

VicRoads Association

Newsletter No 201



Membership of the Association is available to all who have been members of VicRoads or forerunner organisations or the spouse of deceased members and bestows on them all the rights of the Rules of Association. Current cost of membership is a once only fee of \$30 plus a joining fee of \$5. Enquiries about membership or receipt of the Newsletter by e-mail should be directed to the Secretary at 60 Denmark Street Kew 3101 or by phone or e-mail as shown in the footer below. An application for membership of the Association can be found at the end of the Newsletter.

Dear Members,

The main purpose of this newsletter is to alert you to our functions in March and April 2018. They are listed in the Dates for Your Diary section below. I especially want to remind you of the Annual General Meeting scheduled for Monday 19th March at 11.30 am followed by the buffet lunch at 12 noon.

I commenced writing this on the day after Boxing Day. I hope you had a wonderful Christmas and I wish you all the best for the New Year. Are you going to make a traditional New Year's resolution to improve your life or to change an undesired trait or behaviour – as many of us do? If you do, you are following a tradition that dates back thousands of years to the times of Janus, a mythical god of early Rome. The month of January is named after Janus. Janus, the god, had two faces. One looked forward – into the New Year - while the other looked backwards – into the old year. At the end of each year, the Romans looked in both directions, the one to look forward optimistically by making resolutions and the other to look backwards to forgive their wrongdoings in the previous year and to forgive enemies in the past. Thus New Year's resolutions were born.

A resolution doesn't necessarily aim to eliminate a negative habit such as losing weight or giving up smoking or stop eating junk food. It can be aimed at developing a positive habit – such as going to the gym or walking every day or even joining an organisation to do community work.

I think we all have made a resolution at one time or another but most of them are never taken seriously or are given up after trying. According to one study cited on the internet only about 8 per cent of resolutions are ever kept and the rest are wasted, either because too many are set or small setbacks erode them.

Who am I to give advice, but I suggest that if you do want to make a resolution, don't be too ambitious and make sure it is realistic. And perhaps you should have an end date too so that when you reach that date you can review your target and perhaps reset your goal. I am sounding suspiciously like a Woman's Weekly columnist, aren't I?

I have never consciously set any New Year's resolutions but if I did I might try to become more forgiving of our politicians. I take comfort in that often they don't mean what they say but they have to say it to save their own necks. I am also reminded of another thing when I am shopping at the supermarket. If I see something on special I often buy two or three of them when often, I don't need even one. So that could be grounds for a resolution. I also hate asking my children to fix my phone or computer. Perhaps I could resolve to ask my grandchildren and ask them not to mention it to their parents. Another resolution could be not to make a noise when I get out of a low chair. Another would be for me to find a successor as President of our Association – if I promise to continue writing the newsletter!

But perhaps I should consider taking up a new hobby such as procrastination – or maybe I'll do that later.

I have commenced writing this newsletter so early because VicRoads has outsourced its design studio and printing sections. Until all this has bedded down it takes extra time to produce the newsletter. You may have noticed that the last two were a bit late. So I ask you to take careful note of our program for 2018 and put them in your diary now rather than rely on the reminders in the newsletters. By then it may be too late!

David Jellie
Editor

Dates for your diary

Our program this year is as follows:

DATE	TIME	EVENT
February	Monday 12	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
March	Thursday 1	6.00 pm Drinks and dinner at Waverley RSL
	Monday 19	11.30 am AGM, VicRoads cafeteria followed by buffet lunch at noon
	Friday 2	12 noon Golf day at Green Acres Golf Club
	Monday 26	TBA Visit to North East Link Project
April	Monday 9	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
May	Monday 7	TBA Visit to Melbourne Level Crossing Removal Authority
June	Monday 4	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
	Monday 18	TBA Visit to Office of Projects Victoria
July	Monday 30	TBA Visit to VicRoads R & L, Traffic Centre and Road Safety
August	Monday 13	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
September	12 and 13	TBA Visit to Bendigo Regional office and attractions
October	Monday 8	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
	Thursday 11	6.00 pm Drinks and dinner at Waverley RSL
	Monday 29	TBA Visit to Melbourne Metro Rail Project
November	Monday 26	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
December	Monday 3	12 noon Christmas luncheon
2019		
February	Monday 11	12 noon Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown

What's coming up

Occasional Lunches – Shoppingtown Hotel – Monday 12th February and Monday 9th April 2018

Bookings are not essential, but it would help with arrangements if you can let Kelvin York know on 9438 1028 if you can attend. We hope to see you there.

Annual Golf Day – Friday 2nd February 2018

Our annual golf day will be at Green Acres Golf Club in Kew starting at 12 noon.

Please contact Jim Webber on 9817 4182 or 0412 064 527 or jimwebber@optusnet.com.au if you want to participate. Partners and friends are very welcome.

Drinks and Dinner at Waverley RSL – Thursday 1st March

This is an opportunity for old friends and colleagues and their partners to get together in very pleasant circumstances to enjoy dinner together - at a very reasonable price. It is a good opportunity to get your old work groups together for a bit of fun.

If you can make it, please contact Ken Vickery on 0409 561 618 or kenvickery@tpg.com.au so that we can arrange the catering. We always have a good attendance at these - so if you haven't been before come and join us. It is a great night.

Annual General Meeting – Monday 19th March at 11.30 am

The AGM will be held in the Cafeteria at Head Office between 11.30 a.m. and 12 noon on 19th March. It will be followed by a buffet lunch in the Cafeteria on the first floor.

At the AGM the General Committee for the next twelve months will be elected – six office bearers; President, Vice President, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Asst Secretary, Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Asst Treasurer, and six ordinary members, half of the latter to be elected for a two-year period. Nominations are to be submitted in writing by the proposer, include the consent of the nominee, and lodged with the Secretary by Tuesday 13th March. A nomination form is on the last page.

The business of the meeting will be to confirm the minutes of the 2017 Annual General Meeting, receive the Annual Report, receive the Financial Statement, consider any Notice of Motion, elect Committee members, appoint an Auditor, confirm or amend the joining fee and annual subscription, and any general business. Any Notice of Motion proposed is to be received in writing by the Hon. Secretary no later than Tuesday 13th March. A form for this purpose is provided on the back page of this newsletter.

We are always keen to find new committee members so if you are interested – or know of someone else who may be interested – please don't hesitate to fill out a nomination form.

Please also note that the address of the Hon. Secretary is c/- Ms Natalia Morgan, 2nd Floor, VicRoads, 60 Denmark Street, Kew 3101.

Visit to North East Link Project – Monday 26th March 2018

We are still planning this visit so final details are not available yet. However if you are interested in attending this visit please register your interest with our Secretary, Jim Webber, whose contact details are shown in the footer on the front page.



WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

Christmas Lunch – 4th December 2017

The Christmas lunch was as popular as ever. We had 50 people sit down to lunch and the meal and the company was most convivial as demonstrated in these few photographs.



Rosslyn and John Wright



Jan and Frank Brown



Ted and Mary Barton



David Williamson, Merv Williams and Ray Bridger



Simon Eggleston and Neil Tull



John Ford and Jan Weinberg



Graham Gilpin and Tony Fry



Anne Green and Lyn and Jeff Briggs



John Bethune and John Rebbechi

NEWS FROM VICROADS

Hoddle Street Improvements

VicRoads is kick-starting the transformation of Hoddle Street with an eight day construction blitz in January 2018. By the time you receive this newsletter a lot of the work will be history. The plan is to close Hoddle Street in both directions between the Eastern Freeway and Victoria Parade between 7th and 14th of January.

During this closure, more than 100 crew members will be working around the clock to strengthen the bridge over the Eastern Freeway and demolish and rebuild the centre of Hoddle Street, so that a third lane can be added to the freeway entry. Further disruptions on Hoddle Street will continue throughout 2018. The map below shows the scope of the work.

Local businesses will still be open as usual. All local residents and businesses in the surrounding streets will still be able to drive and walk through area. All DART (Doncaster Area Rapid Transit) and Route 246 buses will continue running during these works but delays will be experienced. There may also be changes to pedestrian access during this closure and these may vary throughout the works. Access to Hoddle Street Overpass will be maintained for cyclists but they will have to dismount and walk their bikes across or take the signed detour.

Parking on Hoddle Street between Noone Street and Gipps Street will be temporarily removed during the works. This lane will be used for local access, emergency vehicles and buses.

During this closure, works will take place during the day and night. VicRoads crews will be working 24/7 to get this work done as quickly as possible. Construction is planned so that the more noisy work will take place during the day. Overnight, noise-reducing construction equipment will be used to minimise the impact on local residents as much as possible. Minimal dust and vibration is also expected as a result of these construction methods including using water suppression to reduce dust on windy days.

These works are part of the \$60 million upgrade project for Hoddle Street and Punt Road to improve the intersections at the Eastern Freeway, Johnston Street, Brunton Avenue and Swan Street.



Monash Freeway Upgrade

When the Monash Freeway Upgrade is complete, the M1 will be a managed motorway from Werribee right through to Pakenham. This provides smoother, safer driving conditions for commuters and freight vehicles over this 90 kilometre stretch.

During peak times, traffic trying to enter the freeway can queue back along the entry ramps and cause congestion on other roads. Cars surging on to the freeway in groups create stop-start driving conditions on the freeway and interrupts smooth traffic flow. Freeway incidents can cause delays at points far from the incident site. Without prior warning that a lane is blocked, or advice to travel at a slower speed, cars can bank up and take many hours to clear.

To solve this problem ramp signals will be installed at entrances to the freeway. Freeway ramp signals balance the number and timing of vehicles entering the freeway traffic along the whole route. Part of a centrally coordinated system, ramp signals generally operate during peak hours and at any time when freeway conditions are heavy.

Sometimes it may seem that the signals are operating at a ramp despite smooth traffic conditions nearby. That means the congestion is elsewhere on the route and that entry at that ramp is being regulated to improve overall flow. This will benefit motorists at that ramp and all along the freeway.

Lane Use Management Signs (LUMS) will also be installed. LUMS consist of overhead signage mounted on gantries at regular intervals along the freeway. Easily updated from a central coordination point, LUMS enable efficient responses to changing traffic conditions. When traffic incidents or other disruptions occur, controllers can use LUMS to coordinate lane closures and variable speed limits. Drivers receive advanced warning about upcoming traffic disruptions, allowing them to make informed decisions about their travel.

The addition of Automatic Incident Detection (AID) to this system enables automatic detection of an incident or breakdown, flagging with the traffic management centre the need for attention and potential action in the form of quickly reducing speeds or closing lanes.

The benefits of a managed motorway provide:

- Easier and safer merging into freeway traffic.
- Reduced congestion and improved traffic flow on the freeway, as well as the surrounding roads.
- Smoother driving and more reliable travel times.
- Reduced emissions from vehicles.

VALE

It is with great sorrow that I announce the death of two of VicRoads' most esteemed characters – Reg Patterson and Jim Wilson.

Reg Patterson


Reg Patterson, one of the memorable personalities of the Country Roads Board, the Road Construction Authority and VicRoads died on 14th November, a month before his 87th birthday.

Burton Patterson and Adeline (nee Vogeles) gave birth to two sons, Horace, known as Horrie and Reginald who would be known as Reg. Burton had served in World War One in Egypt and returned home to work with the Victorian Railways, as a fireman, loading the furnace on steam trains.

Reg was born on Christmas Eve in 1930, just as the world was entering one of the greatest economic depressions ever experienced. He was born in Bendigo and attended the Violet Street State School, followed by the Bendigo Junior Technical School and then the Bendigo School of Mines. He received a Legacy Academic Scholarship, which enabled him to undertake tertiary education.



Reg Patterson



As a lad, Reg played footy, but times were tough and children made the most of what they had and even though they might not have had a fortune, families in those time enjoyed a good social life with extended family and wonderful neighbours.

Reg often told his family of the lard sandwiches which were often on the menu in most kid's school lunches and how he'd make some money by riding his bike to place bets for some old blokes in Bendigo.

Reg met Myrtle Chew in Bendigo while she was working at the Kia Ora factory. Reg's brother Horace also worked there and he and Myrtle were dating at the time. There was a family story as to why Reg and Myrtle became a couple and if told by Reg, always reflected his gallantry for a damsel in distress. No doubt Horace's story would have been different but the upshot was that Reg and Myrtle began 'stepping out' together and fell in love. They enjoyed dancing together, especially at all the country balls in vogue in those days. They were married on the 6th June 1952 at the Bendigo Presbyterian Church.

Reg and Myrtle lived first with her brother Alec in Bendigo until her brother Lenny built their first home at 15 Niemann St in Bendigo. As a young engineer Reg was employed by the Country Roads Board based in Bendigo and his four children – Maree, Christopher, Joanne and Stuart – were born there.

In Bendigo Reg played a significant role in improving the road network servicing the Mallee. Reg would spend days at a time in the region supervising road construction work, identifying pavement material sources and generally ensuring the work was done to appropriate standards and estimated costs. He formed an enduring friendship with Jack Sullivan, the CRB Roadmaster based in Ouyen who provided strong local support to Reg in achieving these goals.

Reg's move from construction supervision to a more senior road management role occurred when he was appointed Assistant Divisional Engineer at Traralgon Division in 1966 where family life was hectic, with four children all with many and varied interests. The centre of Victorian power generation the Latrobe Valley was a busy place and Reg made his mark in that development.

Athletics was a big focus for the family with Reg starting up the Achilles club in Traralgon and then later in Benalla, serving on the committees and training the athletes which included all four Patterson children.

An appointment as Divisional Engineer Benalla in 1970 was at an important stage in the establishment of the alignment of the Hume Freeway between Melbourne and Wodonga and Reg was placed at the centre of difficult and at times heated community discussions about where the freeway should go. Today motorists enjoy a fine Hume Freeway in part due to the input by Reg in those Benalla Division days.

After living in regional areas, the Patterson's moved to Melbourne to live in Lower Templestowe. By then Maree and Chris had left home and Reg and Myrtle became grandparents, a role they both thoroughly enjoyed.

Education was always Reg and Myrtle's focus and their children and grandchildren were encouraged to do their best and to set themselves goals and to involve themselves in meaningful activity.

When Reg was appointed Metropolitan Divisional Engineer, he was responsible for managing Melbourne's major arterial road network. This was at a time of significant developments in the overall system and Reg played a major role in implementing the Board's programs using all of his typical perseverance, determination, skill and perhaps a bit of guile!

For a brief period Reg was the Chief Bridge Engineer with VicRoads but was fairly quickly appointed Deputy Chief Executive and then in 1990 Chief Executive Officer of VicRoads. This was the pinnacle of a career that commenced as a young engineer in a rural Division of the Country Roads Board and ended with Reg occupying the office of the most senior officer of VicRoads. All who have worked with Reg over the years acknowledge that he was the hardest worker that they have ever known - a bit uncompromising as a boss but deserving of all the rewards of work well done. Reg resigned from VicRoads in 1994.

He travelled the world extensively with his career and after his resignation he consulted on a number of overseas aid projects travelling to places such as India, Yemen, Japan, Sri Lanka, Western Samoa, the UK and other locations in the Middle East.

Reg loved pottering in his garden and around the home, always building and re-building structures, putting in fish ponds, extending this and modifying that! There was never allowed to be a stray leaf in sight in the garden and the lawn would be mown within an inch of its life. Reg and Myrtle moved to Templestowe after Reg's retirement. Reg and Myrtle enjoyed attending live theatre and musicals and over the years, playing golf and dining with their friends. They also enjoyed many cruises, to Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore and New Zealand.

Sadly, Myrtle passed away in January 2015, after being quite unwell and being cared for by Reg and Stuart. She spent six months in a nursing home until her passing after which, Reg was very lonely and struggled. He kept visiting the nursing home, realising there were many people there who never had visitors and took many of Myrtle's orchid collection to the home to help brighten up the resident's environment. After Myrtle's passing, Reg's health deteriorated significantly. He soldiered on as best as he could, his determination ensuring that he could stay at home and look after himself. He was still pottering in the garden, wearing his familiar hat and making sure everything was neat and tidy, until the day he entered hospital, prior to his death.



John Meritt (CEO) reported Reg's death to current staff at VicRoads as follows:

We were saddened to learn this week of the passing of Reg Patterson, a former VicRoads Chief Executive. Reg had a long and distinguished career with VicRoads and its predecessors CRB and RCA. Early in his career, he worked in a variety of engineering roles in many of the Regions (formerly Divisions) and held senior roles of Divisional Engineer and later, senior management roles in Head Office and Major Projects. He was Chief Executive (1990-1993) following Ian Stoney - a stark contrast in styles.

Mal Kersting recalled that Reg had a reputation for being a really tough cookie and there were many legendary tales about his early exploits hard working, a fierce negotiator, with a no-nonsense approach to getting things done. He admired loyalty and staff that spoke their mind, and he would fiercely defend the organisation. He loved his work, golf, his family and occasional travel. Many would say there will never be another Reg.

I think Reg would have been pleased with his send off. There were a lot of his colleagues at his funeral as shown in the photographs below.



Colin Roy, Merv Williams and Ray Bridger



Anne Matthews and Bev Thompson



Bruce Phillips, Merv Williams and Trevor Phillips



Bill Peyton, Graham Gilpin and John and Rosslyn Wright



Frank Brown, Colin Kosky and Peter Lowe



Geoff Coath, Bill Rowe and Doug Matthews



Jim Wilson

Jim was a very close and respected colleague of mine. He was 87 when he died. I succeeded him as the Project Manager of the West Gate Freeway back in the early 1980s. He was an excellent all round engineer and he had a rather irreverent sort of humour. He had a private funeral but I was invited to provide a small eulogy about his work and this is what I said.

'The story of the connection of the Wilson family to the CRB goes back to the 1940s and perhaps, even earlier. When I heard of Jim's passing, I rang Tom Russell who was the last Chairman of the Country Roads Board and the first Chairman of the Road Construction Authority – at the time that Jim was working in these organisations. As a young man, Tom started his career with the CRB on the highway between Alice Springs and Darwin during the Second World War. After returning to Victoria, he was sent to work on the Kiewa Valley Road and there he met Jim's father, Ted.

Ted was a bridge overseer on that project, supervising CRB gangs of men building bridges. There was another overseer working on the project supervising other gangs. His name was Stuart "Fatty" Gardiner. He was a big man and apparently very pushy.

This was around the time that a lot of refugees or displaced persons were coming to Australia to forge new lives here. Most of them were housed at the Bonegilla camp. At any rate the CRB offered work for many of these men – to work on the road and bridge gangs in the area. The pay was good and they were given free accommodation and meals and a palliase to sleep on. Tom said that the men were bussed in about 40 at a time and they were lined up for the overseers to select personnel for their gangs.

Fatty always barged in and had first pick. He chose the biggest and strongest of the bunch and then he let Ted select from those left over. Ted would find one who could speak English and then using him as an interpreter calmly walked along the line chatting to the men, finding out about their skills such as carpentry and so on. They were always the skinniest and smallest of the bunch but – according to Tom – they were by far the best. Apparently Fatty couldn't understand why Ted always picked the most reliable of the men – many of whom subsequently had long-term careers working for the CRB.

Tom described Ted as the gentleman overseer and I think Jim had the same sort of temperament and insight into the human condition as his father. I recall Jim saying that he used to go out with his father working on the bridges during holiday breaks so perhaps it was his destiny to become a bridge engineer.

Jim worked with the Highways Branch of the MMBW working on the South Eastern Freeway before joining the CRB as a senior bridge construction engineer. In this position he oversaw other engineers managing contracts and overseeing construction, quality and progress. I was not one of those engineers.

I was down at Orbost supervising the construction of the bridges over the Snowy River – and later up at Euroa as Resident Engineer Bridgeworks. However, I knew and liked Jim and I was always pleased to spend time with him when our paths crossed – which they did fairly often. I loved his gentleness and decency but most of all his humour.



His humour nearly got me into trouble once. It is no news to you that our Prime Minister, Harold Holt, drowned at Cheviot Beach just before Christmas. Someone had arranged for a television to be set up in the office so that we could watch the funeral telecast. There must have been 100 or so people watching including the big bosses. We saw President Johnson (LBJ) and Ladybird arrive and all the other dignitaries arrive and then Jim made a passing remark saying how embarrassing it would be if Harold suddenly appeared dripping seaweed. This set me off and I had to leave the room under the stern eyes of my superiors.

I left the Hume Freeway project to supervise the construction and testing of deep, high capacity piles, in South Melbourne preparatory to the design of the elevated section of the West Gate Freeway. At this time, Jim was supervising the Montague Street Bridge over the Yarra – now called Charles Grimes Bridge. This project was being built using similar piles in similar geotechnical conditions. Jim was only too happy to help me out and he coached me and shared his knowledge with me to the extent that I became about as half as competent as he.

This sort of piling work was not easy and we were pioneering design principles and construction techniques that were later copied by private enterprise to build Southbank and the Casino. These piles were 1.5 m diameter and penetrated mudstone at depths of 50 m below surface level through layers of highly compressible silts. Imagine if you got two drinking straws and stuck them together end on end – that would give you a comparison in scale.

In fact years later after Jim had retired, I and Peter McDonald (another CRB engineer), were awarded the Baker Medal by the Institution of Civil Engineers in London for the research and innovation that was used for the West Gate Freeway – but when I think of it, Jim's hand played a leading role in a lot of this work.

When Jim finished on Charles Grimes Bridge he transferred to the West Gate Freeway as my boss as the Project Manager. I was very pleased with this. He was a pleasure to work with. He always consulted with me and sought my opinions so that I felt appreciated and fully involved. At this time, the bridges of the elevated freeway were being designed and we had to draft up the specifications for the construction contracts. We were using technology hardly used in Australia before on one of the largest projects of its type in the world. The specifications were unusual in that we did not have a final design so that the documentation was based on estimates and projected quantities and details. Jim had great writing skills and we had many discussions on grammar and syntax and expression – as it was very important to keep the documentation simple, unambiguous and easily understood by construction personnel.



The design was very complex. 2,070 high strength concrete segments were manufactured in a factory specially built on site. All segments were unique and – because of the construction method specified – they had to be built to exacting standards. I can remember saying to Jim what a daunting task we had ahead of us, mainly because of the complexity of it all. His response was that complexity was really layers of simplicity. And so it turned out.

Another aspect of Jim's nature was his unflappability. I never heard him raise his voice in anger and nor did I hear him swear at anyone. As his father was a gentleman overseer, so too was Jim a gentleman engineer. At West Gate, we had many meetings with trades union, contractors and the like and Jim treated them all with courtesy and respect. At this time the Cain Government was finalizing arrangements with the infamous Norm Gallagher to wind up the Builders Labourers' Federation. We had experienced a number of nasty lightning strikes brought on by three competing unions – but the BLF was by far and away the most belligerent.

The Minister of Industrial Relations sent someone down to our office with a brown paper bag and directed Jim to give it to a BLF representative in a usually deserted shed at the far end of the site. Jim did not know what was in the bag. He asked me if I would accompany him because if anything happened he needed a witness. I agreed. The meeting was like something out of Prime Suspect. Jim and I stood on the dirt floor in the middle of the shed in the half gloom. A door opened and in walked the two meanest looking blokes I have ever seen.

They were both about seven feet tall with squashed noses and cauliflower ears. Jim greeted them, calling them gentleman and shook their hands. I did too and my hand disappeared into their huge mitts. I was so nervous I thought I would pass out.

Jim said that he had been instructed to give the paper bag to them and that we didn't need a receipt. They took the bag and turned heel and that was the very last we ever saw of the BLF. Jim beamed at me and reckoned it as the best job he had ever done.

Not long after this, Jim went to see his accountant, and he came back to the office and he told me he was going to retire the following week. Apparently if he stayed on it was going to disadvantage him financially. I was a bit crestfallen because I really enjoyed working with him and the task ahead was formidable. However in a way it was the making of me because Jim had mentored me so well I was able to manage.

Sadly we lost touch. After West Gate I was seconded away to a job that required a lot of overseas travel and our paths crossed only rarely. But that does not diminish the esteem and admiration I will always hold for him. My father said that the best thing you could say about anyone is that they were decent. Jim was a decent man – funny, intelligent and without conceit – and a first class engineer.'

After I delivered this eulogy, a couple of Jim's children approached me and told me that they had no idea what Jim did at work. They said that he never talked about work at home.

NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

This is the second instalment of John Wright's story about his early working days. I have had to edit some of it for the sake of my audience.


Life as a public servant

Looking back, especially in the light of what passes as acceptable employee conduct in 2017, I find it difficult to believe my own recollections of life in the Public Works Department.

For starters, there was a serious drinking culture. Well after the official finish to the 1-hour lunchtime break, the office was often bereft of senior officers - especially engineers. If they were needed urgently, a phone call to the back bar of the Oriental Hotel at the near end of Collins Street would invariably find them. The famous Oriental, with its homely back bar is long gone - probably incorporated into one of the many skyscrapers that transformed the Paris end of Collins Street into bland ugliness in the 1960s. On one occasion, a brawl broke out when one of the engineers (who later became the City Engineer at Frankston) grabbed a soda syphon and began spraying his workmates. They were all ejected from the hotel and turned up at the office mid-afternoon, soaked to the skin and highly animated.

I remember one lunch hour when I was still 17 years old, and my friend Alan Southon was leaving his job at the bank in South Melbourne to return to Bairnsdale to take up a job in the Bairnsdale Advertiser. To celebrate the occasion, we met for a counter lunch and a few beers in the downstairs bar of the Graham hotel in Swanston Street, just around the corner from Collins Street. It was quite a distinctive, modern building with a stainless-steel façade that was totally out of keeping with many of the fine old buildings around it. After drinking too many beers I wended my way back to the office, somewhat the worse for wear and completely useless to my employers, who quickly discerned that I was as perky as a parrot and sent me home. There was no reprimand and the incident was never mentioned again.

Nobody really seemed to supervise their staff. People would disappear for hours, and return to talk about some movie they had just returned from seeing.



Some of the staff were real characters. There was one older, Greek draftsman in the main drawing office who was a very fatherly type. One afternoon, when most of the bosses were still up at the back bar of the Oriental, he gathered some of the younger draftsmen, including myself, and explained with the help of diagrams the intricacies of the birds and bees and hence marital happiness. Most of us, including myself, had never heard of most of what he described, but we all felt that we had been imparted great wisdom and knowledge.

The person in charge of the Ports and Harbours section, where my friend Geoff worked, was an ex-naval commander John Coles, who tended to describe things in colourful seafaring vernacular. In Ports and Harbours there was an older English draftsman, Harry Smith whose penmanship was absolutely beautiful. He was also a gentleman. I aspired to produce drafting work like his, and I believe that over a period of many years I came close to doing this.

The deputy Chief Engineer was a much older man named Charlie Fitzsimons. For a while, I worked with four other design staff in the small area surrounding his glass-enclosed office. Charlie was a crusty old character and we had very little to do with him - other than to witness his frequent coming and goings and try not to interact with him. He was a very snappy dresser, however, and was rarely around during Oaks Day and other major racing days. I often wondered what he really did with his time. One of the other guys working in this office was Joe Delaney, who left to become a policeman and later still became the Chief of the Australian Federal Police.

Pay days

Pay days in the vast, high-ceiling hallways of the State offices were always exciting. In common with almost everybody else, I was always broke by pay day. The pay cart arrived, with a dust-coated officer wheeling it, accompanied by a huge, uniformed, totally bored-looking individual carrying an enormous revolver in a heavy leather holster on his hip. The cart had a wooden tray on its top, filled with small, brown-paper envelopes containing crisp, new notes. I'm not sure if it was the envelopes or the new money that exuded such a wonderful, unique and aromatic smell. Your name was called out and your hand shot out in a reflex action. You immediately counted your money while the officer was there - just in case it was short. It never was, but I can remember one honest individual exclaiming in amazement when he found that he had been grossly overpaid. He knew that if he simply pocketed it and said nothing that somebody else would go short, because the paymaster was deemed to be infallible.

There was this tall, garrulous, brown-suited young insurance salesman who would appear shortly after the pay-cart had passed, engaging young, new officers, like myself with compelling reasons why they should sign up immediately to a sizeable policy with an equally sizeable fortnightly deduction from our pay, which was already pathetic.

He was very good. I fell for him twice, and both times I went back to the pay office and cancelled the deduction authority. The salesman turned up about a month later and went ballistic about this. After we complained to management about this predator he was banned from the building. This enterprising guy probably became a billionaire director of a major financial corporation.



My friend Jeff and I decided we would have some fun with my pay packet one day. I stuffed my empty pay packet with nice, crisp pieces of Pound note-sized blank paper, so that it was bulging attractively. We left it lying in the middle of the main hall of the Public Works Department and hid behind a partition to see what happened. We didn't have to wait long. A well-dressed individual came by, spotted what was obviously a pay envelope and without breaking step dipped down to scoop it up. He continued out the Building's main entrance and started walking up the path towards Collins Street. After about 50 feet, he could no longer wait to examine his fortuitous find - and when he realised that he had been 'had' he tore up the envelope and its contents in a fury.

My first business trip

Having just turned 17, I was told that I was to accompany an engineer, Jan Scheromski and a driver to Gippsland to act as a survey assistant for them in their inspections of public works for schools at Traralgon, Mirboo North and Wonthaggi. We would be away for 2 nights, staying at hotels.

We arrived at Traralgon around lunch time, and called into a hotel for a counter lunch. Because I was tall, my tender years were not an issue to my senior officer and the driver, who managed to down no less than 3 beers (and insist that I do the same) in about 15 minutes as a thirst quencher before heading out to inspect some little school in the backblocks. My job was to hold the graduated staff so that Jan could take levels for a new cricket pitch. I had great difficulty holding the staff upright, and Jan and the driver were lubricated enough to find this vastly amusing. Later that day, when we had dinner at our hotel in Traralgon, Jan and the driver wisely decided that I should not drink any more beer.

The next morning in Morwell, we met with a civil works contractor to inspect some completed driveway and drainage works to some government buildings, prior to Jan approving payment. Jan was walking along one of the newly completed concrete driveways with the contractor, who was describing his own work in glowing terms. I was walking behind and recall that Jan seemed to have stopped listening, and then he stopped walking. The contractor turned around to see what was wrong, just in time to see Jan raise his fancy leather boot with the steel-clad heel and smash it right through the concrete. Obviously, Jan could tell from the sound his boots were making on the driveway that the concrete was only a thin skin, maybe half an inch thick, over a sand base - certainly not 4 inches, steel reinforced thickness over a crushed rock base as per the specifications. The look on the contractor's face was priceless. Jan didn't say a word. He just turned around and walked away. What the contractor needed to do did not need to be articulated by Jan.



Jan's suspicions of the contractor were undoubtedly well founded. I remember being told by Percy Trevaskis - a botanist as well as an engineer, about a storm-water drainage line a contractor had installed in a suburban schoolyard. When Perc turned up to inspect the completed works he insisted on testing the line with water to see if it actually worked. To the contractor's dismay, Perc found a fire hose, placed it down the pit at the upper end of the line and turned it on full-blast. He then retired to the last pit at the lower end of the line to see the result. After some time had elapsed and no water had emerged into the lower pit, he asked the contractor to uncover a section of the line. He quickly saw that not only had the pipes not been connected, there was no bedding beneath them. They had simply been rolled into a rough trench and covered up. Needless to say, no payment was made.

That evening, we stayed at the Mirboo North Hotel. After dinner, Jan started drinking heavily and was soon seated at the piano in the lounge and playing and singing a merry ditty like a professional. The place was packed, and around 8.30 pm there was a commotion as the local copper entered the room, declaring in a most belligerent manner that he was going to charge the Licensee with having patrons who were not bona-fide travellers staying at the hotel. The lady Licensee was outraged and quickly produced the guest book and was able to demonstrate that all travellers were indeed bona-fide. As for myself, I was not drinking beer, thank heavens, because I was still under-age.

My work at the PWD

Half of my work was preparing site plans for simple upgrading works to small country schools - i.e. new footpaths, toilet blocks, shelter sheds and the like. If the work was for Percy Trevaskis, it would also include new tree plantings with the botanical names shown. All of these plans were produced using Indian ink on waxed Irish Linen sheets that had a faint blue colour. I also prepared plans of new comfort stations.

Occasionally I would be sent to visit the architectural branch of the PWD to collect drawings. My friend Alan Gardiner was working there as a draftsman as part of his course to become an architect. I loved looking at the old architectural drawings which were prepared on quality paper and meticulously painted. They were wonderful pieces of art in my view, and I spent much time admiring them and their creators.


The other half of my work involved preparing plans of improvement works to many of the State's mental institutions and sanatoriums. These were Tom Vaughan's responsibility. I remember that the man in charge of these institutions at the time was Dr Cunningham Dax.

My first experience was at the Royal Park Mental Hospital at Flemington as a survey assistant to the meticulous 'Nick' Nikolajuc, using a steel tape to establish a traverse line from which he precisely measured the edges of footpaths, roads and buildings within and bordering a large park. I was fascinated, especially when we reached the far end of the park where there was a building with a large, circular enclosure maybe 30 metres in diameter that I can only describe as a cage because it was edged with high, closely-spaced iron bars to keep the occupants in. They were all women and they were silently walking round and round the enclosure, automaton-like, in the manner of captive wild animals. It was my first encounter with mentally ill people.

My next encounter was with Tom Vaughan at the Kew Mental Asylum, which has now been closed for decades. I think the imposing Victorian buildings with their high towers overlooking Kew and the Yarra are now called Willsmere. This visit was a real eye-opener.

I was holding the levelling staff on what was to be a new drainage line beside a large chain-wire mesh enclosure. Tom went off to speak to some supervisor and left me by the fence for a while. On the other side of the chain-wire fence was a long, rectangular exercise yard bordered by a red brick building with a covered veranda. Within this yard and beneath the veranda were perhaps 10 or 20 seriously disturbed people. Most simply sat there, staring into space. One man was seemingly being beset by imaginary insects and he was whirling and cursing and slapping at them non-stop. Another man, who was sitting in a chair, would repeatedly scream at the top of his voice. Yet another was sitting on the ground and using his hands and heels to drag himself about. He had worn a large hole in his trousers. I was transfixed by this spectacle when a middle-aged man approached me from the other side of the fence and told me that he was not crazy and that he was not supposed to be there. He begged me to help him get out. It occurred to me that he could be telling the truth, but there was nothing I could do for him. Fortunately for me, Tom returned and I was spared further entreaties.

It was not until 2003, that I was to discover that my maternal great grandfather, English sailor Henry Sawyer from Portsea, Hampshire had been admitted to this very institution in April 1880 in a demented state, which was then believed to have been caused by "softening of the brain". He had been transferred there from the Castlemaine Benevolent Asylum, where he had been admitted by my great grandmother, Fanny Bland in March 1879. Henry died there on 9 December 1880 and was buried in common ground at the Melbourne General Cemetery. My other great grandfather, Jens Christian Nielsen from Denmark, is also buried in the same 'common ground' and may well have become demented from what was then a common complaint of old and not-so-old men - the end stage of syphilis.



On another occasion, Tom and I travelled to the Sunbury Mental Home for the Aged. Like Willsmere in Kew, this place was an architectural treasure and had probably been constructed well before the turn of the century. It was very depressing, with many senile old people, probably drugged out of their brains, creeping around like zombies, barely able to articulate but desperate to stay alive and curious as to our presence.

I also visited the Springvale Sanatorium, the Public Library in the city and the Government Cool Stores in the course of improvement works to those facilities.

Night school, 1957

Concurrent with starting full-time work, I enrolled for a part-time, Associateship Diploma of Civil Engineering at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), a huge, venerable institution also known as the Working Man's College and having frontages to Swanston, Latrobe and Franklin Streets. This was to be a relationship that would endure until 1970.

My first group of subjects included English 1 (Matriculation), Strength of Materials (a subject about stress and strain in steel and timber, and how to design simple beams and riveted joints) Engineering Drawing 2, Land Surveying 1 and Mathematics 2A.


RMIT was a totally different experience to Caulfield Technical College. A number of my friends from the PWD were also attending, including Jeff Dobell. I remember an orientation tour of the RMIT Library and being enormously impressed at the reference material, assistance and research facilities that were available.

My classes usually commenced at 5.30 pm, which left me with just enough time to walk there from the State Offices, purchase a pie and a drink and sit down in the class. All classes went for 2 hours. A second series of classes commenced at 7.30 pm and went until 9.30 pm. These late classes really used to drag, especially after a very long day travelling, and it was often a struggle to concentrate. By the time I walked down Swanston Street to Flinders Street Station, caught a train to McKinnon and walked up McKinnon Road to our street, it was often 10.30 pm.

Some of my classes were held during the day. I undertook several subjects in the Civil and Aeronautical Engineering Annexe, which adjoined the Old Melbourne Gaol. One of these classrooms opened onto the rooftop where, during our brief classroom breaks, we quickly discovered that we could just see through the grimy windows of the adjoining bluestone building (part of the Old Melbourne Gaol), where large groups of very healthy-looking school girls from the Emily MacPherson Girls School performed interesting callisthenic exercises....

Amongst other subjects, such as Hydraulics 1, I studied Land Surveying 1 in this building, where I learned about precisely measuring lengths, altitude and angles in the field. I learnt about triangulation, where a single baseline of maybe 40 miles in length is meticulously measured and precise angles are then taken from each end of this line to obelisks on distant mountain peaks to form a network of interlocking triangles over vast distances, allowing measurement by precise calculation rather than by direct measurement. In those days there was no electronic distance measurement equipment available to surveyors. We learnt how triangulation was used by the British in the Great Survey of India, and how the gravitational effect of the mighty Himalayas pulled the plumb bobs of the surveyors out of the vertical and introduced a distinct error into the survey.

The very oldest buildings in the College were at the Franklin Street end of the College's central dividing lane, and still bore the title "Working Men's College". It was a 3-story, brick building, and the bluestone steps on its stairways were well-worn from the tread of countless students like me. My mathematics classes were held here. There was no air-conditioning, and on hot nights the ripe, yeasty odours of brewing beer would drift through the open windows from the brewery across Franklin Street, along with all of the sounds of steel beer drums being cleaned, workers shouting and other brewing machinery humming and whining - all of which was very distracting. Maths was still my worst subject, and I was to fail Mathematics 2A about 3 times in a row before I got it right.





TRIVIA AND DIDACTIC WHIMSIES

Great workmanship

These workmen in America are tidying up after installing bollards in the pavement. They'll probably have to pull one out to extract the van.





Where are we?

Three tourists were driving through Wales. As they were approaching Llanfairpwllgwyngyll on the Welsh island of Anglesey, They started arguing about the pronunciation of the town's name.

"LLan-fair-poo-wee..." said the first.

"No no – it's llan-fair-pi-well..." argued the second.

"I think we need to ask a local about this," the third sighed.

They argued back and forth until they stopped for lunch. As they stood at the counter, the third asked the girl behind the counter:

"Before we order, could you please settle an argument for us? Would you please pronounce where we are... very slowly?"

"Sure!" said the girl. She leaned toward them and said: "Burr-rrr-gerrrr-Kinnnnng."

New Year's Resolution

A woman noticed her husband trying to weigh himself on the bathroom scale. Each time he stepped on, he started sucking in his stomach.

"That's not going to help, darling," said the wife. "Trust me."

"It's already working," the husband said smugly. "Now I can see the numbers."

Politically Incorrect with a Touch of Truth

Donald Trump goes on a fact-finding visit to Israel. While he is on a tour of Jerusalem he suffers a heart attack and dies.

The undertaker tells the American diplomats accompanying him, 'You can have him shipped home for \$50,000, or you can bury him here, in the Holy Land for just \$100.'

The American diplomats go into a corner and discuss for a few minutes. They come back to the undertaker and tell him they want Donald shipped home.

The undertaker is puzzled and asks, 'Why would you spend \$50,000 to ship him home, when it would be wonderful to be buried here and you would spend only \$100?'

One of the diplomats replied, 'Long ago a man died here, was buried here, and three days later he rose from the dead. We just can't take the risk.'

A perfectly timed photograph



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Monday 19th March 2018, 11.30 am

VICROADS ASSOCIATION

Reg No A00222505

NOTICE OF MOTION

Mail to the Hon Secretary, VicRoads Retirees Association Inc, 60 Denmark Street, Kew, Vic 3101 for receipt by Tuesday 13th March 2018.

Notice of Motion to be presented at the Annual Meeting, 19th March 2018:

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

19th March 2018, 11.30 am

NOMINATION FOR COMMITTEE

Mail to the Hon. Secretary, 60 Denmark Street, Kew, Vic 3101, for receipt by Tuesday 13th March 2018.

Nomination for General Committee March 2018 to March 2020:

Office/Position:

Nominee (Print name):

Signed: Date:

Proposer (Print name): Date:

Signed: Date:

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING BUFFET LUNCH

19th March 2018 – 12 noon to 1.00 pm at Head Office Cafeteria.

Mail to the Hon. Secretary, 60 Denmark Street, Kew, Vic 3101, for receipt by Tuesday 13th March 2018.

I will be attending accompanied by:

(Please print)

Members Name:

(Please print)