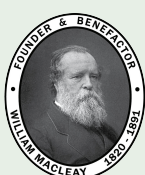


Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales

The Sesquicentenary of the publication of the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales (1875-2025)*



Natural History in all its Branches

**King, R.J. (2025) The
Sesquicentenary of the
publication of the *Proceedings
of the Linnean Society of New
South Wales (1875-2025)*.**

*Proceedings of the Linnean
Society of New South Wales*
147, 69-76.

Published on 4 December 2025 at
[https://openjournals.library.sydney.
edu.au/index.php/LIN/index](https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/LIN/index)

Manuscript accepted for publication
24 October 2025

Keywords: Linnean Society of New
South Wales history; Presidential
addresses

PO Box 291, Manly NSW 1655
<https://linneansocietynsw.org.au>
secretary@linneansocietynsw.org.au
0490 542 524

ISSN 1839-7263

ROBERT J. KING

Emeritus Professor, University of New South Wales
kelp@unsw.edu.au

ABSTRACT

The Linnean Society of New South Wales was ‘instituted for the Cultivation and Study of the Science of Natural History, in all its Branches’ and was founded in Sydney, New South Wales (Australia) in 1874. Since that time the journal of the Society, *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales*, has published many valued contributions to the study of natural history in all its forms in Australasia. In 2025 we celebrate 150 years of publication, trusting that the *Proceedings* will remain a hallmark of the Society’s activities.

INTRODUCTION

Writing of the early history of Australian phycology, Ducker (1990) recognised three periods: the age of the explorers, scientists and naturalists who made brief visits to Australia and published their findings in their home countries; a second period when Australian scientists and naturalists sent materials to experts in Europe; and a third from the middle of the nineteenth century in which colonial Australian scientists observed, collected and published on Australian marine plants. A similar pattern can be observed in other botanical and zoological fields. The Linnean Society of New South Wales (hereafter referred to as the Linnean Society) was but one of the scientific societies established in this third period and it played an important role in meeting the needs of the growing community of both amateur and professional individuals able to contribute to Australian studies in natural history. The establishment of such societies, including the Linnean Society, is summarised in Branagan (1971/72).

The Linnean Society of New South Wales was ‘instituted for the Cultivation and Study of the Science of Natural History, in all its Branches’ and was founded in Sydney, New South Wales (Australia) in 1874. The Linnean Society succeeded the Entomological Society of New South Wales, which had been founded in April 1862 and was in existence until 1873. William Macleay was the first and only President of the Entomological Society and James Charles Cox its first Secretary. The Entomological Society was founded to provide those interested in insects the opportunity to meet together, and to publish members’ papers. The latter was achieved with the publication of two volumes of *Transactions of the Entomological Society of New South Wales*. The Linnean Society expanded the remit

of the Entomological Society, from the improvement and diffusion of entomological science to all aspects of natural history: botany, zoology, and geology. The establishment of the Linnean Society in 1874 was largely due to the efforts of Commander Thomas Stackhouse and Dr H.G. Alleyne (Walkom, 1925) and its early successes, especially the publication of the *Proceedings*, to the dedication and financial support of its first President, William Macleay.

At the time of its formation in 1874, Macleay (1876) was able to claim legitimately that the Linnean Society of New South Wales was the only exclusively natural history society in New South Wales, and he believed, in Australia. The emphasis here should be placed on this exclusivity. The Royal Society of New South Wales [with its predecessors] was already well established but its coverage was considerably broader (Coote, 2024). Macleay (1876) recognised the Royal Society as an ‘Improvement’ society with its aim ‘to receive at its stated meetings original papers on subjects of Science, Art, Literature and Philosophy, and especially on such subjects as tend to develop the physical character of the colony and illustrate its Natural History and Productions’. In what might be seen as justification for a new society (the Linnean Society) Macleay noted that the Royal Society was well established, possessed ample funds and furthermore included in its membership the most scientific men in the community.

In his first Presidential Address to the Linnean Society (31 January 1876) Macleay outlined the first year of its activity, and while speaking well of the Royal Society, justified the formation of the Linnean Society with more specific aims. He alluded particularly to the Royal Society of Sydney [New South Wales] noting that ‘a number of valuable papers have been read at its meetings. But mingled with those scientific papers have been others not of a scientific character, and possessing certainly no interest except of the most local kind’. He regretted then that valuable (scientific) papers read at the Royal Society meetings had ‘not been conducted with the celerity and regularity to be expected from a society not deficient in point of means, and it is that irregularity and uncertainty in publication which makes it as a society useless as a record of zoological, botanical or geological discovery’. Branagan (1971/72) in his account of 150 years of the scientific societies in Australia notes that he was unable to find any comment about the formation of the Linnean Society in the records of the Royal Society of that time.

In his Presidential Address to the newly formed Linnean Society, Macleay (1876) emphasised the importance of the publication of the *Proceedings* to the success of the Society. In writing of the first hundred years of the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales, Prince (1979) made the relevant observation that ‘No scientific body can gain credence or prestige outside its own membership unless it publishes the results of its members’ academic work, and that of other reputable workers in the same field’. Such was clearly in the mind of the Linnean Society’s founders, albeit that in the early days it was strictly the case that the *Proceedings* included only

papers by financial members and those papers were to be read at Society meetings.

In the published proceedings of the Annual General Meeting of the Linnean Society of New South Wales (Monday 22 January 1876) the President William Macleay was able to report that ‘three parts of the proceedings of the Society had been published during the year’ (referring to 1875). Only a few days later (31 January 1876) in his address to the Linnean Society Macleay noted that the proceedings of the monthly meetings, with the papers read, had been printed as soon as the matter in hand was sufficient for an octavo sheet. Volume 1 was issued and sold in four parts and the compiled Volume 1 dated 1877 (Figure 1).

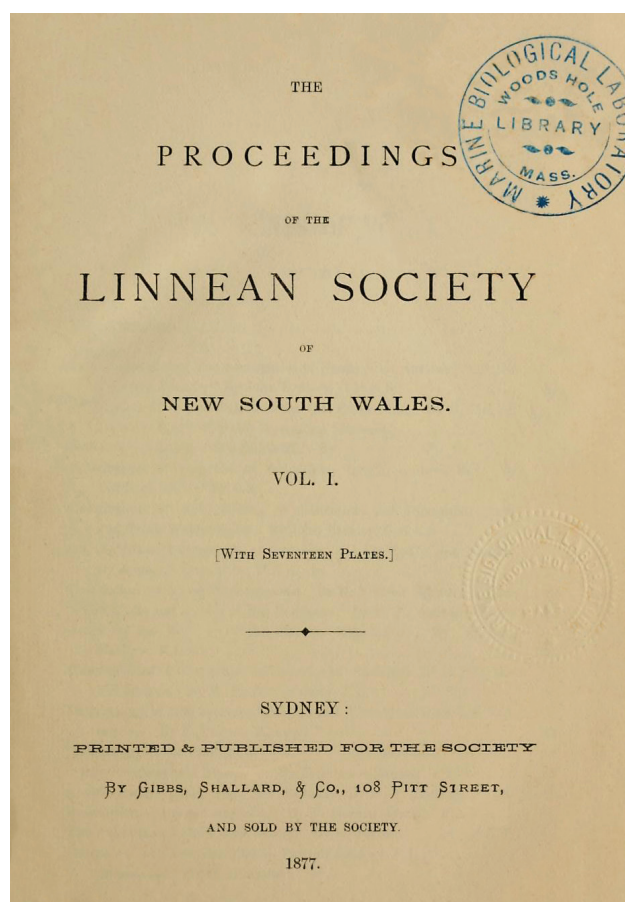


Figure 1. The title page of Volume 1 of the *Proceedings* 1877

As a consequence, major library catalogues such as that of the Biodiversity Heritage Library index record Volume 1 as 1877-1878. While this may be understandable it is not the case. Since the first parts were published in 1876, in 2025 the Linnean Society of New South Wales can legitimately and with pride celebrate 150 years of continuous publication of natural history science through its *Proceedings*. The anomaly of Volume 147 being issued in 2025 results from the fact that the completed Volume 1 has been treated as published in 1877, and on two occasions a numbered volume has covered contributions for more than one calendar year.

As already noted, the main object of the Linnean Society when founded was ‘the cultivation and study of science of natural history in all its branches’. At that period scientific interest of natural historians was concerned primarily with collecting and/or describing the fauna, flora, rock formations and fossils of what was, from the point of view of the scientific world, a relatively recently discovered continent. Initially the Society’s *Proceedings* published papers largely but not exclusively concerning zoology, botany and geology. The geographical scope was Australia primarily but also extending to the South Pacific. Many of the papers in the first volumes related to the Chevert expedition, funded by William Macleay, and this has been suggested as giving the impetus to the establishment of the Society (Fletcher 1893) (Figure 2).

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.	
PART I.	
	Page
List of Members	iii
Rules	vii
Description of fourteen new species of Shells from Australia and the Solomon Islands. By John Brazier, C.M.Z.S.	1
Description of a new <i>Ptilotis</i> from the Endeavour. By E. Pierson Ramsay, F.L.S., Curator Australian Museum	9
Notes on the Entozoa of a Sun Fish. By W. Macleay, F.L.S.	12
Notes on a new species of <i>Dendrophis</i> from Cleveland Bay. By William Macleay, F.L.S.	15
Descriptions of eight species of Australian and Tasmanian Land and Fresh Water Shells. By John Brazier, C.M.Z.S.	17
On the Stone Implements of Australia and the South Sea Islands. By James C. Cox, M.D., F.L.S., &c.	21
Description of a new <i>Trichoglossus</i> . By E. Pierson Ramsay, F.L.S.	30
A new genus and species of Rat Kangaroo. By E. P. Ramsay, F.L.S.	33
Notes on the Zoology of the Chevert Expedition. By William Macleay, F.L.S.	36
Characters of a new genus and species of Passerine Bird from the Fiji Islands. By E. Pierson Ramsay, F.L.S.	41
Descriptions of new species of <i>Merula</i> and <i>Rhytidura</i> from the Fiji Islands. By E. Pierson Ramsay, F.L.S.	43
Ornithology of the Chevert, Part I. By George Masters	44
A new <i>Pachycephala</i> from Fiji. By E. Pierson Ramsay, F.L.S.	65
A new <i>Pachycephala</i> from New Britain. By E. P. Ramsay, F.L.S.	66
Description of a new <i>Lamprolia</i> . By E. Pierson Ramsay, F.L.S.	68
The Avi-fauna of the Fijian Group. By E. Pierson Ramsay, F.L.S.	69
Description of a new Bat. By E. Pierson Ramsay, F.L.S.	81
Annual Address. By the President	83

Figure 2. The contents list of Volume 1 (1877) included many papers resulting from the Chevert expedition.

The early papers in the *Proceedings* were short, often little more than a page long, and many were concerned with taxonomy or at least descriptions of new species. Understandably given the origins of the Society, almost all the papers in Volume 1 were zoological, remarked upon by Macleay (1876) who hoped this could be remedied, and in short order it was. Over the 150 years of publication the concept of natural history has expanded and encompassed a broad range of disciplines including anthropology, ethnology, microbiology, palaeontology, physical geography and history to name but a few. David Keith (2004) notes that some of the earliest descriptive scientific studies of

vegetation in Australia were done in eastern New South Wales during the first half of the 20th Century including Blue Mountains, Kosciuszko, Barrington Tops, Myall Lakes, Bulli and the central coast. These formative studies were all published in the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society*. Ecology, environmental science, and palaeontological studies continue to feature prominently in the *Proceedings*.

The evolution of broadly based scientific societies in New South Wales is reflected in shifting priorities and values within the broader scientific community. The demise of ANZAAS (Australian New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science) presents a textbook case, with the ANZAAS web site noting that ‘In the 1990s, membership and attendance at the annual meetings decreased as specialised scientific societies increased in popularity’. The consequence has resulted in major challenges for such societies, and the Linnean Society is no stranger to the pressures to retain relevance.

A key role in maintaining the Linnean Society’s relevance for over 150 years has been publication of the *Proceedings*. This has not been easily achieved. Issues confronted include the difficulty in maintaining the *Proceedings* in its traditional format while attracting papers of sufficient calibre for publication, and the ongoing costs of publication and distribution.

Attracting submissions for publication

When the *Proceedings* were first published sufficient papers were presented at meetings for each volume to be published in 4 parts. Volume 1 Parts 1-4 presented some fifty papers, all but three of which were zoological, with two on geological aspects and one anthropology. Papers were brief (average length c. 7 pages). All papers were single authored. Most recent papers have been considerably longer and all but a few papers multi-authored. The *Proceedings* now have a limited profile and in part this reflects the fact that in zoology, botany and geology/palaeontology there are many other publication options both locally and internationally.

Writing some seventy years ago, Mercer (1955) commented on the increasing number of journals catering for particular areas within the natural sciences. He recognised that the formation of various specialist societies was often a response to the desire for more focussed platforms dedicated solely to these discipline areas, where researchers sought to ensure not just the rapid dissemination of findings, but also the preservation of a rigorous scientific record distinct from more general or locally oriented publications. As the nineteenth century progressed, these motivations had led to the establishment of societies that aimed for both inclusivity among experts and exclusivity in their subject matter, thereby nurturing a sense of identity and purpose that has shaped publication of Australian natural history science. An early example can be seen in the formation of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW in 1879. There are now many Australian and even local publication

options available. Mercer also drew attention to the changing nature of scientific studies. The move from the general to the specific, and the fact that no longer were members classified simply as biologist or geologist ‘but we have become phytomorphologists, gene-ecologists and geophysicists and so on’. There has also been a move from descriptive to experimental science, driven in part by research funding bodies to support research outside the scope of the *Proceedings*.

Since the mid 1970s two further and somewhat interrelated factors have emerged which tell against publication in a generalist journal such as the *Proceedings*. One is the emergence of so-called impact factors for journals which measure the average number of citations that an article in a specific journal receives over a finite time. They can be over-interpreted as measures of prestige and influence. Journal impact factors have limitations as general measures of the importance depending strongly on discipline, fashion, and particularly the number of scientists in a particular field. The second factor is citation indexes that track and list which later publications cite an earlier one. Both indices have an elevated status for both the journal (impact factor) and the author of the work (citation index). These metrics are strongly supported by commercial publishing houses that largely publish specialist journals.

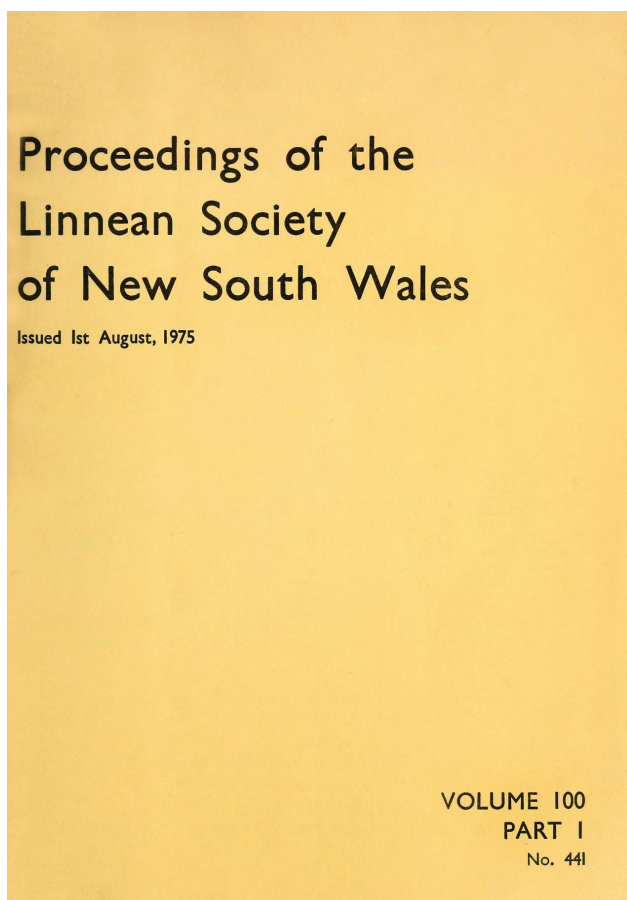


Figure 3. The arrival of the yellow-covered *Proceedings* was a familiar event for members from 1965 to the early 1990s.

Regrettably neither of these factors play out well for publishing in the *Proceedings* with its focus on Australian studies in natural history. As a generalist journal without the backing of a major publisher, the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* is not assigned an impact factor. In any case impact factors are just one measure considered by authors. Other factors will include speed of publication, the length of papers, the target audience, and page costs of publishing in some journals. The target audience can vary greatly, and international comparisons are not relevant for many Australian focused studies. Nonetheless and regrettably the simplistic interpretation of these indices can be observed in promotion and appointment processes in both academia and scientific organisations where the administrative view is that they provide objective data and are sometimes seen as a fair way of assessing quality of research output. International journals with high ratings have thus become a preferred publication choice for many authors.

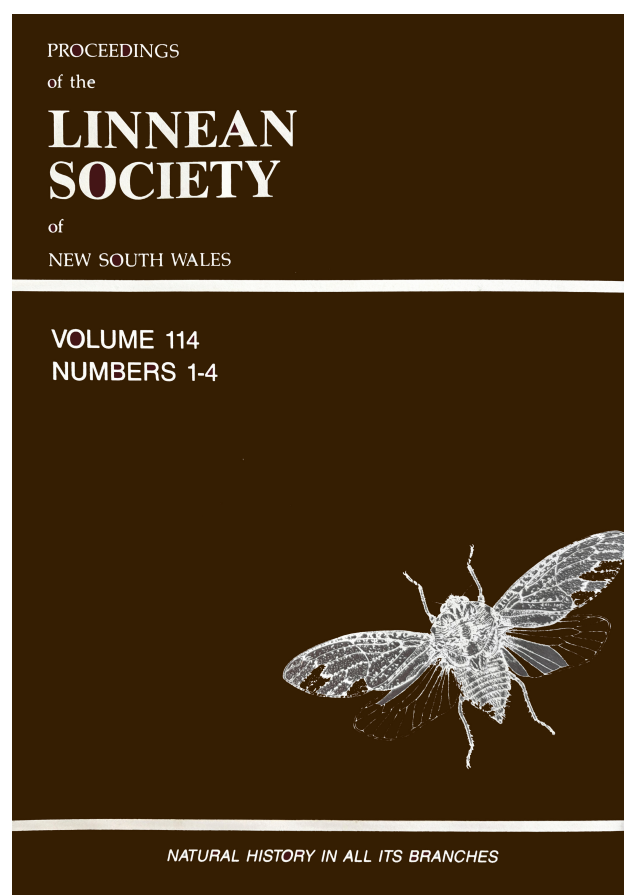


Figure 4. The new brown cover with a small natural history illustration, made the *Proceedings* distinctive from the 1990s, and was later enlarged (2003) for the current two column A4 format.

Finance and the *Proceedings*

‘It is almost an axiom that financial crisis and scientific societies go together’ (Mercer, 1955).

The cost of printing and distributing the *Proceedings* since Volume I has been an ongoing issue for the Society’s

Council (Figure 3). Volume 1 was able to be printed and distributed only through the goodwill and financial support of William Macleay. However, the electronic world has resulted in significant changes in knowledge distribution. Led by the Honorary Editor Michael Augée, Volume 124 (2003) heralded major changes to the printing and distribution of the *Proceedings*. These took advantage of advances in technology and resulted in significant and necessary cost savings.

The editorial comment associated with Volume 124 (2003) noted that: *'this is the first volume to be produced entirely by electronic means and in the new A4 format [Figure 4]. The process has taken a great deal more time and effort than anticipated, resulting in the publication of Volume 124 being held over until January 2003. Therefore, no volume is dated 2002 (volume 123 was published in Dec 2001). Volume 124 is covered by the 2002 subscription and memberships. Volume 125 is expected in the second half of 2003'*. The formal note to members read: *'In an attempt to contain the increasing cost of producing this journal, the Linnean Society now uses desktop publishing to provide Southwood Press with printer-ready copy. At the final stage the journal is in PDF. Therefore, any subscriber or member who would prefer to receive the journal in this format on Compact-Disc should contact the Secretary. Since postage costs are becoming a major financial burden to the Society, the savings resulting from sending a CD rather than a printed Journal are important'*.

A CD of a *Proceedings* volume was made available from 2004. At this time Mike Augée welcomed the technical support of Bruce Welch then at Southwood Press (now Honorary Secretary of the Society), a partnership that prevailed until Mike Augée's untimely death in 2025. In a prescient comment, Augée foresaw a time *'in the near future'* when the journal might be available on-line, but at that time the files were simply too large to allow transmission of the entire journal. Only a decade later that *'near future'* arrived and since Volume 134 (2012) the *Proceedings* have been available electronically, and universally available free of charge (Figure 5). This has benefited the Society greatly. There are minimal costs for publishing the *Proceedings* online; and the very significant postage costs of distributing the journal have been eliminated. The Society has Honorary Editors and Bruce Welch's generous assistance with typesetting and production continues.

The benefits to the Society include more than simply cost savings with printing and distribution. It has allowed the Society to include colour images, to publish papers as they are accepted (later compiled as yearly *Proceedings*), and to publish lengthy contributions without the need to pass on publication costs to authors. Scanning of all the early issues has allowed all issues to be freely downloaded through the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL).



Figure 5. Volume 132 (2011) was the penultimate printed issue. The cover featured a full colour reproduction of a Figure showing opalised fossils from Lightning Ridge NSW from one of the included papers that derived from a Natural History Symposium organised by the Society in 2010 on Geodiversity, Geological Heritage and Geotourism. All papers are now available electronically including back issues.

Presidential Addresses

A feature of the *Proceedings* has been the publishing of Presidential Addresses; the first given by the foundation President in 1876. Early Addresses generally followed detailed reports by the President on the affairs of the Society. Walkom (1925) compiled a list of the Presidential Addresses up to the Society's Jubilee. Vallance (1980/1981) updated this list to 1979, noting that this had become the convention with few exceptions to that time. Recent Addresses have been essentially related to research interests of the President or concerning historical matters, rather than Society activities and no longer include a report on the preceding year activities.

The following list of Presidential addresses since 1979 (Table 1) may be incomplete for several reasons but it is nonetheless apparent that the *'convention'* has fallen from favour. Omissions in the list presented here may be related to the fact that the Addresses have been indexed in a variety of ways and are not readily identified as Presidential Addresses, and they have often been published sometime after the event. In the case of Martin (1987) the Presidential Address of 1982 is identified as such when published in 1987! As presentations

Sesquicentenary of the publication of the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of NSW*

are often related to research interests the subject matter may have been published already, or there are plans to publish elsewhere. There may also be a reluctance to publish where there are several authors in the work reported, where the work is speculative and requires further work before publication, or where the matters covered are only part of a bigger story. These issues are illustrated in the case of the Presidential Address delivered by Barbara Briggs in 1977. In the report of the affairs

of the Society for that year it is noted that ‘Dr. Briggs delivered the Presidential Address entitled *Evolution in the Myrtaceae – evidence from inflorescence structure*. This was based on the results of joint work with Dr L.A.S. Johnson and will be published separately in a later issue of the *Proceedings*’. It was published subsequently as Briggs and Johnson (1979).

Addresses published since Vallance (1980/81) are given in Table 1.

Author	Subject	Reference	Volume	pages
Briggs, B.G. and Johnson, L.A.S. (1979).	Evolution in the Myrtaceae – evidence from inflorescence structure.	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	102	157-256
Waterhouse, J.T. (1987).	Presidential address 1979 - The phylogenetic significance of Dracaena-type growth.	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	109	129-138
Martin, H.A. (1987).	Presidential address 1982 - Cainozoic history of the vegetation and climate of the Lachlan River Region, New South Wales.	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	109	213-257
Vallance, T.G. (1990).	Presidential Address 1989 - Jupiter Botanicus in the Bush: Robert Brown’s Australian field-work 1801-05.	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	112	49-86
Myerscough, P.J. (1990).	Presidential address 1990 Comparative Plant Ecology and the Quest for Understanding of Australian Plants.	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	112	189-199
Horning, D.S. (1992).	Presidential Address 1991 - William John Macleay: Entomological Lion?	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	113	3-14
Horning, D.S. (1994).	Presidential Address 1992 - The natural history collections of Sir William Macleay as reflected through the known diaries (1874-1876, 1878-1881).	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	114	61-68
King, R.J. (1995).	Presidential Address 1993 - Mangrove macroalgae: a review of Australian studies.	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	115	151-161
Osborne, R.A.L. (1999).	Presidential address for 1998-1999 - The origin of Jenolan Caves: elements of a synthesis and framework chronology.	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	121	1--27
Osborne, R.A.L. (2000).	Presidential address for 1999-2000 - Geodiversity: ‘green’ geology in action.	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	122	149-173
King, R.J. (2015).	Presidential Address 2015 - Early Australian botany texts for schools.	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	137	45-55
King, R.J. (2016).	Julian Tennison Woods: Natural Historian - 2016 Presidential Address.	Proc Linn. Soc. NSW	138	49-56

Table 1. Presidential Addresses published subsequent to the compilation of Vallance (1980/81). All have been published in the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales*

CONCLUSION

In a publication to celebrate the Jubilee of the Society, Walkom (1925) noted three key aspects of the Society in which there had been little or no variation during its first fifty years. The first was that members who contributed papers had the opportunity to present their results at Society meetings where discussion of the results was

invited. Secondly that members were encouraged to exhibit and comment on specimens of interest (show and tell). These two aspects have fallen into abeyance since regular members’ meetings have been replaced in part by occasional excursions and conferences.

Walkom’s third key aspect was that papers accepted from members would be published in the *Proceedings*, and

in this way the results of the work of members would be disseminated. One hundred years later scientific papers of relevance to the Society's aims continue to be published, though authorship is now open to both members and scientific colleagues.

In the first fifty years of publications of the Society, papers published in the *Proceedings* were read at Society meetings, though in some cases a financial member could 'read' a paper on an author's behalf (Walkom 2025). Since that time there have been significant changes. Reports of regular meetings are no longer an issue, though a Presidential Address, now given at the Annual General Meeting has generally been published. With the demise of general meetings and cognisant of the need for members to be made aware of the Society's activities, since 1976 a quarterly Newsletter *Linn Soc News* is now distributed electronically to all members covering matters such as field trips and book reviews. The Society's activities are now officially recorded only in the President's and Treasurer's reports which are available in the Minutes of the relevant Annual General Meeting and distributed to members via the Newsletter.

Additionally, attendees at recent natural history symposia organised by the Society have been encouraged to publish their presentations as papers in the *Proceedings*. As an aside it is noted that a major change over the 150 years has been that currently published papers have almost without exception been authored by professional scientists. This is in stark contrast to the situation at the time of the foundation of the Society, which took place in an environment where much descriptive natural history was the domain of gifted amateurs. The Society's Council, working with the new Editor (Doug Benson) is now receptive to publications involving both professional scientists and local enthusiastic amateurs (i.e. projects that include community science) subject, of course, to meeting normal scientific standards.

REFERENCES

- Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/6525>
- Branagan, D. (1971/72). Words, actions, people: 150 years of the scientific societies of Australia. *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* **104**, 123-141.
- Coote, A. (2024). 'Knowledge for a Nation'. (The Royal Society of New South Wales: St Leonards).
- Ducker, S.C. (1990). History of Australian Marine Phycology. In. *Biology of Marine Plants* (Eds M.N. Clayton and R.J. King) pp. 415-430. (Longman: Melbourne).
- Fletcher, J.J. (1893). *The Macleay Memorial Volume*. (Linnean Society of New South Wales: Sydney).
- Keith, D. (2004). *Ocean Shores to Desert Dunes: the native vegetation of NSW and the ACT*. NSW Dept of Environment and Conservation, Hurstville NSW.
- Mercer, F.V. (1955). Presidential Address 1955 including a Summary of Year's Activities and the Address - The Water Relations of Plant Cells. *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* **80**, 1-29.
- Macleay, W.J. (1876). Annual Address. By the President. *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* **1**, 83-96.
- Mercer, F.V. (1956). Presidential address 1956 and the Address - Cytology and the Electron Microscope. *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* **81**, 1-19.
- Prince, J.H. (1979). 'The First One Hundred Years of the Royal Zoological Society of N.S.W.' (The Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales: Sydney)
- Robertson, R.N. (1974). Sir Wm Macleay Memorial Lecture, 1974 - A society of natural history. I hope they may succeed - The first hundred years. *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* **99**, 69-78.
- Stanbury, P.J. (1974). Presidential Address - the Role of Scientific Societies - some Suggestions for the Future. *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* **99**, 7-9.
- Vallance, T.G. (1980/81). Linnean Society of New South Wales Presidential Addresses printed in the Proceedings 1926-79. *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* **104**, 293-296.
- Walkom, A.B. (1925). 'The Linnean Society of New South Wales: Historical Notes of its First Fifty Years - Jubilee Publication' (The Linnean Society of New South Wales: Sydney).

