



Probis Club of Sydney

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Newsletter

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March 2026

Issue 484

MEETING DATES

3 March 2026

Professor Rick Shine AM FAA

New Ways to Control Cane Toads

7 April 2026

Professor Penny Gay

Comments on Jane Austen

ACTIVITIES

11 March - National Maritime
Museum, Darling Harbour

14 April – Historic NSW Rail
Museum, Thirlmere

16 April – Golf Day
Killara Golf Club

15 June – Winter Lunch
Royal Sydney Golf Club

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Gentlemen,

One of our Members, Tony Saunders, also a Member of Hunters Hill Probis, reminded us that the local starting point of the Rotary initiated Probis establishment occurred 50 years ago in 1976. The first Probis Club in Australia was Hunters Hill, placing it as 'Primus inter pares'. Sydney Probis has resolved to send a 'Letter of Congratulations' to the Hunters Hill Probis Club's President, Mrs Josephine McBride in recognition of its Golden Jubilee. Sydney Probis is 44 years in the making, this year.

Probis has flourished there being smallish groups of persons who have retired yet seek to continue meeting others in a social environment, to share current views and plenty of nostalgia, on a reasonably regular monthly basis. The more successful have an inflow of new members and management committees which perceptibly change over time.

Our February meeting heard from Tony Shepherd AO on matters related to our nation's progress leaving questions to be discussed, dealt with or influenced by each of us. There is always more to do – wherever we sit.

Our March speaker will be highlighting the Scourge of Cane Toads. I note the recent disclosure of a particular rare frog's toxin being used to kill Mr Navalny, Mr Putin's nemesis. Our cane toad terminates its attackers effectively. Take care!

March brings us to the end of Sydney Probis' Administrative Year, with the Annual General Meeting, delivering financial results, setting membership fees and electing the new Management Committee. Your 2025 Management Committee comprised outstanding, performing, forward looking persons, with whom it has been a pleasure to be seated.

Yours sincerely,

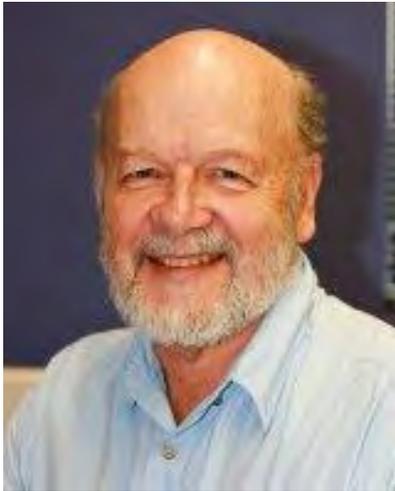
John Doherty.

President

Note: To Register to attend the 3rd March 2026 Probis Meeting at the Union, University and Schools Club, along with any male guest you plan to host - [click here](#)

3 March 2026

**Professor Rick Shine AM FAA
- New Ways to Control Cane toads**



Rick Shine is a Professor of Biology at Macquarie University, in Sydney. He was employed for most of his career at Sydney University and able to devote his time to research through Fellowships from the Australian Research Council (ARC). One of those was a Federation Fellowship from 2006 to 2010, covering the first five years after cane toads arrived at his main study site, Fogg Dam near Darwin, where he had been studying snakes and lizards since the early 1980s. Rick was then awarded a Laureate Fellowship, again from the ARC, to run until 2018, when he transferred to Macquarie University.

Rick has been passionate about wildlife, especially reptiles and amphibians, since he was a small child in Brisbane. He turned that passion into a career, completing an undergraduate degree in science at the Australian National University in Canberra, then a Ph.D at the University of New England.

Rick has conducted research all over the world, mostly on the ecology of snakes. He's published more than 1000 papers and received many national and international awards for his research, including three Eureka Awards for three different fields (research, mentoring, and communicating science to the public). In 2016 he received the two top awards in Australian science: NSW Scientist of the Year, and Prime Minister's Prize for Science.

The cane toad invasion front had been travelling from Queensland towards Fogg Dam for 70 years, and in 2004 it was just at the doorstep. Clearly, this was a unique opportunity to find out what cane toads actually do at the invasion front and what effects they have. Remarkably, given all the public money and private effort that had been devoted to cane toads in Australia, there was really very little detailed information on these animals. But their impending arrival provided a chance to get that information at Fogg Dam – one of the most intensively-studied and thus best understood chunks of tropical real estate in Australia.

Geoffrey McWilliam
Speaker Co-ordinator

FEBRUARY MEETING REPORT

President John Doherty opened the first General Meeting of 2026. The President welcomed members and six guests. There was a brief discussion of the 50th anniversary of Probus in Australia – see President’s column and below.

Geoff McWilliam advised the forthcoming speakers, including today’s speaker Tony Shepherd AO. On 3 March Professor Rick Shine AM FAA will talk about new ways to control cane toads and on 7 April Dr Penny Gay will discuss novelist Jane Austen who was born about 250 years ago.

Kim Oates informed us that the activities program for 2026 is largely planned including; a guided tour of the National Maritime Museum on 11 March, a visit to the NSW Rail Museum at Thirlmere on 14 April, a golf day at Killara Golf Club on 16 April and save the date for the Winter Lunch on 15 June. For further information see the Activities section below and the Club website.

50th ANNIVERSARY OF PROBUS



Founded in Australia in 1976, Probus has grown into a network of social clubs that bring people together through shared interests and regular activities. Today Probus supports more than 90,000 members across 1300 clubs throughout Australia, with each club reflecting the unique character of its local community.

Probus’ 50th Anniversary will be celebrated through local events hosted by clubs across Australia, reflecting Probus’ strong community roots. A key commemorative event was held on 3 February at Hunters Hill Sydney, home to the oldest Probus Club in Australia, which first opened its doors to new members on that date in 1976.

Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Moysten AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia has acknowledged the vital contribution of Probus throughout the country. Her Excellency has stated that: “As a community, you make a lasting contribution to wellbeing across, cities, towns and regions nationwide. I have seen and continue to celebrate the profound impact of Probus in the lives of many family members and in the communities that I have visited across Australia.

25 YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF SYDNEY

The Club sincerely congratulates and acknowledges the following members who have achieved **25 Years of Membership of our Club:**

John Warden, Leonard Regan and Derrick Docherty.

Your dedication, membership and friendship are much appreciated.

INDUCTION

Anthony Joseph AM



L to R: Tony Joseph, President John Doherty, Bob Eckstein

Bob Eckstein was very pleased to introduce Tony Joseph as a new member. Tony graduated in medicine from the University of Sydney in 1977 and trained at the much-loved Sydney Hospital becoming a general practitioner. After training at the Royal North Shore Hospital in emergency medicine, he became a doctor at RNSH and subsequently the Director of the Emergency Medicine Department – a role that he held for some years, retiring in 2022. Bob met Tony quite early in his career and informed us that Tony was a delightful person from day one and much loved by everyone at RNSH. Tony was a great supporter of the hospital during difficult times, particularly in dealing with government, finances and the media.

Tony is currently chair of the Hoc Mai Australia-Vietnam Medical Foundation, which assists in the training of Vietnamese doctors and nurses through bilateral exchange programs.

Hobbies are reading history, playing golf (intermittently), travel particularly to more exotic locations including a trip to Pakistan to take part in a three week trek to the K2 Base camp in the Karakoram Mountains. Nowadays Bob and Tony are working more on how to use Opal Cards to their best effect!

Tony has a wife Sally, eight children and nine grandchildren. He's very friendly, has a good sense of humour – in fact, all the right attributes to be a good member of Sydney Probus.

LIFE BEFORE PROBUS

A/Prof. Michael Hooper



Michael enjoyed a fortunate life and career in endocrinology retiring in 2023 having been in practice for about 55 years. He graduated in 1968 from Sydney University and trained at Royal North Shore Hospital and the Western Infirmary in Glasgow where he still has some very good friends with whom mutual visits take place from time to time.

Returning to Australia in 1976, he worked at the Royal Adelaide Hospital as senior staff specialist for eight years, then moving to Sydney in 1984 taking up the position of Director of Endocrinology at Concord Hospital succeeding John Carter. He retired from the Area Health Service in central Sydney in 2010, continuing in private practice at Gordon and Norfolk Island until the end of 2023. Enjoyable aspects

included the opportunity of working in interesting and remote locations including Woomera, Port Augusta and Norfolk Island where he provided endocrine services.

Norfolk Island had the “advantage” of a poor flight service allowing time to enjoy good fishing, swimming with turtles, etc. The Commonwealth Government takeover nine years ago removed the elected local parliamentarians but had the benefit of introducing Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Visiting specialists provided a great service on the Island reducing the need and cost for patients to travel to Australia.

In Adelaide and in Sydney, Michael had a special interest in metabolic bone disease particularly Osteoporosis and Paget’s Disease, which over time became the focus of the department at Concord. In addition, Michael had been running a series of successful international symposia on metabolic bone disease which led to the formation of the Australian and New Zealand Bone and Mineral Society in Auckland in 1988, of which he subsequently became president. He was Clinical Associate Professor in Medicine at the University of Sydney. He was also involved in the Royal Australian College of Physicians as a board director and honorary treasurer with an interest in governance reform. Based on recent reports, it seems that some challenges remain within the College.

He has had great opportunities to travel, a memorable trip in 2001 was with his son Anthony volunteering to be amateur archaeologists at Pella in Northern Jordan for three weeks digging bits of pottery and learning the history of various empires. Subsequently they visited Petra and then planned to backpack around Syria from Damascus to Aleppo, Crusader castles on the Mediterranean coast and Palmyra. However, their French language was not good enough to hitch rides, so a driver was arranged.

Michael has a very supportive wife in Jenny and children Belinda and Anthony. They have enjoyed travelling as a family. His hobbies include fishing, kayaking and painting.

Hon. Stephen Robb KC



For 45 years before becoming a member of Probus, Stephen was a lawyer practicing mostly from Phillip Street, Sydney. He grew up on the Central Coast of NSW in an old Australian working class family, a matter that he is very proud of and of which he has the fondest memories. It was a different world. That was the time when we walked to school, we were free, we could jump over the back fence and wander through the bush for miles and miles. He went to public school in Gosford and then Gosford High, a magnificent school where the teachers taught the three Rs, with no hint of modern progressive obsessions, but most of all there was discipline. He recalls chanting his times tables whilst the teacher had a stop watch in his right hand and a cane in his left. Learning the wonderful English anthem *Jerusalem* followed a similar process.

Stephen was going to be a teacher, studying at a teachers' college, with the support of a scholarship. However, Stephen's father died when he was in year 11. As he now qualified by way of the means test, he was able to take up a Commonwealth Scholarship and a State Bursary enrolling in the University of Sydney in science for reasons which he cannot recall. It turned out that he didn't do maths in the same way as everyone was supposed to. An assessment marker wrote, amongst other things; "they say that Henry Ford gave the hardest jobs to their least competent experts as they either found an easier way of doing it or they left", so Stephen left.

However, in those days it was possible to change from a science degree to an arts degree and enrol in Arts/Law, so he became a lawyer. Most of his time he practiced at the Bar and after twelve years was appointed as a Queen's Council. He is a member of two clubs, the very active Sydney Probus and the Dinosaur Club of which there can only be twelve members, namely the last barristers appointed as Queen's Council in NSW. The Dinosaur Club has never done anything except acquire a tie for its members. The only problem is for barristers who pride themselves on being called a silk, it's made out of polyester!

In 2013, Stephen was appointed as an Equity Judge in the Supreme Court of NSW. He had previously practiced in commercial law. The thing about general equity is that the judges do decide some commercial matters, but horror of horrors, they mostly decide matters between people. This experience has caused him to form the overwhelming opinion that litigation is not an appropriate way to determine disputes between people who had to pay their own costs, given the incredible uncertainty about outcomes and consequences. If such cases were regularly publicised there would be an outcry.

Stephen has been married to Angie for 46 years with two daughters and five grandchildren. He has spent many years participating in onshore and offshore yacht racing.

AUSTRALIA FROM A BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE

Tony Shepherd AO



In introducing Tony Shepherd AO, Geoff McWilliam reflected on the challenges and opportunities inherent in the expression **“We live in interesting times”** and, given the breadth and depth of his career, commented on how well qualified Tony Shepherd is to speak to us about Australia’s current situation from a business perspective.

The key points Tony made included:

- Business is the backbone of our economy and society, so its welfare and success are very important. Apart from the resources sector, Australian business could currently be summarised as uncertain and nervous, exacerbated by overseas events and the fiscal situation of NSW and Victoria.
- Our productivity is a key statistic. It is falling away in recent years and needs serious attention.
- Commonwealth employee numbers are growing faster than the country’s population, with wages and salaries increasing by 7.6% in the past year. Having said that, a well-paid, well-educated, honest and obedient public service is fundamentally important in the Westminster system of government.
- But our Commonwealth public service is not meeting the high standards that are expected.
- In addition, we are being subjected at both the Federal and State levels to a massive increase in “red tape”. With major potential investors walking away from investing here, Premier Minns is showing the way with a real plan to tackle and fix the problem.
- Tony describes the governments climate change policy as a “fiasco” that has resulted in electricity costs increasing by 38% in 4 years, along with reduction in supply reliability. These factors are putting smelter businesses at risk and impeding industry growth.
- While hydrogen has not succeeded as an alternative energy source, and Tony is not sure that nuclear energy is the answer, he thinks we should at least take a look at the nuclear option. He added, for interest, that Canada is now exporting nuclear generated electricity to some of the US’s northern states!
- With the decline in manufacturing as a proportion of our economy, we are extremely vulnerable to inherently risky, long supply chains.
- Recent changes to our industrial relations laws will make us less competitive and more reliant on imports.
- Alarming a 4 day/week idea is now being addressed by a Senate enquiry which if accepted will be inflationary and reduce productivity.

- We should appreciate the importance of the resources industry which is saving our economy and be keen to support it.
- We have a serious shortage of skilled workers. Education is part of the answer (including mathematics), skilled migration is another possible source as it was in Australia Post WW 2.

The questions and comments that followed covered:

The impact of red tape on housing approvals and supply; the benefits of modular housing; the challenge of achieving productivity improvements in a service industry economy; the need for long term export contracts to underwrite major capital investments in gas projects; the need for the business community to be more vocal with government; the shortage of first class political leadership (of the Hawke and Howard kind) at both the state and federal levels; the Business Council is strengthening its sensible and fact based Government and public lobbying; the outsourcing to consultants of public service roles has been a failure in the downgrading the expertise in the public service which we rely on; concerns about environmental damage from proposed gas projects in northern NSW are not well founded, "wokeness" is being encouraged by our education system; the idea of the Business Council identifying and encouraging candidates who understand business issues to stand for parliament has merit; the Metro has been a remarkable success and the Government should be praised; the light rail is popular and contributes but it's not the answer to dealing with the peaks as it is slow, particularly when loading and unloading.

At the conclusion of the meeting Keith Hartman thanked Tony Shepherd (his neighbour) on our behalf.

Alan Locke

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

Recent Events

Guided Tour of the Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney – 5 February 2026



Members and Guests Enjoying the Egyptian Room – along with Mummy

Twenty of us met at the Chau Chak Wing museum on the grounds of the University of Sydney for a 75-minute tour on Thursday 5 February.

We started with a tour of two temporary exhibitions. The first was of the paintings of J.W. Power, an Australian avant-garde painter, who gave up a surgical career, moved to Europe, and whose works spanned the interwar years. We were very fortunate to be guided by the curator of the exhibition who treated us to the fascinating life story of the artist, as well as his striking artworks and diaries, heavily influenced by the cubist movement.

The second temporary exhibition was of photographs taken by Max Dupain during his time as a student on the Sydney University campus, including campus buildings, examination halls and student protest activities, very entertaining for the alumni of the University in our group.

After that we were guided to a selection of the archaeological and natural science highlights for which the museum is well-known. These included Australian Aboriginal artefacts, Graeco-Roman statuary, Egyptian mummies, and preserved rare animals and birds.

The museum building itself, built in “blunt and modern” architectural style, is an important part of the visitor’s experience.

The tour finished with a pleasant lunch in the café attached to the Museum. We only touched the surface of the many offerings of this Museum, and many of us were inclined to a return visit at our own leisure.

Future Events (please see the website and emails for further details)

Guided Tour of the National Maritime Museum – Monday 11 March ‘26



Situated in Darling Harbour the Australian National Maritime Museum opened in 1991. Its aim is to preserve and showcase Australia’s maritime heritage and our deep connection to the sea. It has a large indoor collection as well as a floating collection of vessels including the destroyer HMAS *Vampire* and a replica of Captains Cook’s *Endeavour*.

We will assemble at 10 am for a one hour *Behind the Scenes* guided tour commencing 10.30 am sharp. Tours are led by volunteers, maximum of 10 guest/tour. We have booked two tours i.e. 20 Probus members and guests.

Cost is \$25. This includes entry to all exhibits, special exhibitions, all vessels as well as our private tour. Once we have final numbers a booking will be made for lunch at 12 noon in *Ripples*, the Museum Café.

The museum is open from 10am to 4pm. Some members and guests may wish to remain at the Museum to board the vessels and see some of the special exhibitions.

The Museum is easily accessed by public transport. The Light Rail stop along the L1 line (Central-Dulwich Hill) is Pyrmont Bay and the ferry stop (from Circular Quay) is Pyrmont Bay, both a short walk from the museum. The nearest train station is Town Hall, from there the museum is a 15-minute walk across Pyrmont Bridge.

FOOD Train Weekend in Orange, NSW – 27-29 March 2026 – FULLY BOOKED



The FOOD Train weekend package is the perfect getaway for food lovers. Hosted by local foodies, this 3-day guided trip on **27-29 March 2026** showcases some of the Orange region's best food and wine experiences. **FULLY BOOKED.**

A Private Tour of the Historic NSW Rail Museum and Heritage Train Ride Rail Heritage Comes to Life - Tuesday 14 April 2026



The NSW Rail Museum, located within the historic town of Thirlmere, is a fascinating and exciting step back in time for all ages with interactive displays, glimpses behind the scenes at Australia's newest locomotive roundhouse and a priceless collection of historic locomotives, carriages, wagons and memorabilia.

On this private tour we will follow the timeline of rail development from the invention of the very first steam engine to today and discover how NSW railways brought life to town and country. We will see inside the driver's cab of an historic steam locomotive, explore a mail van, walk through a prison van and admire the Governor-General's carriage in all its glory. Then visit the Great Train Hall to see an impressive collection of locomotives, carriages and wagons – each with a unique story.

Next, as long as we have a minimum of 25 guests, we will take a ride on a heritage train, followed by a light lunch in the museum cafeteria.

Assemble at the entrance 10 Barbour Road Thirlmere at 10.30 am then walk (10 minutes) to the museum for a private tour commencing at 11 am followed by the train ride at 12 noon.

PCOS Golf Day at Killara – Thursday 16 April 2026



After a very successful golf day last April, a golf event for PCOS members will be held at the Killara Golf Club on Thursday 16th April.

Tee times have been provided by KGC for about 10 am, followed by drinks and a late lunch/snack ordered from the bar menu and paid individually.

We hope that it may be possible to bring this tee time forward, if in the meantime there is no booking by a large group. This should be known about a month beforehand.

Registration will be via our website including payment for cart fees etc for all players, plus green fees for non KGC members.

Please contact Bill Thomas or Peter James if you are interested in playing or need extra information. Those no longer members of a golf club and whose handicap has lapsed are welcome to play.

Non-golfers will be welcome to join us in the club house for drinks and late lunch.

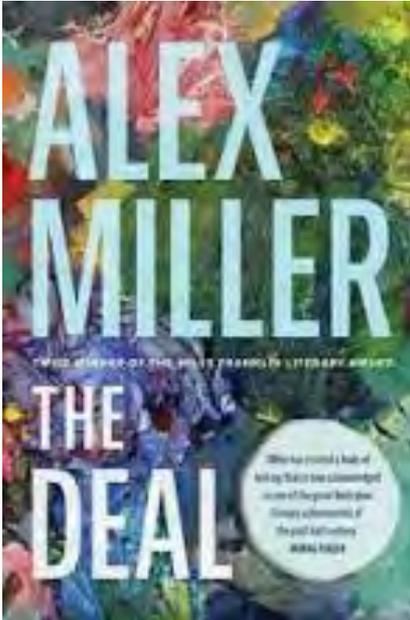
Winter Lunch at the Royal Sydney Golf Club – Monday 15 June 2026 ****SAVE THE DATE****



Kim Oates & Bob Eckstein
Events Coordinators

The Deal

by Alex Miller (2024) 279 Pages – Fiction



Like “Tell Me Everything” by Elizabeth Prout (recently reviewed), very little happens here. However, Miller’s people are very different from Prout’s and his central focus is art in an Australian setting – different from small-town America and unfulfilled lives. Here, the central protagonists struggle to be creative, amidst all the distractions and disappointments of life. However, like Prout, very few words are wasted and these books are a welcome relief to the usual 400 pages.

The young Andy, an unpublished novelist, meets Lang, an older disillusioned Chinese artist. What follows is the double life of Andy. By day, an ordinary Australian husband and father. By night, plunged into the murky world of the artist and art – including the shady side of art dealing. Through his unlikely friendship with Lang, Andy re-discovers his own creativity.

Miller is a famous Australian author having twice won the Miles Franklin literary award and having published about 16 acclaimed books. He writes well. Art is one of his specialties and this book does not disappoint. So, read it for the writing and the brilliant insight into creativity.

David Castle

SCAM AWARENESS

SCAMS ADVICE FROM ANZ

Scammers are posing as legitimate financial advisers or institutions, offering ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ chances to grow your wealth, or promising returns on savings you ‘won’t find anywhere else’. With interest rates changing and people looking for better returns on their savings, scammers are even more active.

If an 'opportunity' sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Common investment scam red flags



Celebrity in emails/socials: Be wary of emails or social media ads featuring well-known personalities promoting get-rich-quick schemes. Scammers use fake news articles and videos to make them look real.



Random messages: If someone you don't know contacts you via SMS or apps like WhatsApp or Telegram and the chat shifts to investing, they could be out to scam you.



Higher rates: Scammers often dangle higher interest rates than what's available elsewhere, targeting people eager to boost their savings quickly. Don't believe it.



No online presence: A legitimate investment firm should be easy to find online. If you can't dig up much about them, steer clear.



Can't withdraw your money: If you're asked to pay a fee to access your own funds, there's a high chance it's a scam.



Remote access requests: If someone from the 'investment company' asks you to install remote access software to help set up accounts, don't do it.



Crypto transfers: If you're told to open a crypto exchange account and send funds to a wallet address they provide, it's almost certainly a scam.



'Help' recovering lost funds: If you've been scammed before and someone contacts you offering to recover your money for a fee, it's very likely part of the same scam.

Think you've been scammed?

If you think you've been scammed, act immediately. If you've shared personal or banking details with a suspected scammer, or sent money to an unknown account, contact the bank as soon as possible. They are there to help.

A TOUCH OF HUMOUR!

Oh for the Simple Life!



Astronomy for Beginners!



Advice for Wordsmiths

Once again, The Washington Post has published the winning submissions to its yearly neologism contest, in which readers are asked to supply alternate meanings for common words...and the winners are:

1. Coffee (n.), the person upon whom one coughs.
2. Flabbergasted (adj.), appalled over how much weight you have gained.
3. Abdicate (v.), to give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach.
4. Esplanade (v.), to attempt an explanation while drunk.
5. Willy-nilly (adj.), impotent.
6. Negligent (adj.), describes a condition in which you absentmindedly answer the door in your nightgown.
7. Lymph (v.), to walk with a lisp.
8. Gargoyle (n.), gross olive-flavored mouthwash.
9. Flatulence (n.) emergency vehicle that picks you up after you are run over by a steamroller.
10. Balderdash (n.), a rapidly receding hairline.

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.