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ROYAL  
SOCIETY  
NEW SOUTH WALES

The Bulletin 503

April 2026

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### A message from the President

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

The RSNSW [Annual Dinner and Awards Presentation](#) at Parliament House on 27 February was a great success. Ross Griffith and the Quantum Law team of Zile Yu and Fauzia Purba, together with Council member Davina Jackson and Vice-President Lindsay Botten, ensured everything ran smoothly. Former Vice-President Peter Shergold was an eloquent MC, and Professor Tony Haymet, the Chief Scientist of Australia, welcomed questions following his speech. The evening came alive with passionate but civilised debate.



On Monday, 9 March, the Society's 2025 [Awards for Postgraduate Students and Early Career Researchers](#) were presented at a ceremony kindly hosted by the University of Sydney. It was a wonderful evening that showcased the excellent research being undertaken by emerging researchers in NSW, through a sequence of short presentations and interviews with renowned ABC science journalist and presenter of the ABC Science Show, Robyn Williams.

Later that week, on 12 March, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley, Governor of NSW, hosted Ideas@theHouse at Government House before a capacity audience. [Lieutenant General Susan Coyle delivered a timely address](#) on strategic uncertainty in space, cyber and national security. One of our Fellows, Major General (Ret'd) Gus McLachlan, managed the spirited discussion that followed.

The focus over the past year has been on implementing our Master Plan through five working groups. Sean Brawley's Member Engagement group reconsidered membership and fellowship

categories, while recruitment for new fellows and members has been strong. The Activities with Impact working group delivered a record number and variety of events. Sarah Jones led the communication strategies group through wide-ranging discussions. Medy Hassan's Future Fund group continues its long-term capital preservation work. Lindsay Botten, as ever, has delivered operational excellence as Vice-President.

For the next Council, I am proposing a return to a more traditional committee structure. This includes re-establishing a committee for Sydney programs and renewing the Publishing Committee. Robert Marks has announced his retirement as Journal Editor after ten years of distinguished service, for which I am most grateful. His retirement will be a significant loss for the Society. Peter Wells, our Treasurer, is also leaving the Council, and we will welcome Erin Gao as his successor. I am proposing a Finance and Risk Committee to support Erin's work.

With the Society's library now dispersed, the Library Committee will refocus on broader knowledge dissemination strategies. The Awards Committee, under Merlin Crossley, and the FMAC Committee under Sean Brawley, will continue with some new members. Our major annual events – the Forum and Annual Dinner – will remain under working group management. Details of the new Executive structure will be announced following the AGM.

Dr Catherine Ball will lead the post-AGM [session on drone technology](#) – a timely topic given current global developments. Simon Masters from UK Research and Innovation was to contrast British and Australian drone programs, but will now join us remotely following flight disruptions. I am sure that it will be a fascinating evening.

For 9 April, Robert Clancy and Debra Perik have organised a [visit to the Sydney Observatory](#), including the Carte du Ciel exhibit. Numbers are limited, so please register before bookings close on 30 March.

In closing, may I remind you that the 2026 Council elections are underway, with voting for Full Members and Fellows closing at midday on Monday, 6 April. If you have yet to vote, please do so. Additional reminders will be sent from our election ballot system, Election Buddy, before this date.

Christina Slade FRSN

[President](#)

[Royal Society of New South Wales](#)

## For your diary

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

- [159th Annual General Meeting and 1339th Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture](#) (Wednesday, 9 April 2026, 6.00–7.30 pm AEST, Michael Crouch Room, State Library of NSW) *A drone by any other name*, Dr Catherine Ball, Scientific Futurist, and Simon Masters, Deputy Director, Future Flight, InnovateUK
- [RSNSW Visits Program 2026-1](#) (Thursday, 9 April 2026, 6.00–8.00 pm AEST, Sydney Observatory)
- [Southern Highlands Branch Meeting 2026-3](#) (Thursday, 16 April 2026, 6.30–7.30 pm AEST, RSL Mittagong, Carrington Room) *A tale of two sites: Excavating at Pella in Jordan and*

*Zagora in Greece*, Dr Paul Donnelly, Deputy Director and Director Exhibitions and Collections, Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney

- [1340 Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture](#) (Wednesday, 6 May 2026, 6.00–7.30 pm AEST, Zoom webinar) *Household Electricity Use and Investment*, Professor Jeffrey Reimers FRSN FAA FRACI, Director, International Centre for Quantum and Molecular Structures, Department of Physics, Shanghai University, Shanghai, China and Honorary Associate, School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, University of Technology Sydney
- [Southern Highlands Branch Meeting 2026-4](#) (Thursday, 21 May 2026, 6.30–7.30 pm AEST, RSL Mittagong, Carrington Room) *Literary France: Susannah's Top Ten Places*, Susannah Fullerton OAM FRSN, Author, Literary Lecturer, and Tour Leader

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## News

### Society Fellow, Sean Brawley, on ‘What are universities for – and who gets to decide?’

**Professor Sean Brawley FRSN** is one of several of our Fellows who regularly contribute to the debate on the future of Australia’s higher education system.

In his latest contribution, published in the newsletter [Future Campus](#), Sean Brawley is exploring the theme ‘What are universities for – and who gets to decide?’ in a four-part series that provides forensic context for the establishment of the proposed Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) and expanded Federal Government regulation. In essence, Brawley contends that governance cannot be disentangled from purpose, and purpose cannot be understood without history.



All six parts in this series have now been published, including:

- [What do we mean by University Governance? – that explores confusion about governance is a confusion about purpose](#)
- [Self-Rule, Scholarship and the State: Foundations of Australian University Governance](#)
- [Before the Revolution – Sector Governance and the Limits of Arm’s-Length Control](#)
- [The Dawkins Revolution – From Coordination to Control](#)
- [The Howard Settlement: The Maturation of Commonwealth Control](#)
- [The Governance Settlement](#)

which are certainly an erudite and informative read that provides a potted history of Australian university governance.

Sean Brawley is a Professor of History and a leader in higher education. Previously, he was the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Strategy and Assurance) from 2022–2024 at the University of Wollongong and, before that, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Programs and Pathways) at Macquarie University from 2017–2022.

## Vale Emeritus Professor Stephen Hill AM FRSN FTSE

20 August 1943 – 7 March 2026

### Remembering a modern polymath

A former Councillor of the Royal Society of NSW and a member of the Council of the Royal Societies of Australia (RSA), **Emeritus Professor Stephen Craig Hill AM FRSN** has died suddenly at the age of 82. Stephen joined the Society in 2015 and brought his enormously diverse international experience and knowledge to both organisations. In recent times, Stephen made major contributions to the RSA's Pre-conditions of Well-being project.



Stephen Hill graduated with First Class Honours in Physical Chemistry from the University of Sydney in 1964 and then taught chemistry at Sydney and Melbourne Universities. After qualifying in Australia's first MBA program in 1965 with a thesis in economics, he was subsequently awarded Australia's first PhD in Business Administration, completed in 1967 at the University of Melbourne. He was subsequently awarded Fulbright Foundation and Ford Foundation Intersocietal Fellowships and appointed an Assistant Professor in Sociology, Business and Industrial Engineering in parallel positions at Northwestern University in Chicago.

After being awarded a Nuffield Fellowship, he took up a Senior Lectureship in sociology at UNSW and then became Australia's youngest full Professor at the age of 30 as Foundation Professor of Sociology at the University of Wollongong in 1974. He subsequently set up three Research Centres – 'Multicultural Studies' in 1978, 'Technology and Social Change' in 1983, and 'The Centre for Research Policy', a Centre of Excellence of the Australian Research Council, in 1990.

Stephen was the Principal Director and Ambassador for South-east Asia with UNESCO from 1995 to early 2006. Based in Indonesia and Paris, he served as the UN's Regional Director for Science for Asia and the Pacific, and as Representative or Ambassador to Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, Timor Leste and Special Representative of the Director-General to Singapore. He was responsible for major UN science, education, media freedom, culture, world heritage and peace initiatives and reforms in the region, as well as being formally mandated by UNESCO's Director-General to reform and decentralise the entire UN Agency globally from 1999 to 2002.

Stephen founded and chaired International Networks in Science and Technology Policy (UN), Social Sciences and Humanities (Pacific Science Association), co-chaired Australia's UNESCO Science Network, and was then involved in the founding of APEC, where he chaired the APEC Human Resources and Technical Education Network and Programs. Additionally, he was central to the establishment of Australia's science relations with China, Indonesia, Korea and Malaysia, part of the basis on which his Membership of the Order of Australia was awarded.

During his time working in UNESCO, he was responsible, as UN Representative, for negotiations for the release of his staff taken hostage by Freedom Fighters into the jungles of West Papua in 1996. He was also responsible for managing the UN response to the May 1998 Democracy Revolution in Indonesia – escaping his house at 2:00 am through mobs and fires, evacuating all

staff but staying to report to the UN Security Council, and in the aftermath launching a wide-ranging program to reform the law and establish media freedom throughout Indonesia. Examples of work in other Asian countries include the development of a program to bring literacy to 7,000 village women in the war zones of Mindanao, southern Philippines; reforming Mongolia's entire science system out of its Soviet-inherited past and into contemporary relevance; and introducing the internet into North Korea.

Following retirement from UNESCO, Stephen was appointed Honorary Professorial Research Fellow at the University of Wollongong in January 2006 and subsequently created an Emeritus Professor at that university in 2008.

Stephen published extensively across diverse fields, including global economics, social dynamics, and the values driving social change, and has been translated into six languages. His bibliography includes over 20 books, many of which explore his own real-life adventures, as well as several hundred research papers.

In addition to his writing, Stephen was committed to engaging with communities through public talks on contemporary issues. His storytelling ability, combined with his deep understanding of global affairs, made him a compelling voice in discussions on humanity and social change. To that end, he proposed the establishment of a 'speakers forum' for the Royal Society of NSW.

Stephen was honoured with several awards from Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines for his contributions to Australia and the Asian region – including Member of the Order of Australia (1996) and Australia's Centenary Medal (2000). He was elected Fellow of several international Academies and Societies, including the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, the World Innovation Foundation, and the Royal Society of NSW.

Stephen was formally named 'Purba' after the last King in a 'Ulos Naming Ceremony' by the Batak Nation of Sumatra, Indonesia, and honoured by indigenous tribute ceremonies, including from the Dani Tribe of West Papua, which ceremonially inducted him as an Honorary Tribal Chief.

Stephen lived and worked in the USA, the UK, Germany, France, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia. He was a Visiting Professor of Doshisha and Kyoto Universities in Kyoto, Japan, where he recently co-led an International Symposium and Writing Program on Creative Economics.

Stephen's CV also includes a stint as a rock musician. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, he was a professor by day and a professional rock musician by night. Stephen's passions for community empowerment and human rights initiatives were a driving force in his life. He was indeed a veritable polymath with skills and influence spanning chemistry, economics and social science at a global level.

Requiescat in pace

With thanks to Emeritus Professor Tony Hulbert FRSN for background information.

John Hardie AM FRSN

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**Vale Sir Anthony Mason—Eminent Jurist and Distinguished Fellow**

The Society was greatly saddened to learn of the death of Distinguished Fellow **Sir Anthony Mason AC KBE DistFRSN FASSA HonFAIB KC** on 17 March 2026, just short of his 101st birthday.



Sir Anthony Mason, a former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia (1987–1995), was a towering figure in Australian law and one of the nation’s most influential jurists, whose influence reshaped the nation’s constitutional and common law. Renowned for his intellectual rigour, principled independence and dry wit, his judicial legacy profoundly reshaped Australian law.

Born in Sydney on 21 April 1925, Anthony Frank Mason grew up during the Great Depression and the political turbulence of the Jack Lang era. After leaving school, he enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force in 1944, training as a navigator in Australia and Canada before the war ended. Returning home, Mason studied arts and law at the University of Sydney, graduating with first-class honours in both. He was called to the bar in 1951 and rapidly established himself as an outstanding barrister. In 1964, he was appointed Solicitor-General of the Commonwealth, before joining the New South Wales Supreme Court in 1969 and the High Court of Australia in 1972.

Initially regarded as a conservative judge, Mason’s jurisprudence evolved markedly. As Chief Justice from 1987, he championed principled legal development over rigid adherence to precedent. His leadership shaped landmark decisions, including *Cole v Whitfield*, the Franklin Dam case, *Australian Capital Television* and *Mabo*, as well as the development of implied constitutional freedoms and national powers.

After retiring in 1995, Mason continued extensive public service in Australia and abroad. Sir Anthony Mason leaves a profound and enduring legacy in Australian jurisprudence. He is mourned by his family, colleagues and the legal profession he served with distinction, and the Royal Society of NSW, of which he had been a Distinguished Fellow since 2018.

The Society extends its sincere condolences to Sir Anthony’s family, friends, and colleagues at this sad time.

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## Events

### **159th AGM and 1339th OGM and Open Lecture — 8 April 2026**

#### **159th Annual General Meeting and 1339th Ordinary General Meeting**

**Date:** Wednesday, 8 April 2026

**Time:** AGM: 6.00–6.20 pm;

OGM: 6.20–7.50 pm AEST

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

**Pre-meeting drinks:** A cash bar will operate from 5.30 pm  
**Post-meeting supper:** An optional supper will be available from Balcon by Tapavino, 17 Bligh Street, Sydney, following the OGM  
**Registration:** AGM/OGM: [Please register](#) by 2.00 pm AEST on Tuesday, 7 April 2026  
Supper: [Please register](#) before 5.00 pm on Friday, 3 April  
**Entry:** OGM: Members, \$20; Non-members, \$30; Students, \$0  
Supper: \$110 per person (non-refundable) for a fixed menu meal  
**All are welcome**



**159<sup>th</sup> AGM and 1339<sup>th</sup> OGM**  
Council Elections 2026  
16 March–6 April

**REGISTER NOW**

**For the AGM/OGM before  
2.00 pm on Tuesday, 7 April 2026**

**REGISTER NOW**

**for the optional supper before  
5.00 pm on Friday 3 April**

This notice provides information about the:

- [159th Annual General Meeting and Council Elections](#)
- [1339th Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture](#)

## **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 website's [Meetings page](#).

### **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.

Members, Fellows, and Distinguished Fellows, who are financial at the commencement of the ballot, will have received an email from the Society's Election Coordinator, via the electronic balloting company, Election Buddy, at the start of the ballot. This email will include a unique ballot link that provides a random, secret access key for each voter. Voter anonymity is assured by ballot settings that ensure that voter choices cannot be linked to any voter.

The **ballot** will run from **12.00 noon AEDT on Monday, 16 March to 12.00 noon AEST on Monday, 6 April** and will address:

- Procedural Business:
  - Confirmation that the [Minutes of the 158th Annual General Meeting](#) be accepted as a true record
  - Confirmation that the [Annual Report of Council and the Financial Report for the year ending 31 December 2025](#) be received (\*)
  - Confirmation of the proposed Auditors for 2026
  - Vote on a resolution to vary Rules 8(c) and 8(d) for the Admission of Members and Fellows of the Society, specifically to update the method of communication to Society members for the induction of proposed new members, according to the [Explanatory Memorandum](#)
- [Election](#) of Office-bearers and Council members.

(\*) Please note that the electronic ballot allows members to comment on the Annual Report and Financial Statements. There will be an opportunity to discuss these documents at the AGM, at which feedback from the electronic ballot will be reported.

The results of the electronic ballot will be announced at the Annual General Meeting on 8 April 2026 and will be posted on the Society's website on the following day.

The [Ordinary General Meeting](#) will commence immediately following the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting.

### **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, 6 March 2026.

For those Office-bearer and Councillor roles for which there are more nominees than available positions, an election is required.

For roles in which there are the same number of nominees as there are available positions, these 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 are included for information on the electronic ballot form.

<b>Office/Role</b>	<b>Candidate</b>
Treasurer	<a href="#">Erin Gao MRSN</a> (elected unopposed)
Councillors (4 vacancies)	<a href="#">Sean Brawley FRSN</a> <a href="#">Medy Hassan OAM FRSN</a> <a href="#">Liz Killen MRSN</a> <a href="#">Holly Randell-Moon MRSN</a> <a href="#">Michael Taylor FRSN</a> <a href="#">Zile Yu MRSN</a>

### **Ordinary General Meeting**

The 1339<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting will follow the Annual General Meeting and includes a presentation by Dr Catherine Ball, Scientific Futurist and Tech Influencer, and Simon Masters, Deputy Director, Future Flight, InnovateUK..

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

### **A drone by any other name**

**Dr Catherine Ball (1)**  
and  
**Simon Masters (2)**

(1) Scientific Futurist, Tech Influencer, Robotics Expert, Adjunct Professor

(2) Deputy Director, Future Flight, InnovateUK

**Date:** Wednesday, 8 April 2026

**Time:** OGM: 6.20–7.50 pm AEST;



Supper: 8.00–9.30 pm

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

**Pre-meeting drinks:** A cash bar will operate from 5.30 pm

**Post-meeting supper:** An optional supper will be available from Balcon by Tapavino, 17 Bligh Street, Sydney, following the OGM

**Registration:** OGM: [Please register](#) before 2.00 pm AEST on Tuesday, 7 April September

Supper: [Please register](#) before 5.00 pm on Friday, 3 April

**Entry:** OGM: Members, \$20; Non-members, \$30; Students, \$0

Supper: \$110 per person (non-refundable) for a fixed menu meal

**Enquiries:** by [email to RSNSW Events](#)

**All are welcome**

**Summary:** For a decade, Australia was the global drone rule-maker, and the UK was still warming up.

This presentation tells the story of a regulatory power shift. Australia got out fast, with CASA's 2016 reforms making commercial drone operations easier and more accessible well before many markets caught up. It was bold, practical, and business-friendly. In many ways, Australia wrote the early playbook for modern drone regulation.

But being first is not the same as staying first.

The UK arrived later, then surged ahead by pairing regulation with serious national investment. It moved into a more advanced risk-based framework, aligned drone policy with broader aviation reform, and backed it with a Future of Flight strategy designed to scale real-world operations, including beyond visual line of sight. In short, the UK did not just regulate drones; it funded the future they needed.

This presentation compares the two countries side by side, showing how Australia led on early regulatory innovation, while the UK built the stronger long game through capital, policy alignment, and industry mobilisation.

If Australia proved drones could be regulated, the UK is proving they can be scaled.

**Dr Catherine Ball** is an award-winning company director, bestselling author, futurist and adjunct professor working across global projects where emerging technologies meet humanitarian, education and environmental needs.

Working to protect the natural environment and empowering all members of society through mutual education and respect are core aspects of her chosen projects. As well as supporting start-ups and leaders from all generations across the globe, Catherine is particularly passionate about social mobility and equity.



Catherine is proud to be an advisor to a broad range of enterprises and philanthropic organisations, including being an XPRIZE visioneer and member of their Global Brains Trust.

**Simon Masters** has 20 years of experience across industry and public sector roles. With a background in aerospace and technology, he has held senior positions in the civil and military aerospace sectors, including systems engineering and R&D roles with Airbus and BAE Systems.

He took up the role of Deputy Director for the Future Flight Challenge within InnovateUK in 2020, focusing on developing drone and advanced air mobility capabilities and supporting systems in the UK. He has led efforts to integrate technology solutions with emerging use cases, particularly those addressing needs and opportunities in public services. In 2024, he took on the leadership of the Future Flight Challenge program as it transitions from R&D to commercialisation and growth. Passionate about innovation and collaboration, he has worked to build international partnerships across Europe, Japan, and Australia.

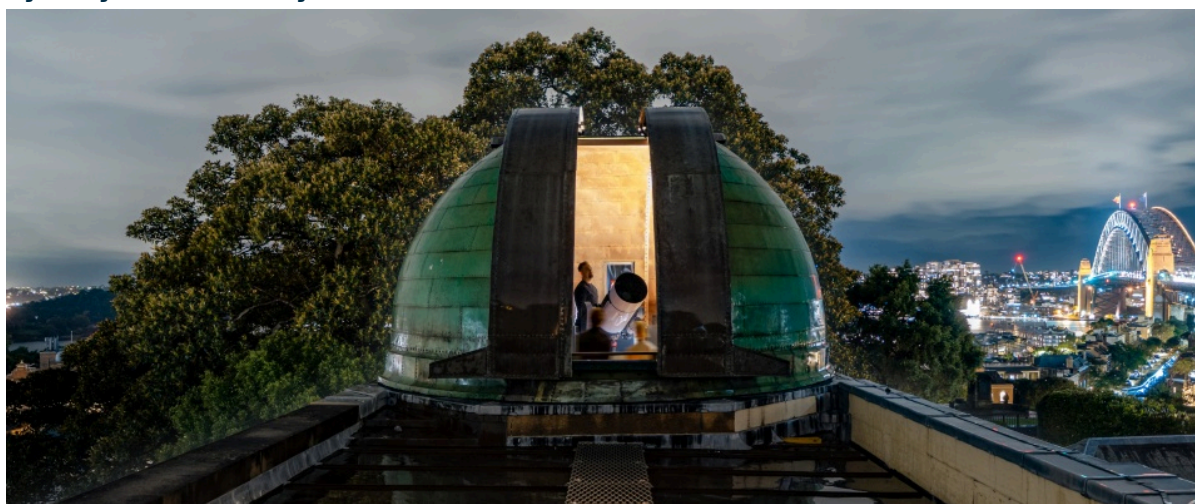


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## RSNSW Visits Program 2026-1 — 9 April 2026

### Sydney Observatory



**Date and Time:** Thursday, 9 April 2026, from 6.00—8.00 pm AEST

**Venue:** Sydney Observatory, 1003 Upper Fort Street, Millers Point, NSW

**Transport:** own arrangements

**Cost:** RSNSW Members, \$25; Non-members/Guests: \$30

**Registration:** [Please register now.](#) Registration closes 5.00 pm AEDT on Monday, 30 March 2026

**Numbers:** limited to 30 places

**Enquiries:** By email to [RSNSW Programs](#)

**REGISTER NOW**

**for this visit before**

**5.00 pm AEDT on Monday, 30 March**

**ENQUIRIES**

**by email to RSNSW Programs**

The Royal Society of NSW Visits Program returns in 2026 with an evening visit to the Sydney Observatory.

The Observatory has been the epicentre of modern science in Australia since its completion in 1858. However, its role in Western astronomy began earlier in providing time to ships in Sydney Harbour. The Observatory Hill itself, being the highest natural site in Sydney Cove, is believed to

have played an important role in the culture and lives of the Gadigal people that stretches back through the millennia. Today, the Sydney Observatory, within the Powerhouse group of museums, brings together communities and stories across arts, sciences, design and technologies to explore, inform and entertain.

Our visit begins with an exploration of the grounds and exhibitions at the Observatory. There will be some naked-eye star gazing, a look at the Carte du Ciel exhibit of international collaboration to photograph and catalogue the entire night sky, a walk through the Observatory building which housed the Government Astronomer with his family, and finally up some narrow staircases to the Observatory's domes for spectacular evening views across Sydney Harbour and, weather permitting, the southern skies through historic and modern telescopes.

**Practical notes:** Meet at the Observatory gates at 6.00 pm.

This evening visit involves walking on lawns, pathways, uneven ground, stairs etc.

The Observatory can be accessed by public transport and vehicles,

see <https://powerhouse.com.au/visit/sydney-observatory#plan-your-visit> for visitor information and maps.

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## Southern Highlands Branch Meeting: 2026-3 — 16 April 2026

### A tale of two sites: Excavating at Pella in Jordan and Zagora in Greece

**Dr Paul Donnelly**

Deputy Director and Director Exhibitions and Collections  
Chau Chak Wing Museum  
University of Sydney



**Date:** Thursday, 16 April 2026, 6.30–7.30 pm AEDT

**Venue:** RSL Mittagong, Carrington Room

**Entry:** Members, \$5; Non-members, \$10 (cashless payments only please)

**All are welcome**

**ENQUIRIES**

**by email to the  
Southern Highlands Branch Chair**

**Summary:** Dr Paul Donnelly has been participating in excavations at Pella in Jordan since late 1989 and Zagora in Greece since 2012. This talk will focus on his activities in the most recent seasons for 2026 in Pella and 2025 in Zagora.

**Dr Paul Donnelly** is the Deputy Director and Director of Exhibitions and Collections at the Chau Chak Wing Museum at the University of Sydney. He has worked in curatorial roles for 30 years. He excavates at Pella in Jordan, which was the focus of his PhD research (2006) and is the Co-Director of the University's Zagora Archaeological Project on Andros in Greece.

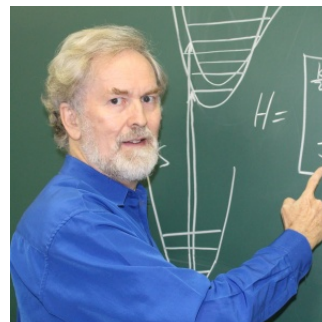
## 1340th OGM and Open Lecture — 6 May 2026

### Household Electricity Use and Investment

#### Professor Jeffrey Reimers FRSN FAA FRACI

Director, International Centre for Quantum and Molecular Structures, Department of Physics, Shanghai University and

Honorary Associate, School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences University of Technology Sydney



**Date:** Wednesday, 6 May 2026, 6.00–7.30 pm AEST

**Entry:** No charge

**Zoom webinar:** [Link to follow](#)

**All are welcome**

### Business of the Meeting

The Agenda for the Ordinary General Meeting is now available on the [Meetings](#) page of the website.

**Summary:** Electricity production, transmission, use, and pricing in eastern states is very complex, with consumer reports indicating very poor community understanding of the basic features. In this presentation, a broad, holistic view is presented. The focus is on how users can save money and be environmentally friendly in their energy use, how to understand and optimise retailer plans and distributor tariffs, and how to optimise investment in household solar power, solar batteries, and electrical-vehicle technologies. Indeed, a strong connection is made between saving money and being environmentally friendly. A central aspect is understanding of the “spot price” and how that is used to stabilise the grid and hence provide the means by which energy production can be transformed from coal/gas to renewables, as well its role in setting consumer costs and investment returns. Bring an electricity bill to discuss.

**Jeff Reimers** studied organic spectroscopy under Ian Ross and Gad Fischer before doing a PhD with Bob Watts on the structure, thermodynamics, and spectroscopy of water and ice. He then studied semiclassical quantum mechanics in the USA under Kent Wilson and Rick Heller, before returning to Australia to be an ARC Research Fellow from 1985 to 2010 at the University of Sydney and there as a professor until 2013. There, he collaborated extensively with Noel Hush and Max Crossley on problems involving electron transfer, molecular electronics, porphyrin chemistry, self-assembly, electronic-structure theory, and photosynthesis. In 2014, he moved to a joint appointment at the University of Technology Sydney and Shanghai University to set up a multi-disciplinary quantum research centre, himself focusing mostly on quantum chemistry, spectroscopy, nanophotonics, and molecular electronics. His work spans a wide range of applications, from solar energy conversion to electronic devices to the origins of consciousness. He has received the RACI Physical Chemistry Division Medal and the H.G. Smith Medal, the David Craig Medal of the Australian Academy of Science, and the 2025 Shanghai Gold Magnolia Medal; he is a Fellow of the RACI, the Royal Society of NSW, and the Australian Academy of Science.

## Southern Highlands Branch Meeting 2026-4 — 21 May 2026

### Literary France: Susannah's Top Ten Places

#### Susannah Fullerton OAM FRSN

Author, Literary Lecturer, and Tour Leader

**Date:** Thursday, 21 May 2025, 6.30–7.30 pm AEST

**Venue:** RSL Mittagong, Carrington Room

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

**All are welcome**



ENQUIRIES

by email to the  
Southern Highlands Branch Chair

**Summary:** There's just so much to love about France – magnificent Paris, French wine and food, French style, superb art, and the glorious French countryside. But there's also its beautiful language and the works of its brilliant writers. France has had more winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature than any other nation. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of its novelists changed the face of the novel, and its purpose – Balzac, Dumas, Flaubert, Hugo and Zola were amongst them. And the 20<sup>th</sup> century also produced remarkable personalities – Proust with his madeleine, and 'enfant terrible' Arthur Rimbaud are two examples.

French writers were so often larger-than-life. They lived life to the full, with mistresses and lovers, enormous debts, lashings of French style, homes they couldn't afford, and banquets and cookbooks as accompaniments. This talk will introduce you to some of those intriguing characters, from George Sand to Marcel Proust. It will take you into their memorable residences – chateaux and manor houses, apartments, a seaside villa, and a windmill – but it will also take you to places connected with their fictional creations, such as a prison and a medical museum.

Most of us have been lucky enough to visit France. It's the most popular tourist destination in the world! This talk will hopefully bring back fabulous 'souvenirs' of your own travels, and will remind you of the glories of 'la belle France'.

**Susannah Fullerton** is a literary lecturer, tour leader and author. She has been President of the Jane Austen Society of Australia for 30 years and has written several books about Jane Austen. Susannah leads literary tours around the world for Australians Studying Abroad. Her most recent book, published by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, is 'Great Writers and the Cats who Owned Them'.

## Report from the Activities with Impact Program

The Society provides an active program of events in Sydney and through its Hunter, New England North West, Southern Highlands, and Western NSW branches. With events planned and held recently by the branches reported separately in this Bulletin, this section focuses on the Master Plan's *Activities with Impact* program and events held in Sydney.



### RSNSW 2026 Annual Dinner and Awards Presentation

The Society's [2026 Annual Dinner and Awards Presentation](#) was held in the Strangers' Room of Parliament House, Sydney, on the evening of Friday, 27 February 2026.

It was a wonderful occasion attended by 180 members and friends of the Society, including the [2025 Award winners](#) (shown in the image below), who were presented with their awards by the President of the Society, Emeritus Professor Christina Slade FRNS. Professor Tony Haymet FTSE, Australia's Chief Scientist, delivered the after-dinner lecture, followed by a thought-provoking Q&A session with the assembled guests.



Pictured above are the 2025 award winners, together with the President of the Society, Emeritus Professor Christina Slade and the evening's master of ceremonies, Emeritus Professor Peter Shergold. From left to right, they are: Professor Simpn Ringer, University of Sydney (Warren Award for Engineering, Technology, Design and Architecture), Scientia Professor Xiaojing Hao, UNSW Sydney (Edgeworth David Medal), Scientia Professor Dennis Del Favero, UNSW Sydney (Creative and Performing Arts Award), Professor Chuan Zhao, UNSW Sydney (Liversidge Award in the Chemical Sciences), Emeritus Professor Christina Slade, Scientia Professor Richard Kingsford, UNSW Sydney (Life Sciences Award), Professor Bradley Moggridge, University of Technology Sydney (Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Scholar Medal), Professor Michaelle Haber, UNSW Sydney (James Cook Medal), and Professor Peter Shergold.

Some images from that occasion are available [at this link](#) for viewing and downloading. A separate folder of [images of the Award winners](#) is also available.

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## RSNSW 2025 Postgraduate & ECR Award Presentations — 9 Mar. 2026

The Society's 2025 Awards for Postgraduate Students and Early Career Researchers were presented at a ceremony kindly hosted by the University of Sydney on the evening of Monday, 9 March 2025.

The evening was introduced by Professor Louise Sharpe, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Researcher Training) and Emeritus Professor Christina Slade FRSN, President of the Royal Society of NSW, who presented the awards. Renowned ABC science journalist and presenter of the ABC Science Show, Robyn Williams AO FRSN, interviewed each of the award winners after their brief presentations.



Those presenting were:

- Dr Yunlong Qiang, University of Sydney (Jak Kelly Award) — *Novel Soliton Solutions: Uncovering the mysteries of higher order dispersion*
- Ms Eilish McMaster, University of Sydney (Scholarship Winner) — *Combining spatial, genetic, and environmental risk data to define and prioritise in situ conservation units*
- Ms Isabelle Nicolas, University of Sydney (Scholarship Winner) — *Balancing legal privilege with anti-money laundering obligations*
- Mr Amir Tourani, Western Sydney University (Scholarship Winner) — *Sick of bad dates? Try sensing their microbiome! Heritable endosymbionts change the chemical profiles of male thrips, allowing females to choose compatible partners*
- Dr Christopher Whyte, University of Sydney (Scholarship Winner) — *Constructing a computational bridge between neurobiology and psychology*
- Dr Adrian Lee, Westmead Institute for Medical Research (Early Career Researcher Citation) — *Unravelling the pathogenesis of Sjögren's disease from bedside to bench*
- Dr Jiayan Liao, University of Technology Sydney (Early Career Researcher Citation) — *Lighting up disease: How nanoscale light is changing the way we detect illness*

- Dr Brandon Munn, University of Sydney (Early Career Researcher Citation) — *Multiscale coordination of brain activity unifies theories of neural coding*

[Further information about the presenters and their talks](#) is available from the website event notice.

A [gallery of images](#) from the occasion is available from the preceding link, and recordings of their presentations will be available shortly on our YouTube channel.

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## **Presentation Report: Ideas@theHouse — 12 March 2026**

### **Navigating Strategic Uncertainty: Space, Cyber, and National Support in a Fractured World**

#### **Lieutenant General Susan Coyle AM CSC DSM**

Chief of Joint Capabilities  
Australian Defence Force

The fifteenth in the series of Ideas@theHouse events, which are joint presentations of Her Excellency, The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of NSW, and the Royal Society of NSW, was held on the evening of Thursday, 12 March 2026, in the Ballroom of Government House, Sydney.

**Lieutenant General Susan Coyle AC CSC DSM**, Head of Space Command, Commander of the Defence Cyber and Information Domain, and leader of Defence's National Support Division in the Australian Defence Force, was the speaker on this occasion, addressing the topic of '[Navigating Strategic Uncertainty: Space, Cyber and National Support in a Fractured World](#).'



Her address presented a sober assessment of Australia's strategic environment and the accelerating transformation of warfare. General Coyle contended that while the fundamental nature of war remained unchanged, its character is evolving rapidly due to advances in cyber operations, space dependence, artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and information warfare across all five domains. The talk highlighted growing global instability, including conflicts in the Middle East, rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific, and coercive state behaviour, noting that distance no longer insulates Australia and that the homeland is now part of the battlespace.

National security was framed as a whole-of-nation responsibility requiring close integration between the Australian Defence Force, government agencies, industry, academia, and society. Space and cyber were described as central enablers and contested domains essential to decision superiority, operational tempo, and deterrence. Information operations now increasingly shape perceptions and legitimacy, while logistics, fuel security, supply chains, and critical infrastructure resilience underpin national endurance.

General Coyle's address stressed the importance of alliances, interoperability, and early collaboration with industry to accelerate innovation. Drawing on lessons from contemporary conflicts, the speaker emphasises urgency, adaptability, and resilience. She concluded by calling for sustained momentum, integrated national preparedness, and collective effort to ensure Australia can deter threats, endure disruption, and actively shape its future security environment.

The address was followed by a lively Q&A session moderated by Major General Ret'd Fergus MacLachlan AO FRSN. Key themes include Australia's low likelihood of physical attack but high exposure to coercion in "grey zone" activities, particularly cyber and critical infrastructure threats. The speakers emphasised the importance of deterrence through alliances, especially with the United States and Five Eyes partners. The discussion covered cost-effective warfare lessons from Ukraine, the role of emerging technologies, and collaboration with industry, academia, and global technology firms while maintaining sovereign control. Other topics include recruitment reforms, lateral entry of technical experts, space as a contested domain, challenges in defence research funding, and the responsibility of young people to engage ethically and critically in a digital world.

A [recording of his presentation](#) is now available on the Society's YouTube channel. A [gallery of images](#) from the occasion is also available for downloading from the preceding link.

Lindsay Botten  
Bulletin Editor

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## Hunter Branch Report

### Presentation Report— 19 March 2026

#### Observing the Faint Universe with the Legacy Survey of Space and Time

#### Professor Sarah Brough FRSN FASA

Head, School of Physics  
UNSW Sydney



The talk delivered by Professor Sarah Brough (pictured right with Hunter Branch Chair, Emeritus Professor George Willis) discussed the Vera C. Rubin Observatory, highlighting how its 10-year Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST) will revolutionise astronomy, particularly studies of galaxy evolution. The Rubin Observatory is an 8.4-metre optical telescope located in Chile, chosen for its dry, dark conditions. It is equipped with a groundbreaking 3-gigapixel camera—the largest ever built—capable of imaging an area of sky equivalent to about 40 full moons in a single exposure across six optical bands from ultraviolet to near-infrared.



Unlike traditional telescopes that target specific objects, Rubin will repeatedly scan large portions of the sky, creating an unprecedented, uniform dataset. Over its lifetime, it will observe each region hundreds of times, enabling both deep imaging and rapid detection of transient events such as supernovae and asteroids. These changes will be broadcast through a public alert stream within minutes.

Professor Brough's research focuses on combining repeated observations to detect extremely faint light around galaxies, known as the low-surface-brightness universe. This diffuse light, described

as the ‘iceberg’ beneath visible galaxies, contains crucial information about how galaxies grow through mergers. In galaxy clusters, stars stripped during interactions form intracluster light, which records the system’s evolutionary history.

She explained how simulations and machine-learning techniques are being developed to measure this faint light efficiently and consistently. With Rubin’s vast, homogeneous dataset, astronomers will finally be able to study galaxy assembly across mass and cosmic time with the statistical power needed to resolve long-standing questions about how galaxies form and evolve.

If you missed the live presentation, a [recording of the event](#) is available on our YouTube channel.

Lindsay Botten FRSN  
Bulletin Editor

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## Southern Highlands Branch Report

### Presentation Report— 19 March 2026

#### PFAS in New South Wales: Is it under control?

##### Associate Professor Ian Wright

Discipline of Environmental Science

School of Science

Western Sydney University



Associate Professor Ian Wright opened his lecture with the surprising statement that the PFAS family of chemicals was to be found in every person in the audience. He then asked for a show of hands of those who had had a blood test for these substances. Not a hand was raised. He then added that perhaps an explanation for this surprising result was the fact that such a test in Australia currently costs \$500, none of which can be claimed on Medicare or private health insurance policies.



It was in 2024 that NSW became aware that some of its residents were drinking water containing harmful chemicals – per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). This was triggered by the news that US health authorities had announced new laws reducing the safe levels of PFAS in drinking water supplies. In August 2024, the announcement came that the Blue Mountains water supply contained elevated levels of PFAS. Analysis of a flowing creek in a ‘protected’ Blue Mountains drinking water catchment showed PFAS at a concentration that exceeded the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines by more than 50 times.

PFAS is not just an issue for Blue Mountains drinking water. An additional concern is the impact of elevated PFAS on water supplies in rural and regional communities. Even grazing livestock are known to be susceptible to PFAS contamination of their meat when their drinking water contains concentrations above trace levels. Ian’s research now includes the Southern Highlands waterways, where recent findings show concerning levels of PFAS contamination. One of Ian’s PhD students found a dead platypus that was the most contaminated ever recorded in NSW. The source remains

unclear, although Wingecarribee River sediment shows high PFAS levels, likely exposing platypus as they ingest sediment while feeding along stream and river beds.

So much more water research needs to be undertaken by scientists like Ian and his team. Before joining Western Sydney University, he worked for 20 years as a water scientist in the urban water industry, mainly at Sydney Water. We all look forward to his continuing research reports.

Anne Wood FRSN  
Chair, RSNSW Southern Highlands Branch

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## Western NSW Branch Report

### Presentation Report— 25 March 2026

#### The illusion of friendship: Why generative AI demands unprecedented ethical vigilance

##### Professor Zahid Islam FRSN

Professor of Computer Science and  
Director, AI and Cyber Futures Centre  
Charles Sturt University



In this online presentation from Charles Sturt University on Wednesday, 25 March, Professor Zahid Islam explored the ethical risks posed by generative AI, particularly the growing 'illusion of friendship' created through human-like conversational interactions. He began by outlining his research background in machine learning, data mining, privacy preservation, and decision forests, establishing his long-standing engagement with AI systems. He explained that while earlier AI tools were primarily task-based, generative AI represents a fundamental shift because it communicates in natural language and can provide emotionally supportive responses.



Zahid Islam argued that this conversational capability can foster emotional attachment, misplaced trust, and dependency. He illustrated this with real-world examples of people forming romantic or companion-like relationships with AI chatbots, sometimes with serious psychological consequences. Drawing on philosophical perspectives from Epicurus, Confucius, and Aristotle, he explained why humans may interpret AI behaviour as friendship, even though genuine friendship requires moral agency.

A key claim of his talk was that generative AI lacks consciousness, free will, and moral responsibility; its apparent empathy is a simulation based on next-token prediction rather than genuine care. Understanding how these systems work can help users maintain emotional distance. Professor Islam concluded by calling for unprecedented ethical vigilance, including public education, human-in-the-loop governance, policy safeguards, and more transparent AI communication design, so that society can benefit from generative AI without harmful emotional or ethical consequences.

If you missed the online presentation on 25 March, a [recording of the event](#) is available on our YouTube channel.

Lindsay Botten FRSN  
Bulletin Editor

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## **The Society and Social Media**

The Society's presence on our social media channels—[Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [X/Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#)—is engaging an increasing following, and we continue to build our repository of events on YouTube.

Our YouTube channel now has nearly 1,640 subscribers, while the 232 full-length videos and 'shorts' that are online have received almost 194,000 views.

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 encourage your friends, colleagues and members of your networks to do so.*

## **YouTube recordings of recent events**

All online presentations and all face-to-face presentations held in Sydney and by the Hunter, New England North West, and Western NSW Branches are recorded and made available on the Society's YouTube channel. These can be accessed directly from our [YouTube channel](#) or the [Presentations](#) page of the RSNSW website.

For convenience, the video links below provide access to current recordings and recent popular recordings. We hope that these will be of interest to members.



YouTube recording of the presentation from the Western NSW Branch Meeting 2026-1 of the Royal Society of NSW (25 March 2026) on *The illusion of friendship: Why generative AI demands unprecedented ethical vigilance*, by Professor Zahid Islam FRSN, Professor of Computer Science and Director, AI and Cyber Futures Centre at Charles Sturt University. A summary of the presentation and brief biographies of the presenters and panellists are available from the [online event notice](#).



YouTube recording of the presentation from the Hunter Branch Meeting 2026-1 of the Royal Society of NSW (19 March 2026) on *Observing the Faint Universe with the Legacy Survey of Space and Time*, by Professor Sarah Brough FRSN FASA, Head, School of Physics, UNSW Sydney. A summary of the presentation and brief biographies of the presenters and panellists are available from the [online event notice](#).



YouTube recording of the presentation from the 12 March 2026 Ideas@theHouse titled '*Navigating Strategic Uncertainty: Space, Cyber and National Support in a Fractured World*', delivered by Lieutenant General Susan Coyle AM CSC DSM, Chief of Joint Capabilities, Australian Defence Force. The [online event notice](#) provides a summary of the lecture and the presenter's biography.



YouTube recording of the presentation from the 1338th Ordinary General Meeting (11 February 2026) on *How many Australians should there be?*, delivered by Dr Abul Rizvi PSM FRSN, former Deputy Secretary of the Department of Immigration and now an expert commentator on such matters. A summary of the lecture and a brief biography of the presenter are available from the [online event notice](#).



@royalsocnsw

#AIHopeAndHype

YouTube playlist of recordings of the RSNSW and Learned Academies 2025 Forum on 'AI: The Hope and The Hype'. A [brochure](#) describing the day's program and listing biographies of the panellists and presenters is available from the preceding link.



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

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

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