



# The Australian Anthropological Society Newsletter

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## President's Report 2004

Presented at the Annual General Meeting of the  
Australian Anthropological Association

Melbourne, Friday 1 October 2004, 2:30-4:30pm

### Introduction

When I took office around this time two years ago, I presented the AGM with a detailed strategic plan. This plan was ratified by the AAS Executive in November 2002, after a process of discussion and amendment, and the final version was published on our website and in the Newsletter. The aim was to lend direction, transparency and accountability to the activities of the Executive and thereby to ensure that the society continues to develop better services and remains relevant to members.

As I go into the details of this year's report, I would like to stress that this strategic plan continues to serve as a fairly comprehensive description of the most important tasks of the society and its Executive. In the second part of my report, however, I will speak about a number of new initiatives in response to last year's public debate on AASnet about a cluster of related issues that were of obvious concern to members.

This year, in general terms, has been one of consolidation. In the first 12 months of my term in office, the executive initiated many important institutional and constitutional changes. In 2004, the main emphasis shifted towards the practical and organizational implementation of these earlier decisions. In the course of implementing the changes legislated in 2003, it was important to have a period of observation and consolidation. For example, with the incorporation of TAJA subscription into AAS membership benefits, it was very important to wait and see how the change would impact on membership numbers and on the finances of both TAJA and the AAS, before making any new financial commitments.

### Part 1. Achievements in the Year 2003-2004

I now return to the structure of the strategic plan in order to systematically report on the range of our achievements in 2004.

#### Objective 1: To increase the membership base of the AAS

The figures we have so far show that 1) the incorporation of TAJA at a favourable price as part of every AAS membership, 2) the tightening of membership category definitions, and 3) the introduction of a two-tiered structure of AAS conference registration fees - with a 30% lower fee for paid members of the AAS than for non-members, together have had an overall positive effect. It is a little early to say, but it seems that the number of paid-up members is stable (the fact that a number of lapsed members had to be removed from the members list means that the current figure we have on the size of our membership is smaller but more realistic). At the same time there has been an increase in the quality of the services we are able to provide to members. New members also joined the society in response to an advertising campaign to reach post-graduate students and staff, by writing to HODs and asking them to post the letter on their departmental email lists. I take this opportunity to thank all those who cooperated in support of this effort.

A particular effort was also made to recognize the important role of post-graduate students in the society. Today I will be awarding the first AAS Thesis prize, a student-related initiative which was approved by the AGM last year, and for which guidelines and administrative procedures had to be developed this year. I would like to thank all those who applied. The application deadline in this first year was extended twice, in recognition of the fact that many departments were not yet fully aware of this opportunity to promote their students.

Early this week I also talked at the inaugural AAS postgraduate students conference. This conference was a stupendous success, with 60 formal registrations and nearly 100 people turning up. There was a rich array of papers and much lively discussion. The conference was very professionally organized and run by Melbourne

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students working together with colleagues not only from across Australia, but notably also from New Zealand. Thanks and congratulation in particular to Tanya King and Karen Turner, but also to all the other student volunteers who contributed to this conference as well as the main AAS conference.

I would very much like this kind of postgraduate conference to become a continuing feature of our annual gatherings henceforth. I also believe the creation of a student representative body would be valuable for the society, and constitute an important step towards making the AAS more relevant to its younger generation of members.

**Objective 2: To improve administrative services provided to AAS Executive, members and the public**

The incorporation of TAJA meant that we had to be able to provide an accurate list of current financial members at any given time, something we had never been able to do before. This demand for accurate membership records lent further urgency to an already evident need to improve AAS administrative procedures following a conditional audit last year, which had been the end result of a long history of patchy record keeping. Thanks to the valiant efforts of our treasurer David Martin, our administrative officer Joanna Tan, and our new auditors, we are now using MYOB software to its full effect and are able to run a much tighter operation than ever before. This has come at some expense because it caused a significant temporary increase in the administrator's workload. On the other hand, we were fortunate to be able to locate a new auditor locally, in Canberra, who has been more effective in helping us to streamline administrative procedures, as well as charging a lower fee. We also had to appoint a new administrator after Joanna decided to take a full-time position elsewhere.

**Objective 3: To ensure that the AAS Code of Ethics is relevant and reflective of the research and working circumstances of Australian anthropologists**

In late 2002 we appointed an Ethics Subcommittee under the leadership of our Vice-President, Mandy Thomas. The committee produced a draft proposal which, after due consultation with members and several amendments, was ratified by the AGM in October 2003. No further work was required at this level for the time being. However, we will today ask members to approve a new initiative to produce and submit a submission to the ethics review committee of the NH&MRC. We will hear more of this later from Mary Edmonds, and I would like to urge you to support this initiative. As I noted in last year's report already, "anthropologists' research has long been subject to ethics approval by the relevant committees of universities, other Australian government or non-government institutions, or as part of the research regulations of foreign governments.... if we do not define such standards ourselves, others will define them for us." We now are seeking to address this issue by taking our case to the NH&MRC.

**Objective 4: To deliver professional services to subgroups in the AAS membership**

David Martin will later speak on the status of the Clearing House, which was to be the vehicle for delivering professional services and was to form an interim arrangement for a new category of membership in relation to different service levels. I think that, perhaps, the time is not yet ripe for major change in this area. I do not feel I have a mandate to approach government in order to see whether applied anthropology, particularly in the area of native title, could be made subject to government regulation and a process of accreditation. Perhaps this issue requires further debate in the coming years.

**Objective 5: To increase and consolidate international linkages**

Following a visit by a representative of the ASAA-NZ's at last year's AGM, which you will probably recall, an agreement between The Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand (ASAA/NZ) and the Australian Anthropological Society (AAS) has been ratified by the Executive. This means that all members of the AAS are now able to attend the New Zealand annual anthropology conference at the same cost as local members, and that the AAS president can attend free of charge, and vice versa. This first step toward better cross-Tasman cooperation is an important one and long overdue.

In a second major development this year, the AAS has entered an entirely new era of international cooperation. I was awarded travel funding by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research to attend the 'World Anthropologies Conference' in Brazil, on 9-14 June 2004. This meeting was attended by the heads of 14 national and international anthropology associations. The workshop was simply aimed at "Strengthening the Organization and Effectiveness of the Profession [internationally]". However, I went to Brazil with a much more ambitious and specific agenda, namely to create a global network of anthropological societies. What I envisaged was a global agreement which would begin with an MOU similar to the one the AAS had signed with the ASA/NZ earlier this year. Other participants agreed with me but were sceptical whether we could actually achieve such an outcome. To my own surprise, and to the surprise of the organizer, Prof. Gustavo Lins Ribeiro, we actually managed to formulate and sign an international agreement to this effect within the three days of the workshop. The agreement has already been ratified by our executive and by the executives of several other national and international organizations, and the others are soon to follow. Once the agreement is in full operation, members of the AAS will be able to attend under the same conditions as local members at the national conferences of the AAA (USA), Canada, the South American Federation, Brazil, the African Federation, South Africa, EASA, France, the ASA/UK, as well as Japan, India, Russia and the International Union (IUAES). Other national societies

are likely to join as time goes by, and the new World Council of Anthropological Associations grows.

In addition to the obvious benefits of this initial agreement for our members, the WCAA will also be a very powerful tool to bring some of the concerns raised by anthropology, for example, about the plight of indigenous peoples, to world bodies such as the UN, and to do so by speaking with a united voice. This has never been possible, because there has never been a representative global anthropology organization consisting of democratically elected national representatives. For me it has been a great pleasure to be able to make a contribution to this historic step on behalf of the AAS.

**Objective 6: To increase the visibility of our profession in Australian society**

The Executive has been able to take at least one important step this year towards promoting Anthropology in the wider arena of Australian Society. We have done this by choosing to lend the support of the AAS, in the capacity of a founding member, to a new organization called the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, or CHASS. CHASS is designed to make representations to Australian politicians and government institutions on behalf of the social sciences. The inaugural AGM of CHASS was held on June 16 at the National Press Club in Canberra. On behalf of the AAS, Mandy Thomas was able to attend the first meeting between social scientists and members of parliament. If you are interested in more details about the activities of CHASS, please visit their home page ([www.chass.org.au](http://www.chass.org.au)). Other than this, the society can occasionally offer more specific advice to government bodies on policy matters, but unlike last year, there were no requests of this kind in 2004.

In the second part of this report, I would like to look at some of the issues we began to discuss last year on AASnet and at the AGM, in order to report how the AAS Executive has responded.

**Part 2: New Initiatives**

The AAS responded to last year's debate on new membership categories in two ways. First, we have foreshadowed on AASnet a resolution to alter and thereby clarify the definition of existing membership categories by making a number of minor changes to the wording of constitution. Second, we have carefully considered a suggestion originally made by Mark Hannah that a new category for non-professional adjunct members be created, which would allow non-anthropologists to become paying members with restricted rights. We agreed to design and propose such a new category to the AGM for approval. Again, the text has been foreshadowed on AASnet, and I will return to that later.

For now I merely wish to point out that this new category of "Associate Member" had to be constructed in such a way that it would not dilute the positive implications of full membership status, which involves undergoing a

formal process of accreditation and requires specific professional qualifications. I think we have successfully safeguarded against any such problems and hence I am urging you to vote in favour when we put the resolution to this AGM later on.

I hope the attention the Executive has paid to issues publicly discussed on AASnet last year provides evidence that we appreciate it when members take an interest in shaping the future of the society. The executive continues to look forward to receiving more suggestions and comments from members in order to help us in our efforts to further improve the AAS for everyone's benefit.

Another new initiative concerns the formation of a national network of senior academic and non-academic representatives, by expanding the character and scope of the informal assembly of Heads of Departments that has traditionally met annually at the AAS conference. The idea is to explore ways of improving communication between leading anthropologists at the coal-face of the discipline, to include anthropologists in non-academic positions of influence, and to improve cooperation between this group and the AAS. The initiative reflects the fact that I am well aware of the many challenges anthropology is facing in Australia. The AAS must work in close collaboration with a committee of Heads of Departments and representatives of major employers of anthropologists, if the discipline is to survive and flourish in Australia in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Again, I will return to this point later, and will ask for your approval of this initiative.

One final, general comment. I take the rich diversity and high quality of the papers presented at this conference as an indication of the significant and ongoing potential of anthropology to make a contribution to Australian society and to the world at large. Providing we can learn to publicly promote ourselves more effectively, and can maintain a strong spirit of collegiality, I am optimistic that we will be able to weather the current storm, which comes in the wake of an unprecedented level of higher education reform in the last two decades.

**Dr Thomas Reuter, President, AAS**

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Roger Just, Keynote Address

## The Inaugural AAS Thesis Prizes

### PhD Prize:

#### **Winner:**

John Patrick Taylor, The Australian National University  
*Ways of the Place: History, Cosmology and Material Culture in North Pentecost, Vanuatu* (2004).

Some examiner comments:

“At once a substantial ethnographic account”; “theoretically sophisticated”; “theoretically omnivorous”; “contributes to several on-going debates within Melanesian anthropology”; Taylor is “clearly a gifted, careful, sensitive and insightful field worker and his thesis is a remarkable and outstanding piece of work, one of the very best pieces of ethnographic writing and analysis I have read in some long time”.

#### **Runner Up:**

Murray Garde, The University of Queensland

#### **3rd place:**

Mandy Wilson, The University of Western Australia

#### **4th place(s) (equal scores):**

Teresa Lea, The University of Sydney

Darlene McNaughton, James Cook University

#### **5th place(s) (equal scores):**

Christine Rocha, The University of Western Sydney

Steven Francis, The University of Melbourne

### Honours Prize:

#### **Winner:**

Noah Pleshet, The University of Sydney

*Value in and out of Place: On the Viability of Indigenous Australian Economies* (2003).

Some examiner comments:

“Without doubt the thesis is a work of excellent scholarship. His use of Heidegger's Dasein-analytical framework... shows a high degree of clarity of thought. Indeed, it is a work of real intellectual toil”.

“A remarkable achievement, far surpassing the expectations one might normally hold of an Honours thesis... It is a thesis of PhD and publishable quality”.

“This is one of the most inspiring analyses I expect to be able to examine at an Honours level”.

“All in all, this is a medal standard thesis”.

#### **Runner Up:**

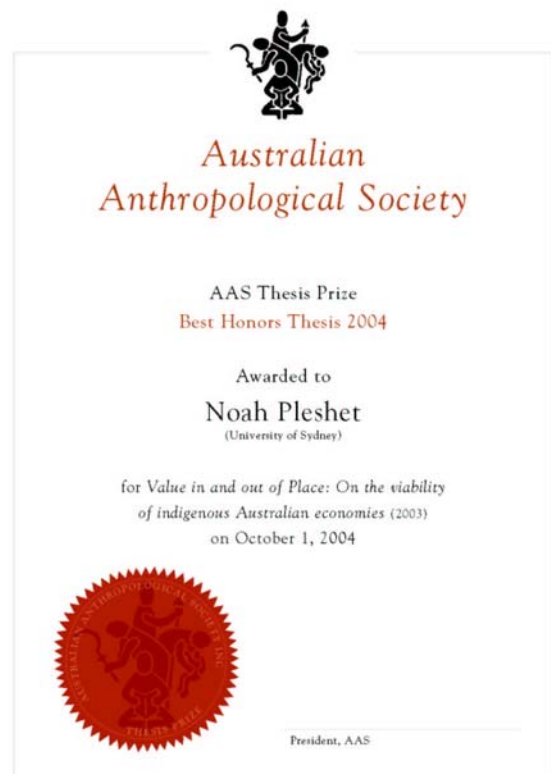
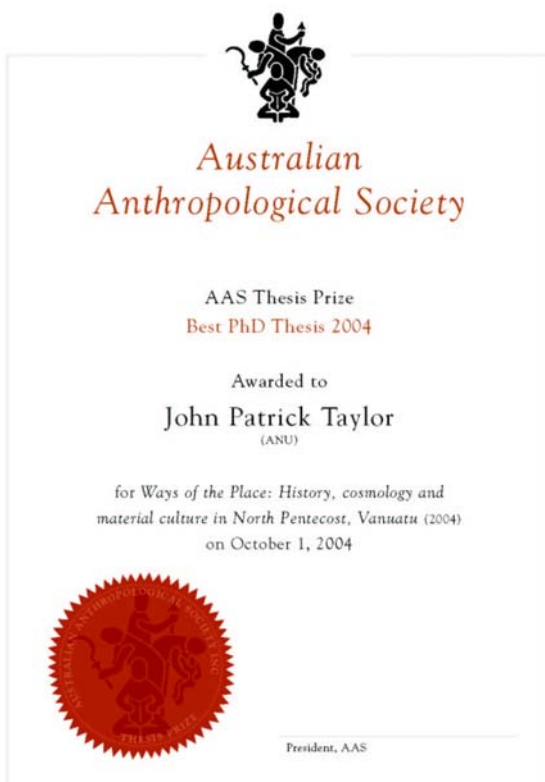
Michael Fabinyi, The University of Melbourne

#### **3rd place(s) (equal scores):**

Alex Parsons, La Trobe University

Paul Walsh, The University of Western Australia

## **Congratulations to the winners and to all the nominees!**





AAS President, Thomas Reuter presenting AAS Honours Thesis Prize for 2004 to Noah Pleshet

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***Moving Forward: Australian Anthropological Society Postgraduate Conference 27<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> September 2004***

*Moving Forward* was a Postgraduate Conference and Workshop designed to address issues of specific relevance to postgraduate anthropologists and held in conjunction with this year's Australian Anthropological Society conference.

Workshop presenters, Steve Francis, Veronica Strang and Andy Dawson, offered expertise and advice and provided a forum for accessing practical advice on career development in anthropology. Our society president, Thomas Reuter, provided an excellent address that discussed the future of the discipline and the current role of postgraduates in Australian anthropology, inspiring debate amongst postgraduate students about 'our place' in anthropology.

The conference organisers also provided a Work-in-Progress session that encouraged research students to present their current interests, explore emerging research fields and theoretical directions. Research interests amongst current students are diverse and exciting, ranging from, experiences of disability, beauty and poverty in Lao, refugees in rural Australia, social capital and local councils to new and emerging meanings of celebrity. Postgraduate anthropologists are also merging their interests with other disciplines including education, political inquiry and social work.

During the conference we registered 86 participants, these registrations were from students and staff from around Melbourne (RMIT, Melbourne University, La Trobe and Monash), Australia (Sydney, ANU, WA, Adelaide, NT) and International guests (New Zealand, France, Ireland and Germany).

The response from the audience was one of enthusiasm and support. This kind of postgraduate forum has not existed for anthropology students in the past so based on it's success, we all felt inspired to continue the event in

following years. The presenters felt the atmosphere was friendly and encouraging, using the forum to explore possible theoretical directions, unpack methodological frustrations and share fieldwork reflections. Overall, students expressed enthusiasm for an event that recognised postgraduate inclusion within the discipline and brought together a range of students from around the country and the world, to share research interests and to build new networks.

**Karen Turner and Tanya King**

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**Submission to the NH&MRC review of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research involving Humans**

The October AAS AGM in Melbourne adopted a resolution in relation to a proposed submission to the Australian Health Ethics Committee of the NH&MRC for their review of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research involving Humans. This is the Statement that is the current basis for university Human Ethics Committees. For many researchers in the humanities and social scientists, the implementation of the Statement by our Human Ethics Committees is highly problematic, and the review offers an opportunity to address some of the key problems. A small working group at the ANU – Mary Edmunds, Robert Cribb, Carolyn Strange, Nicolas Peterson – working from an earlier paper prepared by Robert Cribb (*Monash Bioethics Review* 23(3), July 2004), drafted a submission: *A proposed alternative model for ethical practice in research appropriate for the social sciences and humanities*. This was circulated on AASNet, revised in the light of comments received, and endorsed by the AAS Executive in November. Copies have also been provided to the Academies of the Humanities and Social Sciences for their consideration. The paper itself has been submitted to the review committee who are in the process of preparing their discussion paper. We await that paper with interest.

The key points of the submission are as follows:

1. The current model is based on medical and clinical practice. This is unsuitable for much research in the humanities and social sciences, where much contemporary research has moved in the direction of being a collaboration or partnership between researcher and subjects that has no immediate parallel in medical or clinical research. We suggest that a revised *Statement* give explicit recognition to a different model: that of the research conversation or **research collaboration** 'as a distinctive form of investigation, equal in standing to experimentation and survey, and raising different ethical imperatives' (Cribb 2004). We recognise some exceptions to this model.
2. We suggest that, in order to encourage and ensure ethical conduct in research in the humanities and

social sciences, the *Statement* might better take an approach of limiting itself to a statement of basic principles and approaches, rather than attempting to set out particular procedures for applying those principles. This would assist in shifting the focus of Human Research Ethics Committees from what has in practice become a legalistic approach about management of risk to the university rather than a true fostering of ethical research conduct.

3. We also suggest that, rather than orienting research ethics towards rules and their possible violation, the AHEC review lead, after appropriate consultation, to the adoption of a formal *Code of Good Conduct in Humanities and Social Science Research*. This *Code* would complement professional codes of conduct for the various disciplines and would focus on how best to undertake research.
4. Finally, we suggest that, rather than giving responsibility for all ethical clearance to a small number of central HREC committees, whose expertise across a wide range of disciplines is likely to be uneven, the AHEC review lead to the establishment of a series of ethical advisory committees, at faculty or disciplinary level, drawn from experienced researchers. These advisory committees would offer non-binding advice to colleagues and students on ethical issues in humanities and social science research, fostering a clear sense of ethical conduct to guide researchers through unexpected issues.

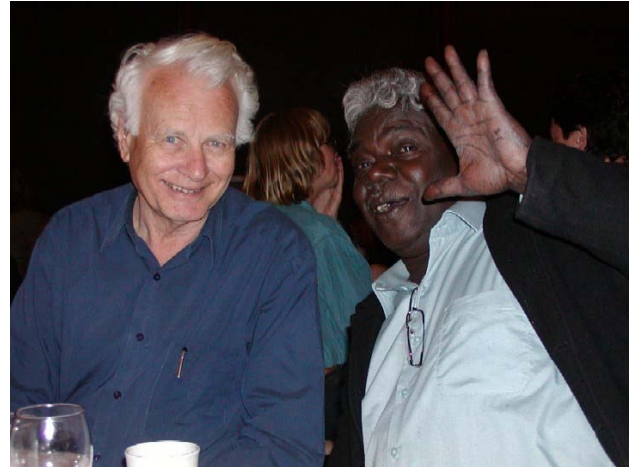
**The key recommendations of the submission are as follows:**

- Explicit recognition in the *Statement* for a model of research collaboration appropriate to research in the humanities and social sciences;
- after appropriate consultation, the establishment of a formal *Code of Good Conduct in Humanities and Social Science Research*;
- except in relation to clearly defined vulnerable groups or exceptional circumstances as identified above, the transfer of responsibility for ethics clearance of research projects from HRECs to appropriately constituted committees at the faculty or disciplinary level;
- the establishment of a series of ethical advisory committees, at faculty or disciplinary level, drawn from experienced researchers.

A full copy of the submission will be made available in due course on the AAS web site, and any updates on developments will be circulated on AASNet.

**Dr Mary Edmunds, Centre for Cross Cultural Research**

## Friends at the 2004 AAS Conference Dinner



Michael Allen and Joe Neparnga Gumbula, the inaugural Liyangarramirri Visiting Fellow at the University of Melbourne



Diane Austin-Broos and David Trigger



Gift Exchange – Thankyou to the 2004 AAS Conference Organisers

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## New Books by AAS Members

Gary Craig and Andrew Dawson, Sandra Hutton, Nerys Roberts and Mick Wilkinson (2004) *Local Impacts of International Migration*. Beverley: HU Press, pp. 118. ISBN 1 903704 18 9.

Monique Skidmore (2004) *Karaoke Fascism: Burma and the Politics of Fear*. Ethnography of Political Violence Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

**Paul Alexander**, author of *Sri Lankan Fishermen* (1982, revised 1995), *Creating Indonesian Cultures* (1989), and co-author of *In the Shadow of Agriculture: Non-farm Activities in the Javanese Economy, Past and Present* (1991), as well as many other works, passed away suddenly on Sunday 5 December. Paul was an Associate Professor at the University of Sydney for many years and supervisor to many students, including Mary Hawkins, Rita Armstrong, Elizabeth Ganter, Alison Leitch, Kathryn Robinson and Linda Connor.

VALE

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## Obituaries

This year saw the loss of a number of key figures in Australian Anthropology, who will be sadly missed. The Australian Anthropological Society Executive expresses its deep appreciation for their service to the discipline, and we extend our condolences to family, friends and close colleagues:

**Peter Hinton**, from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney passed away after a long illness on 23 May. Peter was Secretary to AAS in 1978 and 1979 during which time he initiated the AAS Newsletter. He was also editor of *Mankind*, later renamed *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (TAJA), from 1978 to 1994. Peter is author of a number of key publications on the Karen of northern Thailand including: 'Why the Karen do not grow opium: competition and contradiction in the Highlands of North Thailand' (*Ethnology*, 1983, 22:1-160); 'Do the Karen really exist?' (in J. Mckinnon and W. Bhruksasri (eds), 1983: 155-168).

**Harry Oxley**, author of *Mateship in Local Organisation: A Study of Egalitarianism, Stratification, Leadership and Amenities Projects in a Semi-Industrial Community of Inland New South Wales* (1974), passed away on 8 September, aged 70.

**Marie Reay**, author of *The Kuma: Freedom and Conformity in the New Guinea Highland* (1959), editor of *Aborigines Now: New Perspective in the Study of Aboriginal Communities* (1964) and author of numerous other works on Melanesia and Australia, passed away on 16 September, aged 82.

**Mervyn Meggitt**, author of the classic *Desert People: A Study of the Walbiri People of Central Australia* (1962), and *Gadjari among the Walbiri Aborigines of Central Australia* (Oceania Monograph No. 14, 1966), as well as *The Lineage System of the Mae Enga of New Guinea*, *Blood is their Argument*, and many other works, passed away on 15 November, aged 80.

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***Seasons Greetings to all AAS Members and Friends and Best Wishes for the New Year!***