Quoll magic in Tasmania’s wilderness

By Sharon Webb

When zoologist Shannon Troy applied to Australian Geographic for a small grant to assist her research into Tasmania’s spotted-tailed quoll she couldn’t have predicted such a positive outcome.

Australian Geographic turned her down for the grant, but for three months from July will run a spotted-tailed quoll fundraising campaign from each of their shops throughout Australia.

Not only will Australians be able to buy items such as fridge magnets and mouse mugs featuring the shy, catlike marsupial most famous in Tasmania as a chook-killer extraordinaire, but they will also be informed about the nature and possible fate of the animal through Australian Geographic’s leaflets.

As Ms Troy spends five months this year in the wilds south of Melbourne fencing and trapping the spotted-tailed quoll for her PhD thesis, she knows that the folk at Australian Geographic will be raising funds for her research and doing their darndest to tell people that it’s possible the spotted-tailed quoll could go the way of the Tasmanian devil.

Under national legislation, the status of the spotted-tailed quoll in Tasmania is ‘vulnerable to extinction’ – one step down from its mainland counterpart, which is ‘endangered’.

The difference, apart from genetics, is foxes. Rampant in mainland states, they have killed quolls in high numbers. Tasmanian quolls have escaped that fate, so far.

“When I came to Tasmania I couldn’t believe quolls were running around here and people weren’t excited about it,” Ms Troy said.

“In Victoria there are no quolls and elsewhere they are in serious trouble. People don’t understand how amazing the wildlife is here.”

Even worse, according to Ms Troy, is that we don’t have enough information to conserve quolls properly; they are not being monitored and we don’t even know how many there are.

She wants to gather enough information on quoll habitat to substantially supplement the small amount of research done on the animal.

“That research showed that the highest numbers are in Tasmania’s north-west forests – but that area also has the highest clearance rate,” Shannon said.

“More research in 2002 surveyed forest area for nine months, trapping only 22 quolls. Yes they are hard to catch, but the absence of breeding females was a concern.”

Ms Troy’s survey area is 25 square kilometres of mature forest, regenerating forest and cleared areas.

Her hypothesis is that she will find more quolls in the mature forest area where there is lots of prey for breeding females – but she is open to being proven wrong.

The problem is that the range of the female quoll is huge and they are solitary creatures. In her 25 square hectares she can expect to find only ten females if she is lucky.

“I’m not seeing many quolls at all,” Ms Troy said, having already spent two months in her area of wet eucalypt forest north of the Arthur River and west of the Cam River.

“I’m actually seeing more devils than anything. I must be the only person in Tasmania who doesn’t want to find devils!”

Festival Overture

Festival Overture, commissioned for the Australian Bicentenary and performed in 1989 as a choral suite of four poems by Gwen Harwood, will be heard for the first time with Harwood’s originally commissioned six poems, re-orchestrated for soprano, baritone, chorus and wind symphony,” she said.

Much of Hobart’s musical community will be involved in the gala concert, with the festival choir joined by the Hobart Wind Symphony conducted by Simon Reade, and a capella works conducted by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra choral master, June Tyack.

Tickets for the 60th anniversary gala concert are $25 and $30. Bookings can be made through Centertainment.

Save the Tasmanian devil >> www.tassiedevil.com.au
Our people

Barbara Hatley
Professor Barbara Hatley has been conferred the title of Professor Emeritus. Prof. Hatley was Head of the School of Asian Languages and Studies from 2000 to 2006 and retired at the end of 2008 after a remarkable and colourful career in Indonesian studies. Prof. Hatley will continue to contribute to UTAS through her research activities, in particular as a member of an ARC discovery grant team investigating theatre in the Asia Pacific.

Neil Bose
Professor Neil Bose has been appointed as the Director of the National Centre for Maritime Engineering and Hydrodynamics at AMC. Prof. Bose has been acting director since the start of 2009. A former director of the Ocean Engineering Research Centre at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, his research interests include marine propulsion, autonomous underwater vehicles, ocean environmental monitoring, ice/propeller interaction, renewable energy and aspects of offshore design.

Helen Bound
Dr Helen Bound has recently accepted a two-year appointment as a senior research fellow at the Institute for Adult Learning in Singapore. She will take up her appointment in late June. The institute was established in 2008 by the Workforce Development Agency, with the aim of supporting high quality and continuing education and training in Singapore. Dr Bound will be working closely with trainers in a range of institutions to develop action research projects for professional development. She will also develop the research culture in continuing education and training.

Thao Le
Dr Thao Le, a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education, was a keynote speaker at the recent International Conference on Computer supported Education in Lisbon, Portugal. The title of his keynote address was Computer technology and educational empowerment: A humanistic perspective. Dr Le has also been invited to be a keynote speaker at the international Conference on technology and Education to be held in June 2010 in Paris.

Do you have a tidbit for ‘Our people’? Email news snippets on UTAS people to: Media.Office@utas.edu.au and mark your email subject: ‘Our people’.

Flashing their red walking gear, the UTAS Newnham campus Walking Group recently strode out in support of National Heart Week. The group walks every Monday lunchtime, but the Monday of National Heart Week was special; before embarking on the walk, Professor Madeleine Ball, head of the School of Human Life Sciences, presented Heart Foundation hats to walk organiser Linda Richardson, who will use them as incentives to those who participate in 12 walks or more.

“We know that regular exercise, including brisk walking, improves health and particularly reduces the risk of heart disease. “The School of Human Life Sciences encourages people to join walking groups, participate in exercise that they can enjoy and take notice of the Heart Foundation guidelines for healthy eating,” Prof. Ball said.

All walkers then proceeded on a 30-minute walk around the University campus with participants asked to wear red to support the Go Red for Women campaign, which unites Tasmanian women in the fight against heart disease.
Digging up the colonial society of Northern Tasmania

When Tasmanian Premier Dave Bartlett announced last month that the State Government would contribute $5,000 towards research into the colonial society of Northern Tasmania, the matching funds were almost in hand.

Business and tourism associations, councils and individuals had already contributed over $11,000 to the project. So the next working day after Premier Bartlett's announcement, UTAS researchers started working on the project, titled *The assigned context of the Norfolk Plains*.

The project is being commissioned by a heritage sector partnership called REASSIGN, which was established in December as an initiative of the UTAS Community Place & Heritage Unit (CPHU).

It is focusing initially on the colonial police district of the Norfolk Plains in the period 1830–1853. This encompasses Woolmers and Brickendon estates, which are two of the five Tasmanian sites being assessed for World Heritage listing.

Unit director Professor Henry Reynolds said attracting regional attention to the opportunity for discovery and industry that lies in the heritage of the northern plains, and in positioning UTAS for the research opportunities this presents, was an important win.

“We are working across campuses as we aim to meet the research needs of the heritage sector,” he said.

The research team includes Dr Murray Johnson (supervising historian) and Dr Kristyn Harman. The project also involves a collaboration with Prof. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, which will optimise synergies with his ARC-funded national collaborative research project *Founders and survivors*, a partnership between historians, genealogists, demographers and population health researchers. This collaboration will enable the northern project to hit the ground running.

Lorraine Green, Northern Midlands Business Association Executive Officer and Northern Midlands Council Economic and Community Development Manager, is impressed by the CPHU’s record on quality outcomes.

“This exploration is long overdue and there is no reason to delay. Communities, business and visitors have much to gain and UTAS’s quick response time is critical to the opportunities the north is now facing in the heritage sector,” she said.

“This is an intensely community-engaged project. It has to be. This is our community’s heritage and its discovery is an important part of the development of our community,” he said.

The Premier undertook to support and promote REASSIGN’s plans to raise a further $399,000 in research and development funding via a ‘system of thirds’: one-third state, one-third federal and one-third community and business funding.

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Launching IMAS

W hat a pleasure it was to see the focus in the recent Commonwealth budget announcements of support for the marine sciences. Even more pleasing has been the level of support for Tasmania as a nation in the system of research, teaching and learning, and infrastructure development in marine and maritime. To summarise this success, first there was the pre-budget announcement of the $3.4 million Diversity and Structural Adjustment grant to UTAS for collaboration between the College of Science with James Cook University and the University of Western Australia. Then the 2010 Budget allocated $45 million to UTAS for infrastructure supporting IMAS, our new Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies. Announcements were also made of $52 million for a further advancement of the Integrated Marine Observation System – another UTAS-managed national program – and $120 million for the purchase of a new research vessel to replace CSIRO’s Southern Surveyor, which UTAS uses in joint projects with our CSIRO partners in marine sciences. In all, some $200 million in funding is directed at Tasmania for the marine sciences. The rationale for this concentration of funding is quite clear when we reflect on the high proportion of the national marine science assets that are already vested one way or another in Tasmania. Between UTAS (the University of Tasmania) and CSIRO, the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) and other agencies, Tasmania has around 40 per cent of these national assets, with very considerable reach to global partners and worldwide recognition.

For UTAS, the immediate potential for building the IMAS building, preferably on the Hobart waterfront and in conjunction with the CSIRO Division of Marine Science and Antarctic, is very exciting indeed. Drawing our resources together will enhance the research potential and components of both institutions. We anticipate an iconic building, integrating the heritage wharf buildings and incorporating a range of public facilities in conjunction with new research, teaching and related facilities.

Presently, UTAS is in the process of establishing IMAS as an organisation. We have put in place an interim director and board structure and the State Government and relevant departments in partnership with IMAS. This develops the full capacity of Tasmania and places UTAS, CSIRO and AAD in a clear position of global leadership in marine science and matters Antarctic, especially as they relate to the role of the oceans in climate change and their impact on marine natural resources, coastlines and their management.

Clearly, marine and Antarctic research and teaching is one of our flagships and, developed in collaboration with our partners, national and global, will stamp us as a highly distinctive and distinguished university.

Warm regards

Daryl Le Grew

The full text version of this column is available from the UTAS website: http://www.utas.edu.au/vic/
Fire effect on environment is profound

BY SARAH NICOL

Fires are a substantially underestimated cause of increased levels of carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere, an international study led by UTAS researcher Professor David Bowman has found.

Prof. Bowman from the School of Plant Science said the internationally recognised research has found that fire needs to be recognised as an integral part of climate change, especially in Australia, where bushfires are common.

Prof. Bowman and 21 other researchers from around the world, including Dr Fay Johnston from the Menzies Research Institute, have published their findings in the prestigious journal *Science* discussing the role of fires on human health, ecosystem, society, and climate change.

Prof. Bowman said while the immediate destructive effects of fire are obvious, their ongoing effects on many planetary systems including carbon and water cycles are also profound.

The work is the culmination of a meeting supported by the Kanji Institute for Theoretical Physics and the National Centre for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis, both based at UC Santa Barbara in the USA and funded by the US National Science Foundation.

“Large fires have huge economic, environmental and health costs. The tragic fires in Victoria emphasise the ubiquity of recent large wildfires and potentially changing fire regimes that are associated with man-made climate change,” Prof. Bowman said.

While it is widely accepted that climate affects fire, the research authors show that fires have the capacity to affect the climate through the release of greenhouse gases.

Fires are one of the largest causes of increased carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere, but Prof. Bowman said carbon dioxide is not the only contributor to climate change through burning plants.

“Methane, aerosol particulars in smoke and the changing reflectance of a charred landscape also contribute to changes in climate,” he said.

“Climate affects fire, but more worryingly fire affects climate. This feedback has been overlooked in the projections of the Earth’s climate. “We’re most concerned that fire has not been rigorously and adequately incorporated in the climate models,” Prof. Bowman said.

“It’s remarkable that such an integral part of the landscape has been so sidelined.”

New telescope installed at UTAS Observatory

## BY CHERIE COOPER

A new high-tech telescope has made the UTAS Mount Pleasant Observatory site part of an Australia-wide network to detect the tiny movements of our continent.

The network is an initiative of UTAS partner AusScope Ltd, and funded by the Australian Government under the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy.

The AusScope network will closely examine the structure and evolution of the Australian continent in time and space.

Later this year telescopes will also be installed at Yarragadee in Western Australia and Katherine in the Northern Territory to complete the triangle-shaped network.

Mount Pleasant’s 12-metre telescope dish was laboriously lifted into place over several hours in April.

Dr Jim Lovell, Project Manager for the AusScope telescope project in the UTAS School of Maths and Physics, said seeing the first telescope constructed was exciting.

“It’s wonderful to see the hardware finally arriving and coming together,” Dr Lovell said.

The installation was the culmination of two years’ hard work and organisation for Dr Lovell, which included working with an international team of experts to determine the sort of telescopes needed for the network.

The telescope will allow astronomers to use quasars – objects billions of light years away – as fixed points of reference.

Dr Lovell said measuring accurate positions is very difficult because nothing on earth is fixed.

“Continents drift, there are earthquakes all the time and we’re subject to the tidal attraction of the sun and moon – we need a fixed point of reference off the earth,” Dr Lovell said.

“Because quasars are so bright and so far away, they are stationary and make excellent target objects – we can use them to work out the positions of our telescopes to high precision.”

“At the moment it’s possible to make centimetre-level measurements, but AusScope aims to improve that to millimetre levels.”

The new telescope facility will be operated remotely from the Hobart control room in a specially constructed control room.

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## Smoke from recent Victorian bushfires: scientists say fires contribute to climate change.

(Image courtesy of MODIS Rapid Response Project at NASA/GSFC)
Testing the cat’s slam force

**By Sarah Nicol**

UTAS is leading research into the capacity of large high-speed catamarans to withstand rough seas.

In recent years, INCAT Tasmania has expanded its design and production of catamarans. As well as producing regular passenger ferries, it now also produces military vessels that are exposed to severe sea conditions.

This has increased requirements for the strength of ship structures, which are exposed to the impact of extreme waves – known as slamming.

INCAT-designed catamarans have a wave-piercing design and, due to the complex nature of the transient flow around the bow, it was unknown how large slam forces could be.

Professor Michael Davis and Dr Damien Holloway from the UTAS School of Engineering and Dr Giles Thomas of the Australian Maritime College, together with postgraduates Jason Lavroff, Shinshu Matsumura, Wald Amin, Ben French and Rebecca Dunn, have been investigating extreme slam forces to establish a basis for structural design using both sea trials and model tests.

The sea trials are undertaken during delivery from INCAT to customers around the world. The most recent include the 112-metre, 3000-tonne INCAT-built vessels that now operate between the main islands of Japan.

Wave radar, motion sensors and strain gauges monitor the sea conditions, ship motions and forces, giving the opportunity to evaluate the vessel performance in heavy seas.

Data has also been obtained on INCAT vessels used by the United States Navy in very severe sea conditions. Prof. Davis said trials have shown that these catamarans can experience extreme slam forces of 2200 tonnes and less than one second in duration without damage. It is essential that the structure can withstand such forces.

Slam forces are also being measured using a 2.5-metre model that simulates vessel vibration. The model is being tested in the 100-metre AMC towing tank.

Professor Davis said that model tests give greater control of wave conditions than is possible in sea trials and allow extremes to be carefully explored.

“We’re measuring slam forces about equal to the weight of the boat; those are very large forces,” he said.

There has been good correlation between model and full-scale forces. Currently the occurrence of slams in various seas is being investigated. Prof. Davis said that the catamarans had been tested in seas with a wave height over five metres. No submergence of the bow was reported, which demonstrates the inherent seaworthiness of the INCAT design.

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**UTAS youth alcohol expertise in national study**

'This national scoping project aims to investigate existing research on alcohol education programs aimed at deterring and reducing alcohol use in secondary school students.'

Project components include a literature review, public submissions and school consultations, with school consultations currently being conducted with government and independent schools in all states and territories.

“"The National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction has a brilliant reputation in this area. The study will add to the evidence base and contribute to policy development,” Dr Hughes said.

The final report is due in August 2009. Anyone who would like to be involved in the consultation phase of the study, or would like to receive the results of the study once it is completed, can contact the NCETA, ph: (08) 8201 7535; email: nceta@flinders.edu.au
Awards

Linking study to work

When architecture student Elizabeth Davis was awarded the inaugural Bullock Consulting Scholarship recently, she knew exactly which part of the scholarship would benefit her the most.

“For a university student $5000 will always be very useful, but 12 weeks’ work placement is a wonderful opportunity in this economic climate,” she said.

Bullock Consulting, a leading Launceton architectural, engineering and surveying company that focuses on sustainable design and development, has joined the University of Tasmania to offer the scholarship to further the education of the next generation of engineers and architects.

Presenting the scholarship to Ms Davis, Bullock Consulting director Chester Bullock expressed the company’s desire to ensure that every effort is made to nurture and support local talent.

“We believe it’s vital that all Tasmanian businesses make every effort to foster and encourage young Tasmanians to stay in Tasmania,” he said.

“The University of Tasmania’s scholarship program goes a long way to ensuring local graduates are given opportunities to do just that.”

Graduation joy for rural researcher

Rural services expert Anabel Fulton was awarded a PhD recently in a special graduation ceremony held on the UTAS Sandy Bay campus.

Ms Fulton, who is seriously ill and will not be able to attend the August graduation ceremony, researched issues related to helping farming communities manage change – especially farming families.

“We really need to think about all the family members in a farming business if we’re going to help,” she said.

“We tend to think of farmers as males only but 97 per cent of Australian farms are run by families.”

The effort the University made to accommodate my situation, especially the Chancellor and the people behind the scenes, made me feel special and honoured. My friends and family who came said it was the best graduation ceremony they’d been to.

Ms Fulton has spent much of her career following her interest in understanding the people and organisational aspects of the agri-food sector, working to foster sustainable industry development throughout regional Australia.

Most recently she was a national finalist and Tasmanian winner in the Telstra Business Innovation Award 2008; she was also a state finalist in the Telstra Women’s Business Private and Corporate Sector Award 2009 and runner-up in the Rural Women’s Award for Tasmania last year.

Ms Fulton has been involved with sustainable land management since 1983 when she enrolled in an agriculture consultant and Corporate Sector Award 2009. She is currently an agri-food consultant.

The McCarthy Medal awarded by the University of Tasmania to offer the scholarship would benefit her by local companies such as Bullock Consulting into the future.

“Our company has grown consistently since it was established in 1992 and employs a core team of 40 staff in offices throughout Tasmania.

“We are particularly focused on ensuring that we encourage local graduates not only from architecture but also from structural engineering, building services, civil engineering and surveying.”

Recognition for study

POSTGRADUATE STUDENT

Zhou Zhe has become the first international student to receive the McCarthy Medal awarded by the Faculty of Business.

Zhe flew directly from Shanghai, China, to UTAS for one night to personally collect the medal at an awards presentation in April.

He received the medal as the graduating student with the highest academic achievement in Master of Business Administration with eight high distinctions and four distinctions.

Joining UTAS in 2006, Zhe also completed a Master of Professional Accounting within the School of Accounting and Corporate Governance in 2.5 years and accumulated 13 high distinctions and six distinctions.

Zhe, who is considering returning to UTAS as a PhD student, is one of 324 students enrolled in postgraduate accounting degrees. Around 350 students are enrolled in business degrees, including 234 students studying an MBA and Associated Diploma and Graduate Certificate.

Scholarships for web enthusiasts

UTAS computing students have won two of the three prestigious national Student Developer Scholarships offered this year. The scholarships enable winners to visit Apple’s Worldwide Developers Conference in the USA.

Tony Gray from the School of Computing and Information Systems said that the scholarships, awarded to Andrew Bennett and Jon Manning, follow on from last year’s UTAS win by Paris Burstfield-Addison.

“These recent scholarships are awarded through the Apple University Consortium, a partnership between Apple and 32 universities,” he said.

“It provides a wide range of technical training, conferences, workshops and scholarships for staff and students and directly benefits a significant number of system administrators, software developers, academics and researchers each year.

“These recent scholarships make UTAS one of the best performing universities in the consortium and demonstrates that a real hotbed of Apple software development activity exists on campus.”

A further three UTAS students have won Honours Scholarships worth $5000 each for research topics using technologies unique to Apple. Winners were Matthew D’Orazio, Tim Nugent and Peter Eyle.
Game on for a new degree at UTAS

BY CHERIE COOPER

Love playing computer games? Now it’s possible to game your way to a degree and an exciting career path, with the new Games Technology major offered by the UTAS School of Computing and Information Systems.

Dr Ian Lewis from the School of Computing and Information Systems is a long-time gamer and game designer and said the new major was an exciting development for the school.

“The new gaming units can be completed as a major as part of a Bachelor of Computing degree, but I hope students from other faculties will be interested too,” Dr Lewis said.

“We have geared the first couple of gaming subjects so that anybody with an interest can complete them without any computing prerequisites.”

The first-year unit Games Fundamentals is focused on creating 2D games.

“It actually involves playing and thinking critically about games and assessment is focused either towards programming and graphics or towards thec-}

For Dr Ian Lewis playing games is all in a day’s work.

tiquing of games, depending on where the student’s interest lies. “We expect people from the Art School to have some interest, particularly graphic design students,” Dr Lewis said.

“They can use their skills to create animation and to make things interactive; it’s a great way of using theory practically.”

Dr Lewis said one of the employment opportunities available in the field of animation at the moment is offered by a Hobart company called Blue Rocket, which makes animated TV shows.

“Animation units a traditional business area for Tasmania, and now it’s great that there is an opportunity to put these skills to use in this area.”

The second-year units focus on creating 3D graphics, looking in particular at the design element.

“The emphasis is there going all the way from concept to design to implementation and producing a finished product.”

“If students choose to do the gaming major we are really keen on giving them the opportunity to build up a portfolio throughout each of the subjects,” Dr Lewis said.

“Every subject is geared towards students producing work they would show if they were applying for a job, because for this particular industry, people want to see what applicants have already accomplished.”

Dr Lewis said that the majority of Australia’s gaming companies are currently based in Queensland because gaming-related degrees are offered by universities in that state.

“We already have ex-students who have started their own software development companies after they’ve left the School of Computing and Information Systems. We are hopeful that this will happen with the gaming students as well,” he said.

Plans for a graduate diploma are also on the cards.

“In developing the major, discussions with industry were held and there is a large amount of interest from people who have already graduated,” he said.

“We’ve gone to colleges and talked to kids directly and we have had a lot of people contacting the school saying they’ve heard about the new major.”

BY CHERIE COOPER

Have you ever seen an antelope the size of a cat, or a frog bigger than a lapdog? What kinds of animals thrive in the Sahara? This vividly illustrated atlas is the essential wildlife reference, providing a spectacular visual survey of animals and their habitats across the globe. Divided into eight geographic areas and organised by continent and habitat type, The Illustrated Atlas of Wildlife leads readers from the Great Barrier Reef to the Appalachians and from the ocean floor to the cloud forests. Exploring in scientific detail the bizarre, beautiful and highly specialised wildlife of each location.

The Illustrated Atlas of Wildlife
Patrick Quilty, School of Earth Sciences; Eric Woolhes, School of Zoology et al. (University of California Press, 2009)

Reading Popular Physics: Disciplinary Skirmishes and Textual Strategies
Elizabeth Leane, School of English, Journalism & European Languages (Ashgate, 2007)

“This text contributes to our understanding of the nature and implications of physics popularisations. Leane situates her examination of several best-selling texts within the heated interdisciplinary exchanges known as the “Science Wars”, focusing specifically on the disputed issue of the role of language in science. Leane’s use of literary analysis in the book is based on lectures given to students who have little knowledge of calculus and includes typical suggestions and questions from students. It is an introduction to the field of computer intelligence.”

Artificial Intelligence: A Guide to Intelligent Systems
Michael Negnevitsky, School of Engineering (Pearson Education, 2009)

“Artificial intelligence explains the basics of intelligent systems and aims to eliminate the fear of artificial intelligence. It has moved away from the traditional writing on the topic, which generally involves complex mathematics. Instead it looks at the way systems such as personal computers have become a part of everyday life and how we want them to become more intelligent. The book is based on lectures given to students who have little knowledge of calculus and includes typical suggestions and questions from students. It is an introduction to the field of computer intelligence.”

UTAS books

UTAS June 2009 Number 330

My PhD

Hannah Jenkins
School of Philosophy

Partnering the paranormal and the academic

The paranormal and the academic might sound like polar opposites, but for Hannah Jenkins they make a perfect combination.

Hannah’s PhD, Beyond Belief: A philosophical examination of anomalous phenomena and explanation theory, explores psi, the umbrella term for telepathy (mind reading) and psychokinesis, which is movement of matter with the mind.

Hannah’s masters project evaluated the evidence of psi in relation to current scientific methodology. Her PhD furthers that research by looking at how we should deal with the phenomena in relation to contemporary explanation theory.

Hannah said many arguments in philosophy assume any evidence of the paranormal can be rationally explained away as fraud or sloppy experimentation.

“I’ve discovered there is a substantial body of evidence for psi that has been studied since the 1920s and my PhD thesis makes a case for re-evaluation of the evidence in the light of explanation theory.”

“There’s a dominating explanation theory called the ‘covering law theory’, which excludes things like telepathy and psychokinesis from the explanatory scope.”

Hannah discovered that the covering law theory came into dominance just as the results from the early laboratory experiments were gaining publicity.

“I think these two things happening together reinforce the theory that even though it appears there is evidence for these things, they can’t be possible because there’s no covering law that can explain them,” Hannah said.

“But when you actually become acquainted with the evidence, you realise how crazy that statement is — to suggest that all of that evidence has been produced by fraud.”

Hannah said if we were to accept all evidence of psi as fake, then we would have to question what we consider acceptable scientific evidence and apply it to the rest of science.

“So is Hannah a believer in psi herself?”

“It is something that’s not explained naturally, but it’s not unexplainable — I do think we will eventually have a natural explanation for the events that remain unexplained at the present,” she said.

“But at the moment a great place for furthering the discussion is philosophy, because it can help put it into perspective.”

MY PHD

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Design in all its glory

By Sharon Webb

On surfaces in the brand new chapel at the Bango Seminary in Queensland the words CONVEXITUTUM + SPIRITU+SANCTO are repeated many times. They mean ‘clothed in the Holy Spirit’.

But in the physical world, as opposed to that of the spirit, the chapel’s clothing – its furniture – was designed and made by a talented alumnus of the University of Tasmania.

Gregory Gilmour, whose studio Redesign is in Brisbane, began creating the chapel’s furniture when building was almost complete.

“It was a different kind of job,” he said.

“This is the most complete set of pieces I’ve ever done for one space. And it’s enduring work; if you design furniture for a bar, it’s ripped out within five years and replaced. The chapel furniture was designed to last 30 or 40 years – or more.”

The seminarians and the Archdiocese of Brisbane were impressed with the pale, spare lines of Gregory’s work.

Not only have they continued to order pieces from him – such as the font, which has a bowl designed to be removed so that seminarians can walk about with it, and the thurible (incense burner), which is more usually designed by a jeweller – but the Archdiocese has also asked him to make furniture for another chapel.

“The then rector of the seminary, Father Michael McCarthy, sent me an email after the job was installed, basically beaming about the space because it was so lovely to walk into,” Gregory said.

He mentions the large dovetail detailing on the two kneelers referring to the chasps, hands, and the simple, pure lines of the chairs, hopefully reflecting the history of the church and a simple life.

“It’s fair to say Gregory took a while to come to a point in his life where he can get this sort of substantial satisfaction. It wasn’t until Gregory studied for his Bachelors of Fine Arts (Design in Wood) as a mature-age student in Hobart, graduating in 1989, that he found what he really wanted to do in life.

“That’s when I really got focused and I’ve continued steadily along those lines,” he said.