

The Francis Forbes Society

For Australian Legal History

The Forbes Society is pleased to inform members of the Bar Association that on **Monday, 6 May 2024 Dr Ben Chen** will be presenting a Forbes Legal History Tutorial on “**Automating Empirical Legal Research**” at the **Law Society, Level 2, 170 Phillip Street** (Rooms 201 & 202) @ 5.15pm – please note the different venue (with our thanks to the Law Society).

Ben is talking on empirical legal research which involves learning from a large number of judgments, legislative materials, or other documents. For example, legal historians may wish to investigate how hundreds or thousands of cases fitting some description have developed over several centuries. While empirical research can be rewarding, it can also be costly, time-consuming and mundane. Sydney Informatics Hub and Ben are developing a web-based program to reduce the cost of doing empirical research, using judgments as a test case. Called the *Empirical Legal Research Kickstarter*, this program seeks to make empirical research viable without a large budget and an army of research assistants.

Pilot versions of the Empirical Legal Research Kickstarter can automatically search for and download judgments of select Anglo-Australian jurisdictions. This program can also automatically produce common data formats with case-specific descriptions/features. For example, a spreadsheet with rows of judgments and columns of catchwords/keywords, hearing dates, decision, decision date and so on. Moreover, the program can instruct GPT — a generative AI — to do much of the menial work traditionally done by research assistants.

Pilot versions of the program are available at:

(NSW) <https://empirical-legal-research.streamlit.app>

(CTH) <https://cth-empirical-legal-research.streamlit.app>

(UK) <https://uk-empirical-legal-research.streamlit.app>

Ben’s bio: Ben Chen is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Sydney Law School, a Councillor of the Francis Forbes Society for Australian Legal History, and a former Tipstaff to Justice Geoff Lindsay. Ben writes in the areas of equity and trusts, civil procedure, succession law, and game theory. He has published his research in leading academic journals based in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. His works in legal history have been cited extra-judicially by judges of the New South Wales and Queensland Courts of Appeal. The Australian Research Council is currently funding his research on costs and delay in litigation over inheritance.

Supreme Court Bicentenary: The illustrated history of the Supreme Court “Constant Guardian: Changing Times – The Supreme Court of New South Wales 1824-2024” is available and may be ordered here <https://constantguardian.info/>.

On Tuesday 2 April the Chief Justice was interviewed on ABC Radio National’s Law Report and spoke of some famous criminal cases - JH Plunkett and the Myall Creek massacre trials and the Shark Arm Murder (see Chapter 6), and controversy surrounding the establishment of the Judicial Commission (see Chapter 13) <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/lawreport/chief-justice-andrew-bell/103551688> or the transcript is here [Highlights of the Radio National interview on 2 April 2024](#)

See [Bicentenary events \(InBrief\)](#) and the Court’s Bicentenary page: [Bicentenary of the Supreme Court](#)

Membership renewal and supporting the Francis Forbes Fund: A renewal / application form is available here: [2023-24 Francis Forbes Membership Application and Renewal](#). Memberships are renewed annually and will run to 30 June 2024. Please return a completed renewal / application form to the address on the form or email to membership@forbessociety.org.au.

The Society is dedicated to studying and documenting the history of Australian law. Its membership includes legal practitioners, academics, journalists and students. Benefits of membership include timely notification of legal history events *via* updates emailed to members from time to time and opportunities to obtain discounts on publications from time to time published or arranged by the Society. The Society encourages **donations** to the **Francis Forbes Fund** – members know that one of the Society’s objects is to encourage and promote research into Australian legal history, and it maintains a fund for that purpose to which donations may be made.

Dates for diary

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| 6 May | Ben Chen tutorial on <i>Automating Empirical Legal Research</i> at the Law Society, Level 2, 170 Phillip Street, Sydney @ 5.15 pm |
| 17 May | Ceremonial sitting of the Supreme Court at 9.15 am in Banco Court |
| 30/31 May | A contemporary New South Wales adaptation of Gilbert & Sullivan’s classic operetta will be performed in the Banco Court under the baton of maestro the Hon. Peter Hidden AM: see Trial by Jury Dramatic Cantata in One Act |
| 12 June | Robert Turnbull, barrister (8 th Floor Wentworth Chambers) and previous tipstaff to the Chief Judge in Equity the Hon P A Bergin – legal history tutorial on ‘ <i>The History of precedent</i> ’ |