



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
Australian Capital Territory Branch

COMMONWEALTH NEWS

RCS Newsletter Spring 2019

Patron: HE General the Hon. David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) Governor-General of Australia

THE DECOLONISATION OF AFRICA AND ITS HIDDEN VOICES

The decolonisation of Africa— how it has been interpreted over the years, how it is being re-written, and the absence of African voices in official records—are driving the current research interests of African-born and educated Deryck Schreuder, Emeritus Professor of History, who gave the annual D.A. Low Commonwealth Lecture at the ANU in September.

Professor Schreuder drew on Professor Low's observation that African decolonisation owed as much—if not more—to local African agency as to 'high global winds of change' in the aftermath of World War II which saw Britain and others re-appraising the cost of maintaining their colonies in and the need to create something new.

Although tensions present interesting ways of probing the 'dissonances' of the past, between African social dynamics and this demission of European power in African empires, Professor Schreuder has found official records are lacking in what some scholars are now referring to as 'the hidden voices'.

'Imperial Studies', he said, 'present a one-sided account. Africa was changing rapidly before the *Wind of Change** speech by the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, and is not reflected in colonial documents.

'What was happening at the local level where things were changing among local African leaders?' he asked. 'What did the British think they were doing? How did they read situation?'

In the 19th century, when the colonial powers decided to carve up Africa among themselves for its natural resources, imposing taxes and new methods of agriculture, serious tensions grew in societies that 'saw the

** A line from this speech: 'The Wind of Change is blowing though the [African] continent ..' was generally seen as signalling whose side Britain would take in ending its Empire when Macmillan addressed, what has been described as an 'astonished' Prime Minister, Henrik Verwoerd, and the South African Houses of Parliament in Cape Town in February 1960. Macmillan had just spent time in (independent) Ghana with Kwame Nkrumah, and had been impressed by 'the growth of African national consciousness as a political fact'. Ed.*

world through spirits and gods and magical healing'. With the imposition of things like co-ops—and education provided by missions—trade unions emerged concerned with wages and conditions, and Africans 'began to respond to the world we brought them' and the 'new men' became associated with these and political movements.



Members of Professor Low's family with Professor Schreuder (middle) and RCS President Colin Milner (second from left) Ms Georgina Neuhaus (left) Mrs Angela Neuhaus, Ms Penny Low and her son Mr Anthony Harrison, and Mr Matthew Neuhaus, who is currently Australian Ambassador to The Netherlands.

The Pan African movement drew from the American experience. A small but significant number of Africans studied overseas: Julius Nyerere at Edinburgh University, Jomo Kenyatta in London to study Anthropology, Nkrumah and Hastings Banda to study medicine.

But the British continued to work through 'the old men', chiefs and leaders of stature, even though a number of new leaders came from families like this. This led to frustration and political activism e.g. Mau Mau in Kenya, a local civil war over land issues that challenged the colonial Government. This caught Britain's Colonial Secretary Iain Macleod out, according to Professor Schreuder, in that it took on the settlers and challenged the colonial government. Macleod, however, was constantly adjusting to change, and saw to the staged release of Mau Mau detainees, also of Kenyatta.

In 1959, when Macleod became Colonial Secretary, Sudan and Gold Coast were already independent and Nigeria was close. When his tenure ended in 1961, his policies had paved the way for the remaining 16 (except Southern Rhodesia) becoming independent by 1968.

FROM THE PRESIDENT . . .

As we near the end of the calendar year, I must advise Members that I will be retiring as Branch President at the AGM in February 2020 after three years in office. There will be a number of vacancies on the Branch Council to be filled and I encourage members to consider whether they might be willing to offer to serve the Branch in this way. I would be happy to speak with any Member who might be giving this matter consideration and may be contacted on my mobile at 0418 287 684 for this purpose.

I have served on Council for 16 years, from 1991-93 and again since 2006, and have found the overall experience most rewarding. I need, however, to focus more on other important (including Commonwealth-related) commitments in the time ahead. But I certainly plan to continue my membership of the Branch - and be available to assist appropriately as Immediate Past President.

For the Branch to function well in the future, key positions will need to be filled at the AGM. I am very pleased to advise that a relatively new member, Mr Saurabh Singh has joined the Council on an *ad hoc* basis until the AGM and is already helping to organise our membership data more effectively. It is encouraging to see new members like Saurabh coming forward to support the Branch.

Since the last issue, there have been two most enjoyable Branch events, on which reports appear in this issue - thanks once again to the efforts of the Editor, Mrs Maureen Hickman. These were a Morning Tea on Friday, 4 October at which Emeritus Professor Satendra Nandan spoke on 'Commonwealth Literature: An Uncommon Journey' and the Spring Luncheon held jointly with the Australia-Britain Society on Sunday, 20 October at the Royal Canberra Golf Club. Thanks must go to Satendra for his most interesting address and to Mrs Ann Sutton for her sterling work once more in organising the Luncheon.

A major event in September was the annual Commonwealth Lecture named for the late Emeritus Professor D.A. Low, a Vice-Chancellor of the ANU, a member of this Branch and Founder of the Commonwealth Round Table in Australia. A report on Emeritus Professor Deryk Schreuder's address, on the history of the decolonisation of Africa—in which he and Professor Low shared personal experience as well as a profound interest as historians—is on page 1.

The Branch's Christmas Drinks will be held on 8 December (*see notice p.4*). We also look forward to welcoming a delegation of RCS youth members and associates from India in early December.

Colin Milner

LAUNCH OF CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

The wisdom of indigenous communities that found a way to live in harmony with their environments has been drawn on to create a regenerative climate change model that will be taken to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Rwanda in June 2020.

At the London launch of *Common Earth* in October, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland, said that this ancient wisdom will be married with emerging innovations, technologies and scientific approaches to create a network of projects that could be replicated and adapted to any country, community, country or region. She described it as 'looking at practical, existing strategies to clean streams, restore forests and damaged ecosystems, protect marine health and educate our populations'. It also aims 'to challenge the economic and development approaches that led to the decline of our planet'.

The proposed model is the outcome of a meeting of government officials, environmentalists, scientists, economists and representatives from indigenous groups at the Commonwealth Secretariat to discuss how the initiative can achieve sustainable development while protecting the planet.

SPRING LUNCH AT GOLF CLUB



The azaleas were in full bloom around the clubhouse at the Royal Canberra Golf Club in Yarralumla when members and friends of the RCS ACT Branch joined those of the Australia-Britain Society for a buffet carvery lunch in October, jointly hosted by the two societies.

Among guests (*above*) were Mrs Sue Gage (*left*), Dr Hugh Craft and the Hon. Margaret Reid.

There were two young speakers at the lunch. They were Caitlyn Crick, of Merici College, winner of the 2019 PESA Award, and Ross Lillington, 2019 ABS Young Endeavour Sailor who gave a presentation of his experience as a deck hand on the replica of Captain Cook's *Endeavour*, illustrated with photographs of its journey along the coast of SE Australia.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY THROUGH COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE

If the English language is the 'binding vine, or golden thread' of Commonwealth literature, for Fiji-born Satendra Nandan, it has also been the 'great gift' which became the sustaining and creative force of a lifelong journey that began at aged 16 on reading his first English book, a simplified version of *Treasure Island*.

In a talk to RCS members in October, Professor Nandan—a Canberra resident since his parliamentary career was cut short by the first Fiji coup in 1987—gave a wide-ranging presentation of his life in literature, and especially Commonwealth Literature. This, he explained, is not the same as English, Irish or American Literature; Commonwealth Literature, as a body of works, is barely 60 years old, the first conference on the discipline being held at the University of Leeds in 1964.

'A distinctive aspect of Commonwealth Literature,' he said, 'is that while the creative medium is English, the sensibilities it embodies are not traditionally English.'

'While English Literature in its forms and framework affect Commonwealth Literature, it in turn has affected the teaching and study in departments of English, worldwide.'

Professor Nandan identified three major sources of Commonwealth Literature. The first—literature from Australia, Canada and New Zealand—extends the same cultural themes and mythology, exploring new landscapes away from the motherland, with English as the creative medium.

'Then, there are writers from the Indian subcontinent, who write in English but against profoundly rich and varied literary traditions on their own native land, older even than English.'

Among these writers, he added, are those who have produced some of the contemporary world's finest novels and autobiographies; for example, the autobiographies of Nehru and Gandhi succeeded in changing British public opinion about India's struggle for freedom.

Professor Nandan said that the third category of Commonwealth Literature is 'the variety of harvest from cultures close to our own lives, where there's a richness of oral traditions with which scarcely anything was done before European exploration and colonisation.'

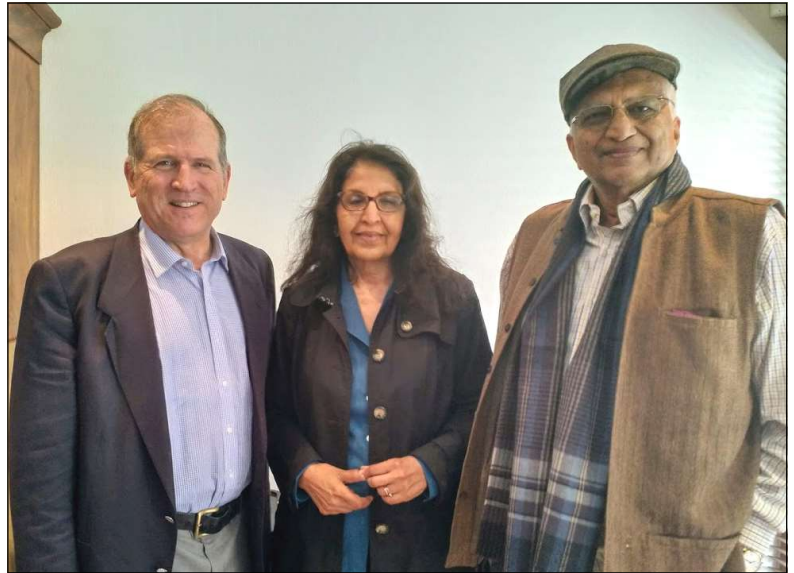
'In our part of the Pacific, nothing was written until a little over 200 years ago. In Africa, the first novel published in English was Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in 1958.'

'Some of our finest Commonwealth writers have lived, loved and created literature in exile, remembering

their lost landscapes and loves with greater intensity than their mundane lives.

"Sometimes," he added, "literature alone seems to give some balance to our sense of common humanity, a common home, a scarred landscape or shared history."

A transcript of Professor Nandan's talk is available on the RCS ACT Branch website www.rcsact.org



Emeritus Professor Satendra Nandan (right) with his wife, Dr Jyoti Nandan and RCS ACT Branch President, Colin Milner, who hosted the Literature event for RCS members at his Kingston home in October.

VISIT BY INDIAN YOUTH DELEGATION

To mark the 70th anniversary of the Modern Commonwealth, a group of young people from India representing the India-Australia Youth Cognizance Project (CYCP) will arrive in Canberra in early December to strengthen ties with their Australian counterparts.

The visit is an initiative of the Commonwealth Students' Welfare Group of India.

A program of meetings with government representatives and other officials, members of the diplomatic corps, NGOs and RCS Branch members is being organised by Jack Milne, RCS National Youth Coordinator who is also a member of the RCS ACT Branch Council.

A basic focus of the CYCP is developing leadership and team work skills while building self-confidence.

It also aims to provide opportunities for young people to re-evaluate some of their beliefs, attitudes and assumptions, particularly around different cultures and their own priorities in life.

RWANDA SETS DATE FOR 2020 COMMONWEALTH LEADERS' SUMMIT

In a video message in September, The President of Rwanda Paul Kagame and Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland invited Heads of Commonwealth countries to attend their biennial meeting in the week beginning 22 June, in Rwanda's capital city, Kigali.

The choice of Rwanda, as host of the 2020 leaders' meeting, was made at the last CHOGM in London in February 2018. The decision was considered both inappropriate and surprising, according to some observers of Rwandan politics, further dividing opinion that began with Rwanda's admission to the Commonwealth in 2009 only 15 years after the genocide in which 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu may have died.

The admission of Rwanda, which, like Mozambique, had no prior relationship with the British Empire, was approved despite a critical report by the international chair of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Professor Yash Ghai, who argued that it was premature, so soon after the genocide. In any case, he said, it did not comply with the principles agreed by Commonwealth leaders in their 1991 Harare Declaration.

With the backing of Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, as well as other African governments and the United Kingdom, Rwanda became the Commonwealth's 54th member at the 2009 CHOGM.

In an Opinion piece published in the *Round Table Journal** earlier this year, Richard Bourne, an adviser at London's Ramphal Institute, says that Kagame, a Tutsi, was in Uganda during the genocide, becoming a 'prominent commander' in Musaveni's bush rebellion. His main concern, however, is whether Rwanda is a suitable host for CHOGM, given its failure to honour key principles of the Commonwealth Charter, namely commitments to democracy, human rights and freedom of expression which should have been considered by Commonwealth leaders before making their decision.

Richard Bourne cites several examples of Rwanda's flouting of these principles, including targeted assassinations of its enemies, including its own people living in exile outside the country, many of them in South Africa; documentation by Human Rights Watch of over 100 cases of illegal detention and torture in military detention centres between 2010 and 2017; and Britain suspending budgetary support for the regime after it was found to be backing the M23 rebel group in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo.

Citing examples of crack-downs on freedom of expression in Rwanda, Richard Bourne says that between 1997 and 2017 eight journalists have been killed or have gone missing, 11 have been given long jail terms and 33 have been forced to flee.

Rwanda is currently a Commonwealth member of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, together with Australia, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa and the UK. Unlike them, says Bourne, it has made no voluntary pledges for supporting rights, either nationally or internationally.

* *The Round Table*, founded in 1910, is the oldest journal providing analysis and commentary on all aspects of international affairs affecting the Commonwealth. Richard Bourne's Comment piece was published in the February 2019 issue (Vol. 108, No.1). Along with other articles, it can be read in full by accessing the Round Table's website at

www.commonwealthroundtable.co.uk

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

RCS Christmas Drinks

The President, Colin Milner, will host Christmas Drinks on

Sunday 8 December
3.00pm to 5.00pm
at

Unit 12, The Elms,
36 Gosse Street, Kingston

Acceptances by Sunday 1 December to Colin at colinmilner@7mail.com or 0418 287684

Parking: on Gosse Street or nearby Telopea Park. Unit 12 is inside the complex, not on the street.

RCS BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Members are reminded that annual fees fall due on 1 January each year. To be eligible to vote, or to stand for Council, fees for the current year (2019) must be paid by the date of the Branch AGM scheduled for 10 February 2020. To check if you are financial please contact our Treasurer, Mrs Ann Sutton, Tel. 62951297

NEW MEMBER

The President and Council of the Royal Commonwealth Society ACT Branch warmly welcome Mr Michael Keating as a member.

The RCS ACT Branch Newsletter *Commonwealth News* is published four times a year. Letters and contributions are welcome. Contact: Maureen Hickman, Editor, at maureen.hickman@bigpond.com