

ANZAMEMS President's Report – Annual General Meeting, April 2021

What a year it has been. When I wrote my last report Aotearoa New Zealand was at its highest level of lock down. I am pleased to say that, while there have certainly been ups and down on both sides of the Ditch, as I write to you now matters seem to be improving steadily. Today, a travel bubble has opened, finally, between Australia and Aotearoa. While doubtless a positive step, the bubble has come a little too late for some things. The last Association conference held at the University of Western Australia was in 2001. If UWA had hosted the conference in 2021, as originally intended, it would have marked ANZAMEMS's return to Western Australia for the first time in twenty years. However, as I announced at last year's AGM, the General Committee took steps to postpone the conference in light of the pandemic. It is worth noting that had it taken place, it would have been marked by a number of important celebrations: the **Association** was first formed in 1996 and this year is, therefore, our **twenty-fifth anniversary**. In addition, *Parergon* was first published (the old series) in 1971, so 2021 also represents the fiftieth anniversary of our journal.

Matters have, of course, not gone quite according to plan. I cannot help but be put in mind of a comment Aaron Sorkin once memorably incorporated into one of his more niche series: "This is not the comedy we intended to do when the week began".¹ While our celebrations must, necessarily, be a little more subdued, it is worth remembering that there is certainly much the Association should be proud of. And I am delighted to inform you that the **conference is now re-scheduled for mid-2022**, and will go ahead at UWA. It will doubtless be a different event to that originally planned but one that I have no doubt will still bring together fascinating and varied scholarship. The General Committee has looked, in particular, at issues of improving access in what will doubtless remain challenging times. I am particularly pleased that the careful husbanding of the Association's resources has enabled us to increase the value of travel scholarships available and the support we will be able to give to the conference more generally.

Last year we also took a number of other steps to support scholars. We **assigned \$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 who paid early in

¹ For those of you who believe no report is complete without notes, the series is *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (2006); the specific episode is "The West Coast Delay". It is well worth tracking down if Aaron Sorkin – and Saturday Night Live – are your sort of thing.

2020, we have provided them with free membership in 2021 so that they do not miss out. We also made **five years of *Parergon*** (2014-2019) available on **open access** via Project Muse until 30 June 2020, a contribution to supporting the wider scholarly community beyond our membership.

As this will be my final report as President, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the significant contribution to the Association made by all members of the ANZAMEMS General Committee not just in the past year, but over the course of my term. As I look back over the membership of the Committee, I note that only two of the current elected members were there when I first joined and only one has remained a consistent member throughout. I am particularly grateful to Clare Monagle. She began her term as Secretary at the same time as I did as Chair before subsequently transitioning to the role of Australian Vice-President. Clare does fantastic work on behalf of the Association, and particularly in this past year has represented our position to peak bodies and government. She has always provided sound advice for which I remain grateful.

Among the current Committee membership, I would like to extend particular thanks to Sue, *Parergon's* tireless Editor, who steps down from that role this year after much hard and transformative work, and to Peter, our redoubtable Treasurer. They are the rocks upon whom the Association is built. I would also like to note the hard work, good humour, and positive attitude of our Executive Administrator, Marina Gerzić, now in her fifth year in this role. Alongside Clare, Marina has been the other consistent presence since I started my term. Marina is central in ensuring the Association continues to function effectively. The membership as a whole owes her much.

I'm also very grateful to the rest of this year's General Committee. Karen Jillings stepped into the role of Secretary in 2018 and has been doing excellent work keeping us organised, as has Claire McIlroy who returned to the Committee last year, picking up the Reviews Editor's portfolio. I'd like to extend particular thanks to my fellow Cantabrians, Francis Yapp, who steps down from his role of NZ Vice-President this year, and Lisa Rolston, who began as NZ's Postgraduate Representative before taking on the Communications portfolio. She now steps down to focus on completing her thesis. I'm also very grateful to Charlotte Rose-Millar, who

completes her six-year term as a general member, and to Louise D’Arcens, Andrew Brown, Helen Young, and Megan Shaw all of whom are running for re-election this year. They have been an excellent team and I could not ask for better people to have worked with.

The efforts of the General Committee 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 all members of the Association to consider standing for a position at some point.

General Committee Business

The period since the 2020 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.

This year’s major work has been to begin to implement some of the recommendations from the ANZAMEMS Futures Working Paper (November 2019), albeit with modifications to suit the COVID and post-COVID world. The latest step has been the introduction of **a revised grants scheme** for the conference, including features such as support for care givers. In an initiative led by our Postgraduate Representatives, Nat Cutter and Megan Shaw, the Committee is also presently looking at a wider revised annual grants scheme for PGs, ECRs, and the unwaged.

The most notable achievement in 2020 was the setting up of **two new co-sponsored Open Access awards**. The winner of the first of these, the [ANZAMEMS–ARC Humanities Award for Original Research](#), is to be **announced at the AGM**. The second, the [ANZAMEMS–ARC Humanities Borderlines Award](#), is open for applications now. Both awards are currently operating in a trial period; they are structured so that they can be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain relevant.

An important feature of the Committee’s work in 2019 was 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 but still requires review and final sign-off by the General Committee before it is made available to the membership. This has been delayed, in part, because the report will need some re-consideration to ensure it remains of value in the post-COVID-19 world.

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. After considerable work by Peter and Marina, this account is now fully operational. It will speed up the process of paying out prize money, arranging conference financing, etc.

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

- A permanent sub-committee to address issues of **Equity and Diversity** (Chair: Louise D’Arcens). Louise has led a number of important initiatives in the past year and, in particular, building on the 2020 Adelaide Special Project, around decolonising the MEMS field.
- The **Honours and Prizes** sub-committee (Chair: Andrew Brown), which administers not only the Crawford and the Maddern prizes but also the new Open Access prizes. Andrew himself chaired an international panel, which assessed the Original Research award. The call for *Parergon*, Crawford, and Maddern prizes, having been delayed by one year following the decision to postpone the conference, will be issued shortly.
- The **Conference** sub-committee (Chair: Kirk Essary), which has been working tirelessly to re-plan and re-develop the conference to guarantee the best possible experience for members in a post-COVID world.

I would like to thank all of the sub-committee chairs for their hard work over the last year; they ensure ANZAMEMS remains a vibrant, active, and responsive organisation.

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

Administration

The administration of ANZAMEMS continued in 2020 along the pattern established in 2019, the year in which the Association completed its transition to a model of fixed virtual AGMs. The latter 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; this project continues but has been delayed by COVID-19.

ANZAMEMS seminars (formerly PATS)

In 2019, we created a new sub-committee, the ANZAMEMS Seminar Committee (Joint Chairs: Clare Monagle | Nat Cutter), whose function is to administer the Association's seminar programme. This replaces the Postgraduate Advanced Training Seminar programme (PATS). Funding was assigned for 2020 to host the first of the ANZAMEMS Seminars at the University of Sydney's Medieval and Early Modern Centre but this has been delayed due to COVID-19. The Seminar Committee put out a call for EOI in the second half of 2020 but no applications were received. The Committee holds funding in reserve, in a flexible format, to support local or online events should members wish to apply for it.

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, the General Committee have prepared an **ANZAMEMS Conference Policy** document to offer guidance. Those interested can contact the Executive Administrator, who will provide a copy.

In ending this, my final report, I would like to thank all those Committee members who have served since I took up office. They have provided much wisdom, excellent ideas, and friendship. I am deeply indebted to Committees, past and present. It is the hard work, freely given time, patience, and tremendous efforts of the Committee that build the foundations that ensure ANZAMEMS remains the friendly and supportive Association that it is. And members of the Committee have never shied away from telling me when they thought something should be re-considered – or when I was simply wrong. These are probably the most valuable services any chair needs. And yet, I do not need all the fingers on one hand to count the number of occasions that substantial disagreements arose. In the course of six years, I find that a striking testimony to remarkable people. On a personal level, I would never have had the opportunity to get to know, not just the scholarship, but so many of the fine individuals responsible for it were it not for this role. I am very grateful to all of them.

Finally, I thank you all for allowing me the privilege of serving you for the last six years. To be your President has been a tremendous honour and is something I will always consider one of highest points in my career. I wish the Association, the incoming Committee, and its new Chair happy times and good fortune in the years ahead. Hoki whakamuri, kia anga whakamua.

President, Chris Jones

April 2021