

## Editorial: *The New York Times* has noticed us

Robert Marks

Editor

It was a day or so after the total solar eclipse seen from the East Coast of the U.S. I noticed a column in *the New York Times* on April 8, 2024, by a resident columnist, Peter Coy, entitled, “The Economic Luminary who Loved Solar Eclipses. Inspired by science, William Stanley Jevons strove to make economics a more rigorous field.”<sup>1</sup> We know about Jevons: in the 1850s he was a member of the Philosophical Society of N.S.W., while employed as an assayer at the new Sydney Mint in Macquarie Street. Before graduating, he had accepted this new position and voyaged from London to Australia. A polymath, he wrote on economics, sociology, meteorology, astronomy, etc, and befriended the Rev. W. B. Clarke, the geologist who was an early president of the Society. On his return to England, he completed his degree and proceeded to revolutionise what became known as neo-classical microeconomics (together coincidentally with a French and Austrian economist). Aged 46, he drowned while swimming in the English Channel in 1882.

Having been stopped by the title of the article, I wanted to know what was in the *NYT* about Jevons. I read on: Coy described a total solar eclipse in Sydney 43 minutes

after sunrise at 6:08 am (Sydney Mean Time) on 26 March 1857,<sup>2</sup> as observed by Jevons from Bellevue Hill. The column included a link<sup>3</sup> to a paper we published here in 2016: an address on Jevons by the late Ian Castles, erstwhile Australian Statistician, at a dinner to mark the opening of an exhibition in 2004 about Jevons and his work in Sydney at the Powerhouse Museum.

Unfortunately, only subscribers to the *NYT* have access to Coy’s column, but I was so chuffed when I clicked on the phrase “he wrote” in the sentence: “After sleepless night got up about 3:30 and started to Bellevue Hill in dark,” *he wrote* in his diary about one, which happened shortly after dawn. “About 5 a.m. commenced observations concerning eclipse” and it linked to the 2016 paper by Castles!

I was amazed! In 2016 I had found the words of Castles’ address on the Powerhouse web site. Unfortunately, he had died in 2010, but his family had given their permission for the *Journal* to publish the address, which, like so much else, has since disappeared from the Powerhouse web site. Now, the *New York Times* had published a link to this paper in an obscure journal on the other side of the world.

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1 <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/08/opinion/william-stanley-jevons-eclipse.html>

2 Editorial Board member Nick Lomb advised me. See Lomb & Stevenson (2023). Nick tells me the next total eclipse to be visible from Sydney will be on 22 July 2028. The Sydney Observatory (“latitude, 33°51.41, longitude, 151°04.468”) reported in the *SMH* in 1863 that: “the time ball is dropped accurately at one o’clock Sydney mean time, or 14h. 55m. 14s. Greenwich mean time.” This was before time zones were adopted worldwide (see Blaise 2001). Until 1925, GMT followed the astronomical convention of starting at noon, not at midnight as it does now.

3 See Castles (2016).

This link in an *NYT* article was the most publicity the *Journal* has ever received, although we cannot know how many clicks the Castles paper has received. I emailed Peter Coy, author of the column, but he could not remember how he had come across the Castles paper. I advised him of a second paper in the same issue of the *Journal*, also on Jevons,<sup>4</sup> which attempted to accomplish three things: to report on Jevons' activities while in Sydney, specifically with the Philosophical Society; to argue that his activities in Sydney had led directly to his work on economic theory and application on his return to England; and to underline Jevons' achievements in independently pioneering what is now known as neo-classical microeconomics. I wrote this paper to signal that not all luminaries of the Society had been traditional "hard" scientists. Of course, now we strive to diversify our membership, in several dimensions.

### The Editorial Board

The Council has asked me to diversify the Editorial Board. Since I became Editor in 2016, the Board has not changed much: there have been two new members (Jessica Milner Davis and Len Fisher) and one member has retired. There is no limit to the number of members of the Board. The Board was instrumental in a motion being voted on by the members of the Society to include the Editor as a Councillor: since 2021, when the Council was restructured, the Editor has not been a designated member of Council. Instead, I stood for election and was successfully elected twice. This year the membership voted overwhelmingly to make

the Editor a member of Council. Thus the Editor joins the Librarian, the Webmaster, the Treasurer, the Vice President, and the President as designated members of Council. This does not preclude an election for the Editor, if two or more members aspire to the Editorship.

The Editorial Board is not heavily worked. This is because the *Journal* receives few unsolicited MSS for review. In a traditional journal, the Editor relies on her editorial board to choose referees for submissions and then acts on the Board members' (the associated editors') recommendations. Our Editorial Board members are not associate editors: I occasionally ask them to suggest referees for a paper on a topic I am not familiar with. And they have given the Editor support over the position of the Editor in the Society.

I have set out to expand the diversity of the Editorial Board. Since new members must be approved by Council, any announcements must wait. To remind the reader: a list of the current members of the Board appears on the inside front cover of the *Journal*, below the Councillors.

At a recent meeting of the Council, a (new) Councillor took me to task, but he had only a cursory familiarity with the contents of the *Journal*: he was unaware that, unlike the *Bulletin*, it appears only twice a year, and he was unaware of the Point Counterpoint sections in which we have built forums for scientific disagreements about topical issues. In the past, we have included a debate between the Chief Scientist and others about the use of gas as a transitional fuel in the country's decarbonising.<sup>5</sup> It was

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<sup>4</sup> See Marks (2016).

<sup>5</sup> See the *Journal & Proceedings of the Royal Society of N.S.W.* (2020), pp. 180–204.

suggested that the Federal Opposition’s enthusiasm for nuclear power — as opposed to renewable power — might make an interesting debate. I think not: the CSIRO (2024) has revised its earlier report on the feasibility of nuclear power for Australia, and there are no scientists stepping up to argue the case for nuclear. Indeed, some are criticising the Opposition for its approach to new policy.<sup>6</sup>

In February, Roy Green gave an address to the OGM of the Society in which he argued that the Australian economy, and specifically the manufacturing sector, had been “hollowed out” by the resource boom associated with exports of iron ore, coal, etc. to China, with a drastic reduction in the complexity of our manufacturing. He argued that our lack of complexity in manufacturing is an issue. Meanwhile, the doyen of economic journalists in Australia, Ross Gittins, has been arguing that the future of the Australian economy (and indeed of other countries’ economies) lies not in manufacturing (or extraction) but in services<sup>7</sup> (or at least in the skills and work needed to make the most of our transition to a low-carbon economy, using renewable energy). I have asked Ross whether he would write a piece (or allow us to reprint one of his published pieces) in a Point Counterpoint on this debate. Watch this space.

### The Forum

This issue contains papers and edited transcripts from the presentations last November at the 2023 Royal Society of New South

Wales and Learned Academies Forum on “Our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Brain.” The Forum comprised five sections: The Developing Mind; The Brain: Social, Cultural and Philosophical Perspectives; The Brain Disease Burden in Adults;<sup>8</sup> Turbocharging Human Intelligence with Artificial Intelligence; and Implications for the Future. Disappointingly, only six presenters submitted papers; the other 13 presenters are here represented by edited transcripts of their addresses. This is a clear change from past forums, when almost all presenters submitted papers.

The issue also includes six abstracts of PhD theses chosen by the graduating institutions (here: the universities of Wollongong and Newcastle NSW) as their three best theses. The issue also includes a paper by Mesaglio et al. on the photographic documentation of Australia’s flora and a short illustrated paper on the botanical revelation of Australia’s flora. Thomas Mesaglio was awarded a Royal Society of New South Wales 2022 Scholarship.

### Housekeeping

Above, I have reported on the position of the Editor being firmly reestablished as a permanent member of Council by an overwhelming vote of the membership, as it had been from 1867 (thanks, in considerable part, to the support of members of the Editorial Board). I am also refreshing the membership of the Editorial Board to better reflect the growing diversity of the Royal Society. As always, I thank Jason Antony for his work on the *Journal*. Jason was announced at the

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6 See “I’m not being political:” ABC chair criticises Coalition’s approach to nuclear policy, in *Crikey*, 13 June 2024, at <https://www.crikey.com.au/2024/06/13/abc-chair-kim-williams-coalition-criticism-nuclear-policy/>.

7 Gittins (2024).

8 A recent article (Bonhenry et al. 2024) reports on neurodegenerative disease risk from SARS-CoV-2 infection.

2024 Annual Dinner as a worthy recipient of a Royal Society of NSW Citation for his work on the *Journal* and the *Bulletin*. Congratulations, Jason.

Balmain, June 2024.

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