A report from the 13th Biennial Scientific Glassblowers Society of Australia and New Zealand Symposium, by Terri Adams

The symposium was held in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia on Thursday 15th to Saturday 17th November 2018.

The morning of the 15th saw the symposium get off to a bright and early start with an 8.00am registration, meet and greet with coffee ahead of the formal welcome and opening address which was delivered by Society President Mr Keith Holden.

I was up next having had the privilege of being invited to give the Keynote speech. I used the opportunity in the most to convey the challenges facing the BSSG in terms of our ongoing work towards achieving government accreditation of the BSSG syllabus and generally raising the profile of Scientific Glassblowing and the role it has to play in underpinning world class research. This work has been supported by Scientific Glassblowing having been highlighted as an endangered craft by the release of the Radcliffe Trust Red list and the lack of formal opportunities for training in the UK.

Having recently attended the VDG symposium in Switzerland I was fortunate to have been able to take an active role in the informal 'international glassblowers forum'. The forum was gathering of likeminded glassblowers sitting down together to discuss what changes or challenges we were facing and how /if we could try to establish a way to work together more effectively and unite with a common policy. Falling memberships and training opportunities were a common theme. At this point I'd just like to add that there were at least 8 countries represented around the table so what may be lacking in numbers globally was made up for with the enthusiasm of these relative few. It very quickly became evident that similar difficulties are being experienced the world over, due not least to the changes being made/considered to the existing established formal training programs which, dare I say can be seen and appreciated as a dumbing down of formal scientific glassblowing training under the umbrella of giving the student an comprehensive overview of glass manipulation with the opportunity to specialise later – effectively diluting the time available for specialist training needed. The other issue cited was a total lack of access to formal training in countries including established traditional family businesses where the younger family members are now choosing not to join the business, so comprehensive formal in-house training programs needing to be established in order to recruit. The will to establish formal lines of global communication between organisations was fully supported with the idea for reciprocal arrangements for symposiums to avoid duplication. The idea to try to establish an international standard to strengthen our position was also muted. Only time will tell if this can be progressed.

Mr Keith Holden presented the first paper titled, *Rotating Crystal Support for UHV Molecular Beam*. As one would expect, it was a comprehensive paper, thoroughly well delivered; the type of old school research & development glassblowing which was both a joy and a challenge to be involved in. Sadly this type of opportunity seldom comes up today but the knowledge of the processes developed and techniques employed in such a project are priceless. A blast from the past glory days of research scientific glassblowing. I'm sure Keith would consider offering a copy of the paper to any interested parties.

Next I had the pleasure of being able to talk about my artistic work and my private workshop. As many of you will know, I have always had an interest in creative glassblowing and over the years have had several very satisfying commissions which I was able to showcase and discuss. I do like to challenge myself artistically and prefer to work with hollow blown figures which have gotten progressively larger – currently around 18" tall on average. This year I've set myself a project to make a life size scale model of the human circulatory system! I hope then to illuminate it with one side being red and the other blue; therein lies the biggest challenge for which I am always happy to receive advice.

The next paper was presented by Greg Purdy titled *Digitised Imaging of your glassware, Part 2 'let's get creative'.* Now *w*e are all too familiar with the difficulties in photographing well our glass creations. Greg presented a comprehensive and very creative insight into techniques he has developed to produce professional quality images of glassware. Greg has tremendous imagination which he combines with his knowledge of the use of tools such as an infinity table, sheets of coloured cellophane, a polariscope ,computer editing software and a wealth of lighting techniques and experience to put together the paper. Greg shared hints and tips on how best to first achieve a good image, then how to get really creative producing fun, futuristic images like glassware floating in a tree.

The viewing of the competitions took place next. There were two competitions, one for artistic glassware and the other for technical glassware. What I particularly like about the competition process here is that the glassblower gets to stand up and present their piece – we find out who has made it, the story of the piece if it has one and the thought/manufacture process. It's a very light hearted event so nobody feels intimidated and only those who deserve it may get heckled. Each delegate then gets one vote for each competition and the prize is awarded at the official dinner.

The afternoon started with a bus trip to the workshop and gallery of our host for the afternoon glass artist Richard Clements at Chamelon Gallery. Richard was born in London in 1950; he was first introduced to glass at an open day in the research laboratories where his father worked. Fascinated by the medium he applied for an apprenticeship as a scientific glass blower at the age of 16. It was here that he learnt the technical skills to make some very complicated equipment such as vacuum pumps and spiral condensers.

At the age of 20 he became one of the last 'ten pound poms' to leave England and immigrate to Australia. Arriving in Sydney in 1970 he began working in a scientific laboratory in Marrickville. It wasn't long before Richard wanted to extend himself more creatively. So with a couple of colleagues who also wanted to something a little different they formed a new business called Argyle Glass down at the Rocks in 1972.

The trio set up in the old arts and crafts building and commenced to blow glass in front of the public. It proved to be very popular with people crowding eight deep to watch the process. At that time we were making items like dragons, candelabras mushrooms etc. They often worked seven days a week for eight to nine hours a day. After three years of this pace and city life Richard took a well-earned holiday in Tasmania. It was then where he found his little piece of paradise in Franklin, returning to Sydney and selling his share of the business he then moved to the property here in Franklin where he still works today.

Richard has always worked with borosilicate glass which up until the last few years only came in clear so he began experimenting making his own colours first on the bench and then building

furnaces to make larger amounts it was also at this time that he started making his first perfume bottles, today he says he still loves making them. The designs keep evolving, each piece is unique and like a jewel.

Richard's workshop was like Santa's Grotto to me, wondrous and fantastical! Richard was a very generous host, a very humble, super talented and knowledgeable man. I personally am certainly more inspired to explore the use of coloured borosilicate for artwork again now.

Day two started with a trip to the workshop of Mr Mike Brandon who would host the workshop demonstrations. Mike's workshop is very impressive, not least the array of tooling he has developed to support his work…. And the absolutely immaculate workshop and beautiful setting in which it sits!

Demos included:

Keith Holden - his home made quartz burner.
Chris' Tommo' Tompkins & Grant Flanklin- Making an extended tip Quartz cone
Steve Newcombe – Quick Spiral twist, glass sheers, twisted stems
Mike Brandon – Glass ceramic seals, GL flanges and other hints and tips.

The enthusiasm for and quality of the demos was a pleasure to have been a party to. Mike's wife also provided the most delicious morning tea with homemade treats a plenty. Mike also laid out a display of Brandon Scientific components to be explored and critiqued. The range of greaseless high vacuum stopcocks I found particularly impressive and a definite quality alternative to some of those currently on the UK market.

Back at the hotel our afternoon continued. Ingo Schmerda, a glassblower from Germany, presented a paper on his glassworking. Ingo is a very impressive glass engraver as well as a competent glassblower and was able present some of his amazing work as slides. Ingo was able to talk the group through the techniques behind some of his creations which included engraving on the inside of vessels, partial and full thickness removal of glass and creating a 3D effect.

The final paper of the day was presented by Mr Steve Newcombe. The paper was titled *Barometry.* Steve has taken guidance and learned from the very best in the field of Barometry and Barometer restoration. Steve's technical knowledge and thorough understanding of the evolution, working characteristics and finesses of barometry are bewildering. As with his workshop demo's, Steve has great depth and wealth of knowledge and experience and a willingness to teach and advice anybody who wishes to learn, whilst constantly continuing to teach himself- another man of many talents.

The afternoon concluded with a panel discussion of the future of SGSANZ and scientific glassblowing. As touched on earlier in this report, the issues we face are mirrored the world over but the determination to keep the skill alive is still there and a way forward shall be found.

The official dinner was a very warm and friendly event but much more casual than 'we' are used to at BSSG official dinners. Thoughts and laughter exchanged, even meaningful conversations could be heard around the room alongside great food and a cheeky tipple. The symposium Chairman Mr John Holmes presided over the evening. Certificates of appreciation were presented to all those who contributed to the symposium and the winners of the competitions. The artistic competition was won by Mr Greg Purdy with his entry, Taz 'Devil may hare'. Steve Newcombe won the technical competition with his splendid working model with a rack and cog. There was a very special 'This is

your life' interlude for Keith Holden, presented by Chris 'Tommo' Tompkins ,one of Keith's former apprentices before Keith received a life time achievement award presented by John Holmes. There was a very touching photo taken of Keith, his wife Pat and the 4 former apprentices from the Holden stable…. What a wonderful legacy to have.

The AGM took place on Saturday morning and I'm delighted to report that all three key posts within the society were filled and the society is looking healthy going forward. The outgoing President, Keith Holden and Secretary, John Holmes were thanked before handing over to the incoming President Mr Mike Brandon to close the AGM.

The symposium was formally closed after a photoshoot wearing our wonderful yellow shirts and black caps by the Symposium Chair John Holmes. The group headed out to Hobarts renowned Salamanca Market…. Where we were mistaken for a team of hockey players thanks to our symposium shirts!

Sinead and I had an amazing time and would like to thank the committee and all the delegates for the wonderful welcome we had and the lasting friendships we have made.