

VicRoads Association Newsletter No 200



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,

This is the last newsletter for 2017 so it is the last chance we have this year to wish you all a happy Christmas and festive season. So – Happy Christmas!

Those of you who are Richmond supporters have experienced an early Christmas. Like last year when the Bulldogs were supreme, I think most Victorians were supporting the Tigers and they didn't let us down. As a keen football follower, I admired Dustin Martin's season more than I have ever admired another player. Whenever I saw him play this year, he seemed to impose himself on every game and I can remember saying to my son – himself an ardent Richmond supporter – after Richmond's first game of the year against Carlton, that I have never seen such a dominant player influence the outcome of a game so much as Dustin Martin did that day. He thoroughly deserved the Brownlow Medal.

I was very happy with the progress of my team – the Bombers. They have some brilliant young players who have gained valuable experience and I think their future looks pretty good. But what I was pleased about the most this year was the performance of Melbourne Storm in the National Rugby League. I have been a member of Storm since about 2000. I saw their first grand final win in Sydney in 1999 and I have followed them ever since. Storm is an amazing club and in Craig Bellamy we have a master coach.

I have been privileged in the last decade to see three of the best players ever in Cam Smith, Cooper Cronk and Billy Slater – and the current team is arguably among the best ever. It makes living in Melbourne a pleasure to see this team in action throughout our winter. It is not just a three-man team. All the other players are stars in their own ways and they conduct themselves on and off the field with great poise and flair. I know Mike Verey would agree with me. He sits behind me at Storm games.

Now I want to remind you of our Christmas lunch to be held in the cafeteria at Head Office on Monday 4 December commencing at 12 noon. Please refer to the notice later in this newsletter.

By the way, in case you haven't noticed, this is the 200th edition of our newsletter – and the 80th I have written. I am not being boastful when I say that I know most of you enjoy reading the newsletter. I get many messages and comments to this effect. But I also need to tell you that I enjoy writing them especially when people write in to me – such as Leo Russell whose letter is published later in this newsletter. I also am grateful that we worked for an organisation that provided excellent and professional public service, and whose managers were supportive of the development of their staff right across the state.

David Jellie
Editor

Dates for your diary

Our program this year is as follows:

DATE	TIME	EVENT	
November	Monday 27	12 noon	Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
December	Monday 4	12 noon	Christmas lunch at Kew HO
2018			
February	Monday 12 Friday 23	12 noon	Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel Members and Guests Golf Day at Green Acres Golf Club, East Kew

What's coming up

Occasional Lunches – Shoppingtown Hotel – Monday 27th November

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 – and partners and guests are welcome.

Christmas Lunch – Monday 4 December at 12 noon

The location and arrangements for the lunch will be the same as for last few years. Drinks will commence at 12 noon with lunch being served at 12.30 p.m. The cost will be \$45.00 per head and we require prepayment either by cheque or bank transfer.

If you propose to come, please fill out the acceptance form at the end of this newsletter, and post it – together with your cheque – to Jim Webber, Secretary VicRoads Association, c/o Natalia Morgan, 60 Denmark Street Kew, Vic 3101. Cheques should be made out to VicRoads Association. Direct bank transfers should be made to VicRoads Association BSB 083323, Account Number 170934017 and you should include your name as a reference – so that we know who has made the payment. If you choose to pay by transfer, we would appreciate it if you ring or e-mail Jim just to let him know that you are coming. Please respond by Wednesday 29th November to allow sufficient time for catering arrangements.

Please also note that lunch will be again served on the mezzanine floor of the cafeteria (first floor, north east wing).





WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

Visit to Eastern Region, Traralgon, 13th and 14th September 2017

A party of 17 people visited Traralgon for this very enjoyable and interesting visit. Scott Lawrence (Regional Director) and Vincent Lay (Project Director) briefed us on regional developments and issues on the road network.



Eastern Region

Eastern Region extends from Warragul in the west to the NSW border. There are 270,000 people living in the region but this is expected to rise to 386,000 by 2041. The region has a gross regional product of \$15.8 billion with 105,000 working people.

The region has 97% of Victoria's natural gas, 87% of Victoria's energy, 25% of Victoria's beef, 23% of Victoria's timber, 22% of Australia's dairy output, and 14% of Australia's oil. It is also one of Australia's major tourist destinations. It has 11 million visitors annually to Phillip Island, Wilson's Promontory and Gippsland Lakes. Serving this economy and community are 3,500 km of arterial roads and 842 major bridges and culverts.

The Princes Highway is the main artery through the region and work is continuing on the duplication of it between Traralgon and Sale as shown in the diagram below. Of the works underway, it is expected that the Traralgon East section will be completed by mid 2019, the Nambrok section by late 2019 and the Fulham section by mid 2018. That would leave the remaining 12 km to be constructed after 2019.



Over \$20 million is being spent on planning a pipeline of future projects in the region including:

- Princes Highway East – Sale Alternate Route
- Princes Highway East – Improvements within Traralgon
- Princes Highway East – Bairnsdale
- Princes Highway East – Traralgon Bypass
- South Gippsland Highway – Coal Creek
- Bass Highway – Anderson to Leongatha

There is also planning for the Phillip Island Corridor underway but this is being funded from a different source.

Road safety is a major issue for the region.

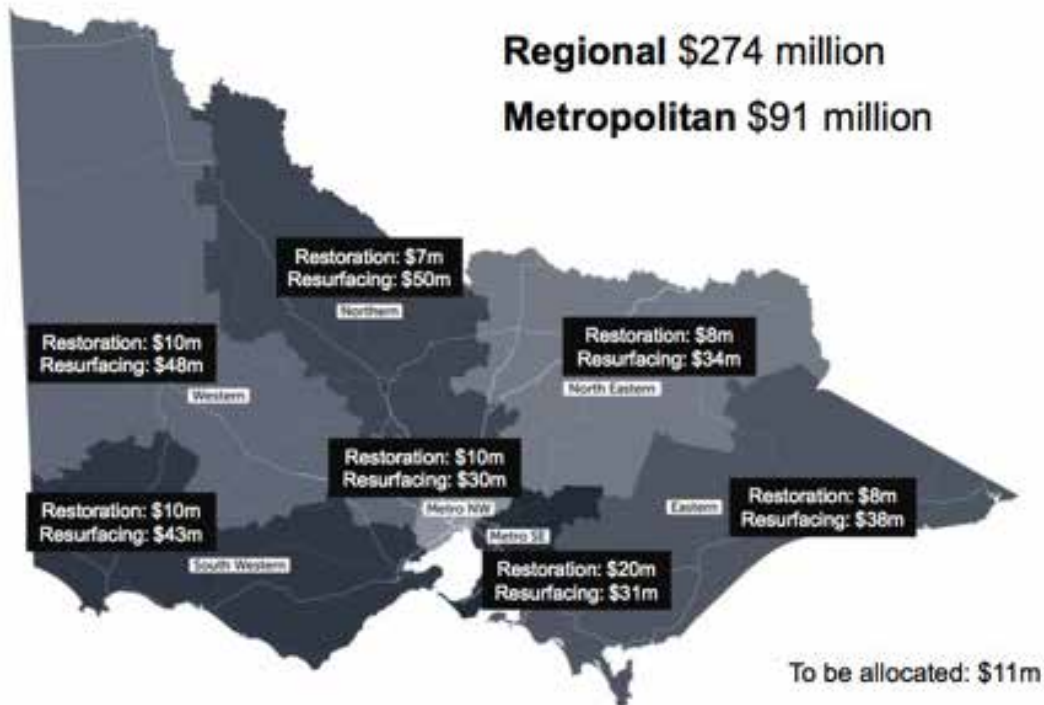
- You are four times more likely to die or be seriously injured on a country road compared to travelling in metropolitan Melbourne.
- About 30 people are killed and 300 seriously injured on Gippsland roads each year.
- Typically 55% of road trauma in Gippsland is on arterial roads.
- Motorcyclists and pillion passengers represent only 4% of registered vehicles but are represented in 25% of the lives lost or seriously injured in Gippsland.

Their Safe System Road Infrastructure Program has major works being implemented between Longwarry to Bairnsdale, Bass Highway, Maffra to Sale, South Gippsland Highway and the Paynesville Road.

Regional road upgrades valued at \$49 million are being undertaken at Wonthaggi (Bass Highway) and at Moe, Rosedale and Bank Street on the Princes Highway East. A bridge widening and strengthening program of \$41 million is also under way.

I am happy to report that there will be a significant improvement in road maintenance funding commencing this year – see diagram opposite for allocation of funding to the various regions.





Project Maps

Princes Highway East



Monaro Highway



Hyland Highway





After lunch with some of the regional staff, we boarded a bus for a tour of some of the roadworks currently under construction in the region. This journey took us through Longford where we visited the Swing Bridge over the Latrobe River.



Some of the intrepid travelers: Jim and Kay Webber, Brian and Joy Kemp, David Dix, Gary and Heather Edwards, Peter Lowe and Ted Barton checking out the Swing Bridge.

That evening we had dinner with local members and current and past staff members of VicRoads. I did not count how many turned up but I think it would have been about 50 people. It was great to catch up and we had a lot of fun catching up with everyone.

The following morning we had an early meeting with the Latrobe Valley Authority where we were briefed by the CEO on the initiatives they are taking on worker transition services – following the closure of Hazelwood – and business support in the area. They are liaising with community organizations, councils, education providers, government authorities, local industries and individuals to work together in building the future of the Valley.

We then boarded the bus for a tour of Loy Yang Power Station. This station was commissioned 20 years after Hazelwood which has just closed down. Loy Yang is split into two sections – A and B – and A has four generators and B has two. Their combined output makes it the biggest power station in Australia with 3,000 MW capacity. It provides about one third of Victoria’s power needs. It is owned by AGL.

The power station has its own open cut mine. The mine has an area of 800 hectares, and produces more than 30 million tones of coal per annum. The perimeter is 13 km long and it is 180 metres deep. The age of the coal seam is 30 million years and there is about another 40 years worth of mining. The coal is high in moisture content – about 62% – and the ash content is 2%.

There are four bucket wheel dredgers excavating the coal. Each machine is longer and higher than the MCG – 190 m long, 50 m high and weighs over 500 tonnes. The wheels are 13.2 m diameter with 10 buckets of 2.3 cub m capacity. It digs up to 4,000 tonnes of coal per hour and its travel speed is 8 metres a minute. Coal is loaded directly on to a conveyor belt system comprising belts two m wide and up to two km long with a total network of 30 k. The coal is conveyed to a 70,000 tonne capacity coal bunker and that amount of coal is consumed every day.



One of the dredgers at work in the mine



The power station with the mine in the foreground. The coal bunker is the rectangular building on the left.

The other notable features are the two giant chimneys. They are 200 m high and 25 m dia. at their base and 18.5 m dia. at the top. There are four flues per chimney.

After lunch we all went our separate ways but we all agreed it was a great experience visiting the region.



I nearly fell over taking this shot.



Taken inside the power station

NEWS FROM VICROADS

John Merritt

John Merritt sent the following message to staff on October 16.

Over the last couple of months I have been reflecting on my work and leadership at VicRoads, and my working life generally. Our recent OCI results give us a picture of where we are at as a place to work, and they add to my overall sense that we are heading in the right direction, our foundations are stronger, and that our people are in good hands.

Whilst there is never a good or easy time to leave a role like mine, I feel the time is right for me to move on.

Our Minister, Luke Donnellan, has, as always, been incredibly supportive of me, and I have agreed to stay on until December 20, and help as best I can in the transition to the next leader.

There will be plenty of opportunities between now and then to discuss what worked and what didn't, where VicRoads is at and what's next.

For now, can I simply say that I could not have asked for more support in my role from you. Individually and collectively you have been wonderful to me, and I will be forever grateful for the fantastic life experience of working in this great organisation.

VALE

Noel Dumesny

Noel's granddaughter, Bella Ainsworth, contacted me to say that Noel passed away on 24th September. She wrote:

'I regret to write to you and tell you of the passing of my wonderful Pop, Noel, on the 24th September this year.

Noel started with CRB in 1956, rising to overseer of Benalla workshop and worked 36 years+. He loved working with CRB/VicRoads and my Nan, Maureen, thought it best to pass on the notice of his passing.

Thank you for everything you did for Pop.'

I sent condolences on behalf of the Association.

Anton Pommers

I am sorry to announce that Anton died on 10 September at the age of 90. Those of you who knew Anton will remember a quiet, refined man with impeccable manners and a quiet confidence in his perception and understanding of road planning and traffic engineering. He loved music and he played the cello. Many people from the CRB attended his funeral and Trevor Phillips and Bill Saggars gave eulogies – from which I have extracted most of the information provided below.

Anton was born in Riga, Latvia in 1927. During his childhood and youth the Republic of Latvia went through troubled times. Latvia had declared independence from Russia in the aftermath of World War I. However, by the 1930s, the country became increasingly autocratic after a coup in 1934 establishing an authoritarian regime under Kārlis Ulmanis. The country's de facto independence was interrupted at the outset of World War II, beginning with Latvia's forcible incorporation into the Soviet Union, followed by the invasion and occupation by Nazi Germany in 1941, and the re-occupation by the Soviets in 1944 to form the Latvian SSR for the next fifty years.



Anton as a young man



Anton as we knew him

Although Anton was reluctant to talk about his experiences during the war, he did describe his dilemma when he had to choose between joining the Hitler youth or likely death at the hands of the Russian army. He chose to join the Hitler youth movement in order to escape the Red Army advancing on Latvia. He was sent to Czechoslovakia and from there, he and others escaped and made their way across Europe towards the west where they were hoping to meet the advancing Allied forces. This must have been a harrowing experience – avoiding capture and fossicking for food. Anton once described killing a deer and hiding it in an outhouse so that they could retrieve it after dark. But they were successful in being captured by the British and American forces. Anton was very emotionally affected in recalling these times and his relief and gratitude to be in Australia to enjoy peace and freedom and a way of life so different to his earlier experience was palpable.

The last time he saw his mother, she had pleaded with him to get as far away as possible from Europe and he took this advice by migrating to Australia in 1948 – at the age of 21. He never saw his family again.

He was initially posted to Bonegilla camp but was later able to enroll at RMIT to study part time for a Diploma in Civil Engineering. He so excelled in maths that RMIT invited him to stay on as a tutor/lecturer. He later joined the CRB and he became involved in the development of the Mechanical Sub-branch depot in Glen Waverley. Trevor Phillips recalled that he first met Anton at the Exhibition Building office in March 1960. A small task force was established under the guidance of Neil Guerin comprising Jon Loder, Frank Vroombout, Trevor and Anton to form the 'Location' element of the Traffic and Location section. Their task was to identify and locate future freeway alignments outside the inner metropolitan area which was then controlled by the MMBW. Its mandate was to plan for at least 30 years ahead and to consider the following 20 years.

These projects included the Mulgrave Freeway (now Monash), Scoresby (now Eastlink), Eastern and Dandenong Ring Road, the Frankston Bypass, and later all of the Mornington Peninsula Freeway to Sorrento. They did the initial location work on the Hume Freeway (Wallan to Broadford), together with the Western Highway to Ballarat. The Princes Freeway from Doveton was also in their overview resulting in the bypasses of Narre Warren, Berwick and Pakenham. They also did smaller works on the Keilor Bypass, Kyneton Bypass and the Explosives Wharf access at Werribee East. In fact it would be difficult to find a freeway in Victoria where Anton had not had some influence.

Trevor, Anton and others were co-opted into the Ministry of Transport in the 1980s from where Anton retired when he turned 65. Trevor concluded his eulogy saying, "I salute a very valued, trusted, and loyal colleague, of the many persons who travel with you on life's journey, my memory of Anton will be an indelible mark on my recollections. Thank you old friend for a significant contribution, may your next installment in this journey through time and space be less turbulent, less demanding and even more satisfying than a life past."



NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Leo Russell

Leo wrote the following letter to me.

Dear David

I want to congratulate and thank you for the production of the VRA newsletter. Your story on India was very interesting. As a product of Colac you would love to be up there with Hodgy and Finchy (Luke Hodge – Hawthorn footballer (ret'd) and Aaron Finch – Australian cricketer).

Just down the Princes Highway from Colac we have Winchelsea from where the school bus taking students to secondary school in Geelong would start. Robin Underwood was picked up at Buckley, myself at Mt Moriac, Ron Angus and Ken Hands (former Carlton champion) at Highton.

I can identify with David Anderson's great verse re Joe Gwizdek. It was so sad to lose Joe and it came as a complete surprise to me. Divisional Engineer Neil Jephcott would always get Joe to compere farewells, Christmas parties and staff functions and then he would sit back and enjoy. On one occasion, David Anderson and another engineer were in Bairnsdale from Head Office and attended such a function. I was there and in a position to see David thoroughly enjoying the entertainment provided by Joe.

The prostate problem was less kind to Joe than myself. I've had a catheter in the belly for over two years. A wheelie walker gets me to church but my wife, Athol isn't happy when I nod off during the homily, and in any of the coffee shops around.

Athol and I have been in Hervey Bay for nearly 11 years thanks to a daughter already residing there. We are enjoying a lovely climate especially for people with respiratory problems. I am still interested in the "gee gees" and I test my luck with a TAB phone account.

David please say hello to Ros and Peter Lowe and thank Peter for his years as VRA secretary. I turned 90 a month ago.

With kindest regards

Athol and Leo Russell

Carn the Cats!

P.S. 25 deg here today and 12 deg in Melbourne!

John Wright

I spent a very enjoyable morning with John recently talking about family history. I mentioned in the last newsletter that I had just started to write a history but John is much further advanced than I and the amount of research he has done is very impressive. He has given me permission to publish a section of what he has written about his first entry into the workforce. I have broken this up into two installments, the first of which follows.



"At the beginning of 1957 I was sixteen and a half and had completed the first year of my Mechanical Engineering Diploma at Caulfield Technical College – as it was then known. Bob Menzies was Prime Minister and Henry Bolte was in the second year of his second term as Victorian Premier. The Olympic Games had barely finished in Melbourne.

I had just finished my holiday employment as a Myer's shop assistant and was determined to find myself a job that paid real money. All my friends seemed to be working and I didn't have the smarts to realize that I would be far better off to stay at school and complete my Diploma of Mechanical Engineering than trying to do it part-time. When I told Mum and Dad, neither of them turned a hair. I don't remember them counselling me against this foolish course of action. As I recall, they simply nodded and got on with their previous conversation. I suspect they were relieved that they were finally 'off the hook' after 32 years of raising children. Besides, my marks for the end-of-year exams at Caulfield Tech hardly qualified me to be Dux of the school.

Early attempts to find work

I had some vague notion that I wanted to be a geologist, and spent a fruitless afternoon visiting the corporate offices of major mining and oil companies in Collins Street.

My next attempt was with the Victorian Railways as a draftsman, because I had good marks in Engineering Drawing. I scored an afternoon interview at their Spencer Street headquarters but made the fatal error of missing the train from McKinnon by 30 seconds, due to it arriving 2 minutes early (at that time, I was an obsessive wrist watch setter and my watch was correct to the second).

I turned up at the Spencer Street office half an hour late. The unenthusiastic interviewer went through the motions of interviewing me but wrote me off at the end, saying that if I couldn't turn up to my interview on time, I would never be able to get to work on time. Being a good railway man, he would not accept my earnest tale of the train turning up early (would never happen). Thinking back, I was meant to miss that train and never to work for the railways. My friends, including Jeff Dobell (who later joined them so he could get a scholarship) said it was the absolute pits, and I believed them.

State Electricity Commission

My next attempt to find a career job was with the State Electricity Commission. I recall my mother telling me that they were good people to work for. The staff officer who interviewed me in the SEC's Flinders Street office was a gifted salesman who overcame my half-hearted desire to become a civil engineering draftsman and instead 'sold' me on becoming a trainee electrical operator, which, he said would apparently lead me to a wonderful career with a very generous starting salary. Somehow or other, he had managed to stop me thinking about what I really wanted to do.

The following day, I attended a second interview in a St Kilda Road office of the SEC, at which my physics and chemistry results were viewed favourably and I was ushered into another room for a quick physical examination. Almost immediately, I was told I had the job, and that I would be starting work the very next day at the West Brunswick Terminal Station. Even with my general lack of savvy, I was slightly gobsmacked at the speed with which I had been appointed. However, I was also pleased that I had gotten myself a job.

The next morning, I travelled by train and tram to the West Brunswick Terminal Station. I was treated like royalty, with a senior officer providing me with a comprehensive tour of the facility, starting with their massive control room, which impressed me enormously. He explained to me that the power entering the station was coming direct from the Latrobe Valley via tall towers carrying the 220,000 volt aerial lines. The primary task of the terminal station was to 'break down' the high voltage, via banks of massive transformers, to 66,000 volts for the main metropolitan distribution grid and to manage fluctuations in demand through load shedding and other methods.

At that time, he explained, they had a particular problem with the Graeme Kennedy's In Melbourne Tonight TV show, which had only recently commenced. In those days, the old black and white sets devoured electricity like it was going out of fashion. It seemed that Graeme Kennedy was not especially liked by all of Melbourne's watchers (There were only two channels then, 7 and 9), and when his show came on, several hundred thousand people around Melbourne turned off their sets simultaneously. All of that electricity had nowhere to go and would start heating up the transmission lines, thus causing considerable consternation at the Brunswick Terminal Station, whose operators had to quickly re-route it elsewhere before things started to melt, while they urgently contacted Yallourn to slow down the generators.

During this discussion I was also to learn, to my great surprise, that I would be spending 6-monthly stints in SEC generating facilities all around Victoria (in some of the most god-forsaken places in tiny mountain towns) for the next umpteen years, and that this would involve me working shifts for the whole period. I discovered that the generous salary they had quoted me was that of the senior manager in charge of Electrical operators and that my own salary would be far less than that. I was still digesting these new facts, which my interviewing officers had inexplicably withheld from me, when my guide was temporarily called away on a phone call.

I was staring bug-eyed at all of the dials, switches and gauges arrayed along the circular wall of the control room when a young guy in a dust coat came up to me and said "... you must be the new guy". When I replied "Yes" he said that my predecessor had only lasted two weeks. I remember saying something completely lame, like "... he must have been crazy to walk out of a great job like this". Before he could reply, my guide returned and we resumed our tour. We went down many flights of steel steps and emerged into this vast machinery hall that was filled with the deafening roar of electrical equipment. We walked across to a huge, cylindrical machine that was perhaps 10 metres long and 3 metres in diameter and half set into the concrete floor. It had a name The Machine, and my guide told me, shouting over the huge din it was making, that its purpose was to maintain the electricity frequency of 50 cycles per second. How it did this was (and still is) a mystery to me.

While most of the rapidly rotating machine was concealed within its steel windings cover, there was an exposed copper armature with huge carbon brushes at one end, and just beyond that was one end of the 150 mm diameter spindle that supported the entire device, spinning on its bearings in a torrent of cooled oil delivered through an adjacent tube. When I pointed towards the brushes, saying "What's that?" my guide smacked my hand away, exclaiming "Don't touch that! There's 66,000 volts in that armature!" Recovering his aplomb, he added "One of your jobs will be to check that the oil is running through the bearings at both ends of the spindle".



I asked "What happens if there is no oil running through the bearings?" He simply said "Run". I had a vision of this massive machine starved of oil, seizing up and suddenly wrenching itself out of its mountings, blasting through the wall at the end of the great hall and cutting a ghastly swath of destruction – smashed houses and crushed cars right across the eastern suburbs before coming to a steaming halt in Port Phillip Bay.

We then moved outdoors where he showed me a line of huge, oil-cooled transformers topped with brown ceramic insulators. He said: "One of your jobs will be to climb up to the top of each transformer and record the oil temperature". He added: "When it gets misty, you can often see a bright corona discharge, right across the top of the transformer". "Isn't that dangerous?" I asked. He said "No more than anything else here, but you have to be even more careful because the ladder gets very slippery and you can certainly feel the current on your skin".

We then went back upstairs and entered a switch room, where I saw rows of huge, brass knife switches. By this time, I had my hands clasped tightly behind my back. He said "You'll have to be very careful in here. One of the technicians was a bit slow in closing a switch and was temporarily blinded by the flash when the current bridged the gap. He fell backwards into another bank of switches. The control room staff heard the bang and rushed in to find a pink cloud – all that remained of the technician." I was beginning to wonder if this was what had really happened to my predecessor.

After lunch, I was taken for a tour of the Spotswood Terminal Station, which was a much older facility providing a special electricity supply of 25 cycles per second for the suburban railway system. It was a very dreary and grimy place, with rusting equipment lying everywhere in the yards, surrounded by weeds. None of the staff looked happy. My guide told me I would be based here to begin with. I think this was the last straw for me.

What with the prospect of crap pay, unsociable shift work requirements, spending long periods in isolated country Victoria, as well as the constant risk of instantly turning into a cloud of pink vapour, I decided that night that the SEC was not for me. The next morning, I telephoned my original interviewer and told him I would not be proceeding with the job. He was furious. I told him I didn't want to be an electrical operator – I wanted to be a civil engineer. He said "Civil engineers are tuppence a dozen. You won't get a job here as a civil engineer or a draftsman". I replied that I had no desire to work with the SEC anyway, and that was the end of the conversation.

Public Works Department (PWD)



Upon hearing of my job travails, my friend Jeff suggested that the PWD might have a position for me as a draftsman, so I applied and was appointed to a position in the PWD's Engineering Department in the Government Offices in Treasury Place. This section dealt with the maintenance and construction of public buildings, such as comfort stations (as public toilet blocks were then known), schools, the Public Library, sanatoriums, mental hospitals and ports and harbours. Jeff worked across the hallway from my office, in the Ports and Harbour's Department. My other friend, Alan Gardiner worked in the architectural branch of the PWD on the other side of the building.

The massive white building also contained the other core government departments, including the Premier's Department, the Education Department and the Lands Department, all on the floors above the PWD. When I was working there, the Premier, Mr Henry Bolte, would arrive at work around 10.00 am every morning, accompanied by his chauffeur and enter via the door almost directly across from my office. He always had a cigarette in his mouth.

The Premier's Department also hosted the annual Miss Victoria (I think) competition. All of these gorgeous girls would arrive in expensive sports cars, which would park alongside the building. The girls would then alight and walk through the door immediately opposite my office on their way to the Premier's office where they would be subjected to certain tests – such as demonstrating the proper manner in which asparagus should be eaten. Then they would all troop out again to the waiting cars. Needless to say, very little work got done in the PWD and other State offices while this was going on.

I started work, still aged 16, under the nominal control of an engineer called Tom Vaughan. Tom had that grey look of heart candidates, was probably in his early fifties, wore a grey, very conservative three-piece suit and had so many blackheads in and hairs sticking out of his long, pointy nose that I had difficulty not staring at it when he was speaking to me. I started work in a large room filled with the following people in addition to Mr Vaughan:

Jan Nikolajuc was the draftsman actually in charge of me. I think he was from the Baltic area, in his late fifties and spoke with a heavy accent. He wore an old, dark pin-striped three-piece suit beneath his equally old dustcoat. He looked a bit like the actor who played Sir Hugo Drax in the James Bond movie, Moonraker, and was quietly spoken, meticulous in his approach to work and, like most of his colleagues in the room, seemed very proper and conservative.



The others in the room included Mr Altmann; an overweight person – also from the Baltic area, in his early sixties who produced the most incredibly detailed structural drawings and was very temperamental. Mr Altmann, who looked like he didn't suffer fools gladly, had no voice box and used a vibrating, battery-powered speaking device that he pressed to his throat to communicate – on the rare occasions that he did so.

Also in the room was Jan Scheromski, a short, blue-eyed engineer, also from the Baltic region, in his late forties who wore fancy leather boots with dainty heels and carried a wonderful, portable Curta calculating machine that looked like a large rotary pencil sharpener, attached to one of his belt loops. (I say 'Baltic' because none of them talked about their origins, and given that WW2 only ended 12 years ago, I guessed that none of them would welcome innocent enquiries from a gangly 16-year old).


Opposite him sat Reg. Jackson, a fairly short Australian engineer who was also in his forties. He dressed well and always wore a navy reefer jacket, white shirt & tie and grey trousers, and finally there was Ray Hanson, a big, tall jovial Australian engineer in his forties, whose morning greeting to the younger guys in the office was usually some cheeky comment. Ray and Reg mainly looked after schools and Tom and Jan looked after other public buildings. After 60 years I am still amazed that I can remember these people.

The adjoining room was the main drafting office and contained a number of young and older guys, all in dustcoats. There was a huge wooden set of drawers containing thousands of original pen and ink drawings on waxed Irish linen. Many of them were works of art, which I admired greatly. These plans gave off a wonderful smell when you opened the drawer.

There was a small mezzanine office off to one side of the room where the boss of the section sat. He was a WW1 veteran flyer and he was a big man with a deep voice that carried right through the masonry walls when he was on the phone, and his nickname was "The Bull". It seemed very appropriate, and we were all terrified of him. After I had been there for a few months I had managed to come late three times in one month. This meant that I had to present myself to the Bull to explain myself. After knocking politely, I walked in and he looked up from his desk and said "Well?" I stammered out my pathetic story, promising never to allow such a thing to happen again. "Was it your fault?" he asked. I said "No, the trains were late". He said "Well, let me tell you now son, don't ever make promises you can't deliver. Understand? Now get back to work".

In the same big drawing room was a tall, balding and rather dignified looking man in his fifties whose name was Jim Wilson. Jim was always dressed in a dark blue, three-piece suit that was almost shiny, and he didn't seem to have a particular workplace. Jim seemed like a lost soul and I would often see him sitting on a stool, earnestly reading something. I thought he was doing research until one day I discovered that Jim had incurred the very considerable wrath of the Department head by using his government-issued utility vehicle in the conduct of his private business as the owner and operator of a small timber mill somewhere near Yea. He had been warned, but kept doing it. Upon being confronted with abundant evidence of his misdeeds, Jim was expected to resign. He didn't, and it seems that under the regulations at the time, he couldn't be sacked. So, management sent him to Coventry by giving him no work. He would turn up every working day in the same suit and would do absolutely nothing and, I presume, he was still being paid for this. I remember, as a cheeky 17-year old, coming into the drawing office after lunch one day and saying to him: "G'day Jim – had a busy day?" He went bright red and called me a cheeky young b*****, but I knew that he couldn't do anything to me."

I will include the second half of this pilgrim's progress in the next newsletter.



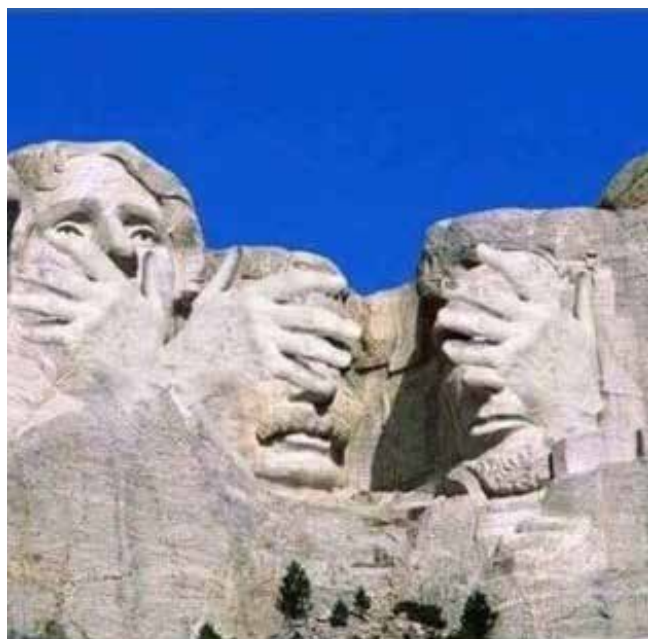


TRIVIA AND DIDACTIC WHIMSIES

The Mystery Man

Remember in the last newsletter I could not identify the central character in the photograph taken in 1970. I received responses from about 15 people to say that it was Dick Coulter. Noel Anderson is going to look through his 1970 diary to see if he can identify the occasion.

Recent amendments made at Mount Rushmore



Oh no, what's he done now?


A Plug for Government Schools

For the last couple of terms I have been working with students at Auburn High School and Camberwell High School on small projects that culminated in the production of a number of 5-minute films – scripted, photographed, edited and produced by the students themselves. They covered a whole range of subjects including sport, art, travel and personal experiences. At Auburn, I was working with Year 7 students and at Camberwell, with Year 10 students. Jim Webber also participated in the program at Auburn.

The ethnic mix at Auburn was more pronounced than at Camberwell. For example my group of four at Auburn comprised two Chinese boys, a Kenyan girl and a Filipino girl whereas at Camberwell I have a group of three boys all of whom have European backgrounds. However this is a bit of the luck of the draw because there are a large number of Chinese students at Camberwell too. The students at Auburn had all arrived in Australia since 2013. They had excellent English and were very bright – and their IT skills far exceeded mine. I was very pleased that the Kenyan girl told me she wanted to be an engineer. I enjoyed my sessions with them very much and their teachers were outstanding people. I can't understand anyone thinking that teachers have it easy. I think that people are blinded by the holidays but when you see them at work (including the extra work after hours they put in) they would probably change their minds. I for one would love to see the status of teachers elevated in our society. Their work is key to the country's prosperity and development.

A recent review of 30 academic studies (Cobbold 2015) show that public schools achieve similar student outcomes across a range of indicators as do independent schools. There was no difference in national and international tests and university completion rates. In fact students from public schools outrank their independent school colleagues in the first year of university. They achieve higher grades.

Now you might query my qualifications for making such prognostications. My views are based on our experience of both systems. All four of our children went to state primary school. For secondary education, my eldest daughter, Sara, went to an independent, special school simple because at that time – 40 years ago – there were no special schools in the State system. My second daughter, Clara, went to a public school for all of her secondary education at her own request. We offered to send her to an independent school but she chose to remain at Canterbury Girls High School.



She obtained good grades, has three tertiary qualifications, and a highly demanding and important job in Canberra researching population and health issues. My eldest son, Dugald, went to Camberwell High School for four years, but he won an art scholarship to Camberwell Grammar where he completed his last couple of years. He too had good grades and he was in the first batch of students to graduate with a Bachelor of Journalism – before that it used to be Arts. Our youngest son, Hugh, did all his secondary education at Camberwell Grammar and he graduated from the University of Melbourne with a double degree in Arts and Commerce. For him, the great advantage of Camberwell Grammar was its reputation as a champion hockey school. He never lost a competition game during his secondary education and he participated in an international tour playing hockey in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Great Britain – but we had to pay for it. The parents at the school had the wherewithal to pay for the costs.

Now I am telling you all this because I don't think there is much difference at all. In fact public schools are great value for money when you consider it costs about \$30,000 per year for tuition fees at independent schools. Admittedly there are some costs for parents of public school children to pay for books and some other essential items but nowhere near the costs of independent schools. Furthermore, children attending public schools usually have a far wider mixture of students from different backgrounds. The advanced social skills they develop – cooperation, empathy, and problem-solving – are increasingly prized in the modern workplace. They equip students for success in life and in work.

And the other great advantage of public schools is that they are neighbourhood schools. They provide facilities that are usually available for use by the local community, they foster local friendships between students, forge closer links with other local institutions and students can walk or ride to school rather than being bussed in from afar. I don't know whether this figure is still accurate or not, but I remember VicRoads claiming that 27% of peak hour traffic in Melbourne comprised parents driving their kids to school.

Our politicians for years have been saying that we have choice and you can't deny that. However I think the choice of which system parents want to place their kids in is based on social perceptions (I am probably saying snobbery) and, to a lesser extent, in religious beliefs – and the perception that if you have to pay more money you get a better product.

Now I know that there is not one member of our association for whom this is an issue. But your children and grandchildren are making these decisions and these thoughts might be worth passing on. And I know that there will be many who disagree with me and I would be only too happy to publish their thoughts. I am consoled by the educational system in Germany. There, only six per cent of secondary students attend private school but some attend through social subsidies especially children with learning difficulties, special needs or who come from dysfunctional family environments. A very different private system to ours!

Perseverance

Every year the winged insects play a game of soccer against the non-winged insects. At half time, the winged insects were four goals to nil. Then, in the second half, the non-winged insects went crazy and the centipede kicked 17 goals.

When the game was over, the coach of the non-winged insects asked the centipede, "What were you doing during the first half?" He replied, "Putting on my boots!"





Signs of the Times

John Wright sent me these. According to the blurb they were collected in Manchester, England but whether they are true or not they make you laugh out loud.

Sign on a toilet door:

TOILET OUT OF ORDER. PLEASE USE FLOOR BELOW

In a laundromat:

AUTOMATIC WASHING MACHINES: PLEASE REMOVE ALL YOUR CLOTHES WHEN THE LIGHT GOES OUT

In a department store:

BARGAIN BASEMENT UPSTAIRS

In an office:

WOULD THE PERSON WHO TOOK THE STEP LADDER YESTERDAY PLEASE BRING IT BACK OR FURTHER STEPS WILL BE TAKEN

In an office:

AFTER TEA BREAK STAFF SHOULD EMPTY THE TEAPOT AND STAND UPSIDE DOWN ON THE DRAINING BOARD

Outside a second hand shop:

WE EXCHANGE ANYTHING – BICYCLES, WASHING MACHINES, ETC. WHY NOT BRING YOUR WIFE ALONG AND GET A WONDERFUL BARGAIN?

In health food shop window:

CLOSED DUE TO ILLNESS

Spotted in a safari park: (I certainly hope so)

ELEPHANTS PLEASE STAY IN YOUR CAR

Seen during a conference:

FOR ANYONE WHO HAS CHILDREN AND DOESN'T KNOW IT, THERE IS A DAY CARE ON THE 1ST FLOOR

Notice in a farmer's field:

THE FARMER ALLOWS WALKERS TO CROSS THE FIELD FOR FREE, BUT THE BULL CHARGES

Message on a leaflet:

IF YOU CANNOT READ, THIS LEAFLET WILL TELL YOU HOW TO GET LESSONS

On a repair shop door:

WE CAN REPAIR ANYTHING. (PLEASE KNOCK HARD – THE BELL DOESN'T WORK)

And these newspaper headlines indicate that proofreading is a dying art.

Man Kills Self Before Shooting Wife and Daughter

Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says

Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers

Panda Mating Fails; Veterinarian Takes Over

Miners Refuse to Work after Death

Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant

War Dims Hope for Peace

If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile

Cold Wave Linked to Temperatures

Enfield (London) Couple Slain; Police Suspect Murder

Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges

Man Struck By Lightning Faces Battery Charge

New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group

Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft

Kids Make Nutritious Snacks

Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half

Hospitals are Sued by 7 Foot Doctors

And the winner is....

Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead



Jim Webber

Secretary VicRoads Association,
c/o Natalia Morgan,
60 Denmark Street
Kew, Vic 3101

Please complete and return to the Secretary by Wednesday 29th November 2017

CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

MONDAY 4th DECEMBER 2017 AT 12 NOON

I will be attending, accompanied by:

.....
(Please print)

Member's name:

.....
(Please print)

Special dietary requirements, if any:

Please find enclosed a cheque for \$

or direct bank transfers should be made to VicRoads Association
BSB 083323, Account Number 170934017 and you should include your name as a reference

(The price is \$45.00 per person)

