The Owl Club

NOTICE

Tuesday 9th December 2025: Notice of meeting #1378

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

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Honorary Auditor: Geoff Everingham

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

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This month's edition:

Editor: Peter Hyslop

Proofreaders: Kate McCallum, Julian Wannell and Hugh Amoore

Contributors: Hugh Amoore, Nigel Gwynne-Evans and Mike James

Photography: Mike Bruton

Drawings: Tony Grogan and Sheila Camerer

Dear Fellow Owls

The 1378th meeting of The Owl Club, preceded by a festive dinner, will be held on Tuesday 9th December 2025, 6:00 pm for 6:45 pm start, in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove Club.

Chairman: **President Owl Mike James**

This gathering will differ from our usual monthly meetings. We will meet on the lawns (near the tennis courts) from 6:00 pm onwards for a glass of festive "bubbly" and/or orange juice (please note, there will be no cash bar outside), following which, at 6:40 pm, Owls will proceed to the Grill Room. This meeting will be, as usual on the 2nd Tuesday, (9 December 2025. **And as usual this is for Owls only – i.e. no guests at this meeting.**

President: **Owl Mike James**

Master of Ceremonies: **Owl David Muller**

The Owls organising the entertainment for the Christmas Meeting have surprises in store for us; so, not to spoil the surprises have not divulged - even to the Committee - the fare for the evening, though it has been let slip that there will be a quiz!

Dinner fee: R350.

Dress: Black tie (or similarly elegant attire).

RESERVATIONS & PAYMENTS:

Any Owl who does not have internet access is welcome to telephone the Owl President at 0835037051 or 021 531 8295 to book a perch.

All other Owls are encouraged to use the Pay'n Perch procedure by paying their 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.

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 Wednesday 3rd December 2025.

All bookings will be acknowledged.

November 2025 Meeting

On Tuesday, 18th November, 61 Owls and 19 Guests gathered in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove, Newlands for the 1377th Meeting of the Owl Club. The proceedings started at 6:45, with President Owl Mike James welcoming all and Owl Leon de Wet delivering the Grace. This was followed by a three-course dinner (see page 17 for the menu).

Owl President Mike James then congratulated the 18 Owls celebrating birthdays in November, and of those, seven were present at the meeting. Those not present included octogenarians Mike Johnson, Gerald Rosenthal, Nigel Bruce, Jimmy Baigrie and Paul Mills. Others with birthdays in November and who were not at the meeting were Helen Boonzaier, Rob Cowling, David Little, Norman Smuts, Solly Moeng, James Hanley and Rob Skelton (who turned 40 on 1st November). Owls with birthdays in November and who attended the meeting included Nigel Franks, and Stan Sandler. Owls Bruton and Tyrrell turned 79 on 25th November and, in their sixties, were birthday Owls Sebastian van As and Medee Rall.

Having asked all Owls in attendance to rise and give the traditional toast to the guests, Owl President Mike James invited the guest speaker, Nicole Strauss, to address the assembled Owls and guests on her topic: *Echoes of Deelfontein*.

Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Nicole Strauss*.

Following the address, Owl President Mike James thanked Nicole Strauss for her talk and presented her with a bottle of port. Following this, Owl Julian Wannell introduced the first set of the music programme for the evening, presented by Albie Van Schalkwyk (piano), Christiaan Snyman (bass baritone) and Doc Caldwell (tenor).

After the first musical interlude, Owl President Mike James thanked all the musicians for their performance.

Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Albie Van Schalkwyk, Doc Caldwell and Christiaan Snyman.*

Following the bar interval, the assembly returned to enjoy the second set of the music programme. At the conclusion of the performance, Owl President Mike James thanked the performers for their contribution to the evening's entertainment.

After this, Owl Roxane Mather presented her WPB, on the topic of *The Myths We Still Live By – Greek Mythology in Modern Times*. Following the WPB, Owl President Mike James thanked Owl Roxane, and by way of concluding the meeting, he invited Owls and their guests to raise their glasses in a Toast to the Owl Club and wished all a safe flight home.

Above: Sheila Camerer, *Drawing of Owl Roxane Mather*.

Guest Speaker: Nicole Strauss: “Echoes of Deelfontein – War, Light, and Memory”

Lisa Grobler, *Deelfontein Drawing 5*, 2020. Mixed-media on archival print. 16.8 x 17.21 cm. From the exhibition *Voices From A Divided Fountain,* held during the COVID pandemic in 2020.

It is a pleasure to be here this evening – and a peculiar one, I must add, to speak about a story that began not as a grand idea, but exactly as the novel proceeds: as an art exhibition in an empty warehouse at the height of the covid pandemic in 2020. By depicting Deelfontein, this forgotten, unreal place in the middle of the arid Karoo, acclaimed visual artist Liza Grobler's exhibition *Voices from a Divided Fountain* awakened my interest in this place of echoes and initiated a project that would last for more than two years. Liza's images of the wind across the landscape and her reflections on the dry, haunting music that carries both history and forgetting in its melody, of dust plains and abandoned ruins, begged me to find the story behind the artworks and write it down.

The product of this project was a novel in three parts called Deelfontein. The narrative starts in March 1900 when the protagonist arrives in Cape Town from London to serve as a doctor in a field hospital in the Karoo. The second part is set in another British outpost, Shanghai, during the first half of the previous century, and in the final part it travels to modern day Cape Town with some action in post pandemic London as well.

When I first began writing this novel, I thought I was writing about a hospital. Later, I realised I was writing about power.

And later still, about the strange persistence of memory – how the past never quite lies still, but shifts beneath our feet like dust on a dry plain.

So, where did it all begin? The real Deelfontein – which, of course translates to English as either shared or divided fountain – is a railway siding between Richmond and De Aar, an unremarkable patch of the Karoo. Except that in 1900, during the South African War, it became home to the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital, the largest and indeed grandest British field hospital in South Africa at the time.

But let's rewind a couple of months. During the “Black Week” of 10th to 17th December 1899, the thinly stretched colonial forces of the British Army have just lost nearly 3,000 men in the defeats of Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso. They are currently no match for the Boers and the time has come to recruit a better class of British soldiers. The call goes out for “eight thousand men who can ride well and shoot straight” in order to overcome the veld skills of the South African farmers.

A new cavalry force, the Imperial Yeomanry, comes into existence. During the course of the war, more than 35,000 men join the 177 Imperial Yeomanry companies. Although some are ill-trained and are reported to be “incompetent, cowardly and drunk”, the majority of them are young, fit and sharp-eyed men.

At home, a small group of British high society led by Ladies Chesham and Curzon make an impassioned appeal via the newspapers to the British public to fund a new hospital for these soldiers, many of whom belong to the upper classes. Dubious about the reality of their husbands and sons sharing medical facilities with Tommy the foot soldier, dragged from the streets of London, plagued by famine and tooth decay long before the war even broke out, they find sponsorships to the tune of a hundred pounds per bed, and raise nearly 175,000 pounds over three months. Queen Victoria sponsors two beds.

The ladies knit socks and scarves, collect chocolates and cigars. The state of the art hospital at Deelfontein, outfitted with silverware, crystal glasses and white linen tablecloths should serve only Yeomanry officers and soldiers. Or so they hoped. In the end, the hospital treated whoever came along, even Boer soldiers and prisoners of war. But that came later.

Top doctors and medical personnel are recruited from the motherland; nurses arrive, dressed in stiff uniforms. (Of course – this is Victorian England transplanted to the semi-desert, after all – they are housed in tents on the opposite side of the railway to where the men slept.) It's the kind of medical centre the present-day Karoo can only dream of. But not only is the hospital one of a kind, the inhabitants are quite impressive too. One of them, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a medical doctor initially stationed at the hospital in Bloemfontein but commandeered to Deelfontein during a particularly heavy break-out of typhoid, brought the world Sherlock Holmes. Another, Sir John Hall -Edwards, was a well-known surgeon and one of the pioneers of radiotherapy who eventually lost his left hand because the effect of x-rays on human tissue was not known yet.

The principal officer was Sir Arthur Thomas Sloggett, a well respected leader and excellent judge of character. He had a keen interest in nature and collected a so-called menagerie of, amongst other things, a baboon and a tame meerkat. He discovered a vlei rat which was named after him. At his side was Sir Alfred Downing Fripp, a surgeon from Guy's, who was responsible for the planning of the hospital and the procurement of its staff. After the ground breaking work of Florence Nightingale and her nurses during the Crimean war, Fripp made provision for four times more nurses at Deelfontein than was customary at the time, and despite the criticism he received, his foresight proved immensely valuable. The female touch and emotional support of the nurses boosted the morale of the wounded and the sick and resulted in the establishment of better sanitation and hygienic practices, whilst pioneering professional standards in temporary hospitals. It is said that the right of British women to participate in war was essentially won on the battlefields of South Africa.

Mr Fripp's wife was the well-respected and much-loved matron at Deelfontein; she even got the men to sew! Fripp later became honorary surgeon to Kings Edward the Seventh and George the Fourth.

In their war diaries and letters home, the doctors and personnel commented on what they discovered when they arrived at Deelfontein. They were delighted that their rifles did not rust in the dry air, but complained about the copious amounts of Vaseline they had to use to combat its effect on their skin. They found the cool evening air after a thunderstorm during summer months delightful. But the dust bothered them immensely. They found it in their soup, clothes, watches, eyes, mouths, between their teeth and in their wounds; it blunted their razors and turned their white sugar into demerara. Dr Hall-Edwards had a hard time keeping his X-ray equipment dust-free. They lamented that "this country is not worth fighting for", that it is a "fine country to be away from" and the *Daily Mail* reported that the Karoo is "the dustbin of creation". The other constant pest was of course the eternal presence of flies; in summer they had to eat after dark.

Into this unlikely setting I sent my young doctor, Oliver Glenville. He works at Guy's Hospital in London; is earnest, newly qualified, full of the optimism of science; the type of person who shyly quotes Rudyard Kipling during breakfast. He arrives with a Brownie camera, that little miracle of the new century, and a belief that healing is a form of virtue and pride.

But Deelfontein, as he discovers, is not a place for clear certainties. It is a place of contradictions – order built upon conquest, medicine performed amid moral ambiguities. Even if the hospital treats both British soldiers and Boer prisoners, the act of healing itself becomes tainted by the injustices that surround it.

Among the staff is Klara Grootboom, a young local woman working as a cleaner and laundress. She is practical, dignified, perceptive – and it is through her that Oliver first begins to see the limits of his own civilisation. He encounters her not only at the hospital, but also at the tavern of JJ Adamstein, another true life who

made his fortune off the relatives of the deceased buried in the small graveyard left behind by the British when they departed. Klara asks Oliver for a seemingly simple act of kindness – to help her suffering father die with dignity – and, in doing so, she fractures his neat, imperial conscience.

Their encounter – not as much a romance as a recognition – becomes the novel's heartbeat. Klara embodies everything the empire cannot see, and Oliver, for all his good intentions, embodies everything it cannot admit. Before the end of the war, Oliver leaves South Africa broken, his camera filled with images he no longer understands and wishes he could unsee. These images will haunt him to the end of his days, and lead him to far-off Shanghai, where he will fall into the arms of opium and morphine. He will marry, have a daughter, and eventually return to England with his granddaughter Olivia. In the last, modern day part of the novel, Olivia will track her grandfather's footsteps to an art exhibition in Woodstock, Cape Town, about Deelfontein, that strange place that he recalled during drug laced dreams while she listened from behind his chaise-longue.

But let's get back to Deelfontein. What is a hospital, if not a mirror of the society it serves? Around 6000 patients were treated at Deelfontein; only 134 died, of which 112 were the victims of typhoid. The Imperial Yeomanry Hospital was the pride of British medicine – a symbol of progress – and yet, like many empires, it was built upon contradiction. Here was modernity, surrounded by desolation; humanitarianism, underwritten by conquest. It was a place designed to heal, yet born of a war that made healing impossible.

Above: Guest speaker Nicole Strauss

When I wrote about Deelfontein, I kept thinking: What is a hospital, really? A place where pain is made visible. A place that exists because something has gone wrong. And isn't that, in a way, what a society, a country is too – a collective attempt to treat its own injuries? I imagined those rows of white tents, like moral statements fluttering in the wind, and I thought of how easily reason and cruelty can coexist.

The hospital became, for me, a metaphor for what powerful empires can become: sterile, efficient, and utterly blind to its own pathology.

Deelfontein was dismantled, in its entirety, exactly a year after it was built. All that remained were the British graves and, if you listen closely, the sound of Adamstein's lonely violin and the echoes of the past mingling with the deadening silence of the light.

So what happens when descendants hear these echoes? More than a hundred years after the war, we find Klarissa Grootboom, Klara's descendant, living in Cape Town during the pandemic. She is an artist, a creator of installations, a woman for whom light and sound are languages. Her father was Esau Grootboom, a complicated and abusive man, who hailed from the Northern Cape and adored his deceased grandmother. However, he despised his grandfather, the English soldier who disappeared after the war but left more than mere destruction and misery in his wake.

The ghost that haunts Klarissa is not her great-grandfather though, but a question. How does one inherit a history that was never meant to be remembered? How does one turn absence into a narrative, a visual one at that, and silence into voice? What remains at Deelfontein today is what Klarissa discovers when she visits the site: ruins of Adamstein's hotel, its portico still somewhat intact; faded murals visible amongst broken bricks; an owl perching on what remains of a wooden beam; an abandoned railway station; the small graveyard where the deceased were buried while the Last Post sounded through the thin Karoo air.

Her art becomes an act of recovery. Where Oliver's camera froze the moment, Klarissa's work releases it; he was the doctor who captured without understanding, she is the artist who sees without claiming to own. And when the two descendants of Dr Oliver Glenville visit Deelfontein together, his two worlds collide, and some sense is made of history, memory and its lasting effects.

Let's muse about photographs and X-rays for a minute or two. Oliver's Brownie camera plays a quiet but crucial role, and so does Hall-Edwards's work with X-rays. Photography was new then – a technology of wonder – and yet it was also a tool of control. To photograph is to frame, to decide what belongs inside the picture and what stays out.

But the Brownie could only see and expose what is on the surface, whereas the X-ray machine could reveal that which remains unseen. Similarly, the photo bears the subjective choices of the photographer, whereas the X-ray itself is an objective, quite sterile tool. Both technologies mediate power. But Oliver's Brownie alludes to representation, memory, and narrative, while the X-ray device refers to embodiment, trauma, diagnosis and authority. Together, they allow the novel to interrogate the ways in which truth presents itself, and the role individuals play in the representations thereof.

In the novel, the camera becomes a moral instrument. It captures suffering but cannot relieve it; it records, but does not understand. A century later, Klarissa reverses that gaze. She uses images not to possess, but to listen. She experiments, creates, allows the landscape to breathe. In her hands, art becomes a form of ethics – an act of paying attention to what was previously unseen. In a way, her gaze discovers the hidden interior, similar to the beam of an X-ray machine.

How did power become a central theme of the novel? As I researched and wrote, I realised that the central theme, one that connects all the different parts of the narrative, is power – not only political power, but the quieter, more insidious kinds of power that shape our lives.

There is the power of war, which decides who may live and who must die; the power of violence, also gender based, which writes itself into the body and the mind; the power of illness and addiction, which humbles even the proudest intellect; and the power of a pandemic, which exposes our fragility and our interdependence all at once. There is also the power of alcohol and drugs – chloroform, morphine, quinine – those early miracles of modern medicine that promise relief, yet sometimes dull the conscience as much as the pain.

Against all these stands another, quieter power – the power of art. Art does not conquer; it resists. It does not cure; it reveals. It turns domination into dialogue, distance into empathy. Where the empire sought to classify, art seeks to connect. Where science sought to explain, art learns to endure ambiguity.

Klarissa's work, in the novel, is not about triumph or revenge. It is about restoring balance – about creating a space in which the forgotten may once again be seen, not as curiosities, but as human beings. If war and medicine are the languages of control, then art is the language of relinquishment. It reminds us that power, without imagination, almost always becomes cruelty. But where power is a central theme, Deelfontein has a central governing image as well and that is light.

The light of the Karoo – that merciless clarity that exposes everything.

The light of medicine – the glare of the surgical lamp, the X-ray beam, the relief it brings.

The light of the camera flash – freezing a moment into permanence.

And finally, the light of art – not to expose, but to reveal.

Light can heal or burn, illuminate or blind. It depends on how we use it. And perhaps that is true of all knowledge, all progress, all power. Oliver's light was the light of mastery; Klarissa's, the light of empathy. Between them lies a century of learning – or unlearning – what it means to see.

When I began Deelfontein, I was writing about war, art and power. Afterwards I realised I was writing about inheritance – about what endures after the battle is done. History, especially in South Africa, is never as distant as we imagine. The landscape remembers. The bones remember. The stories we tell ourselves about who we are, are always provisional – always in negotiation with what came before.

For me, writing this book was not an attempt to accuse or to reconcile, but to listen. To listen to the silences between the official records. To listen to the quiet dignity of those who were never photographed in focus. And perhaps that is all any of us can do – as writers, readers, or simply as citizens – to keep listening.

When you next pass through the Karoo – as one does, quickly, with a sense of relief when the first telephone tower reappears – remember that somewhere out there, between the stones and the wind, lies a place called Deelfontein. Nothing remains of the hospital now; only a fenced off piece of earth where sparse vegetation grows and a few rows of British graves lie under their cast-metal crosses in utter stillness, covered in sand and dust.

But if you stand there quietly, you may sense it still: the echo of voices, the faint click of a camera shutter, the murmur of the wind that carries both memory and forgetting. I think that is what literature tries to do – to hold those echoes for a moment, before they fade.

In the end, Deelfontein is not about war or empire or even art. It is about the fragile, stubborn human capacity to care – to care enough to remember, and to look again with kinder eyes.

Above: Guest speaker Nicole Strauss

Musical Notes: Pot Pourri: Albie Van Schalkwyk (piano), Christiaan Snyman (bass baritone), Doc Caldwell (tenor)

The Owls present at the November meeting were treated to this diverse "Pot Pourri" of musical works including:

First Half

Doc Caldwell:

Swanee (Variation on a theme by George Gershwin)

Christiaan Snyman:

Smile (Charlie Chaplin)

Try To Remember (The Fantasticks)

Non Piu Andrai (Mozart – Marriage of Figaro)

Doc Caldwell:

Cover Drive (a la Mozart)

Little Boxes (Pete Seeger variation)

Christiaan Snyman:

Cäcilie; Zueignung (Richard Strauss)

Second Half

Christiaan Snyman & Doc Caldwell:

Elixir Of Youth (Mozart duet)

Christiaan Snyman:

On The Street Where You Live – My Fair Lady

Stars - Les Miserables

Doc Caldwell:

Trial By Surjury (G&S; Munro & Caldwell)

A Song Of Venesection (Flanders & Swann)

Christiaan Snyman:

If I Were A Rich Man – Fiddler on the Roof

Doc Caldwell:

A Nightingale Sang (Manning Sherman)

About Owl Robert-Ian (Doc) Caldwell:

"Caldwell humour, based on human foibles, a mixture of the ingenious and the ingenuous, is pungent but not too acid" – Charles Worrod – *The Natal Witness*.

Caldwell's debut on the Grahamstown Festival Fringe was in 1985 with *Trial by Surjury*, a medical spoof based on Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury*. His first "one-man show" was *Shaggy Dogs & Flannelled Fools* in 1989. An ongoing midlife crisis has involved him on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, ten Grahamstown and seven Hilton Festivals, and more recently in performances in Knysna, George and Plettenberg Bay, usually as fundraisers. Robert-Ian is known as Doc: also answers to "Doc Doc Doc" – nicknamed Doc aged 10.

Albie van Schalkwyk has established himself as performer over the past 40 years and is one of South Africa's leading chamber musicians and vocal accompanists. He has performed as soloist with SA orchestras, given solo recitals, taught master classes for singers and accompanists, worked as a music producer for the SABC, and arranged music for various combinations, including Broadway musicals and operas for 2 pianos and orchestral pieces for 3 to 8 pianos. He completed his Ph.D. in Music at the University of the Free State in May 2012.

His interest in vocal music and the art song in particular has led to many fulfilling concert partnerships with singers. One of these was the formation in 1994 of *The Songmakers' Guild*, a Cape Town organisation which provides a regular platform to performers in the field of the art song and from which he recently retired as Artistic Director. He was involved in the Neuberg Internationale Kulturtage summer school as coach and performer for over 20 years and during one university sabbatical year worked as coach in the Vocal Department of the Mozarteum Music University in Salzburg, Austria. In 2009 the SA Academy of Arts and Sciences awarded him the Huberte Rupert Prize for his contribution to ensemble playing and teaching over more than 30 years. Albie retired from his post as Associate Professor in Piano and Chamber Music at the SA College of Music, University of Cape Town, at the end of 2017. Since then he has continued his activities as collaborative pianist in chamber music and the art song repertoire, piano teacher (live and online), vocal coach and arranger for multiple pianos, all under the heading of the Musicumbrella Piano Studio.

Above: Albie van Schalkwyk at the piano.

Below: Doc Caldwell in full cry.

Christiaan Snyman regularly performs classical favourites and songs from the musicals. He studied at TUT, Pretoria, and at UCT with Nellie du Toit and Angelo Gobbato. He sang in opera around South Africa and in Windhoek before spending seven years in Germany. There he sang at the City Theatre of Koblenz on the Rhine and took major roles with the Kammeroper Frankfurt and Opera Classica Europa before returning home. He performs regularly with the Pretoria Symphony Orchestra, where he has "done" *Don Giovanni* and *Tosca* as Scarpia. He sang the demanding role of Wotan in Wagner's *The Valkyries* in New York with the Manhattan Opera Studio in 2019. He performs lieder recitals with Albie Van Schalkwyk and does gigs with Jazzband, singing well-loved swing numbers. Christiaan always promises a lively performance, engaging with his audience, telling them the stories, making them feel part of the music.

WPB: Owl Roxane Mather: "The Myths We Still Live By – Greek Mythology in Modern Times"

When we think of Greek mythology, most of us imagine ancient marble temples, winged sandals, thunderbolts hurled from Mount Olympus, and stories that seem far removed from our modern, digital world. But if you look closer, you'll notice something fascinating: we are still living those myths – just dressed in jeans, holding smartphones, and scrolling instead of sailing.

Tonight, I'd like to explore how Greek mythology is repeating itself in our time – not as ancient legend, but as everyday life.

The Eternal Return of the Gods. Let's start with the gods themselves. The ancient Greeks imagined their gods as mirrors of humanity: flawed, emotional, passionate, and deeply involved in mortal affairs.

Think of Zeus – ruler of the heavens, always in search of new conquests, endlessly powerful and endlessly restless. Today, Zeus might not throw thunderbolts; he might throw tweets. He might be a billionaire CEO, commanding the skies through satellites and rockets, striving for immortality through technology. His lightning bolts are the electric flashes of innovation and scandal alike.

Then there's Athena, goddess of wisdom and strategy – reborn in every woman and man who uses intellect to navigate chaos. You see her in the boardroom, in classrooms, in the tireless pursuit of reason over impulse.

And of course, Dionysus, god of wine, theatre, and ecstasy – well, Dionysus is having a great time in our age. He lives in our festivals, our nightlife, our music, our search for escape – whether through art, travel, or even a good glass of wine after a long day. We all need our Dionysian moments.

The truth is: the Olympian gods never disappeared. They've simply changed address.

The Myths We Re-enact. Beyond the gods, the stories themselves repeat. Take the myth of Icarus, the boy who flew too close to the sun. His wings — made of wax – melted when he soared too high. The moral is timeless: ambition without humility leads to downfall.

In our world, Icarus takes many forms.

The Icarus myth isn't a warning against flying – it's a reminder to respect the sun.

He's the entrepreneur who overreaches, the influencer who trades authenticity for fame, the society that races toward progress without pausing to ask – should we? Artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, social media fame – all are wings made of wax if we ignore their limits.

Then there's Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection. Sound familiar? He's alive and well on Instagram. Every selfie, every algorithm that rewards attention over connection, every endless scroll of comparison – these are modern mirrors in which we risk losing ourselves. The myth warns not against vanity, but against forgetting that reflections are not reality.

And let's not forget Pandora, the curious woman who opened the forbidden jar and unleashed chaos upon the world. Today, Pandora might be a metaphor for technology. We open digital boxes daily – sometimes with beautiful results, sometimes disastrous. Every innovation brings both hope and unforeseen consequence. Yet, even after all the evils escaped, Pandora found hope at the bottom. That's an important lesson: even in our darkest mistakes, humanity's capacity for hope remains.

Modern Heroes and Ancient Trials. Greek heroes, too, walk among us. Their journeys haven't changed – only the settings have.

Odysseus, for example – the clever wanderer trying to find his way home after years of war. Isn't that all of us, in a way? Navigating storms of information, temptation, and distraction, searching for a sense of belonging in a noisy world. The sirens that tried to lure Odysseus off course sing today through notifications, advertisements, and endless entertainment. Resisting them – finding silence and self – is our modern form of heroism.

Or consider Prometheus, who defied the gods to bring fire – knowledge – to humanity.

Today's Prometheans are scientists, artists, and innovators who push boundaries for the sake of progress. But Prometheus was punished – chained for his defiance. And that, too, echoes in our times: society often punishes its visionaries before celebrating them. Every whistleblower, every revolutionary idea, begins as a crime against the status quo.

Why do these stories keep repeating? Why do we see echoes of them everywhere – in politics, business, media, and our personal lives?

Because myths aren't just stories about gods and monsters – they are maps of the human psyche. They express emotions and conflicts that don't belong to one culture or century; they belong to us. Love, pride, fear, ambition, envy, hope – these are the building blocks of both mythology and modern life.

Psychologist Carl Jung called these patterns "archetypes." He believed that myths reveal something deep and universal about human nature – things we keep replaying in new forms, because the lessons are never fully learned. That's why no matter how advanced we become, we still fall in love like Aphrodite, rage like Ares, or dream like Hermes.

In a way, our civilization is just another stage on which the old stories are being retold – with Wi-Fi.

What we can learn with this realisation is that we are living myths.

First, we can learn humility. The Greeks knew that hubris – excessive pride – was the downfall of heroes and gods alike. In an age that worships self-promotion and speed, humility is a revolutionary act.

Second, we can seek balance. The Greeks believed in the "Golden Mean" – nothing in excess. They valued harmony between reason and passion, between Apollo's light and Dionysus's fire. Perhaps that's a lesson our polarized, all-or-nothing world desperately needs.

And finally, we can embrace the mythic within ourselves. Each of us carries both chaos and creation, fear and courage, wisdom and folly. Recognizing that makes us more human – and perhaps, a little divine.

As we look ahead, it's worth asking: what new myths are we creating?

Every generation writes its own mythology. The Greeks had Zeus and Athena; we have algorithms and artificial intelligence. Our gods are no longer on Olympus – they're in the cloud. But the questions remain the same:

What does it mean to be human? How do we use power wisely? How do we find meaning in a world we are constantly reinventing?

Perhaps the truest measure of progress is not how far we move from myth – but how well we understand the one we're living in. So, the next time you read a headline, or scroll your feed, or wrestle with ambition, love, or loss – remember: somewhere, in those ancient stories, a Greek hero has already been there, made your mistakes, and maybe even found your answers.

We are not escaping mythology. We are continuing it.

Members' News

Owl Club Membership

The Committee is pleased to announce the election as an Owl of Roger Silberberg (Science: proposed by Owls James and Morris). We look forward to his induction in the near future.

The Committee has received a proposal of membership for Verwey Wiese (Proposer Owl Morris and seconded by Owl Tyrrell) and believing that he would make a worthy Owl has agreed to Notice him. Owls may recognise the name: Verwey has been Honorary Auditor to the Club for the past decade! Any Owl who may wish to comment on this proposal is invited to contact the Owl President or the Secretary Bird in confidence.

Owl Club Committee for 2026/2027

Owls are invited to consider joining the Committee in 2026. The Committee has not yet identified an Owl able and willing to take over the role of Secretary Bird in 2026; volunteers please.

Owl Club Christmas Meeting: Please Note

This meeting will be, as usual on the 2nd Tuesday, 9 December 2025. And as usual this is for Owls only – i.e. no guests at this meeting.

A subcommittee led by Owl Derek Leisegang is devising a programme of entertainment for the evening.

As the Secretary Bird will be out of the country from 4 December 2025, perch booking for the December meeting should be made as early as possible; we would be pleased if these could be submitted in the usual way by 6pm on Wednesday 3rd December 2025. Any communication about the DECEMBER MEETING after Tuesday should go to Owl James please to Mike.james@uct.ac.za

Owl Club Subscription for 2026

The annual subscription has been R360 for many years (it was not increased in 2023, 2024, or 2025). The Committee has resolved to increase it to R420 for 2026 and the Fiscal Shrike will soon send notices to all Owls inviting them to renew their membership for 2026.

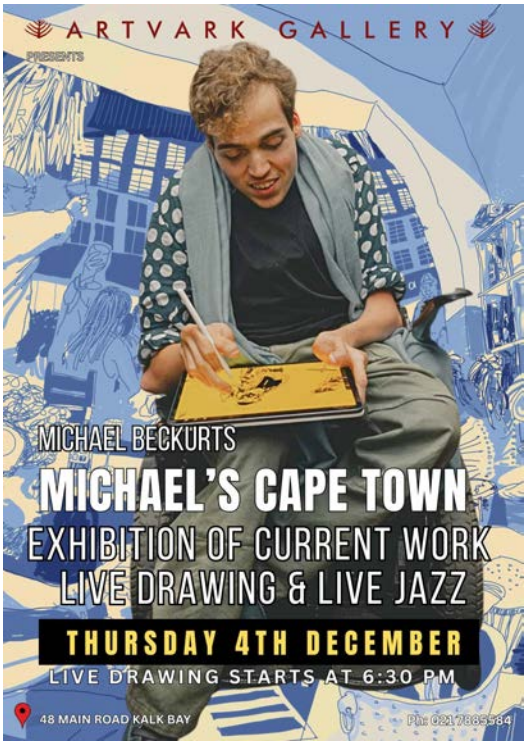
It is the firm intention of the Committee to fix this at this level for the next three years.

The entrance fee will increase at the same time to the same amount (these numbers have always been the same).

Owl Club Website

The members' section of the Owl Club's website (owls.org.za) is for members only and is password protected. It seems that many Owls may have forgotten their password or may think that they were never allocated one. If you need help with this please let the Secretary Bird know and he will arrange for the Webmaster (Owl Kevin Rorke) to resolve the matter, if necessary by allocating a new password.

Michael Beckurts is Exhibiting Once Again



Report on the Sixth Colloquium by Owl Mike Bruton

Twenty-five Owls and 14 guests attended the sixth colloquium of the Owl Club held in the Pavilion at the Kelvin Grove Club on Friday, 7th November 2025 on the theme "South Africa's changing status in the global geopolitical landscape".

In his introductory comments Owl Mike Bruton noted that South Africa today finds itself in an important historical moment. We live in a dangerous, polarised and uncertain world, but also a world that is full of opportunity. Our government's strategic response has been one that involves taking relatively independent and non-aligned positions on global affairs, with our main affiliation being with BRICS, and navigating between competing world powers. The question is: "Do our current policymakers have the political acumen and bureaucratic ability required to navigate this complex global order and to exploit the new possibilities?", as strategic autonomy is not the norm in global affairs. The current global disorder presents an opportunity for power to be exercised in new ways. South Africa, and Africa, are not bound by post-industrial lock-ins that tie economies to fossil fuels and prevent the growth of green industry. They are also not constrained by a declining population, nor paralysed by nostalgia for a geopolitical past.

In her talk entitled "How will South Africa navigate a hectically changing global geopolitical landscape", Owl Sheila Camerer highlighted the importance of the forthcoming G20 meeting that is being chaired by South Africa on the theme "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability", and emphasized that we should use this opportunity to enrich our national and international dialogue. She noted that rising policies of protectionism are a threat to South Africa and that the aggression and unpredictability of President Trump have resulted in international turmoil being the order of the day. She further opined that South Africa's reaction to Trump's tariffs will be an important flexing point.

Owl Sheila emphasized that South Africa needs to steer its own course and that the people of the country need to find a shared common purpose. She also stated that the prospects for economic reform are not great under the present government but that the Government of National Unity (GNU) is now a reality and is beginning to find its voice by, for instance, questioning Ministers about their portfolios.

She stated that democracy is on trial and that national strategies for a new geopolitical dispensation are conspicuous by their absence. We also need a stronger institutional framework and must realize that economic growth will be a major factor in solving the national debt problem.

The second speaker was John Matisonn, a leading political journalist whose topic was "Creating a South African foreign policy with nuance and agency". John's most recent book, *Cyril's Choices. An Agenda for Reform,* applies his research at the University of Chicago to a meaningful revamp of South African domestic and foreign policy, which, he believes, has been mishandled for 17 years. He emphasized that South Africa currently has a low international status partially because our economic growth rate and unemployment figures, and political acumen, are poor. He noted that the present government does not have the outstanding understanding of foreign policy that President Mandela had and shared his insights on the inner workings of our foreign policy relationships with China and India. Several of his incisive and thought-provoking comments elicited murmurs of approval from the audience.

Above: John Matisonn.

The third speaker was Anthea Jeffery, Head of Policy Research at the Institute of Race Relations. She discussed the strong international law opinions that South Africa had expressed in relation to the Diego Garcia air and naval base on Chagos island and the ongoing, highly contentious issues in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Isreal. She highlighted the complexity of multilateral and multi-polar international relations and attempted to present both sides of the different arguments.

During the discussion after her talk strongly opposing views were expressed from the floor and it was suggested that the speaker had taken a rather one-sided view of some issues. In retrospect it is a pity that the speaker did not present a much wider view of the way in which changes in international law and policy are having an impact on Africa and South Africa in particular.

The proceedings were concluded by Owl President Mike James who thanked the speakers and those involved in organizing the colloquium and announced that the next colloquium would be held in May 2026.

After the colloquium six Owls and the two invited speakers enjoyed a lively discussion on the theme of the colloquium, and on a variety of other topics, over lunch at the Grove restaurant at Kelvin Grove Club.

Books by Owls

Owl Mike Bruton is compiling a list of books, and chapters in books, published by Owls (in English and other languages) since 2020. If you have published a book or a chapter in the last five years, please send him information on these publications in the following formats:

Lawrence, Jeremy (2025). *Tall tales from Table Town.* Gryphon Press, Cape Town. 105 pages.

Bruton, Mike (2025). *Traditional fishing methods and indigenous knowledge in Africa,* pages 81-113. In: *Indigenous knowledge systems. An authoritative guide for South African teachers.* Via Afrika, Cape Town.

Seen & Noted at the November Meeting

Above left: Christiaan Snyman in performance.

Above right: Owl Roxane Mather.

Above (from left to right): Owl Brian de Kock, Guest Verwey Wiese, Owls Roger Silberberg, Clare Stannard, Richard Morris and Nicholas Winearls.

H.G

The Owl Club
Tuesday, 18th November 2025

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Starter
Mushroom Soup

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Main Course
Grilled Hake
Served with baby potatoes mixed vegetables and aioli

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Dessert
Trio of mini desserts

***

Filter Coffee

Food for thought:
Greek myths are ancient stories about the gods, goddesses, heroes, and monsters of antiquity that explain natural phenomena, moral values, and the world - whether the adventures of Heracles, the creation of the world, or the Olympian gods, the Trojan War, or Theseus and the Minotaur. They were central to ancient Greek religion, art, and literature, and through Homer to much modern art & literature.

That this is true for many cultures – think of the influence of Arthurian myths on English.

The Canadian critic Northrop Frye in his Great Code, examines the influence of the Bible on Western art and literature and on the Western creative imagination in general and presents the Bible as a unique text distinct from all other epics and sacred writings. He was observed: I soon realized that a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads: The most conscientious student will be continually misconstruing the implications, even the meaning.
Owls may ponder what this means to current and future generations of first language English speakers neither versed in the Greek myths nor Bible stories?

The Grace.

Good Food

Good Wine

Good People

Good Fellowship

Good God

Amen.

Grace by Owl Leon de Wet, a variant on one of Leslie Stradling's Book of Owls' Graces.