

# Matthew Vickers

1975–2023

**Written with contributions from Stephanie Mancell, Darren Covell, Chris Winslow, Chris D’Aeth and Andreas Heger**

**O**n 22 November 2023, the NSW Bar Association suffered a significant loss with the unexpected death of Matthew Vickers. Most of the Bar Association’s members would never have met Matt, but he was an instrumental part of many of the Association’s key functions for over 20 years.

Matt joined the Bar Association as an IT consultant and programmer in 2002. Together with his dear friend and colleague Darren Covell, Matt inhabited a small room in the subterranean bunker of the Bar Association premises which, to the confusion of those around them, they

deliberately made even darker by removing lighting to optimise the displays on their many screens.

It was at a Christmas party that staff first heard Matt tell the story of his high school work experience at a livestock agent in New England. The business owner told him to round up some cattle and move them from one yard to another. Being a complete novice, Matt asked the owner how that would be done, and in response he was given an umbrella and told to go prod the cattle. Matt never told us how the episode ended, but we assumed that he rolled up his sleeves and went about his task with the same can-do spirit that was the hallmark of his career.

One of Matt’s early achievements was the introduction of an automated process to count the votes in the Bar

Council elections. This modernisation was unwelcome among some of the more traditional staff at the time, who preferred (and only trusted) the tried and true manual counting method. Matt was playing the long game though, as that machine has outlasted all the sceptics. Voting in the Bar Council elections has now become a hybrid process, with an option between the online platform (also built by Matt) and the paper ballot count, during which staff gather to open the envelopes and pass the paper ballots to Matt, to coax through his original, now twenty-year-old counting machine.

During the over 20 years Matt was with the Association, he either established, developed or augmented all of the Bar Association’s online presence and systems. These included the Bar Association website;





the original Find a Barrister platform; online CPD streaming; online renewal systems for practising certificates and membership; and the silk applications platform. He managed the Bar Association's database of membership and practising certificates and, at the time of his passing, was working on the Bar Association's next iteration of its database. Matt also supported the Australian Bar Association, including building its national Find a Barrister page, which brought together listings of barristers from across Australia.

Matt's laconic and laidback manner belied his incredible intellect and diverse interests. He was just as comfortable talking about footy as he was about art, music, politics, or philosophy. He was popular with his colleagues, with the seat next to Matt at the Bar Association's annual staff

Christmas lunch being more coveted than a ticket at the Bench and Bar dinner. Matt never sought out the spotlight, but was a keen observer of the ironies and oddities of life and would inevitably be rewarded with a laugh when he chose to share them with others.

He played more than a few seasons with Bar FC, to whom he was known as 'The Enforcer' in his preferred positions of goalkeeper or last full back. Matt had a significant physical presence and was not adverse to putting his body on the line; not many players or soccer balls made their way past him.

Matt was a fantastic darts player, who despite his modesty ('It's not hard, it's just maths, really'), represented the ACT at the National Darts Championships in 2022, which included beating New South

Wales and tying with a South Australian team comprised of two Australian representatives. Refusing to accept any celebration of this performance, he put it down to the right balance in his competition hydration strategy (just the one beer and one whisky between sets).

Matt confounded some of the stereotypes of a software coder. True, he was a heavy metal fanatic, but he was well versed in the literature of rural Australia and could recite Banjo Paterson's 'The Man from Ironbark' in its entirety.

In 2018, for his family, he moved to Dalton (population 230) in rural New South Wales and continued supporting the digital operations of the Bar Association remotely. He was an abiding source of reassurance in all matters relating to IT, for staff and managers alike. He was a rock of logic, upon which wave after wave of confusion would break and recede. No problem was insoluble to him. On the occasions when we sought his help, he would listen intently, get out his signature yellow notepad, take a pen from the pocket of his King Gee shirt, and map a solution.

Dalton, though never busy, became a ghost town on the day of Matt's funeral. It was obvious to the out-of-towners that the locals had adopted him. Though Matt had the talent to work for any of the global tech giants, he chose a different path. It was clear that day that he had made the right decision and that his family would receive all the care and support that the people of Dalton can provide.

Matt's incredible generosity with his time and knowledge extended to everyone he knew, including former colleagues, who frequently rang him just to run something past him (often despite having their own IT teams working on the issue). This was evidenced by the number of both former and current Bar Association staff who travelled to Dalton to attend his funeral.

Outside work, Matt was a devoted family man who was amazingly proud of his children, speaking of them with love and pride often. He is survived by his wife Megan and children Elyssa, Jacob, Jaxyn and Veronica.

Matt is dearly missed by all those who were fortunate enough to have worked closely with him. **BN**