



ISAA

National Newsletter

The Boab tree is self-sustaining; it draws on its own resources. Upside down, it flourishes against the grain.

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ISAA Publications

Draft Timetable 2009

August..... *ISAA Newsletter*
Autumn.....*ISAA Review*
December....*ISAA Newsletter*

MEMBERSHIP

\$70 – Full Members & Friends
\$45 – Concessional Members
\$85 – Household Membership

— In a comparison of recent 'best of' anthologies of American and Australian essays (*ABR*, February 2009), Gay Bilson reflects on what makes a good essay. She quotes US editor Adam Gopnik's view that 'An essay without a bit of both abstract reflection and winning anecdote isn't quite an essay. The ideal essay has facts and feelings, emotions and thought, an argument about and an anecdote from, parallel and then criss-crossing all over it'.

According to Bilson, Gopnik divides essays into three kinds: 'the review essay, the memoir essay and the odd-object essay' all of which owe much to the 16th-century French essayist Michel de Montaigne. Although Gopnik insisted on the 'I' as the dominant voice in the essays he selected, the subjects of many of these are abstract compared to the essays chosen by editor David Marr in the Australian anthology. 'The Australian essays are *peopled* in a way the American essays are not,' Bilson writes.

Much has been written about what constitutes an essay but perhaps less about why someone likes writing them. For Inga Clendinnen it is, 'because they are short, as I now know life is' (Introduction, *Agamemnon's Kiss* 2006). This means, she continues, that they are 'about the right length for the way we live now: for reading in waiting rooms, between planes, on planes; for putting yourself to sleep at night; for thinking about when you can't sleep'. Some of her essays do not look like 'finished work'; sometimes they end with a question mark. 'You can't preach in an essay,' Clendinnen writes, because it turns into a lecture; you can't exhort in an essay because it turns into a harangue, and you can't dredge the mud at the bottom of your soul because then it will turn into a confession.'

A cursory glance through the contents page of, say, the May 2008 *ISAA Review* reveals a satisfyingly 'peopled' agenda: case studies in human rights, history in several manifestations, book reviews and reflective pieces on writing biography – and essays. Add to these the proceedings of papers presented at annual conferences and NSW seminars, not to mention the introductions written by Gretchen Poiner that are essays in their own right, and ISAA can be justifiably proud of a rich discursive resource. But boundaries can always be pushed a little further. Last year's modestly successful NSW Chapter essay competition was a good step in encouraging members to reflect, as Bilson does, on what we want from an essayist. Bilson entitles her review 'Elegance of the Pen', a reference to John Adams' admiration of this quality in the writings of Thomas Jefferson – a way of summoning 'interest in just about anything, if the writing is marvellous in itself'. That, surely, is the goal of every ISAA scholar. *Susan Steggall, editor* ♦

Postscripts:

• Due to changes in personnel, production of ISAA's publications has meant delays in layout preparation and administration, which has considerably added to the already heavy load shouldered by National President Ian Keese. One area where help is needed is ISAA's website. If any member with suitable expertise, time and inclination, could either take on the web manager's job or share the work, it would greatly assist Ian.

• Attention is drawn to the inclusion with this *Newsletter* of an erratum slip (an amended Contents Page of the 2008 *Proceedings*).

President's Report

It has been rewarding to note that the flow of new members into ISAA is continuing. Please make them feel welcome and encourage their participation.

Make a New Year resolution to support ISAA activities through attending functions, writing for publications and offering your services to committees. A small group of people put a lot of work into our activities and all they ask in return is that you give up an hour or so of your time to attend. I know you will be sure to gain from doing so.

We were very sorry to lose Marie-Louise Rankin as our Admin Officer but I am pleased that Alan Roberts from the ACT Chapter has taken over. Alan has had an extensive background in this kind of work and is already proving a great asset.

Sue Wiles, who prepared the quality layout for the last *Review* and some NSW Chapter publications, has had a greatly increased workload on a prior commitment and is unable to continue. It has taken time to find a replacement but I am negotiating with a person who has the skills required and will charge us at the rate we can afford. This has held up the publication of the *Review*, and my sincere apologies to contributors and members. **Ian Keese** ♦

ISAA Chapter Reports

ACT Chapter

We had two successful meetings in February though numbers were small. Prof. Campbell Macknight spoke on 'Prospero's dilemma in South Sulawesi: tales from a colonial past' describing how Dutch scholars and their local colleagues studied local languages and culture in the colonial era of the 1930s. The lunch time meeting at the High Court revealed the wide range of books that members find interesting.

Calendar

12 March: Meeting postponed due to the clash with the Canberra Day Oration to be given by Harry Evans at the NLA at 5.30 pm.

9 April: Dr Michael Pearson, 'Recherche Bay and the hydrographic surveys of Beaufort-Beaupré'.

14 May: Dr. David Lee, 'Stanley Melbourne Bruce: the Forgotten Prime Minister'.

11 June: Dr Elizabeth Morrison, 'David Syme: The Man Behind The Legend'.

9 July: Prof. Ian Cowan, 'Who is afraid of Charles Darwin?'

All meetings: 5.00 for 5.30 at the Friends Room National Library ♦

NSW Chapter

Our final event for 2008 was the Christmas get-together at the NSW State Library. We were delighted to have with us the State Librarian, Regina Sutton, and Elizabeth Ellis, the former Director of the Mitchell Library (now Emeritus Curator), to celebrate the festive season and our successful collaborations during the year. Congratulations have been extended to Elizabeth Ellis on the award of the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the Australia Day Honours list.

We are looking forward to an active and engaging ISAA year in 2009. Our first Works-in-Progress meeting will be held on Friday 27 March at Gretchen Poiner's home at Marulan. It continues the principle begun in 2008 of holding meetings in regional areas to include members living outside Sydney. A special invitation is extended to ACT members.

In the work-in-progress presentation Gretchen will explore the relationships between garden and place with particular focus on the garden at 'Rosehill' that has struggled in its development from four original rose bushes. We are looking forward to a special ambience, interesting discussion and, for some, the opportunity to spend a weekend in the Southern Highlands or Canberra.

On Wednesday, 17 June, our Works-in-Progress meeting will move to Newcastle, hosted by John and Marie Ramsland on the topic of 'The World of Small Places and their Communities: An exploration of the human condition'. Two speakers will explore the nature of small communities as they reflect on growing up in country areas. Marie Ramsland will interview Les Ridgeway, a Worimi elder and family historian about the Aboriginal reserves in the Newcastle area. Allan Chawner, Associate Professor of Fine Arts, will present a visual essay on family life in small communities in various parts of the world.

Our first seminar series in collaboration with the State Library in 2009 is planned for **Saturday 4 July** on the theme of *Scenes from Childhood*, exploring cultural and social dimensions of 19th-century Australia. The significance of this theme is its link with planned celebrations for the centenary of the Mitchell Library in 2010.

Calendar:

Friday 27 March: Works-in-Progress meeting at the home of Gretchen Poiner, Marulan. Arrival time for coffee at 'Rosehill' is planned for 10.30-11 am before the talk at noon followed by a picnic lunch. Everyone – including interstate ISAA members and friends – is welcome. It would be helpful, but not necessary, to have some indication of expected numbers. Contact Gretchen if you intend to come. NSW members please consult the NSW Chapter *Bulletin* (No.45, January 2009) for directions. If coming from interstate, please contact Gretchen as to how to get to 'Rosehill'; **gretchen.poiner@bigpond.com**

Thursday 21 May: Annual General Meeting, with address by Regina Sutton, Director, SLNSW, on the topic 'The NSW State Library and its Strategic Direction', **12.30pm**.

Wednesday 17 June, 11am-3pm: A Works-in-Progress Forum. 'The World of Small Places and their Communities: an exploration of the Human Condition', at the home of John and Marie Ramsland, 271 Parkway Avenue, Hamilton (Newcastle) NSW 2303 (a light luncheon will be provided). Contact John & Marie Ramsland on 4969 6948 or john.ramsland@newcastle.edu.au if you are coming. (Trains to Newcastle from Central stop at Hamilton with a 15-minute walk; by car, from the expressway at Wahroonga takes about 2 hours).

Saturday 4 July: Seminar in conjunction with the NSW State Library, 'Scenes from Childhood'. 1.00pm for 1.30pm. Details of these events, including address details and RSVP contacts are available from the Secretary, Ian Keese at 0423 536 656. Email: nsw@isaa.org.au

Janet George, Chapter Chair (02 9251 9778) ♦

Victorian Group

Ideally we would like to plan ahead for our 2009 events to give us a regular rhythm. We continue to have ready access to a meeting room at the State Library of Victoria, which should allow us to plan regular meetings and also schedule additional meetings at relatively short notice, perhaps when ISAA members from interstate are visiting Melbourne.

It is important for us to try and rebuild the Victorian Group. Please give it some thought on how we can aim to be vibrant and welcoming to all members.

Walter Struve: wstruve@slv.vic.gov.au ♦

South Australian Group

The topic of our December meeting was 'A book that has been important to me' and several people volunteered to present a ten-minute explanation of a book that had been seminal in their thinking. Diana Chessell began the session with *Montaillou: the promised land of error* – Emmanuelle Le Roy Ladurie's portrait of life in a medieval village, based on direct records and testimonies of the lives of peasants during the Inquisition (from the Register of Jacques Fournier, Bishop of Pamiers in Ariège in Southern France 1318-1325). The book gave Diana three insights: firstly the research was based on the whole lives of peasants – from childhood to death, from household practices to communal rituals. Together with the spiritual – 'fate, magic and salvation' – these provided an integrated frame for the writing. Secondly the book countered the causality arguments of much 20th-century research, and thirdly it expanded Diana's ability to 'read for absences amongst data of a social issue'. As an introduction to 'seeing and sensing invisible cultural assumptions and practices', Diana welcomes comments to extend the dialogue on invisible cultural assumptions beyond the discussion time allowed.

Stuart Hill, who spoke after Diana, set the cat among the pigeons in his ambiguity about his choice: Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. As a scientist, his response to its tone, sources and effect on the careful reader gave the group an inconsistent reading of his opinions. None of us had read it, so discussion was protracted. Other personal book choices now await a later opportunity. This is likely to occur, since the theme for the year, which emerges from within the current interests of the group, is a focus on issues of scholarly thinking and writing.

With this in mind, we asked Dorothy Heinrich to initiate discussion at the February meeting with some thoughts on her current struggle with editing and problems of narrative in the scholarly approach to the fragmented historic records of events impinging on the settlement of South Australia. Once again, the group was drawn into entertaining, deep and useful discussion on many issues raised – as we expect to be in April, when Jane Nelson reports on her research in Germany late last year into the performances by early modern English players in Germany. **Convenor, Virginia Cotterell Kenny, virginia@virginiakenny.com** ♦

New Members

Welcome to the following new members who have joined since publication of the December Newsletter.

- John Hosie
- Dr Michael Pearson
- Dr Wendy Michaels

Summary of ISAA's Financial Position as at end of 2008

At the February Council meeting the Treasurer Stephen Horn provided the financial report for the six months July–December 2008. The figures excluded income and expenditure on the Conference, which were not finalised as the cost of the *Proceedings* had yet to be included.

Income:	\$4,517.15
Expenditure:	\$6,303.68

Balance as at 1 January 1 2009: \$11,747.10 (Compared with \$10,909.12 at the same time last year). Income for the six-month period was lower as renewal notices went out earlier, and many subscriptions came in before July 2008. However the overall balance is slightly up compared to the same time last year. **Stephen Horn, Hon Treasurer** (02 6258 5045) ♦

Report from the National Council Meeting, February 2009

ISAA National Council had its first meeting for 2009 on 12 February. Ian Keese, Elspeth Browne and I regularly travel from Sydney to the ISAA Council meetings, and Gretchen Poiner, Lesley Vick, Sue Steggall, all with Conference and editorial responsibilities, and Keith Powell as Public Officer, attend when possible. ACT Council members are Mike Austin, June Sutherland and Stephen Horn. Meetings occur on the second Thursday in February, April, June, September and November. Fortuitously they coincide with a program of interesting monthly talks arranged by the ACT Chapter in the National Library. The good news at this first meeting for 2009 was that Alan Roberts, an historian and author and an ISAA member in the ACT for some years, has taken on the role of ISAA Administrative Officer following Marie-Louise Rankin's departure. The Council welcomed Alan on your behalf and in the light of the vacancies existing on Council we have invited him to reprise the practice which Julie Bozza followed when she was Administrative Officer and become a member of the Council until the AGM in 2009.

The Council sees the organisation of the Conference and its *Proceedings* as central to the value of belonging to ISAA. Members now have the 2008 *Proceedings* and you will agree that not only does it pack in its pages an extremely interesting spectrum of scholarship around the theme of 'Civic Heritage', but also in its new format it looks and feels so good. This does not happen by magic and our thanks go to Gretchen Poiner, editor, and Catherine Rogers, designer, for voluntarily giving many hours of their time in its production. ISAA has an arrangement with the international academic database Thompson Gale that places the *Proceedings* and the *ISAA Review* on-line – an added incentive to submit an abstract for the 2009 Conference on the 'National Estate theme', focussing this time on Cultural Heritage.

At its next meeting Council will be thinking about ways of pushing membership numbers up beyond the current 200s because this will keep Conference costs and publication costs viable. Your individual actions in letting people know of ISAA and its state and regional activities would be much appreciated. We are re-producing the ISAA brochure as a convenient way to give new members necessary information. **Jane Burns, Hon. Secretary** ♦

ISAA Publications

The National Estate – Civic Heritage – the 2008 National Conference Proceedings are available should you need additional copies. Please visit the website – www.isaa.org.au – for the availability of current and past publications you may wish to purchase. ♦

Members' Activities

Awards & Prizes

• John Ramsland has been awarded the NSW Writers Centre's **2008 Non-Fiction Openbook Prize** for best non-fiction book of the year, for *Brave and Bold: Manly Village Public School, 1858–2008* (2008). He has also won first prize in the **2008 Coves Historical Writing Competition** for an unpublished history essay under 2000 words: 'Behind Sandstone Walls from Paradise Quarry' (about the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children).

Earlier in 2008, John won the North Shore Historical Society's **Isabella Brierley Historical Prize** for 2007 for his essay "'He's a fish, not a man!' Barney Kieran, North Sydney Amateur Swimming Club's first world-champion swimmer' (since published in the English journal *Sport in History*, vol.27, No 2, as 'Barney Kieran, the legendary "Sobraon Boy": From the Mean Streets to Champion of the World"').

John has just completed *The Rainbow Beach Man. The Life and Times of Les Ridgeway*, due for release by Brolga Publishing, Melbourne, in June 2009. ♦

Publications

• Stella Barber, *Something Quite Noble* a history of Goulburn Valley Grammar School (GVGS) published in 2009, by The Prominent Group and GVGS. The book documents the early years before the school opened and celebrates the achievements of the many students, staff, parents and principals who have each played a vital role in this history.

• Stella Barber, *Your Store Myer* (2009). The book captures the spirit of Myer, Australia's greatest retailer – a business built on entrepreneurial drive and a deep understanding of market trends and consumer needs by Sidney Myer, the founder. A companion book, *100 years of Myer fashion* appeared in December 2008 (both books, Focus Publishing).



Stella Barber, author's corner
New library complex, Goulburn Valley Grammar School

• Adrian Chan, *Orientalism in Sinology*, Academica Press, California, 2008. Taking ideas from Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Adrian questions Sinology as it was founded by Christian missionaries who denied the validity of China's cosmogony and even her method of achieving moral perfection and improvement. ♦

New Administrative Officer

Dr Alan Roberts, our new Administrative Officer, is an active member of ISAA who has addressed the ACT Branch and had a book, *Marine Officer, Convict Wife: The Johnstons of Annandale* published late last year. He is currently completing a book on the history of the Australian Academy of Science's 'Shine Dome' in Canberra.

Alan gained a doctorate in Australian urban history from the University of Sydney, tutored at Macquarie University and became the first full-time field and research officer with the Royal Australian Historical Society. He then joined the Australian Public Service where he mainly contributed to heritage and arts policy and program administration. He was president of the Annandale Association (a resident action group in Sydney) during which he co-founded the *Leichhardt Historical Journal*. He has been honorary secretary of the Oral History Association of Australia and honorary secretary and treasurer of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies to which he was elected a Fellow. He is a member of the ANU Emeritus Faculty. Since retiring from full-time work, he has devoted himself to historical writing.

Alan looks forward to helping ISAA build on its impressive achievements to date and become an even more vibrant organisation meeting the needs of its members. ♦



Annual Conference and Annual Lecture 2009

will be held at the
National Library of Australia – 4th Floor Conference
Room, **Thursday 15 and Friday 16 October 2009**

Mark these dates in your diary.

This year's theme - the third in the series *The National Estate* is 'Cultural Heritage'

Lesley Vick, Convenor, Conference Committee:
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