

## **President's Report to the Annual General Meeting, ANZAMEMS, April 2024**

2023 was another challenging year for medieval and early modern studies in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as globally. I thank all ANZAMEMS members who have taught and learned, researched, and undertaken leadership roles in the past 12 months for their resilience, commitment, and achievements under often very difficult circumstances. Creating new knowledge through research, sharing it through teaching, learning about it, and performing service roles that shape practices to support others' work are all intrinsically valuable. I congratulate us all, individually and collectively, for our contributions to the many disciplines of MEMS, in the past 12 months.

### **ANZAMEMS Events**

#### *Conference*

In February 2024, our latest ANZAMEMS conference was held at the University of Canterbury, Ōtautahi Christchurch. I thank the co-convenors Associate Professor Chris Jones and Dr Madi Williams in particular, and everyone who was involved in the conference and seminar that followed. The long ANZAMEMS tradition of a collegial and convivial event was proudly upheld, not least by the intellectual curiosity, rigour and generosity I heard from speakers and audiences. With attendees (both in person and virtual) from around the world, the conference re-iterated ANZAMEMS' position as an organisation with a global reach.

I heard a great number of stimulating, engaging papers (and missed hearing others through a plethora of options), notably from international keynotes: Dr Tarren Andrews (Yale University), Associate Professor Wallace Cleaves (University of California, Riverside), and Associate Professor Natasha Hodgson (Nottingham Trent University). I am grateful for the opportunity to speak of my own research to such a through and generous audience.

It was my pleasure to speak at the opening reception of the "Saints in Coffee Jars" exhibition of relics (<https://relics.nz/saints-in-coffee-jars/>), a joint endeavour of the University of Canterbury and the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives and co-curated by A/Prof Chris Jones. ANZAMEMS supported the reception financially as part of its outreach work related to the conference. The relics on display include medieval and early modern objects, brought to Aotearoa New Zealand by the first Roman Catholic Bishop of Christchurch, John Grimes, as part of his vision to build a Christian Catholic community. I highlighted the ways that the exhibition parallels ANZAMEMS' core purpose, bringing together a 'community of interest' of people engaged with the medieval and early modern, and their legacies.

I also enjoyed acting as quiz master at the first (to my knowledge) ANZAMEMS pub quiz. Congratulations to Alexandra Forsyth for her great work with this initiative. The terrific breadth of questions was a fun reminder of the variety of expertise and depth of knowledge that ANZAMEMS colleagues have, and of our own individual limits.

As the first ANZAMEMS conference with an in-person element since the start of the covid-19 pandemic, the event raised some challenges, both foreseen and unexpected, that can inform planning and organisation of future events. An expression of interest for hosting the next conference, to be held in the summer of 2025/2026, from colleagues at the University of Melbourne, Australia, can be found in the AGM paperwork.

### *Seminar series*

ANZAMEMS supported to workshops from the 2023 budget:

1. “Medieval and early modern sources: skills for reading medieval and early modern manuscripts and printed texts,” November 2-3<sup>rd</sup>, hosted by the Australian Catholic University. Thanks to the organisers: Professor Megan Cassidy-Welch (then Australian Catholic University); Professor Ros Smith (Australian National University); Dr Kathleen Neal (Monash University); Dr Kirk Essary (University of Western Australia); and Dr John Gagné (University of Sydney)
2. a day-long workshop on digital humanities methodologies, hosted at the University of Canterbury, following from the conference. I thank Dr Chris Thompson (University of Canterbury) and Associate Professor Natasha Hodgson (Nottingham Trent University) for leading sessions, and A/Prof Chris Jones for organising the event.

Planning work is currently underway for an ANZAMEMS-sponsored event as part of the Council of Humanities and Social Sciences convention in Perth in November 2024. Thanks to the members of the Seminars sub-committee, particular the chair Dr Matthew Champion (University of Melbourne), for their work in this space.

### **Administration**

Changes to industrial relations law in Australia aimed at increasing job security and redressing some of the damages of extensive casualisation (including but not only in tertiary education) came into force in December 2023. These changes create an opportunity for ANZAMEMS to review and revise its contract with Dr Marina Gerzic for the role of Executive Administrator, as they coincided with a necessary renewal of her contract. Marina

had been offered a 5-year position by ANZAMEMS in 2021, however the University of Western Australia (through which she is directly employed through a long-standing arrangement) did not allow more than a 2-year contract for externally funded positions. With the changes in law, the UWA position changed, and ANZAMEMS was able to arrange for a 3-year contract to complete the full 5-year term (rather than a second 2-year and then a 1-year contract as would have previously been the case).

ANZAMEMS maintains the strong financial position established over the past 5-10 years, but faces rising costs due to inflation, particularly in our core business of the biennial conference and producing *Parergon*. While royalties from *Parergon* remain strong, there is a need to make the most of the Association's saving and diversify its income stream. As discussed at the 2023 AGM, the General Committee has further explored potential registration with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). Registering as a non-for-profit association would allow ANZAMEMS to accept tax-deductible donations and potentially seek philanthropic funding, for example. Information from the ACNC confirms that the Association would be able to operate as an international entity, with office holders in both nations, although some revisions to the constitution and financial reporting would be necessary. The General Committee discussed the possibility of registering as a not-for profit organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand, either in addition to or as an alternative to with the ACNC. It was concluded that Australian registration would be the better option given our current incorporation Western Australia, bank accounts held in Australia and the balance of membership. The next step is to seek professional advice on how to go about such registration, and to discuss among

## **ANZAMEMS initiatives and programs**

### *State of the Field report*

An executive summary of the ANZAMEMS State of the Field report was produced and circulated to members. It can be found on the ANZAMEMS website here <https://www.anzamems.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Mapping-report-executive-summary-FINAL-060923.pdf> The full report was undertaken in 2019-2020, just before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A number of factors, including the challenging environment for the tertiary sector, and for MEMS programs and colleagues in particular at many institutions, meant that work on proposed book prizes and a pilot publication subsidy scheme has progressed more slowly

than intended. The General Committee continues to support these initiatives, as is reflected in the proposed annual budget included with AGM paperwork.

### **Advocating for Medieval and Early Modern Studies**

2023 saw devastating loss of jobs for colleagues in medieval and early modern studies in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. I extend my very best wishes and support to all who are affected, as I am sure all members do. I thank everyone who advocated, privately and publicly for colleagues, their positions and programs, including through leadership and management roles in their own institutions. As President, and with other members of the General Committee, I took advice from those who were most directly affected at different institutions about the nature of any ANZAMEMS' advocacy and how it might be best undertaken and directed. Outcomes of those conversations included direct submissions to institutional consultation processes, circulation of petitions to members, targeted emails, and a public statement on the planned cutting of the Medieval and Early Modern Studies program at the Australian Catholic University (a copy of which can be found here <https://www.anzamems.org/?p=12373>)

### **General Committee Business**

I thank all members of the General Committee, who work hard on behalf of the Association and its members. ANZAMEMS could do nothing without their efforts. I extend particular gratitude to Emma Rayner, who has stepped down her role as Australian postgraduate representative, and to Professor Katie Barclay, Dr Kathleen Neal, and Dr Claire McIlroy for their willingness to re-nominate for their respective current roles. The General Committee has continued its established pattern of meeting 4 times annually by Zoom, with subcommittees meeting as needed.

In late 2023, personal circumstances meant I had to take several months of leave, including from ANZAMEMS business. I am extremely grateful to everyone who took on leadership and essential duties in addition to their own roles, notably Dr Marina Gerzic, Dr Matthew Champion, Dr Kathleen Neal and Professor Katie Barclay. As members have been notified, I have decided to step down as ANZAMEMS President at this time. It has been a pleasure and an honour to work with the ANZAMEMS committee and members in this third year as President. I am grateful to members for entrusting me with the position.

President, Dr Helen Young, April 2024