



## John Emerson

legal writer  
science writer  
web and print

### Most recent work (mid-2021)

In 1946 while eating his lunch during a mining exploration in the western Flinders Ranges, it dawned on geologist Reginald Sprigg just how ancient the fossils were he had discovered.

The jellyfish-like organisms that had left behind their imprints had lived over 500 million years ago, when Australia was under warm seas.

Sprigg's discovery was so important that for the first time in over 100 years a new geological period was created. The Ediacaran Period stretches from 635 to 541 million years ago, predating the Cambrian period.

Reginald Sprigg (1919-1994) studied geology under Sir Douglas Mawson and graduated with a Masters of Science in 1942. He helped found several mineral exploration companies, including SANTOS and Beach Petroleum.

This sculpture by Sylvio Apponyi is of one of those fossils, named 'Spriggina floundersi'. It was donated to the University in 2020 by the Hon. Tom Gray QC and is the fossil emblem for South Australia.

Judges are usually painted with unquestioning reverence.

Arthur Boyd's whirls of thick oil slapped on with trowel and bare hand depict one judge in a floral dress, another in yellow on crutches pointing at a prostrate Chinese 'coolie', and yet another on fire. Many of the twelve paintings in 'The Judges' series draw crude attention to the masculine gender.

In being exposed and far from their lofty benches the judges become vulnerable, like those who appear before them.

The University of Adelaide commissioned Arthur Boyd in 1967 to produce a ceramic mural for the relatively new Napier building. Instead he offered 'The Judges' series and they arrived from his London studio in time to be exhibited at the Festival of Arts in 1968.

Over half a century later the paintings continue to challenge and shock and are among the University's most treasured works of art.

## Long-form excerpt – plus review

From *First Among Equals* (University of Adelaide)

(Chapter 5 on Len King)

Michael King introduced his son to two passions that would endure for life: the Labor movement and horse racing. Victoria Park racecourse was just a short walk down Kensington Road from their home, and Michael had an interest in horses from his days on the family farm. One of the effects that the Depression wrought on those outings was the end of the occasional visit to the grandstand, thereafter it was the free admission flat. They were often joined by Mary, who also enjoyed a day at the races. Like his father, Len's interest was not in gambling. His interest was the sport, and he remained a committed annual pilgrim to the pinnacle of the Australian track, the Melbourne Cup.

On Sunday afternoons in the early 1930s, Adelaide had a Speaker's Corner in Botanic Park, and Michael King loved to go along with his son each weekend. Among the enthusiastic crowds of people who came each week to participate – whether it was to air their views, listen or occasionally heckle – was the popular ALP ring. Budding politicians and prominent ALP members would promote the Party's policies from a stump acting as the dais. The Lang Labor group had their own ring and so did the Communist Party. Len King believes that this early exposure to this hotspot of ideas – albeit crudely expressed – had a considerable effect on his understanding of the broad Labor movement and a profound influence on the development of his own political ideas.

Ever conscious of Len being an only child, Michael King would also take his son to other events. One of these was the opening of parliament. Len King remembers his father pointing out the “august personage” of the Chief Justice, Sir George Murray, in full ceremonial dress. In his retirement speech in 1995, King said: “It would have been beyond the horizon of his [father's] wildest imaginings that his son would one day occupy the office of Chief Justice.

“Emerson wields a light pen. His tight biographies ripple with a sense of the character as well as the life and times of his subjects.

Legal careers and political events flow through as absorbing narrative rather than leaden fact.

The five chief justices ... emerge not only as powerful figures in South Australian history but also as interesting people with human foibles.”

Samela Harris

***The Advertiser***

## Mid-length excerpt

Blackstone almost certainly did not know perhaps the most appreciative of his readers in 1770s France. Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau (1749–1791), had been several times incarcerated in the dungeons of the château of Vincennes by his autocratic father for running up debts, and became a critic of arbitrary imprisonment as a result.

In 1776 Mirabeau published an *Essai sur le despotisme* condemning the practice, for which he was again locked up in Vincennes from 1777 to 1780. During this period he completed an exhaustive comparative study of various penal systems, in particular focusing on the relationship between crime and punishment.

Not having access to writing paper, Mirabeau tore out blank pages from the books he was allowed to borrow and read, wrote in tiny writing and sewed the resulting text into his clothing. These notes were only published during the 1830s, as part of his collected works. They always cite Blackstone in the original English, especially in volume 7, *Des lettres de cachet et des prisons d'état*, first published in 1835, which covered habeas corpus, jury selection, breach of the peace, civil liberties and feudal customs. Mirabeau's interest in Blackstone's jurisprudence was not motivated solely by his own plight; he was concerned for the French legal system overall, writing that 'The severity of laws, says Blackstone, is an almost certain symptom that the State is being attacked by some insidious disease, or at very least indicates the weakness of its constitution.'

Mirabeau's conclusion, written a decade before the Revolution, shows a concern for one of the most precious of the English legal system's concepts, lack of which in France allowed people to be thrown into prison without reason shown, or recourse.

From a chapter published  
by Bloomsbury

## From an interview recorded for publication

*JE I was also interested in your involvement in the founding of SAFM? The very first FM station that then grew to Austereo. How did that happen?*

BP Well, I think it was Bill Cooper. We always acted for Coopers Brewery and we've been slightly related to the Cooper family. My mother said their old house was not far from Coopers Brewery when she was younger. I knew Bill Cooper well from school. I had him in my class at school, and Bill was a great friend of my brother's, that's my younger brother. I suppose it was half way through my directorial career when Bill said oh I've got this opportunity to go for an FM license. I said, what's that?

He said Coopers Brewery are going to put 25 per cent in, Channel Ten Adelaide are going to put 25 per cent in. They were owned by TVW in Perth, which was Seven Perth.

Someone else put 25 per cent in and the public would be asked to put in 25 per cent.

A hotel – the hotel on the way down to Victor Harbor – or the airport, Richmond Road - I will think of it in a minute. A hotel down there – Kevin Palmer was the fellow anyway.

Between us, I'm not sure whether I asked the other directors or he did. Anyway, we got John McKinna who was the recently retired Police Commissioner; Kim Bonython who is well known; Kevin Palmer, myself, Bill Cooper and one of the Channel Ten executives - I'm trying to think of his name at the moment - to make the board up and to work on how we could apply for this thing.

We started operating I reckon in about August. We hadn't been making any money until about – well we didn't make any while I was Chairman. I was asked to go on the board of The Advertiser because they had a big problem in The Advertiser. Their Managing Director had refused to – do you remember that?

*JE Oh yes, he refused to provide a source.*

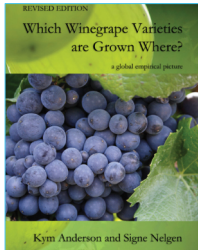
BP Yes, and he went to jail. I was asked to act for The Advertiser, which I did, and I briefed one of the Judges, I think it was Kevin...

*JE Kevin Duggan?*

BP Yes, Kevin Duggan, I briefed Kevin. When we finally sorted out the mess, Sir Arthur Rymill who was Chairman said Bob, we'd like you to join the board - which I thought I was pretty... - I'm retiring, Neil McEwin's retiring, we want you to come on the board of directors. There's you and Bill Scammell and Jim Hardy. So I took that board on. The problem was the law said you couldn't be on the board of two radio stations. Because 5AD was owned by The Advertiser, and SAFM was another one, I had to resign from SAFM.

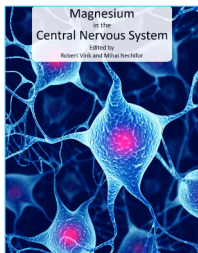
Commissioned by  
the Law Society with  
the late Bob Piper of  
Piper Alderman

## 6 examples as a book publisher - wrote or oversaw all promotional web and print material



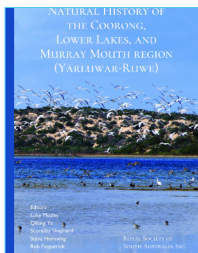
### Which Winegrape Varieties are Grown Where?

2016 winner of best viticulture book by the Organisation of Vine and Wine, Paris



### Magnesium in the Central Nervous System

Over 250,000 electronic edition downloads majority non-scientific readers



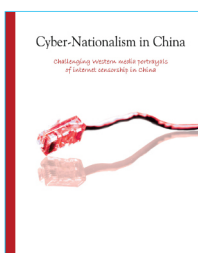
### Natural History of the Coorong, Lower Lakes, and Murray Mouth region (Yarluwar-Ruwe)

Commissioned by the Royal Society of South Australia



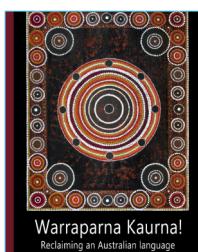
### Potential Benefits of an Australia-EU Free Trade Agreement

Commissioned in partnership with the European Union



### Cyber-Nationalism in China

The political implications of the internet in China



### Warraparna Kaurna! Reclaiming an Australian Language

The renaissance of the Kaurna language



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John has published legal articles, science articles, columns, blogs, blurbs, restaurant reviews and film reviews.

He has degrees from the Sorbonne in Paris and The University of Adelaide.

He is the author of *A History of the South Australian Independent Bar* published in 2006 and updated in 2020, *First Among Equals: Chief Justices of South Australia since Federation* (2006) and *John Jefferson Bray: A Vigilant Life* (2015).

In between the books, John founded and ran the University of Adelaide Press, launched by Nobel literature laureate J M Coetzee. He oversaw the publication of over 80 books. As well as the print editions, the free electronic editions went on to find over 1 million readers world-wide.

Recently he has coached academics across Australia in writing clearly and publishing to schedule.

<https://jjemerson.com>

[john@jjemerson.com](mailto:john@jjemerson.com)

0403 820 720