

*“a movement to draw together  
in bonds of comradeship the  
English speaking peoples of the  
world”*

*The founder of The English-Speaking Union  
(ESU) - Sir Evelyn Wrench in London in 1918*

## ANNUAL REPORT ON ACTIVITIES, 2023-2024



The English-Speaking Union  
Victoria Branch  
ABN 42 004 297 803

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## 1. PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The 2024 financial year recorded the completion of chimney and roofing restoration work on ESU House and the funding of new educational and cultural initiatives.

Works on our Victorian heritage-registered building in Ascot Vale included the re-construction and stabilization of chimneys, replacement of roofing gutters and slate tiles, and the restoration of masonry. The high-quality workmanship of Abode Restoration, heritage building specialists, will see our building continue to serve as a landmark in Ascot Vale for decades to come.



I am grateful to ESU Director and Building Committee chairman, Geoffrey Mills, for his unremitting dedication to our heritage property's restoration and preservation. Geoffrey and his Committee have already begun planning the internal plaster and decorative restoration work required to restore the grandeur of our meeting rooms. Internal building work will proceed in the coming year, with guidance from our heritage architect, Trudy Rickard, and in accordance with our Conservation Management Plan. To mark the completion of the exterior restoration, we opened ESU House to the public on 11 May, combining a talk about the building by Geoffrey and Trudy with tours and discussion.

This year witnessed two ESU milestone anniversaries. On 31 August 2023, I joined other ESU members including ESU Secretary Margaret Birtley in celebrating the South Australia Branch's centenary in Adelaide. In November 2023, ESU Treasurer Andrea Shershoff and I attended a reception at Government House, Sydney, in honour of the NSW Branch's centenary.

Our investment program continues to generate good yields that support our activities and power our educational and cultural initiatives. This year, we have sponsored the publication of *Mathilde*, a gloriously illustrated magazine aimed at traditionalist women, and the launch of a new publication, *Observer & Review*, which addresses cultural, historical and metapolitical issues. The Oldham Wedlick Scholarship will give life to a new Australian poetry journal in late 2024. Our awards programs are similarly funding a range of projects that advance our mission by promoting aspects of the heritage, culture, identity and fellowship of the English-speaking peoples.

In this context, I wish to acknowledge the contribution of member Lucas Smith in developing and managing our new initiatives - an ESU Writer's Residency, ESU University Student Fellowship, and an ESU Formal Verse Contest. The formal verse contest is being judged by Stephen Edgar, a winner of the Prime Minister's Literary Award. These projects seek to attract interest from a new cohort of cultural creators.

In November 2023, we welcomed our new Administrative Officer, Kristian Noonan, who is shouldering much of our Branch's administrative workload, enabling ESU directors and volunteers to focus on strategic and creative goals.

During the year, our Branch re-ignited our Friday Night Forum events, allowing ESU members, grant winners and sponsorship recipients to generate discussion on topical issues with audience participation. Highlights included a world premiere reading of a new Shakespearean-themed play, *Arrant Knave*, in ESU House in November and talks by ESU members about re-thinking economics and immigration. Other successful activities included presentations by recent award

winners Jordan Grantham and Dr Liz Rushen AM and our annual gatherings for “Poems we love”, the end-of-year festive season, and Anzac Day.

In reflecting on the achievements of the year, I thank all members for their loyalty and support. I am also grateful to members of the Council who have devoted their expertise and considerable personal time by assisting with the governance, management and operations of our organisation.

Robert Furlan

PRESIDENT

The English-Speaking Union (Victoria Branch) Ltd



The South Australia Branch centenary celebrations included a reception hosted by the Lord Mayor of Adelaide in the Queen Adelaide Room at the Adelaide Town Hall. Pictured with Robert Furlan are (on his right) three members of the SA Branch and (on his left) Marion Furlan and Margaret Birtley AM from the Victoria Branch.



Pictured in November at the NSW Branch centenary reception at Government House in Sydney are (L-R) Chris Perriam (President, SA Branch), Robert Furlan, John David Olsen (Vice-President, NSW Branch), Peter McInerney (NSW branch), Andrea Shershoff (Deputy President, Victoria Branch, second from right), and Dr Martin Hess (President, ACT Branch).



Shown above is the anniversary cake that guests enjoyed at the fine dinner organised by the ESU South Australia branch as part of its centenary events.



ESU Victoria Branch President Robert Furlan presented a gift to the South Australia Branch, to honour its centenary in August. Pictured above (L-R) are: Chris Perriam (SA Branch President), Mrs Gill Perriam, Robert Furlan.



2. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

In April, the Council reviewed its Strategic Plan, noting the completion of many projects during the period from March 2022 to April 2024 and setting new Operational Priorities for 2024-2027. During the past year, and as communicated to members in May, the ESU has operated as an ‘engaged membership’ organisation; this model will be reviewed at the end of 2024.

The ESU’s strategic directions are as follows:

Mandate

The English-Speaking Union (Victoria Branch) is a charity established for the purpose of making the English-speaking peoples of the world better known to each other and of engaging in any educational work designed to further that end.

Vision

An engaged community embracing our English-speaking heritage, culture, identity, and connections.

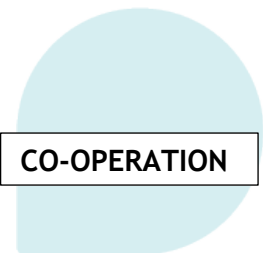
Mission

To shape the future by promoting the heritage, culture, identity, and fellowship of the English-speaking peoples.

Values



We love and advocate the heritage and culture of English-speaking peoples.



We establish and foster personal and community relationships.



We hold ourselves accountable for supporting and providing quality educational, cultural and community programs to support our vision.



We act with integrity, ensuring what we do is ethical and honest.

Strategic Pillars



By promoting and advocating the traditions and identity of the English-speaking peoples.



By encouraging and fostering goodwill, cooperation and understanding with other organisations and the wider community.



So that we are an effective and efficient organisation.



Directors oversee each area of operational activity. Responsibilities at 30 June 2024 were:

Area of responsibility	Responsible member of the Council
Advocacy	Robert Furlan
Educational initiatives	
Governance & administration	
Awards	Margaret Birtley AM
Communications	
Cultural & social activities	
Finance & investments	Andrea Shershoff
Building & premises	Geoffrey Mills

Short reports on areas where activity has occurred during the year are provided in sections 3-8 of this document.

### 3. GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION

The Council is the governing body of the ESU.

During the period from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, the Council met on 12 occasions.

One director, Dennis Katsonis, resigned from the Council in July 2023. We thank him for his long service in the role of Treasurer.

The previous term of director Margaret Birtley concluded at the AGM held on 26 November 2023. At that meeting, she was re-elected (unopposed) for a further three-year term.

At the same AGM, Lukas Drobik and Andrea Shershoff were elected for three-year terms: Mr Drobik as a director and Mr Shershoff as the Treasurer.

This table lists the directors of the Council as at 30 June 2024.

Role	Name	First elected / appointed	Latest election	Number of Council meetings attended
President	Robert Furlan	2006	27 Nov 2021	12
Deputy President	Andrea Shershoff	2022	27 Nov 2022	10
Treasurer		2023	26 Nov 2023	
Company Secretary	Margaret Birtley AM	2017	26 Nov 2023	12
Director	Jay Hutchison	2022	27 Nov 2022	9
Director	Geoffrey Mills	2017	27 Nov 2022	11
Director	Lukas Drobik	2023	26 Nov 2023	6

The ESU employed a full-time Administrative Officer from November 2023 to the present.

In June, the Council hosted a brainstorming session with interested members, aiming to identify projects and future directions that ESU can support. The session was productive and has resulted in the ESU making contact with a number of organisations that are now keen to apply for our awards and sponsorships.

## 4. AWARDS

During the year, the ESU Awards were promoted via our *E-News* bulletin, direct emails, website (<https://esuvic.org.au/content/awards>) and word-of-mouth.

We thank those ESU members (including some members of the Council) who kindly assisted as members of the judging panels for the Awards.

Three new awards with a literary focus were launched in March 2024 and advertised in the mid-year edition of *Quadrant* magazine: a Writer's Residency for a month at ESU House (stipend: \$5,000), a Formal Verse Contest with prizes totalling \$8,000 and a University Student Fellowship (stipend: \$1,000). The winners will be announced later in 2024. We thank ESU member Lucas Smith for his initiative in proposing and developing these awards. He is now managing their implementation as our appointed contractor.

No awards were made for the 2024 Major Project Grant or for the July 2023 round of the Minor Project Grant.

We congratulate the winners in the following categories.

### Oldham Wedlick Scholarship (November 2023)



The Scholarship supports the further study and appreciation of the English language.

#### *Full scholarship: Clarence Caddell*

Clarence Caddell is an established poet, with many of his works being published in books, magazines, and/or journals. He will use the Scholarship to produce a literary journal to 'foster continuity with the deep tradition of English poetry'.



#### *Half scholarship: Dr Mark Schier*

This grant will enable Dr Schier 'to research and document the changes in the usage of the English language as reflected in contemporary versus traditional versions of hymnals and songs of faith'.

### Minor Project Grant (December 2023)



#### *Joint Winner: Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network*

This grant will support the creation of a children's book which highlights 'the history and chronological evolution of Melbourne's land-side maritime trade operations...since early colonial times'.

## Minor Project Grant (December 2023), *continued*



*Joint Winner: Clarence Caddell*

This grant will support the publication of ‘a volume of poems that cumulatively convey a narrative of divorce and family dissolution.’

## Minor Project Grant (March 2024)

**Winner: Matthew Higginson**, Edmund Burke Society of the Riverina

This grant is being used ‘to intellectually and politically energise English-speaking Australians in the Riverina so that they can engage with their fellow man and with the institutions of government’.

The Society aims ‘to grow an understanding of the cultural allusions, legends, and mythology of the English-Speaking world, and of the political and legal framework that developed from this history’.

The grant helped the Edmund Burke Society, in September 2024, to host former deputy Prime Minister John Anderson AC who delivered a talk on the future of Western Civilisation.



## 5. COMMUNICATIONS

All ESU members have provided their email addresses, so posted communications are, normally, no longer required.

The ESU uses email to communicate relevant news to members and to a wide range of community groups and educational organisations. The ESU operates two social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter).

During 2023-2024, the ESU published eleven editions of the *E-News* bulletin:

- #13 and #14 in August
- #15 in October
- #16 in November
- #17 and #18 in December
- #19 in February
- #20 in March
- #21 in April
- #22 in May, and
- #23 in June.



## 6. CULTURAL & SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Eligible people can now borrow items from the Sir Owen Dixon Library via mail. This allows access to our books and other items for those who are unable to attend ESU House.

The ESU was pleased to host the following events during the year:

### 2023

Saturday 12 August	<i>Poems we love</i> - a Zoom gathering facilitated by ESU Deputy President Andrea Shershoff. Members and friends shared and discussed examples of poetry. This event was open to the public and attracted bookings via the national Poetry Month calendar hosted by Red Room Poetry.
Friday 8 September	Friday Night Forum: <i>Publishing Confidential - candid insights for Australia on written culture's future</i> was presented by Jordan Grantham, winner of the 2021 Oldham Wedlick Scholarship.
Monday 25 September	Members and friends visited the Royal Historical Society of Victoria to view the exhibition <i>Garryowen's Melbourne</i> and to enjoy a talk by the curator, Dr Liz Rushen AM. Dr Rushen is an ESU Social Member. Her exhibition was supported by an ESU Minor Project Grant in the March 2023 round.
Friday 3 November	Friday Night Forum: <i>Arrant Knave - a play-reading</i> . This new play dramatizes the story of Shakespeare's contemporary, the comic actor and dancer William (or Will) Kemp who morris-danced from London to Norwich across nine days during February and March 1600. Playwright and actor Tim Ferris introduced Kemp's life and times, then read Kemp's account of his journey, <i>Nine Days Wonder</i> . After a dinner break, Tim directed a reading of <i>Arrant Knave</i> . The story & concept of <i>Arrant Knave</i> are by Tim Ferris and Liz King who were jointly supported by an ESU Project Grant in 2022.
Sunday 26 November	The Annual General Meeting for ESU members was held by videoconference.
Saturday 9 December	A convivial and festive end-of-year luncheon was held at The Last Jar, an Irish-themed hotel in Melbourne.

### 2024

Friday 1 March	Friday Night Forum: <i>Rethinking Economics</i> was presented by ESU member Dennis Katsonis.
Thursday 25 April	An ANZAC Day Service and BBQ lunch was held at ESU House.
Friday 3 May	Friday Night Forum: <i>Rethinking Immigration</i> was presented by ESU member Denis McCormack.
Saturday 11 May	<i>ESU House - Talk &amp; Tour</i> was presented by ESU Director Geoffrey Mills with heritage architect Trudy Rickard. This event was open to the public and attracted bookings via the Australian Heritage Festival calendar hosted by the National Trust.

We thank all who helped plan and deliver these activities, and all who participated.

## 7. FINANCE & INVESTMENTS

### Financial report

The ESU's audited financial report is provided as a separate document for members at the Annual General Meeting.

### Sponsorships

Sponsorships awarded during 2023-2024 supported:

- The development and growth of *Mathilde Magazine* (<https://www.mathildemagazine.com>). Published twice per year, the magazine is determined to 'hold fast to what is good'. This high-quality hardcopy magazine facilitates free enquiry into the cultural *zeitgeist*, stands for reclaimed feminism, and explores the legacy of our Western heritage without being constrained by a political script.



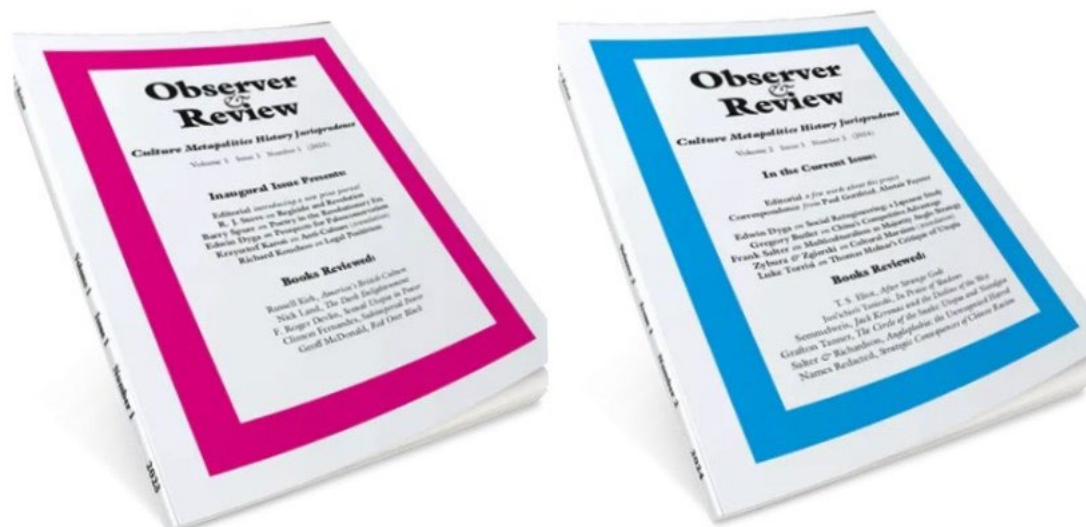
- The **2023 Performance Festival** organized by the Speech and Drama Teachers' Association of Victoria (<https://sdtav.org.au>). The Festival aims to give young people the opportunity to compete in a safe and supportive environment that enables them to be challenged, to grow in confidence and to develop their acting, public speaking and communication skills. In 2023, over two hundred entrants in 16 sections competed for trophies, medals and monetary prizes. The ESU usually attends the Festival and presents the prizes for public speaking events but ill-health prevented ESU participation on this occasion.



Tanya Salinas-Byrne, SDTAV President,  
with some of the prize winners at the 2023 Performance Festival.



A sponsorship awarded during 2022-2023 to Sidestream Press has enabled publication this year of the first two volumes of *Observer & Review*, a scholarly journal that features articles on culture, metapolitics, history and jurisprudence (<https://sidestream.press>).



## 8. BUILDING & PREMISES

Comprehensive restoration of the exterior of ESU House was completed at the end of 2023, as shown in the photograph below. ESU thanks Abode Restoration for its skilled and dedicated work.



ESU also thanks heritage architect Trudy Rickard for her assistance as our Contract Manager for the work done by Abode Restoration. Trudy continues to advise on the implementation of projects identified in the *Conservation Management Plan* that was prepared for ESU House by Landmark Heritage in 2022.

In May 2024, Trudy Rickard and Geoffrey Mills delivered an illustrated talk about the former English, Scottish and Australian Bank building and the recent exterior restoration and repairs undertaken by the ESU. This successful public event was promoted as part of the Australian Heritage Festival, organized annually by the National Trust.



Trudy Rickard and Geoffrey Mills speaking about the restoration of our building to an enthusiastic audience in the Board Room at ESU House, May 2024.

## 9. MEMBERSHIP & GENERAL MEETINGS

The Annual General Meeting for 2022-2023 was held by videoconference on Sunday 26 November 2023.

With sorrow, we record the passing of two long-term ESU members:

- Long-standing member Frances Nicholls passed away peacefully on 22 August 2023, having reached her 103rd year. Frances was an ESU stalwart and a member of the Victoria Branch for more than three decades.
- Heather Chase passed away peacefully on 5 September 2024 following a brief illness. A long-standing member of the ESU Victoria Branch, Heather and her late husband Brian Chase first met at a Branch function in our South Yarra premises in the 1970s. Both Heather and Brian contributed significantly to our Branch over four decades. Heather served on the ESU Council from 1995 until 2015. She was a mainstay of our House Committee and



volunteered her time generously to ESU activities, helping to set up rooms for functions and assisting with the running of events. Heather also served on the ESU Education Committee and was a selection panel member for the Oldham Wedlick Scholarship from 2008 to 2012. She regularly participated as a Victoria Branch delegate at national ESU meetings throughout her period on the Council. Her commitment to our Branch was exemplary.

We extend sincere condolences to the family and friends of these members.

## 10. MEMBERSHIP OF THE AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

Our President Robert Furlan served as President of the Australian English-Speaking Union Ltd (AESU) throughout the 2023-2024 year. The AGM took place in Adelaide on 1 September 2023.

Two major anniversaries were celebrated this year. We congratulate the South Australian Branch and the New South Wales Branch on their centenaries and were delighted to attend the formal celebrations in each state.

## 11. JOINT ACTIVITIES WITH KINDRED SOCIETIES

The ESU is a member of the Council of British & Commonwealth Societies and was represented at several meetings during the year.

In October, the President and Secretary attended the launch of *River to Bay: Victoria's Maritime History*, a children's book commissioned by the Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network (MMHN) with support from an ESU Minor Project Grant in the December 2021 round. The launch was held at the City of Melbourne's Library at the Dock, in Docklands, with excellent views of Melbourne's active maritime infrastructure and culture. Our ESU banner had pride of place beside the lectern at the book launch. *River to Bay* is written by Carole Wilkinson, illustrated by Prue Pittock, and published by Wild Dog Books. It has subsequently been recognised as a Notable Book in the 2024 Eve Pownall Award run by the Children's Book Council of Australia.



Pictured above with *River to Bay* are (L-R):  
The Hon. Ted Baillieu AO (Chair of the Australian Heritage Council and former Premier of Victoria) who launched the book;  
Dr Jackie Watts OAM (Chair of the MMHN); and Cr Nicholas Reece (then Deputy Lord Mayor, City of Melbourne).



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