



Celebrating 50 Years

1962 - 2012



This publication was commissioned by the Executive Committee of SSAI in 2012, as part of the Society's 50th birthday. The vision was to create a 'story' of the Society, part historical, part discursive and part personal reflections. The document is based on the historical records of the Society, other relevant literature and interviews with a range of members. The publication was authored by Lindsey Dixon and approved by the Executive Committee. Thanks to all who contributed to the publication.

Kerrie Mençersen
President, SSAI
February 2013



RUTLEDGE R.

63

THE STATISTICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

To the Council:-

I hereby apply for (FULL membership of the STATISTICAL SOCIETY
(ASSOCIATE
(STUDENT

OF NEW SOUTH WALES, and, if elected, agree to abide by its Constitution.

I enclose herewith £1-1-0, as membership subscription for the year ending December 31st 194 .

SIGNATURE. *R Rutledge*

Date. *10th July 1948*

DETAILS TO BE PROVIDED BY ALL APPLICANTS.

1. Name in full: *RUTLEDGE, Robert Whitaker.*
(Surname first, and in Block letters.)
2. Address for correspondence. *1282 Pacific Highway, Turramurra.* Tel: Bus. *MW 2743*
Priv.
3. Where employed at present. *Colonial Sugar Refining Co, Ltd, Distillery, Pyrmont.*
4. Sex. *Male.*
5. Year of birth. *1915.*

ADDITIONAL DETAILS TO BE PROVIDED BY APPLICANTS FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP.

6. Nature of work in present position. Give details of statistical work involved and the degree of responsibility carried. *I am Chief Chemist at the Colonial Sugar Refining Co's Distillery at Pyrmont; in charge of manufacture of industrial alcohol carbon dioxide & rum. Work is factory control & supervision. Statistical methods used to further these ends: (a) analysis of factory figures generally & particularly in connection with the fermentation process; (b) developmental work. The usual methods as described in standard texts are required; also have found applications for rank correlation techniques, tests of randomness, the work of Barnard, Pearson on 2x2 tables, discriminant functions. I am purely a user of these tools to further the technical & administrative*

7. Past employment. *work on which I'm engaged.*

Employment.	During years.	Position held.	Nature of work.
<i>Ministry of Munitions</i>	<i>1941-1944</i>	<i>Asst Head, later Head Guncotton Section Explosives Factory, Ballant</i>	<i>Factory control & supervision</i>
<i>Col Sug. Ref Co</i>	<i>1944 - to date</i>	<i>Chemist in distillery at Helbourne & Sydney</i>	<i>" " "</i>

8. Degrees, Diplomas or Certificates held. Include the name of the conferring institutions, whether pass or honours, and the class of honours. Include any other academic honours obtained.

*Bachelor of Science (pass - ie 3 years course; fourth year not taken). Sydney University. (P.T.O.)
Chemistry - major subject. (Physics & Mathematics secondary subjects)*

The first documented member registration form, 1948

1947

It was the spring of 1947 when Stuart Rutherford posted out a circular to academics, professionals and dignitaries in the realm of statistics. The notice was a result of discussions between Helen Turner, Oliver Lancaster and himself exploring ways in which members of the field of statistics could benefit from a platform which allowed them to communicate with each other. The circular read;

“As a result of discussions among a number of us here in the University who are engaged, in our different departments, upon work of a Statistical nature, it has been decided to explore the possibilities of forming, in Sydney, some sort of Statistical Society fairly closely modelled on the British Royal Statistical Society.

“The main purpose of a society would be to provide a common meeting ground for the quite considerable number of people in the State and Local Government Service, the business and commercial centres of the city, and in the University, who are interested in the application of statistical methods. It is hoped to hold regular meetings for the reading and discussion of papers, and possibly to arrange for their publication in some form. It is felt that the widening of interest and knowledge and the critical discussion that might so be obtained would be of great benefit to all of us.

“At the same time it is hoped to recruit a wider membership from those who have, or wish to have, an understanding of Statistical methods but are not themselves ‘Statisticians’.”

The memorandum was followed by invitation to a selection of persons “likely to be interested in the formation of a (statistical) society”, to a meeting due to be held on Sept 25th 1947.

With the support and endorsement of the statistical community, the Statistical Society of New South Wales was born. Minutes from the meeting cited ‘Mr Rutherford, Mr McNair, Mr Pollard, Dr Lancaster, Dr Duncan, Mr Bradshaw, Mr Mulhall, Mr Prescott and Miss Turner’ as being present, Helen Newton Turner was elected the first ever president, and twelve committee members were appointed, each of whom represented a different field of statistics such as economics, psychology, biology and engineering. These committee members were enlisted with the duty of writing the Society’s constitution.

The committee unanimously agreed on the definition of the Society’s aim as being to “(further) the study and application of statistical methods in all branches of knowledge and human activity.” though opinions on the locality of members were divided. The suggestion of forming a national society was hotly debated, however the committee came to the decision that there was, at the present time, not enough interest from other states to form a national organisation. In the following years a fellow statistical society would form in Canberra, operating independently from the NSW Society.

The first year of the Society proved to be successful, enrolling 41 members and hosting a series of regular meetings. These general meetings were implemented to encourage ongoing learning for trained statisticians, and also to appeal to people “who, while not technically trained, are interested in the application of statistical methods in a variety of fields”. These meetings covered a wide range of interests, including:

- A Survey of Statistical Methods used in Biological Investigation (Miss H.N. Turner)
- A Survey of Statistical Methods used in Economic Studies (Mr R.S.G. Rutherford)
- John Gaunt and his Bills of Mortality

(Dr H.O. Lancaster)

- Recent Developments in Machine Calculation (Dr L.J. Comrie)
- Market Research (Mr W.A. McNair)
- Sequential Analysis (Dr D.B. Duncan)
- The Measurement of Mental Ability (Mr G.D. Bradshaw)

The positive reception from the meetings led to the establishment of a number of sub-groups, with the aim of “providing an opportunity for discussion of statistical problems of a specialised nature”. The first sub-groups (or Sections as they came to be called) included Biometrics, Economic Statistics, Industrial Statistics, Mathematical Statistics and Psychometrics. These sections would go on to evolve, diminish, and be replaced by new groups throughout the history of the Society.

In 1949 members were treated to the first of many monthly bulletins. Edited by Prof. H.O. Lancaster, the Society’s Bulletin engaged and informed members about the activities of the Society, movements of members, notes of interest in statistical topics and book reviews. In the following years, the content of the Bulletin evolved and the audience grew. In 1959 the Bulletin became the first published edition of The Australian Journal of Statistics, edited by Dr H.S. Konijn . Initially the Journal contained articles of an applied nature; however this policy was relaxed to allow sufficient copy to go to print. Reception from the Journal’s readers was positive, many of them praising the book reviews and the promptitude with which they appeared. Although the primary operation of the Journal was carried out by members of the Statistical Society of New South Wales, the journal was governed by an advisory panel consisting of leading statisticians from interstate, allowing a national spread of input.

For many years the society’s member base grew, which begged the question as to whether a national



National Presidential ROLL CALL

1962 P.A.P Moran	1987 D.J. Trewin
1964 C.E. Weatherburn	1989 R.G. Jarrett
1965 H.O. Lancaster	1991 T.C. Brown
1967 D.W. Maitland	1993 R.L. Sandland
1969 C.W. Pratt	1995 H.L. MacGillivray
1971 K.R.W. Brewer	1997 D.F. Nicholls
1973 E.J. Williams	1999 I. James
1975 J.H. Pollard	2001 N.I. Fisher
1977 C.A. McGilchrist	2003 N. Bartlett
1979 C.C. Heyde	2005 K. Basford
1981 E.J. Hannan	2007 W.Dunsmuir
1983 J.N. Darroch	2009 G.Lee
1985 R.L. Tweedie	2011 K. Mengersen



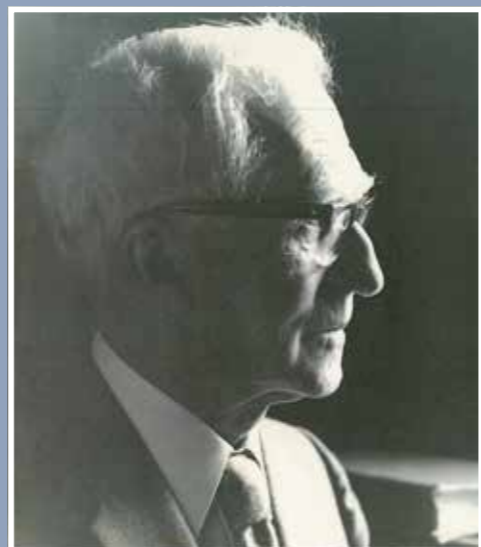
society should be formed. While there was interest across the country for a National Society, many states did not have the number of statisticians required to support a state branch. As such, current president Doug Maitland initiated talks between the former presidents of the NSW Society and the President of the Canberra Society. A constitution for a new national Central Council was written in 1962, with the NSW Society and Canberra Society amalgamating and forming its first state branches. Pat Moran was elected the first president of the Statistical Society of Australia.

1969

In 1969 the Victorian Branch instituted The Belz Lecture named in honour of Maurice Belz, the

Foundation Professor of Statistics at the University of Melbourne, who was largely responsible for setting up the first autonomous Department of Statistics in Australia. In the following years other branches of the Society followed suit. The Canberra Branch established the Knibbs Lecture, named after George Handley Knibbs, who was appointed the first Commonwealth statistician in 1906 and played a pivotal role in the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics' early days. New South Wales' Cornish lecture pays respect to Edmund Alfred Cornish, the Foundation Professor of Mathematical Statistics at the University of Adelaide who moved on to become the Chief of CSIRO's Division of Mathematical Statistics. The Canberra Branch, in conjunction with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), instituted the Foreman lecture as homage to E.K. Foreman, the head of the ABS Methodological Branch.

Equipped with solid foundations and a strong mission backed by loyal members, the Statistical Society of Australia (SSA) continued to move forward. Focussed on promoting ongoing education



The Pitman Medal

In 1978, the SSA established and awarded the first ever Pitman Medal to Professor Edwin Pitman. Professor Pitman was a mathematics professor at the University of Tasmania and made a significant contribution to statistics and probability theory.



In 1988, the Society awarded its first E.J. Pitman Prize. The award is bestowed annually (at most) to the most remarkable talk delivered by a young statistician.

and sparking discussions between members, the seventies and eighties saw the Society implement many changes that remain current today, such as the revamp of the Australian Journal of Statistics, greater support for young statisticians and the introduction of the Society newsletter.

After critical feedback from its readers, the Australian Journal of Statistics underwent some dramatic content changes in the 1970's. Readers had suggested that the Journal had become too concise and highly mathematical in its presentation of articles. In a bid to remain true to the Society's objectives and appeal

to a wider spectrum of statisticians, the Journal implemented suggestions to make the subject matter more leisurely and application based.

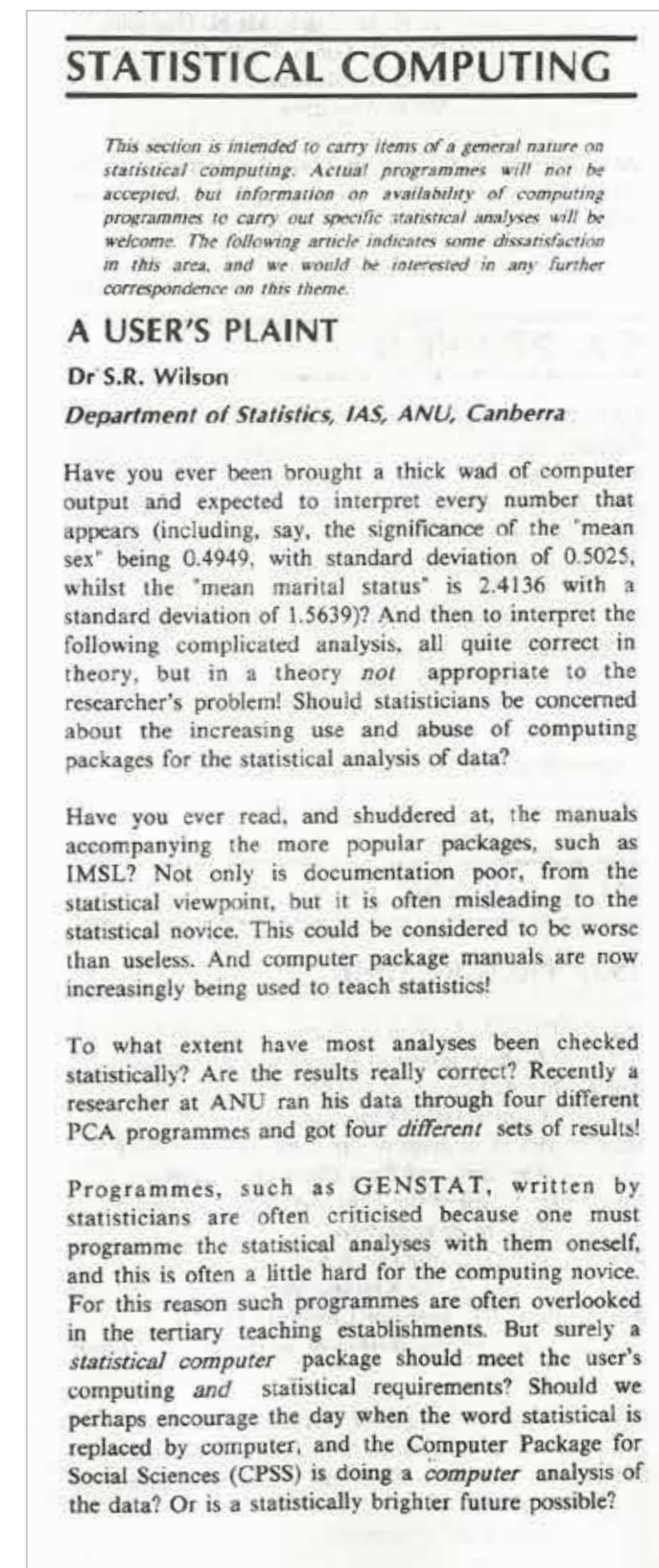
While changes to the journal were well received, the number of communication channels within the society still remained limited. Much to the delight of members, the SSA distributed its first Newsletter via post in May 1977. By producing a newsletter three times annually, it was hoped that the new medium would allow broader communication between the Society and its members. The pilot issue contained a report from Central Council and each branch (New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Canberra), as well as news regarding education and upcoming conferences. As a delicious sign of the times, the first edition contained a column on Statistical Computing written by Dr S.R. Wilson, citing the difficulty in adapting to computer technology for statistical analysis. While the article expressed much resistance to shifting to statistical software that was difficult to navigate, it suggested that, due to increased usage, a full conversion to computer packages may be inevitable.

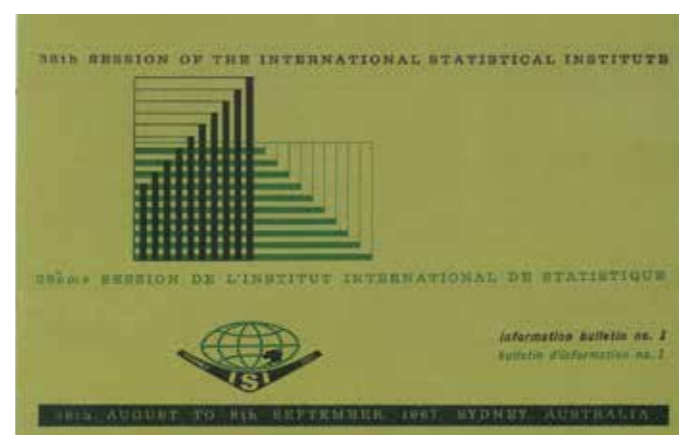
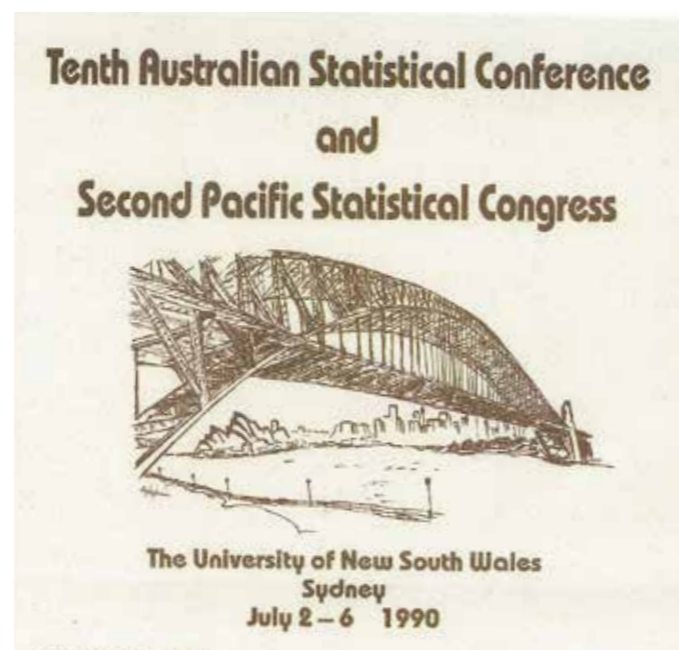
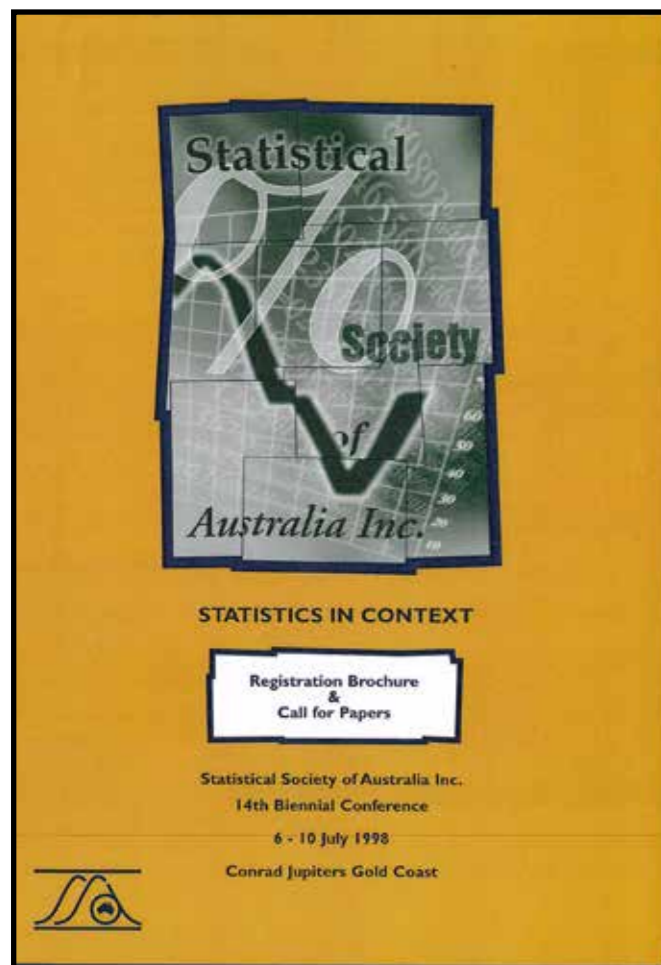
1981

Having created a vehicle in which the Society could converse with its members directly, Central Council was now able to offer broader, more inclusive support to statisticians based on immediate feedback from members. As a result of this, the establishment of a Queensland branch was formally recognised in 1981. That same year, Central Council passed a movement that would resurrect the formation of sections. Six sections were formed – Biological & Medical Sciences, Physical & Engineering Sciences, Social & Economic Sciences, Statistical Computing, Survey & Management Statistics and Teaching & Training – with the hope that these sections would attract new members in various areas of application. In contrast to previous incarnations, Sections now played a greater role within the Society; providing

relevant news to the newsletter, organising segments of the SSA Conferences and planning seminars in their field. In doing this, the Society now hosted a broader and more interesting spread of activity for its members.

(Below) Dr S.R. Wilson's article on Statistical Computing, featured in the Society's first newsletters, published May 1977





Promotional material for various Statistical conferences in 1967 (bottom), 1990 (top) and 1998 (left)

However, the Society's inclusion wasn't limited to statistical fields. In a bid to reach out to the younger generation of statisticians, the New South Wales branch sponsored a one day event; 'Experiences in Statistics – a Symposium for Young Statisticians'. The event was held at the CSIRO National Measurement Laboratory in Lindfield in December, 1982, and its purpose was to provide a forum for recent graduates to discuss their work and the problems they had embarking on a career in statistics. By fostering career growth in its younger members, the Society encouraged success on both an individual and collective scale.

In the mid-eighties it would seem the Society became more aware of the talents, diversity and capacity of its ever growing family of members. Drawing on the Society's collective range of skills and strength, a call was sent out in the August 1986 Newsletter asking for members to contribute to a biennial project relating to Australian youth unemployment. The rising rate of youth unemployment was at the forefront of

national news; however the limited information on the subject couldn't accurately illustrate the effects of long term unemployment. Seeing an opportunity for statistical input, a steering committee consisting of William Dunsmuir, Chris Heyde and Ian McRae orchestrated a string of research projects aimed at gathering further data. Aside from creating a productive impact on a significant social issue, it was hoped that collaborating together in the public domain would help boost the Society's image.

Having gathered momentum from the biennial project, the Society continued to seek status within the community and further support the work of statisticians. In a memorandum from newly appointed president Dennis Trewin, several exciting

new strategic directions were proposed.

Trewin shone the spotlight on the issue of declining attendance in statistical education. He suggested the society was well equipped to promote statistics as a career by engaging prospective statisticians with professionals, conducting stimulating work experience and partaking in career expos. In addition to encouraging newcomers to the field, Trewin placed high value on continuing the education of existing members by supporting the notion to run more workshops and special courses within the state branches.

Also noted in his memorandum was the need to improve the public profile of statisticians and the quality of their work. The Society had already taken a pivotal step by embarking on the Biennial project, however the issue was large and require action from all angles. Further to the project, Trewin recommended the Society establish itself as a 'watchdog' for statistical misconduct and promote ethical conduct in the field.

With a fresh set of challenges to tackle, members of the Society united and pushed forward.

Members of the Society eagerly organised the 10th Annual Statistical Conference at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, 1990. Registrations were at an unprecedented high, with over five hundred people registering for the event. The conference was deemed a resounding success, despite many members reflecting on the event as the coldest conference they had ever attended. Ron Sandlands famously suggested the Society should sell shirts emblazoned with 'I stayed at UNSW and survived!' Unsurprisingly, it was decided that conferences would no longer utilise university accommodation at future events.

A shift in regulations in 1994 saw the Society adapt a more unified presence. The restructure was introduced to satisfy the incorporations act, and allowed the SSA to move from an umbrella organisation to a national

body. Current secretary Helen McGillivray was the engine behind the restructure, and after compiling a finely detailed draft aimed to please members and stay within the incorporations guidelines, she sent it out to the state branches for approval. The states accepted the proposal and the Society became known as the Statistical Society of Australia Incorporated (SSAI).

Around the same time, the next generation of statisticians expressed their enthusiasm to become more involved in the Society. Following a discussion regarding networking opportunities between young statisticians at the 1993 National Conference in Canberra, an idea was pitched to Central Council to form a Young Statisticians section. Although initially received with scepticism, it was eventually approved and the Young Statisticians Section was born. Since its inception, esteemed statistician Richard Tweedie remarked it was one of the best initiatives he'd ever seen and recommended it be adopted elsewhere.

1996 The SSAI played host to many intriguing Annual Statistical Conferences over the years, however

many members reflect on the Sydney International Statistical Congress in 1996 as one of the best ever - fondly referred to as SISC96. The conference was attended by almost 900 delegates from no less than 45 different countries, gathering to hear talks spread across a week of activity in Sydney.

The annual general meeting held at SISC96 marked the commencement of standardised practice for statisticians. In the years leading up to the meeting, the Society had debated the implementation of an accreditation scheme. While the issue of misconduct in the field was widely acknowledged for many years, it was feared the introduction of accreditation would make the profession 'elitist' and see a decline in the number of statisticians nationally. Perhaps it was Alan Branford's comment, 'we will always argue about

Young Statisticians Conference 1987

Having finished my PhD in 1986, I was invited to the Young Statistician conference in 1987 to be held in Hepburn Springs. My age of 29 stretched the definition of “young” but since Danny Kildea was the organiser, I was not going to miss it.

A couple of weeks earlier, Danny had been down at the pub. A gentleman had been standing on a table lambasting the patrons with the seemingly impossible question: “You uneducated rabble wouldn’t even know who student is!” To which Dan had shouted out “W.H. Gossett, who derived the t-distribution for the probable error of the mean in 1908.” A beautiful friendship was formed, and we had our first invited speaker, who turned out to be a practicing data analyst in his day job.

I gave a short presentation on maximal ancillary sigma-algebras which nobody understood and which, I am sure, would now be equally mystifying even to me. The technology was appropriate to the times - a roll of plastic film on an overhead projector and multi-colored textas. Talks were measured in meters of plastic rather than minutes or Powerpoint slides. One lass must have used 5 meters, but she wrote big.

We also did some practical experiments, the results of which are alas lost to history. The aim was to investigate the effects of different types of alcohol in a hot humid environment. The apparatus was a four-person sauna with a fridge outside. The treatments were beer, champagne or water. But we couldn’t get anyone to take the water treatment. So we just tested beer and champagne. These days we would call beer the “active control.” At least two treatments allowed a complete 2 by 2 design, but alas there was no-one left to record the results and

we couldn’t remember them the next day.

If we had had i-phones, then there would be many photos of the weekend. Instead, we only have memories which, while subjective, are much more vivid.

Bi-Annual Conference 1986

The bi-annual conference in 1986 was held at UNSW in mid-winter. It was the first conference I ever spoke at, so I was very nervous indeed. Especially since Professor Sir David Cox was organizing the session.

I thought the talk was going well until Sir David fell asleep at the 5th minute of 20. When the talk concluded, he woke up and asked a question that was extremely pertinent. Either he was pretending to be asleep, or he had managed to extrapolate the next 15 minutes from the first 5, including a questionable assumption I made at the half way point.

Anyway, he must have liked the 5 minutes because he offered me a job at Imperial College 6 months later. As a colleague there, he told me that he had never been do cold in his life as he was at the UNSW conference. There was no heating in the college and a single thin blanket was provided. Extra blankets were possible but one had to make an appointment with the warden to be given one (after providing a deposit) and we only found out about this possibility the last day.

So if anybody reckons there have been inefficiencies in the last few conferences by reply is....”Luxury.”

Chris Lloyd

what a statistician is, but we will always agree on what a statistician isn’t that prompted the Society to move ahead and draft an accreditation model. The model was based on that of the Royal Statistical Society, however it was adapted to include maintaining accreditation. The final draft was approved by Central Council at the 1996 annual general meeting, progressing the Society’s vision to improve the standard of statistical practice in Australia.

At the Council meeting, it was decided that The Statistical Society of Australia and the New Zealand Statistical Association would amalgamate their two journals and publish with Blackwell’s (now Wiley-Blackwell). A financial and editorial model for the amalgamation was developed in 96-97, and The Australian Journal of Statistics became The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Statistics from 1998.

The new millennium brought a fresh image to the Society with the opening of a national office based in Canberra. Although Barbara Hartley’s kitchen table had served the organisation well, the new office space lifted the Society’s professional image, generated room for growth and allowed Ms Hartley the luxury of once again using her kitchen space for cooking.

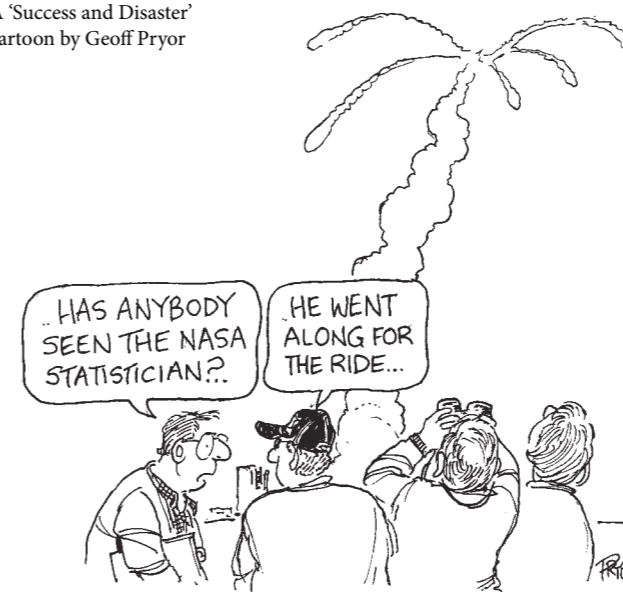
While the office may have provided a slick modern edge for the Society, two projects breathed new life

into the Society’s long-standing objectives that were established fifty-five years previously.

2002 The first project started in 2002 at a meeting in conjunction with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Many of Australia’s statistical educators were attending the 6th International Conference on Teaching Statistics at the time, but their work is of the utmost importance both locally and nationally. Australians have played, and continue to play, major roles at the forefront of statistical education internationally. The 2002 meeting advocated the importance of statistical education in response to the declining numbers of students in statistics - a problem shared with many countries. Reflecting the Society’s constitutional goal to advance education, the strategic objective was “to promote the development of statistics education for year 11 and 12 students at school, based on the best teaching practices that can be utilised, together with appropriate training for teachers”. In late 2009, a small SSAI/ABS committee was formed to give input to the national curriculum. This committee worked very hard both behind the scenes and in formal and official input to ACARA on both the P-10 curriculum and then the 11-12 curriculum. There is a strong need for good quality learning and teaching resources in statistics for students and teachers across school levels, but particularly in middle and senior school.”

The second project was a statistical public awareness campaign, commencing in 2003. The campaign had two objectives: advertise the risks of an unprofessional approach to handling statistical data, and promote the benefits of a professional approach using accredited statisticians. The advertising campaign featured cartoons by renowned political cartoonist Geoff Pryor, letter drops to federal parliamentarians and was supported by the publication of ‘success and disaster’ stories. By engaging in the project, the Society helped shed light on the importance of

A ‘Success and Disaster’ cartoon by Geoff Pryor





statistics in the public arena, as well as illustrating the advantages of utilising the newly established accreditation system.

In 2008 the Society moved with the digital age and launched a brand new website – StatSoc.org.au. StatSoc contained all of the features one would expect from a modern day website, as well as a collection of newsletters in digital format. Following on from the success of the website, the SSAI created its own Facebook page. In contrast to the monthly bulletins viewed by members in the 1950's, the Facebook page treated its 'Likers' to a live news feed through status updates. This new medium allows members to swap

paper newsletters for an iPad screen and access SSAI news however, wherever and whenever they please.

By tapping in to current communication platforms and social media, engaging in education and boosting the public profile of statisticians, it is hoped that the SSAI will preserve the art of statistics, continuously raise the standard of its practice, encourage innovative methods and inspire a new generation of Statisticians to carry the profession into the future.



In 2012, we asked the members...

I like the opportunity to network and socialize with other statisticians at monthly meetings. I also like hearing diverse topics at the monthly seminars, which makes me appreciate how varied and interesting our field is.

It is really important that we have a broad based and active stats professional society, because stats as a profession is always threatened by charlatans and is under considerable pressure world wide as an academic pursuit.

What do you like most about being a member of the Society?

Being able to receive regular emails and updates about the activities of the Society such as workshops, public lectures, conferences etc. It has given me plenty of opportunities to attend various professional courses that help in the development of my research.

(The) sense of belonging to an elite group of academics and a profession.

Everyone is so friendly and willing to share their knowledge – a generous heart like Bill Venables. It is like being a member of a family.

My experience with the society is dominated by time on executive, so I would have to say it is the privilege of working closely with dedicated colleagues and a common vision, plenty of arguments, and occasionally seeing good things happen, most obviously evolution of a viable society attracting a broad membership representing the profession; but as well it is the sense of building on the inspiration of earlier statisticians who saw clearly the role of the society in larger scientific, professional and public endeavours.

Statistics as a profession needs a strong, unified voice, and the Society fills that need. Being part of our professional body means being strongly identified as a statistician, and therefore as someone who has something to offer in our data-drenched world.

I enjoyed being president of the WA Branch of the SSAI March 2006- March 2008. It gave me opportunities to really appreciate my colleagues in the society and was in a sense great fun as well.

I like the fact that you offer discounts from book publishers...now I just have to figure-out how to use them in the States.

I've had the opportunity to attend two events: Young Statistician Conference 2011 and Australian Statistical Conference 2012. They have both helped in improving my networking and personal communication skills by interacting with statisticians from various regions of Australia. Also, there were great chances for me to learn more about research in the area of statistics, both theoretical and applied. ”

Attending Young Stats Conference in 2009 in Sydney. I met a fellow statistician from Adelaide who I keep in contact with.

Being around to see Mohamad Hanif present Ken Brewer with the special issue of Pakistan Journal of Statistics offered him on the occasion of his 80th birthday at a plenary session of the last Australian Statistical Conference. This showed the society could recognise its role, and the role of its members, in the world statistical community and in the developments and contributions of the discipline in Australia.

Being branch president in NSW and having to travel from Newcastle to Sydney monthly for evening meetings – hardly a big issue!

The biennial meeting in Melbourne in 1976 - the first I ever attended.

There is no single most memorable moment, but a collection of satisfying and worthwhile experiences, eg development of personal/professional relationships with statisticians working in businesses and industries different from my own, & presentations by statisticians about their work, both at conferences and monthly meetings.

What has been a highlight of your time at the Society?

Chairing the ASC2010 in the Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle. This one week event had a lead up of over 30 preparatory meetings with the conference organizer, and went without a hitch. In the weeks running up to the conference I had a daily telephone conversation with the Chair of the Organizing Committee. Subsequently ASC2010 was a success on all accounts including numbers of delegates (many from overseas) and the healthy return to the coffers of the society, as well as the brilliant line up of international speakers.

Being the SSAI webmaster for a while was a fun job, and it is definitely worthwhile being an editor of the Journal.

My first ASC in 1978 in Canberra included fascinating extras such as watching delegates gape at a Dave Griffiths' poster ('is it for real?') and warily avoid minders of USSR speakers at the associated Conference on Stochastic Processes.

From then to watching the enthusiastic presentations at the 8th OZCOTS in 2012, the third to be successfully run in conjunction with ASC's, it has been a privilege to be part of the diverse and dedicated professional community of the Society. Accompanied by a 4 month-old, I represented the new Queensland Branch at my first Council meeting in 1982, at an ASC where Evan Williams introduced President Ted Hannan who presented the Pitman medal to Pat Moran. In 1996, I used extracts from the tape of Pat's speech in presenting the Pitman medal to Warren Ewens.

Highlights too many to list include the 1st ASC in Queensland in 1984, for which, as secretary and LOC chair, I had to keep ordering more sponsor's nametags as the delegate numbers grew beyond all expectation. Then becoming Queensland secretary, by dint of a couple of cartons left at my office door, I joined those wrestling with a pioneering version of online records whose clunkiness would not be believed today.

Every occasion on which a speaker really engaged his/her audience. When a speaker respects the audience by presenting in a way that enables listeners to follow and understand the topic discussed from start to finish and, at the same time, communicates enthusiasm for the subject matter, the impact is quite memorable.

Statistics Society conferences, workshops and seminars. Don't get time to go to many now days, but loved it when I did have time.

As national secretary (1990-1994), I wrote the revised constitution to gain national incorporation, and proposed the Young Statisticians Section, and, as president (1995-1997), wrote the initial accreditation model, and sweated over the finances to amalgamate the Australian and New Zealand journals, and to change from 'homegrown' publishing to Blackwell.

After serving as president of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Council, I became increasingly involved in statistics education, and was delighted, as one of the first National Senior Teaching Fellows, and in collaboration with Brian Phillips (the founder of OZCOTS) to bring OZCOTS and ASC together in 2008. Although I was of course proud to be the first female SSAI president and then honorary life member, I am prouder on the international stage, first as IASE president, and now as ISI vice-president, of being a small part of the Australian statistical community.

We are a small Society, but, like past and present outstanding Australian statisticians, our international standing is high. Nurturing the SSAI is not, and never will be, easy, but it is as important as Statistics is, and of immense value to the whole Australian statistical community.

- Helen McGillivray

When I became NSW Branch Secretary in 1980, I inherited an old green filing cabinet with Branch and SSAI papers in it. I was casting around to find out what to do with it, and someone mentioned that P A P (Pat) Moran was on the archives committee of the Australian Academy of Science. The next time I saw Pat (probably at the conference in Sydney in 1980) I asked him if the Academy would be interested in the papers. He immediately flung his arms out wide (spraying bits of pipe tobacco in all directions) and said "Come to my arms my beamish boy!" (quoting Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky").

- Doug Shaw

Now there is a professional secretariat – that is a very important step. Professional accreditation is another important step.

I like the fact that you offer discounts from book publishers...now I just have to figure-out how to use them in the States.

(It's become) more proactive in training its members – offering accreditation.

(The Society) seems to have more workshops and internet sessions

How has the Society changed since you have been a member?

The Society has changed a lot, in part due to the way Statistics itself has changed in response to the data revolution we are experiencing. There have been many innovations - CPD programs, accreditation, and other ways in which the Society has been able to draw together our “high variance” profession.

Some things have worked well, others less so, but all have been initiated with a consistent aim to improve statisticians’ profile in the broader scientific and social community and to give us a voice.



It has turned from being an extension of an academic cum CSIRO/ABS network to an organisation supporting the careers and activities of individual statisticians in whatever corner of the profession they were occupied with. Essential parts of this transformation include the establishment of a Young Statisticians group; the investment in a fully functioning properly equipped permanent office; the consolidation of a CPD workshop programme resting on high quality standards in presenters and in accessibility to members and non-members; the reviving of Sections within the Society governance; and the improvement in communication between branches and the national executive; the passage of executive to monthly meeting frequency (from twice a year face to face); the establishment and smooth running of an accreditation scheme. To this should be added several initiatives that will be important for the society in the future: the StatCan scheme; participation in Science and Technology Australia; direct lobbying of government on statistics education and curriculum; first elements of international engagement.

In step with the times, the professional focus of members is becoming more specialised. There are many more young statisticians among the membership and more members with jobs outside academia. But there remains the long-observed gap between the interests of academic statisticians and statisticians in government, business and industry: indeed, that gap seems to be widening.

The talks are much more interesting in this electronic age with power point and all. Chalk has been relegated to the archives of history.

I would like to see the Society to continue to be the leading statistical society in Australia. It would be good to see more collaboration with international researchers. I am hoping that the Society will continue to be a platform for statisticians in Australia to interact, grow and achieve higher goals. I am certain that the Society is committed to playing the role as the leading statistical society in Australia.

The world envisioned by Google, SAS and other leaders results in the scientific work of turning data into information being recognised as statistics, and statisticians achieving a widely acknowledged place in society so that every major organisation employs and values statisticians

Being more inclusive in nature – drawing in membership from the part-time users of statistics – demonstrate the value that the use of statistics can offer business, science and services within Australia. Have non-statistical talks by people with interesting problems that could benefit from a statistical approach to answering them.

I think the society is doing fine with the enthusiastic people at the helm. We probably will enter the age of films instead of discussing papers, but hey, there is always change.

More exchange opportunities among members from worldwide

I would like to see the Society pursue more energetically what its Founders regarded as so important, that is, to bring together statisticians from all manner of fields in the physical, biological and social sciences, the technologies, and the humanities. It would also be good for renewed efforts to be made to bridge the gap between academic statisticians and non-academic statisticians (including plain users of statistics) in these fields.

I would hope that in the next ten years the society builds on its member base; sees the Sections being sites of innovation and advance; engage with the region properly; engage with issues of public importance; work more closely with our NZ counterparts on training, professional development and scientific exchange; re-invent the conference towards a dialogue with government, industry and the public on the importance of quantitative insight; and to attract people to the discipline and the profession. There are emerging models for statistics education, public consultation and the dissemination of statistical knowledge which the society can support or advise if it invests in Sections and listens to its members, and is open to change itself. One thing that needs strengthening is attention to foundational premises and how they influence the various methods strands that seem to define the discipline at the moment. From this comes confidence to tackle emerging problems and debates in more general discourse - scientific or policy.

Where would you like to see the Society in the next 50 years?

Asking a statistician for a prediction is like asking a magician for a trick - although the results may be somewhat more variable. Luckily, for a statistician that is a good thing. When I was a kid, the standard prediction for the future was that robots would do all our work. This doesn't seem to have happened, so I shall refrain from any robot-based prognostications. But I do think that automation has a lot to do with where we are headed - data are getting bigger and more complex, and the gap between what statisticians can do and what normal people can understand is growing (e.g. does anybody “normal” have a good understanding of how Google really works?) So there is a massive and important role for statisticians to convey the information they command, and this is where I see the Society playing a big role in being an effective conduit between statistics as a profession/discipline and the world that so desperately needs us. Let's hope this prediction is broad enough to come true!



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