

Launch of Digitized *Journal and Abstract of Proceedings of Sydney University Engineering Society and Minutes of Proceedings of the Engineers' Association of New South Wales*

Ian Jack, 24 August 2010

As an ordinary historian, I am delighted to participate in this technological event. In the academic world, successful collaborations must never be taken for granted. They deserve recognition when they happen, so I am grateful to the University Library for bringing us together this evening to launch a satisfying project.

The initiative for the digitizing of the *Journal and Abstract of Proceedings of the Sydney University Engineering Society* and the *Minutes of Proceedings of the Engineers' Association of New South Wales* came from a small and pleasingly specialist outside body, the Australian Society for the History of Engineering and Technology. Because of its unwieldy name, this Society is known to its friends by its acronym, ASHET. Ashet happens to be, as I am sure you all know, the Scottish name for a large ceramic serving dish. Since the Society's aims are:

to encourage and promote community interest and education in the history of engineering and technology

it seems right that we should be serving up nourishing fare on an ample platter. And as a card-carrying Scot, I like to think that ASHET keeps in mind the signal contribution of the Scottish nation to both engineering and technology all over the nineteenth-century world, not least in Australia.

So I am here tonight as President of ASHET to celebrate the successful dishing up of one of our projects. ASHET was founded in 2003 to form a bridge between the professional engineers and the historians. The Society had its foundation meetings in the splendid nineteenth-century town-house in Macquarie Street owned by the Royal Australian Historical Society and our relations with the RAHS have remained close

and cordial. Our regular meetings held there have filled a perceived gap in the menus of the RAHS on the one hand and the Institution of Engineers Australia on the other.

ASHET's founding and continuing Secretary, Ian Arthur, despite being a specialist in refrigeration, has led us with real warmth towards ways of helping our potential constituency. And the digitisation of relevant serial publications is a very appropriate public good.

I strongly supported the choice of the *Journal of the Sydney University Engineering Society* and the *Proceedings of the Engineers' Association* for the treatment. Under the inspiration of Professor Warren, the University Society was formed in 1895. Its aims were more prolix, and more parochial, than those of ASHET, but they were no less effective:

to promote the welfare of the Department of Engineering by bringing into closer contact the graduates and undergraduates by reading papers and by the delivery of lectures on professional subjects and by such other similar means as may be from time to time decided by the committee of the Association.

The best of these papers are very impressive indeed and were well worth publishing. But a full set of either journal has not been readily available to those out of reach of Fisher's Rare Books section and there has been no simple finding aid to their very varied contents. So ASHET was delighted that Ross Coleman, always receptive to good ideas, was so supportive of the digitization of the full set of these journals. Some years ago, the University's expertise in this technology had been most satisfyingly displayed in the Ferguson Project which brought together digitally some of the most evanescent Australian publications of the early 1840s from a variety of libraries. Now we celebrate the presentation of an entirely home-grown University of Sydney product. I have been a satisfied user of Sydney University Library for almost half a century and I am delighted to be involved in the launch of the electronic version of both these significant journals.