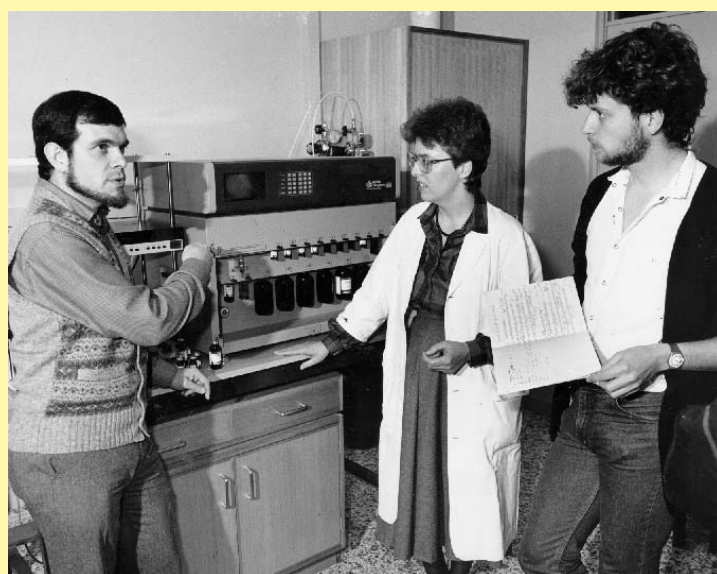


## Society Activities and Annual Meetings

In this decade, the Society became very active in running or financially supporting numerous workshops and symposia. These were often held directly before or after the Society's annual meeting. In the early 1980s, the Society began to support the burgeoning specialist meetings that started to appear. Such activities are still strongly supported by ASBMB today. At that time, the Society's scientific meetings were attracting about 600 delegates annually, and there are divided opinions whether specialist meetings detract from these or not.

Many interviewees held warm memories of the 1976 ABS meeting held in Armidale. David Hume reminisces, "There was a lot of fun, it was quite a collegial meeting. It was relatively small and quite friendly which is what you sacrifice if you have the big meetings. Armidale was a different kind of venue, it wasn't dominated by local people who went home at the end of each session for the day, it was more social. Due to today's time constraints and a greater level of professionalism in science, it stopped being a vocation that people did for the enjoyment and become something people did for the business. You don't talk about unpublished data and you worry about the competition, we've gained productivity but lost enjoyment in the process."



**Team who created the first complete working gene to be made artificially in Australia in 1985 (left to right) Phillip Nagley, Gabrielle McMullen and David Gearing.**



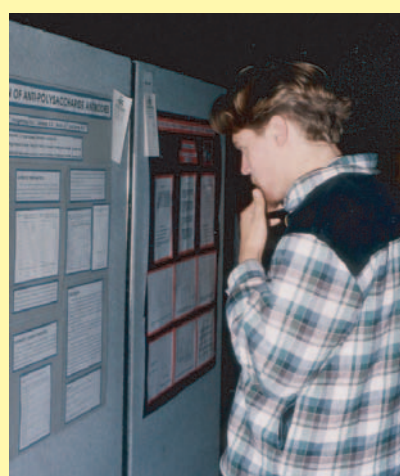
**Some eye-catching Lorne Meeting t-shirts from over the years.**

## Lorne Meetings

The Lorne Protein Meeting was established in 1976, and Gerhard Schreiber recalls its roots as "the protein discussion group in the Biochemistry Department of Melbourne University, started by Syd Leach. One day we thought it would be good if we could discuss protein topics in a nice environment, and Bruce Grant suggested we could meet at Erskine House." Initially, the Society was unsure of where it stood with respect to this new venture. However, in 1977 the Society donated 50% of the meeting's costs. Bill Sawyer notes that, "at that time it didn't appear to be a big change, it just evolved into a huge success. But if you look around at the world, you see the same thing happening." Later, the Lorne Genome and Cancer Meetings were modelled after the successful Protein Meeting. Gerry Wake notes the phenomenon of the time that, "The Society meetings became very general and people were less attracted and started to go to specialist meetings. That's largely been overcome now. Now the two types of meetings have developed where they both make a very positive contribution. I find Society meetings of real value, I like going to more general talks because sometimes you get ideas for your own research by listening to people who are speaking outside your own field." Bruce Stone reflects, "We've seen the Lorne Meetings flourish, being important fixtures on the calendar. One of the problems at the time was having two large meetings in the same calendar year, and a lot of people felt that they didn't want to do that. But that's changed now – people move around the country more freely than they did." Phillip Nagley concludes, "The Lorne Meetings have taken their place alongside the ComBio meetings and are not really competitive with them. They have different characteristics that attract people for different reasons. And so long as the meetings are not held at the same chronological period of the year, I think we can continue, not just to coexist, but to nurture and cross-promote each other as being high points of scientific exposure and communication. ASBMB is very happy to sponsor one speaker at each of these Lorne meetings every year."

## Student Poster Exhibitions and Prizes

In 1984, student poster exhibitions with prizes were established at the Society's scientific meeting. Clem Robinson explains why this was such a useful development, "Everybody now knows poster sessions, but before then it was all oral presentation, and that curtailed the number of possible presentations enormously. Nowadays with poster sessions, everybody can present something." Bill Elliott continues, "The introduction of posters enabled the main conference to become very structured into organised symposia, and that, I think, made a tremendous difference." Gerry Wake remarks, with respect to poster prizes for students, "That was largely the initiative of Michael Clark. And it's had a very positive influence – I hadn't realised the tremendous boost it would give to individual students. I think the ABS was one of the first societies that I'm aware of ever to introduce these prizes." This poster exhibition has grown exponentially over the years, today with poster presentation sessions running over three days and numerous monetary prizes. Philip Kuchel admires the posters: "The prominence given to posters and technology has enabled them to be produced in a much more elaborate way than they were in the past, so it was really something for students to be proud of as a work of art as well as the science. Often the science is very much in the early stages, and yet they can still stand by their poster and be proud of it."



Science communication – posters and their presenters at the 1995 ASBMB meeting.

## International Speakers at Society Meetings

Through the 1970s, the Society continued its scheme of inviting three overseas speakers to the annual meeting and to travel the country. Indeed, in 1976, the Society had to raise \$1400 from pharmaceutical firms to pay for the first class fare for Sir Hans Krebs to visit Australia. In 1979, after many years of patient negotiation by Tony Linnane, an exchange arrangement of an annual visitor with the German Biochemical Society was agreed upon, with Karl Decker as the first guest. However, this scheme ended in 1983 due to the cessation of funding from the Department of Science and Technology. Moreover, funding of a British visitor ceased simultaneously, due to the Royal Society withdrawing its sponsorship of the arrangement.

A new direction had to be forged. Michael Clark points to, "John Ballard – he was largely responsible for modernising the Society. At that time our overseas visitors were relatively few and a lot of money was spent having them visit all centres. John proposed that we invite more people to the meeting; therefore making the meeting more attractive to the members, and thereby keeping the numbers up. So we went from 2 or 3 or 4 overseas speakers at our annual meeting to 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. And then it increased more and more as you see nowadays." Clem Robinson concurs, "When John Ballard's plans came in, the speakers weren't treated quite as royally, they were just given a lump sum and their visiting schedule around the states was up to them. But the resulting change was that there were many more visitors to come. With modern air travel being a lot cheaper than it had been, we now had many more visitors and that reflected a wider spread of interests in the Society. One of the good reasons for change was that it was extremely hard to get people to come for three weeks, most people wanted to get it over and done with in a week, which was really impossible."



John Ballard.

Thus, in 1984, a new policy was implemented, whereby numerous overseas visitors were invited to speak at each annual conference. Thirteen came in 1984, costing the Society the equivalent sum as the four who came in 1983 under the old scheme. Meetings were also centred around several major themes to entice and focus delegates. John de Jersey comments, "I can remember we used to invite three international speakers through the '60s and '70s. And they used to go on a trip around the country and that was excellent. But I think you can contrast that with what you have now, over 20 overseas speakers annually. It's a fact that you go to a meeting, you can meet and talk to a substantial number of leaders in the field internationally."





## 1982 IUB Congress

As a further recognition of the growing strength of Australian biochemistry, the Australian Academy of Science was awarded the right to hold the 12th International Congress of Biochemistry in Perth in 1982. The successful bidding for the meeting was mainly due to the efforts of Tony Linnane and Bill Elliott as representatives of the AAS. The Society was subsequently invited to become a co-sponsor of the meeting and its members and officers played major roles in its organisation, including Tony Linnane who became the President of the Congress. Naturally, this meeting stood out in many people's minds, most of all because of the organisational challenges it assumed. Eight satellite meetings were held in conjunction with the Congress. Gerhard Schreiber recalls fondly, "It was the best meeting – well-



A Rottneest  
Island quokka

organised, relaxed, a huge number of people attending in a beautiful campus with these discussion areas outside in the lawn on campus. And the idea of organising the Sustaining Members exhibition in a huge tent was quite original." John Ballard continues, "It was a pretty major thing for Australian biochemistry to bring in the International Union for a meeting here. But that was difficult because it was very much Cold War time." Keith Boardman details, "Yu. Ovchinnikov, an eminent Soviet biochemist, was invited to be a major speaker at the Congress. But Ovchinnikov was also Vice President of the USSR Academy of Sciences and he was not granted a visa by the Federal Government to attend the IUB Congress. Consequently the entire Soviet delegation withdrew from the Congress." John Ballard recalls fondly, "My group ran a specialist meeting associated with the IUB meeting on Rottneest Island. And it was the first time they'd ever had scientific conference at Rottneest. We had about 100 people mostly from overseas and it was great fun. I remember a roly-poly Irish guy saying, 'If I stay here one day longer, I'll never go home.'"

## Society Finances



In 1983, ABS bought a 'microcomputer' to allow the Treasurer to computerise the records. Computerisation allowed the Society to create a membership database to aid in streamlining subscription, producing membership cards, collating members' interests to guide meeting topic selection and publishing the names of new members. It was a big investment by the Society, putting 20% of its reserves into the Apple II computer.



Apple II computer

At that time, the Society stood on relatively shaky financial ground. John Williams observes, "The way the Society conducted its

financial affairs was really just to lurch from one year to the other and raise enough money during that year to conduct the meeting. We had no reserves to finance much and I think that's all the members wanted. And in the end, it caught up with the Society and thank God for Burt Zerner who was able to come along with his abilities and to start to put the Society on a good financial basis. The Society was still fragile financially and was very dependent on the number of members it had and attendance at meetings. If ever there was a drop-off in meeting attendance, the Society was really in trouble. This was due to the ridiculously low annual fee and meeting fee. But even now, the Society is still cheap." Treasurer Burt Zerner saw that the Society's reserves were going backwards, holding only \$30,000 at the end of 1984. He suggested that the membership fees be significantly increased and then keep in line with inflation, with a target of \$150,000, three times the annual turnover of the Society. Burt spoke emphatically at the Society's 1985 AGM, "I have no doubt that it is easier to get the  $\text{Zn}^{2+}$  out of urease than to separate some 20% of our members from their subscriptions. With adequate reserves we shall be able to do much more in the way of innovation which our current fragile finances do not allow." He also noted that there was a 15% dropout rate of members each year: "I believe we need to be much more aggressive in the recruitment of members and I commend that to you, the State Representatives." After this, the Society's funds rose quickly to \$70,000, finally reaching Burt's target in 1990. John de Jersey observes, "Burt Zerner was a very strong and controversial personality. He put the Society on a strong financial footing and insisted on the Society building a bank balance that would allow us to move to more expensive meetings and have money behind us. It sounded like a lot of money at the time in the '70s and '80s, people thought, 'What do you want that for? We're only a society, we wouldn't want more than a couple of thousand.' But he rightly proposed that you have to provide for emergencies, you've got to be able to pre-fund, you've got to have that resource behind you and the Society is in a very strong position today because of that. I don't think we'd be able to foster the ComBio concept if it hadn't been for that sort of money." Today in 2005, the Society has a very healthy financial reserve, due to prudent financial management by a series of highly competent treasurers. The financial successes of the ASBMB, and later ComBio, meetings over the past decade have contributed greatly to the Society's financial health.