The Owl Club

NOTICE

Tuesday 15th July 2025: Notice of meeting #1373

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 2025/2026

President: Mike James

Senior Vice-President: David Little

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Treasurer: Richard Morris

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Dear Fellow Owls

The 1373rd meeting of The Owl Club, preceded by dinner, will be held on Tuesday 15th June 2025, 6:00 pm for 6:45 pm start, in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove Club.

Chairman: **President Owl Mike James**

Guest speaker: **Tommie Meyer,** on the topic of: ***"Artificial Intelligence"***

"Tommie Meyer is a professor of Computer Science at UCT where he holds a Research Chair in Artificial Intelligence and co-directs the Artificial Intelligence Research Unit. He has an A rating from the National Research Foundation (NRF) (i.e., he is recognised as an international leader in his field which is Knowledge Representation and Reasoning, a subarea of artificial intelligence, focusing on belief revision and non-monotonic reasoning as well as their application to description logics). Owls may learn something new from his talk!"

Music: **James Grace, *Guitar Recital*.**

"There will be a rare musical treat when one of South Africa's leading concert artists, James Grace, takes the stage to present a programme for solo guitar. This versatile artist is widely recorded, and has performed with all the major South African orchestras and arts festivals. Now he will be seen at the Kelvin Grove Grill Room to entertain Owldom."

WPB: **Owl Teresa Raposo** on the topic of**: *"The Exodus from Angola of the Portuguese Colonists and their Descendants."***

" Special emphasis on the massive Airlift from May to early November 1975, when 905 planes from Portugal, France, the UK, the US, West and East Germany, the Soviet Union and Belgium transported close to 200 000 evacuees from Luanda and Nova Lisboa (now Huambo) to Lisbon and Porto."

Dinner price: R350. PLEASE NOTE THE NEW PRICE.

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 13th July 2025.

All bookings will be acknowledged.

The June 2025 Meeting

On Tuesday, 17th June, 63 Owls and 5 guests gathered in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove, Newlands for the 1372nd Meeting of the Owl Club. The proceedings started at 18:45, with President Owl Mike James welcoming all and Owl Pete Sutherland delivering the Grace. This was followed by a three-course dinner (see page 16 for the menu).

Owl President Mike James then congratulated Owls celebrating birthdays in June.

Two Owls reached 90: Brian de Kock was 90 on 3 June while the winter solstice heralded Owl Jeremy Lawrence's 90th birthday! No fewer than 8 Owls celebrated birthdays in the 80s this month; Owls Roger Cleaver, Ian Farlam, Rory Gilmore, Dan Ncayiyana, Peter Gilchrist, Doc Caldwell, Mariette Bernstein and Pete Sutherland. Younger Owls celebrating birthdays in June were Owls Rick Haw, Henk Beets, Guy Preston, Julian Pino, Leighton Ashmead, Rudi le Roux and Dean Allen. Of the two new nonagenarians – Owls Lawrence and de Kock – and the new octogenarian – Pete Sutherland were in attendance at the meeting.

The President then (requesting that guests remained seated) ordered that the lights be dimmed whilst he proposed the traditional Toast to Our Guests.

Owl President Mike James invited the guest speaker, Andy Buffler (who holds a chair in Physics at the University of Cape Town) to address the assembled Owls and guests on his topic: *The UCT Proton Project and Links to Shackleton*.

After the address, Owl President Mike James thanked Andy Buffler for his insightful talk and presented him with a bottle of port.

Above: Michel Beckurts, *Drawings of Some of Those (Owls & Guests) Present at Meeting 1372*

Following this, Owl Julian Wannell introduced the first set of the music programme for the evening, presented by soprano Frances van Vuuren and baritone Themba Mdlalose accompanied by pianist Tertia Visser Downie.

Following the musical interlude, Owl President Mike James thanked all the musicians for their performance. After the bar interval, during which Owls enjoyed a celebratory glass of port courtesy of Owls Sutherland and de Kock, the assembly returned to enjoy the second set of the music programme. At the conclusion of the performance, Owl President Mike James once thanked the performers for their contribution to the evening's entertainment.

Following this, Owl Julian Wannell presented his WPB, on the topic of: *Gentlemen's Clubs of London.*

Having thanked Owl Julian Wannell, Owl President Mike James invited Owls and their guests to raise their glasses in a Toast to the Owl Club, following which the President wished all a safe flight home.

Guest Speaker: Andy Buffler: "The UCT Proton Project and Links to Shackleton"

Andy opened his talk by promising us a "show and tell" story rather than a lecture. He introduced Radio Robbie, a superhero doll with a cape given to children undergoing radiotherapy as a symbol of their superpower. The kids were also given a cape to wear. He went on to describe the proton therapy that is the most innovative and advanced tumour therapy being provided for these children. This provides cancer treatment with greater precision than traditional radiotherapy enabling more focused therapy with less surrounding tissue damage, making it ideal for young children and for tumours in the nervous system. The problem is that while there are 140 proton treatment centres in the Global North, there are none in the Global South, although one is being established in Australia. Establishing a proton treatment unit in South Africa is an enormous undertaking.

Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Andy Buffler.*

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He next showed us a copy of the famous textbook "Radioactivity" by JJ Thomson (Nobel Prize 1906) and went on to expand on the development of atomic theory and Thompson's discovery that atoms were not the fundamental particles but were made up of smaller components that he called "corpuscles". He went on to describe the work of William and his son Lawrence Bragg who developed x-ray crystallography, work for which both were awarded the Nobel Prize. R W James was a student of JJ Thomson's – and a friend of Lawrence Bragg. He was a fellow crystallographer. Bragg showed James an advert for Shackleton's Antarctic expedition. After joining the expedition, RW James kept a diary, a facsimile of which Andy showed to the parliament, indicating its injunction "Do not copy"! James is reputed to have been responsible for the extraordinarily accurate measurements of latitude and longitude that enabled Shackleton's doomed expedition (including RW James) to escape to Elephant Island and eventually return to England.

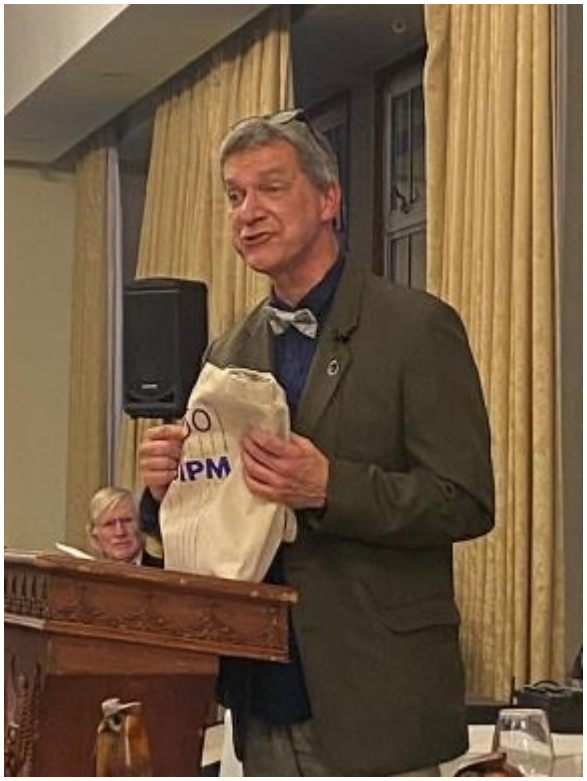
After his return, James found himself serving in France during World War I and he invented sonic ranging devices that improve the accuracy of the guns. Back in academia, James pursued his research into the structure of matter before taking up the position of Professor and head of the Department of Physics at UCT in 1937. His physics classes yielded many great minds including Prof Alan Cormack and Sir Aaron Klug, both Nobel laureates. Cormack was co-inventor of the CT scanner, a crucial device, particularly for cancer diagnosis.

The use of x-rays for treating tumours is well established, but they are very imprecise and cause damage to surrounding tissues. Protons, by contrast, are particles that are accelerated to 2/3 of the speed of light in a cyclotron. They are very accurate and protons deposit their energy at the end of their travel according to the Bragg curve.

Consequently, the energy from protons can be directed very precisely and there is no exit dose, unlike other forms of radiotherapy. Consequently, surrounding cells are largely spared and it is possible to "paint" the tumour leading to very effective, unique form of cancer management.

In partnership with *iThemba LABS*, UCT is developing a proton unit, but this is extremely costly. Nevertheless, the investment is worthwhile as Africa has the highest number of childhood cancers and this project is likely to have a huge impact and it will be only such facility on the continent. A side stream of the project is a facility for the making of radioisotopes for the whole of Africa. This project will result in creating a unique setting for paediatric cancer treatment in the Global South in conjunction with radio therapists, paediatric oncologists and paediatric neurosurgeons.

In closing, Andy drew the link between the survival of RW James on the Shackleton expedition and his subsequent enormous influence in Cape Town. It is probable that without this unique story of survival, the likelihood of the UCT Nobel laureates achieving their successes and the subsequent development of the proton project would have been small.



Above: Sheila Camerer, *Drawing of Andy Buffler.*

Musical Notes: Music from the Operas: Soprano: Frances van Vuuren & Baritone Themba Mdlalose accompanied by Tertia Visser Downie

For the music programme, the Owls present were treated to a selection of work including:

1. *Fin chan' dal vino* (Themba) *Don Giovani* by W.A Mozart

2. *La ci darem la mano* (Frances, Themba) *Don Giovanni* by W.A Mozart

3. *Cäcilie* (Frances) *Lieder* by Strauss

4. *Hai gia vinta la causa* (Themba) *Le Nozze di Figaro* by W.A Mozart

5. *Ah, je ris de me voir* (Frances) *Faust* by C. Gounod

6. Papageno, Papageno duet (Frances, Themba) *Die Zauberflote* by W.A Mozart

7. *Stars* (Themba) *Les Miserables* by C.M Schonberg

8. Meine Lippen, *sie küssen so heiß* (Frances) *Giuditta* by F. Léhar

9. *Lippen schweigen* (Frances, Themba) *Die lustige Witwe* by F. Léhar

10. *Funiculì, Funiculà* (Frances, Themba) *Neapolitan Song* by L. Denza

11. *All I ask of you* (Frances, Themba) *Phantom of the Opera* by A.L Webber

The music was simply outstanding and greatly appreciated by the Parliament. One Committee member commented that we had been rather starved of excellent vocal entertainment. Not only were the singers first rate but the pianist was extraordinarily accomplished.

Baritone opera singer Themba Mdlalose hails from Eswatini, where his active involvement in school choirs' competitions sparked his interest in opera. He thereafter went on to compete and win numerous solo competitions both locally and within the Southern African region. *The Voices of South Africa International Opera Singing Competition* in 2020 stands out as the one in which he won first prize in the under-22 age category. Themba earned a Bachelor of Arts in Social Science with a major in economics and political science from the University of Eswatini. He served as the institution's choir's music director while he was a student.

Top of the page: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Frances van Vuuren and Themba Mdlalose accompanied by Tertia Visser Downie.*

Owing to his intense passion, love, and enthusiasm for opera, he enrolled at the University of Cape Town for opera undergraduate studies under the guidance of Violina Anguelov Hobbs, where he has since performed the role of Ridolfo in Opera UCT's world premiere production of Gaetano Donizetti's long-lost opera *Dalinda*. In 2024, Themba participated in a masterclass with Professor Michelle Breedt and performed in various venues in Cape Town and around the Western Cape with Dr Lisa Engelbrecht. At the beginning of 2025, he was selected to be part of the Johannesburg Mozart International Festival's vocal masterclass organized by Maestro Richard Cock.

Frances van Vuuren, soprano, is from Cape Town and is pursuing a postgraduate diploma in opera at the South African College of Music with Violina Anguelov-Hobbs. She has been a finalist in the Friends of Cape Town Opera Bursary competition (February 2023), the Neues Lied competition (September 2023), shared third place in the Aviva Pelham Operetta Competition (May 2023), shared first place in the David Aldred Memorial Prize for Sopranos (April 2024) and placed fourth in the 23rd Schock Foundation Prize for Singing (October 2024). She was awarded first prize in the 2024 Fine Music Radio Bursary Trust Music Awards. With Opera UCT she covered Isabella in L'inganno Felice and performed the role of Stella in Les Contes d'Hoffmann. Frances completed her BMus and MMus degrees at the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. There, she performed Sandman in Hansel and Gretel and Fortuna/Damigella in *L'incoronazione di Poppea.*

She was also seen in the ensembles of *L'étoile, Le Nozze di Figaro, La Traviata, H.M.S Pinafore*, and *Die Zauberflöte*. Additional credits include Bianca in La Rondine with Chicago Summer Opera, Eurydice (cover) in *Orpheus in the Underworld* with Utah Vocal Arts Academy, Suor Genovieffa in *Suor Angelica* with Opera Lucca and First Spirit in *Die Zauberflöte* with Bloomington Chamber Opera.

Tertia Visser Downie is an accomplished South African pianist who studied under national and international piano masters John Antoniadis, and London-based Martino Tirimo, after winning the prestigious Mabel Quick Overseas Scholarship. She completed her Honours degree in Music at the University of Stellenbosch, as well as achieving the Unisa Performers' and Teachers' Licentiates, with distinction in both qualifications. Tertia regularly gets invited as an official accompanist at globally acclaimed music competitions and regularly accompanies talented and award winning musicians at various events and concerts. She was one of the official accompanists at the UNISA International String Competition in 2010, accompanying Yura Lee (violin), the overall winner. In 2014 she accompanied Sang Yoon Kim (clarinet), one of the global winners of the Unisa Flute and Clarinet Competition, enhancing her profile as a leading South African accompanist, impacting the international music scene. Tertia's talent is versatile and in 2009, she joined renowned poet Philip de Vos on a national tour to bring masterpieces *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Mussorgsky and *Kinderscenen* by Schumann to stage, radio and television. In 2008 Tertia took the leading female role in Pieter Dirk Uys's play, *Appassionata*, and performed the Beethoven Sonata with the same name. Tertia has produced numerous CDs of her own as well as establishing and managing her *Tots in Tune* programme designed to introduce classical music to young toddlers. She also released a CD with well-known cellist Marian Lewin at the end of 2009. In November 2016, she received her Fellowship from the Trinity College of Music. She has been organising the very successful Erin Hall Concert Series in Rondebosch since the beginning of 2014.

WPB: Owl Julian Wannell: “Gentlemen’s Clubs of London”

In 1652, as Jan van Riebeek arrived at the Cape, London witnessed the rise of its first coffee house, established by a Greek/Armenian servant of an English merchant trading with the Ottoman Empire. Coffee quickly became the new craze, stimulating intelligent conversation and fitting the puritan spirit that rejected rowdy taverns. By 1663 there were over 80 coffee houses in London; ten years later, 3,000 existed across England.

Dubbed “penny universities” for their one-penny entrance fees, these establishments became centres of news, politics, and business. Their popularity fostered modern democracy, periodical literature, and the Enlightenment. Coffee houses often developed political or trade affiliations; some even became brothels or gambling dens, catering to every pastime. Their political influence grew so concerning that Lord Danby tried unsuccessfully to close them in 1675.

The coffee houses’ role in London’s social life led to the birth of significant institutions like Lloyd’s of London, which began in Edward Lloyd’s coffee house serving maritime merchants.

As social strata and snobbery grew, some coffee houses evolved into exclusive clubs where private conversations became possible—an important shift that laid the groundwork for the London gentleman’s club.

St James, near the royal court and Parliament, was ideal for clubs catering to politicians and the upper classes. This area became home to high-class clubs and, historically, red-light establishments. Many clubs were Tory- or Whig-aligned, reflecting the political divisions of the time.

White’s Club established in 1693 as Mrs White’s Chocolate House, is London’s oldest and most exclusive gentleman’s club, traditionally Tory. Jonathan Swift called it “the bane of half the English nobility” for the ruinous gambling it hosted. William Hogarth famously depicted White’s members so absorbed in gambling they ignored a fire. Benjamin Disraeli said only two honours were beyond command: becoming a Knight of the Garter and a member of White’s.

Boodle’s Club, founded in 1762, directly opposed White’s, created for those excluded from or opposed to it. It admitted landed gentry, one rank below the nobility.

Brooks’s Club founded in 1764 by 27 Whig nobles, rivalled Boodle’s from across St James’s Street. Famous for gambling, it birthed the sandwich: the 4th Earl of Sandwich asked for meat between bread so he wouldn’t leave the gaming table. Its betting book records wagers like Lord Cholmondeley’s bet on Lord Derby fornicating with a woman in a balloon 1,000 yards up – an outcome unrecorded by history.

Dr. Samuel Johnson described a club as "an assembly of good fellows, meeting under certain conditions." Clubs offered dining, gambling parlours, libraries, and later luxurious accommodations. As gambling was illegal in public, clubs provided a private refuge where alcohol-fuelled gaming led to both fortunes and ruin – like Sir John Bland, who gambled away the entire city of Manchester and died penniless at 33.

By the Victorian era, London boasted around 400 clubs, driven by the rising upper middle-class eager for social, political, and professional networks. Clubs mimicked aristocratic homes in architecture and opulence, giving gentlemen a "home from home" free from domestic constraints.

By the mid-19th century, 95% of MPs belonged to at least one club. Winston Churchill reportedly belonged to 15. Clubs increasingly formed along professional and political lines, cementing their importance in British society.

About 40 traditional gentlemen's clubs remain in London, most in the West End. Many occupy grand Georgian or Victorian buildings with libraries, bars, billiard rooms, smoking rooms, and bedrooms for members. Some offer gyms, spas, and gardens. One club even has a 42-acre garden.

Membership typically ranges from 1,200 – 1,500, though some have as few as 60 or as many as 17,000. Waiting lists span from two years to over a decade; one club's list is closed entirely.

Clubs maintain strict traditions: hall porters greet members and control visitors, knowing every member by sight. Dress codes generally require jackets, collared shirts, and ties for men; electronic devices and business dealings are banned in most public rooms.

Club dining has improved dramatically in recent decades, and cellars often house tens of thousands of bottles of well-curated wines.

Traditional clubs are distinct from flashy modern private clubs catering to the ultra-wealthy. Traditional fees are modest by London standards, thanks to not-for-profit management and careful expense control.

Pratt's Club (1857) is a cozy club still privately owned by the Duke of Devonshire. All staff are called "George" (or "Georgina" for women), sparing members the effort of remembering names. Its décor includes eccentric taxidermy like a duck-billed platypus.

The Turf Club (1861) known for racing and gambling, posts reminders to members who neglect debts and hosts a marquee at Ascot.

The Reform Club on Pall Mall (1836) was designed by Sir Charles Barry (who also built Highclere Castle/Downton Abbey). Famous as the destination in Around the World in 80 Days, it has appeared in Bond films.

The Travellers Club (1819) required members to have travelled 500 miles overland outside the UK. Its library of travel books and maps is unmatched.

The Athenaeum Club (1824) attracts intellectuals, including 52 Nobel laureates, and houses a vast library. Many bishops belong, and one vicar famously died at his own 70th birthday party at the club.

The Garrick Club (1831) was formed to unite actors and men of refinement. Its theatrical collection exceeds 1,000 artworks. A dispute between authors William Thackeray and Charles Dickens originated here, sparking a 15-year silence.

The Beefsteak Club, founded in the 18th century, was notorious for secrecy and irreverence; the current incarnation, the Beefsteak Club (1876), caps membership at 500 and calls all staff "Charles."

Buck's Club, established post-WWI, gave the world *Buck's Fizz*. It inspired P.G. Wodehouse's fictional Drones Club and is known for youthful members and backgammon.

The National Liberal Club, founded by Gladstone in 1882, was the first major club to admit women (1976). An apocryphal tale claims Churchill mistook it for a public lavatory.

The Farmers Club (1842) promoted farming before a Ministry of Agriculture existed. Its building once housed MI6 and notable residents like George Bernard Shaw.

The Bath and Racquets Club (1989), founded by Mark Birley, is London's most exclusive sports club, with membership fees around £10,000 annually.

The Society of Dilettanti (1734), a 60-member club without a clubhouse, promotes classical art. Horace Walpole described it as requiring Italian travel – or drunkenness – for membership.

Quirky customs abound: clubs once washed silver coins in hot water before returning them to circulation; Boodle's still employs silvermen to care for its port wheel and 77,000-bottle cellar.

Stories persist of members dying quietly in clubs, unnoticed until the Monday morning staff check-in. One cartoon satirizes this with two members reading obituaries, one exclaiming, "Good God, Fenton! I didn't know you'd died!"

Hauntings exist too: the Naval and Military Club reported sightings of a Blitz-killed member's ghost but refused an exorcism because he hadn't formally resigned.

While many clubs once excluded women, attitudes are shifting. The Savile Club recently admitted its first woman – formerly a male member transitioning – ending a 150-year tradition.

Despite traditions, idiosyncrasies, and occasional snobbery, clubs thrive because they offer calm, privacy, and civility lacking in modern life. One secretary explained clubs' appeal: in restaurants, you endure loud phone calls; in clubs, manners and quiet prevail. As one member summed up his joy in watching from the window: "I like to watch the damn people outside... getting wet."

For all their quirks, London's clubs remain unique havens preserving social graces and connections. Long may they survive and prosper.

Above: Sheila Camerer, *Drawing of Owl Julian Wannell.*

Members' News

Two new Owls, an Owl Resuming his Perch After a Long Migration, and a Proposal of Membership

The Committee has been pleased to elect the following to membership of the Club

Sebastian van As (Proposed by Owls James & Bruton: Science)

Gerrie van Niekerk (Proposed by Owls Gwynne Evans & Murray: Literature)

(we look forward to their induction in the near future)

and to re-admit to the fellowship after an eleven-year migration in other parts -

Peter Grassow (originally proposed by Owls JP van Niekerk & Lundy: Literature)

The Committee has received a proposal of membership for Robin Marais (retired judge of appeal) (proposed by Owls Camerer & Hund) and being of the view that he would make a worthy Owl resolved to notice him. Any Owl wishing to bring to the Committee's attention any factor of which it ought to be aware is invited to contact the President or the Secretary Bird.

Owl Club Branded Accessories

As of the August meeting the Committee plans to have for sale to Owls in good standing a new range of Owl Club branded accessories.

The range will include clothing (see table below).

Item	No ordered	Selling price in 2025
Self-tie bow tie	50	R250
Ready-tied bow tie	50	R250
Cummerbund	50	R300
Waistcoats		
Size: M	10	R550
Size: L	20	R550
Size: XL	20	R550
Size: XXL	10	R550

In addition, the Club has on order a limited number of black & silver clutch bags with silver Owls attached (@R475), and single silver owls (@R150) to attach to other items which a wearer may wear. These too should be available for sale at the August meeting.

As will be evident, the numbers ordered are limited and will ensure that the first edition at least is a limited one: subsequent orders will depend upon demand, and the Fiscal Shrike will not wish to tie up capital in slow moving stock! Owls who are for any reason not able to dine at the August meeting may reserve one or more items in advance by (1) contacting Owl Paul Murray and (2) making payment by EFT to the Club's account with the reference <name; clothing>.

Wine at Owl Club Dinners: Would all Owls Please Note!!!!!

The Club does its best to ensure that Owls and our guests who wish to are able to enjoy a glass or two of wine with their dinners, and to enjoy this during the meetings that follow dinner. White and red wine are routinely placed at all tables before the start of the meal. Where the modest enjoyment of one or both varieties creates a shortage at the table, the designated table host may order further wine from the Club's stocks at Kelvin, and this level of consumption, always with the dictum *sit modus in rebus* omnibus in mind, is factored into the dinner fee.

The Committee (and in particular the cellar master) have noted that on more than one recent occasion a diner (usually an Owl) other than the designated table host, has ordered additional bottles of wine for the table, and signed for these as if the designated table host – in other words has signed for these to be charged to the Club's account.

There is of course no bar to diners (Owls and guests alike) placing orders for additional beverages before during or after dinner, and during the bar break, provided they do so for their own account and make payment (Kelvin accepts card payments only) though there should be no need to do this during dinner: if the designated table host is so engrossed in dinner time conversation and as a result overlooks an imminent or already apparent shortage, he or she, if appealed to, will always ensure that that that is necessary for the enjoyment of the meal is ordered!

Kelvin staff will be reminded of the role of the designated table host, and that others who may order additional drinks must make payment at the time they place the order.

Michael Beckurts's *Drawing Performance* at the Bishops Eisteddfod.

Owl Michael Beckurts presented a *Drawing Performance* at the Bishops Eisteddfod on Wednesday, 25th June, where his drawings of the musicians in concert were projected onto the stage wall. This was a first at the Bishops Eisteddfod.

Above: Owl Michel Beckurts drawing 'live' during a performance at the 2025 Bishops Eisteddfod.

Above: Michel Beckurts, *Drawing of a Musician in Performance at the 2025 Bishops Eisteddfod.*

Seen & Noted at the June Meeting

Above: Baritone Themba Mdlalose, pianist Tertia Visser Downie and soprano Frances van Vuuren.

Above left: Guest speaker Andy Buffler delivering his presentation on the topic of *The UCT Proton Project and links to Shackleton*. **Above right:** Owl Julian Wannell delivering his WPB on the topic of: *Gentlemen's Clubs of London*.

Mike Bruton: Report on the Fifth Colloquium: "The Impact of Ageing"

In the same week that the UN announced that, for the first time, the human fertility rate had dropped by 10%, a very successful colloquium on 'The impact of ageing human populations on socioeconomics and politics' was held by the Owl Club in the Pavilion at Kelvin Grove Club. The colloquium took place on Friday, 6th June 2025 and was attended by 31 Owls and 14 guests. It was organized by Owls John van der Linde and Anthea Serritslev with assistance on the day by Andrew Wilkinson (sound equipment) and Owls David Muller and Mike Bruton.

Owl John introduced the topic by contrasting a typical pyramidal human population age structure for developing countries (with higher numbers of younger people) with the more columnar-shaped population structure of developed countries such as Japan (with a high proportion of older people). He even pointed out that more adult nappies are sold in Japan today than child nappies!

Life expectation worldwide has increased from about 40 years in 1841 to over 80 years today. Furthermore, in developed countries, people live longer and tend to have fewer children. He also pointed out that 'Demography is destiny', i.e., population structure will determine a country's future, not just for a few years but for decades and even generations.

The first invited speaker, Shamil Ismail, spoke on the topic, *The Impact of Ageing Societies on Socioeconomics*, and noted that shifting demographics will eventually usher in the decline of civilization as we know it. Modern business practices depend on growth and a constantly rising human population and demand for products and services, However, research has shown that at least 36 countries will have declining populations by 2025. Therefore, we cannot expect the future to be "business as usual".

Fertility rates have declined from 5.3 in 1953 to below 2.1 (the rate of replacement) in 96 countries, and it is anticipated that there will be a shortage of labour amounting to over seven million people in seven leading countries by 2050. This trend has been exacerbated by urbanization as urban parents tend to regard children as an expense whereas rural parents regard them as an asset. Urban parents are also more likely to benefit from family planning services. Furthermore, it is anticipated that technology will not solve the problem of a shortage of labour as most manual jobs that can be automated have already been automated. The exception is that AI will impact on high-level professional jobs. He also noted that automation does not replace consumers, nor does it match their demand for services.

Research suggests that the global human population will peak by 2080 and will then begin to decline, eventually to near pre-industrial levels of about 1.2 billion by 2300. Another notable trend is that younger people have lower job fidelity, as the number of years they stay in the same job has declined from 8 to 5 and now to about 3 years, which has major implications for corporate strategies and business analytics and may reduce a company's intellectual capital and cause institutional amnesia.

Other marked trends are that many younger employees are not in favour of a later retirement age and place a strong emphasis on an appropriate work-life balance. Furthermore, the rising educational levels among young people have created a shortage of skilled artisans. In Japan about 10% of people had a college education in 1970 but that figure is expected to rise to over 50% by 2050. Better educated adults also tend to have fewer children. While this trend could be countered by revised immigration policies, anti-immigration sentiments tend to act against this approach.

A combination of the above trends is likely to lead to sharply reduced tax bases, deteriorating urban and transport infrastructure, vacant homes, malls and office blocks, plummeting property values, a decline in living standards, and an urgent need to find ways to counter a decreased demand for products and services. They may also lead to more heterogenous populations and multi-cultural melting pots, if the politicians will allow it.

These global trends are good news for Africa (and could indeed lead to this being 'Africa's century') as our developing countries population structure means that the continent's population is likely to grow from about 1.2 billion in 2023 to about 3.9 billion by 2100, with about 2.5 billion working-age people by the end of the century. Worldwide, pro-natal policies are being introduced, including extended maternity and paternity benefits and birth bonuses as well as potentially draconian measures, such as banning contraception.

The second invited speaker, Maarten Ackerman, spoke on the 'Impact of ageing societies on politics'. He started by showing a frightening map of the number of countries that are currently in conflict and noted that one out of every four people of voting age had voted in presidential elections in the past year and that many populist candidates had been elected.

He also noted that the demographic dividend that Africa possesses will serve it well in future but civil wars, poverty and the low educational levels of many young Africans will prove to be a deterrent. Later, during question time, it was pointed out that many Africans who are relatively uneducated by formal Western standards are, in fact, competitive in the marketplace as they are highly computer-literate and tech-savvy and have bridged the digital divide. This has partly made up for their lack of formal education; the speaker agreed with this sentiment.

Ackerman pointed out that global economic growth reached 3.5% after the 2008 crash and Covid pandemic but is expected to decline to 2.5% due to slow economic growth, bottlenecks in the supply of key materials and fuels, and various demographic factors. In particular, the ageing population is reducing the workforce and reducing productivity. This will result in a new global equilibrium being achieved as happened after Covid. China is likely to replace the USA as the major economic engine room on the planet, and the unhappy 'marriage' between the USA and China, and the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, will continue to create tension and unpredictable geopolitical conditions.

There will also be a race for access to green resources, especially in Africa, which holds some of the world's largest deposits of vital minerals that are needed for the development of a green economy, such as cobalt (90% of the world's reserves in the DRC) and lithium (5%). Africa will therefore, for the first time, hold centre stage on the world geopolitical map. He also pointed out that electric vehicles require a far greater range of materials to manufacture than internal combustion engine vehicles, and that many of these materials come from Africa. New mines will need to be created, and China is leading the way in their establishment.

Ackermann also noted that more than half the large companies in Africa are based in South Africa, which will have a major role to play in the development of the continent, and that the best continent to invest in today is Africa, a positive note on which to end.

The Owl Club
Tuesday 17 June 2025
The 1372nd Meeting

President: Owl Mike James
Dinner @ 6.45 pm
Grace: Owl Pete Sutherland
Dinner:
Toast: South Africa: The Owl President
A break for the tables to be cleared
The 1372nd Meeting 7.55 following dinner:
Announcements: The Owl President
Toast to our guests: The Owl President
Talk: Andy Buffler: The UCT Proton project and links to Shackleton
Music: Part 1.
Bar Break
Music Part 2

WBP Owl Julian Wannell
Toast: The Owl Club,

And a safe flight home

Samuel Johnson said, "If a man does not make new acquaintance as he advances through life, he will soon find himself left alone. A man, Sir, should keep his friendship in constant repair."

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we thank you for the Owl Club and the opportunity it provides us to make new friendships and refresh old ones. Please bless the food and drink and conversation we are about to enjoy to this purpose.

Grace by Pete Sutherland

KG

KELVIN GROVE

The Owl Club
Tuesday 17 June 2025
The 1372nd Meeting

Starter
Oven roasted tomato & sweet bell pepper soup,
Served with basil pesto croutons
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Main Course
Baked hake
Served with garlic baby potato, seasonal vegetables and aioli sauce
***

Dessert
Chef's choice Petit dessert

Food for thought
The Winter Solstice

Saturday marks this year's winter solstice. By ancient tradition in many and varied cultures, in the north and the south, the winter solstice has been and remains a time for reflection. In pagan communities the winter solstice traditions celebrated the "birth of the sun'. Some western European traditions

- Light candles or a fire:
- Using sage or palo santo, clear the space in which to honour the winter solstice.
- Reflect on the past year.
- Practice gratitude.