



Probis Club of Sydney

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Newsletter

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OCTOBER 2024

Issue 469

MEETING DATES

OCTOBER 1

IAN WESTMORELAND

Healing Through Adversity

NOVEMBER 12

SIMON PERROTT

The Wayside Chapel

ACTIVITIES

OCTOBER 10

Sydney Cricket Ground

NOVEMBER 18

NextSense Tour

DECEMBER 9

Christmas Lunch

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A touch of Humour

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Gentlemen,

A postponement of an arranged external Guest Speaker enabled us to hear from one of our many distinguished members at our October meeting. Prof Steven Schwartz gave us a fine analysis of the massive recent growth in numbers of Australia's university students, many of whom are failing, and/or suffering from student debt plus in many sectors suppressed salaries after graduation. He provided some suggestions to address this situation, prompting the usual engaging Q&A, which is such an interesting feature of our meetings.

The 68 who attended (of whom almost two-thirds stayed for lunch) very much appreciated Steven's excellent presentation, plus hearing the remarkable Life before Probis talks by Bob Eckstein and Rob Robertson, as well as the welcomes given by the proposers to our new inductees, Phil Barnes and Rod Ravenscourt. Aside from their career and community achievements, most importantly they are friendly and we look forward to their participation and contribution to further enhance the camaraderie and friendships that we enjoy as members.

I would like to acknowledge the superb contribution made by Bill Cheshire, who will attend his last meeting on 1st October after 11 years with us. Aside from taking fine photos, Bill was integral to the development of our club's IT systems which are such an important part of the smooth administration of our club. Many thanks Bill, and all best wishes for your life back with your family in New Zealand.

Best wishes,

Peter James

President

Note

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

OCTOBER 1

Ian Westmoreland

Healing Through Adversity



Ian Westmoreland worked for 40 years in the Australian and New Zealand utilities industries in various IT roles, mostly as an IT development and support manager.

On 10 September 2013, he experienced a life changing moment that ultimately led to his decision to retire from paid work in May 2014 and commence a volunteer mentoring career with the Raise Foundation, Kidshope and COACH.

During his involvement in these mentoring programs Ian identified that there was no free life mentoring readily available for Australian adult men; a group that needs mentoring as much as any other group. So in June 2018 Ian began developing the Mentoring Men program and this program was officially launched in November 2018.

“I have met thousands of men and I believe none of us genuinely has it all together all the time, despite how we might sometimes appear. Everyone one of us can experience periods of anxiety, feeling down, relationship issues and low self-esteem; for some men these negative emotions are occasional and for others they occur more frequently.

“In my own case I felt unusually sad and flat for a few weeks so I went looking for someone who would just listen to my story without judging me. I had been mentoring high school and primary school children for several years and had seen these mentoring programs achieve great results. But finding an organisation that offered a free mentor service as an adult man proved impossible and it burned in the back of my mind that I wasn’t the only man who wanted some advice. That’s when I decided to do something about it, so I channelled my energy into setting up a not for profit organisation called Mentoring Men. It’s a program that carefully matches volunteer trained male mentors with adult male mentees to provide the life mentoring.

Ian has been married to his gorgeous wife Helen for 41 years and they have four children and 12 grandchildren. He is a keen sportsman who enjoys his tennis and golf and enjoys going for a swim and bike rides with Helen.

SEPTEMBER MEETING REPORT

President Peter James welcomed two guests.

There were committee reports from Geoff McWilliam about the speakers programme for the next few months and from Ted Brogan who spoke about the events planned for the next few months.

INDUCTIONS



Phil Barnes, Gavin Barr, Geoff McWilliam and Rod Ravenscroft

Phil Barnes

Phil was introduced by Gavin Barr. Phil was educated at Normanhurst Boys High. He then trained in gastroenterology at Royal North Shore Hospital. In 1982 he and his wife and young family moved to London where he undertook research in the physiology of the large bowel. He returned to Sydney to set up private practice in St Leonards and he worked at Concord and RNSH until he retired in 2020. He has a lot of eclectic interests including art. He is a keen farmer and has 3 daughters and 10 grandchildren.

Rod Ravenscroft

Geoff McWilliam introduced Rod who he has known for more than 40 years. He described Rod as 'falling into the bankers group'. His first degree was in pure mathematics and history at Monash University. He has an MBA from the University of Pennsylvania and a graduate certificate from UNE in Pure Mathematics. He has been involved in business for many years including some time in India. He has been involved in a number of charities. He has 3 daughters and 7 grandchildren.

LIFE BEFORE PROBUS

Rob Robertson



Bob grew up on the North Shore of Sydney and at the age of seven was diagnosed with a childhood hip disorder which required him to wear a caliper and use crutches for four years. His disability may have been the reason that he wanted to become a doctor.

Schooling was at Sydney Grammar from year 6 where he enjoyed his time participating in sports and cadets. However, his Leaving Certificate results were average. As a result, he did not get into Medicine but was lucky enough to transfer

into Medicine after a year of Science at Sydney University and he graduated in 1973. Serenading a young lady with his guitar at the Mount Cook youth hostel in New Zealand on a university holiday led to love and marriage in his graduating year!

His residency was done at Royal North Shore Hospital, and he was accepted into an Obstetrics and Gynaecology training programme which included a year in the UK. At this point in his training, he could have followed the path of most trainees and commenced a career in obstetrics and gynaecology, but he could see the need for providing genetic counselling to couples who had babies born with birth defects and the possibility of detecting their problems during pregnancy. In the late 1970s there was no clinical genetics program in Australia, few trained Clinical Geneticists here and none were Obstetricians.

With his pregnant wife and a small child, he travelled to Los Angeles in 1978 to commence a three-year genetics fellowship at UCLA. A comprehensive programme in clinical and laboratory genetics was provided together with specialised training in prenatal testing and obstetric ultrasound.

On their return to Australia in 1981 Rob was appointed as an obstetrician/geneticist at RNSH and at the Sydney Adventist Hospital providing genetic counselling, obstetric and gynaecological ultrasound and prenatal diagnosis and therapy. In the beginning these services were infrequently utilised, ultrasound equipment was primitive, and he began to wonder if he could make a career out of it. However, gradually the message was received, technology improved and over time he had more work than he could manage.

He joined a specialist obstetric and gynaecological ultrasound group in 1995 he helped grow into a multisite practice across metropolitan Sydney with 7 doctors and 20 sonographers; eventually the partnership was acquired by Monash IVF in 2015.

One of the highlights of his career was to witness the reassurance that a normal test result provided to many couples who chose to have genetic counselling and testing during pregnancy. In this 30-year period, genetic diagnosis and laboratory investigation changed dramatically from basic chromosome analysis and biochemical testing to complex DNA testing, with the discovery of the human genome, the development of IVF and preimplantation genetic diagnosis.

In 2015 he retired completely from medicine and commenced an Arts degree, majoring in modern history. The shift to essay writing was both challenging and illuminating.

From the serenading guitar moment until now he has been happily married for 51 years to his wife Jill. They have 4 adult children and six grandchildren which keeps them both very busy. Golf has given him some special lifelong friendships which he cherishes more than the frustrating game itself although he has had a hole in one!

Rob enjoys bridge and music and he still plays the guitar and is now learning to play the piano. Travel has provided the excitement of new places and people, and he has had many memorable sailing holidays and many other holiday trips both here and overseas.

Bob Eckstein



Bob was born in Sydney in 1952 to parents who had arrived in Sydney just before the outbreak of the Second World War, their origins being in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and more recently Vienna. His earliest memories are of friends and family get-togethers and in the Viennese tradition, afternoon coffee and cakes. In those early years he learned to understand both German and English at the time and he still does.

Schooling was at Sydney Grammar and some drivers that lead to his choice of Medicine might perhaps initially be associated with being hospitalised for a month with rheumatic fever at the age of 6 and secondly having a seriously hypochondriacal uncle in whose study was a thick and comprehensive Dictionary of Illnesses. He was fascinated to read about

diphtheria, rabies, American sleeping sickness, thallium poisoning and a lot more. Thirdly, as he did well at school and having parents that had never been to university, he was encouraged to enter a learned profession.

At age 17 he started Medicine at Sydney University and after five years of pathology training at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, finishing in 1983, he completed his College Fellowship before taking up a specialist position at RNSH. He trained in the discipline of Tissue Pathology or Anatomical Pathology which included six months of Forensic Pathology. The most exciting parts were to attend murder scenes and the firing of pistols at the police station located then in Goulburn Street. He later spent a year at Charing Cross Hospital in London.

Over the almost most 50 years of his career the diagnostic process has become much more sophisticated as practitioners began to be able to identify specific proteins and gene products in cells and tissues using labelled antigen antibody techniques. Diagnosis wasn't always straightforward. Teaching of pathologists in training was a crucial part of the job as it is essentially an apprenticeship system. Continuing education of all Consultants was also crucial, and Bob became heavily involved with the International Academy of Pathology and for some years represented Australia as an international vice president.

Around 1990 Bob became head of the Department of Pathology at Royal North Shore Hospital. During this time both public and private pathology organisations were able to mechanise most blood work and the practices enlarged into complex businesses. At the start of his career, he was dealing with every part of the body from brain tumours to toenail infections. By the end he was largely restricted to specimens from the gut, liver and kidneys.

In 1980 he married a fellow medical trainee who was a training to be an oncologist when that speciality was brand new. They happily raised four children and felt bulletproof until 2008 when his wife Anne developed a form of Parkinson's disease that unfortunately took her life in early 2016. The grief hit him hard but sometime later he was introduced to another lovely lady, Kathryn, at North Ryde Golf Course and that has developed beyond mere friendship. Through her he has met a new group of very fine people not the least being Geoff McWilliam, our esteemed director of speakers.

Pathology has for him been a profession, passion and hobby. His late hypochondriacal uncle would be amazed that he can say that he has now seen (at least in tissue specimens) diphtheria, American sleeping sickness, rabies and thallium poisoning along with countless other conditions.

In 2018, after he developed a health issue himself, he decided to fully retire and made a clean break with work. Grandchildren kept coming on the scene and now number 10, most under the age of 6. He enjoys golf, Pilates, skiing, bushwalking and running.

Roger Williams

Emeritus Professor Steven Schwartz AM

Failing by Degrees: The High Cost of Degree Inflation



Following some amusing introductory remarks, Steven provided some historical background to his talk about degree inflation. He pointed out that of all the social institutions, around 85, that have survived since the year 1500, the large majority are universities that serve vital social functions.

He contends that higher education is necessary to preserve culture, develop new knowledge and provide an opportunity for bright students to fulfil their potential, but uncontrolled growth in universities and student numbers is bad for students, graduates and the nation.

In the early 1900s, each Australian state had a university with a combined enrolment of 3000. Numbers picked up after WW2 with universities seen as useful in integrating returned servicemen into the economy. With the Commonwealth providing most of the funding, the view developed that increasing the number of graduates was of benefit to all Australians.

A further, major boost in numbers occurred as a result of a policy adopted enthusiastically by John Dawkins which was to transition various institutes and technical colleges into universities, mostly by simply changing their name, then encouraging them to grow. “University growth was turbocharged”.

In addition to the growth in domestic students, in the last 20 years, international student numbers quadrupled. “The average Australian university is now twice the size of its American counterpart and four times larger than the average British university”. They are large businesses with the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne, for example, having annual revenues exceeding \$3 billion.

This growth has been good for universities, but not so for students and the economy. Many of the students, who would not normally have been admitted, struggle and quit with no degree and a debt.

With employers attracted to the idea of requiring a university qualification, students who would normally undertake a trade or similar vocational course were encouraged to enter a university, leading to trades' skills shortages and wage inflation.

Concurrently the financial premium over a lifetime from having a degree diminished from 25% in 1990 to 15% in 2000 and is now the third smallest premium in the OECD.

38% of employed graduates have said they are working in roles that do not require their degree.

Universities face a cost squeeze due to rising wages and salaries and limited scope for productivity improvements. The outcome is increased student numbers and higher fees are needed each year.

Students experience crowding and may receive a lower standard of higher education. Given the financial demands of growing universities, the vocational and technical education sector is underfunded. The increased number of degree holders (ie "degree inflation") has not increased national productivity.

Steven offered these insights:

"It is time for a reset" including requiring universities to pay a share of the cost of unpaid loans. Their having "skin in the game" would discourage them from admitting students with low potential to complete their course and pay back their student loans.

It is also time to reconsider the need for degrees for particular roles, pointing to the leadership provided by a US state governor who reduced the number of roles in his state's public service requiring a degree by 92%.

Continuing to fund the growth currently sought by universities would be a major misallocation of resources.

In summary, degree inflation is bad but we still need universities to enlighten the mind, refine understanding and elevate the soul, including of potential leaders.

Following questions including the nature of recent protests on campuses, the proliferation of courses being offered, higher education standards and caps on foreign student numbers, Professor Max Irvine proposed the vote of thanks for Steven's insightful and informative address.

If you would like a copy of Steven's slides, please contact him directly.

Alan Locke

Check out Steven's Free Newsletter, **Wiser Every Day**:

<https://stevenschwartz.substack.com/>

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

The Salon des Refusés visit took place on the 16th of August. Most of the attendees stayed on to have a café style meal at the adjoining Trust Café.

Our guide was very informative, particularly on the subjects of the history of the Salon in 1880's Paris, its revival in Sydney and some of the conventions around classical portraiture. The paintings on display were the ones the Salon judges felt were the best of those not included in the Archibald prize at the NSW Art Gallery and it was generally agreed that many of them deserved more recognition.

We have a full program of Events for the rest of the year including:

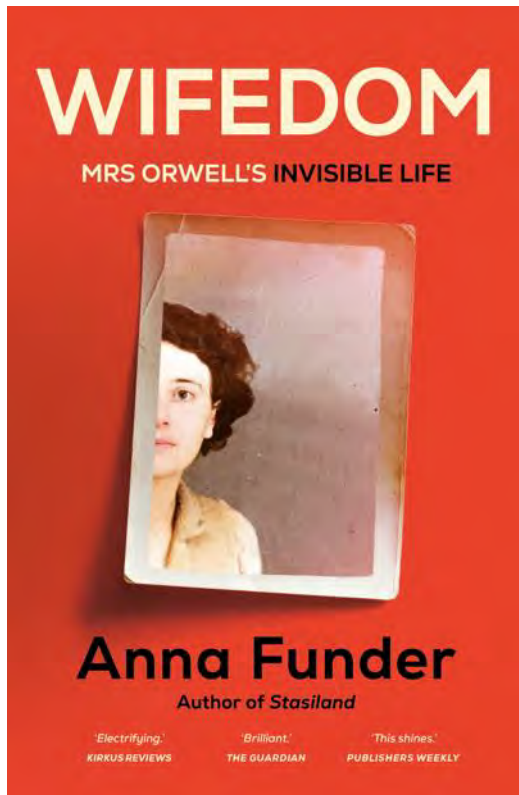
NSW Parliament (Monday 16th September) the **Sydney Cricket Ground** (Thursday 10th October) The Deaf & Blind Society - now called **NextSense** (Monday 18th November) the **Christmas Lunch** (Monday 9th December) and in the New Year, **St Paul's College** (Monday 10th February) plus a voyage for 50 members and quests along the Western Harbour of Sydney with the Naval Historical Society (Friday 28th March). Additionally, we are hoping to arrange an informal walking tour of Barangaroo led by Committee Member Adrian Pilton before the end of the year.

Details of these events will appear progressively on the Probus website, so please look at the website from time to time, particularly if you are not a regular attendee at the monthly Lunches.

As always, wives and partners are always welcome to attend Events.

Ted Brogan
Events Coordinator

Wifedom by Anna Funder (2023) – 400 pages – Biography



Devotees of 1984 and Animal Farm are in for a surprise. George Orwell, as a person, was not the romantic hero some of us imagined.

Funder explores at great length the relationship between George and his wife. The wife (Eileen) has been neglected by history – and in particular all the biographers of George. From a 21st century feminist point of view, George was deeply flawed as a husband and person. All this from Funder, who is or was a great admirer of Orwell's work.

Funder has uncovered 6 letters from Eileen to her best friend. These letters are the bases for her thesis and deep research.

Whether or not you agree with that thesis, Funder writes brilliantly and has some

remarkable insights into their joint involvement in the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

So the writing is brilliant, the research appears to be impeccable and the characters of great interest. Orwell is not unique in being a deeply flawed character, certainly by modern standards. To what extent (if any) does this detract from his work?

David Castle

A TOUCH OF HUMOUR!

SOME INTERESTING SIGNS!

SIGN IN A SHOE REPAIR STORE IN VANCOUVER, BC

"We will heel you, we will save your sole, we will even dye for you."

AT AN OPTOMETRIST'S OFFICE :

"If you can't see what you're looking for, you've come to the right place."

ON A PLUMBER'S TRUCK:

"We repair what your husband fixed."

ON AN ELECTRICIAN'S TRUCK:

"Let us remove your shorts."

AT A CAR DEALERSHIP:

"The best way to get back on your feet – miss a car payment."

IN A VETERINARIAN'S WAITING ROOM:

"Be back in 5 minutes. Sit. Stay."

AT THE ELECTRIC COMPANY:

"We would be delighted if you send in your payment on time. However, if you don't, YOU will be de-lighted."

IN THE FRONT YARD OF A FUNERAL HOME:

"Drive carefully. We'll wait."

KEEP SMILING

**I was mugged by a thief last night
on my way home.**

**Pointing a knife at me ... He asked
me "your money or your life!"**

**I told him I am Married... so I have
no money and no life...**

We hugged and cried together.

It was a beautiful moment...



**MY WIFE MADE ME
COFFEE THIS MORNING AND
WINKED AT ME WHEN SHE
HANDED ME THE CUP.**

**I'VE NEVER BEEN MORE
SCARED OF A DRINK IN ALL
OF MY LIFE.**

One big difference
between men and women
is that if a woman
says "Smell this",
it usually smells nice.



Shared by silversurfers.com

Husband:
I think I'm having a heart attack...

Wife:
Ok honey, give me the password to
your phone so I can call an Ambulance

Husband:
Nevermind. I'm feeling better.



With thanks to Alan Locke

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.