

Rotary Connection

The School That Moved, and the Boat That Capsized

Club Meeting Highlights • Wednesday 21 October 2026

Acting President Jim Dillon was in the chair at the Geraldton Golf Club at 7.00 am. Ian Taylor gave the invocation and the toast. Sergeant Bob Urquhart had the box. Shane Rutter was the guest.

Meeting at a Glance

- Jim Dillon in the chair; Sergeant Bob Urquhart; invocation and toast by Ian Taylor.
- Guest and speaker: Shane Rutter, Principal, Meekatharra School of the Air.
- Apologies: Leni Tenwinkel (Outward Bound camp, Walpole).
- Congratulations to Dr Richard Taylor, WA GP of the Year.
- CWA Bluff Point trial meeting under discussion. Radio Auction: volunteers and a plate of food.
- Heads and tails to Barry Dring. October fines to RFDS.

Opening the Morning

Barry Dring gave the thought for the day. It was the anniversary of Trafalgar, of Magellan's passage through the straits that took his name, of Alfred Nobel's birth, and of the election of Japan's first woman Prime Minister. The question he left with the room was simpler: if a piece of soap falls on the ground, is the soap dirty or the ground clean?

Announcements

GP of the Year — Jim Dillon

Jim had news that could not wait. Dr Richard Taylor, Ian's son, is Western Australia's GP of the Year. The announcement had come through on the Saturday night. Ian had not mentioned it when Jim saw him in the surgery on the Monday. The club's congratulations go to Richard, and to the family that produced him. Barry observed, with a wicked grin, that Richard takes after his mother

CWA Trial — Grant Woodhams

The board has been looking at a different meeting place. Bob Hall and Grant visited the CWA rooms at Bluff Point and found them suitable. Charmaine Trezona manages the rooms. Bob and Grant will meet her early next week. The arrangement would be a donation of \$100 to the CWA, covering the club's use of the facility for a year. A generous offer. The trial date has been set for November 25th.

Radio Auction — Di Gilleland

The spreadsheets close on Friday. Setup is on the Friday before the auction, the 6th of November. Heavy frames need hands. See Don Rolston and Bob Symington. On the day itself, 8 November at the NACC rooms, Rotarians are asked to bring a plate of morning or afternoon tea.

A photograph of a stuffed marlin is circulating. A lady moving into the Hooks building has offered it. Facebook suggests mounted fish can fetch a thousand dollars. Thoughts on whether to accept it, and what reserve to put on it, are welcome. A poster for display and sending to your networks is attached.

Rotary cakes have arrived. Boxes were in Di's car for anyone who wanted one. 

Youth Exchange — Hugh Lavery

Leni Tenwinkel is on an Outward Bound camp with Geraldton Grammar at Walpole. She is due back on the weekend. Janica Ringwood is going to Perth to collect her. From there she moves to Chantelle Keogh's family for November, December and January. Host parents are covered through March, and for June. April and May are still open. Anyone with a trip or an activity Leni might enjoy is asked to let the Leni or her host parents know.

Guest Speaker — Shane Rutter

The school that moved



Shane Rutter, Principal, Meekatharra School of the Air.

Grant introduced Shane, the Principal of Meekatharra School of the Air, which is located in Kempton Street, Geraldton. Shane and his wife moved here in 2022. She is the Principal of Holland Street School. The school started in 1959 and is one of five Schools of the Air in Western Australia. The others are at Derby, Port Hedland, Carnarvon and Kalgoorlie. It moved to Geraldton in 2011 after the buildings it occupied in Meekatharra burned down. The Department of Education, Shane observed, is often unaware that the Meekatharra school is based in Geraldton.

Lessons run from 8.00 am to 2.30 pm. There are 55 students, all in primary school. They come from three groups: pastoral stations; families overseas in the same time zone, in Bali or Malaysia; and travelling families. English and Maths are taught four days a week. Other subjects are provided online. Every student has a laptop or an iPad.

“School of the Air have been in the shadows for a long time. We’re now trying to get out a bit more and be more aware of the community, more aware of what we can offer.”



Shane Rutter presenting to the club.

Students come in several times a year. The visits let the school assess them face to face, and they give the parents and carers a chance to upskill in their role as home tutors. While they are in Geraldton the children do their swimming lessons, and the parents meet services they may not reach from a station: Desert Blue Connect, Headspace, and others. In term four the older students travel to Perth with the other Schools of the Air. Every three years the Year 4, 5 and 6 students go to Canberra.

A piece of the school's history is that Prince Charles, now the King, visited in 1979. He sat in on a lesson and signed the guest book. He signed it simply as Charles. Shane brought the book with him.

Parents, and the difference

"They're so invested in their kids' education, they're so supportive, because they're sitting next to their kids every day."

Shane has been at the school since 2022. Before that he spent more than thirty years in mainstream schools. The relationship with parents is different. In a mainstream school, he said, parents often appear when something is wrong. At School of the Air they are partners. They know what is happening. They ask politely when they are unsure.

"I've been thirty-something years as an administrator in schools. A majority of your day can be just sorting out little disputes. You sort of get away from that core business of looking after kids' education and families. So it's a refreshing move."

The school is funded the same way as a mainstream school, but the money is spent differently. The Department provides internet connections, though some families have moved to Starlink for reliability. Shane's impression is that the parents are greatly invested. The school has begun advertising on Facebook for prospective students and has been inundated with enquiries.

Questions and thanks

Ian asked where the students go after School of the Air. Most come into town for high school, often to the residential college and Geraldton Grammar. Some continue online through the School of Isolated and Distance Education. Russell asked about the physical reach. The closest station students are at Yalgoo, Meekatharra and Mount Magnet. The furthest include a family near Kalgoorlie who stayed with the school for continuity. There are no hard boundaries between the five Schools of the Air.

Peter recalled a conversation at Landor, years ago, with a station owner who had been a School of the Air student himself. Grant asked why Shane had come to Meekatharra School of the Air rather than a mainstream school. Clare, a classroom teacher, asked about technology and noted that some of the remote families may have better internet than some classrooms in town.



Clare McElhinney presenting the certificate to Shane Rutter.

The thanks were from Clare: a certificate, and 200 polio immunisations in Shane's name.

Coming Up

Friday 23 – Sunday 25 October — Big Sky

Readers and Writers Festival, its 21st year. Bookings essential.

Program and tickets: [Humanitix — Big Sky](#)

Wednesday 28 October — Club meeting

Geraldton Golf Club, 6.45 for 7.00 am. Guest speaker Ian Taylor, Iceland. Register: [Club Meeting](#)

Sunday 1 November — Northam Rotary 80th

11.30 am, Northam Recreation Centre. Names to Grant.

Wednesday 4 November — Club meeting

Geraldton Golf Club, 6.45 for 7.00 am. Guest speaker Grant Russell, Great Northern Football League.

Friday 6 November — Auction setup

Heavy frames. Hands needed. See Don Rolston and Bob Symington.

Sunday 8 November — Radio auction

NACC Conference Rooms, 8.00 am to 4.00 pm. Bring a plate.

Wednesday 11 November — Club meeting

Geraldton Golf Club, 6.45 for 7.00 am. Guest speaker Rob Houwen, Future Automobiles.

Monday 16 November — Club board

In person, 5.30 pm, Mid West Financial Services. Agenda items to Grant before the meeting.

Wednesday 18 November — Club meeting

Geraldton Golf Club, 6.45 for 7.00 am. Guest speaker Bob Hall, Scotland.

Wednesday 25 November — Club meeting

CWA Hall, 6.45 for 7.00 am.

30 November — RYLA applications close

Ages 18–28. Camp in mid-January. Grant, or ryla@rotarywa.au.

Wednesday 2 December — AGM and Fellowship

Geraldton Golf Club, 6.45 for 7.00 am.

Wednesday 9 December — Club meeting

Geraldton Golf Club, 6.45 for 7.00 am. Guest speaker Bishop Michael Morrissey, a Christmas message.

Saturday 12 December — Christmas function

5.30 to 8.30 pm. Tarts & Co. The list is still thin. Names to Grant.

Register: [Christmas Celebration](#)

Wednesday 20 January 2027 — Club meeting

Breakfast at Levy Street Life. Guest speaker Rohan Prowse, Levy Street Life and the Friday Circulars.

Fellowship and Fines

Heads and tails, with a bottle of red from four miles from nowhere, went to Barry Dring. Then the box. October's fines go to the RFDS.

Barry, back from Landor and looking well in the shirt. He had missed a maritime heritage board meeting the night before. He confessed he had not yet paid his dues. The Sergeant was confident he would, eventually.

Ian, for the son. The knowledge, Bob said, had been passed on by his wife. Well done.

Bob himself, and the boat. He has pulled craypots for 35 years in a fibreglass boat he built. Only once before had he been caught in breakers the size of the room. This time he took Rasmus, the Danish visitor who has been coming for years, and Glenn Feltham. The boat was thrown. Bob and Rasmus went out the side. Sixteen crayfish in the bag, six lost over the side. Bruises down one side, and a limp for a day or two. He will go again, more carefully.

Di, back from her travels, with a list of little jobs and the marlin photograph. Terry and Russell, for not registering. Someone else as well. Clare registered at 10.22 the night before. She remembered just before she went to sleep.

Buying the box. Jim's oldest grandson turned five yesterday. His eldest brother received the OBE — Over Bloody 80s. Hugh's grandson Nicholas turned five in England. He used to sit on Hugh's knee at Rotary ZOOM meetings. He speaks, Hugh said, like a proper little POM!

A Word of Thanks

Thank you to Jim for the chair and the congratulations, to Ian for the invocation and the toast, to Barry for the soap, to Sergeant Bob for the box and the boat, to Grant for the CWA, to Di for the auction and the cakes, to Hugh for the host parents still needed, and to Shane — for the school that works in the shadows, and for the parents who sit beside their children every day.

— Rotary Club of Greater Geraldton —