



# Probus Club of Sydney

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## Newsletter

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DECEMBER 2023

Issue 460

### MEETING DATES

DECEMBER 5

MATT EGERTON-WARBURTON  
Catch Water Restore Land

FEBRUARY 6

IAN CHESTERMAN AM  
Paris Olympics

### ACTIVITIES

12 December  
CHRISTMAS LUNCH at Orso

9 February

NAVAL HARBOUR CRUISE

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

*Gentlemen,*

What a wonderful celebration we had at the November meeting. Jack Blackman scoring his ton was a great occasion, highlighted by his reminiscences of childhood at Little Manly and his reflections of life at present (“It’s funny; I was a nobody ..... but when I turned 100, suddenly I became somebody!”).

Tony Wither gave a fascinating Life Before Probus talk -- where in the world has he not lived?! Brett Mason’s talk on Mark Oliphant and Howard Florey was well researched and presented -- and made us all proud to be Aussies!

December 5 is our last meeting of the year featuring Rod Hansen and John Hyslop giving LBP talks and Matt Egerton-Warburton discussing how agriculture and the environment can work in unison, particularly from an aquatic viewpoint. I’m looking forward to seeing you then and also at our Christmas lunch on December 12 (there is still time to register!).

Best wishes,

**John Carter**

President

### Note

To Register to attend the December meeting at the Union, University and Schools Club - [click here](#)

### DECEMBER 5

*Note: Due to ill-health, the Hon Gary Nairn, who was scheduled to speak at the meeting is unable to attend and he has arranged for his deputy to speak in his place.*

#### **Matt Egerton-Warburton**

Deputy Chairman of the Mulloon Institute

##### **Catch Water Restore Land**



Matt is the Deputy-Chairman of The Mulloon Institute a global leader in environmental regeneration and sustainable agriculture. The Institute uses its United Nations recognised Mulloon Rehydration Initiative as a model to deliver landscape rehydration and catchment-scale projects across Australia.

Its world-class scientific research and educational outreach helps Australian farmers create resilient, productive, and profitable farms where agriculture and the environment work in unison. Rehydrating landscapes helps restore their natural function, boosts ecosystem biodiversity, and

makes them more resilient to climate extremes. It also allows for increased agricultural productivity and greater soil carbon capture through healthier soils and vegetation cover.

Matt believes a key role of the Institute is to assist landholders to farm sustainably and profitably – helping them repair and rehydrate their land while profitably producing high quality agricultural products.

His presentation will cover The Mulloon Institute’s work on the ground in various parts of the nation as well as its education and advocacy programs.

***John Doherty***

## NOVEMBER MEETING REPORT

The meeting was opened by President John Carter. He welcomed seven guests, including former member Ross Berglund who was returning for the day to join the birthday celebrations for Jack Blackman.

John Doherty reported on his speaker's programme for the next few months and Ted Brogan described the recent visit to the Transurban control centre which was very interesting. Ted encouraged members to book for the Christmas lunch on Tuesday 12 December. He also advised of a tour on 9 February on a boat owned by the Naval Historical Society which is on the website. It has been heavily booked to date but there are still some vacancies.

### Inductions

#### David Kirton



Paul Cheever introduced David Kirton as a new member. David is an accomplished golfer and tennis player.

David has a Bachelor of Commerce from UNSW and a Diploma in Applied Chemistry from the Ballarat School of mines. His career started with BHP in Newcastle where he was a cadet. Since then, he has been the Chief Chemist at Geo Kinnear and Sons in Melbourne, Product Marketing Manager with Union Carbide in Sydney, General

Manager of the joint venture between BF Goodman and James Hardie and the Marketing Manager for Hardie Iplex in Sydney.

He founded Plasson Australia 45 years ago, importing Israeli pipe fittings and is still the Chairman of the company. He enjoys sailing, reading, golf, tennis, croquet, music and travelling as well as being a grandparent. His current passion is working to develop a trap to capture and eliminate cane toad tadpoles!

## Alec Brennan



Alan Locke introduced Alec Brennan. Alec gained his first degree in Food Technology at UNSW and then completed an MBA at the Bayes Business School in London.

He spent much of his career with CSR where he was the CEO of various key business units becoming Finance Director and Director of Strategy where he developed the proposal to separate Rinkler Materials from CSR from 2003-07.

After retiring from the company in 2007 he had a broad range of interests in business and not-for-profit groups, including 12 years on the Senate of Sydney University and acting as Deputy Chancellor.

He founded and chairs the Brennan Family Foundation which provides funds to a number of charities. In 2013 he was awarded an AM and in 2023, an Honorary Degree in Business from Sydney University. He is a keen bird photographer and enjoys spending time with his family, including his 3 grandchildren.

## Life before Probus

### Tony Wither



Tony gave us a full account of his life, starting from his birth in 1935 in Ahmedabab in NW India where his father was a Colonel in the Punjab Regiment. When he was 6 years old the family was living in an Army camp in Kohat near the Khyber Pass, and he remembers the excitement of 'going to town' in Peshawar in an armoured car convoy because of the dangers of being held up by Afghans!

The next move was to Calcutta at the time of the Japanese move towards India. The family lived in a flat overlooking a large park which had been converted into an airfield where Tony was excited by the views of Spitfires and Hurricanes. For safety he was then sent to school in Darjeeling for a short time before moving to a mission school in Kashmir. The school had a component of Outward Bound which influenced the young (German) Kurt Hahn to found an outward school

in Germany and later the Gordonstoun School in Scotland. Because of the war the students had to stay at the school for 2.5 years without going home so they learnt a lot including camping, skiing and swimming (3 miles at aged 10!).

When peace came, he went to England to boarding school. Between 1952 -59 he became a student apprentice where he learnt manufacturing engineering, finishing up with a year studying marketing which is what he really wanted to do. Sadly, his mother was killed in a plane crash and so in school holidays he went to holiday homes in Devon where he enjoyed shooting, riding and so on. In short, he had a lovely life!

In 1959 he decided to go to Canada and ended up staying in Toronto for 9 years where he had several engineering jobs. Fortunately, he got a job with an engineering hire company and became their sales manager and eventually becoming the company's distribution manager for Europe. This led to a posting to Finland importing products from American and selling them to Russia. After the company was sold, he moved to Brussels to set up another office and then back to the UK with a division specialising in high-speed gluing. A further move saw him in Ohio where he stayed for 5 years and then decided to come to Australia.

Having joined a rugby club in Canada he had made many Australian friends who made him welcome in the country. One of these became the very first McDonalds' licensee in Australia and Tony applied to be a fellow licensee, ending up with three McDonalds restaurants and 400 employees before he sold the business. One noteworthy achievement was that he invented the McCafe!

He sold up in 2001 and moved to Sydney in 2004. He travels a lot and enjoys visiting his children and grandchildren in Amsterdam, London, Byron Bay and Sydney.

## Raconteur Jack Blackman



Jack, who is celebrating his 100th birthday, started by telling us that there is nothing to it – it's only a number! He then told us the story of his life over the past century including some of the major events which happened during that time. As he noted, there has been tremendous change.

When he was born it was the era of the flappers and of jazz. Warner Brothers was founded and the first portable radio was invented. Mount Etna erupted and Tokyo was flattened by an earthquake. Insulin was discovered and – most importantly of all – Vegemite was unleashed on Australia! Whilst the infamous Robert Maxwell (then Jan Hoch) was born in Czechoslovakia, Jack Blackman was born in Manly. Houses didn't have running water, the dunny was out

the back and ice was delivered to an icebox. Full cream milk was poured into a billycan that had been left out for the milkman.

At age 7 Jack's family moved to a modern unit overlooking Little Manly and Jack developed a lifelong passion for sailing and fishing. The 16-footer he sailed then is now in the heritage museum. The Manly ferries, which had been built in Glasgow and sailed out to Australia, docked at the Little Manly Wharf and Jack enjoyed looking at the engineers and smelling the oil. Manly was a homely village in which to live.

Jack lived through the Great Depression and remembers the unemployed men selling clothes props, rags, sharpening knives - anything to make some money. It was awful. At age 12 he wanted to join the navy at Jervis Bay but, as an only child, he was not allowed to do it but he decided to explore the underwater world at Manly using a helmet that he had made from an old kerosene can!

At 14 he was the Captain of the Manly Intermediate High School. As he put it, he was a big fish in a small pond but when he finished his Leaving Certificate at Shore School, he was a very small fish in a big pond.

World War II broke out when he was 15. At 17 he matriculated and went, with 6 or 7 friends, to Sydney University to study medicine. The course was shortened because of the war and so there were few holidays but when they did have a break, he would go cycling for 10 days at a time. After graduation in 1946 he became a Resident at Sydney Hospital. At that time the new doctors actually lived in the hospital. It was very hard work and they rarely got out of the building.

He then got married and went to Wolverhampton in England to study urology and general surgery. In 12 months, working day and night, he had only 1 day off! He returned to Australia and, fortunately for Jack, one of the assistant urological surgeons had died and he was appointed to the staff. Later he also worked at the Royal Hospital for Women but when the Wran government closed the Sydney Hospital he moved to St Vincent's General Hospital although he operated at all the private hospitals. He joined Sandy Pearson in Macquarie Street where he was privileged to meet a lot of important people in religion, commerce, the arts, agriculture and the Mafia!

He had a very busy life but retained his passion for fishing and sailing and in 1954 he rented a shack on one of the only two pristine rivers in NSW and later bought a cottage on the waterfront with a friend where they used to fish the beach, the rocks and the estuary. When he was 25, he bought a 2,000 acre property at the junction of the Abercrombie and Lachlan Rivers where his great great grandfather had farmed in 1822. Through hard work in eliminating rabbits with 1080, fencing and pasture improvements, as well as buying adjacent blocks, he built a new shearing shed and grew the property to 6,000 acres with 8,000 sheep and 400 cattle. He told us that all of his family learnt how hard farming was – they would be lucky to have one good year in 10.

Jack has been married twice, has 6 children, 12 grandchildren and umpteen great grandchildren. He has often been asked the secret of a long life and says that about 20-25% is down to ancestors, the rest being up to then individual. Barring accidents or serious illness everyone has a good chance to make 100! One needs to be active,

bodily and mentally. “Walk, don’t ride, don’t put on weight, eat anything in moderation with plenty of vegetables and fruit”. Alcohol is OK in moderation (Jack has a glass of wine with dinner and a glass of scotch every night). As we get older, we have to keep in contact with our friends and talk to people - which is why Probus is so good!

After the splendid story of his life Jack concluded with a couple of stanzas of poetry before the President asked him to cut a birthday cake whilst the members sang a rousing Happy Birthday!



## BRETT MASON

### Wizards of Oz



Immunologist, educator, former Senator, former Ambassador, Brett Mason delved into the extraordinary contributions of two Adelaide scientists, Mark Oliphant and Howard Florey, who had a profound impact on the outcome of World War II.

To quote from his book “Wizards of Oz”:

“The Allies eventually prevailed – this much is known. But the vital role the two Australians played in achieving that victory remains largely unrecognised.”

Oliphant and Florey led teams that over a period of 100 days in early 1940 developed the device that was critical to winning the war, conceived the powerful weapon that ended it, and produced the miracle treatment that enabled countless casualties to survive it.

Their contribution, however, did not begin and end with science. Just as importantly, Florey and Oliphant were also instrumental in enlisting America’s technological and industrial might for their cause. In another 100 days burst of activity a year later in mid 1941, their tireless lobbying and agitation across the length and breadth of the United States ensured the full potential of these breakthrough inventions would be realised.

Microwave radar, the atomic bomb and penicillin became the three most significant scientific and industrial projects of the Second World War. They also proved crucial to winning it. Without the two Australian scientists and their unheralded contributions in and out of laboratories, the course of the war would have been far deadlier and more protracted.”

In covering the above key points, Brett gave us lots of fascinating details of these two remarkable men and their crucial inventions. Particularly noteworthy were the following:



- They were childhood friends, whose lives had many close parallels, especially in Adelaide, going to England to study in the 1920s, the coincidence of their discoveries in 1940, and their separate visits to USA in 1941

- After doing a lot of research work with Lord Rutherford at Cambridge, Oliphant moved to the University of Birmingham just before the war. It was there in Feb 1940, his team produced the cavity magnetron, which used microwave thereby revolutionising radar due to the device's hand size transportability and power (compared with the static 70 metre masts that previously had used longwave to detect incoming aircraft).

- Just 2 weeks later, another team there led by Oliphant, provided first proof that an airborne atomic bomb was technically feasible.

- Only 2 months later at Oxford University, Florey's team conducted trials on mice that demonstrated that penicillin could kill bacteria in a severe infection without harming the body of the mouse (and later the human patient). In time penicillin revolutionised health, not only in treatment of infected wartime wounds, but also across the spectrum of infection control.

- It was then important for these massive discoveries to be put into large scale use, with special immediate application into the WWII effort. Britain's industry was pressed by the war effort, so in 1941, both Oliphant and Florey went to USA separately on secret missions (unknown to each other) to persuade the US government and industry that these developments be expedited (noting at the time the US was initially sceptical and reluctant about developing these technologies and had not yet entered WWII). The benefits of microwave radar were soon realised and the Americans devoted huge resources to its mass production to revolutionise offence and defence and consequent success in WWII. Similarly, only US had the capacity to mass produce penicillin, and eventually the major US pharmaceutical firms were instructed by Roosevelt's office to do so, giving the allies a way to greatly reduce fatalities from infections.

- In addition, Oliphant was lobbying to US authorities to build a nuclear weapon before Hitler did. Despite US scientists' initial dismissal of the British proof that it would work, this eventually was taken up, as portrayed in the Oppenheimer movie which made no reference to Oliphant or his team's breakthrough research that gave foundation to the bomb design.

After Q&A, covering German radar, the Battle of the Atlantic, patents, the problematic relationship with fellow Nobel Laureate Alexander Fleming, their future careers, etc, Paul O'Sullivan thanked Brett on behalf of members for his fascinating and uplifting presentation on these two extraordinary Australians.

**Peter James**

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

### Tour of Transurban's Control Centre

On 9 November another 15 another members and their guests had the opportunity to undergo a fascinating tour of the Operations Centre of Transurban Ltd. at St Peter's similar to the tour reported in the November newsletter.

### Future Activities

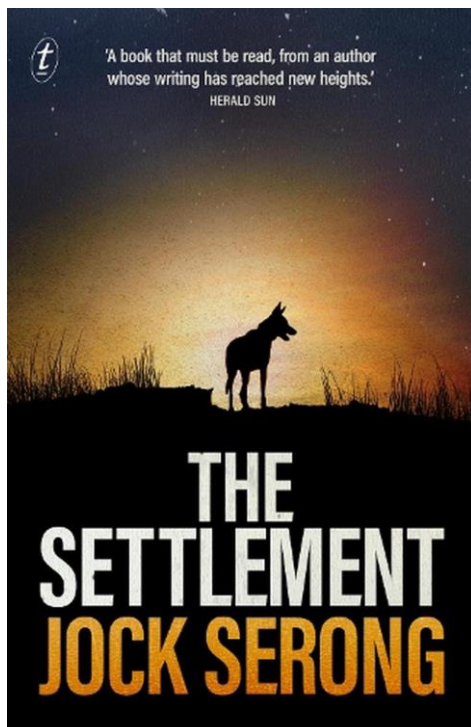
Tuesday 12 December: Christmas lunch at Orso. Bookings now open.

Friday 9 February: Naval Harbour Cruise from Wharf 3 at King Street. Departing at 9:45am, returning at 1pm. There are still a few places available although this has been heavily booked.

*Ted Brogan*

## BOOK REVIEW

### The Settlement by Jock Serong (2022) – 295 pages – fiction



Covering the period 1831 to 1835, the book relates the sorry saga of the ill-fated aboriginal settlement at Wyballena on Flinders Island under the leadership of George Augustus Robinson. In many ways the aborigines and their leaders were tricked into voluntarily agreeing to leave their homes on the Tasmanian mainland to avoid further massacre. They died of boredom, disease and neglect.

The book raises the central question of whether they would have been better off taking their chances against extermination by white settlers on the mainland versus languishing and dying on the island.

Told through the fictional character of a surveyor on the mainland, who became the storekeeper on the island. However, the central protagonist is, of course, Robinson. In the earlier chapters, pre-repatriation, Robinson was described as “the Man” and as brave and well intentioned. In the bulk of the book, in the settlement he is described as “the Superintendent”. He was a deeply flawed character. His bravery is commended in the early chapters – when he is “rescuing” groups of tribal aboriginals

and befriending their chiefs. He is portrayed in those earlier chapters as being motivated to save lives – whether because of his religion or his humanity.

Once he became superintendent of the settlement, he seems to have changed – much for the worse. He is portrayed as full of self-importance and ambition. At his worst, he is shown as tricking some of the aborigines (including the sister of the deceased chief) into believing that the chief would remain buried – while plotting to dig him up and send his head to a museum in Britain. Robinson's motivation being praise and promotion. His main ambition was to become Chief protector of aborigines in Port Phillip Australia, which he secured in 1839. He is portrayed as ruthless and uncaring, in order to achieve this ambition.

There are few redeeming features in the behaviour of Robinson and his cohort; and how the aborigines were treated. However, it is just another chapter in the way in which indigenous peoples were treated by white settlers in the 19th century. It is a tale that should be told and is well told by Serong.

It demonstrates once again how fiction can paint a much more graphic picture than fact. Although based on the diaries of Robinson and other historical sources, the author uses fiction brilliantly to paint a bleak picture– but one that should be better known by all Australians.

*David Castle*

## A TOUCH OF HUMOUR!

### **WIT!...IT WILL NEVER GROW OLD...(from Frank Barr-David)**

I had a rose named after me and I was very flattered. But I was not pleased to read the description in the catalogue: - 'No good in a bed, but fine against a wall.' -  
*Eleanor Roosevelt*

Last week, I stated this woman was the ugliest woman I had ever seen. I have since been visited by her sister, and now wish to withdraw that statement - *Mark Twain*

The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; And to have the two as close together as possible. - *George Burns*

Santa Claus has the right idea. Visit people only once a year - *Victor Borge*

Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint. - *Mark Twain*

By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you'll become happy; if you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher. - *Socrates*

I was married by a judge. I should have asked for a jury. - *Groucho Marx*

My wife has a slight impediment in her speech. Every now and then she stops to breathe. - *Jimmy Durante*

I have never hated a man enough to give his diamonds back. - *Zsa Zsa Gabor*

Only Irish coffee provides in a single glass all four essential food groups: Alcohol, caffeine, sugar and fat. - *Alex Levine*

My luck is so bad that if I bought a cemetery, people would stop dying. - *Rodney Dangerfield*

Money can't buy you happiness .... But it does bring you a more pleasant form of misery. - *Spike Milligan*

Until I was thirteen, I thought my name was SHUT UP. - *Joe Namath*

I don't feel old. I don't feel anything until noon. Then it's time for my nap. - *Bob Hope*

I never drink water because of the disgusting things that fish do in it. - *W. C. Fields*

We could certainly slow the aging process down if it had to work its way through Congress. - *Will Rogers*

Don't worry about avoiding temptation. As you grow older, it will avoid you. - *Winston Churchill*

Maybe it's true that life begins at fifty, but everything else starts to wear out, fall out, or spread out. - *Phyllis Diller*

By the time a man is wise enough to watch his step, he's too old to go anywhere - *Billy Crystal*

And the cardiologist's diet: if it tastes good spit it out.

### **MORE TRUTHS FROM FRANK!**

I became confused when I heard the word 'service' used with these agencies:

- Banking 'Service'
- Postal 'Service'
- Telephone 'Service'
- Pay TV 'Service'
- Public 'Service'
- Customer 'Service'

This is not what I thought 'Service' meant. Then I visited my uncle, he's a farmer and he hired a bull to 'Service' his cows.

Suddenly WOW!! It all came clear. Now I understand what all those agencies are doing to us!

## NEOLOGISMS

Every year the Washington Post invites readers to submit alternative meanings for common words (neologisms). This year's winners are:

1. **Coffee** (n), the person upon whom one coughs
2. **Flabbergasted** (adj), appalled over how much weight one has gained
3. **Abdicate** (v), to give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach
4. **Esplanade** (v), to attempt an explanation whilst drunk
5. **Willy-nilly** (adj), impotent
6. **Lymph** (v), to walk with a lisp
7. **Flatulance** (n), emergency vehicle which picks you up after you have been run over by a steamroller
8. **Rectitude** (n), the formal, dignified bearing adopted by proctologists
9. **Pokemon** (n), a Rastafarian proctologist
10. **Circumvent** (n), an opening in the front of boxer shorts worn by Jewish men
11. **Frisbeetarianism** (n), The belief that when you die, your soul flies up onto the roof and gets stuck there

## DRESS CODE FOR THE UUSC

In response to some enquiries from members, the UUSC has provided the following information:

"The rules at the UUSC have not changed. Coat and tie is the standard requirement from level 1 and above with the exception of level 3 which is the business centre.

Mobile phones should not be used in the public areas but may be used in function rooms. Members and visitors are encouraged to have their phones turned to silent or vibration."

## HOW TO CONTACT A COMMITTEE MEMBER

To contact any committee member [Click here](#)

**Please use email where possible or telephone if you require urgent contact.**