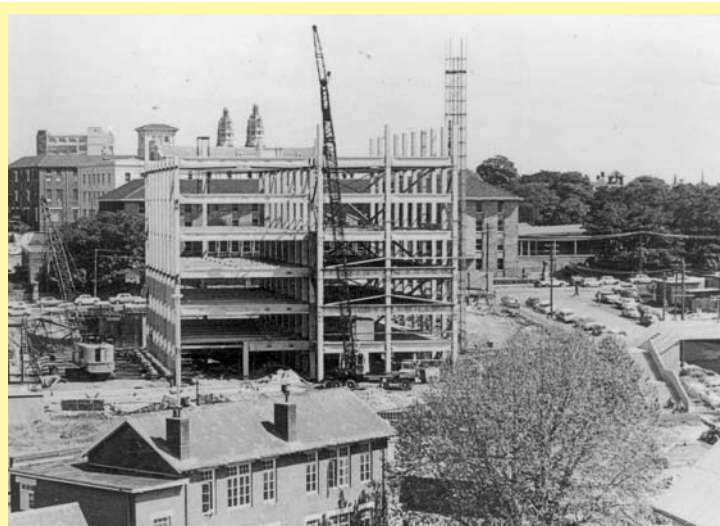


1966-1975

Biochemistry Takes Off

By 1966, the Society's membership had increased to 662 people. A dawning of a new scientific era was heralded with the awarding of the 1965 Nobel Prize to a French team for their work studying the Lac operon, thus providing the first example of a transcriptional regulation system. One of the researchers, Jacques Monod, suggested the existence of mRNA as the informational link between DNA and proteins. Geoffrey Kellerman remarks, "At that stage we were starting to understand the structure of large molecules – proteins and DNA. Then the Monod material started to come through and it was even understood by students. That's when the major shift occurred from the metabolic pathway emphasis to what are the actual catalysts, what's the coding material and how is it translated. We went from relatively simple chemistry to these macromolecular structures." During this time, Australian universities expanded rapidly in size and number. Gerhard Schreiber tells of the mood when he came to Australia from Germany in 1973: "the general feeling was one of possibilities for great developments in the future, Monash University had been started in 1961, and La Trobe in 1970. It was Whitlam's time and there was quite a bit of hope for good changes."



Construction of the Biochemistry and Microbiology building, University of Sydney in 1971.

New Initiatives

In the late 1960s, the Society ran a series of four Summer Schools. These technical updates were very popular. They ran for two weeks mid-February and were organised by senior-level volunteers from the Society. The topics were Microbial Genetics (1966), Enzyme Kinetics (1967), Techniques and Interpretations in Protein Chemistry (1968), Biochemistry and Methodology of Lipids (1969). These Summer Schools did not continue on, largely due to the great organisational effort required.

Geoffrey Kellerman recalls a significant development of the late 1960s being that, "Edwin Webb, who as President, made the initial hard decision to put guards on the doors and therefore to admit only those who had registered. That made a significant difference to our finances as previously quite a number of the locals used to drop in free."

In August 1970, the Society published its first ABS Newsletter. It was a black and white four-sided missive with an olive green banner, sent out approximately quarterly. Bruce Stone comments, "Once upon a time the only communication we had was the edited Proceedings of the Society. But there was a feeling that we needed some sort of communication during the year with Society members. And so a newsletter was instituted. It was a very modest four-sided communication but given that we didn't have the internet at the time, it was very useful." Michael Clark concurs, "Mick Gould becoming the Society's first Editor in 1969 was a major transition. He did a lot of work behind the scenes, making sure everyone attended the Council meetings and coordinating scheduling for the various annual meetings." Indeed, Mick Gould is the Society's longest-serving Executive member; as Editor for a total of 17 years (1969-1973 and 1975-1998).

Bruce Stone recalls the fierce debate regarding a possible Society publication. "There was an idea that the ABS should produce a journal. People pointed to other national biochemical journals which had not really flourished and in the end the proposal was not taken up. I think, in hindsight, that was a very good thing." Today, the Society's publication, the Australian Biochemist, remains a highly informative news and scientific resource that is non-peer reviewed.

- (1) Simple Michaelis Theory leading to the integrated Michaelis equation. Treatment of Experimental Data.
- (2) Steady-State Kinetics of more complex systems.
- (3) Acyl-Enzyme Systems.
- (4) The Meaning of K_m and K_s .
- (5) Multiple Substrate Systems.
- (6) Kinetics of Allosteric Systems.

Left: ABS 1967 Enzyme Kinetics Summer School lecture outline.

Below: The first issue of the Society's newsletter.



1966 ABS Conference, 23-26 May, University of Queensland



From left: J.E. O'Hagen, F. Gordon Lennox, Joe Bornstein and Tony Linnane taking a tea break.



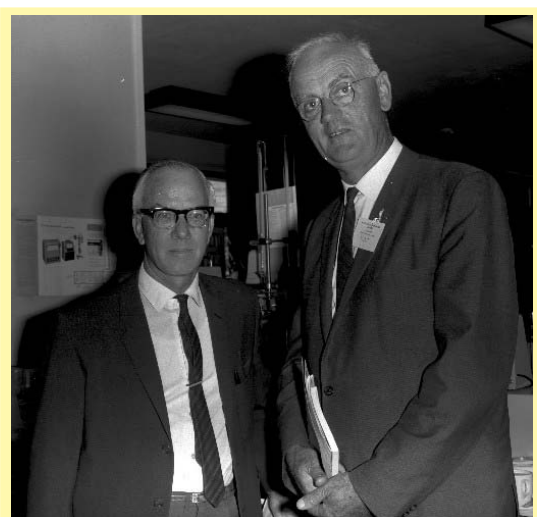
Frank Gibson (left) getting to know overseas visiting speaker Eric Conn (USA).



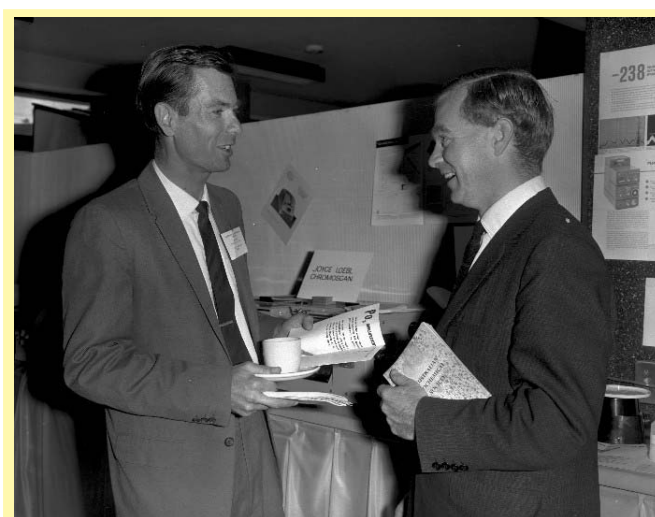
From left: Keith Boardman, Ted Thompson and Ian O'Donnell talking science.



Two future Presidents of the Society, Geoffrey Kellerman (left) and Bill Elliott.



ABS 1966 President, John Falk (left) and W.J. Scott.



Queensland locals David Simmonds (left) and Ken Scott.

1966-1975

Student Memories

In the course of our interviews, it was surprising to hear most people recall their first Society meeting, generally from the late 1960s and early 1970s, as their favourite. Liz Dennis declares, "I'd like to reaffirm that in the '60s, ABS was really an important influence on me, it showed me where science was and the sort of things people could do in science. I'm sure it was important in my decision to continue on in science." Nick Hoogenraad relates his experience, "I guess it's like your first love – the meetings I remember most fondly are the ones where I was still a PhD student. I remember listening to two giants of the Society, Frank Hird and Michael Berry, fighting it out in a symposium where people were hanging from the chandeliers. There were a few meetings where some of the big players in Australian biochemistry clashed." Phillip Nagley tells, "In 1967, I was an Honours student at the University of Sydney, which was where the ABS meeting was held that year. I was able to hear a whole range of research presentations first-hand. I really enjoyed the process of seeing those people who had done the work: not always lab heads, often PhD students, postdocs weren't so prevalent in those days. It was just good to see a range of scientific topics dealt with, most of which I could understand and enjoy." Michael Clark adds, "I first presented in 1968 at ANU. And as most people would admit, it is a terrifying experience, I'd never given a public presentation, nor had I been attacked in public! It was an interesting occasion, but I enjoyed it. It was an enormously positive experience."



The Schreiber lab in the mid-1970s, University of Melbourne Biochemistry Department, (left to right) Kaylene Edwards (PhD student), Gerhard Schreiber, Anne Millership (MSc student) and Joerg Urban (postdoc).

Annual Conferences

As the meetings continued to grow in size, they developed in character too. Keith Boardman relates an anecdote from the 1969 Adelaide meeting, "The sponsor was the South Australian Brewing Company and we had our annual dinner down by the waterfront. One of our overseas speakers was David Trentham and it was hilarious, I can remember him dancing on the table. After that it was suggested that AGM dinners should be fun affairs." He also valued the 1971 Brisbane meeting due to its excellent international speakers, "We had Rodney Porter the antibody chemist, Harold Scheraga on protein conformation and developmental biologist John Gurdon".

Bruce Stone recalls the 1975 La Trobe University meeting for several reasons, "We ran it just three or four years after the Department started, and that was quite a big event for a small department to run. Because it was during the vacation (in May), the heating had been turned off in the lecture theatres. So on Monday morning, the members froze until we stoked the boilers. The dinner was quite a big affair, and it went pretty well, except the wines, it turned out, had been watered down. And I sometimes wonder if it was Professor Eddie Dawes (who was one of our visitors and also a prestidigitator) giving us a performance of his prowess, turning the wine to water. Anyway, as a result of that, the caterers refunded us a dollar for every head at the dinner and that money went up to Armidale to support the next dinner."

Left: the mid-1960s new look ABS Program and Abstracts. These booklets also contained advertisements from the newly created Sustaining Members.



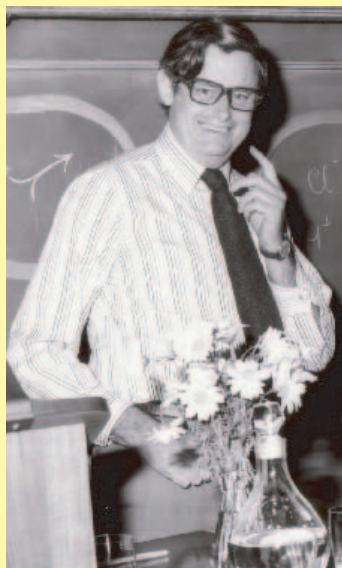
PERKIN-ELMER

*cordially invites your attendance for
Pre-Dinner Drinks and Buffet Dinner
to be held on 22nd May, 1968
at 5.30 p.m. for 6.30 p.m. dinner
at Bruce Hall*

*Entry by ticket only, obtainable at
Perkin-Elmer Exhibition, 1st Floor, Chemistry Laboratory,
Chemistry Building*

No. 324

Left: Keith Boardman in the roaring '70s



1966-1975

Overseas Speakers

The second decade of the Society's existence witnessed the advent of invited international speakers at the annual scientific conference (see Visits of Speakers article in this issue). It was felt that Australian biochemists could only derive so much benefit from talking amongst themselves, and that an external stimulus would boost both the meetings and the field. This process was formalised by the mid-1960s, whereby overseas speakers (typically three) were invited to speak at the annual meeting then travel around to Australian centres, the itinerary arranged by the Society's honorary Travel Officer. In 1966, an alliance was made with the British Biochemical Society, whereby a British biochemist would visit as one of the three international guests. This was a reciprocal arrangement, such that a leading Australian biochemist travelled to lecture in the United Kingdom. Clem Robinson recalls that the speakers' trips were covered at the Society's expense, noting, "The overseas speakers clearly had an important influence – some of them gave talks which were absolutely brilliant and inspiring and set me going scientifically afterwards." Keith Boardman points out, "The person who saw that we needed to interact a lot more with the international community was Tony Linnane. He was responsible for that 1972 international meeting in Sydney on the 'Biochemistry of Gene Expression in Higher Organisms' where we had 21 overseas speakers. And I think that did put the Society on the map – Sanger (of protein and DNA sequencing fame) was one of the speakers at that meeting."



Nobel Prize winner,
Frederick Sanger.

Start of Sanger's
1972 ABS
meeting abstract.



SEQUENCES IN GENETIC NUCLEIC ACIDS

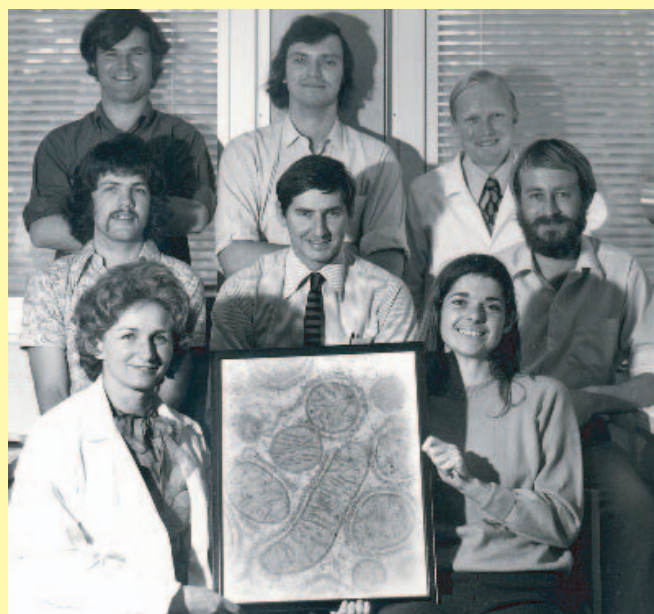
F. Sanger

Laboratory of Molecular Biology, M.R.C., Cambridge, England.

Little is known about the nucleotide sequences in the informational nucleic acids of higher organisms; however methods are being developed for the study of these sequences and have so far been applied only to the genetic material of bacteriophages. Some of this work from our laboratory will be discussed, on the assumption that the techniques will eventually be extended to the study of higher organisms.

Federation of Asian and Oceanian Biochemists

In 1972, ABS was a founding member of the Federation of Asian and Oceanian Biochemists (FAOB), now FAOBMB, along with the Indian and Japanese societies. FAOBMB is one of the four regional organisations of IUBMB, and functions by stimulating interactions between neighbouring national biochemical and molecular biological societies. FAOBMB currently has 19 constituent member societies representing more than 18,000 biochemists. Several Australians have taken leading roles in the organisation, namely, Edwin Webb (President 1972-1974), Tony Linnane (President 1975-1977), Fyfe Bygrave (Secretary-General, 1980-1987) and Bill Sawyer (President 1999-2001). Bill Sawyer notes, "Quite frequently we're all so taken up with our local issues and our national issues that we forget the international ones. I think they can be just as important." John Wallace concurs, describing FAOBMB as a useful forum, "We've got an opportunity to interact with lots of people we don't know very well at this stage, as well as our traditional friends in North America and Europe." In 1995, ASBMB hosted the 7th FAOBMB Congress in Sydney (see 1986-1995 section).



Fyfe Bygrave is the longest-serving office bearer of FAOBMB. He is pictured with his lab in 1974 (left to right) back: John Roberts, Rupert Thorne, Greg Barritt centre: Terry Spencer, Fyfe Bygrave, Ken Reed front: Arlene Daday, Heather McIntyre.