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## The Bulletin 481

### April 2024

#### Editor's Note

This edition of the Bulletin has been reissued to correct an omission relating to the outcomes of the Master Planning process in the President's Report. We apologise for this oversight. There are no other changes to the content.

#### In this newsletter:

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### A message from the President

Dear <<First Name>> <<Last Name>>

Many of you attended the Society's Annual Dinner and Awards Presentations in the Strangers' Room of Parliament House Macquarie Street on Friday, 1 March 2024. Our patron, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, attended along with 220 other guests. The photographs and comments speak for themselves. Here is one — *By any measure, the dinner was spectacularly successful. I really enjoyed seeing people engage with one another and, despite his poor health, Saul Griffith was a brilliant speaker.*



Someone who should be singled out for special attention is Selena Griffith for her truly original flower arrangements, which were the perfect creative marriage of Science and the Arts. Selena sent me her explanation of the symbolism of the flowers which is not recorded elsewhere. *Historically plants have held symbolic significance in many cultures. In*



*preparing for the centre pieces for the annual dinner I researched and compiled plants that*

would suit the RSNSW event. I used the test tube racks to reference the scientific nature of the organisation. In the centre tube was a Pineapple and a Scotch Thistle. The pineapple plant symbolises a cheerful welcome and a warm reception. At the height of the Russian empire, the festival season would start the day the first pineapple arrived from the exotic east and finish the day it collapsed in on itself. Hence many silver pineapple centrepieces used to decorate formal tables. I think everyone felt warmly received at the event. The Thistle symbolised devotion, bravery, determination, and strength. Alludes to the Scottish origins used to inform the foundations of the RSNSW. All good qualities of seekers and holders of knowledge. Pepper symbolises clarity of thinking and was paired with Kangaroo paw flowers, or *Anigozanthos*, which are associated with the idea of uniqueness and individuality. Pink gerberas symbolise purity, cheerfulness and loyalty. Burgundy Dahlia flower meanings include inner strength, dignity, and kindness. Green Chrysanthemum – long life and rebirth – matching the themes explored in the after-dinner speech.

I reiterate the Society's gratitude to Council member Pamela Griffith, Chair of the Dinner Committee and who I denoted our Dinner Artist, her husband, Ross Griffith our Dinner Engineer, and the other members of the Committee, Kathy Belov, Marian Kernahan, and Joanna Mendelssohn.

Five days later, John Bell AO OBE enthralled our in-person and live-streaming audience during his presentation on *Shakespeare on politics – what can we learn at Ideas@theHouse*, now available on our [YouTube channel](#). Once again, the tributes flowed. Robert Marks will be publishing Her Excellency's, John Bell's, and my remarks in the Society's Journal and Proceedings.

You should be aware by now that thanks to our Webmaster, Lindsay Botten, our website features a [Gallery](#) of photographs taken at each event for you to peruse and download.

On 13 March, we celebrated our 2023 RSNSW Postgraduate and Early Career Research winners at a unique event hosted by Western Sydney University at its Parramatta South Campus, the Old Female Orphan School. The winners' short presentations and Q&A were facilitated by renowned journalist and broadcaster, Robyn Williams AM FRSN FAA, who will publish interviews stemming from this event on his ABC Science Show soon after Easter.

March has also been intense for the Council as it met frequently after accepting the final RSNSW Master Plan report and all ten recommendations from Poetic Thinking. The recommendations are to:

1. *Establish and manage the RSNSW Foundation and implement a capital-raising strategy*
2. *Create university partners or partner tiers*
3. *Continue to establish and enhance regional branches*
4. *Engage in conversation with First Nations peoples to include their perspectives and knowledge*
5. *Expand member tiers and undertake a member drive*
6. *Improve event variety, ambience, and interactions*
7. *Reframe the Council as facilitating volunteers*
8. *Plan for succession (and in the long term build the Society to support a 1x FTE Executive and 0.5x FTE Executive Assistant)*
9. *Enact a digital content strategy*

10. *Optimise communication channels to generate engagement, membership, and revenue.*

If you are interested in reading the full report, please get in touch with me.

The Council has translated the recommendations into five implementation plans structured around the headings: what, who, when, where, why, and how. They are:

1. *Royal Society of New South Wales Future Fund*
2. *Activities with Impact*
3. *Effective Communication*
4. *Member Engagement*
5. *Operational Excellence*

Each of the plans has a nominated leader but needs many more members to come forward to contribute their expertise and energy to successful implementation. If you are one of these members, wanting to make certain that the Society is contemporary, progressive, and relevant, please get in touch with me. We live in turbulent times driven by worldwide megatrends such as de-globalisation, de-carbonisation and digitalisation. We must play our part in projecting the Society's full potential and identity within its sphere of influence.

We now head towards the Annual General Meetings of each of our Branches and the Society as a whole. The [157th AGM](#) for the Society will be held on 17 April in the State Library of New South Wales after the electronic ballot, asking members to vote on procedural matters, including confirmation of the 2023 Annual Report, and the election of Council members, closes at noon on 15 April. I look forward to seeing as many members as possible at the AGM.

The [Annual Report](#) recounts and acknowledges the work of all Council and Committee members during the past year. Our work has clearly driven dividends in terms of the increased presence of the Society across New South Wales and beyond. Thank you all for generously volunteering your expertise and time to make the past 12 months so successful.

The AGM will be followed immediately by an Ordinary General Meeting that features Peter Shergold and Kristy Muir in conversation about the fragility of democratic governance under the title "[Putting the 'Civil' back in Civil Society](#)".

We work for the Society because we understand the need to enhance public discourse on a wide range of topics that are crucial to our future. Society members have excellent ideas to contribute. In that spirit, I look forward to hearing your ideas and suggested ways to bring them to fruition.

Susan Pond AM FRSN FTSE FAHMS  
[President, Royal Society of NSW](#)

## For your diary

- [Western NSW Branch Meeting 2024-2](#) (Wednesday, 10 April, 4.00 – 5.00 pm AEST, Port Macquarie campus — Building 802, Room 2330/7, Major Innes Road — Charles Sturt University and live-streaming), *Out of Africa Arabia: how ancient*

*human history gave us modern lifestyle diseases*, Professor Alan Cooper, Professor of Evolution and Environmental Change, Charles Sturt University

- [157th Annual General Meeting and 1320th Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture](#) (Wednesday, 17 April, 5.30 for 6.00–8.00 pm AEST, Metcalfe Theatre, State Library of New South Wales, Macquarie Street, Sydney), *Putting the 'Civil' Back in Civil Society*, Emeritus Professor Peter Shergold AC FRSN FASSA, Vice-President, Royal Society of NSW and Professor Kristy Muir, CEO, Paul Ramsey Foundation, in conversation
- [Southern Highlands Branch Meetings 2024-3](#) (Thursday, 18 April, 6.30 pm AEST, RSL Mittagong, Carrington Room), *Webb's Wondrous Window on the Universe*, Professor Fred Watson AM, Astronomer-at-Large, Australian Government
- [1321st Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture](#) (Wednesday, 1 May, 6.30 – 8.00 pm AEST, Zoom webinar), *Brain Health Equity – a new frontier for healthy longevity*, Scientia Professor Kaarin Anstey FRSN FASSA FAHMS, Deputy Director, ARC Centre of Excellence for Population Ageing, Neuroscience Australia, UNSW Sydney
- [Joint RSNSW and State Library of NSW Special Event: May 2024](#) (Friday, 3 May, 3.00 – 4.00 pm AEST, Maps Room, Mitchell Building, State Library of NSW, Shakespeare Place, Sydney), *On the history of Russian conflict with Ukraine*, Emeritus Professor Dennis Reinhartz, University of Texas, Arlington, in conversation with Emeritus Professor Robert Clancy AM FRSN
- [1322th Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture](#) (Wednesday, 5 June, 6.00 for 6.30–8.00 pm AEST, Metcalfe Theatre, State Library of New South Wales, Macquarie Street, Sydney), *RNA and me: from the origins of life and nanomedicine to building an RNA ecosystem*, Professor Pall Thordason FRSN, Director, UNSW RNA Institute, UNSW Sydney

The Society's complete events program for the year is published in the [online Events Calendar](#), which is updated regularly.

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## News

### Recent Events on YouTube: March 2024

Most face-to-face events and all online events conducted by the Royal Society of New South Wales are recorded and made available for subsequent viewing on our YouTube channel: [youtube.com/royalsocnsw](https://youtube.com/royalsocnsw).

Three events have been posted to YouTube from late February into early March 2024.

On 21 February, an audience of more than 60 people attended the 2024 Annual Meeting of the Four Societies (Australian Institute of Energy, the Australian Nuclear Association, Engineers Australia, and the Royal Society of NSW) in the Metcalfe Theatre of the State Library of NSW on 21 February 2024. They were treated to an outstanding presentation and a lively discussion

**New YouTube  
Recordings**

ROYAL  
SOCIETY  
NEW SOUTH WALES

[youtube.com/royalsocnsw](https://youtube.com/royalsocnsw)

on [“Resilience before Readiness — ‘... for the want of a horseshoe nail’”](#), delivered by **Vince Di Pietro AM CSC FRSN**, former Commodore, Royal Australian Navy, and former CEO of Lockheed-Martin Australia. A recording of his presentation is [now available on YouTube](#).

On 28 February, the Western NSW Branch of the Society, in collaboration with Charles Sturt University, presented a lecture by **Professor Shokoofeh Shamsi**, Professor of Veterinary Parasitology in the CSU Gulbali Institute of Agriculture, Water, and Environment, titled [“Parasites, Australia's silent threat: coincidence, nature's hand, or policy complacency.”](#) The recording of this presentation is [now available on YouTube](#).

Most recently, on the evening of Wednesday, 6 March, the ninth in the series of Ideas@theHouse events — joint presentations of Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC, Governor of New South Wales, and the Royal Society of New South Wales — was held in the Ballroom of Government House Sydney. Acclaimed actor and theatre director, **John Bell AO OBE**, the Founder and former Artistic Director of Bell Shakespeare, presented [“Shakespeare on politics — what can we learn”](#) to a face-to-face audience of approximately 100 people, which included Society members and invited guests including students from NSW universities, together with an online audience. In an erudite, thought-providing, and highly entertaining talk, Dr Bell presented a brief survey of the political scenarios in Shakespeare's plays — Tragedies, Histories, and even the Comedies in the context of these three questions. He discussed how do Shakespeare's observations resonate with us now, and what can we take from them to confront the dilemmas we face today? A recording of this presentation is [now available on YouTube](#).

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## RSNSW Council Elections 2024

Voting in the RSNSW Council Elections for 2024 will commence on Monday 25 March at noon and will continue for three weeks, closing at noon on Monday 15 April. This precedes the Society's 157th Annual General Meeting, to be held in the Metcalfe Theatre of the State Library of NSW, commencing at 6.00 pm AEDT on 17 April.

Full members of the Society, i.e., Members, Fellows, and Distinguished Fellows, who are financial as of 31 March are eligible to vote in the electronic ballot and should have received an email from Election Buddy at approximately noon on Monday, 25 March. If you are a financial member of the Society who is eligible to vote and have not received an electronic ballot by now, please contact the [Elections Coordinator by email](#).

Prior to writing, please check the 'junk' or 'spam' folders of your email client.

The ballot comprises procedural business and the elections of five Ordinary Councillors (from a field of six nominees) who will serve for a two-year term, commencing at the close of the AGM. For the position of Treasurer, there was only a single nominee who will be declared elected at the AGM.



**Council  
Elections  
2024**

**25 March–15 April**



[Further information about the ballot and the AGM](#) can be found on the website event notice, and in this issue of *The Bulletin*.

We look forward to seeing as many members as possible at the AGM, and at the following Ordinary General Meeting at which Professors Peter Shergold AC FRSN and Kristy Muir will engage in a lively discussion on “[Putting the ‘Civil’ back in Civil Society](#)”.

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## Events

### Western NSW Branch Meeting 2024-2

**Out of Africa Arabia: how ancient human history gave us modern lifestyle diseases**

**Professor Alan Cooper**

**Professor of Evolution and Environmental Change, Gulbali Institute  
Charles Sturt University**



**Date:** Wednesday, 10 April 2024, 4.00 — 5.00 pm (AEST)

**Venue:** Port Macquarie Campus (Building 802, Room 2330/7, Major Innes Road), Charles Sturt University and live-streaming

**Entry:** No charge

**Registration:** [Registration through Humanitix](#) is required

**All are welcome**

**Please register now**

*This meeting is a joint presentation of Charles Sturt University and the Western NSW Branch of the Royal Society of NSW.*

**Summary:** As modern Humans moved Out of Africa and around the world just 55,000 years ago, they were forced to rapidly adapt to multiple new environments. As a result, humans are a great model animal system to study rapid genetic adaptation to climate change. DNA from ancient human skeletons (dating back as far as 46,000 years) shows how and when we moved Out of Africa and around the world, and how the critical step was a major phase of genetic selection for cold. Surprisingly, this appears to have occurred during a long unknown period when we were trapped in the Arabian Peninsula. During this ‘Arabian Standstill’ from around 80-55,000 years ago, major networks of genes involved in the regulation of fat, nerves, and skin all changed. Related genes were also incorporated from Neandertals, with whom we interbred just as we left Arabia. Surprisingly, many of these same genes are now associated with major modern diseases, from autism

to obesity and cardiovascular disease, heralding a brand new field — evolutionary medicine.

**Alan Cooper** is the Professor of Evolution and Environmental Change at Charles Sturt University, Albury. His multi-disciplinary research integrates genomics, climate and environmental change, bioinformatics and mathematics, archaeology, microbiology, palaeontology, and medical sciences and has resulted in over 35 papers in *Nature* and *Science*. He has been centrally involved in the field of ancient DNA since the earliest days, working with Svante Pääbo (Nobel Prize in Physiology/Medicine 2022) and Allan Wilson at UC Berkeley in 1989. He was the inaugural Professor of Ancient Biomolecules at the University of Oxford (2001), and an ARC Federation, Future, and Laureate Fellow at the University of Adelaide from 2005-2020, where he built the Australian Centre for Ancient DNA. He has been the South Australian Scientist of the Year (2016/2017), won a Eureka Prize (2017), and led the multiple award-winning Aboriginal Heritage Project to reconstruct pre-European Aboriginal Australia history using ancient DNA. More information is available at [www.blueskygenetics.com](http://www.blueskygenetics.com).

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## 157th Annual General Meeting and 1320th Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture

**157th Annual General Meeting**

**and**

**1320th Ordinary General Meeting**



**Date:** Wednesday, 17 April 2023, 5.30 pm for 6.00–8.00 pm AEST

**Venue:** Metcalfe Theatre, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney

**Entry:** Members, \$10; Non-members, \$20; Students, \$5

**Registration:** [Registration through Membes](#) is required

**Drinks:** A cash bar will be available in the adjacent Macquarie Room from 5.30 pm

**All are welcome**

[Please click here to register](#)

### Annual General Meeting

Rule 4(c) of the [Society's Rules](#) requires that an Annual General Meeting (AGM) must be held in April of each year.

The [Agenda](#) for this meeting is now available on the [Meetings page](#) of the website.

### Business of the Annual General Meeting

The formal business of the Annual General Meeting, including the election of Council Members, will be conducted via an **electronic ballot** in accordance with Rule 18.

The **ballot** will run from **Monday 25 March 12.00 noon AEDT to Monday 15 April 12.00 noon AEST** and will address:

- Procedural Business:
  - Confirmation of the [Minutes of the 156th Annual General Meeting](#)
  - Confirmation that the [Annual Report of Council and the Financial Statements for 2023](#) be received
  - Confirmation of the proposed Auditors for 2024
  - Voting on a Special Resolution to affect a Rules change proposed by the Council, the intent of which is to make the Editor of the Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW an appointed member of the Council, as described in the [Explanatory Memorandum](#)
- [Election](#) of Office-bearers and Council members, namely the:
  - Ordinary Councillors (5) — from a field of six (6) candidates.

Please note that:

- for the position of Treasurer, only a single nomination was received. Accordingly, this Office-bearer will be declared elected at the AGM without the need for a ballot.

The results of the ballot will be announced at the Annual General Meeting on 17 April 2024 and will be posted on the website on the following day.

### **Election of Office-Bearers and Ordinary Members of Council**

Listed below are the nominations for the incoming Council received by the Secretary by 5.00 pm AEDT on Friday, 8 March 2024.

For those Office-bearer and Councillor roles where there are more nominees than available positions, an election is required. For roles where there are the same number or fewer nominees than there are available positions, the candidates will be declared elected at the AGM without the need for a ballot.

In all cases, candidates have been invited to provide an [optional statement](#) outlining how their expertise and experience fit them for these roles and will benefit the Society. These statements are available through the links below and also are provided as information on the electronic ballot form.

Office/Role	Candidate
Treasurer	<a href="#">Peter Wells FRSN</a>
Councillors	<a href="#">Sean Brawley FRSN</a>
(5 positions)	<a href="#">Sally Cripps FRSN</a>
	<a href="#">Vince Di Pietro AM CSC FRSN</a>
	<a href="#">Medy Hassan OAM FRSN FAIB</a>
	<a href="#">Liz Killen MRSN</a>
	<a href="#">Robert Marks FRSN</a>

### **Ordinary General Meeting**

The Agenda for this meeting and [Minutes of the previous OGM](#) will be available on the [Meetings](#) page of this website.



## Putting the 'Civil' Back in Civil Society

**Emeritus Professor Peter Shergold AC FRSN FASSA**  
**Former Chancellor, Western Sydney University**

and

**Professor Kristy Muir**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Paul Ramsey Foundation**



*The presentation will be preceded by the 157th Annual General Meeting and the 1320th Ordinary General Meeting of the Society. Please note the earlier starting time for the events due to the need to accommodate the formal business of these meetings.*

**Summary:** *A conversation with Professors Kristy Muir and Peter Shergold*

A generation ago, it seemed that democracy was a given.

No longer.

Democratic governance appears fragile, under the threat from authoritarianism, xenophobia, and populism. Trust in political leaders is wavering, thanks to the rise of AI and the increasingly powerful role of social media as a primary news source. In Australia, as elsewhere, public discourse seems riven by increasing social divisiveness and political discord. What's going wrong? Who or what is to blame? What can be done to restore a truly civil society?

Kristy Muir and Peter Shergold will argue across a contested terrain.

*Kristy Muir, a Professor of Social Policy at UNSW, is the CEO of the Paul Ramsay Foundation. Peter Shergold, Deputy President of the RSNSW, is Chair of the James Martin Institute for Public Policy. They previously worked together at the Centre for Social Impact, Kristy as CEO and Peter as Chair.*

**Professor Kristy Muir** is Paul Ramsay Foundation's Chief Executive Officer. She is also a Professor of Social Policy at UNSW Sydney Business School and Chair of Allan & Gill Gray Philanthropy Australasia.

Kristy has worked for more than three decades — as a support worker, academic, collaborator, leader, funder, and board director — with for-purpose organisations that enable children, families, and communities to thrive.

Kristy is a seasoned keynote speaker and internationally recognised leader. She has published widely and has delivered her insights on governance for social impact to hundreds of non-executive directors and CEOs through formal executive education programs. She founded the AGSM Governance for Social Impact course and the [Social Impact Leadership Australia](#) program which she currently teaches to for-purpose CEOs.

Kristy has undertaken more than 100 social impact projects with partners across sectors, including governments, not-for-profits, corporates, social enterprises, academics, and philanthropists. Many of these projects were designed to work alongside families and communities, and they spanned housing, education, employment, social participation, disability, mental health, financial resilience, wellbeing, and the social purpose sector.

Kristy was CEO of the Centre for Social Impact (2017-21), served as an elected academic member of UNSW's Council (2016-2021), and was a non-executive Director of the Community Council of Australia and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People (ARACY). She has a PhD in social history and is a graduate of executive education at Harvard Business School and the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

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## Southern Highlands Branch Meeting 2024-3

### Webb's wondrous window on the Universe

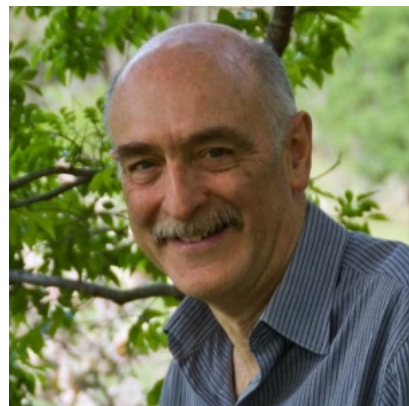
#### Professor Fred Watson AM

#### Astronomer-at-Large Australian Government

**Date:** Thursday, 18 April 2024, 6.30 pm AEST

**Venue:** RSL Mittagong, Carrington Room

**All are welcome**



**Summary:** NASA's James Webb Space Telescope has been fully operational since July 2022. Its first science images made global headlines with their breathtaking clarity and depth, showing cosmic detail that was only hinted at by its smaller cousin, the ageing Hubble Space Telescope. They foretold a game-changing career of discovery that is now being realised with findings that challenge our understanding of the Universe's deepest mysteries. In this entertaining and copiously illustrated talk, Australia's Astronomer-at-Large describes the Webb telescope, its images, its mission, and its relationship to other upcoming facilities like the Square Kilometre Array and Europe's Extremely Large Telescope. Not to be missed!

**Fred Watson AM** is the Australian Government's Astronomer-at-Large, an outreach, advocacy, and advisory role created in 2018 in the Department of Industry, Science and Resources. Educated in Scotland at the universities of St Andrews and Edinburgh, Fred worked at both of Britain's Royal Observatories before joining the Australian Astronomical Observatory as Astronomer-in-Charge in 1995. Today, he is best known for his award-winning radio and TV broadcasts, books, music, dark-sky advocacy, and the Space Nuts podcast. His work also includes providing expert input to the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in Vienna on the issue of satellite constellation interference in astronomy. Fred has an asteroid named after him (5691 Fredwatson) but says that if it hits the Earth, it won't be his fault.

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# 1321st Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture

**Brain Health Equity – a new frontier for healthy longevity**

**Scientia Professor Kaarin Anstey FRSN  
FASSA FAHMS**

**Deputy Director, ARC Centre of Excellence  
for Population Ageing  
Neuroscience Australia, UNSW Sydney**



**Date:** Wednesday, 1 May June 2024, 6.30 pm AEST

**Venue:** [Zoom Webinar](#)

**Entry:** No charge

**All are welcome**

**Please click here to join the  
Zoom webinar on 1 May at 6.30 pm**

**Summary:** In the past 20 years, evidence has accumulated on the importance of modifiable lifestyle factors, and chronic disease which impact brain health and increase the risk of late-life neurodegenerative conditions. In the past 5 to 10 years, the evidence on environmental risk factors for neurodegenerative conditions has strengthened. However, implementing strategies to reduce risk has typically focused on individual behaviour change. In this talk, Professor Anstey will provide an overview of this evidence on dementia risk reduction and brain health promotion and outline what individuals can do to reduce their own risk of dementia. She will then discuss the socio-demographic and socio-economic factors that enable or prevent brain healthy lifestyle and go on to present an argument that brain health inequity is one of the largest challenges to society and governments' aspirations for healthy ageing.

**Scientia Professor Kaarin Anstey** is an ARC Laureate Fellow in the School of Psychology at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). She is also Director of the UNSW Ageing Futures Institute, and Co-Deputy Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing as well as a conjoint Senior Principal Research Scientist at Neuroscience Research Australia. Anstey's research programs focus on cognitive resilience in ageing as well as the prevention of dementia. She has developed risk assessment tools and interventions for people at risk of dementia. A second focus of her work is on older driver safety and, in this field, Anstey has also developed and validated risk assessment tools and interventions. Anstey is a member of the World Dementia Council. Professor Anstey is also the winner of the 2023 Royal Society of NSW Award in the Social and Behavioural Sciences.

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**Joint RSNW and State Library of NSW Special Event: May 2024**

## On the history of Russian conflict with Ukraine

**Emeritus Professor Dennis Reinhartz**  
**University of Texas, Arlington**

**in conversation with**

**Emeritus Professor Robert Clancy AM FRSN**  
**Royal Society of NSW and**  
**University of Newcastle**



**Date:** Friday, 3 May 2024, 3.00 pm AEST

**Venue:** Maps Room, Mitchell Building, State Library of NSW, Shakespeare Place, Sydney

**Entry:** No charge

**Registration:** [Registration through Membes](#) is required (max. 40 places)

**All are welcome**

**Please click here to register**

*This event is jointly presented by the Royal Society of New South Wales and the State Library of New South Wales.*

**Dennis Reinhartz** received his BA and MA degrees in history from Rutgers University and his PhD from New York University. After a university career of over forty years, and having retired in 2008, he is an Emeritus Professor of history and Russian at the University of Texas at Arlington. He also has taught at Rutgers, New Jersey Institute of Technology, James Madison University, Bridgewater College, University of London, and Oxford University and holds several teaching awards. He has offered courses in world history, modern European history, Russian and East European history, modern Chinese history, transatlantic discovery and exploration, the history of cartography, and historical methodology and theory. He is the author or editor of fourteen books and numerous book chapters and scholarly articles related to his fields of interest. He is past president of The Society for the History of Discoveries, the Arid Lands Studies Association, the Western Social Science Association, the Historical Society of New Mexico, and the Texas Map Society.

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## Branch and Committee Reports

### Program Committee Report

The Society provides an active program of events through its Hunter, Southern Highlands, and Western NSW branches, and in Sydney. The full program for the year can be found in the [website event calendar](#).

With events held recently by the branches reported on separately in this Bulletin, this section focuses on recent events held in Sydney.

## ROYAL SOCIETY NEW SOUTH WALES Program Committee

### Report on the Ideas@theHouse, 6 March 2024

On 6 March, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales, hosted the first Ideas@theHouse event for 2024. The lecture was given by **John Bell AO OBE**, Founder and former Artistic Director of Bell Shakespeare. He spoke on the topic 'Shakespeare on Politics: what can we learn?' As might be expected from a consummate actor and great Shakespearean, the lecture was a *tour de force* of Shakespearean quotations, historical allusions, and a belief that theatre and language have created our political identities. The questions ranged widely and included a spirited debate between John Bell and Judith Wheeldon on the status of women and the moral stature of Portia in the Merchant of Venice. Judith argued that Portia was deeply embedded in the prejudices of the age, quoting her harsh judgement of Shylock, while John Bell replied that the play should be read as 'a satire about race' and Portia justifiably tough. Robert Marks will be publishing the lecture in the Journal — I do commend it to all. A recording of the presentation for those unable to attend in person or view the live stream is available on our [YouTube channel](#).



### Report on RSNW 2023 Student and ECR Awards Presentations (13 March 2024)

On 13 March, Western Sydney University kindly hosted the student and early career awards for 2023 at the Whitlam Institute on its Parramatta South Campus. The Whitlam Institute is housed in the former Female Orphans home which has been most sensitively restored. We were given the opportunity to see the Whitlam Institute Exhibition, 'A changing Australia', a collection of images and recordings that was particularly resonant for those of us who lived through the events.



We are grateful to Robyn Williams AM FRSN FAA, the presenter of the ABC Science Show, for addressing each of the students and early career researchers and raising questions about their presentations.



The winner of the Jak Kelly Award, Dr Jaime Alvarado-Montes, from Macquarie University, spoke of the evolution of planetary systems under strong gravitational forces with great elan.

Mr Jayden McKinnon from the University of Wollongong made 'Advancing mass spectrometry imaging towards the single-cell resolution' not only comprehensible but with remarkably evocative images.

Dr Jacinta Martin, from the University of Newcastle, spoke with great passion about 'Mitigating the impact of environmental pollutants on neo-natal health and development'.

Dr Ahbimanu Pandey, from the Australian National University, spoke of his work on bowel cancer and of harnessing the immune system to destroy cancer cells.

Dr Shoujin Wang, from the University of Technology Sydney, talked of his work developing 'responsible AI-powered systems for combating fake news'.

We are grateful for the support Associate Professor Alice Motion, of the University of Sydney, an expert in science communication, who gave all participants in tailoring their presentations for a generalist audience.

Christina Slade FRSN  
Chair, Program Committee

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## Hunter Branch Report

The Hunter Branch of the Society held its Annual General Meeting on 21 March 2024 and conducted an election for new Office-bearers and the Branch Committee for 2024.

The Society offers its sincere thanks to members of the Hunter Branch Committee for their service in 2023, particularly the outgoing Secretary and Treasurer, Honorary Professor Philip Bolton FRSN, who managed the affairs of the Branch so effectively and conscientiously during his tenure, and Emeritus Professor John Aitken who stood down as Chair after two years in the role, becoming the Immediate Past Chair for the coming year.

The Branch Committee for 2024 comprises:

Chair	Emeritus Professor George Willis FRSN FAA
Secretary	Adjunct Professor Robert Whittaker AM FRSN FAIB
Committee Members	Distinguished Emeritus Professor John Aitken FRSE FRSN FAHMS FAA (Immediate Past Chair)
	Emeritus Scientia Professor Eugenie Lumbers AM DistFRSN FAA
	Dr Philip Bailey MRSN

Lindsay Botten FRSN  
Bulletin Editor



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# Southern Highlands Branch Report

Presentation Report— 21 March 2024

## The antiquity of life: Oldest (3.7 billion years old) stromatolite fossils discovered in Greenland

**Professor Allen Nutman**  
**School of Earth, Atmospheric and Life Sciences**  
**University of Wollongong**

ROYAL SOCIETY  
NEW SOUTH WALES  
Southern  
Highlands

Stromatolites are the commonest fossils from the Precambrian Earth, being carbonate-rich mounds built in shallow water by photosynthesising microbes. For many reasons described by Nutman, the stromatolites at Isua in Greenland have enjoyed a unique level of preservation. He described them as the oldest tangible evidence of life on Earth.

In this beautifully presented lecture, the images presented of the ongoing research under extraordinary conditions painted a picture which otherwise may have been unimaginable. For evidence of life, Nutman emphasised the degree to which geochemical signatures are instrumental in analysis of the collected samples. This methodology allows techniques such as natural radioactivity measurements to play a large part in the dating of these ancient structures, with the result that they are now being termed by scientists as “chemofossils”. The many types of chemical analysis in use were discussed well by Nutman to describe the extraordinary dating information which allows his teams to present with confidence the timeframes of 3.8 to 3.7 billion years at Isua.

The Isua stromatolites are much rarer than rock samples returned from the moon; of great interest is the fact that despite the remote locations under discussion, these extraordinary objects must be protected from plunder! Because the stromatolites rely, for their growth, on photosynthesising bacteria, their growth is obviously dependent on the amount of light they receive. An increase in sea water levels or wave turbulence can therefore deprive the bacteria of light, resulting in their death. Nutman added that the atmospheric conditions during these times contained many more greenhouse gases than we see today as there was no evidence of ice in the sea. He added that carbon dioxide levels would appear to have been 1000 times higher than they are today.

Professor Nutman concluded his excellent lecture with a taste of his current research, soon to be published. The Southern Highlands Branch hopes to host him again for the next instalment of his research at the end of 2025.

### Branch Committee for 2024

The Southern Highlands Branch held its Annual General Meeting on the evening of 21 March 2024 at which the following Office-bearers and Committee for 2024 were elected.

Chair	Ms Anne Wood FRSN
Vice-Chair	Air Cdre (Retd) Peter Eustace MRSN FRAeS



Secretary	Ms Ann Fieldhouse MRSN
Treasurer	Mr Michael Jonas MRSN
Assistant Treasurer	Mr Douglas Mackinlay MRSN
Committee Members	Dr Michael de Percy MRSN
	Mr Hubert Regtop MRSN (Technology)

Anne Wood FRSN  
Chair, Southern Highlands Branch

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## Western NSW Branch Report

### Event Report

In conjunction with the Western NSW Branch of the Royal Society of New South Wales, Charles Sturt University is conducting its Provocations Public Lecture series that showcases and celebrates research at the University.



### Recent Event

**Professor Shokoofeh Shamsi**, Professor of Veterinary Parasitology at Charles Sturt University, presented the first lecture in the 2024 series on Wednesday, 28 February at Wagga Wagga. In her talk titled *Parasites, Australia's silent threat - Coincidence, nature's hand, or policy complacency?*, Professor Shamsi addressed the surge in recent parasitic incidents that have captured the news headlines, exploring their origins, implications, and possible human factors contributing to these predicaments, asking are these occurrences mere coincidences driven by the forces of Mother Nature, or do they serve as stark reminders of complacency within the policymaking domain? The talk is available on the [Society's YouTube channel](#).

### Forthcoming Events

The next event in the Provocations Public Lecture series, titled [Out of Africa Arabia: how ancient human history gave us modern lifestyle diseases](#), will be delivered by **Professor Alan Cooper** on Wednesday, 10 April 4.00–5.00 AEST from the Charles Sturt University Port Macquarie Campus and will also be live streamed. His lecture will explore how ancient human DNA, dating back 46,000 years, reveals our journey Out of Africa and the 'Arabian Standstill.' Trapped in the Arabian Peninsula 80-55,000 years ago, we adapted to cold climates, incorporating Neanderthal genes. These adaptations now link to modern diseases, paving the way for evolutionary medicine.



The remaining events for the year are:

- Topic: TBA, Professor Muhammad Shiddiky, Charles Sturt University, Orange Campus, Wednesday, 26 June 2024, 6.00—8.00 pm AEST
- Adapting to change — Invasive plants and pests take up the challenge, Professor Leslie Weston, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga Campus, Wednesday, 28 August 2024, 6.00 – 8.00 pm AEST
- Topic: TBA, Professor Sarah O'Shea, Charles Sturt University, Dubbo Campus, Wednesday, 23 October 2024, 6.00—8.00 pm AEDT
- Rural and regional health, Professor Allen Ross, Charles Sturt University, Orange Campus, Wednesday, 5 November 2024, 6.00—8.00 pm AEDT

## Provocations Blog

In August 2023, Charles Sturt University launched a multidisciplinary academic blog called Provocations intended to challenge orthodoxy through new thinking but revive policy ideas and political thought from the past for one more encore. After each Provocations Public Lecture, that lecture is intended to become a blog article. The most recent latest article by Professor Ganna Pogrebna titled *Behavioural Data Science as a Game Changer for Understanding the Interface between Human and Digital Systems in the New Digital Economy* is available on the [Provocations website](#).

Nilima Mathai

Treasurer, Western NSW Branch

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## The Society and Social Media

The Society's presence on social media platforms is growing strongly, particularly following the appointment of the Society's part-time Communications Officer. Our [Facebook page](#), [LinkedIn channel](#), [X/Twitter feed](#), and [YouTube channel](#) are engaging an increased following, and we continue to build our repository of events on YouTube. Our YouTube channel now has more than 870 subscribers, while the 148 videos online (which now include six well-received 'Shorts') have received over 107,000 viewings.

The social media icons at the end of this newsletter will take the reader to our pages on these platforms, from where you can follow, subscribe, and be notified of new content.

*As a Society member, please consider subscribing to our social media channels to support the Society's outreach, and also please encourage your friends and colleagues to do so.*

## YouTube recordings of recent events

All online presentations and all face-to-face presentations held in Sydney and by the Western NSW Branch are recorded and uploaded to the Society's YouTube channel. These can be accessed directly from [YouTube](#) or from the [Presentations](#) page of the RSNSW website.

For convenience, the video links below provide access to recordings from the most recent three months. We hope that these will be of interest to members.



YouTube recording of the Ideas@theHouse lecture delivered at Government House Sydney on 6 March 2024 by renowned actor and director, John Bell AO OBE, Founder and former Artistic Director of Bell Shakespeare, on the topic of *Shakespeare on politics — what can we learn?* A summary of his presentation, and a brief biography of Dr Bell, are available from the [website event notice](#).



YouTube recording of the presentation from the Western NSW Branch Lecture 2024-1 (28 February 2024) on the subject of *Parasites, Australia's silent threat: coincidence, nature's hand, or policy complacency* by Professor Shokoofeh Shamsi, Professor of Veterinary Parasitology at Charles Sturt University. A summary of the lecture, and a brief biography of the presenter, are available from the [online event notice](#).





YouTube recording of the presentation at the 2024 Annual Meeting of the Four Societies (21 February 2024) on the subject of *Resilience before Readiness — “... for the want of a horseshoe nail”* by Vince Di Pietro AM CSC FRSN. A summary of the lecture, and a brief biography of the presenter, are available from the [online event notice](#).



YouTube recording of the presentation at the 1319th Ordinary General Meeting (7 February 2024) on the subject of *Productivity: what is it, and why it matters* by Emeritus Professor Roy Green AM FRSN, University of Technology Sydney. A summary of the lecture, and a brief biography of the presenter, are available from the [online event notice](#).

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Edited by: [Lindsay Botten](#) FRSN, Webmaster, Royal Society of New South Wales

Disclaimer: Positions expressed in this publication by authors of articles and event presenters do not necessarily reflect those of the Society.

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