

Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows – History

In the Beginning!

While the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation was re-established in its current format in 1953, Australian links to the Foundation were known to exist prior to WWII. For example, one Distinguished Fellow, the late Mary Angela Miller, with the support of an Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship, studied at Munich University in the early 1930s, taking courses with Dr. Vossler (Romance Language), Dr. Katcher (Romance Theatre) and Professor Pinder (Romance Art).

The earliest Fellowship known amongst the current Association membership is that awarded to Dr Harold Goodwin in 1967 who conducted research in Chemistry at the University of Munich. There were many others in the years after this, with the result that a Symposium of past von Humboldt Fellows was held in Sydney in 1973 [1]. It was during this Symposium that concern was expressed at the lack of any Australian reciprocity in relation to the valuable research support afforded by the Foundation in Bonn towards visiting Australian Fellows. It was partly this initiative and subsequent encouragement for the formation of regional Associations of Fellows from the Foundation itself that led to the first steps being taken to form an Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows at a conference held at Melbourne University in 1983.

On-going Conferences

The enthusiasm of the founding President, Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger and his initial committee set the pattern of Biennial Scholarly Symposia of Fellows and subsequent Meetings were as follows:

University of Melbourne (1985)

University of Adelaide (1987). “The German Experience of Australia 1833 – 1938”
Organising Committee: Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger (Chair) (Flinders University), Dr George Gream (University of Adelaide) and Dr Ian Harmstorf

Flinders University (1989). Organising Committee: Dr Peter O’Donoghue (Chair), Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger (Flinders University) and Dr George Gream (University of Adelaide).

University of New South Wales (1991)

Mannix College, Monash University, 3rd – 5th December, 1993. “The Australian Experience of Germany” Organising Committee: Dr Gabrielle McMullen (Chair), Assoc Professor Trevor Finlayson and Assoc Professor Ian Nicholls (Monash University).

University of Melbourne (1995). Organising Committee: Dr Harold Graze (Chair), Dr Fred Bull (University of Melbourne) and Dr Helmut Hügel (RMIT University).

Australian Catholic University (Ballarat) (1997). Organising Committee: Professor Gabrielle McMullen (ACU, Ballarat).

Australian National University (1999). Humboldt Global Colloquium. Organisation: Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Bonn.

University of New South Wales (2001). Organising Committee: Assoc Professor Roger Read (Chair), Professor David Black, Assoc Professor Harold Goodwin (University of New South Wales).

University of Auckland, New Zealand (2004)

- University of Queensland, 2nd – 4th September, 2005. Organising Committee: Dr Ralf Dietzgen (Chair) (University of Queensland) and Dr Kathy Andrews (Queensland Institute for Medical Research).
- Australian Catholic University (Melbourne), 7th – 9th September, 2007. “In the Spirit of von Humboldt”. Organising Committee: Professor Gabrielle McMullen (Chair) (ACU), Assoc Professor Trevor Finlayson (University of Melbourne), Dr Gary Bryant (RMIT University) and Assoc Professor Ian Nicholls (Monash University).
- University of Otago, New Zealand, 28th – 30th January, 2010. “In the Spirit of Alexander von Humboldt and Friedrich Wilhelm von Humboldt: The Role of Fundamental Research in our Society”. Organising Committee: Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger (NZ) and Professor Majella Franzmann
- Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA), Sydney, 30th September – 2nd October, 2011. “Preserving the Humboldt Tradition of Scholarship in Australasia”. Organising Committee: Assoc Professor Kay Double (Chair) (NeuRA), Dr Maria Nowotny (University of Western Sydney) and Professor Rob Robson (James Cook University).
- Mercurie Hotel, Sydney, 17th – 19th October, 2013. Humboldt Global Colloquium “Looking to the Future: International Research in a Changing World”. Organisation: Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Bonn
- IMAS Centre, University of Tasmania, 20th – 22nd November, 2015. “Global Perspectives, Local Knowledge”. Organising Committee: Dr Peter Jarvis (Chair), Professor Simon Ellingsen, Assoc Professor Michael Gardiner, Dr Nathan Kilah and Professor Jeff Malpas (University of Tasmania).
- Royal Society of New Zealand, Wellington, 17th – 19th November, 2017. “Our Changing World in the South Pacific”. Organising Committee: Professor Eamonn O’Brien (Chair) (University of Auckland), Dr Grant Williams (Victoria University, Wellington), Professor Barry Scott (Massey University), Dr Andrew Matthews (AM-NZ Services), Professor John Hearnshaw (University of Canterbury) and Assoc Professor Trevor Finlayson (University of Melbourne).

In each case, the organisation of the Meeting has been undertaken by a team of volunteers, for the most part Fellows from the institution mentioned or from neighbouring institutions. Some financial support has often been afforded to attendees by the Association and Fellows have been encouraged to include their post-graduate students in the Meetings where appropriate.

Two particular Biennial Symposia were held under the auspices of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation itself, namely those in 1999 and 2013, and these were conducted under the “International Global Colloquium” program which is a feature of the Foundation’s activities. The Meetings held at venues in New Zealand (2004, 2010 and 2017) were a direct result of the good-will which has existed between the Australian and New Zealand Associations, since their inceptions. It is a matter of odd coincidence that the founding Presidents of both Associations had the name “Peter Schwerdtfeger”, despite the two having no relationship, to the best of knowledge of these authors.

Following five of the above Biennial Conferences, a publication, containing some of the papers presented, has been published. These publications are as follows:

- 1987** “The German Experience of Australia” eds. Ian Harmstorf and Peter Schwerdtfeger ISBN 0 9588149 0 2 (Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows, 1988) 138 pp.
- 1989** “Proceedings of the Third Biennial Conference” ed. Peter O’ Donoghue (Flinders Press, Adelaide, 1990) 52 pp.

- 1993 “The Australian Experience of Germany” eds. Trevor R. Finlayson and Gabrielle L. McMullen ISBN 0 9588149 1 0 (Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows, 1994) 103 pp.
- 2011 “Preserving the Humboldt Tradition of Scholarship in Australasia” ed. Trevor R. Finlayson ISBN 9780958814929 (Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows, 2012) 92 pp.
- 2015 “Global Perspectives, Local Knowledge”, *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*, Vol. 150, Part 1, eds. M. Davies and T.R. Finlayson ISSN 0080-4703 (The Royal Society of Tasmania, 2016) 60 pp.

In addition, as the result of a joint symposium between the Association and The Royal Society of Victoria entitled “Celebration of German Contributions to Australian Science and Victorian Scientific Institutions – Past and Present” (1st – 3rd October, 2014) the following “Humboldt Issue” was published:

Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria, Vol 127, Part 1, June, 2015, eds. William Birch and Mark Williams ISSN 0035-9211 (The Royal Society of Victoria, 2015) 116 pp.

Administrative Structure

The Association has maintained a formal administrative structure, according to a **Constitution** which was established from the beginning. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, there have only been very minor modifications to this Constitution since it was established. Administratively, it calls for a **Biennial Business Meeting**, held in conjunction with the Biennial Conference, at which a **National Committee** is elected consisting of an Executive (President, Vice-President, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer) together with nine other members of whom at least one must be from each of the States and Territories of Australia. This National Committee holds office from 1st January of the year following the Meeting until 31st December, two years from that time.

State and Territory representatives from time to time organise **local events**. A popular and time-honoured event is a dinner held locally and as close as is convenient to 14th September, to “celebrate” Alexander von Humboldt’s birthday.

The Executive Members since the beginning of the Association have been as follows:

President:

Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger (Flinders University and Airborne Research Australia) (1983 – 2009)

Professor Rob Robson (James Cook University) (2010 – 2012)

Professor Gabrielle McMullen AO (Australian Catholic University and Mary Aikenhead Ministries) (2012 -)

Vice-President:

Dr. Harold Graze (University of Melbourne) (1983 – 1992)

Professor Rob Robson (James Cook University) (1993 – 2009)

Professor Gabrielle McMullen (Australian Catholic Universities and Mary Aikenhead Ministries) (1997 – 2005), (2008 - 2012)

Professor Jeff Malpas (University of Tasmania) (2012 -)

Honorary Secretary:

Dr. Peter O'Donoghue (Flinders University) (1983 – 1998)
 Dr Julian Lower (Australian National University) (1999 – 2007)
 Associate Professor Trevor Finlayson (University of Melbourne) (2008 -)

Honorary Treasurer:

Dr. George Gream (University of Adelaide) (1983 – 2003)
 Professor Gary Bryant (RMIT University) (2004 -)

Association Awards

Two Association awards were introduced as the result of a motion at the Biennial Business Meeting held in conjunction with the 2010 Conference. The **Peter Schwerdtfeger Award** (at most one to be offered every two years) was introduced to recognize the achievements of a young Alexander von Humboldt Fellow while the **Distinguished Member** recognition (no more than two every two years with the exception of the first year) was introduced to acknowledge both the scholarly achievements and work for the Association by members.

The details of these awards since their inception and their respective criteria are given elsewhere on this website, but in summary the recipients have been:

Peter Schwerdtfeger Award:

2011 **Dr Kathy Andrews** (Queensland Institute for Medical Research)
 2013 **Dr Robert Mailhammer** (University of Western Sydney)
 2015 **Dr Jared Cole** (RMIT University)

Distinguished Member:

2011 **Dr David Teakle** (University of Queensland), **George Bornemissza** OAM (CSIRO),
Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger (Flinders University and Airborne Research Australia),
Professor Elspeth McLachlan (University of New South Wales), **Mrs Mary Miller**
 (Secondary School Teacher)
 2013 **Associate Professor Trevor Finlayson, Dr George Gream**
 2015 **Professor David Black** AO (University of New South Wales), **Professor Rob Robson**
 (James Cook University)

[1] “The German Experience of Australia 1833 – 1938” eds. Ian Harmstorf and Peter Schwerdtfeger ISBN 0 9588149 0 2 (Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows, 1988) (Preface).

NOTE: Members, past and present, are invited to provide material that might be added to these records of our Association. Such material could be documents, photographs or additional information or amendments pertinent to the Association. Such information should be sent to the Association Honorary Secretary at the address below. It will be vetted by the authors of this history file before being made available on the web.

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