

Editorial

This issue of the *Journal and Proceedings* comes to you from a new Editor. I am honoured to take on the job of Editor of this venerable journal, but I do so not without a little trepidation given our Society's long history. In my professional life I am an astronomer, but it is by chance that the first three articles in this issue have an astronomical theme, exploring the history of Parramatta Observatory and Governor Brisbane's central role in its establishment, as well as that in the forerunner to our own Society, the Philosophical Society of Australia, in the infant colony of NSW. That he did so to perhaps the neglect of his duties as Governor of the Colony is an interesting story in its own right. These three articles arose from a special Symposium held at National Trust of NSW on Observatory Hill in December 2011 to commemorate Brisbane, organised by the author of the first, Ragbir Bhathal. The other two articles in this issue come from the biological sciences, describing the science emanating from the first decade of the National Marine Research Centre in Coffs Harbour and a study on identification on hatchery produced Murray Cod. Three thesis abstracts also appear.

Penning an Editorial gives one a chance to muse on current issues, and for my first opportunity to do so in the Journal I would like to ponder on what it takes to contribute to the scientific endeavour. In an event close to my own interests as a researcher we celebrate, as I write, 100 years from the event I regard as the first astronomical science to have come out of Antarctica. For, in December 1912 three young explorers, all in their 20's – Francis Bickerton, Leslie Whetter and Alfred

Hodgeman – were trudging across the snow in the coastal highlands of Adelie Land in Antarctica. They formed the “Western Sledging Party” of Douglas Mawson's epic Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911-14. While the events of Mawson's own tragic sledging expedition form a core story from the “heroic age” of Antarctic exploration, those of the Western Sledging Party show both the serendipity often involved in scientific discovery, as well as the insight to realise that indeed it is a discovery. Our party were three days into a 7-week trip. They had recently abandoned their “air tractor” – there to provide a mechanical means of pulling their heavy load – and were now man-hauling a single sledge across the rough snow surface. There ahead of them they saw a shiny black object, half buried in the ice. About the size of one's hand, they picked it up. That was the serendipity. The insight was that they immediately realised that it must be a meteorite – a messenger from space – for how else could it have got there, all alone in a vast expanse of snow? It must have fallen from the skies! That was the insight, obvious in hindsight, though when survival was a more pressing concern, a remarkable one at the time. The Adelie Land Meteorite, as it came to be known, was the first meteorite to be discovered in Antarctica, and can now be seen on display in the Australian Museum in Sydney. The pressure to publish not being what it is today, it was to be another 11 years before the paper describing this discovery appeared in print. It was also to be another 60 years before the special conditions that transport meteorites across Antarctica to selected sites, and so make it the prime place on our planet for finding them, was to be realised (~30,000,

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or two-thirds of all known meteorites, have now been found there). The science began, though, with that chance discovery and realisation of December 5, 1912 while on a sledging expedition!

Michael Burton
Hon. Secretary (Editorial)
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