

Capturing the Story of Jim Breen and Crabtree

Dr Jim Breen began his association with the Crabtree Foundation in 2009 when he was invited to join the group by Jim McGrath who was the manager of the Monash University Bookshop, Clayton campus at that time. After a career in the public service, Jim worked at the (now) Monash University Caulfield campus from 1985 and was head of the Robotics and Digital Technology Department. This department moved to Clayton in 1992 after the amalgamation of the information technology departments from Chisholm Institute of Technology, Caulfield with the Monash University, Clayton in 1990. Up to this time when Jim joined, the Crabtree Oration was held at the Monash Staff Club but after 2009 the foundation moved to the Savage Club in central Melbourne. Jim recollected that the membership at this time was very focussed on people associated with Monash and Latrobe Universities. The move to the Savage Club enabled the Foundation to expand.

Jim enjoys the social network of the Foundation and has met a range of very interesting people from different areas of scholarship. In our discussion, he named a few including Jenny Hocking who is an Emeritus Professor, History at Monash University. She has recently released a book on her work re the dismissal of the Whitlam Government including her fight to gain access to material from the National Archives of Australia. Jim noted another interesting person, that he has become acquainted with through the Foundation, is Elder Stephen Downes who is a food critic, writer, and journalist. Meanwhile Jim has also introduced several of his long-time fellow academics from the Faculty of Information Technology, Monash University to join the Foundation. It has also given him the chance to re-connect with former Monash colleagues such as Elders Paul Rodan, Ian Cummins and Roy Jackson, and acquaintances in the wider world of scholarship such as Elder Paul Williams (they were both on the Council of the VCA Secondary School, along with Scholar Liliane Cummins) and Elder Martin Comte, who was a music undergraduate with Jim's wife Scholar Julia Breen.

In 2018 Jim was given the opportunity to present the annual Oration at the Savage Club. Jim had long contemplated discussing the adventures of Joseph Crabtree in the world of international espionage with his role in the English seizure of Spanish gold from the Americas as well as helping bring about the English defeat of the French fleet under Admiral Villeneuve in 1805. Someone pointed out that with his background in computing perhaps he could explore the history of Crabtree and the developments in mechanical computing in the early nineteenth century. Unsure, Jim googled Crabtree and Ada Lovelace, who is recognised for her early work in programming. Sure enough, the answer popped up – he quickly realised that Crabtree was Ada's father not Lord Byron who was married to her mother for a brief time. Crabtree guided young Ada into the intellectual pursuits of mathematics and eventually to meet Charles Babbage who was then designing his calculating machines which became the precursor for the concepts of the modern computer.

Eloquently explained by Jim Breen, in his Oration *Joseph Crabtree: The Father of the Computer*, we now know that Crabtree's name should be amongst the early scientists who developed the first ideas to build a computer.

Jim's involvement with the Crabtree Foundation has increased in the past few years as he took on the idea that the Australian Chapter should have a webpage (which was suggested by fellow Scholar Chris Avram). Jim organised a domain name and is now the Webmaster. A brief history of Joseph Crabtree provides an insight into the man and his achievements. After establishing the website, Jim sought out the notes from the past Orations and these are now preserved for future Scholars. Jim

maintains this website and recently he has taken on the task of also maintaining the membership email list. His contributions have helped to preserve the presentations of past Orators, widen our knowledge of Joseph Crabtree and keep the Foundation visible in the modern world.

Scholar Barbara Ainsworth

Jim Breen's Home Page can be found at <http://nihongo.monash.edu/index.html>

Elder Stephen Downes <https://stephendownes.com.au/about/>

Jenny Hocking <https://research.monash.edu/en/persons/jennifer-hocking>

Chapter Domain Name <http://www.crabtreemelbourne.org/>