

## **ANZAMEMS President's Report – Annual General Meeting, April 2020**

As I write this annual report, Aotearoa New Zealand continues at its highest level of lock down, level 4; we look forward to a gradual scaling down of the alert levels. Or, as the opposition politician Judith Collins put it, a period “a lot like level 4 but with KFC”. In both Australia and Aotearoa, as well as around the world, we face an unprecedented public health crisis, one whose legacy is likely to be with us for some considerable time to come. You may be reflecting on what medieval and early modern scholars can contribute at this time. Many of you will find yourselves adjusting to new methods of teaching online and experimenting with new ways of conducting research. And all this comes at the end of a year in which, whatever side of the Tasman one lives on, our sense of the Antipodean good life has been shaken by both fire and terrorism. In such challenging times, ANZAMEMS stands, I hope, as a reassuring reminder of normality and a beacon of fellowship. It is, however, inconceivable that we will not feel the impact of COVID-19's legacy, and it will be a key aim of the General Committee going forward to prepare for this changing environment.

To date, we have taken three practical steps to support our community in these challenging times.

- First, we recognise that COVID-19 is likely to impact financially most immediately on those among us who can least afford it. The General Committee therefore determined at its March meeting that it would **assign \$5,000 for a Special Project (2020-21) to pay the fees for one year for those who had taken concessionary membership in 2019** (for those in that bracket who paid early in 2020, we will provide them with free membership in 2021 so that they do not miss out).
- Second, after consultation with the Conference Sub-Committee and its chair Kirk Essary, we have decided to **postpone the 2021 conference** to be held at the University of Western Australia. There are several reasons for this, not least of which are the financial and travel uncertainties facing potential participants. The intention is that the conference will now take place in 2022. One important consequence of this, is that the subsequent conference will be in 2024; we will not, therefore, be making a formal call for Expressions of Interest at this year's AGM.

- Third, we are making the **last five years of *Parergon*** (2014-2019) available on **open access** via Project Muse until 30 June 2020. This is our contribution to supporting the wider scholarly community beyond our membership.

On that last note, it is worth underlining that under the leadership of the Editor, Sue Broomhall, our journal goes from strength to strength in terms of the quality of its content and maintains a strong placement in the Project MUSE rankings; its h-index rose from 7 to 8 over the past year, having jumped from 5 to 7 in the previous year.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the significant contribution to the Association made by a number of key members of the ANZAMEMS General Committee in the course of the past year. I would like to extend particular thanks to both Sue, as *Parergon's* Editor, and to H el ene Sirantoine, the Reviews Editor.

H el ene is one of several members of the Committee who will step down this year, and I would just like to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work she has done in assuring our reviews are maintained to the highest quality, as well as noting both her active role on the Committee and, indeed, in organising the Sydney conference last year. And I should also apologise, sheepishly, because, despite my best intentions, I still owe her an outstanding review. I would also like to note the incredible hard work undertaken by our Executive Administrator, Marina Gerzi c, now in her fourth year in the role. Marina is central in ensuring our association continues to function effectively.

I'm also very grateful to the General Committee members as a whole. Karen Jillings stepped into the role of Secretary last year and has been doing excellent work keeping us organised. Amanda McVitty has done sterling work as our Communications Officer and we are sorry to see her step down this year, as we are to see Elisabeth Rolston and Hannah Skipworth end their terms as postgraduate representatives. All three have brought fresh ideas and new approaches to the Committee from which we have benefited a great deal.

Before moving on to specific issues, I think it important to acknowledge the hard work of all ANZAMEMS's General Committee members. Their efforts ensure the smooth running of the day-to-day business of the Association. Committee service is hard work but offers a genuine opportunity to make an important contribution to

fostering the well-being of medieval and early modern studies in Australasia. I would encourage members to consider standing for a position.

### **General Committee Business**

The period since the 2019 AGM has seen the General Committee working extremely hard on behalf of the Association's membership. The series of sub-committees set up in 2015 continue to explore new ways in which to advance ANZAMEMS's primary goals. Each sub-committee is chaired and staffed by members of the General Committee.

One notable feature of the Committee's work this year has been to introduce a series of special projects. The first of these, supported at the 2019 AGM, was to commission a report on the state of the field. This was completed in February 2020 by Katharine Blake and is awaiting final sign-off by the General Committee before we make the report available to the membership. The Committee also agreed to support, under the special projects umbrella, a timely colloquium held in February 2020 at the University of Adelaide, chaired and organised by Katie Barclay. This successful event offered an important opportunity to explore the topic of "Western Civilisation in the Twenty-First Century". Both special projects, along with this year's funding for concessional members, have been made possible by the careful husbanding of the Association's resources.

At the 2016 AGM the membership voted to establish the Finance sub-committee (Chair: Peter Sherlock). This sub-committee has continued its assessment of expenditure across the Association with a view to ensuring the future sustainability of seminars, prizes, administrative support, and high quality journal production. The Finance sub-committee took steps in 2018/19 to create a separate bank account for the Association independent of the University of Western Australia. This new structure is intended to speed up the process of paying out prize money, arranging conference financing, etc. Unfortunately, this project has experienced some technical delays, which have now been compounded by the COVID-19 outbreak. It is the Committee's intention, however, that the bank account should be fully operational by the end of this year.

Committee members serve on a range of further sub-committees. These include:

- The Honours and Prizes sub-committee (Chair: Andrew Brown), which administers both the Crawford and the Maddern prizes and works with the Editor and the Finance sub-committee to explore options for introducing further substantial prizes. The Parergon, Crawford, and Maddern prizes will be delayed by one year following the decision to postpone the conference.
- A permanent sub-committee to address issues of equity and diversity (Chair: Louise D’Arcens). Louise succeeded to Charlotte-Rose Millar, and we extend our thanks to both for their tremendous service in this role.
- The ANZAMEMS Futures Committee (Chair: Chris Jones), which this year drew up a range of potential future projects. The Committee plans to evaluate these in the light of the 2019 Special Project report while taking account of the financial status of the Association.

I would like to thank all of the sub-committee chairs for their hard work over the last few months. We will review the work of all the sub-committees at the AGM and I anticipate most will continue into 2020/21 with the aim of ensuring ANZAMEMS remains a vibrant, active, and responsive organisation. I would welcome expressions of interest from the membership if you feel you might have particular skills to contribute to the work being undertaken by the General Committee in any of the above areas.

A full list of the sub-committees and their current membership is available on ANZAMEMS website.

### **Administration**

The administration of ANZAMEMS continues to evolve. Last year, the association completed its transition to a model of fixed virtual AGMs to ensure we comply fully with our constitutional obligations and reporting requirements. The President/Chair convenes regular virtual meetings of the General Committee three times a year (spaced approximately four months apart in non-conference years). Editorial sub-committee meetings, convened by the Editor, are held once every six months, while other sub-committees are convened on an ad hoc basis by their chairs as business arises.

The position of Executive Administrator combines key activities around membership and administration with broader elements of the communications portfolio. A full position description is available via the ANZAMEMS website. In 2019, the EA role was supplemented to enable Marina to begin a project looking at the history of the association itself.

### **ANZAMEMS seminars (formerly PATS)**

In 2019 we created a new sub-committee, the ANZAMEMS Seminar Committee (Chair: Peter Sherlock), whose function is to administer the Association's seminar programme, which replaces the Postgraduate Advanced Training Seminar programme (PATS).

2019 saw the last project to take place under the PATS branding in the form of the highly successful "Approaching Medieval and Early Modern Conflict", organised by Megan Cassidy-Welch at the University of Queensland (St Lucia campus), 11-12 August 2019. Funding has been assigned for 2020, to host the first of the ANZAMEMS Seminars at the University of Sydney's Medieval and Early Modern Centre (timing will be reviewed in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak).

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I would like to encourage the membership to start thinking actively about proposing **Expressions of Interest** for what will now be our **2024** and, indeed, **2026 conferences**. If you are keen but uncertain quite what is required and what support ANZAMEMS is able to offer, I would be delighted to discuss, informally, what hosting a conference involves. We have also prepared an **ANZAMEMS Conference Policy** document. Those interested can contact the Executive Administrator, who will provide a copy. A formal call for EoI for the 2024 conference will now be requested at the 2021 AGM.

In these challenging times, I would like to encourage the membership to make the most of the Association's online presence. That presence has continued to develop in 2019/20 under the guidance of Marina, Amanda McVitty, and, most recently, Elisabeth Rolston; ANZAMEMS is well-positioned to provide excellent resources and

a reliable source of information to scholars in this hemisphere. It is my intention that our website, in particular, will become a first point of reference for those in the rest of the world who, perhaps as a result of encountering our journal, are curious to know exactly what goes on in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. It is also to be hoped that it will become a reference point for non-academics in Australasia seeking expertise in our field. I am especially interested in exploring ways in which it may become a platform through which to raise awareness of new digital research. It is all the more important that we do so in these challenging times.

In ending this, my penultimate report, I would like to thank all of my fellow Committee members but in particular Clare Monagle (VP Australia) and Peter Sherlock (Treasurer). Both Clare and Peter have been – and continue to be – sources of sage advice, excellent ideas, and friendship. Indeed, I am deeply indebted to the Committee as a whole as it is their hard work, freely given time, patience, and tremendous efforts that build the foundations that ensure ANZAMEMS remains the friendly and supportive Association that it is. And I extend my warm wishes and support to all of you and my hope that I shall see many of you in person at the next conference even if that is slightly further off now than we had originally anticipated.

President, Chris Jones

April 2020