

Editorial

In the nineteenth century a knowledge of science was part of the experience of many public officials, especially those drawn from a naval or military background. Several of Australia's colonial governors had an active interest in scientific pursuits.

Among scientifically inclined governors, Sir Thomas Brisbane in New South Wales and Sir John Franklin in Tasmania are especially notable. Brisbane is best known for his short period as Governor of New South Wales, 1822–4, three years out of a long and active life. His role as both an administrator and astronomer in New South Wales has been studied, but no modern assessment has been made of his scientific activities throughout his life. To remedy this, the Australian Science History Club sponsored a symposium on 'Sir Thomas Brisbane and the Sciences: A Reappraisal' at Sydney Observatory on Saturday 7 June 2003. An introductory paper on Brisbane's life and official career was presented by Carole Liston. Revised versions of the other three papers on Brisbane's scientific work are published here.

That Brisbane established an observatory at Parramatta in 1822 at his own expense is well known. The operation of the observatory is explored in detail in the paper by Shirley Saunders. Less widely appreciated is the fact that Brisbane had private observatories in Scotland both before and after his term of office in New South Wales. Alison Morrison-Low's survey of Brisbane's Scottish observatories and of his scientific heritage in Scotland sets the scene for Saunders' paper, and enables the work done at Parramatta Observatory to be seen in the framework of

Brisbane's long-term engagement with science. The surviving instruments from Parramatta Observatory, some of which came from Brisbane's first Scottish observatory, are the subject of the concluding paper by Nick Lomb.

'Sir Thomas Brisbane and the Sciences: A Reappraisal' was organized by Julian Holland and Desmond Barrett for the Australian Science History Club. Julian Holland was primarily responsible for coordinating the papers for publication.

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The year 2004 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Australian Academy of Science. Consciously modelled on the Royal Society of London as an élite rather than a representative institution, the Academy has come to play an important leadership role within the Australian scientific community. Among its activities has been, since 1966, the publication of a journal—initially entitled *Records of the Australian Academy of Science*—committed to publishing, among other things, scholarly articles on the history of science in Australia and biographical memoirs of deceased Fellows of the Academy. In 1980, the journal was given a more definite historical focus that was reflected in a new title, *Historical Records of Australian Science*. Through its commitment to the journal and in other ways, the Academy has been a powerful influence in promoting scholarly work on the history of Australian science. Australian historians of science join in congratulating the Academy on reaching this significant milestone in its history.

R.W. Home