

## REPORT ON MARCH MEETING

### **Mr Eric Waite: Lawrence Hargrave.**

At our March meeting, Mr Waite's easy, relaxed manner, without reference to notes, except to read one or two extracts from Hargrave's papers, provided a very interesting and absorbing evening.

The underlying theme of his address was how well-known Hargrave was in overseas scientific circles, compared to how little he has been recognised in Australia, virtually a case of "A prophet is without honour in his own country".

Hargrave's altruism led him to share all his research work with the worldwide scientific community, rather than patent his inventions or seek either recompense or aggrandisement for himself. He was the true scientific spirit, steadfastly refusing to patent any of his inventions, regarding patentees as legalised robbers. Had he patented just one of his inventions, such as his radial engine, he would be a national hero today.

Mr Waite listed Hargrave's major contributions to the science of flight, including his scientific papers read to learned societies like the Royal Society in Sydney and London. The Royal Aeronautical Society made him a life member in 1899. He is best known for his work with curved surfaces applied to box kites which formed the basis of early aeroplanes, indirectly as in the case of the Wright Brothers in America and with acknowledgement by Santos-Dumont in France. His radial engine design had been published in a Royal Society paper in 1889, but knowledge of this was denied by the Seguin brothers in France who patented the first radial engine in 1908. Being the first man to lift himself above the ground by the power of the wind earned him a special place in the history of aviation.

Hargrave corresponded with other researchers all over the world. One of these was Alexander Bell who visited him in Sydney in 1910 and at a conference at the University of Sydney lauded Hargrave's contribution to aviation:

*"Mr Hargrave's researches on this subject have been given, not to Australia only, but to the world, and they have been given through the Royal Society. In that way the Royal Society of NSW and Mr Hargrave are known wherever flying machines are constructed, and that is in every civilized country".*

Despite his great achievements, many of the locals at Stanwell Park regarded him as that mad old man who flies kites down at the beach. A prophet is indeed without honour...

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Lawrence Hargrave (on left) with Dr Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, during a visit to Sydney in 1910.