

Royal by name, real by nature: RACI at 90

Helmut Hügel looks at the 90 years history of everything RACI, the men, women and students with a personal or professional interest in chemistry.

It has been some 15 years since John Spink published “The RACI-1917-10967: In search of a History” and Tom Spurling’s record “Twenty five Years in the RACI” which summarily covered 75 years of our Institute’s history. Here are some historical snapshots to celebrate, recall and reflect the 90th birthday of our professional organization. History provides an account of what has happened which people then interpret or ‘editorialise’ to shape their opinion and judgement. Of course what makes it interesting is learning/reading/reflecting on reasons how/why/what way the chronological sequence of events unfolded.

1917 – 1920

David Orme Masson, chemistry professor at the University of Melbourne was the driving force behind the establishment of the Australian Chemical Institute (ACI) in Sydney in September 1917. The recognition, requirement of professional qualifications and the development of sound analytical protocols demanded high priority. In short the pioneering members’ activity focus was on ‘quality issues’ in their quest for official status.

1920 – 1930

Frustrated by the lack of support for a Charter from the Institute of Chemistry of Great Britain and Ireland, in 1923 the ACI was incorporated under the Companies Act of NSW with Masson was the first president of the ACI. The first student members were accepted in late 1923 and by 1925 revised regulations setting new standards for membership admission were in place. By the end of the decade the membership had grown to 842. State branches began to flourish, in 1927 the Victorian Branch had established its office at Kelvin Hall in Melbourne.

1930 – 1940

The Depression, dampened economic activity and everything else, by 1934/5 membership numbers had declined to 748. Finally in 1932 the Royal Charter was granted which was the catalyst for a new lease of institute life. The RACI Headquarters were relocated in 1934 to Melbourne and it was also the beginning of the *Journal and Proceedings of the Australian Chemical Institute*. From 1937 as professional activities gained momentum, institute membership increased.

1940 – 1950

The Institute was involved in a range of activities related to the war years including the establishment for the Defence Department a register of professional chemists that provided information on qualifications, skills and experience. From State Branches special interest Groups developed their professional activities. In this decade the Institute was in the Vanguard encouraging education institutes to raise academic standards. Employers granted workers increased study leave and the Institute recommended the first scale of minimum salaries for all professional chemists.

1950 - 1960

In 1951, *Proceedings* and a new quarterly: *Reviews of Pure and Applied Chemistry* replaced the *Journal and Proceedings of the Australian Chemical Institute*. The provision of a supplemental Royal Charter allowed the use of ‘Royal’ in RACI from 1953. In 1957 the Council introduced the first National Convention to raise the professional profile of chemistry and the chemical industry. At the same time, the

State Branch based active Groups evolved into National Divisions to advance ‘global’ interests.

1960 – 1970

Some 700 delegates attended the 3rd National convention, the opening event of the Institute’s Jubilee Year in 1967. In June 1968, the Institute Headquarters and the Victorian Branch office moved to premises in Clunies Ross house.

1970 - 1980

By 1971-2 the National Divisions [Analytical, Cereal, Chemical Education, Coordination and Metal Organic, Electrochemistry, Industrial and Engineering, Organic, Polymer, Solid State] functioned as the ‘learned societies’ of the Institute. Ten years later 11 Divisions [the above plus Physical, Medicinal and Agricultural Chemistry] participated in the 7th National Convention.

1980 - 1990

From the introduction of National Chemistry Week in June 1982 to promote chemists/chemistry in our community followed in 1984 the ‘Chemistry in Schools’ program. The Australian Bicentennial Authority was the catalyst to the 1989 RACI ‘Chemistry in an Australian Context Sourcebook’. Also in the same year the biography ‘Masson of Melbourne’ was published.

1990 – 2000

The 75th Anniversary celebrations in 1992 included a lecture by Sir John Cornforth and the annual presentation of “The Cornforth Medal” to an RACI member for the most outstanding chemistry PhD thesis. The trend of strengthening bonds with chemical societies in Asia via FACS continued. October 1993 posted a record membership of 9,784 [25% female] and in November the opening of the new RACI premises in Vale Street North Melbourne ensued.

2000-2007

The restructuring/repeat of the Institute history happened in 2000 in order to provide better continuity of management and more efficient changes to the Constitution [rules]. Based on the American Chemical Society model, the Royal Charter was replaced by the operation of the RACI under the Victorian Incorporations Act and the Institute became RACI Inc Australia-wide. An eight member Board with an executive, composed of regional representatives that manages/runs the Institute plus an Assembly [Division and Branch Presidents] chaired by the President that deliberates on Policy and Public Relations matters was established. This reorganisation also triggered the process [ongoing to this day] of consolidating Institute finances into a centralised banking system.

The *Future of Chemistry Study* published in 2005 examined the supply and demand of chemists from an educational and industry perspective. The RACI website continues to evolve to reflect the dynamic nature of the chemical sciences and to provide an efficient communication link and resource for members. A snapshot of some of the major Institute activities and publication highlights is presented in the Tables.

Since 1917 the RACI has catalysed the advancement, growth and development of the chemical sciences at the highest professional level. The fruits of our labours’ is focused on the fact that the chemistry profession makes a dynamic and essential contribution to our society. We have to continue to use technology such as the Web and our DIY professional proactive attitude/nature to further build the skills and professional leadership of our members.

Table The RACI and Australian Chemistry at a glimpse

RACI Functions	Activities & Outcomes
RACI structure activity relationships	ACI \Rightarrow ACI Inc \Rightarrow RC-ACI \Rightarrow RACI \Rightarrow RACI Inc 1917 1923 NSW 1932 1953 2000 VIC RACI history repeats itself
Maximising Membership	Recruitment via Conventions and Conferences - Inclusion, Involvement, Improvement
Robust Activities-	Course accreditation; Member qualifications; Professional standards; Chemistry outreach programs; Career development; Regional and International advancement of the chemical sciences
Networking	Quick learn from peer contact
Conventions, Conferences, Meetings, Symposia, PHODs	Professional development, gain knowledge and exchange ideas
Public Relations, Chemical education	Press and pressure releases, National Science Week, Science communication
Consolidation	Enhance Financial Fitness, Increase interest from all accounts

Australian Chemistry	Enduring Legacies
1917 – 2007	The RACI activities are sustained by the free energy of members. Its history reflects the constant challenge to make the Institute more effectively represent the chemical profession and efficiently serve its members
D O Masson	<i>Universities should not be second hand science shops</i>
9 April 1949	The first Australian Chemistry PhD graduates from the University of Melbourne: Dr Alan Buchanan, Dr Claude Culvenor
1972	<i>Nature in the Balance</i> HF Hartmann, N Norman, A Triffett, D E Weiss
1989	<i>Chemistry in an Australian Context Sourcebook</i> Project co-ordinator and editor: I Irvine
1989	<i>Masson of Melbourne</i> L Weickhardt
2001	<i>Chemobiography</i> R F C Brown
2005	<i>Future of Chemistry Study</i> Steering committee chairperson: E Gibson