The Owl Club

NOTICE

Tuesday 16h July 2024: Notice of meeting #1362

Founded 1894

Visit our website at www.owls.org.za for current notice, back notices, Constitution (as amended 2021), *In Memoriam* 1894-2023, list of members and more.

Committee 2024/2025

President: Ron Duff

Senior Vice-President: Mike James

Junior Vice-President: David Little

Secretary: Hugh Amoore

Treasurer: Richard Morris

Immediate. Past President:

Geoffrey Ashmead

Additional Members: Paul Murray

Nigel Gwynne Evans, Peter Sutherland

Peter Hyslop, Kevin Rorke, Anthea Serritslev & Martin Hess .

Honorary Auditor: Verwey Wiese

Dinner bookings:

Email: secretary@owls.org.za

Telephone: 021 671 3121

Mobile number: 082 440 8204

Treasurer: Richard Morris

Email: treasurer@owls.org.za

Mobile number: 0832720500

Bank details

The Owl Club, Standard Bank of South Africa

A/c no. 071 818 006

Bank branch code: 051 001

This month's edition:

Editor: Peter Hyslop.

Contributors: Hugh Amoore, Mike James and Mike Bruton.

Photography: Alan Lindhorst and Mike Bruton.

Drawings: Tony Grogan and Sheila Camerer.

Dress code:

Dinner Jacket/Dark evening gown (or similar formal attire) is preferred.

Dear Fellow Owls

The 1362nd meeting of The Owl Club preceded by dinner, will be held on Tuesday 16th July 2024, 6:00 pm for 6:45 pm start, in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove Club.

Chairman: **President Owl Ron Duff.**

Guest speaker: **Dr Iekram Hoosen Alli** on the topic of:

"Mechanics of the Human Mind "

"Mind time and clock time are two totally different things. They flow at varying rates.

The chronological passage of the hours, days, and years on clocks and calendars is a steady, measurable phenomenon. Yet our perception of time shifts constantly, depending on the activities we're engaged in, our age, and even how much rest we get. , the speech is an attempt to explain the physics behind changing senses of time and reveals why the years seem to fly by the older we get.

He will examine the mechanics of the human mind and how these relate to our understanding of time, providing a physical explanation for our changing mental perception as we age."

Music: **Isaac van der Merwe.**

Piano recital; details to be confirmed.

WPB: **Owl Anthea Serritslev** on the topic of:

"Change and Challenges in the Philippi Area of Cape Town."

"As a City Councillor and board member of Philippi Economic Development Initiative (PEDI), I have been a regular visitor to the Philippi area for over 25 years and watched it change from a rural farming area to the overpopulated, crime ridden and chaotic area it is today. I will share the changes and my experiences of the area."

Dinner price: R320. Dress: Black tie (or similarly elegant attire).

RESERVATIONS & PAYMENTS:

Any Owl who does not have internet access is welcome to telephone the Secretary Bird at 082 440 8204 or 021 671 3121 to book a perch.

All other Owls are encouraged to use the Pay'n'Perch procedure by paying their (and their guest's) dining fee into the Club's bank account by EFT and instructing the bank (using the option provided) to send a remittance confirmation email to secretary@owls.org.za whereupon their perches will be booked.

Besides details of your invited guests (see above), no further emails will be needed from you unless you also have special dietary needs or if you are using a dining credit.

In all cases, bookings will close at 6:00 pm on Sunday 14th July 2024 2024.

All bookings will be acknowledged.

The June 2024 Meeting

On Tuesday,18 June, 59 Owls, 6 dinner guests, and 2 guests (post prandial) gathered in the Grill Room Kelvin Grove, Newlands. The proceedings started at 18:45, with President Owl Ron Duff welcoming all and inviting Owl Graham Avery to deliver the Grace, followed by a three-course dinner (see page 13 for the menu and Grace). The President then asked Owls to charge their glasses and to rise for the Toast to South Africa, followed by a short break.

Although no Owl celebrated a birthday on the evening, Owl President Ron congratulated several have attained, or will attain, milestone birthdays in June: Owls Brian de Kock and Jeremy Lawrence who are turning 89, Owl Roger Cleaver who turned 88 on 3 June, Owls Ian Farlam, Rory Gilmore, and Dan Ncayiyana who are, or will very shortly be 85. Two Owls (Owl Mariette Bernstein and Doc Caldwell) are, or will shortly be, 80, while another six Owls have birthdays in this month.

Owl President Ron extended his special congratulations to all especially to those birthday owls who attended the meeting, specifically Owls Brian de Kock, Roger Cleaver, and Rory Gilmour.

New Owls Prieur Du Plessis and Rupert Pardoe were then (with due ceremony) inducted, welcomed into the fellowship and invited to dwell in harmony with fellow Owls. The President then (requesting that guests remained seated) ordered that the lights be dimmed whilst he proposed the traditional Toast to Our Guests. The guest speaker for the evening, Ian Glenn, was then introduced to address the

gathering on his topic: "Wildlife Documentaries in Southern Africa: From Dassen to My Octopus Teacher". Ian Glenn has held chairs in English Language and Literature and in Film & Media Studies at UCT. He is the author or co-authored of three books on Francois Levaillant, the French author, naturalist, explorer, zoological collector, travel writer, and noted ornithologist, and has and most recently has published Wildlife Documentaries in Southern Africa: from East to South (2023). A report on his presentation is covered in more detail herein.

Owl President Ron invited Owl Ian Sutherland to fill the WPB on his topic: "Solace and Celebration in a World at War the Owls' Jubilee banquet of 1944".

After the address, Owl Ron thanked Ian Glenn for his presentation, then followed David Little's introduction of the performers for the evening Elna Van der Merwe (piano), Peter Martens (cello) for the first set.

First Set:

Serge Rachmaninov (1873 - 1943) – Sonata for cello and piano Op 19 in G minor, Lento – Allegro Moderato. Allegro scherzando. Andante. Allegro mosso.

After the first musical set, there was a Bar Interval of about 20 minutes,

After the WPB, Owl President Ron thanked Owl Ian Sutherland, and then Owl David Little to introduce the second set.

Second Set:

Peter Klatzow (1946 - 2021) – Sonata for cello and piano. Allegro moderato. Andante tranquillo. Vivace. Adagio.

After the second set, Owl President Ron thanked the performers to their wonderful contribution to the evening's entertainment.

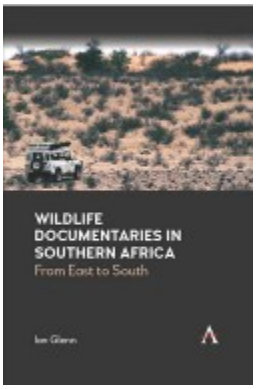
To conclude the evening, Owls and their guests were invited to raise their glasses in a Toast to The Owl Club following which the President wished all a safe flight home.

Above: Sheila Camerer, *Drawing of Peter Martens.*

Below: Sheila Camerer, *Drawing of Elna Van der Merwe .*

Guest speaker: Ian Glenn: “Wildlife Documentaries in Southern Africa from Dassen to my Octopus Teacher”

Ian opened his talk be expressing his pleasure that the Levaillant legacy was alive and well in our using the ornithological terms of “Le Chat Familier” (Familiar Chat) and “Le Fiscal” (Fiscal Shrike) for our office bearers!



Introducing his 2024 book “Wildlife Documentaries in Southern Africa” Ian emphasised the role that nature media had played in bringing about an understanding of the importance of wildlife. This book follows on from his previous book “The First Safari” in which Ian details how he spent quarter of a century researching the great ornithologist, explorer, naturalist zoological collector and anthropologist of the Cape, François Levaillant. Ian has worked on the present book for a long time with extensive help from a variety of filmmakers. The cover picture features David and Carol Hughes tracking a honey badger, from the documentary of the same name. The honey badger doesn’t care! These documentaries have largely avoided the commonplace big five animals.

When he first mooted the idea to his publishers, he faced a great deal of criticism partially based on the idea that he should not be writing about a white genre that depended on stolen land and a white audience. However, Ian pointed out the fallacy of this position as wildlife documentaries are now the most widespread cultural export from Southern Africa. documentaries like “Wild Kingdom” had been viewed by over 35 million people. About 1 in 6 US citizens watch as wildlife documentaries. Others like “Eternal Enemies” telling the story of the perpetual antagonism of lions and African Wild Dogs has probably been seen by over a billion people. The up close and personal wildlife documentary series Mad Mike and Mark reached 200 million households. The latest in the genre, “My Octopus Teacher” has been translated into 35 languages. Southern African documentaries have had an influence like no other.

These documentaries have had social and political influences including emphasising the value of rural land. Tourism industry in South Africa have been driven by photographic eco-tourism. These have led to a re-evaluation of land claims and their validity but also to enormous conservation successes in southern Africa. There are now more wild animals here than there were a century ago and these films have had a lot to do with that. As Thoreau said “In wildness is the preservation of the world”. The major features of these extraordinary wildlife films have been that many of them were made by husband-and-wife teams who knew the environment intimately and had home-ground advantage, unlike filmmakers from overseas attempting to capture Africa.

Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Ian Glenn.*

The success involved time and the elegant telling of wildlife stories. It also involved the building of infrastructure to support wildlife filming and extraordinary innovations. One of his featured filmmakers was Dr Gus Mills. Who moved from being a very bad student at school, being told he would never be fit to study science to becoming a world-renowned scholar and author of several books on African wildlife, particularly focusing on cheetah and hyena.

Several of these documentaries featured wildlife preservation initiatives that capture transfer of animals; documentary makers like Plage and Borland, Roelf de Bruine and Norma Foster achieved worldwide recognition. He reminded the audience of the South African filmmaking pioneer Jamie Uys, better known for his comedies. Uys led the way in wildlife documentaries with his “Animals Are Beautiful People” that won a Golden Globe award for best documentary film in 1974. This was filmed in Namibia and in the Kruger using some innovative filmmaking tricks that Uys introduced into wildlife photography.

Mike Rosenberg, who was born and educated in South Africa and returned in his later years was a giant figure in Southern African filmmaking. He won more Golden Panda awards than any other producer in the field. These awards are important because they say what is happening and what the industry insiders think. They recognised South Africans as major figures in the wildlife filming industry. Mike established excellent links with David and Carol Hughes, the Jouberts, Richard Goss, the Richardsons, Peter Lamberti and Steve Irwin. He funded lengthy field visits and produced authentic films. The South African era has been groundbreaking in its technological innovation and superb infrastructure. Other outstanding South African documentaries include John Varty’s Silent Hunter and The Great Dance.

Private game parks within the Sabi Sand environment, including Mala Mala and Londolozi have emphasised the role of trackers, guides and filmmakers in ecotourism and wildlife preservation. These places emphasise the overlap between filming, guiding tourism. The Silent Hunter explored new possibilities and formats for producers looking for wildlife television, moving from blue-chip wildlife productions to presenter-driven wildlife documentaries. These have had a huge impact on wildlife filming.

The importance of infrastructure realism, using technologies and devices to enhance wildlife filming, led by South Africans, has been critical. Appropriate accommodation and necessary scientific background together with the use of open vehicles was very important. The structure of these vehicles has changed considerably from the Land Rover-type vehicle to custom-made game viewing vehicles, with specially designed tracker seats for the game spotters, to enhance their ability to seek out game. The WildEarth vehicle is a further development, equipped with a range of tools to enhance the filming. Roads are a crucial part of filmmaking with dirt roads being crucial since we see what the road allows us to see.

Cherry Kearton, who came to Africa with Theodore Roosevelt (1914) became the first man to hunt wildlife with a camera rather than a rifle and set the scene for others to follow. New technologies in the last 50 years have enhanced filming from basic crude devices to microlight planes.

The field of animal capture, with new technologies of darting and better anaesthetic agents, has led to the ethos of managing and saving animals, and moving rare and threatened animals to safer environments.

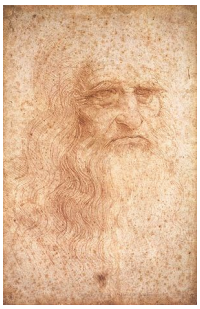
Ian emphasised the difference between South African filmmaking and that of the BBC's Natural History Unit (NHU). The BBC approach involve travelling to the environment, limited professional engagement with the surroundings and a neutral, dispassionate commentary in typical David Attenborough's sonorous terms. The Southern African approach was totally different. It involved being part of the country with full engagement in the entire wild environment. The local filmmakers were passionately engaged with the projects. The NH approach involved David Attenborough-style received pronunciation whereas the South African version used a range of voices, many of which with the voices of the filmmakers themselves. The BBC produced excerpts that they could sell on, whereas the South African approach is to tell stories.

Ellen Windemuth of the WaterBear Network said that the BBC can't tell stories. To tell a real story requires real-time that you must invest. Cervantes said "time has more power to undo and change things than human will". By contrast, Attenborough and others come with a shot list, films they must make and scenes they must shoot.

Virtual safaris are becoming more popular with professional narrators. James Cockburn, famed for his tough guy demeanour was a tender narrator of Richard Goss's leopard and warthog documentary. The voice over artist, Jeremy Irons only works for the Jouberts in film documentaries. The Great Dance, directed by brothers Craig and Damon Foster was a surprise winner of the Golden Panda 2000 award. It emphasised the role of the San people and told their story in a lyrical and poetic style.

Ian introduced us to the Bomb Squad of wildlife filmmaking in Southern Africa including Phil and Lynn Richardson, Keith and Colleen Begg, Peter Lamberti, Tauna films, Mad Mike and Mark, Lynn Davies and the Shamwari reserve and Will and Leanne Steenkamp. Stoop, a documentary on the Rhino Horn Wars and the Eye of the Pangolin are hard-hitting recent documentaries emphasising the dangers faced by species on the verge of extinction.

Finally, Ian emphasised the moral and ethical reasons for wildlife documentaries. Dieter Plage, writing in 1980 quoted Leonardo da Vinci: "human creatures will forever be fighting and killing one another. They will destroy the vast forests of the world and when they are filled with food they will deal out death, labour, terror and banishment to every living thing. Everything on earth or under it or on the waters will be pursued, disturbed or spoiled or removed from one country to another." Yuval Noah Harari, in his book Sapiens refers to the horror that one clever technological primate has done to the planet. Wildlife films prod our consciences, remind us of what we are doing and have done, offer us alternatives and hopefully inspire us.



Musical Notes: Peter Martens (cello) and Elna van der Merwe (piano).

"Rachmaninov Piano Sonata; and a Short Sonata by Peter Klatzow"

Owl David Little introduced the performers for the evening's programme, Elna van der Merwe (piano) and Peter Martens (cello), regarded as two of South Africa's most prominent musicians. Their performance at the meeting did not disappoint. In particular, their interpretation of the Rachmaninov sonata for piano and cello was exceptional, and they received a standing ovation.

Elna van der Merwe was a full-time accompanist and part time piano lecturer at the Conservatory of the University of Stellenbosch until 2001. She has recorded many albums with various artists and performed in all the major festivals in the country.

Peter Martens studied at Stellenbosch University and at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. Peter is currently the Director of the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival, principal cellist of the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra and a SAMA award winning cellist. Peter Martens's albums have been released internationally on the Meridian, Cello Classics and 2Pianists labels.

The first set consisted of a fine interpretation of Serge Rachmaninov's (1873 - 1943) – Sonata for cello and piano Op 19 in G minor; Lento – Allegro Moderato, Allegro scherzando, Andante and Allegro mosso.

Rachmaninov composed his cello sonata in 1901 in the wake of his celebrated second piano concerto. It was composed for cellist Anatoly Brandoukov and had its first performance in Moscow later in 1901 with Rachmaninov himself at the piano.

It is a large-scale work by the young Rachmaninov, expertly laid out for both instruments. In fact, the piano part is so virtuosic that at times it seems to push the cello into the background. Most of the these are first introduced by the piano, and then embellished and developed by the cello.

Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Elna van der Merwe and Peter Martens .*

The sonata bears a strong kinship with the second piano concerto, both in character and the quality and richness of its melodic invention. It is instantly recognisable as the voice of Rachmaninov, and is one of the most significant works of the 20th century for cello and piano.

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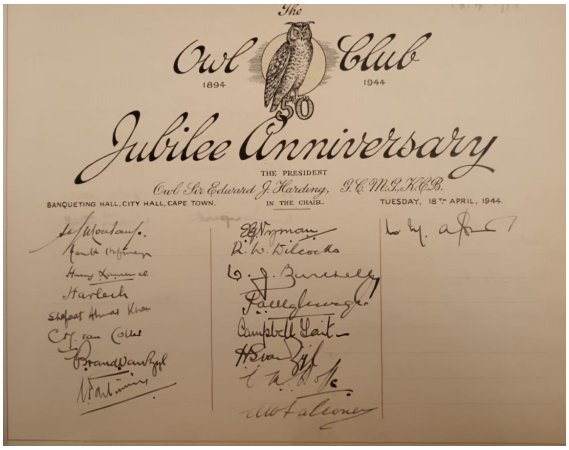
The second set consisted of Peter Klatzow's (1946 - 2021) – Sonata for cello and piano; Allegro moderato, Andante tranquillo, Vivace and Adagio.

Peter Klatzow was one of South Africa's most prolific and well-known composers, having studied in London, Italy and Paris. He returned to South Africa in 1966 and worked for the SABC as a music producer. In 1973 he was appointed to the Suth African College of Music, UCT, in Cape Town, where he later became professor in composition. The Danielle Rossouw, Annelize de Villiers & Nathan Huysamen, all current or former members of the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra.

WPB: Ian Sutherland: “Solace and Celebration in a World at War (The Owls' Jubilee Banquet of 1944)”

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I’m going to ask you to join me in a little time travel tonight. To imagine that it’s the 18th of April 1944. The world’s been at war for 5 long years. You’re at a special parliament of Owls, a Jubilee Dinner, to celebrate fifty years since the establishment of the Club in 1894. Which is being held at the City Hall. In style, with your tables adored with streamers, candelabras, flowers and silver cutlery. Which you, as the Fiscal Shrike, know is costing a whopping 110 pounds, more than a quarter of the Club’s annual budget. But sadly, the usual meeting place couldn’t accommodate the full complement of 120 Owls and 37 special guests. Pity, because the Refectory of the Lodge de Goede Hoop, designed by famous architect Louis Thibault, would have been perfect. Though you’re not a mason yourself, you recognize the Worshipful Master, de Smidt, sitting at a nearby table with the city’s mayor, Councilor Nyman. Shame, de Smidt has aged, his hair now completely white, shoulders hunched, no doubt from the dreadful reports filtering out of Nazi Occupied Europe of his fellow masons being arrested and deported for being part of a supposed Jewish-Masonic conspiracy to control the world.

You’re picking at your starter, an avocado and prawn cocktail. A waiter is at your shoulder asking if you’d like more white wine or would prefer to switch to red. But before you can reply, Owl Jacobs to your left, a retired cardiologist in his late eighties shoves his almost empty glass toward the waiter, barely pausing his conversation with his former colleague from Groote Schuur Hospital, special guest, Professor ‘Oubaas’ Falconer, now Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town who sits opposite you. Feeling a bit left out, you summon the courage to introduce yourself to the gentlemen on your right, Major Brand van Zyl, former Judge-President and Administrator of the Cape Province and soon to be one of only 22 South Africans admitted to Britain’s Privy Council, an august list including Jan Smuts, Louis Botha, Patrick Duncan, D.F. Malan, James Rose Innes, Henry Burton, and William Schreiner.



You’ve finished your starters and half of your second glass of wine. A hush descends on the room. The first of four speeches is about to start. You cross your legs and lean back in your chair. Owl President Sir Edward Harding, former British High Commissioner to South Africa, stands at the lectern.

‘Good evening,’ he declares. “It is my great joy and privilege to welcome you all, fellow Owls and special guests, to this auspicious occasion to mark our Club’s Jubilee anniversary. I’d like to begin my address tonight,’ he says, picking up a sheet of paper. ‘By reading to you from a letter from the president of the Savage Club, London, which so aptly captures the spirit of conviviality and human kinship we’re here to celebrate tonight.’ He puts on his spectacles and reads, ‘All my brother Savages send their heartiest congratulations and greetings to the Owl Club on achieving its Jubilee and further congratulations to its Honorary Secretary, Alfred Holtzer on completing thirty years of self-sacrificing service.

May you all go on from strength to strength in your spending work for the brotherhood of the world. It is the duty of such clubs as ours to keep open the channels by which the arts and sciences progress, for they are the common denominators of the world’s true mind. They are the spiritual hemoglobin, continually healing the wounds which a misguided world inflicts upon itself.’ Sir Edward peers above his spectacles at the audience, which breaks out in patches of hesitant applause. He replaces the letter with his speech notes and gazes out again with an avuncular smile. ‘And now on a more practical note,’ he says as the clapping peters out. ‘I’d like to make special mention and thank you all for the many practical contributions the Club is making to the war effort. Especially to the thespians among us who alone have raised a tidy sum for the Governor-General’s Fund and the Red Cross Society from their splendid plays at the Little Theatre. A far cry, I’m pleased to say, from just three years ago, when we struggled to raise a mere 100 pounds for the Savage Club when their building was bombed in the Blitz.’

Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Ian Sutherland.*

He looks up, his expression now somber. 'Gentlemen, let us not forget those dark days just two years ago, when the survival of the Empire, of civilization itself, hung in the balance as the all-triumphant Wehrmacht stood at the gates of Moscow, Rommel had our measure up North, and the Japanese had taken Singapore.

'And now…' Sir Edward reaches back for his glass. 'I'm going to ask all Owls present to stand and guests to please remain seated. He raises his glass. I have the great privilege to propose a toast to our honored guests.' He scans the High Table and the tables about it, including yours, pausing to nod appreciatively at the more prominent of the guests.

The lighting dims. You do the to-whit-to-woo. 'To our guests,' Sir Edward says, glass raised. As 'our guests,' reverberates about the hall. The lights are restored. Sir Edward has his notes in hand. 'Time unfortunately forbids me to mention all our esteemed guests by name. But I'd to make special mention of a handful, always a hazard, but I trust you'll forgive me in advance. Firstly though, an apology from our Prime Minister, the honorable Field Marshal Jan Christian Smuts, now also honorary member of the Owls.' Sir Edward lifts a letter from the lectern and reads. 'My reply to your invitation, dear honorable Sir Harding, asking me to be present at the Jubilee banquet, was delayed owing to your letter having been left in a suit which I had not worn for a week. But I am pleased to propose in my stead, the honorable Jan Hendrick Hofmeyr MP, Minister of Finance.' Sir Edward turns to the bespectacled figure with an unusually large forehead beside him, and bows. 'It being a time in this war,' he reads, his expression now serious, 'when it seems that the momentum is finally well and truly on our side, we join in all civilized people in expressing our ardent and sincere hope in the imminent and complete liberation of all occupied lands in Europe. And especially, Holland and Belgium, whose government representatives are both present with us tonight. To the honorable Mr. Wurfbain, Consul General for the Netherlands and the honorable, Monier Moulaert, Minister Plenipotentiary for Belgium.' he says, tilting his glass at each respectively as the audience applauds. 'Which of course makes it all the more fitting,' Sir Edward continues, 'that we make a special toast to those guests among us from the armed forces, whose combined medal count for bravery and loyal service is exceeded only by the number of post numerals to their names.'

You crane your neck to see which uniformed dignitaries you can recognize at a cluster of satellites to the main table. Your eyes immediately lock on one you are determined to speak to in the break, Major-General IP de Villiers. He cuts a fine figure, even seated. You've seen him at the Owls before. Getting special mentions when he was awarded Companion of the Order of Bath (C.B) and the Military Cross (M.C.). Not bad, you think, for a fellow SACS old boy from Somerset East. You remember how fast he'd risen from a newly qualified lawyer through the government to become Commissioner of Police before joining the army. Seeing him there causes your mind to wander. To your son, Jonathan. Ah, how you miss him! Last you'd heard he was in a prisoner-of-war camp somewhere in northern Italy.

Taken there across the Mediterranean by the Germans after the fall of Tobruk. Talk about bad luck: Jonathan had transferred there from South Africa's 1st Division to the 2nd just before Major-General Klopper took over command from IP (de Villiers) and had to surrender all 25,000 of his troops. That was two long years ago. To think, Jonathan had set off with such high hopes. One of the first to line up at the Castle – just here, on the other side of the Grand Parade - to volunteer. A few weeks' basic training at the Military College in Voortrekkerhoogte followed by a signals course, and he'd returned home a changed man – the orange flash pinned proudly to his shoulder. Which had almost got him beaten up by a mob of angry Nationalists on the way home from a dance in town. You can picture, like it was yesterday, when you stood on the platform at Cape Town Station, struggling to hold back the tears as your only son boarded the train for Durban. And all you've heard from him since was one, heavily censored letter. Describing six days on a transport ship up the Mozambique channel to Mombasa, sleeping on deck to avoid overcrowding.

And inland from there by rail, past the towering, snow-capped Mount Kilimanjaro and vast herds of antelope and elephant, down into the Great Rift Valley, ever northwards to the plains of Naivasha to Fort Wajir, crossing the ancient camel caravan route once used by King Solomon and Queen Sheba. Where legend has it a race of long-armed giants dug 2000 wells but were promptly killed by bees for their efforts and lie buried there to this day under stone cairns.

But since that letter, you've had to rely on the newspapers for updates on Jonathan's progress. How he and his fellow brave Springboks fought the Italians all the way through Abyssinia, from El Wak, across the Juba Line to Mogadishu and Addis Ababa, and eventually being dispatched to the Middle East to join the rejuvenated British 8th Army as it prepared to counterattack the Desert Fox.

You shudder back to the present. Owl President Harding is saying something about Vice-Admiral Sir Campbell Tait, Naval Commander-in-Chief of the South Atlantic Station in Simonstown. Who you read on the program earlier is both a Knight of the Order of Bath (K.C.B) and a Member of the Royal Victorian Order (M.V.O.), 'To the honorable, Vice-Admiral,' Sir Harding waxes 'Who we will forever be indebted to for restructuring our navy and air forces to ensure Allied domination of our seas. And to his soon-to-be successor,' Owl Harding shifts his focus. 'The Honourable Admiral Sir Robert Burnett (K.B.E, C.B., D.S.O.). Of whom the entire free world is much indebted for the Allied triumph over Battleship Scharnhorst, pride of the Kriegsmarine, at the Battle of the North Cape in Norway. Who I'm pleased to say has now also accepted honorary membership of our esteemed fellowship.'

Owl President Harding sits. Waiters swarm out from the shadows, bearing plates. Not a moment too soon. Your stomach has been rumbling. Ah, wonderful, you think - roast beef, rice, potatoes and string beans all sloshed in gravy – what a treat in these times of food rationing. The last of the waiters scurry off. A hush descends. The Right Honorable Lord Harlech, Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (K.C.M.G.) and High Commissioner for the United Kingdom and an Owl, rises to reply to Sir Edward's toast.

You adjust your chair to get a good view of the legend: tall, slicked back black hair and a prominent nose. William David Ormsby-Gore, as the 5th Baron Harlech is better known, has a reputation which precedes him. He starts his talk with a personal anecdote from his time at Eton. Where a boy in his boarding house had killed himself. And the housemaster called an assembly to ask if any of them had an idea why this should have happened. To which young Ormsby-Gore had apparently piped up. 'Please sir, but could it perhaps have been the food?'

Fact or fable, such sangfroid in the face of danger, would surely have stood Ormsby-Gore in good stead when he'd served in the Phantom, Britain's secret reconnaissance division, which in the late thirties, was assigned responsibility for gathering intelligence if the Nazis invaded Britain. And, after the war, would get him appointed British Ambassador to the United States, where he'd supply President John F. Kennedy with a stream of Cuban cigars from his diplomatic bag and help him secure the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. But then promptly undo his good graces with the Kennedy clan after JFK's assassination, when he had an affair with Jacqueline, proposing (unsuccessfully) to her while holidaying in Cambodia.

The waiters are back, whipping dirty plates from the tables and replacing them with desert bowls. Melba pudding, Owl Jacobs grumbles. You try a spoonful. Passable, you're thinking, as the next speaker is announced. The honorable Jan Hendrick Hofmeyr rises. A bundle of energy, he almost runs to the lectern. The hub-hub dies down.

You become conscious of the clink your spoon makes as you lay it on your plate. 'Hoffie' as he's known, commands respect wherever he goes, but especially among an intellectual bunch like you Owls. Another SACS boy, you think, with a warm glow in your heart. But that's where the comparison ends. Not only is he South African royalty - nephew of the great Onze Jan, Afrikaner Bond President and Minister in Paul Kruger's cabinet – but Hoffie is a boy genius, matriculating at 12; graduating with a B.A. in the Classics with first-class honors at 15; a B.A in the sciences and a M.A. in the classics and writing a biography by the age of 18, from professor to President of what would become Wits University, Rhodes Scholar, Honorary Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, Administrator of the Transvaal, MP for the South African Party, Minister of Finance and Education, and, finally deputy Prime Minister, who is often running the government these days in place of an absent Smuts.

Who would say at Hoffie's funeral just a few years later, 'here was the wonder child of South Africa, who with a record with which South Africa shows no parallel, from his youngest years beat all records, whose achievement in a comparatively brief life shows no parallel in this land, and whose star at the end was still rising. He has passed on, but his service and the high spirit in which he sought to serve his country and his fellow men of all races remain our abiding possessions.'

The consummate politician, 'Hoffie' closes his address with a commendation of the Owl Club, describing it as 'doing good work if it is only keeping the capacity for laughter alive,' for which he receives a standing ovation.

A hard act to follow, you think, as Owl Dr. Sydney Harold Skaife rises to respond to the Honorable Hofmeyr. But 'Stacey' as he's known, is not one to be easily intimidated. A famous entomologist and author, not only of science, but of a series of detective novels published under the pseudonym Hendrik Brand. Normally he talks the hind leg off a donkey, but thankfully tonight he keeps his address short. "In a world of change," he concludes, "the Owl Club will not change, but continue along its sweet and mellow way, in the future as it has in the past.' Amen and amen, you and your fellows at table murmur, and add to the rousing applause.

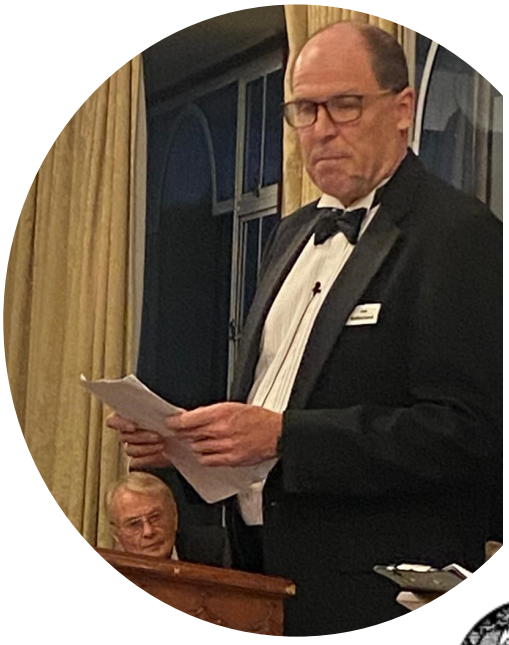
The half-eaten portions of melba pudding are cleared from your table. It's time for a break. And not a moment too soon. Your back is stiff and you're desperate for a cigar. You watch as Owls from all over the hall clamor towards the High Table for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rub shoulders with such a concentration of dignitaries. Unfortunately, General de Villiers is already swamped by admirers. Hopefully, you'll get a chance later. You stand and stretch. With the bathroom and the aroma of cigar front of mind, you head for the exit. Along the way giving the customary half nods and smiles as you cross paths with some of the older, slower Owls still making their way to the High Table. Nearly out, you pause at the display table. Pride of place is a portrait. Of none other than your Owl President, Sir Edward Harding. You don't need to read the attached description to identify the artist. Owl Professor Roworth has distinctive style. Trained at the Slade School of Art before joining the British army and being shipped South to fight the Boers. Becoming President of the South Africa Society of Artists and painting some of South Africa's first church frescoes. The pompous portrait itself isn't your cup of tea, but you must acknowledge it's a good representation of the quintessential civil servant of Empire, who you suddenly realise is looking your way. So, you focus on the painting for another few polite seconds and nod approvingly at it, before moving on. Out into the anteroom where a few Owls and stray guests have gathered. One, looking eager to find someone to latch onto, introduces himself to you as Doctor William Kingdon Spencer. An Englishman, who doesn't hesitate to tell you he's a leading light in the field of Education. And an authority in Echinodermata, a branch of paleontology, he tells you, better known as fossil starfish. A specialization that, he once again readily tells you, he took at Oxford, where he also lectured Geology before taking early retirement to the South of France. Before it was overrun by the Germans, and he had to flee to South Africa. Boring, you think, excusing yourself. You notice a man standing aloof, sipping his whisky. He introduces himself as Sir Shafa 'at Ahmad Khan, High Commissioner for India, and tells you he was previously Chairman of the All-India Muslim Conference. Mmm, you think, probably the most interesting person you've met tonight. But you're interrupted by another guest who says he's Sir Gerald Whiteley, C.M.G., Chief Commissioner of the Western Province of Nigeria. Oh no, you think, another civil servant. Now I REALLY need the bathroom.

Eventually, you're back at your table, your glass has been topped up and you're ready for the musical interlude. Mozart's Flute Quartet in D-Major, performed by members of the City Orchestra. 'And who better to introduce them,' says Sir Edward, clutching a wooden object wrapped in a bow, 'than Flight Lieutenant Redvers Llewellyn.' You smile for Redvers has become a friend of yours. An accomplished Welsh baritone, who'd performed for the Carl Rosa and Sadlers Wells Opera companies in England, most famously in the role of Rigoletto. And would go on to become a Fellow of the Royal College of Music. 'Who, Sir Edwards announces, 'will be leaving us this year, for London.' He holds up the object, takes its wrapping off. 'But first... as a token of our huge gratitude,' he says looking fondly at Redvers, 'for all your contributions to the Club's musical entertainments, we'd like to present you with this stinkwood owl, carved by the sculptor, Owl Mitford Barberton' who would go on to design the monument to Jock of the Bushveld in Barberton and the Leopard Memorial in Hout Bay.

You look at your watch. Ten pm. After all the food, drink and cigars and stimulating conversation, you're struggling to stay awake. Unlike old Owl Jacobs next to you, who has long since given up the fight, and is snoring gently.

The room quietens. It's time for the final toast of the evening. Club Vice-Present Evelyn Haddon stands. 'To absent Owls', he says, raising his now-empty glass, 'and the many away on active service.' Next to you, Owl Jacobs shudders awake. He looks bewildered, has a line of saliva running down his chin.

And then, alas, the celebrations are over. The Owl President wishes you all a safe flight home. You all rise. Say your fond farewells, stroll out the hall and down the stairs chatting amiably, the postmortem on the speeches and the food, already in full swing. And as you spill out onto the pavement and into the cold night, you light one last cigar for the road. Puff after gentle puff, you feel your mind swim. You look up at the starry, starry night and then lower your gaze over the Grand Parade where you see that the sky is lighter above the Tygerberg where the moon waits to rise. And for a moment all is well in the world. Thank God, you think, for the solace of the Owls.



Members News

Flown to a Higher Perch: Owl Glenn Babb

Owl Glenn Babb flew to a celestial perch on 25 June 2024. He was elected in 1991, served on the Committee for many years, was a past President, and was recently made an Honorary Owl, a distinction reserved for those who have made a special contribution to our Fellowship. Outspoken, sometimes controversial, even idiosyncratic, he will be missed by his fellow Owls. The Immediate past President will pay tribute to him in the customary way at next year's AGM and his flight to a higher perch will be noted at the July meeting.

Membership: Three New Owls

The Committee is pleased to announce the election of Glynis Humphrey (Science: proposed by Owls James and Bruton (who some Owls will remember for her talk in February this year on fire); Clare Davies (Science: proposed by Owls Rodney Cottrell and Ron Duff); and Patrick Woudt (Science: proposed by Owls Amoore and Clayton) – Patrick continues in the long tradition of astronomer Owls and Owls will remember his talk to the Club in May last year on The impact of the James Webb Space Telescope.

We look forward to their induction in the near future.

Showing Appreciation for Outstanding Music.

Those Owls who were at the June meeting were privileged to hear a major work performed by two of South Africa's leading musicians: the performance by Peter Martens and Elna van der Merwe of the Rachmaninov sonata for piano and cello was truly outstanding and must rank with the best the Owl Club has heard in its 130-year history. The Owls present rightly gave them a standing ovation. This has led the Committee to some introspection, and a sense that standing ovations should be reserved for such occasions – truly exceptional musical performances.

The Committee recognises that Owls will show their appreciation in the ways they wish to but suggests that the standing ovation (which at Cape Town concerts has become so standard that it is devoid of meaning) should be reserved for those really special and rare performances such as was the Martens/Van der Merwe performance of the Rachmaninov sonata.

Owl Club Colloquium: The Role of the Arts in Society

The Third Colloquium of the Owl Club, on the 'Impact of the arts on society through the ages', was as thought-provoking and stimulating as the 27 Owls and 24 guests who attended expected it to be. The three speakers - Owl Peter Hyslop on the fine arts, guest David Attwell on literature, and Owl David Little on music, left the audience in no doubt that the arts are powerful shapers of society and define our species.

David Attwell made the comment that we should distinguish between the short-term impact of the arts and the longer-term influence that they have. This point was addressed by all the speakers as well as by the audience in a lively discussion session.. The texts of the talks will shortly be made available to all Owls and published on the Club's website.

However: a dozen of those booked to attend failed to arrive (and thus failed to pay the modest fee charged to cover costs). Kelvin bills the Club on the numbers given to them, and the Club will have to meet the shortfall. This failure to attend is not owlish, and should an Owl transgress in this way in future he or she will be billed!

Wheelchair Availability

Wheelchair availability : a repeat note in case you missed it. For some Owls the availability of a wheelchair – which Kelvin now has – may make attendance at meetings possible. Should any member facing mobility challenges wish to use it for meetings - and thus enjoy the fellowship that an Owl Club meeting offers – please reserve this in advance; a call a day or two before a meeting to Owl Peter Hyslop (064 690 9059) or the Secretary (082 440 8204) will suffice.

Owl Club Excursion: Owl Angel Tordesillas' Remarkable Book Collection

A group of 12 Owls and guests visited Owl Angel Tordesillas' extraordinary private library and book collection at his home in Sea Point on Saturday, 15th June 2024. The event had a distinct Spanish flavour as Angel served up a delicious seafood paella, tapas, wine and other traditional Mediterranean fare.

Owl Angel's book collection, which is displayed in eight rooms in his mansion, defies description as it covers virtually every subject ever written about. The privilege of having a guided tour of the collection, and being able to hear firsthand the back stories behind the acquisition of some of his most prized possessions, made it an unforgettable experience.

Owl Angel's range of interests astounded the Owls present. Although he spent most of his career running a major fishing company, and is currently developing a Maritime Museum in Lüderitz, he is a Spaniard with a passion for cricket, has the largest private collection of different editions of Cervantes' Don Quixote in the world, and is an authority on European art and history. The excursion was everything that an Owl Club event should be: cultured, thoughtful, enjoyable and stimulating.

We thank Owl Angel and his son, Miguel, most sincerely for offering us this glimpse into their private lives.

The next Owl Club excursion will be to the eclectic private museum of Rear Admiral (ret.) Arne Soderland in Glencairn on Saturday, 16th November 2024.

Seen & Noted at the June Meeting

(Clockwise from top left): Owls Rupert Pardoe and David Muller; in the second photo, Elna Van der Merwe & Peter Martens and in the third, Owls Sean King, Duncan Martin, Clare Davies, Rodney Cottrell, Mike James & John Webb.

The Owls Club
Grill Room – Kelvin Grove
18th June 2024

MENU

Starter
Butternut Soup

***

Main Course
Baked Hake
Served with Stir Fried Vegetables

***

Dessert
Malva Pudding
Served with Custard

***

Filter Coffee or Tea

Grace

Bless this food prepared. May it strengthen us to serve; in a World where many are hungry may we eat this food with humble hearts; and in a dangerous World where many are suffering and lonely may we share this friendship with joyful hearts.

Amen.