Gain and Alex Hynes investigated in 2007 they found sad boats and little else.

“It wasn’t as bad as other unis where the clubs have totally collapsed,” says Mallet.

The club currently has six boats: Lasers, Tazers and Sharpies – the latter to be sold. “We’re moving to a boat called an RS Vision,” says Mallet. “It’s plastic so it’s more durable than the fibreglass dinghies, it can carry a spinnaker, so it’s a fun boat to sail.”

Mallet has identified a niche in the Sydney sailing world that he hopes the club – and alumni – might jointly fill.

“In clubs around Sydney there’s a decline in younger membership,” says Mallet. “You sail as a kid – as I did – then there’s a gap when you start uni, leave home, start working, to when you’re about 30ish and you may not have a boat but want to sail, which is where the uni sailing club comes in.”

As well as sailing and racing their own boats Mallet and his soon to be formed club executive are keen to re-engage alumni sailors, as well as those who sail at a high level but have little if anything to do with the club.

“There are about 17 Blues that I know of but they’re not involved with the club,” says Mallet. “And we’d really like to involve them.”

The revitalised club is already attracting keen sailors, says Mallet, and the social side is as important as the activities on the water.

“We sail most weekends, even in winter,” he says. “But we need new boats to be competitive and we’re heading in that direction. We’re also looking to cooperate with other clubs. UNSW has a windsurfing club and we combined with them on a weekend to Hawks Nest, which was great.”

“The biggest and most challenging fixture on the calendar in the near future is a revival of the University Regatta. ‘It’ll be over Easter,’ says Mallet. ‘At Rose Bay. We’ve established good relations with the Club and it will be similar to the combined high schools regattas – based on the yardstick system so any boat can race against any other on a handicap.”

The students are also starting a training program so new members can learn and work towards a RYA/RHA certificate and they also have a database so sailors and boats looking for crews can be matched up.

“Whether you’re an alumnus or a student you can find boats and crews,” says Mallet.

The University Regatta, hosted by the University of Sydney 15-17 April at Woollahra Sailing Club; alumni register at ausysailing@gmail.com.

Talent spot

SydneyTalent, the University’s fully-owned student development and recruitment service, offers future graduates a competitive advantage in the employment market and officially opened its doors late last year.

SydneyTalent is a unique way for business to access 46,000 potential student employees. It’s also an opportunity to build contact with the University, and invest in student development and high calibre talent from the first year of study through to final, or doctoral, stages.

To students – 85 per cent of whom work during their university years – SydneyTalent means a connection to paid employment aligned with their academic interests, along with related development.

For the employer and the student, SydneyTalent delivers mutual benefit. As well as preparing employees for the workplace, a performance development process ensures employer satisfaction and generates valuable feedback for students.

Every enrolled student is eligible to register, and during employment they enjoy the security of being on the SydneyTalent payroll.

CEO of SydneyTalent, Anne Moore, whose career in learning and development and human resources spans more than 20 years, says that the organisation’s model resonates with business – particularly in the present climate. “The current imperative for many is to minimise payroll risk and maximise capability which is where contractors can provide a solution.

“We encourage industry to be more flexible. By offering reduced risk, it’s easier to experiment and innovate with recruitment methods.”

Another element attractive to business, Moore says, is the fact that SydneyTalent takes on the development of employees as part of its contractual commitment.

“This is a positive initiative for the University of Sydney,” says Patricia Forsythe, Executive Director of the Sydney Chamber of Commerce and a keen advocate of the service who enjoys the connection that SydneyTalent can offer to business.”

SydneyTalent’s unique programs include online orientation covering legislative and Occupational Health and Safety training. Its ongoing development workshops help students build key life and work skills that are critical in the workplace. Students enter employment ready to begin making practical contributions.

The aim is to place some 3700 students into employment over the next three years.
Great Hall much drama
What happened at the opening 150 years ago.
By Paul Lancaster

With the official opening of the Great Hall in July 1859, just seven years after the first 24 students gained entry, the grand Musical Festival heralded to the colony that Australia’s first university was ready to take its place alongside those of the “old country”. Since then the Great Hall has played a pivotal role in the University’s life.

At a meeting on 5 January 1859, the Senate resolved that the opening of the Hall “should be celebrated by a Musical Festival on similar principles to those periodically held at the Commemorations at Oxford and Cambridge and at the principal cities and towns in England”.

It fell to Senate members, senior academics (there were few others) and members of the Committee from outside the University to ensure its success. This required much planning and was not without setbacks, some predictable and others less so.

There were no Event Coordinators in the 1850s so the Musical Festival Committee met more than 40 times between January and the last of six concerts on Saturday 23 July. These were mostly chaired by the Vice-Provost (now called Vice-Chancellor) the Hon Francis (“Futurity”) Merewether. Other representatives from the Senate were Rev Dr John Woodley, Professor of Classics and Logic, and the Hon John Hubert Plunkett, a recent President of the NSW Legislative Council, Irish-born and “an important leader of Catholic opinion in the colony”.

It was to be very much a “gown and town” occasion. Other Committee members came from the Philharmonic Society, the Sydney Vocal Harmonic Society, and some co-opted members, especially Rev Henry Hose, first Warden of St Paul’s College. Committee meetings were usually held in the Legislative Chambers in the city.

The extraordinarily detailed, handwritten minutes kept by Committee Secretary, “Mr J Dyer” from the Vocal Harmonic Society, give genuine insight into the plans for the Festival. Tracing the unfolding events and practical difficulties encountered reads like a mini-drama.

An eminent conductor and musical director, Lewis Lavenu, was engaged; his terms of appointment were £75 for six weeks attendance and return passage from Melbourne. He also had the “benefit” of the Committee closely overseeing the proceedings.

Highlights were excerpts from Handel’s Messiah and Haydn’s The Creation (with scores borrowed from gold-rich and sophisticated Melbourne.) Additional arias and choruses were by Mendelssohn, Rossini, Mozart and Donizetti. Madrigals and other music, including Lavenu’s ballad Molly Asthore, completed the line-up.

Other than the “amateurs”, invited performers were well known; Madame Marie Carandini (born Mary Burgess but married to an Italian revolutionary exile in Hobart Town), Mrs Elizabeth Testar (accomplished painter and soprano), Sara Flower (born in Essex but declared “the Australian Nightingale” by the Melbourne press), Frank Howson and his daughter Clelia also of Tasmania; John Gregg and Walter Sherwin – both frequently on playbills with Carandini and Lavenu.

They were supplemented by a chorus of almost 300 singers, drawn from the Vocal Harmonic Societies in Sydney and Melbourne and “gentlemen of the German Choral Union”. The organ was borrowed from the Pitt Street Congregational Church and chairs were hired from the Sydney Exchange.

Ticket prices were seven shillings and sixpence for reserved seats and five shillings for other seats. Preliminary takings for the concerts of almost £2000 were about £200 less than the expenses. After much debate the Committee decided to recoup the loss by putting on an extra concert.

Even then, Committee members were ultimately requested, several months later, to donate £3/10s each!

To put these sums in perspective, the Government grant for the eastern front of the main University buildings was £50,000, supplemented by a further £10,000 to complete the building and battlements of the tower.

In a prescient discussion by the Festival Committee several weeks before, concern was expressed about the state of the roads at the entrance to the University. By Wednesday of concert week, a violent storm had been raging for 36 hours, necessitating extra Committee meetings at which it was decided that concerts should not be postponed, but teams of horses were hired to “extricate” carriages and omnibuses that might become bogged.

The minutes describe other difficulties including adequate lighting (gas lamps) in the Great Hall, its approaches and adjoining passages. Also, an advertisement advised that it “would not be requisite for the ladies to appear in full evening dress” at 1pm performances! Numerous last-minute changes were made to the concert programs – discounting for the performers, but probably not as upsetting as the sudden death of Lewis Lavenu at the height of festivities. Was it the inclement weather or stress? He is buried nearby in Newtown.

The University Archive still lacks details of many facets of the original Festival. We would be delighted to receive any information. Contact Paul Lancaster on (02) 9660 0576, pallancaster@gmail.com

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neuroscience

these mechanisms could explain behavioural differences between species. From there we might come to a better understanding of how humans and animals think. If science can identify the blueprint behind the organisation of the brain, then we may be able to understand the very basis of thought. In turn, could this lead to an explanation of mental disorders and other brain diseases? Like so many problems in biology, headway can be made by asking a simple question: where did it all come from in the first place? What is the evolutionary origin of the brain?

Looking at neurons in different animals

The great 19th Century Spanish anatomist Ramón y Cajal exploited improvements in microscopes and chemical stains to discover that it was possible to see, in thin slices of brain tissue, individual neurons. Rather than being round cells like those in many other tissues, Cajal observed that neurons had a tree-like branched appearance and that each branch was covered with dozens of little bumps, the synapses. He soon found that all vertebrates have brains made of neurons.

From little things, big things grow

Understanding the evolution of the brain is on a par with the quest to comprehend the organisation of the cosmos, writes Dr Seth Grant (BSc ’80 MBBS ’84)
Neurons were also found in invertebrates such as insects, worms and snails. It may be a surprise to beach loving Australians that even the simple jellyfish has a network of neurons, which it employs to control its rhythmic contractions and thereby swim. Since jellyfish and other invertebrates with simple nervous systems are found in the fossil record from more than a billion years ago, it is thought that these animals were the first to evolve a brain. In other words, the origin of the brain is in ancient invertebrate animals.

It is also widely assumed that invertebrate neurons are more or less the same as the ones that are found in vertebrates and all other animals, including humans. The idea that neurons are fundamental building blocks from which all brains are built is simple and appealing; animals with more neurons are smarter than animals with fewer neurons, right?

Vertebrates have a wider overall repertoire of behaviours with many more specialised forms of behaviour than invertebrates. Take learning and memory for example; flies, slugs and worms learn in simple ways – sensitisation or habituation to particular stimuli – but mammals show many more forms of learning such as fear, spatial and verbal learning. Can this be explained by simply having more neurons?

It’s not just the total size of the brain, but also the size of different parts of the brain that has received attention from scientists wishing to explain the differences in behaviour between species. Take the human and primate brain for example: the frontal regions are proportionately larger in humans than in chimpanzees. Because this is where some “higher mental functions” are performed it seems obvious that humans have more neurons in this part of the brain and that explains why we are better at these sorts of behaviours.

While there is a general relationship between the number of neurons and the range of behaviours or animal’s ability, there are exceptions that complicate the picture. Bird brains have a quite different anatomy to mammals. Despite their relatively small brains, parrots and other birds have been shown to have some mental abilities comparable to a five-year-old human or a chimpanzee. There may be more to the evolution of behaviour than just numbers of neurons.

While counting neurons has been around for a century, it is only in the past 10-15 years that the world of molecular biology has opened up in brain science. Through molecular biology we are beginning to get an entirely new view into the origins of the brain and the differences between species.

The complex molecular world inside the synapse

In 1989 as a postdoctoral fellow at Columbia University in New York, I collaborated with Dr Eric Kandel – later awarded the Nobel Prize in 2000 – who was then working on the functions of synapses in marine snails. Using electrophysiology, which measures the electrical functions of neurons and synapses, he found that synapses showed plasticity or changes in their strength when the

snail learned. My goal was to take new genetic methods, learned while I was a postdoctoral fellow at Cold Spring Harbor laboratory, to try to find the molecules at the synapse that controlled plasticity and learning. I was more interested in the complex brain of mammals especially since we had new ways to study them.

By examining behaviour of mice that had gene mutations engineered into them we discovered new molecular mechanisms of learning and memory. Between 1989 and 1992 we discovered that synapses had proteins within them called tyrosine kinases – essential for synapse plasticity and learning. Since then, this genetic approach has uncovered over 200 genes involved with learning, far more than anyone expected. Many of these genes are also important in humans who have learning disability and mental disorders.

While it was tremendously exciting to witness the uncovering of the molecular basis of behaviour, it was slowly becoming apparent that we were seeing many more molecules than expected. Not only did the genetics reveal over 200 genes involved with plasticity and learning, but in the year 2000, while at Edinburgh University, my team discovered hundreds of new proteins at the synapse using a new method called proteomics. The total number of synapse proteins is now around 1500. This makes the mammalian synapse the most complex of any cellular structure known.

So the mammalian brain has an astronomically large number of synapses with a very high number of proteins within them. Evolution seems to have gone to great lengths to build brains of great complexity. How and why did synapses and the brain evolve to be so complex?

Finding the origin of the brain

Paradoxically, this vast complexity in the long list of mouse synapse proteins gave us a new and simple way to ponder the evolutionary origins of the brain. It was an exciting prospect: although the synapse had been studied in thousands of research papers, almost nothing was known about its origins and evolution. Would we find that the brain evolved from simple invertebrates, as was the standard model? Would we find that invertebrate and vertebrate synapses were essentially the same, as was thought?

The first step was to ask which animals have the genes that make synapse proteins. This was easy to answer because the genome – the full complement of genes encoded in DNA – had been decoded for many species and we could use a computer to search their DNA sequence for the synapse genes. We examined 19 different species including humans, primates, rodents, birds, fish, insects, worms and even single-celled animals.

We made unexpected findings. The most surprising was that 25 per cent of mammalian synapse proteins were also found in animals with no neurons at all; single-celled organisms such as yeast, for example. What could these proteins be doing in yeast? Can yeast think? At some level the answer to this is yes. Yeast cells make decisions in response to changes in their environment. For example, when the nutrients or acidity in their external environment...
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On 20 February 1979, staffed by University of Sydney students and graduates with the support of the Faculty of Law, Marrickville Legal Centre opened at Marrickville Town Hall. Marrickville Legal Centre provides free legal advice and assistance to disadvantaged people of the Inner West and surrounding areas. The Centre’s catchment area now covers 12 local government areas, which include Auburn, Ashfield, Bankstown, Burwood, Canada Bay, Canterbury, Hurstville, Kogarah, Marrickville, Rockdale, Strathfield and Sutherland. With the assistance of a strong and dedicated base of volunteer legal practitioners, the Centre continues to assist local residents by providing free legal advice at evening advice clinics. Over the past 30 years the Centre has made a major contribution to the local community. All current and former staff, volunteers and board members, should be congratulated for their personal contribution to the Centre’s many achievements during this time.

If you are a legal practitioner and you are interested in being part of the Centre’s volunteer program, please contact Lisa Woodgate on 02 9559 2899 or email Lisa_woodgate@clc.net.au
The synapse is the centrepiece around which the origins and evolution of the brain is organised.

changes, yeast cells detect the change and respond by altering their growth or behaviour. The proteins used by yeast to make decisions in response to their environment were some of the same proteins found in human synapses.

These observations lead us to a startling conclusion: the evolutionary origin of the brain lies not in jellyfish or other invertebrates, but in an ancestral set of proteins that unicellular animals use. I call this the “synapse first” model of brain evolution and the ancestral set of proteins the “protosynapse”.

The next step in unravelling the story was to look carefully at all the different species and see how many synapse proteins they had. Contrary to the assumption that invertebrates and vertebrates have neurons that are the same, we found that vertebrate synapses had twice as many of the specialised synapse proteins than did invertebrates. And the number of invertebrate synapse proteins was twice as many as the ancient protosynapse proteins found in unicellular animals. Thus it became apparent that after the protosynapse proteins first evolved in unicellular animals, and when invertebrate animals arose, there was a step-wise expansion in the number of synapse proteins and another expansion again when vertebrates later evolved.

Not only did we find that the molecular origins of the brain were much older than expected, but we also found that vertebrates and invertebrates were very different in their synapses. This points to the concept that the synapse is the centrepiece around which the origins and evolution of the brain is organised.

From simple origins to big complex brains

While this synapse evolution model gave us a new view of the origins of the brain it did not, at first glance, explain why humans and other vertebrates have enormous brains with many neuron types. There was however, a very provocative clue: the big set of vertebrate synapse proteins evolved millions of years before any of the animals with large brains, such as dinosaurs and mammals, evolved. We know this because we can use ‘molecular clock’ data from the DNA sequences of the species living today to estimate when the vertebrate synapse genes arose.

Could it be that “big” molecularly complex vertebrate synapses were needed for big brains to evolve? After all, the brains of vertebrates are much bigger than invertebrate brains. As a step toward answering this question we examined many types of neurons in many different regions of the mammalian brain to see which proteins were in them and a very clear and simple picture emerged: the ancient proteins from the protosynapse were generally found in all different types of neurons in the mammalian brain and the recently evolved synapse proteins and in particular the ones that arose in vertebrates were found in some but not all neurons. Thus it was the vertebrate-evolved proteins that made the specialised nerve cell types and brain regions of vertebrates. Therefore the evolution of the synapse is a template for the evolution of the diversity and specialisation of the many types of nerve cells that make large and complex brains of mammals. This brings us full circle to link our molecular studies to the century of studies documenting the many types of neurons.

Our studies show that the evolution of the brain is not only about numbers of neurons. It is about numbers of molecules at synapses and how they are organised. The vast numbers of synapses in the human brain are built around a core set of protosynapse proteins, which first evolved in unicellular animals, and new proteins were added to this protosynapse core when invertebrates – and later vertebrates – evolved. These were the molecular building blocks for constructing the many different types of neurons and synapses found in the mammalian brain.

Synapse evolution, human behaviour and mental illness

While it may seem academic and of no practical use to be investigating the origins and evolution of the brain, the results of this study have opened new and exciting ways to understand the causes and treatments of mental illness and brain disease. Brain diseases impact more on health services in western countries than any other diseases and are very poorly treated using existing pharmaceuticals. The great challenge is to not only find new drugs and their molecular targets in the synapse, but to understand the very nature of the behavioural disorders that arise in these diseases.

We noticed that many diseases, including Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s disease, schizophrenia and depression, are caused by vertebrate-evolved synapse genes. This tells us that although evolution has produced beautifully organised and complex synapses for humans to use in their behavioural repertoire, it comes with a price: when those proteins are defective we end up with mental illness. Our future research will try to uncover how disease related proteins are used in synapses, why they have evolved, and how we can treat these diseases. Putting this together with evolutionary studies might lead us to understand the origin of thought processes and our similarities with other animals.

Seth Grant is Professor of Molecular Neurobiology and based at the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute in Cambridge, England. He also holds Professorial appointments at the Edinburgh and Cambridge Universities.
The getting of wisdom

Bruce Beresford has learned to accept that lights and camera don’t always mean action, writes Sandra Hall

As a Sydney University student, film director Bruce Beresford (BA’64) had thick, curly dark hair and an intense look that could well have scored him an audition to play Byron or Heathcliff. These days, the hair has thinned and the intensity has been moderated by a mingling of self-deprecation, frank practicality and wry amusement at the wonders of the industry in which he’s worked for almost 50 years.

We meet at a coffee shop in the Queen Victoria Building concourse. He hasn’t eaten this morning and having already discovered that the breakfasts here are good value; he orders a hearty bacon and eggs. He’s taking time off from editing his new film, Mao’s Last Dancer, an adaptation of the best-selling biography of Li Cunxin, the Chinese ballet dancer who defected to the US, danced with some of the world’s great companies and married an Australian ballerina before retiring from dance and finding a new career as a stockbroker in Melbourne.

As to how the film is going, Beresford (whose credits include The Adventures of Barry McKenzie, Don’s Party, The Getting of Wisdom, Breaker Morant, Puberty Blues, Tender Mercies, the Club, Crimes of the Heart, Driving Miss Daisy and Black Robe) says he hopes it will be all right. His tone doesn’t exactly invoke confidence but there’s nothing new about that. I once heard him introduce a screening of Paradise Road – his gripping film about a group of women held in a Japanese POW camp during World War II – with a speech that so thoroughly undersold the picture you could have excused the audience for rising en masse and racing for the exit.

When I mention this, he’s mildly surprised that he could have done such a thing then returns to Mao, cheerfully adding that he wouldn’t want to lie and say it’s a masterpiece. “It might be okay. You just sort of hope. You can’t tell, you know.”

He will allow that it’s a great story. What struck him, he says, is the determination shown by Li Cunxin, who realised early on at the Beijing Dance Academy that he wasn’t as naturally gifted as some fellow students. Yet he worked so hard that he became one of the best.

A similar tenacity has marked Beresford’s long career. He’s weathered tough times. Even better, he’s written about many of them in one of the frankest and funniest film memoirs to be published in recent years. Josh Hartnett Really Wants To Do This recounts his experiences during a peripatetic 18 months from October 2003 to July 2005 when nothing went right. As he flew between the US, Australia and various parts of Europe and the UK in search of that elusive commodity, the done deal, projects kept crashing around him. Promises evaporated, money dried up, yet he persevered, sustained, it seems, only by his sense of humour.

To his chagrin, the book didn’t sell well – possibly because few readers over the age of 20 have heard of the young American star, Josh Hartnett, but it did generate some very positive responses from his peers, several of whom registered a sharp shock of recognition. “So many directors contacted me,* he says, “to say, ‘I thought it just happened to me’.”

Of all the projects that got away, one that he particularly mourns is an adaptation of the play Boswell For The Defence by Melbourne writer Patrick Edgeworth. The story centres on the latter years of Samuel Johnson’s biographer James Boswell, struggling to maintain his law practice in London, when he’s engaged to defend Mary Bryant, the convict woman whose remarkable escape from the Sydney colony landed her in Newgate Prison on trial for her life.

Starring Leo McKern as Boswell, the play was a hit in the West End but the hard heads that prevail in commercial movie making were harder to win over. After signing on to direct against the judgment of his Hollywood agent, Beresford decided he wanted Richard Dreyfuss to play Boswell. When his backers vetoed that, Michael Caine was cast instead, along with Samantha Morton as Mary Bryant and Michael Gambon as the Lord Chancellor.

All up, Beresford spent 14 months on pre-production. The Australian cinematographer Peter James, a frequent collaborator, went to London and the designers began building a set for the prison at Shepperton Studios. They also got as far as making 40 sedan chairs. Then a little more than a week before shooting was due to start, Beresford got a call from the film’s English producer.

He tells the story with his now standard air of bemused resignation: “I was in the car when Nik Powell, cheerful as ever, rang me and said, ‘the film’s off’. I couldn’t get back to him. The phone had been cut off and when I got back to London, the office had gone.”
Beresford has pursued a career of such diversity it’s hard to pin him down

That night, they had a morose wrap party for what Beresford has since dubbed The Best Film I Never Made. Another ambition, which he’s been pursuing for years, is to film Women In Black, a beguiling novel by Madeleine St John, a contemporary of Beresford’s at the University. Set in Sydney in the 1950s, it’s about Lesley, a girl who gets a holiday job in a department store modelled on David Jones. There she makes friends with Magda, an older, sophisticated saleswoman. Mixing with Magda’s émigré friends, Lesley receives a rapid education in fashion, food and European culture.

Beresford has been working on the project with producer Sue Milliken and he thought they had a chance of making it happen after Isabella Rossellini said she’d be interested in the role of Magda. Potential backers, however, thought otherwise. Not box-office was their verdict. And their picks? The much younger Monica Bellucci or Salma Hayek.

As things now stand, his next film looks like being an adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s A Woman Of No Importance starring Annette Bening and Sean Bean. This one, too, has been in the works for a while.

When he’s not making films or pursuing the next one, Beresford is directing opera. He fell in love with music as a small boy listening to ABC radio at home in the western Sydney suburb of Toongabbie. He was not much older when he bought his first movie camera. Ever resourceful, he made tasselled holders for golf tees, peddling them on golf courses and putting the proceeds towards an 8-millimetre camera. “In those days,” he says, “I was interested in making films for the sake of making films. I later got interested in having things to make films about.”

He was a teenage film buff, travelling all over Sydney to hunt down art house classics – which throws us into a mutual bout of nostalgia as we reminisce about long-gone Sydney cinemas. He fondly recalls the mid-city Savoy, which served coffee in the foyer and featured curtains decorated with an Eiffel Tower motif. But it was at Sydney University that his early film career began to flourish. His was the era that produced Clive James, Robert Hughes, Germaine Greer, Mungo McCallum and John Bell. It was Bell who starred in Beresford’s first real fiction film, a 36-minute melodrama called The Devil To Pay, which eventually scored a late-night slot on television. There was, too, It Dropped As The Gentle Rain, a dramatisation of a piece by the surrealist poet and screenwriter, Jacques Prevert. Made with fellow director Alby Thoms, this five-minute offering managed to offend NSW’s censorship laws with a scene that has God signalling the end of the world by defecating on a room full of partying socialites.

Since then, Beresford has pursued a career of such diversity that it’s hard to pin him down. As his book demonstrates, luck and expediency have had such large roles to play that it’s difficult to see where their influences end and his own style and tastes kick in. I suggest that he’s naturally attracted to stories about social interplay and he agrees.

Then there’s his tenacity. He’s still sad that he didn’t succeed in getting Women In Black onto the screen while close friend Madeleine St John was alive. (She died in London of emphysema three years ago.) Beresford is her literary executor and somehow, sometime, I think he’ll definitely get this one up and running.

Sandra Hall is a biographer, novelist and film critic for the Sydney Morning Herald.
Paradise found

If you were to design a perfect natural research laboratory, you could not do better than One Tree Island

Text and photography by Linda Vergnani

Professor Maria Byrne is standing on a coral shelf in the aquamarine waters of a vast lagoon. In her hands is a glistening, tubular creature the size of a baseball bat.

Around her, striped angelfish, turquoise and pink parrotfish and myriad other reef inhabitants flit. But rather than observing the paradisal parade below, Byrne is intent on the beche-de-mer, or sea cucumber, that she has just caught.

Surprisingly, its skin has the woody texture of tree bark, but the creature can change the stiffness of its body walls at will. Within seconds, the coppery-coloured animal spurs a defensive jet of water and droops over her arm. Now it feels more like a floppy jelly.

“If I keep interfering with this beche-de-mer it will disintegrate altogether. It thinks it is going to die and literally self-destructs,” explains Byrne, Professor of Marine and Developmental Biology at the University of Sydney.

Director of One Tree Island Research Station, Byrne is a world expert on echinoderms, the 500 million-year-old family of invertebrates that includes seastars (starfish), sea urchins and sea cucumbers. One Tree Island is what she calls “sea cucumber heaven”, with 32 species recorded so far.

Beches-de-mer form the basis of a $6.5 million per annum industry in Queensland. Once caught, they are exported, predominantly to China and other Asian nations, for consumption and use in traditional Chinese medicines. Byrne is trying to find out which species can be harvested sustainably now that the population of one of the most sought after sea cucumbers, the black teatfish, has crashed due to overfishing. All commercial harvesting of this teatfish in Queensland has been stopped.

Some of Byrne’s research has been done in the lagoon’s “micro atolls”, swimming pool-size basins in which she can confine sea cucumbers. “If you designed a perfect natural research laboratory, you could not do better than One Tree Island,” she says.

Restricted to scientists and post-graduate students, One Tree Island has “not been impacted by stressors from development and tourism,” Byrne says. “You come here to do the kind of research you can’t do anywhere else.”

But this perfect laboratory is under threat from climate change. The research station complex, with its dormitories, laboratories and aquarium, could disappear under the waves in decades. “If the sea rises a metre here we could be gone,” says Byrne.

Located at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef, just seven kilometres from the coastal shelf and buffeted by cooling winds from the south, it is thought that corals here might have a greater chance of surviving warming oceans than elsewhere.

Through long-term monitoring of the creatures that live here the scientists at One Tree Island are getting an “early warning of change”.

About 100 km from the nearest coastal town of Gladstone and 20 km east of Heron Island in the Capricorn Bunker group of islands, One Tree Island was first recorded in 1843 when HMS Fly carried out a survey voyage of the Great Barrier islands and reefs. On board, naturalist J. Beete Jukes wrote in his journal of anchoring near an island on which a “single conspicuous tree” was growing.

Now there are groves of low trees, sheared by the wind. The island, a coral rubble cay, is on one edge of a great ring of reefs that enclose the lagoon.

Founded by the Australian Museum, the station has been run by the University of Sydney since 1974. It attracts researchers from across Australia as well as from institutions including Princeton University and Germany’s Max Planck Institute.

Squeezing over the encircling reef is only possible for an hour or two at the highest tides. This time, Byrne has planned a trip to coincide with the annual coral spawning. There is no jetty, so she jumps into knee-deep water and wades ashore to be greeted by a robust crew in wetsuits and sarongs - research students, lecturers and professors from various universities.

The station, with its banks of gleaming solar panels, is set amid low scrub and stunted emerald-green pisonia trees from which comes the constant churring, chattering noise of thousands of grey noddy terns, many of which have eggs in nests of dried leaves. Brilliant white, bridled terns have commandeered crannies in the reception building and laboratories to raise their fluffy chicks.

The station takes a maximum of 28 researchers, who might stay for days or even months. The station is run on an environmentally sustainable basis, using rain water for drinking and showering (one bucket a day) and composting toilets. Kitchen waste is sorted and removed from the island and all laboratory waste is removed. All food has to be ordered and shipped in by individual researchers. On this trip, Byrne arrives with a backpack filled with frozen meat, a new electric drill for the station manager, and her laptop.

Among those currently working at One Tree is Dr Selina Ward, a marine biologist and lecturer at the University of Queensland, doing research on how coral spawning, larval development and reef settlement will be affected by different climate change scenarios.

The live corals she is studying fill most of the plastic tanks in the aquarium room and Ward is assisted by three students.

On the night the cry goes out “the coral is spawning”, they use infrared lights, to gather and watch bundles of egg and sperm rising from the coral branches like slow-motion
pink bubbles. As the spawn reaches the surface, it is scooped up for experiments and cross-fertilising programs.

In the following days, the students tend tanks filled with fishy-smelling coral larvae that resemble brick dust. Ward says her previous research at One Tree showed that there were big changes in the larvae’s ability to calcify and form coral when exposed to more acid seawater. “It’s a very grave outlook,” she says.

The work of the coral crew complements Byrne’s major research into how a combination of ocean warming and acidification affects the “unbelievably fragile” larval skeletons of abalone and other commercial shellfish. Byrne says they are extremely vulnerable to ocean acidification, which is caused by man-made pollution generating increased carbon dioxide levels in the water. (The carbon dioxide dissolves to create carbonic acid and decreases the availability of carbon ions, which marine animals use to build their shells and skeletons.)

Byrne found that at pH levels of 7.6 (compared to the current pH of 8.1) abalone larvae were unable to make shells. The “naked abalone” would not survive in the wild. Sea urchin larvae could tolerate slightly higher levels of acidification before their shells became “corrupted”.

In between overseeing the station, her own research, supervision of postgraduates and administration, Byrne gets updates from other researchers. Among them are three Australian Institute of Marine Science scientists who are setting up sensor stations across the lagoon as part of the Great Barrier Reef Ocean Observing System.

German doctoral student Maxi Eckes is studying how damselfish adjust the level of sunscreen produced in their mucus according to the depth of water they live in. As the recipient of the One Tree Island Scholarship, Eckes is spending a month on the island.

Dr Richard Stump is doing post-doctoral research into a method of ageing crown-of-thorns seastars from pigment bands in their venomous spines. These voracious predators, which are referred to by the acronym COTS, can reach a metre in diameter and grow 23 arms.

Stump, who works at Sydney University’s Bosch Institute, trained as a marine biologist and did his doctoral thesis on COTS. He dives down to collect bristly specimens, which he wrestles into a boat.

On board, two assistants weigh and sex each seastar, then insert a tetracycline tablet into an incision in an arm. Stump says the antibiotic will leave a mark in the calcium of the spines which will help determine the creature’s age when they are recaptured. Because the size of the animals is not directly related to age, it is currently difficult for researchers to work out how old the adults are at One Tree.

Byrne says the population of COTS at One Tree has remained small and stable for years, whereas, in disturbed areas of reef, plague populations devour huge tracts of coral. She is interested in discovering the factors that keep these predators in check on the island.

The professor believes that studying creatures like COTS within One Tree’s healthy, undisturbed ecosystem is vital as a benchmark for determining the effects of global warming. For example, warmer waters might mean the crown-of-thorns population will explode.

Byrne muses: “I think One Tree Island could be a cradle, a refuge for biodiversity. This is the end of the reef and if the corals and fish cannot survive here there is nowhere else for them to go.”

For further details contact Professor Byrne at mbyrne@anatomy.usyd.edu.au.
Every dog has his day

The love and lives of Henrietta and Thomas Huxley (“Darwin’s bulldog”) is celebrated at the Macleay Museum, writes Jude Philp (BA '90)

The British biologist Thomas Henry Huxley recognised the ideal of a balanced education. At the time when it was dominated by ancient languages and prayer, he fought successfully for science to be part of the national curriculum, and we have him to thank for the acceptance of biological sciences as a discipline in our schools today.

Huxley is also remembered for his role in promoting Charles Darwin’s ground breaking On The Origin Of Species (150 years old this year). Well understanding Darwin’s reserved nature, Huxley styled himself as Darwin’s bulldog, going on the attack at any opportunity. He did not entirely agree with Darwin’s ideas, but promoted evolution because he recognised that, above all else, this idea would propel scientific thought at an immense speed. The furtherance of knowledge was one of Huxley’s life’s works.

Huxley is central to the Macleay Museum’s exhibition Accidental Encounters – not for his prodigious academic output, but rather for the manner in which he met and loved the woman who would be his wife, Henrietta Heathorn. This episode in his life is illuminating of the period that led up to the publication of one of the world’s most influential theories, of the personal development of Huxley himself, and for the light their letters shed on Australia in the mid-1840s.

When they met in Sydney in 1847, Huxley was a modest assistant surgeon serving on an important ship, HMS Rattlesnake, at the start of its survey of the difficult shipping route along the Great Barrier Reef (1846-1850). The position had cost the impoverished 21-year-old dearly (uniform alone was nearly £50, a quarter of a year’s salary). It was, however, a probable path into a job in Natural History. Heathorn was also 21 when they met, equally impoverished and living with her sister’s family (Oriana and William Fanning) at Holmwood in the New Town just outside Sydney. (The house was demolished last century but the name survives through a street name.)

Their love story starts with a dance at the new Government House on Sydney’s foreshore and quickly moves to an engagement at Holmwood. For eight long years “Hal” and “Nettie” wrote to each other, documenting their lives, waxing lyrically about their estrangement, and cautioning each other on the perils of their daily lives. For Nettie the outbreak of yellow fever in Sydney was a real risk; she writes of her friends and friends’ children dying of the fever. For Hal the sheer ennui of ship life threatened his existence, and he in turn writes of his salvation in the thought of their eventual union.

The Rattlesnake docked in Sydney for a few months each year when weather in the north prohibited surveys. Any interruption to this brief time together was an anxiety. On one occasion Charles Nicholson invited Hal to work on medical matters for a week. Nettie’s full scorn is directed to an engagement at Holmwood. For they were married in 1855 and had eight children who occupied much of Nettie’s time.

When they were grown, Nettie pursued her poetry and linguistic interests and published in both areas. Huxley became a regular member on Government Commissions, writing extensively and lecturing to all. Many of their children took on the intellectual and cultural interests of their parents in their future careers, becoming knighted for their services to the Empire: Julian Huxley was a celebrated biologist and poet, his son Aldous an author and his sister, Meredith, or Mady, a painter whose portrait of her father hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in Britain.

Ironically, given Huxley’s interests in education, the scientific landscape would have been quite different if he had been able to apply for the Chair in Natural History that was mooted to be established (but did not go ahead) with the new University of Sydney in 1855. SAM

Dr Jude Philp is Curator of the Macleay Museum

Accidental Encounters, at the Macleay Museum until 24 May 2009. The correspondence is held at Imperial College, London. Prof Iain McCalman generously made transcriptions available for the exhibition.
A mother and son in conversation. The usual banter and collisions between a middle-aged parent and an adolescent male. Except, as the dialogue between Sue and Simon progresses, it becomes obvious that something is not quite right. One of these people is a little off balance. There are signs of a disturbance that might be cause for concern.

It’s a scenario that some will recognise when they attend a performance of Inside Out, an award-winning new play by Mary Rachel Brown at the Seymour Centre in May. Subtitled “When you think you know someone”, this brisk, unsentimental, often funny play delicately exposes the early warning signs that baffle so many parents before a diagnosis of psychiatric illness labels their child as suffering from schizophrenia.

But while the play offers both entertainment and insight, real-life dramatic breakthroughs are happening elsewhere throughout the Sydney University campus in the search to find a cure for schizophrenia.

* * * * * *

The former Bonds Clothing headquarters in Camperdown, which lay dormant and filthy with pigeon droppings for years, is the unlikely nerve centre for one of Sydney University’s most dynamic and ambitious developments, the Brain and Mind Research Institute, where research into the causes of schizophrenia is shedding light on this much misunderstood condition.

This flagship institute is the product of former Vice Chancellor Gavin Brown’s and Professor Maxwell Bennett’s vision. Now converted into a laboratory housing thousand of rats, mice and zebra fish (apparently the best species to use for observing cell migration as one can see straight through them) and offices on five floors in Mallett Street, the building is at the heart of an ever-expanding site. Currently spread over 15,000m², the Institute’s footprint will grow with the launch of a new building opening in June 2009 dedicated to adolescence, combining community outreach programs - including ambulatory care for sufferers of autism, ADHD and brain tumours - with molecular biology research facilities. Next will come a research hospital, the first on any university campus devoted to psychoses and neurological disorders, including multiple sclerosis.

Established in 2003, the Brain and Mind Research Institute (BMRI) is unique, a world-first hub for neuroscience and the investigation of psychological and neurological disorders. Some critics believe that schizophrenia has long played poor cousin to mood disorders when it comes to research in Sydney, lacking high-profile academic champions to further research – unlike Melbourne, which is recognised internationally for its pioneering work. But the BRMI is changing all that.

Its philosophy is that few medical discoveries are made in isolation and that new and effective solutions require collaboration, a clear common purpose and an active dialogue with the wider community.

At the helm of the BMRI is Professor Ian Hickie, former director of the Beyond Blue Institute, an
in genetic and imaging, has changed all that.

“Gavin Brown picked up on this as a hot issue and pursued it,” Hickie explains. “Until then, the University had over 60 disparate groups working on brain science, but none of them were coordinated and focused. Now they are combined and interdisciplinary. We have been able to attract international funding for our research and there are over one hundred people at the BMRI now on competitive research grants, about half of which are tied up with mental health problems.”

Professor Hickie is a passionate and persuasive advocate of early intervention in schizophrenia.

“All too often it is dealt with after 20 years of symptoms, but we should be tackling it in the teen years, when there is a significant change in frontal lobe development,” he says.

Professor Maxwell Bennett (DSc ’77), the sprightly 70-year-old Director of Science at the BMRI, cups a reproduction of the human brain in one hand and explains:

“You are born with a third of your synaptic connections in place in the brain. Then, in the first ten years of your life, you make new connections at the rate of half a million every second, night and day for 10 years.”

During adolescence, says Professor Bennett, these are pruned back. The brain loses a third of those connections by the age of 20 due to environmental factors and for increased efficiency when it comes to higher cognitive learning. “Later, between the ages of 20 and 70, nothing much happens,” he says.

“In sufferers of schizophrenia, we see accelerated synaptic regression,” says Bennett. “Instead of losing a third of these connections, they lose another 30 per cent – a total of 60 per cent. We can see that thanks to the latest technology such as non-invasive neuro-imaging, but we still have no clear idea why, although we suspect it has something to do with a hormone group called glucocortisoids, produced by the adrenals, the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland, which disrupt the synapses by stressing certain molecular properties.”

Professor Bennett is in charge of the neurobiology laboratory looking into the molecular mechanisms underlying synaptic transmission in the nervous system. The lab is currently placing special emphasis on synaptic plasticity, the brain’s remarkable ability to alter the structure of its circuitry (a discovery that has particularly attracted the attention of baby boomers keen to stave off Alzheimer’s and other degenerative diseases with new brain exercises and techniques).

“Once we understand the normal process of synaptic regression and its molecular, chemical drivers, we may be able to manipulate that through the use of second generation anti-psychotic drugs to slow down the process in schizophrenia sufferers,” says Professor Hickie. Professor Bennett cites the encouragingly positive results from clozapine, a well known but controversial antipsychotic drug, which some doctors are wary of because of significant risk factors.
Over in Concord, Professor Tim Lambert is at the frontline of clinical outreach in charge of schizophrenia treatment and outcomes. Since 2008 the Concord Hospital Centre for Mental Health has operated a 170-bed facility. Its mission is a multi-pronged strategy covering the much-neglected physical health of sufferers, relapse prevention and treatment resistance.

The facts that Professor Lambert is dealing with are stark. Despite advances in treatment, the longevity of schizophrenia suffers is going backwards. “They lose 25 years of life on average, mainly due to premature cardiovascular disease,” says Lambert. “Moreover, the quality of physical care that schizophrenia sufferers receive is appalling. Our research shows that they are rarely checked for diabetes, blood pressure or cancer and that mental illness is a real barrier to getting standard medical care. Our centre now provides a cardiologist and an endocrinologist to help integrate physical and mental health.”

Professor Lambert has forged international links with other centres of clinical research, making Concord the first in a global network with future links in Barcelona, Munich and New York coming on-stream by 2010. “These will be centres of excellence to develop improved clinical services, teaching and training in relation to detection and management of schizophrenia,” he explains. “We will be training local people and offering fellowship for local doctors who want to get involved in our programs.”

Across town at the Royal North Shore Hospital, SAM spoke with Dr Carissa Coulston (MPsych '98 PhD '06) who completed her PhD in 2006 in Psychological Medicine, examining the neuropsychology of cannabis and other substance use in schizophrenia. Her groundbreaking research found that for some individuals with schizophrenia, cannabis use can improve cognitive functions such as attention, speed of information processing, and planning and organisation.

“Our clinical sample of 60 males with schizophrenia and a control group of 17 healthy males were recruited through hospitals and community mental health centres in the Northern Sydney and Mid-Western Area Health Services,” explains Dr Coulston. “The individuals with schizophrenia varied in terms of frequency and recency of cannabis use. They had to meet criteria of being psychiatically stable at the time of assessment. All were taking antipsychotic medication in order to manage their illness. My results found that relatively frequent and recent cannabis use was associated with better cognitive performance, but that does not mean I would advocate it as a treatment for all individuals with schizophrenia.”

Cannabis has already been found to alleviate symptoms in sufferers of Multiple Sclerosis and other neurological conditions, but Dr Coulston is the one of the first to publish research suggesting it may be of some benefit to sufferers of schizophrenia. Earlier research had shown a now widely accepted view of a causal link between cannabis use and the onset of psychotic episodes in those with a genetic predisposition to the disorder.

...
first time, we can pull all the evidence together, forming a much more comprehensive and complex picture and making the detective work much more thorough.”

One of the revelations this approach has already revealed is the identification of poor synchrony.

“In a healthy person, the brain synchronises information every few milliseconds to integrate perception, cognition and emotion like a perfectly calibrated watch,” says Williams. “The brain of someone with schizophrenia does not do this, it is out of whack, causing it to make random associations and to have no ability to contextualise things such as random sounds. Now we have to work out how that links up with everything else we can observe and find the cause.”

(Adding to the notion of the perfectly calibrated timepiece, Tim Lambert comments that research in chronobiology indicates that people with schizophrenia also have defective circadian rhythms as part of a genetic fault.)

While investigation continues in departments of psychology, psychiatry and medicine within Sydney hospitals, other University departments are also engaged in furthering a better understanding of schizophrenia from the perspective of another discipline.

The Faculty of Education and Social Work’s Agi O’Hara (BA ’90) trains future social workers in how to provide effective services to better support sufferers.

“We look for practical solutions, how to work with people who suffer from the illness, their families and their friends,” Dr O’Hara says. “There are lots of personal anecdotes in our discussion as it is quite common for students to know someone who is a sufferer. We’ve had students who have been sufferers themselves who have provided us with very valuable insight into strategies that have proved helpful to them and we collate all that information so that it is available to each new group of students entering the department.”

Some of the negative perceptions and myths associated with the illness are reinforced by the media, says O’Hara.

“Media stories are problematic because they misrepresent the truth. For example, the focus is generally on the small minority who harm others, ignoring the reality that people with schizophrenia are much more likely to harm themselves. And, contrary to popular belief, many people don’t hear voices. There is a wide spectrum of symptoms.”

Attending a reading of Inside Out, O’Hara was struck by how authentic Sue’s slow realisation of Simon’s problem was.

“Too often, the early warning signs are ignored as typical adolescent behaviour. What I think Inside Out captures so well is that the illness develops gradually, and that there are small clues that should ring alarm bells for us. Diagnosis happens way down the track. We need greater awareness in schools and we need to normalise the condition a bit more, to eliminate the stigma.”

In her teaching Dr O’Hara tries to introduce her students to the way other cultures perceive the condition.

“In some cultures, sufferers would be thought of as shamans. The illness is not pathologised in the same way, the sufferer is not shunned or ostracised. Research shows that the way one responds to the condition can affect whether a sufferer will have a relapse or not; criticism can trigger an episode as it creates stress.”

Families need to learn how to back off and resist responses that, despite their best intentions, appear critical or smothering, she explains.

“We also discuss why some people choose to go off their medication because of side effects and that it is important for family members not to judge them for doing this.”

Inside Out plays at the Seymour Centre, May 13-30: for tickets: www.seymour.usyd.edu.au. Dr Agi O’Hara will conduct a 45-minute discussion forum after the performance on 14 May. For further information: a.ohara@edfac.usyd.edu.au

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A tongue-in-cheek “joint media release” (by Chris Henning) in The Sydney Morning Herald (November 24, 2008) sums up the feelings of more than one NSW resident:

“This is a joint announcement from both sides of NSW politics. We have decided that the present state of affairs in NSW is so grave, and we are so talentless, inept and bereft of ideas, that the best possible thing for both of us to do in the public interest is to withdraw completely and leave NSW to run itself.”

Therein lies the nub: to bring back everyday democracy as the Ancient Athenians practised it. We could update the practice to include women and migrants who were excluded in Ancient Athens. We could also seriously investigate alternative ways of running the state to reduce the power of politicians and increase the influence of citizens. This investigation could begin with the anxieties expressed by an American political scientist more than a century ago.

In 1902, when Australia was newly federated, Moisei Ostrogorski published Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties. He was of the opinion that political parties and the powerful party machines in the United States of America were undermining democracy. In 1985 University of Sydney philosopher John Burnheim published Is Democracy Possible? (republished in 2007 by Sydney University Press) which addressed these concerns in a more modern context. The answer to Burnheim’s question is surely that democracy is possible, but not while our political arrangements are predicated on increasingly powerful political parties and a weakened citizenry. Burnheim opens with the claim: “Democracy does not exist in practice.” At best, we are experiencing elective oligarchy mitigated by the right to protest against and expose the dubious compromises of politicians.

The recent US presidential race showed us how elections have become an extremely expensive celebrity pageant, an entertainment, a gladiatorial spectacle, combining grandiloquence with superficiality. Finally Obama was crowned and he became a vessel for dreams and hopes. We marvelled at American electoral madness, ignoring our own electoral embarrassments. Unfortunately, we have inherited many Washington ways (and the US inherited some of ours - the secret ballot, for example, formerly known as the Australian Ballot). What we experience in Australia and the US falls well short of Athenian democracy even though we now have the means to redesign those ancient democratic methods to produce a far more robust form of governance.

We cannot abolish elections or political parties or political wheeling and dealing in the short run. Coalitions would form and parties would surface in another form to diffuse their power, possibly leading to unstable coalitions, making the wheeling and dealing worse. We could create new voting systems (as New Zealand did with its Mixed Member Proportional representation which replaced first-past-the-post in 1993) to force parties to form coalitions in order to diffuse their power. It is remarkably difficult to change our own inclination toward existing ways of interacting in the political landscape. We think this is the only way to do democracy yet this system is relatively youthful. Maybe it has reached puberty and needs a good talking to. Whatever the stage of its young life, those who are experiencing its appalling behaviour are certainly disappointed by it.

The recent Australian Citizens’ Parliament (www.citizensparliament.org.au) did an excellent job of identifying the many problems that lead to malodorous parliaments. Instead, I want to consider some wild proposals and some bold experiments to strengthen our political system. I don’t think for a moment that people will take to the streets demanding, “What do we want? Deliberative democracy!” but we do need to begin some serious conversations about the mess in which we find ourselves.

In the 1990s I had a brief spell as an elected representative in local government. It was a sobering experience. It taught me a lot about centralised power and its deleterious impact on sound decision-making. It led me to a heightened respect for typical citizens, in particular in their ability to take control of their own community lives. More recently, my belief in the collective wisdom of typical citizens has been reinforced by the experience of dozens of “mini-publics”, randomly selected groups of citizens brought together to deliberate. Some examples of these democratic inclusive processes follow.

The Hon Alannah McTiernan was Australia’s longest-serving planning minister until the ALP lost office in Western Australia in 2008. She convened more mini-publics than anyone I know. For instance, Dialogue with the City was convened to develop a long-term metro strategy for Perth. She invited 1100 people (a diverse sample of the metropolitan area) into the Fremantle
passenger terminal and encouraged them to deliberate over a weekend about how to make Perth the world’s most liveable city. Experts spoke, people worked with various options, recommendations were made which she then acted upon. It was an excellent example of land-use planning that involved a cross-section of the people affected by the decisions, giving them a high degree of influence over the final outcomes.

Creating dialogue in a city is ambitious, but the Canadian province of British Columbia took on a bigger challenge. The Premier of BC convened a Citizens’ Assembly to consider reform of its first-past-the-post electoral system. Had he given this task to elected politicians, the voters would have been sceptical of their recommendations. Instead, randomly selected citizens met together over a year, listening to experts, holding public hearings themselves and deliberating about different electoral approaches. The final option was put to the whole province as a referendum question. Upon exiting the polling booth, people were asked why they voted for the model on offer.

Their responses tended toward two camps. Some had researched the option and decided the single transferable vote was best. But most professed to know very little about it yet trusted the judgment of their fellow citizens who had deliberated deeply over such a long period of time. This is active citizenship at its best.

What these strategies share is a willingness to trust citizens with complex problems. In both examples, a representative cross section of their respective populations - including linguistically and culturally diverse people - were engaged. The BC method was immensely deliberative, the WA method much shorter and far less deliberative, but with many more people involved. Both were very influential.

These processes were one-off events but there have been hundreds more. They have been convened by government, non-government organisations and research institutes. None were intended to undermine the existing system. Rather, they were designed to strengthen policy-making. Astute politicians could see this.

Here’s an even wilder idea. Beyond NGO (non-government organisation) -sponsored events like Australia’s first Citizen’s Parliament, could we take this to the national scale and look at our electoral system? Why do we passively and reluctantly vote for a handful of mediocre candidates pre-selected by a diminishing pool of party members? As Ostrogorski noted a hundred years ago, the candidates are “settled beforehand by professional politicians under the influence of a host of calculations and considerations among which it is not always easy to discover a concern for the public interest.”

Most professed to know very little about it yet trusted the judgment of their fellow citizens.

We could take back some of the power we have ceded to parties and demand the right to choose “none of the above” on a ballot paper when the field of candidates is poor; we could thereby attract a better calibre of candidate. We could throw out an incompetent government (for example, as some US states do by triggering a recall election when there is evidence of misconduct).

Better still we could use the principles incorporated in mini-publics that were outlined above and change the political arrangements of our parliaments. Burnheim described a system that he called demarchy. In it, the decision-making currently taken by each government minister and bureaucratic department is devolved entirely to a mini-public. Burnheim believes that members of the public are simply the best judges of how public goods and services should be deployed.

While Burnheim in Sydney was thinking about how to restructure political representation from the bottom up, in California Eric Callenbach and Michael Phillips were advocating change at the top (see their Citizen Legislature, 1985). They saw Congress under the influence of lobbyists and campaign donations, thereby disintegrating into a “special interest state”. Their solution was a randomly selected legislature that could correct those weaknesses and deliver the representative promise of the founding fathers – “a portrait of the people in miniature”.

Their proposal aligns with recent proposals by British commentators to apply similar forms of random selection to the UK Parliament. Keith Sutherland suggests in A People’s Parliament (2008) that the Commons should be elected by lot. He sees the House of Lords as “a chamber for informed advocacy”. In Sutherland’s model the Commons would decide whether or not to approve, reject or amend legislation initiated by the House of Lords. In the same vein, but with a different house in their sights, Anthony Barnett and Peter Carty advocate The Athenian Option: Radical Reform for the House of Lords (2008). In their version, the upper house is selected by lot with the Commons continuing as is.

The examples sketched above (and detailed in their various books) might lead to a more descriptively representative parliament. But it is what representatives do once they are there that also requires attention at this critical time when we have so many pressing global challenges. We must move beyond posturing and disagreeing for the hell of it. We can no longer have representatives spending their days hurling abuse across the chamber, caucusing behind the scenes, deciding by
vote along party lines, with one eye constantly on the next election. We revere the vote as an essential instrument for democracy. I would suggest that it has been our undoing. Had we chosen the Athenian lottery option and strengthened it to create more deliberative decision-making mechanisms we might have avoided the current crises.

Sceptics would typically respond that we cannot trust people, we cannot trust facilitators of such processes, we could never get a microcosm of the population to form a genuine mini-public, populations are too large now for solutions based on the Ancient Athenian model; people would rort the system, factions would form, the powerful would dominate. There are more concerns than these and all are well known to designers of deliberative processes. Neutral evaluators have scrupulously examined mini-publics, however, and though not all are exemplary they stand up well to close scrutiny.

Circumstances demand better decision-making skills and more democratic tools: critical inquiry, reasoned arguments, weighing strengths and weaknesses, listening deeply to each other’s viewpoints to improve understanding (all inherent in the principles of deliberative democracy). This means that citizens are not simply monitors – they are partners in decision-making, meaning that democracy is possible.

A sustainable future requires that we cultivate an ability to discover our commonality for the sake of the public good. This is what we witness routinely in deliberative inclusive processes like Citizens’ Juries, Consensus Conferences and Citizens’ Assemblies. When there is less precious attachment to a pre-determined outcome and a willingness to move beyond self-interest (which, in deliberative practice, is much easier than one would imagine), anything is possible. Studies of deliberative mini-publics have shown that participants often change their views in the process, convinced they have attained a better understanding of the problems.

Meanwhile, in the absence of government sponsorship, the tools described above are being used by NGOs and research institutes to consider issues such as climate change (the deliberative NSW Climate Summit is one example, Global Voices in the US is another proposal by AmericaSpeaks, World Wide Views on Global Warming is an initiative of the Danish Board of Technology which has EU support and involves dozens of countries). Electronic media are also offering innovation. Australia’s Citizens’ Parliament, for example, demonstrated how online deliberation could be integrated with face-to-face deliberation. GetUp has been flirting with ways to monitor elected representatives and has also experimented with local face-to-face conversations that are backed up by its activist website. Maybe, just maybe, if democracy is strengthened with methods such as these, we can still find our way out of the current mess.

Lyn Carson is Associate Professor in Applied Politics at the University’s United States Studies Centre

USEFUL WEBSITES
Active Democracy www.activatedemocracy.net
Australia’s Citizens’ Parliament www.citizensparliament.org.au
British Columbia’s Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public
Dialogue in the City details can be found at http://activatedemocracy.net/articles/jhk-dialogue-city.pdf
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16. Wine glasses
17. Champagne glasses
18. Bag
19. Sweatshirt
20. Vest
21. Towel
22. T-shirt
23. T-shirt
24. T-shirt
25. T-shirt
26. Coaster set
27. Sweatshirt
28. Sweatshirt
ORDER FORM

Please select products, sizes, colours and quantities and complete and return the order form below. Fax to +61 2 9351 6698 or mail to: The University Gift Shop, the University of Sydney, NSW 2006 Australia.

Name ____________________________
Address ___________________________
Postcode __________________________
Phone: Work _________________________ Home ____________________ Fax ____________________ Mobile ____________________

Payment method:
[ ] Cheque enclosed  [ ] Money order  [ ] Visa card  [ ] Mastercard

Card No. ___________________________
Expiry / ____________________________ Signature ______________________

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Dinner plate</td>
<td>$45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bread and butter plate</td>
<td>$30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mug</td>
<td>$20</td>
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| 4. Clip box (crafted wood) | $90
   Small |
| 5. Crafted gift box rosewood / gum pine | $160 |     |
| 6. Wall plaque and stand | $67 |     |
| 7. Crystal whisky glass (hand engraved) | $11 |     |
| 8. Crystal decanter (hand engraved) | $77 |     |
| 9. Flag style mug | $14 |     |
| 10. Matching plate | $12 |     |
| 11. Bone China mug | $20 |     |
| 12. Matching plate | $12 |     |
| 13. Rugby mug (Bone China) | $22 |     |
| 14. Place mats (box of 6) | $22 |     |
| 15. Glass coasters (box of 4) | $26 |     |
| 16. Crystal wine goblet (hand engraved) | $25 |     |
| 17. Champagne flutes | $12 |     |

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<td>18. Sports bag</td>
<td>$35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Picnic rug (polar fleece)</td>
<td>$35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Ladies silk scarf</td>
<td>$60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Anodised coasters (box of 6)</td>
<td>$26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Wool scarf (100% merino wool)</td>
<td>$44</td>
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</table>
| 23. Lion cotton tshirt
   Adults 30/31/32/34/36/38/40 Size
   Children's sizes 4/6/8/10/12 Size | $18
   $16 |     |
| 24. Navy cotton polo 30/32/34/36/38/40 Size | $35 |     |
| 25. Navy Cotton Tshirt - quadrangle 30/32/34/36/38/40 Size | $22 |     |
| 26. Clocktower coasters (box of 6) | $15 |     |
| 27. Navy cotton shirty 30/32/34/36/38/40 Size | $22 |     |
| 28. Navy jumper (80% acrylic wool) 30/32/34/36/38/40 Size | $19 |     |
| 29. University of Sydney Architecture | $40 |     |
| 30. The Great Hall Guide | $9 |     |
| 31. Correspondence card - Simon Fieldhouse | $3.50 |     |
| 32. Graduation bear (faculty colours) | $45 |     |
| 33. Graduation lion (faculty colours) | $55 |     |
| 34. Papiermache (hand engraved crystal) | $25 |     |

Total price/products (DM GST included*)

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<th>Product</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postage and Packaging</td>
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GRAND TOTAL

*Cost of postage and packaging (P&P) is calculated and added to the total cost of the items.

Guide to postage and packing:

Australia: Inter Sydney and interstate Parcels under 250g – $6, up to 500g – $9, up to 1kg – $11
Sydney metropolitan: Under 250g – $6, over 250g – $9
To register/insure: $3 for the first $100, plus $2 per $100 thereafter
Overseas: Parcels under 250g – $10–$15, up to 500g – $18–$25, up to 1kg – $25–$40
Before consignment: Where available the fee is $9 for the first $100, plus $2.50 per $100 thereafter

Please tick if you wish to register/insure the parcel (the University Gift Shop cannot accept responsibility for uninsured goods).

Visit our website to view our complete range of products including exclusive jewellery.
When this series of small but punch-packing books began appearing in bookshops in 2008, the attention they attracted was as gaudy as their rainbow array of covers. The attention was also largely predictable.

Germaine Greer (MA '63, DLitt '05) wrote thoughtfully about what she sees as the unspoken and deep-seated rage in Aboriginal men being a profound factor in indigenous social ills (poor health, alcoholism, domestic violence). It was a typically provocative argument, which generated typically choleric responses. It was obvious that few of her critics had actually read the essay before taking a blunderbuss to their favourite agent provocateur. But, of course, that never stops anyone when it comes to Greer.

David Malouf (DLitt '98), on the other hand, was accorded the slightly puzzled deference due a writer whose name is speculatively linked, from time to time, with the Nobel Prize for Literature. And deference due a writer, who everyone thinks they should read, must definitely have on the shelf, but that's as far as it goes.

Anne Summers (PhD '79) had the misfortune to be published after the first flush of media attention had waned (about two weeks) and this is a pity. Hers is the best of the series so far – in my view – and should be widely read. Rather like Donald Horne's off-misquoted (and mis-remembered) “lucky country” epithet, Summers's view of luck in the Australian context is double-edged and dangerous.

Americans, she writes, have enshrined the right to happiness, while Australians want the right to pursue luck – and its concomitant fantasies and ultimate ruin.

We want to think of ourselves as lucky, she writes, “it accords with the sentimental view we have of ourselves … Perhaps because we have always secretly harboured the fear that Australia Felix is a self-reinforcing myth … we seized upon Donald Horne's term as if it were a life raft, and we have floated, more or less comfortably, upon it for the past forty-odd years.”

More than that, “Financial planners bemoan the fact that many Australians are ready to spend as much as $60 a week on lottery tickets yet are unwilling to invest a third of that on their retirement.”

Summers's analysis of “luck” is clear-eyed and wide-ranging. She starts with The Fortunes Of Richard Mahony and ends with Cathy Freeman at the Sydney Olympics. She observes that we have been able to grow and take inspiration from hardship throughout modern Australian history while riding on the merry notion of “she’ll be right”, which detracts from the reality of hard work and courage, which is the real backbone of Australian society.

“We can draw strength from sorrow, affirmation from adversity,” Summers writes. “If we can do it with tragedies, why can't we do it with other things? … our economy, our infrastructure, our creative industries. Stop chancing our arm and start plotting a course. If we stopped rolling the dice, and took our future into our own hands, imagine.”

Some 10 years after his official retirement from the University, former students fondly and respectfully recall Professor Fletcher as an inspiring and provoking proponent of history and its teaching. This book could only confirm that view. It's an exhaustively researched history of the man and the times that gave us the landmark building and its treasure trove of books and other documents.

If that sounds dry or daunting: don't be put off. Fletcher's writing is lively and his scholarship is lightly worn and beautifully tailored.

David Scott Mitchell's collection of books, maps, manuscripts and other material relating to Australia and the Pacific region was nearly lost to posterity on a number of occasions. Political indifference, chicanery and stupidity abound and Fletcher's eye for detail and nose for a cracking good tale are put to great use.

Scott Mitchell and his peers come alive in the book, as does Sydney as it began to have ideas about itself in the 1890s and around the turn of the 20th century. Magnificent Obsession lifts the veil of everyday unknowing so that you'll never walk past or into the Library in the same way again.
The first thing you notice about Trish Fallon is she's tall. Very tall. She stands at 190cm, or 6'3” in the old measure. It partly explains why she represented her country in basketball for so long. Height plus talent goes a long way. "Being tall, that really helped me a lot,” she laughs. The former Australian Opals and Sydney University Flames player didn’t even play basketball until she was a teenager. Her family – from Geelong – had produced a long line of tennis players. Fallon was a talented athlete and it didn’t just seem a logical decision for her to follow in the family’s footsteps, it seemed the only one. "We all ended up playing tennis,” Fallon says. “I started playing when I was six or seven and we travelled around the state and interstate playing tournaments.” It was when her tennis career peaked at age 14 and her game was no longer improving that Fallon took to the basketball court at the local YMCA, where her mother worked. Within two years she had shown enough potential to earn a place at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra. More than 200 international games later, Fallon has more than a few standout memories from a remarkable career. She won three Olympic medals with the Opals – a bronze in the 1996 games in Atlanta, silver at the Sydney games in 2000, and silver when she captained the team at Athens in 2004. “Yeah, I guess they’d be up there,” she says. “But when I received the medals, they weren’t the best part of the Olympic Games. It’s more the experience of the two weeks being there… you’re sharing something really special with a lot of people.” Her time playing in the United States with WNBA teams Minnesota and Phoenix also rates a mention. “If you can cut it over there you can cut it anywhere,” she says. “The USA, just with their own players, is very...
strong. Then you throw in a lot of international players… they just make it the best league in the world. It's where everyone aims to go.”

Fallon played the 1999 season with Minnesota Lynx, missed the 2000 season because of commitments to the Australian team, then returned to play the 2001 season with Phoenix Mercury. She also played extensively throughout Europe at various stages in her career.

Pressed to name the best player she has come across, she nominates fellow Australian Lauren Jackson, now the Opals captain and the player many call the Michael Jordan of the women’s game.

“She’s the best in the world for sure,” Fallon says. “She’s a freak, really. She’s just that one in a million that comes through every now and then and makes everything look really easy.”

Off court, Fallon is now Operations Manager with the Sydney University Flames, the team she spent much of her career with. When she describes what the role involves it is hard to believe she has much time for anything else.

“The list goes a mile long,” she laughs. “I get everything organised for game day, I service sponsors, I service the board, organise all the promotional work, liaise with our travel organisers to make sure they’ve got the flights all in place – it just goes on and on and on.”

The 2008/09 season is a tricky one too because the Flames are in a transition period and, after several seasons of great success, their current form (at time of going to press) is “inconsistent”. Despite being one of the two teams to beat the high-flying Canberra Capitals, the Flames have also had disappointing losses.

Fallon says that is to be expected from a young and relatively inexperienced squad. “We’ve had a huge change from last year so we’ve lost a lot of experience,” she says. “Not having a lot of experience in the team, week to week, you don’t really know what you’re going to get.”

With the exception of captain Alicia Poto, the Flames are now all under 25.

“They’re learning on their own, which is why their season’s really up and down,” Fallon says. “They’re still learning that every game’s a big game. They go out and play hard but it just doesn’t always fall into place because of the lack of experience. Most of these girls are 19, 20 and 21.”

It’s for that reason that Fallon and the Flames are looking forward to the next few seasons as a young but talented squad begins to gel with more games under its belt.

“They’ve come a long way in one year,” Fallon says. “I think Karen [Flames coach Karen Dalton] is looking at a long term program as opposed to just trying to win everything this year. It’s more a three to five year goal of developing the core players that we have.”

While success on the court is still a work in progress, the Flames are already a well-performing entity away from it. The club is financially strong, has the support of several major sponsors and attracts enthusiastic crowds to its home games.

“We’ve generated some good interest and had good crowds,” Fallon says. “We actually need more seating, that would be nice.”

It is reassuring that the Flames are performing well, given the situation in which their male counterparts find themselves. NBL team Sydney Kings folded with debts of $1.5 million at the end of the 2007/08 season and are no longer in the competition, having been the face of men’s basketball in Sydney for 20 years.

And the future of Sydney Spirit, previously the West Sydney Razorbacks, looks murky. While they will play out the rest of the 2008/09 season thanks to an NBL rescue package, it is unclear whether there will be a Sydney men’s team after that.

Fallon likens professional basketball’s situation in Australia to that of soccer several years ago. The National Soccer League was a floundering competition that was failing to capture the public’s interest. Funds and crowds were both low. The response from soccer’s administrators was a rejuvenated competition in the form of the A League, and the game has moved ahead since.

“Maybe it ends up being like soccer where they have to stop for a year, restructure the whole thing, make sure it’s done properly, and start again,” Fallon says.

But according to Fallon, basketball certainly has cause for optimism at grass roots level.

“We’ve got heaps of kids playing, there’s no problem there. But you’ve got to have something there for them to look forward to so they can set goals,” she says. “If they don’t have a team there and the league’s falling apart, we’ll lose these kids to other sports.”

The good news is that the WNBL is in good shape. Rather than losing teams, the women’s league welcomed new team Logan Thunder from Queensland at the start of the 2008/09 season.

“We’re not a big money program so it’s easier for sponsors to stay on board, or for us to find new sponsors to come in and not spend a lot of money,” Fallon says. “The women’s league is really strong.”
After graduating he worked in mixed dairy-based country practice in Warragul Vic until retiring to part time work in 2000, and finally fully retiring at the end of 2007. He has been heavily involved in the deer farming industry in West Gippsland, also as a pig veterinarian for the whole of eastern Victoria for many years, and finally as a piggery Quality Assurance facilitator. Since then he has worked for Game Council NSW on their new Hunter Education Handbook and for the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) of New York.

This latter project was focussed on a Mongolian white-tailed gazelle commercial harvesting model based on the Australian Game Standards and the Kangaroo field harvesting protocol. The project included a field pilot harvest with the essential sanction of the Mongolian Ministry for Nature. The project was an offshoot of the current UN-sponsored Eastern Steppe Biodiversity Program. WCS were attempting to control hunting pressures by introducing population census and the formulation of sustainable quotas, coupled with carcass value-adding through quality control on harvesting methods. Opportunist collection of gazelle blood samples obtained during this pilot harvest shed important light on the local 2002 Foot and Mouth disease outbreak. Results have been published in the *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* in 2006. Antibodies to the 2002 FMD virus were positively identified in 67 per cent of these gazelle, which had been exposed to local infected cattle herds. The gazelle were not considered a threat as a FMD vector.

As an Honorary Research Assistant at the Sydney Vet School, he has recently assisted with a Vet Student Firearms Elective, introduced by Dr Paul Hopwood PhD, and has himself introduced a similar but voluntary firearms proficiency course for Melbourne Veterinary undergraduates with the support of the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Vic). These students, of predominantly urban origin, were thus familiarised with the use of firearms for humane livestock destruction and given expertise to carry out or advise on humane pest animal control using firearms.

He is presently external lecturer in Deer Medicine at the University of Melbourne Veterinary School, Werribee and has also conducted various studies on the biology of wild hog deer on Sunday Island, Vic and sambar deer in the Victorian Eastern Divide, over the years, contributing significantly to the previous scant knowledge on these species in Australia. Both these wild deer species were found to rarely harbour disease or significant parasite burdens.

Present pursuits are bush camping, hunting large and small game, competitive clay target shooting, lure and fly fishing and kayaking. Lecturing on large game field dressing and carcass recovery at a local annual deer hunter education course, conducted by the Australian Deer Association as well as engaging in freelance journalism to five different national hunting magazines (mainly with educational objectives) fills in any gaps, besides spending family time with his wife Gabrielle, four grown daughters and his three grandchildren. Who says retirement becomes boring?

Photo: Dr Matt Draisma with a Mongolian Game Ranger
DR KIERAN F LIM (Lim Pak Kwan) (BSc (Hons) ’85, PhD ’89) is currently Associate Professor and director of the forensic science degree program in the School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Science and Technology at Deakin University. In December 2008, the Royal Australian Chemical Institute awarded me the Division of Chemical Education Medal, which is the Division’s highest award, presented for a combination of chemical education research, teaching, and promotion of chemistry.

STEPHEN MAHER (BA ’88) majored in History. Recently promoted to general manager Colgate-Palmolive Walmart Team based in Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA. Prior to this assignment I worked variously in Australia, New Zealand, China, Vietnam, Switzerland/western Europe and now USA. I am married and have two boys. After graduation, I attained an Officer’s Commission in the Australian Army and served on secondment to the New Zealand army. Also attended the Tuck University Global 2020 Program.

JANETTE PELOSÍ (BA (Hons) ’85) double-majored in History before post-graduate training in librarianship and archives administration. She has worked for State Records (the NSW State archives authority) since 1990 where she is currently Assistant Senior Archivist, Context and Documentation, writing administrative history for its catalogue, Archives Investigator. She is a professional member of the Professional Historians Association.

1970s

GRAHAM KEEN (BSc ’72) has taken up a two-year appointment as Business Manager for Global Interaction (Australian Baptist Mission) in Malawi. Pam and he have left five grown children and a grand-daughter in Melbourne and Broadford. The mission is a whole-life ministry to the Moslem Yao (Yawo) people group, a minority and disadvantaged rural people in Malawi and Mozambique.

JACQUELINE THALIS (MA Hons ’79) plus three degrees from the University of Clermont, France; major in philosophy 1945-49. After teaching in public secondary schools in NSW for 28 years, I took up a part-time position at the Lycee Condorcet in Sydney and taught French Literature and Philosophy for 10 years, as well as teaching French and Spanish at TAFE until 2008. Two sons have completed degrees at the University, in spite of financial problems. I hope I’ll leave some money to help my four grandchildren to gain tertiary qualifications also on these uncertain times.

1960s

FREDERICK IMPERIAL (BSc ’69) is retired and living in Las Vegas, after doing consultancy work in the Philippines for 10 years. I now have a blog: www.realitiedeconomy.typepad.com. It discusses current issues of the American as well as the global economy.

1950s

Emeritus Professor JOHN R FAUST
I was a Fulbright Scholar to Australia in 1953-54, staying at St Andrew’s College. My co-authored textbook China in World Politics 1st edition, 1995, 2nd edition, 2005, was published in the Korean language in Seoul, Korea, in 2008. I retired from the Political Science Department of Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois in 1978. My year in Australia was one of the best years of my life.

JOHN FORBES (BA ’56 LLB ’59 LLM ’71) at graduation I was Associate to a Justice of the High Court. From 1960-67 I was a partner in a city law firm in Brisbane. In 1968 I was appointed Senior Lecturer in Law at the University of Queensland and subsequently Reader in Law. In September 1958 I was married to Anne Frances nee Leader; we have two sons and a daughter. The latter is a senior officer in the office of the Queensland Children’s Guardian. One son is a partner in Malleson’s, Sydney and the other a partner in a national law firm, based in Brisbane. I have published a book on the organization of the Australian legal profession, two texts on the law of evidence (one currently in its 7th edition) and one on Resources law. My wife was one of the first two women to practise for a substantial time (20 years) at the Queensland bar and is now a State tribunal member. I act as a consultant to a national law firm.

In the 1950s I was a member of the SU Cricket Club and a senior NSW rugby referee. I was a 1st grade referee in Queensland for 20 years and controlled a number of interstate and international fixtures.

Professor OWEN M PHILLIPS (BSc ’52) the most recent book is due to be published by Cambridge University Press in February 2009. Entitled Geologic Fluid Dynamics, Subterranean Flow and Reactions, it is concerned with the dispersion of dissolved contaminants in ground water in fractures, porous media, and the chemical reactions between the contaminants and the matrix. Phillips is supposed to be retired, but is currently working on “air spikes” – fugitive images from high-resolution radar, whose origin is unknown.
17 March
Graduate Connections Breakfast
With Allan Moss AO [BA ’71 LLB ’74] former CEO of The Macquarie Group, speaking frankly on “What’s going on in financial markets?”
Swissôtel Sydney, Blaxland Ballroom
Level 8, 68 Market Street
7.15–8.45 am
Cost: $45 Alumni/$50 non-alumni
($320 – table of 8)
Register:
www.usyd.edu.au/alumni/event or
call Sarah Portelli (02) 9036 9278 or
email rsvp@usyd.edu.au

26 March
The Beauty Queen of Leenan
Written by Martin McDonough, the play is a Tony award winner, funny and tragic, starring Maggie Blinco.
Downstairs Theatre,
Seymour Theatre Centre
Alumni Theatre Party: enjoy a drink and canapes before the show and the chance to meet the cast afterwards, at an all-inclusive reduced ticket price of $28.
Book: (02) 9351 7940
(say you saw the offer in SAM)

7 April
Sydney Ideas: Did the Buddha invent Asia?
“Buddhism, Buddhists and the ‘very idea’ of Asia”
Lecture by Peter Skilling, Ecole Francaise d’Extrieur-Orient, Bangkok and Paris and 2009 Sydney University Buddhist Education Foundation Visiting Professor
Seymour Theatre Centre
$20/$15 Concession
Book: (02) 9351 7940 or
www.seymour.usyd.edu.au/boxoffice

NOW TO DECEMBER
WS Macleay and the Natural History Circle
Macleay’s Horae Entomologicae (1819-21) was read by the rising young naturalists of the day including the most promising: Charles Darwin.
The exhibition commemorates the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin’s On The Origin Of Species.
Macleay Museum
Phone (02) 9036 5253 for opening times and other programs.

22 April
Sydney Ideas: Barack and Michelle Obama: Rewriting the Narrative of American History
(Co-presented with the US Studies Centre and School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry)
Distinguished presidential scholar Annette Gordon-Reed, Professor of Law at New York Law School and a Professor of History at Rutgers, puts American race relations in a historical context, with an emphasis on Thomas Jefferson’s complicated relationship with African Americans.
Seymour Theatre Centre
$20/$15 Concession
Book: (02) 9351 7940 or
www.seymour.usyd.edu.au/boxoffice

30 April
Opening of the Law School Building
Celebrate the official opening of the new Sydney Law school building with tours of the building, the library and Faculty centres and Institutes.
Students and staff will also offer demonstration lectures, moot courts and “soap box debates”. Live music and a free BBQ throughout the day.
The event is open to all alumni and the public.
The Sydney Law School Building, Camperdown Campus
10am–3.00pm, Free
For more information:
Melissa Burney (02) 9351 0259 or
email mburney@usyd.edu.au

6 May
Music and the Cosmos
Celebrate the International Year of Astronomy: the Sydney Science Forum and Sydney Conservatorium of Music present a special event of celestial-inspired music, performed by the Conservatorium’s chamber ensemble, and take a journey across the cosmos with images and commentary by astronomers from the School of Physics.
The Great Hall 6-8pm, Free
RSVP: Trixie Barretto (02) 9351 3021
email: ssf@science.usyd.edu.au

Sydney Ideas: 350: The Most Important Number in the World
In this exclusive lecture, the US’s leading environmental writer and best-selling author of The End of Nature and Deep Economy, Bill McKibben, will talk about how climate science and climate politics are quickly evolving and his role as an activist in the US. The Vice-Chancellor will launch Sydney Ideas at this key event.
Verbrughen Hall, Sydney Conservatorium of Music
$25/$15 Concession
Book: (02) 9351 7940 or
www.seymour.usyd.edu.au/boxoffice

9 May
Sydney University Graduate Choir
The Choir and soloists perform Mendelssohn’s Oratorio Elijah
The Great Hall
9 May (8pm), 10 May (3pm)
$40/$20 [subscribers]
Tickets: (02) 9351 7940 or
www.seymour.usyd.edu.au

14 May
Inside Out
The play at the centre of the cover story! [See page 24]
Alumni theatre parties enjoy a drink and canapes before the show and the chance to meet the cast afterwards
All-inclusive ticket price of $32.
Book: (02) 9351 7940
(say you saw the offer in SAM)

2 June
Sydney Ideas: Torture & Democracy
Darius Rejali, Professor of Political Science at Reed College, USA, is an internationally recognised expert on government torture and interrogation. He outlines how, as the 20th century progressed, democracies not only tortured, but set the international pace for torture.
Seymour Theatre Centre
$20/$15 Concession
Book: (02) 9351 7940 or
www.seymour.usyd.edu.au/boxoffice

Save the Date
Spring Back to Sydney 2009 reunion Saturday 19 September
All alumni are welcome to attend.
Celebrate with family and fellow alumni at this all day event.
Great Hall 150th Anniversary, son et lumiere 25–27 September
A weekend of celebration with guided tours through the Great Hall historical tours and “soap box debates”. Live music and variety shows. The Conservatorium’s chamber ensemble, and take a journey across the cosmos with images and commentary by astronomers from the School of Physics.
The Great Hall 6-8pm, Free
RSVP: Trixie Barretto (02) 9351 3021
email: ssf@science.usyd.edu.au

Sydney Ideas: Deep Economy
2009 Bestselling Author and leading environmental writer Bill McKibben discusses Deep Economy, a thought-provoking vision of the future. McKibben argues that the world is on the brink of runaway financial collapse that could lead to a deep economic depression unless we act now to stop the financial madness. McKibben discusses the need for a deep economic depression as the only way for society to recover.
The Great Hall 6-8pm, Free
RSVP: Trixie Barretto (02) 9351 3021
email: ssf@science.usyd.edu.au

Sydney Ideas: The 350 Project
The 350 Project is a global, grassroots movement to put the international pace for climate science and climate politics back in the hands of people and their governments. It is the first and only global movement to place a specific number at the centre of the debate on climate change – the number 350.
The Great Hall 6-8pm, Free
RSVP:Trixie Barretto (02) 9351 3021
email: ssf@science.usyd.edu.au

SAM Autumn 09
Could a BMW X5 3.0sd really be the best value car in its class? Wheels magazine certainly thinks so.

The BMW X5 3.0sd might not be the obvious choice for fuel efficiency, but at 8.8l* per 100km, it actually rivals many smaller sedans.

What’s more, in the recent Gold Star Cars report, Wheels magazine analysed many of the hidden costs of ownership looking at factors like resale value, fuel economy, insurance premiums, finance costs, warranty and servicing. Outstandingly, the BMW X5 3.0sd came first in the “Medium SUVs” category. Proof indeed that sometimes the more expensive choices can also offer the best value.

**Visit your nearest BMW Dealer and discover the power of its economy.**

*Based upon combined driving test cycle from ADR 81/01.

**BMW Sydney**
RUSHCUTTERS BAY
65 Craigend Street
Phone: 02 9334 4855
www.bmwsydney.com.au

**BMW Sydney**
NORTH SHORE
676 Pacific Highway Chatswood
Phone: 02 9334 4855
www.bmwsydney.com.au

**Trivett Classic**
PARRAMATTA
40-52 Church Street
Phone: 02 9841 9095
www.trivettclassicbmw.com.au

**Col Crawford Motors**
BROOKVALE
497 Pittwater Road
Phone: 02 9941 1290
www.colcrawford.bmw.com.au

**Canterbury BMW**
CANTERBURY
376-384 Canterbury Road
Phone: 02 9784 8856
www.canterburybmw.com.au

**Sylvania BMW**
SYLVANIA
101-107 Princes Highway
Phone: 02 8543 5459
www.sylvaniabmw.com.au
ONE special reason to visit India in 2009

Any time is a good time to visit the Land of the Tiger. But there is no time like now.

ONE unforgettable holiday with someone special and a bouquet of never-before benefits
ONE complimentary air-ticket • ONE complimentary sightseeing tour in a city of your choice
ONE day’s complimentary stay in your hotel • ONE complimentary Rural-Eco holiday