

Australian and New Zealand  
FORENSIC SCIENCE SOCIETY



# NSW Branch Newsletter

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@anzfss\_nsw



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nswbranch@anzfss.org



## Reflections from our NSW Branch Life Members: Celebrating 50 Years of our Forensic Science Society

*Amber Brown*

“The future depends on what you do today” - Mahatma Gandhi.

### The path less travelled

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of "The Australian Forensic Science Society", which since 1988 has changed to be the "The Australian and New Zealand Forensic Science Society" (ANZFSS), we have been granted the opportunity to share numerous valuable insights from five of our ANZFSS life members. These members have all travelled unique paths and have set the foundations for the ANZFSS community that we know today. ANZFSS has served as an essential forum to connect diverse members across the forensic community due to the contributions from these members. With each member, comes a valuable principal which we can all use to better the forensic communities of our future.

### Flip the triangle

Focusing on the big picture has always been a key principle for former ANZFSS President, current President of the International Association of Forensic Sciences and Director of the Centre for Forensic Science at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), Claude Roux. Alongside countless other distinctions and positions that Claude currently holds, his contributions in developing the first undergraduate and PhD forensic science programs in Australia has been invaluable for generations to come. As a student in Switzerland, Claude began his path by identifying and classifying photocopiers which may have been used to produce forged or counterfeit documents, followed by a PhD in the

area of microtraces in particular fibres. Since then, Claude has directly provided contributions in over 260 publications while aiding students in countless other works across a wide range of disciplines within the forensic scientific community. Claude acknowledges that his experience has been humbling and that his success has been supported by the people around him. The immense dedication that hundreds of students have demonstrated throughout his tenure has been incredibly rewarding for Claude and has set the foundation for future communities of excellence.

Due to the focused and long-term nature of graduate research work, students naturally tend to get tunnel vision while aiming towards the goals. Claude noted the importance of understanding the wide landscape of interdisciplinary forensic science while maintaining passion for your selected work. Like a general practitioner in medicine, the strength in researchers



comes from being able to apply diagnosis to problems which consider both wholistic and targeted elements. Throughout his career, his guiding principles have been focused on identifying the societal impacts of potential research while emphasising a proactive approach when taking on forensic matters. This vision has paved the way for the academic approach to forensic science within our community. His key advice to future scientists is to remember to flip the triangle! Focus on big picture and then narrow down. Never forget the basics. Don't try to over-engineer your path and follow your passion.

### Do with what resources are in front of you

Many things in the field of forensic science change over time and we all have opportunities to improve as forensic scientists by being more curious, asking more questions and doing more with the tools that we have in front of us. If you are not convinced, consider the journey that Eric Murray has undertaken. Eric first got involved in the forensic science field while driving ambulances outside of his permanent job working for the postal service. As was the case throughout his life, Eric adopted an empathetic and curious approach and began asking questions to why and how people damaged property and other people. As a result, Eric built meaningful partnerships with various stakeholders across the community including, but not limited to, police officers, nurses, analytical chemists, forensic



## Reflections from our Life Members: Celebrating 50 Years of our Forensic Science Society (continued)

psychologists, neurologists, trauma specialists and related researchers. Eric worked diligently to build a holistic understanding of the various stakeholders, and patients, in his community and aimed to bridge the needs of both through effective management. With the help of his network, Eric was able to directly participate and lead in numerous related roles across both medical and forensic disciplines. Eric found that one of the most challenging, but interesting roles he took was related to people profiling and incident reconstructions. As with all of his other challenges, Eric embraced and enjoyed the learning experience. Eric has numerous public recognitions for his invaluable work to the community and is notably known for his “hands-on” approach. Despite Eric’s unbelievable achievements across multiple fields, he leans on the support that he has received from his family and community.



Continuous life-long education has been at the centre of Eric’s service. Whether it was a deep dive into chemistry while working in Occupational Health and Industry Safety or whether it was completing an 18-month study into nursing services provided by the NSW Corrective Services provided by the Health Department to the Corrections Facility, Eric has always pursued studies in various forms. One of Eric’s favourite accomplishments was helping facilitate the move of the Forensic Medicine Unit out of the Correctional Services Facility into a new facility that was run entirely by the Department of Nursing Medical Staff of the Department of Health. This enabled more medical programs to be available to a person’s remediation and led to mental health conditions being treated as health matters and not correctional matters under the NSW Mental Health Act. Aside from his numerous community contributions, Eric has been the benefactor for numerous scholarships intended for upcoming scientists who demonstrate similar curiosity and drive to help others. His key advice to future scientists is to not get distracted in this changing world and do with what resources are in front of you. There are always opportunities to be curious and learn from others.

### Get involved and find improvements

There is a somewhat poetic parallel between the growth of ANZFS and one of its foundational life members Paul Donkin B.Sc (UNSW, 1969) & M.Chem (UNSW, 1980). Whilst studying for his degree, Paul worked in both the pharmaceutical and brewing industries.

He was able to land a role working in the NSW Division of Analytical Laboratories (“DAL”) in 1971. Interestingly, the Australian Forensic Science Society and DAL Chemical Society were both formed during this year. Paul joined the Toxicology Section of DAL, where his eminent colleague Alan Hodda was second in charge. This was a time of rapid transformation across both the practices and instrumentation in analytical chemistry driven partly by new low dose anxiety and sedative prescription drugs. Paul provided insights into how far the lab environment has changed since the 1970’s, as initially the lab only had access to gas chromatography and UV spectrometry.



Since then, the forensic industry, and its capabilities, have been transformed with the development of more sophisticated instrumentation including mass spectrometry, high performance liquid chromatography and other instrumentation. Paul served as Officer-in Charge of the Drug Section of DAL, with some environmental analysis work, until his retirement from DAL in 2003.





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During his career, Paul worked on numerous transformational projects in law enforcement such as the training of Police Breathalyzer operators and “undercover” police officers who specialised in narcotics. He also began the investigation of clandestine drug laboratories and provided drug intelligence via a regular newsletter. Paul politely attributes his success to “luck” but admits you have to be proactive and get involved if you want exposure to future developments.

Sharing information with the forensic community has been a focus area for Paul throughout his career. In 1981, Paul became editor of the now defunct “Proceedings of the Australian Forensic Society” which sought to share articles between the state branches of the society. During his working life and after retirement, he has served on the ANZFSS (NSW Branch) committee several times, being secretary twice and treasurer on one occasion. He has also contributed to the work of the NSW Police Forensic Services Group. His key advice to future scientists is to continue to find new ways to get involved and make improvements. Paul also discussed the importance of sharing research developments and communicating findings within the field. As the world continues to evolve, be forward thinking and make a contribution.

### **Jump in but be honest about your limitations**

From planning the forensic response to Sydney’s Olympic and Paralympic Games to serving in a

2-staff forensic police unit covering 430 kilometres up the coast from Port Macquarie, Carl Cameron has seen it all when it comes to police work across NSW. Carl has earned numerous designations throughout his decorated career including being designated as a Detective in 1971, being awarded the National Medal in 1981, being recognised for his work during the Clybucca Flat tourist coach disaster in 1981, being awarded the Forensic Services Group Director’s Award



in 2000 and being awarded the Australian Police Medal in 2001. Even at an early age, Carl was focused on helping his communities through service in the police force. After he joined as a Probationary Constable in 1964, Carl decided to go in headfirst and specialise in the Scientific Investigation Section. At that point of time, he noted that hand-written notes and physical evidence were

collected and delivered to Sydney and cold cases were sorted out with local police without national media attention. Carl later transferred to Sydney as a Senior Sergeant and became Sergeant-in-charge of the Sydney Physical Evidence / Crime Scene Section. Over his career he adapted to the rapid growth across the forensic industry such as DNA analysis and crime scene organisation techniques..

Carl noted that he always enjoyed working with his teams and found value in the work he performed throughout his career. He discussed the importance of collaborating with the community, as you never know what consequential evidence you may discover through these connections. Although the technology and available resources for his units have changed significantly over his career, the fundamental interests in relief work and connections with these local communities remains throughout the police force he left behind. His key advice to future forensic scientists is to jump in and get your hands dirty with what you want to do but know your limitations if you don’t like being in a particular field or area. Be passionate and honest in your work, but just as honest about your limitations.

### **If not, why not?**

The last of our life members highlighted, current ANZFSS Vice President and former NSW Branch ANZFSS President Alison Sears, has epitomised the definition of resilience throughout her career. After leaving school at the age of 15, Alison chased



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her passion in forensic science and never took “no” for an answer. She first joined The University of Sydney as a research-lab aid and later worked for 14 years as a technical officer in the histology laboratory at the Division of Forensic Medicine (“DOFM”) (now the Forensic Medicine and Coroners Court (“FMCC”). She earned her degree whilst working at DOFM, during the emergence of PCR-based DNA testing and early methodologies for mitochondrial DNA testing protocols for human remains identification. Alison noted that she was always fascinated in the biological aspects of the deceased. She later joined the NSW Forensic & Analytical Science Service (“FASS”) as a forensic biologist. During this time, she worked rotations with the Thailand Tsunami International Team and was the recipient of the NIFS Michael Duffy Travel fellowship which took her to many internationally renowned facilities including the ICMP (Bosnia), Bode, NIST and the New York Office of the Chief Medical Officer.

As Alison broadened her reach, she transitioned from studying forensics related to the deceased to studying crimes against the living. She noted that you often see the worst of humanity in this space, but it is ultimately best to have a pragmatic approach and appreciate the positive impacts you have in your work. Alison noted that she was able to build resiliency through her therapeutic sense of humour and was able to learn how to separate work from family.

Alison has participated in the rapid transformations across DNA

analytical practices and notes the future of bioinformatics brings so much potential to the field of forensic science, especially DNA.

Additionally, Alison has contributed to up-and-coming scientists through her role as a lecturer at Western Sydney University and noted how important it is to nurture and develop fresh perspectives into the forensic community. Alison also shared the pride that she has for the professionalism she has helped instil in a society where practitioners and students can openly collaborate from an even footing. Currently the Manager of the Science, Research & Technology Unit in FETS, NSWPF, her advice to future forensic scientists is to not be afraid of moving around industries to get broad experience which draws out your interests. Do not be afraid of a new opportunity, a plan B or a change of plans. Be resilient but most of all enjoy the experience. The best advice she received: If not, why not?



### Personal Reflection

I want to personally thank all of these highlighted life members for taking time out of their schedules to provide their personal insights over their careers. It was an incredible privilege to interview these members as I could not capture all of their amazing personal stories in one article. We can all take these valuable insights to better our forensic communities for generations to come.

Additionally, we all want to share our gratitude to Graham Cook, Henry Delaforce, Alan Hodda, Tony Raymond, John Snowden and all of the families of these NSW Branch life members. These life members had equally as impressive careers and impacts on this society, as mentioned by many of their colleagues. As we continue to adapt to this rapidly changing environment amidst the pandemic, let's all work to continue to partner and collaborate as our leaders have done before us

*-Amber Brown*