

Rotary Connection

Youth Exchange, Service and a Window on Morocco

Club Meeting Highlights • Wednesday 2 September 2026

Acting President Jim Dillon chaired the first of four meetings while President Bob Hall is in Scotland. The club met at the Geraldton Golf Club at 7.00 am. Hugh Lavery gave the invocation and the toast to Australia, guests were introduced, and the morning mixed club business with a first-hand report from exchange student Leni and a feature talk from Grant Woodhams.

Meeting at a Glance

- Jim Dillon in the chair; Sergeant Bob Urquhart; invocation and toast by Hugh Lavery.
- Guests: Leni Tenwinkel, inbound Youth Exchange student from Norden, Germany, and host mother Janica Ringwood.
- Apologies: President Bob Hall, Di Gilleland and Peter Sukiennik.
- Grant Woodhams recapped Saturday's Bicycles for Humanity breakfast at Flow.
- Leni spoke about school, tennis, a Perth weekend and life as the "big sister" in her host family.
- Grant took members through Fez, Tangier and the French protectorate's imprint on Morocco, with photographs from his visit with Gabrielle at the end of 2025.
- Youth Exchange certificate received for hosting Esther Barbosa Rosa from Brazil.
- Coming up: trauma-informed workshop 8 September; Leonie Forrest (EdConnect) 9 September; Northampton Show parking 12 September.

Opening the Morning

Jim welcomed members and noted this is the first of four meetings he will chair in Bob's absence. Hugh offered the invocation — a blessing on the food, the fellowship and the call to service — and led the toast to Australia.

Hugh then asked the room to stand and introduced Leni Tenwinkel, from Norden in Germany, and her host mother Janica Ringwood. Breakfast followed, guests first. Janica later left to get the younger children ready for school.

From Saturday: Bicycles for Humanity

Grant reported that, apart from Terry, Bob Urquhart and Hugh, everyone present this morning had been at Flow on Saturday to host the Bicycles for Humanity riders and support crew. Ian took photographs. The morning was convivial and well received.

It would be good, Grant said, if the club could stay involved with Peter Moore and B4H wherever that is practical. A fuller account of the visit appeared in last week's newsletter.

RYE Student Leni (Germany): School and a New Big-Sister Role

Incoming president Clare McElhinney introduced Leni, who took the microphone for a short update.

School is going well and the teachers have been kind. Lessons can be challenging because of the way Australians use English, but she is trying her best and has started meeting friends. She has been taking tennis lessons and enjoying them.

Last weekend she travelled to Perth with another exchange student. They went hiking and swimming at Kalamunda — it was cold. She is looking forward to the Chapman Valley Show. At home she likes her host family and is revelling in the role of big sister; in Germany she was the little sister.

Jim thanked her for speaking in a second language and reminded the club that public speaking gets easier with practice. Clare sat at the top table as incoming president and will be introduced gradually to the formal side of meetings.



Youth Exchange Recognised

Hugh reported a certificate of achievement from Graham Fardon, District 9423 Rotary Youth Exchange Chair, thanking the club for meritorious service in the Youth Exchange programme and for hosting Esther Barbosa Rosa from Brazil. The hope is for similar recognition at the end of Leni's year.

Grant Woodhams on History and Morocco

Grant has been a Rotarian since 2000. Before retirement he was the local Member of Parliament, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, a TAFE and university lecturer, and a journalist with ABC Radio. In retirement he is completing a master's degree in history online through a university in Massachusetts.

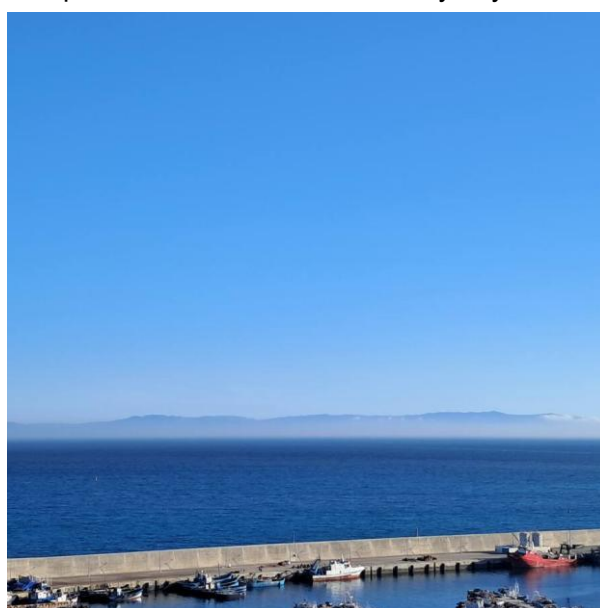
One of his interests is countries that were colonised and have since been decolonised. Australia, he noted, became a nation without an uprising that overturned British rule. Africa is a different picture: every country except Ethiopia was colonised at some point — by Britain, Belgium, France, Spain or Portugal.

That study is what took Grant and his wife Gabrielle to Morocco at the end of 2025. He wanted a country that had lived under European control, had taken that history back, and was practical to travel in independently. They booked accommodation and buses from Australia before they left.



Grant and Gabrielle in a fez shop — one of the stops that illustrated everyday life beyond the history books.

Morocco sits at the far north-west of Africa, a nation of some 38 million, with Rabat as its capital. The Mediterranean lies to the north, the Atlantic to the west, Algeria to the east and Mauritania to the south. From Tangier, on the Strait of Gibraltar, Spain is in view even on a murky day.



From Tangier the Spanish coast sits across the Strait of Gibraltar — close enough to see on a clear morning.

From 1912 to 1956 France controlled Morocco without formally colonising it. The word was protectorate — a legal fiction, Grant suggested, but one with real consequences. In 1953 France exiled Sultan Mohammed V to

Madagascar, hoping to break the independence movement. The move backfired. The Sultan became a symbol of resistance, returned in 1955, and independence followed in 1956. Because the arrangement had been a protectorate rather than a colony in the usual sense, Morocco kept its monarchy, its traditional institutions and a French-educated elite that largely chose to remain. Independence was negotiated with a sultan the country still recognised as its own, not won from the rubble.

The couple flew into Casablanca, the commercial capital and a larger city than Perth, then travelled north to Tangier and on to Fez. Fez is widely regarded as the country's spiritual home. Its medina — the old walled city — still houses some 13,000 people. Vehicles do not enter. The lanes are so narrow that ten steps from the door can leave a visitor lost, and mobile-phone maps are close to useless inside the walls. Hidden behind plain openings are courtyards and gardens. Grant and Gabrielle stayed in a three-storey house and looked out from the roof across a city only a few metres wide at street level. Barry reminded the room that Fez is also home to what is often called the world's oldest school of medicine, established around the year 800.



From the rooftop of their house in the Fez medina: a city packed tight to the horizon.

The French did not demolish the medina. Beside it they built a ville nouvelle — wide boulevards, Art Deco frontages, cafés and administrative buildings — a pattern repeated in every major city. Casablanca's new town is the largest; Rabat's is often called the most elegant. The modern road and rail network, including the ONCF railways, dates from the protectorate and is what still makes the interior traversable. A visitor could spend a week in those French-built streets and never see the other Morocco inside the walls.

Daily life in the medina still runs on donkeys: gas cylinders in, rubbish bags out, then a skip just outside the gate.



A working donkey in the medina — still the practical answer where cars cannot go.



The same lanes that lose visitors in a few steps keep the city's goods and rubbish moving.

Grant's footage of donkey delivering gas cylinders in the medina, Fez, Morocco
youtube.com/watch?v=w0VAHQWR4xY

Arabic and Berber are the everyday languages, yet French remains the language of business, higher education, the courts and the elite — a functional choice kept after independence, not merely a hangover. Civil and commercial law follow a French model, while Islamic personal status law operates in parallel for marriage, divorce and inheritance. Food felt familiar in places: beans, goat, and the tagine.

More than 50,000 French citizens live in Morocco today, many in Marrakesh. Their numbers once fell away after independence and have since climbed again. The relationship with France remains a working one. Questions from the floor filled in the frame: Morocco is independent and keeps practical ties with France, in something of the way Australia still deals with Britain. Barry noted that Morocco was the first country to recognise the United States, in 1777, and recalled a Roman past when the wider region was known as Mauretania. Hugh added that the Ottomans had also left a mark. After the meeting Grant said the trip fitted the master's theme and could be travelled at will.

Club Business

Apprentice of the Year — traineeships added

Rob Mosel reported that the Apprentice of the Year award will be extended in 2027 to include Trainee of the Year. After a meeting with Carol McManus, the working idea is to recognise both a business traineeship and a school-based traineeship for Years 11 and 12. Rob circulated information to members.

Hundreds of traineeship pathways exist. Central Regional TAFE currently has about 185 people enrolled, many in mining-related fields. Traineeships are typically one or two years, full-time or part-time. Nominations will be received as they come, with a closing date of 31 December each year.

A family loss

Jim asked the club to keep in mind Peter's family. Rory's partner lost her father, John, to cancer last week. John had been a bulldozer and machinery operator and mechanic.

Read the newsletter

Hugh urged members to open the weekly notes. The PDF is sent to everyone, the links are live, and it is the simplest way to keep up with event like the trauma-informed workshop, EdConnect and the Northampton Show roster.

Coming Up

Sunday 7 September — Father's Day

Jim reminded the room that Sunday is Father's Day. He and his wife are travelling to Perth to see his father, who is 96. Di Taylor's birthday falls on 6 September, the day before.



Tuesday 8 September — Trauma-informed workshop

EdConnect is offering a workshop, already emailed to members, on how trauma affects learning in young people — and, as Hugh noted, in older people too. Physical or emotional trauma both come into view. Presenter Leonie Forrest will then be the club's guest speaker on Wednesday morning.

Wednesday 9 September — Leonie Forrest, EdConnect Australia

Leonie Forrest, North East Metropolitan, Midwest and Pilbara Area Manager with EdConnect, will explain how the programme places trained volunteer mentors in schools. In Geraldton that includes Geraldton Grammar School and Champion Bay. edconnectaustralia.org.au

Saturday 12 September — Northampton Show parking

8.00 am – 2.30 pm at Northampton Showgrounds. The roster so far: Julie and Bob Urquhart; Hugh Lavery; Peter and Vicki Sukiennik; and Barry Dring. More volunteers would ease the load. The job is a strong club fundraiser — in the order of a couple of thousand dollars for a morning's work.

Sign up: [Parking Marshals – 2026 Northampton Show](#)

Friday 23 October — End Polio dinner

A Gold Polio dinner at Royal Perth Golf Club, keynote Professor Barry Marshall. Dress is not denim. Members make their own arrangements.

Bookings: trybooking.com/DPIZB

12 December — Christmas function

Save the date: Tarts & Co. Grant will start a list of who is coming. Weekly reminders will continue.

RYLA

Applications are open for the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, 9–16 January at Serpentine. Applications close on 30 November. Members who know a suitable young applicant should follow up with Grant, or write to ryla@rotarywa.au.

Fellowship and Fines

Barry's "On This Day" marked V-J Day in 1945, Ho Chi Minh's declaration of Vietnamese independence, the start of the Great Fire of London in 1666, and the death of J. R. R. Tolkien in 1973. Thought for the day: if little things do not seem to matter, try sleeping with a mosquito in the room.

Sergeant Bob Urquhart fined almost the whole room — Leni and Clare excepted. The session took in Rotary anniversaries, a reminder to wear name badges, Terry's double booking on ClubRunner, last Wednesday's catering mix-up when the usual meeting was at Flow, and Bob's own City to Surf in Perth, where he was, he said, just pipped on the line. A sea-container key comedy involving Bob Hall, Bob Symington and a cutting disc ended with new keyed-alike padlocks, paid for privately. Grant's ClubRunner anniversary is listed for next Wednesday, 9 September. The wine raffle was held over to next week.

Also in the Room

Grant is coordinating guest speakers. A possible approach to Helen Leaden was floated. Members were asked to keep speaker bookings in one pair of hands so a guest does not arrive on the wrong week.

A short discussion on the Radio Auction print lift-out — whether a six-page fold can be produced, and at what cost — was parked for a conversation with the printer before any assumption is made.

Next week the club is back for an external guest speaker.

A Word of Thanks

Thank you to Jim for stepping into the chair, to Hugh for the invocation and the Youth Exchange report, to Clare for introducing Leni, to Leni for speaking so clearly about her first weeks here, and to Grant for both the B4H recap and a Morocco address that took the room from a protectorate map to a rooftop in Fez.

— Rotary Club of Greater Geraldton —