

Rotary Connection

Salt, Stone and a Seat to the Abrolhos

Club Meeting Highlights • Wednesday 23 September 2026

Acting President Jim Dillon was in the chair at the Geraldton Golf Club at 7.00 am — possibly his last turn before Landor. Bob Urquhart gave the invocation and the toast to Australia and the King. Guest was Dr Paul Blackwell, who spoke on the salt that eats Midwest masonry and then demonstrated the work in the car park.

Meeting at a Glance

- Jim Dillon in the chair; Sergeant Bob Urquhart; invocation and toast by Bob.
- Guest and speaker: Dr Paul Blackwell. Welcome back Kim Wann.
- Apologies: Bob Hall, Di Gilleland, Ian Taylor (Melbourne), Clare McElhinney, Russell McKinnon and Leni Tenwinkel.
- Leni: Abrolhos with Shine Aviation last weekend; away until late October (Exmouth, Albany, Outward Bound).
- Grant: book launch, Geraldton Regional Hospital, Thursday 1 October at 2.30 pm.
- Paul on rising damp and crumbling heritage stone; demo after the meeting.
- No raffle. Non-Dockers and a 34-year Rotarian found the box.

Opening the Morning

Bob blessed the food and the fellowship and led the toast. Jim asked the room to eat what the caterers had prepared for sixteen. Barry's On This Day marked Bob Marley's last concert in 1980, Bruce Springsteen's birthday, Freud's death in 1939, and the birth of Mary Mallon — Typhoid Mary. Thought for the day, the printable one: if you kick the person most responsible for your problems, you will not sit down for a month.

Leni — a spare seat and a few quiet weeks

Hugh reported that Leni's host mother is in Perth, so Leni is staying with Theodore, the inbound student hosted by the Rotary Club of Batavia Coast. Last weekend Rotarian John Gooch of Shine Aviation offered a spare seat. She flew the Abrolhos. The club has sent a thank-you.

Leni in the right-hand seat with Shine Aviation — last weekend's spare-seat tour of the Abrolhos.

She will be away for the next few weeks: Exmouth with host mum Janica, the Albany Rotary tour, and Geraldton Grammar's Outward Bound. Hugh does not expect her back in the room until late October.

Before that stretch of travel she and outgoing exchange student Lara Day had already put in a day at the Northampton Show — high-vis on the gate, rams in the pavilion, and a python that took a liking to Lara.





Leni and Lara on the gate at the Northampton Show.



Lara Day and Leni Tenwinkel in the ram pavilion, Northampton Show.

On the newsletter, Russell McKinnon wrote that last week's issue made him relive the whole meeting. Others have asked for less detail. Hugh would like the feedback kept coming.

From the Secretary's Desk

Grant reminded the room that club funds helped Margaret Pike and colleagues research and publish a history of Geraldton Regional Hospital. The launch is Thursday 1 October at 2.30 pm in the courtyard next to the foyer. The invitation will go around; the date is worth writing down.

The standing dates remain: Gold Polio dinner Friday 23 October at Royal Perth Golf Club; Northam Rotary's 80th on Sunday 1 November; RYLA applications to 30 November; Christmas at Tarts & Co. on Saturday 12 December.

Polio dinner bookings: trybooking.com/DPIZB

Guest Speaker — Dr Paul Blackwell: Why the Midwest Crumbles

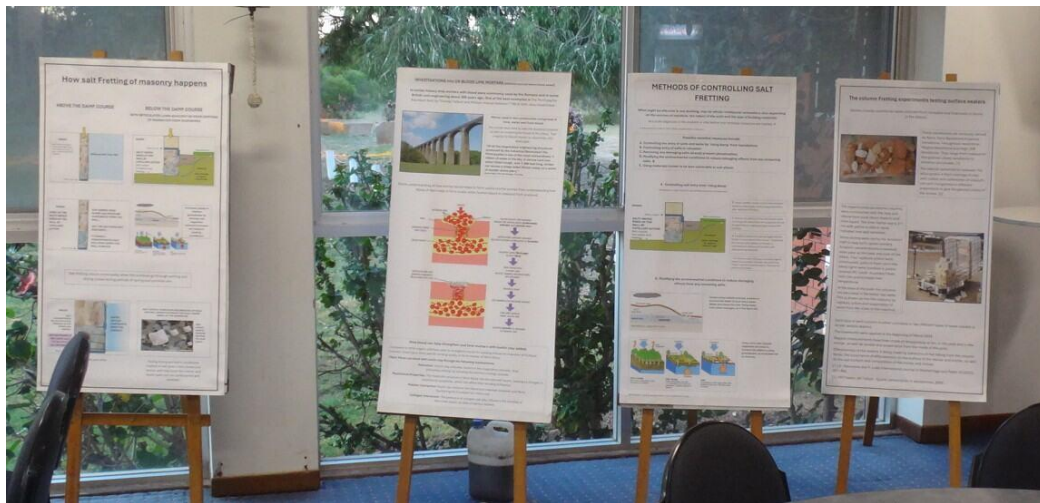


Grant introduced an old friend. Paul has lived in Geraldton since the 1980s, raised three boys with Glenda at Waggrakine, and was one of Australia's leading soil scientists. In retirement he is trying to stop historically important buildings in Geraldton and the Midwest from fretting away.

The mechanism is simple and relentless. Winter swell throws an aerosol of seawater into the rain. That rain washes inland past Mullewa. In porous stone, brick and lime mortar the water soaks down, then rises again by capillary action. The sun and the wind take the water. The salt stays. Crystals of sodium chloride and sodium sulfate grow in the pores and prize apart the natural cement between the grains. Fretting is worst in the first metre above the ground. Pale sandstone suffers; darker, iron-rich stone and the rare blue, almost impermeable sandstone under the Anglican church at Nabawa hold.

Jim already knew the problem. His office faces the old railway station — 126 years old this year. He dug a metre down, carted waterlogged soil to the tip, and packed blue metal. No new damp course; the gravel broke the capillary path and shaded the base from sun and wind. Paul called it a solution without the textbook.

Experiments, churches and a handbook



Paul's boards: how salt fretting happens, Roman blood-lime mortar, control methods, and the column trials.

At Durack, Paul and volunteers have turned IBC pods into small greenhouses — summer evaporation in winter — and built masonry columns with different stones, mortars and sealers. Concrete bricks coated on the sides but not the ends show which products slow fretting. An open day is planned for late November. A sixteen-page handbook will be \$10 at cost from Fine Images.

Cement Aid in Perth has donated penetrating and surface sealers for church work. Mario Amazzini's waterproof blocks and Tap Dry additive sit behind a repair method for buildings as far gone as the Catholic church at Mullewa, which sits on a saline water table: take out a safe strip of the lowest courses, put a waterproof concrete footing and backing with tie bars, replace treated stone in waterproof mortar, then move along — years of work, but the alternative is demolition.

A sandstone building with a reticulated lawn on Geraldton water is, Paul said, a death sentence. Keep irrigation off the base. After the meeting he demonstrated lime mortar made with ethically sourced beef blood — the Roman trick that helped aqueducts last — beside the car park.



The car-park demonstration: buckets, stone, and a short trial wall.

Thanks

Grant presented a certificate and a donation to End Polio Now on Paul's behalf, enough for about 200 vaccinations. Paul, a Dockers man since the beginning, left the room with a line he has earned: fail only means first attempt in learning; you fail when you give up.



Grant Woodhams presenting Dr Paul Blackwell with a certificate — and 200 Polio vaccinations on his behalf.

Coming Up

Wednesday 30 September

Geraldton Golf Club, 7.00 am. Guest speaker Rosie Vlahov (OzFish) — seagrass restoration in Geraldton. Jim may be on the road to Landor.

Thursday 1 October — Hospital history launch

2.30 pm, courtyard beside the foyer, Geraldton Regional Hospital. The club helped fund the book.

Friday 2 – Sunday 5 October — Landor Races

Hospitality at the bar is one of the club's major fundraisers. Extra hands welcome.

Register: [Landor Races](#) • Peter Sukiennik 0418 939 130.

Friday 23 October — End Polio dinner

Royal Perth Golf Club. Keynote Professor Barry Marshall.

Bookings: trybooking.com/DPIZB

Late November — Paul's open day

Heritage masonry trials at Durack. Handbook \$10. Date to follow.

Sunday 1 November — Northam Rotary 80th

11.30 am, Northam Recreation Centre. Names to Grant.

30 November — RYLA applications close

Ages 18–28. Grant or ryla@rotarywa.au.

Saturday 12 December — Christmas function

Tarts & Co. Grant is keeping the list.

Fellowship and Fines

No raffle this week — Barry, the Sergeant said, keeps winning it. Hugh put in for two items: an error in last week's newsletter (Robert Mosel was invited to share the blame) and 34 years in Rotary the next day. Non-Dockers, or anyone openly supporting another side, found the box. The meeting closed at 8.00 am exactly. Walkaway Polocross was this weekend; Landor starts next.

A Word of Thanks

Thank you to Jim for the chair, to Bob for the invocation and the box, to Hugh for the Leni update, to Grant for the hospital date and the introduction, and to Paul Blackwell — for the science, the slides, and the mortar in the car park.

— Rotary Club of Greater Geraldton —