



Probus Club of Sydney

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Newsletter

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FEBRUARY 2025

Issue 472

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Rare Earth Minerals

MARCH 4

MAURICE CUTLER
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Gentlemen,

I hope you had a wonderful Christmas, and wish you and your family good health and lots of joy in 2025.

2024 ended on a high for Sydney Probus, with membership 138 (i think the highest ever), a solid financial position, an excellent December speaker, an extremely impressive visit to Next Sense, and almost 100 attending the very enjoyable Christmas lunch at RSGC.

Many commented to me that Dr Nick Bryant was outstanding, drawing on his close experience in Washington during the previous term of President Trump at the White House, to give us an insightful presentation on "Donald Trump - the past, present and future". His observations also delved into presidential history, and expressed concern about the deep divisions in American politics.

At the December meeting we also welcomed Richard Fisher as an inductee, heard an interesting raconteur analysis of energy costs from Evan Rees, and received a Life before Probus summary of the construction engineering achievements of Max Irvine (who became our longest commuter by flying in from Dallas that morning!).

We can look forward to a fine varied array of interesting speakers, meetings and activities in 2025. Several are already fixed or in the pipeline. However to supplement these, please do not hesitate to recommend speakers or activities that will interest our members, particularly if you have special personal contacts which could facilitate these appointments.

Best wishes,

Peter James

President

Note

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

FEBRUARY 4

Dr Phillip Hellman

Rare Earths

What's so special about rare earths?



Phillip has worked extensively in the rare earths industry including completing the resource studies that were the basis of Lynas's Mt Weld mining operation that commenced in 2007. He has worked on numerous rare earth deposits throughout the world and is the author of various specialist academic and applied papers on rare earth deposits. He has presented to EURARE, the European rare earth industry's specialist organisation.

Phillip graduated in Geology at Sydney University and then completed a PhD in rare earth geochemistry and high pressure petrology at Macquarie and Cambridge Universities. He then worked in mineral exploration including three years based in West Sumatra. Since 1992 Phillip has worked as a consultant specialising in Resource Estimation for numerous commodities with a focus on rare earths.

His recent work has been in the technical evaluation of emerging rare earth projects on behalf of potential lenders and offtake partners. He is also assisting companies with their advanced evaluation of "Ionic Adsorption Deposits", a comparatively new style of rare earth mineralization.

MARCH 4

Maurice Cutler

Antarctica's Forgotten Heroes

As an 18-year-old journalist in Sydney with the United Press news service, Maurice Cutler became the first Australian to reach the South Pole in 1956 while covering the United States activities during the International Geophysical Year.

During that expedition he gave personal reports to Sir Douglas Mawson, welcomed Sir Edmund Hillary to the Antarctic and interviewed a survivor of Scott's last expedition. After 4 months in Antarctica, the US Navy took him to North America. He returned to the Antarctic for another four months in 1958.

Since then, he's mainly lived and worked in Canada and is perhaps the only living Australian to have met Edmund Hillary, The Queen, Pierre Trudeau, JFK, Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser Zhou Enlai, and Richard Nixon, etc.

In 1971, Maurice accompanied a Canadian Trade Mission to China, and became one of the first western journalists to enter China during the Cultural Revolution. He returned to China for each of the next two years to cover the opening of the Canadian Trade Fair in Peking (greeted by Zhou Enlai for a second time), then to cover the first official visit to China by Prime Minister Trudeau.

In 1977 he joined the Canadian Public Service, initially working for the Finance Minister, then as Official Spokesman for the Canadian Foreign Office and later becoming Director of Public Affairs for the Auditor General of Canada.

Since partly retiring about 30 years ago, Maurice and his wife Fran have spent half the year each in Ottawa and Sydney (having a home in each). This avoided the harsh Canadian winters and enabled a lot more golf, whilst maintaining close involvement and interest in international affairs along with family on both sides of the Pacific.

Maurice will focus his talk on many remarkable early explorers who achieved amazing heroic feats, but have not had the recognition they deserve, being overshadowed by Amundsen, Scott and Shackleton.

DECEMBER MEETING REPORT

President Peter James welcomed four guests. Ted Brogan reported on a very successful visit to NextSense and advised the members of future events.

INDUCTION

Richard Fisher AM



John Doherty introduced Richard Fisher as a new member of the club. He graduated from UNE with a Master of Economics and then from Sydney University with a Bachelor of Laws. He worked in private practice for 31 years, primarily engaged in corporate law with a focus on insolvency and corporate reorganization.

He joined Blake Dawson Waldron (now Ashurst) in 1984 where he rose to become a partner and then Chairman of Partners. Between 2001 and 2021 he was General Counsel to the University of Sydney before returning to Ashurst as a consultant. He has been a

Commissioner of the Australian Law Reform Commission and a Consultant to the Asian Development Bank. He has been the President of the Australian Club. He is married to Diana and has two sons. His interests include reading, bridge and golf.

LIFE BEFORE PROBUS

Max Irvine



Max finished his civil engineering degree at Canterbury in 1969. He then worked for a while in Christchurch in stormwater and sewerage before going to London to work as a junior engineer at Freeman Fox & Partners. He was part of a team of six engineers designing the Bosphorus Suspension Bridge in Istanbul which was well under construction at that time. He was to go out on site at the end of 1972 but instead went to Caltech in Pasadena for graduate study. A few years later he was offered a position at MIT and he and his young family moved to Boston for about four years.

They left the United States in 1982 and relocated to Sydney where he had been offered the chair of structural engineering at UNSW. At the same time he took up a part-time consulting role with John Grill's then-fledgling offshore engineering company, which later became Worley. Max was actively involved in some of their specialist work for the best part of twenty years, such as investigating the collapse of a platform at sea; a hydro-electric dam wall collapse, as well as pipeline issues and so on. Since then Worley has grown strongly and now has a turnover of about \$15 billion annually and with as many as 50,000 employees.

At UNSW he could see that there were opportunities to provide training to the neighbouring developing countries such as Indonesia. For example, they developed courses in highway engineering, bridge engineering and construction management for promising engineers from Indonesia's Department of Public Works which continued until about the turn of the century. It was enjoyable and influential work which the staff carried out in addition to their normal academic load. This work was right at the beginning of what subsequently became a huge investment in Asia particularly, with universities around Australia providing a wide range of degree study opportunities. By that stage he spent twenty years in academic life and thought he should get to practice, which he did, by taking early retirement and becoming an emeritus professor. He and his team have worked with good architects and good

builders, enjoying some really interesting projects. This continues. He is now in his 78th year and this will eventually stop but not yet! He has spent the last 10-12 years training young engineers immediately out of university on the practice of engineering with ample site work. He has always had an interest in travel and have seen quite a lot of the developing world. He has had an interesting and fulfilling career as a structural engineer.

Structural engineers, for the most part, deal with skeletons and the force of major significance is the force of gravity. Max has been studying this for 60 years now and it's not altogether straight forward. Sir Isaac Newton took thirty years to get it right!

Raconteur

Evan Rees

The true cost of electricity



There is a lot of confusion on the true cost of power generation in Australia and so Evan Rees offered to clarify matters to assist members' understanding of the issue. Evan started by saying that the best source of facts comes from the British Government as they do an audit on the different sources of electric power every four years.

Cost in Australian dollars for 2021 per MWH. UK prices, and USA nuclear compared to NSW coal.

NSW coal fired	\$27-35 (<i>Dispatch price without green certificate</i>)
Wind on land	\$190
Wind at sea	\$196
Nuclear UK old plant	\$48
Nuclear USA current	\$61-122

The UK nuclear costs were from an old plant and the UK government treated the waste at no cost in their own disposal plant point. Later the Chinese offered the UK to build a new mega nuclear plant in southeast England and to fund it. The condition being that the May government guarantee a minimum dispatch price of \$120 per MWH.

In the same year, 2021 the Australian Treasury figures show that on the Australian eastern states 93% of power was generated from fossil fuel, 7% was generated from renewables and with a subsidy cost of \$13 billion so you can see that renewables are not cheap. This subsidy in Australia is the result of a scheme bought in by Kevin Rudd where the wind farm generates power and earns 1 green certificate for every MWH

produced. The coal fired generator then must buy these Green Certificates for every MWH that they dispatch, increasing their dispatch cost per MWH from \$35 to \$235.

At first these certificates were too cheap so Kevin Rudd passed the law that the minimum price should be \$125 per certificate. Now with the gaming the Green Certificates are around \$200 plus per MWH. As a result power has become too expensive for our manufacturing industry to compete on the world stage.

GUEST SPEAKER

Nick Bryant

America Today! What is the impact for Australia?



Dr Nick Bryant gave us an outstanding insight into American politics in general and Donald J Trump in particular, drawing on his deep knowledge of US history and his close involvement as BBC's American Correspondent spanning President Trump's first term and also writing for the Economist, New Statesman, Washington Post, Sydney Morning Herald and the Age.

After referring to the Economist's Word of the Year 2024 "Kakistocracy" (government by the least suitable or competent citizens of a state) he wondered whether the word for the next year or two may be "plutocracy" (government by the wealthy) or "anocracy" (part democracy, part dictatorship)!

Nick Bryant spoke of his first meeting Trump at the time of the closure of his Atlantic City casinos, and prior to the 2016 election. He described his demeanor away from the TV cameras as warm, polite, curious, and sensible, becoming bombastic when the cameras were turned on, and boasting "I could make Atlantic City great again".

Trump's win in 2016 was a complete surprise and left the press, confidently anticipating a Clinton victory, struggling to make sense of what had happened! The question then became "As President are we to get the humble or the bombastic Trump?" Soon after beginning his inauguration speech in 2017 it became clear that Trump would adopt his bombastic, slightly crazy style. Trump had appealed to those, particularly white people in the rust belt, who had not previously voted and felt the American dream was dead.

Despite the events of January 6 he re-emerged as the standard bearer of the Republican Party. The subsequent prosecutions further mobilised his support. Trump's populist, nationalist style, his focus on conspiracies, his lack of concern for norms, the law and the Constitution are not different to some of the Presidents who have preceded him. Trump is in fact a product of 250 years of American history. Over many years Americans have shown a preference for having a strong man in charge, someone who will defy the law and even the Constitution when the need arises. While with Trump's recent election it may seem that America is entering new territory, the fact is that America has considerable experience with former Presidents like him. Trump is not an outlier!

Nick expressed particular concern about the chronic divisions America is suffering . He pointed to a range of issues on which there are ongoing arguments including for example the result of the 2020 election! Can the country come together again? Nick thinks the divisions will remain with several states taking on deeper shades of red and blue.

The following are some of the points arising from the Q&A session:

- Murdoch, particularly through Fox News from 1998, has been an important promoter of the Republican Party.
- AUKUS has made it harder for Australia to manage its relations with China, given our increased dependence on the US (which may not be able to deliver on its commitment to supply Australia with nuclear submarines).
- Biden stayed in the Presidential race because he liked being President and didn't think Harris could win. He should have withdrawn earlier.
- The unqualified and, in some cases, weird people Trump is proposing for Cabinet and other key roles in his administration will be responsible for managing huge budgets and workforces eg \$1 trillion and 800,000 people in the case of Health!
- Polling is an inexact science and journalists rely too much on them.
- Civil War is now unlikely. It may have been different if Trump had lost!
- Trump in 2024 is not as lucid and mentally sharp as he was in 2016 – 2020
- Journalists tend to be liberal but try to hide it by giving liberal interviewees a tough time .

Paul O'Sullivan, on behalf of members, thanked Nick for an outstanding presentation.

Alan Locke

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

Visit to NextSense

On 18 November some 30 Members and guests visited the newly opened headquarters of NextSense in the campus of Macquarie University. The buildings are modern and very well designed for their purpose. We learned how Nextsense tests children with sight and hearing difficulties, tailors and delivers an on site learning program best suited to support their developmental needs. The results achieved are

truly extraordinary and we were all most impressed with the Facility. The visit was initiated by Sean Wareing who is a past Chairman of the Nextsense Board and our thanks to him for what members who attended thought was the most interesting Event of 2024.



Members at the Next Sense facility

Christmas Lunch



The Probus Christmas Lunch was held at The Royal Sydney Golf Club on 9 December. Almost 100 members and Guests attended to enjoy a traditional Christmas style lunch, including the Quiz arranged by Tony Andrew. Royal Sydney once again proved to be an excellent venue and the weather was fine, allowing us to have pre lunch drinks on the front lawn.

Future events (please see the website for details)

On Wednesday **12 February 2025** we have a visit planned to St Paul's College within the grounds of Sydney University.

On Friday **28 March 2025** there will be a Harbour Cruise around the western portion of Sydney Harbour hosted by the Naval Historical Association.

There are still some limited places available for each of these Events - booking via the website.

POCS GOLF AT KILLARA: Thursday 24 April

Following requests in the survey, a golf event for POCS members is to be held at the Killara Golf Club, as kindly arranged by Bill Thomas with KGC.

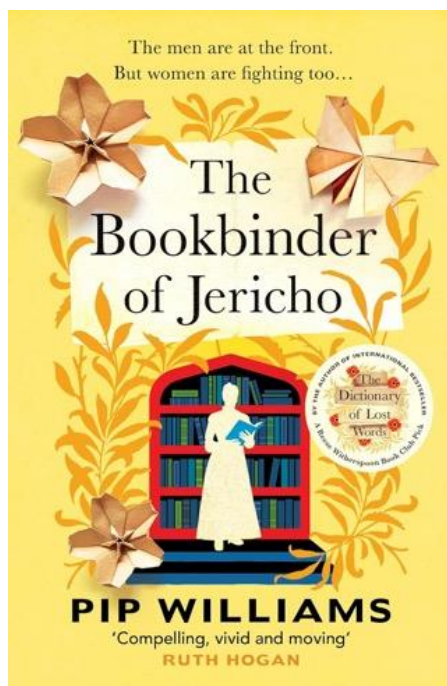
Tee times will be about 8.30 am, followed by drinks and lunch from the bar menu. Non-members of KGC would pay the member's guest green fee of \$120 (ie less than the corporate fee). Players should have a GA/handicap. Registration will be later when full details known, but we need to know approx numbers asap in order to secure tee times.

Please save the date in your diary, and send a message to Bill Thomas or Peter James if you are interested to play **as soon as possible**.

Ted Brogan
Events Coordinator

BOOK REVIEW

The bookbinder of Jericho by Pip Williams (2023) – 424 pages – fiction



Anyone who enjoyed *The Dictionary of Lost Words*, by the same author, will love this book. For others, you will be introduced into the world of the Oxford University Press (OUP) and the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) during World War 1. With so many men called up for war service, women came into their own – although not yet having the right to vote or to graduate.

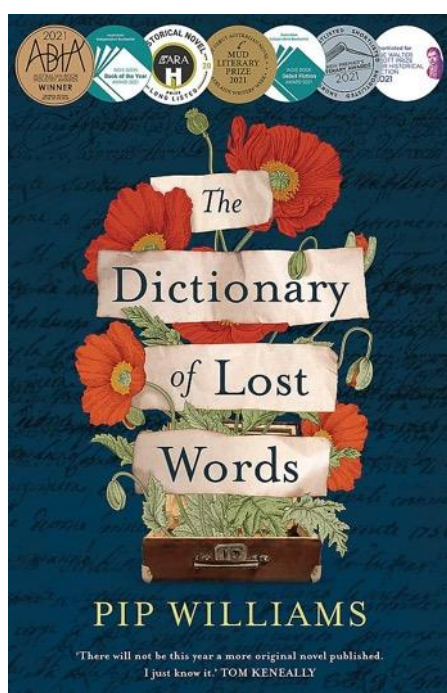
The story focuses on twins working in the bindery of the OUP in Oxford, only one of whom aspires to go to the University. Through her eyes we witness, directly, the impact of Belgian evacuees and, through letters, the horrors of warfare in France and Belgium. Of course the class system in the UK is alive and well – so that

bindery girls do not go to university or read the books they bind. The separation between town and gown has never been more sharp.

So we learn a lot about the Press itself, how the bindery worked, Oxford, the OED, Belgian evacuees, the class system and the role of women. Brilliantly written and very readable, if somewhat too long. The only other minor criticism is that everyone seems so “nice” – barely a baddie in town.

To tell more would spoil your reading. Highly recommended for most lovers of fiction – and historical fiction in particular.

The Dictionary of Lost Words by Pip Williams (2020) – 406 pages – fiction



This book is the predecessor of *The Bookbinder of Jericho* (reviewed above), which it describes as a companion volume. However, it is not necessary to have read the later book to fully appreciate this one – nor is it necessary to read the books in order.

They have in common Oxford and the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). Although this book covers the earlier period from 1886 onwards when Dr Murray (editor of the OED) and his scriptorium were in full swing.

Like the *Bookbinder*, this book has a lot to say about the role of women in the early 20th century, including the suffragettes. However its central focus is on words excluded from the OED because they were “female” words, swear words

or words spoken by the common people and not otherwise appearing in written form. All this is very interesting and you learn a lot about how the OED was put together, the scriptorium and the meaning of various words.

However, *Bookbinder* was enlivened by first- and second-hand WW 1 experiences. There is far less external focus here, so the main interest is in the OED itself and the use and meaning of words.

Therefore, not as entertaining as *Bookbinder* but still worth reading – as an international bestseller and a book that has been turned into a highly successful play and a future film.

David Castle

The Bodybuilder

As the bus pulled up at the bus stop and it was her turn to get on, Melissa became aware that her skirt was too tight to allow her leg to raise to the height of the first step of the bus:

Slightly embarrassed and with a quick smile to the bus driver, she reached behind herself to unzip her skirt a little, thinking that this would give her enough slack to raise her leg. She tried to take the step, only to discover that she still couldn't.

So, a little more embarrassed, she once again reached behind her to unzip her skirt a little more, and for the third time attempted the step.

Once again, much to her dismay, she could not raise her leg. With a little smile to the driver, she again reached behind to unzip a little more and again was unable to take the step.

At this point, a large bodybuilder who was standing behind her picked her up easily by the waist and placed her gently on the step of the bus.

She went ballistic and turned to the would-be Samaritan and yelled. "How dare you touch my body! I don't even know who you are!"

The bodybuilder smiled and drawled. "Well, ma'am, normally I would agree with you, but after you unzipped my fly three times, I kinda figured we was friends!"

Tradesmen!



In a tremendous stroke of luck, Dr. Remley has the opportunity to perform surgery on the contractor who renovated his kitchen.

Cheapskates

Four old friends on holiday were strolling down the street on the Gold Coast when they turned a corner and spotted a sign that read: "Retirees Bar - ALL drinks 10 cents."

They exchanged surprised looks, hardly believing their eyes, and decided to check it out. As they entered the bar, the bartender greeted them with a booming voice that carried across the room, "Come on in, gentlemen! Let me pour you a drink. What'll it be?"

The bar was fully stocked, so each of the men ordered a martini. In no time, the bartender presented them with four perfectly chilled martinis—shaken, not stirred—and said, "That's 10 cents each, please." The men stared at the bartender in disbelief, then glanced at each other, grinning like kids on Christmas morning. They eagerly handed over 40 cents and sipped their martinis, marveling at their good fortune.

Unable to resist, they ordered another round. Once again, the bartender served up four flawless martinis and repeated, "That's 40 cents, please." By now, they'd each had two martinis and hadn't even spent a dollar. Their curiosity got the better of them. One of the men finally spoke up. "How on earth can you afford to serve drinks this good for just 10 cents apiece?"

The bartender leaned against the bar with a smile. "Well, I'm a retired engineer from Sydney. I always dreamed of owning a bar. Last year, I hit the lottery jackpot—\$125 million! So I opened this place where every drink is 10 cents. Wine, liquor, beer—you name it, it's all the same price."

"Wow, that's an incredible story!" one of the men said, raising his glass in admiration. As they continued sipping their drinks, they noticed a group of seven people sitting quietly at the far end of the bar. None of them had drinks in front of them, and they hadn't ordered anything the entire time. One of the men gestured toward them and asked the bartender, "What's the deal with those guys?"

The bartender chuckled. "Oh, them? They're retirees from Victoria. They're waiting for Happy Hour, when drinks are half price."

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.