

VicRoads Association

Newsletter No.215



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. Cost of membership is a once only fee of \$50. Enquiries about membership or receipt of the Newsletter by e-mail should be directed to the Secretary, VicRoads Association, PO Box 80, Kew 3101 or by phone or e-mail as shown in the footer below.

Dear Members,

Well where do I start? We haven't had any of our occasional lunches, we've not visited any projects, the Department of Transport has essentially closed down the office in Kew, there have been no Government announcements about infrastructure to report on, but I've learnt to use Zoom. I am afraid this newsletter might consist of a lot of waffle brought upon us by the COVID-19 lockdown.

How better to start than with grandchildren!

They are growing up and taking giant strides without the wisdom and guidance of their grandfather. My eldest grandson, Angus, has just turned 18. He has reached my height but he's better looking. He loves the theatre and has performed with the Canberra Philharmonic Society in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Legally Blonde*. He is completing his VCE this year and working from home – which he says is no great hardship. He lives in Canberra but he can't get his driver's licence because the testing stations are closed.

On the other hand, my youngest grandson, Jack, aged three, has learnt to ride his new bicycle and sing the Spiderman song at the same time. I think you will agree that this is extraordinarily multi-skilled. We are going to arrange regular family Zoom sessions so that we can see each other properly. I have Face Time with my other grandsons, Alastair and Marcus, but Al usually wanders off and all I can see for most of the time is Marcus's feet. As a variation, he occasionally sticks his tongue out at me while avoiding answering my questions.

That only leaves Ainslie (in Canberra) and Matilda – Jack's little sister. Ainslie is also schooling at home and she too, has no difficulty with it. In fact, she says a lot of their assignments are done this way at any rate. Matilda (nearly 18 months) is learning to defend herself against Jack's raids and one of the most memorable videos I have seen recently is one of her donging Jack on the head with something he was trying to take off her.



Jack on his bike. As you can see by his bloody nose, he has also experienced his first prang.

We all have mechanisms for communicating with our grandchildren during the lockdown. I have a friend, David, in South London who stands on the front porch while his grandchildren stand at the gate so that they can talk! David receives our newsletter so he will be pleased to get a mention. His sister, Mary, lives in North London. Of course, London has been hit far worse than we can imagine. In a recent message Mary wrote:

What a time you have been through - with the fires and now this. I only watch the news once a day as it has been so depressing. I know people who have had the virus but fortunately not too badly. However we were all very sad round here because our local cobbler and his father, who had the shop before him, have both died. They were Turkish

and it does seem to be hitting a huge proportion of ethnic minority people. Yesterday we heard the number of infected people is diminishing so that is some good news.

Some of us may have experienced far worse. For me, it hasn't been too bad. I have continued more or less with my routine. I don't go to the cinema or galleries, I don't drink coffee at my local, I don't go to the football, I don't have my regular lunches with friends, and I don't attend any of our functions. But I still keep in touch electronically and I ring old friends and acquaintances more than I did before - just to check up on them. But David and Mary in London may have memories of the Blitz in which 60,000 people died. And think of the harrowing experiences of the persecution by the Nazis many Europeans went through during the War – as well as the War itself. I would much rather a lockdown for four or five months due to the pandemic than any of these experiences. At least our destiny is in our hands.

But enough of this introspection. I want to make this newsletter as uplifting as possible. I love the promos on Channel 2 where a whole range of people from different ethnic backgrounds sing We are Australian (written by Bruce Woodley of the Seekers and Dobe Newton of the

Bushwackers. I love their enthusiasm and their spirit. The one with the children singing, tugs at my heartstrings. Their enthusiasm and energy makes me feel so proud to be Australian.

Don't hesitate to send me stories and adventures about your grandchildren during the lockdown. No doubt you think they are future Nobel Laureates like mine, but for the time being their main task will be to amuse us.

David Jellie
President and Editor

New postal address

Just a further reminder that we have a new postal address. It is:

**VicRoads Association,
PO Box 80, Kew 3101.**

We haven't received a letter yet so please drop us a line!

New Members

We welcome one new member during the last period, Steve Brown. He is the first member to join using our website and we had to inform him immediately that we had no program due to the COVID-19 close down. Welcome Steve.

And Allan Collins has just joined too after recently retiring. Welcome Allan.

News From Our Members

Lance Midgely

Bruce Phillips, a former workmate and friend of Lance for 50 years, sent me this message on 23 April.

Last evening, I received a phone call from Lance and I'm able to pass on a little more news regarding his health and progress.

Lance has been transferred to the Royal Melbourne Hospital at Parkville, to undergo therapy to assist his rehabilitation – which he expects will take 4 – 6 months.

He is bed/chair bound, is able to speak and has some movement in his arms. However, he is not able to use his fingers and is therefore unable to operate his mobile phone. The phone call I received was made with the assistance of a family member - at visiting time. Because of the Hospital's COVID-19, restrictions ... only close family are able to visit patients, and only a couple at a time.

Lance did lack his usual verve and sounded a bit croaky/tired – but very determined to recover to whatever degree is possible – however long that may take.

Those interested in providing encouragement for Lance, could do so via his mobile phone and leaving a brief message (0407 103 424). The volume of calls, and the logistics involved in responding, may prevent a response - but I'm certain that Lance will greatly appreciate your interest in his wellbeing.

Since then I have spoken to Lance. He said that the physiotherapists were hopeful of him gaining 40 to 50 per cent use of his fingers but it will take some time to achieve. He seemed in very good spirits. He has been trying to contact Pat Gall with whom he worked during his Materials Research days. I have been making enquiries but to no effect. If any of you have contact details for Pat, please let me know and I will pass them on.



News from Regional Roads Victoria

Rural Roads Victoria (RRV) was established in 2018 to maintain and develop Victoria's regional road network. With the population outside Melbourne expected to double to two million people within 20 years, it is important to maintain the modernisation of the road network for the next generation, to strengthen links between and around growing centres.

In early 2017, VicRoads personnel visited communities across Victoria to talk about the state of the roads and what can be done to support regions to grow and prosper. They visited every part of Victoria, having frank conversations about the state of the roads and what can be done to better support regions to grow and thrive. They met with 39 councils and spoke to more than 700 people.

They also engaged with freight operators, transport industry, businesses, tourism operators, environmental and wildlife groups, cycling enthusiasts, motorcycle groups, government agencies, the Victorian Farmer's Federation, RACV and Regional Development Victoria.

The message was clear: fix the roads that need fixing because they are our lifelines; make it safer and easier for us to move around without hurting ourselves or damaging our goods; and help set our regions up for tourism and economic growth while giving people better connections to job opportunities and each other.

There was also a desire for better links between regions, safer overtaking opportunities and investment in sealed shoulders, along with concerns about poor roadside drainage and pot-holes.

The State-wide feedback was:

Road maintenance better road maintenance including more shoulder grading, better surface repairs, more vegetation management and better quality long term fixes.

Road safety more sealed shoulders, smoother roads, widening of narrow roads, more safe overtaking opportunities and safer speeds around schools and shopping areas.

Tourism improved signage, more rest areas, use of technology to share tourist information, more road safety messages and upgrades to key tourism routes.

Trucks keep trucks out of towns and wider shoulders where trucks, cars and bikes share the road. Strengthen bridges, upgrade intersections, add rest areas and provide more overtaking opportunities along key freight routes to enable bigger and more productive trucks.

Regional economies understanding of the changing face of farming with fewer and larger farms with bigger machinery on the roads and growing export demands, including more opportunities for rail freight.

Environment concern about native plant species being lost and wildlife in danger, need to do more to protect the environment by minimising impact on trees, revegetating the road reserve and use recycled materials in road works.

Road safety barriers explain to the community why so much money is being invested in them and how they save lives.

Cycling more bike paths/lanes and better road maintenance for commuter and recreational cyclists.

Connectivity better road connections between regional centres including Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, Benalla, Mansfield and links in Gippsland.

The program arising from this feedback is now the driving force of Rural Roads Victoria in the planning, construction, maintenance and uplift of the regional road network. Work is ramping up across every region: from major highway duplications to improving signage, cycling paths and road safety treatments that will make it almost impossible to run off the road or hit another car head-on across all major interstate highways.

Alongside the increase in spending on road maintenance, planning is underway for improvements that will set regional Victoria up for continued growth. The RRV works much more closely with local regions to understand changing traffic conditions and regional economies, and partners with Visit Victoria to develop new tourist drives to attract more tourists to visit and stay longer.

Not accepting that death on country roads is four times higher than on metropolitan roads, RRV is exploring a star road safety rating system to encourage travel on the safest routes and target road safety improvements.

It is also be making a further effort to reduce environmental impacts of its works, from recycling a million tyres to re-vegetating roadsides. The survey also showed that Victorians wanted much greater transparency about what is happening on their roads. In response, VicRoads produced a State of the Roads report to document the current road conditions and to better inform future decisions by government.

Overleaf we take a look at the administrative regions in breakdown.



(Top) Hall's Gap, Grampians, (bottom) Murray River at Echuca

Grampians

- Changing face of farming with bigger machinery
- Supporting more grain on to rail instead of road
- Better connections for freight into Melbourne
- Tourism growing through Silo Art Trail, the Grampians, Sea Lake
- Wind farm development
- Ballarat regional growth needs support
- Growing commuter traffic to Melbourne and other regional centres
- Bypasses along Western Highway
- Importance of protecting roadside native vegetation
- Growing horticulture
- Tourism potential of the Grampians



Great Ocean Road

Loddon Mallee

- More river crossings
- Support for tourism in Charlton, Echuca and Wedderburn
- Alternative truck routes to avoid towns
- Safer cycling routes
- Protection of wildlife and native plant species
- Intensive farming of almonds, carrots and other produce has impacts
- Better connections for freight from Mildura to Melbourne
- More freight to be moved by rail
- Removing trucks from Mildura's town centre
- Improve roads to keep pace with increased population, tourism and industry

Barwon South West

- Major reconstruction of roads serving Port of Portland
- Keeping Great Ocean Road open for tourism
- Widening narrow seal roads used by freight, school buses and tourists
- Multilingual signage for international tourists
- Enormous residential, commuter and tourism growth
- Safer cycling opportunities
- More inland routes to relieve Great Ocean Road congestion

Hume

- Significant intermodal freight opportunities
- Shepparton Bypass a priority
- Road safety is a critical concern
- More can be done to improve key tourist destinations
- Road signage is important
- Improve roads to keep pace with increases in population, tourism and industry
- Interface with freight and growing residential areas
- Cycling safety along the Great Alpine Road
- New ways to inform drivers of unique weather conditions in Alpine region
- Safety around schools and main streets on country highways
- Choke points in Wangaratta and Rutherglen.

Gippsland

- Better north-south connections
- Alternative truck routes around growing towns
- Growing number of commuters across Gippsland
- Longer-stay tourism potential between Mt Baw Baw, Phillip Island, Wilson's Promontory and East Gippsland
- Difficulty moving around Phillip Island
- Growing freight task with intensive agriculture
- Growing demand for cycling
- Dairy farms getting larger with oversized equipment on roads
- Sealing of gravel roads



Great Alpine Road



Wilson's Promontory

From the archives

Surveying the Matlock-Aberfeldy Road

Over the years people send me stuff for publishing and when I took on the job of producing the newsletter I was given a heap of letters, magazines, photos and the like – most of which had no unattributable source. I was tidying up some of this material the other day – thanks to the COVID-19 lockdown – when I found a very dog-eared and stained green memo with a photograph attached. Most of you will remember the green memos we used prior to the computer era. Here is the photo.



It is a sign on a tree, dated May 1926, with the name of a C.R.B. survey party. The names on it are R. Selover, C. Perrin, S. Sheppard, J. Garner, O. Miller, G. Aitken, and R. Rogers. The names have been expertly painted on the white board. The same names appear below on the black background but these seem to have been carved into the tree.

The hand-written note on the green memo is dated 20/1/1966 and was addressed to C.F.(Charlie) Robinson from the DCE W – presumably the Deputy Chief Engineer – Works. It is entitled 'Re Attached' and it says:

'This survey was done by Mr Selover when I was a "pupil" and started at Matlock, proceeding along the Divide thence down to Selma Spur (I think it was called) to near Aberfeldie (sic). The "attack" on the tree was my feeble effort to fill in some idle moments in the Survey Camp.

We were up there for about three months or so as I recall, under canvas of course and I think we only got home on 2 or 3 occasions during that period.

The first camp was about 3 or 4 miles from Matlock and we were able to take in with us what was I think the first survey truck – a tray-bodied solid rubber-tyred T model Ford. The old track into the first camp site was so steep in one place that we had to tie a tree on behind the truck going down, and had to back it up because the fuel tank was under the seat of the truck and the level of petrol would have fallen below the level of the carburettor! Gravity feed in those days of course!

Camping conditions were pretty rough in those days, although on this occasion we were lucky enough to have a cook for most of the time. I recall our tents coming down on us one night under the weight of snow, tho' generally we had good weather tho' cold.

I'm afraid I don't know where the rest of the party scattered to. Mr Selover, of course passed away a few years ago. Rogers was the cook, and the others were 'chainmen' – not all with us at the same time. Miller, I have an idea went to the SR&WSC but I don't know if he is still there. Aitken I remember was an immigrant when we picked him up – poor fellow was almost destitute. We had to even buy him some clothes to start him off (Better not publish that!)

Strangely enough I have never been over the road since it was built.

C. Perrin'



I found this very fuzzy, undated photograph above of the Matlock-Aberfeldy Road held by the State Library just to give you an idea of the terrain these pioneer road-makers worked in. They would have had no contour plans, no aerial photographs, no topographical maps, no fancy laser technology – just instinct and a truck they had to back up when the terrain was too steep.

And this is what it looks like now.

Not too many people driving around our road network would ever think of the men who built the roads and the hardships they endured in doing it.



VALE

Max Schultz

Sandor Mokos rang me to say that Max Schultz had passed away recently. He was 88.

Bill Sagers sent me the following note about Max:

'Max was always very helpful to new people in Bridge Division when I was there. He had a role in the design of Kings Bridge and was the "keeper" of stress calculations for bridge elements. These were used for choosing which welds were to be X-rayed, with nominated percentages to be met according to stress ranges.

Max was also a prodigious collector of vinyl records from the World Record Club. If you had missed a release you could check with Max. I still have a tape of a lovely rendition of The Whitehorse Inn musical that I recorded from a vinyl WRC label that I borrowed from Max. It is now loaded as a favourite on my car's MP3 playback system.'

Max worked his entire career in Bridge Design. He was a reserved man with an impish sense of humour and was highly respected by his colleagues. He married late in life and retired early at the age of 51. After his retirement he and his wife travelled extensively around the world. We extend our sympathy to his family.

Having a Ball

All through my childhood, youth and young adulthood, every organization held an annual ball - the churches, the hospitals, sports clubs, service clubs, the universities and teacher's colleges, government departments, commercial organisations, charities, and in the country, the Bachelor and Spinster' Ball. Most of the attendees were from that organization but it was not restricted. You could attend anyone's ball as long as you paid the money.

The C.R.B. Ball was a major social occasion. I don't know when the tradition first started nor do I know when the last ball was held, but the concept of a ball seems to have died out. But the C.R.B. Ball was pretty strong in August 1935 as the photograph below attests.

As you can see, the ladies dressed up in their gowns and the men in their dinner suits – so these were fairly sophisticated affairs.

I found the following report in Roadlines magazine in June 1966 about the C.R.B. Ball held on Friday, April 15, 1966.

'Five hundred and forty-four witnesses will agree that 1966 was the best year yet to go to the C.R.B. Annual Ball at Kew City Hall.

Our team of decorators again showed their extraordinary imagination in making hand painted Troll dolls, the main theme of the décor. What's a Troll? I'm told that they are supernatural but mischievous dwarfs of Scandinavian mythology – Crazy! Indeed, but that was the mood of the evening.

The seven-piece orchestra and the blonde vocalist covered the full range from Go – Go to slow waltz and most of us managed to sustain our thirsts all night; some of the 1966 movements are quite strenuous. Supper proved the measure of our appetites – stuffed turkey, flounder,





Kay, Jim and the Minister (for Public Works) 1966

scallops, tartufo and for those whose friends had a lucky number on their Troll dolls – champagne too – yes! A dozen bottles were won at supper time.

Miss Kay Fisher, was chosen our Belle for 1966 – and as you can see, Kay is a very worthy holder of that title. The Honourable M.V. Porter M.L.A. had the enviable task of presenting the sash and a proud man was Jim Webber (Engineer, Bridge Division), Kay’s fiancé.

Official guests were the Honourable M.V. Porter M.L.A. Minister for Public Works and his wife Mrs. Porter, our Chairman and Members of the Board. We were all pleased to see so many representatives from Country Divisions, some of whom had been well known Head Office identities.

At 1.30 a.m. the balloons were claimed by the taller males, while others amused themselves creating an entanglement of coloured streamers. At 2.00 a.m. it was lights out and the crowd left the scene of another great C.R.B. Ball.’

Reading this report, it is interesting to reflect on the differences between the 1960s and now, in terms of workplace interactions – between staff members themselves and with senior management. It can’t be denied that in those earlier days we were far more of a fraternity that worked together and played together.

In Roadlines (March 1965), there are reports on the Drama Club, the Children’s Christmas Party, the Head Office Christmas Luncheon, the Car Club and an extensive report on the Tasmanian Sports and Social Club visit to Melbourne where the C.R.B. played the Tasmanian P.W.D. in tennis and cricket. There was also an advertisement for the Annual Ball on Friday 23 April, including “an excellent 4-course supper, novelties, prizes etc. and Belle of the Ball of course.” Dress was optional but Black Tie preferred and the cost was “only £3/3/- a Double”

Five hundred and forty-four witnesses will agree that 1966 was the best year yet to go to the C.R.B. Annual Ball at Kew City Hall

From memory, the C.R.B. also had a Debating Club, a choir, a Film Society, a Wine Club (still going strong but no longer linked to the organisation), a Chess Club, and a Community Chest that administered donations to charities through deductions from salaries. We had an annual football match between the engineers and the administration staff and an annual golf competition for the C.G. Roberts Trophy (named after our recent Chairman).

Overarching all these specialist clubs was the Social Club whose fees were deducted from our salaries. It organized the ‘big’ functions such as the ball and the Christmas parties. The country offices also had their own Social Clubs and these were microcosms of the Head Office Club.

Each year one of these regional clubs organized a weekend of sport and social activities to which everyone was invited. The Social Club also issued Roadlines quarterly. The first one, in March 1965, was 76 pages long. It included reports from country offices and included notes on marriages, transfers, new arrivals and so on.

I think this social network that we had within work was the catalyst in forming our own Association. We made friends at work and fostered fellowship which we still share today. I don’t see this in any successor organisation and the social distancing brought on by COVID-19 will make it even more unlikely in the future.

Call me old-fashioned but I much prefer the way we did it.

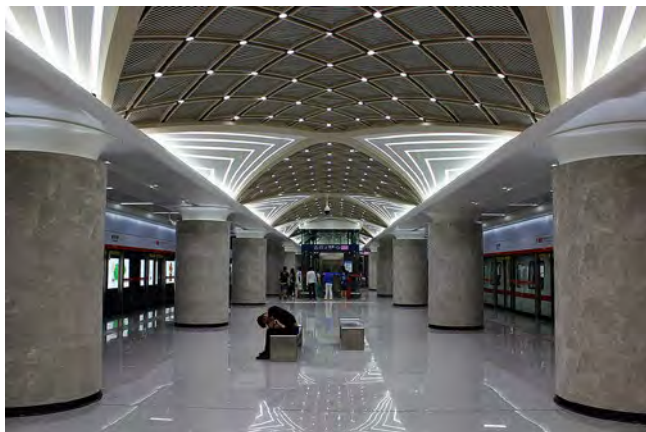
Trivia and didactic whimsies

Wuhan – where our woes began

Recently, the Guardian wrote:

“In the public mind, the origin story of coronavirus seems well fixed: in late 2019 someone at the now world-famous Huanan seafood market in Wuhan was infected with a virus from an animal. The rest is part of an awful history still in the making, with Covid-19 spreading from that first cluster in the capital of China’s Hubei province to a pandemic that has killed about 80,000 people so far.”

That was back in March and the death toll in late April as I write this is well over 220,000 and climbing.



The Wuhan Metro

There are all sorts of conspiracy theories abroad such as China deliberately releasing the virus so that it can take over the economic dominance of the world. On the other hand, China has its own conspiracy theorists alleging that America released it to discredit China. We might never get to the truth because China is not co-operating with the international community to investigate the origins of the pandemic. This should not come as a surprise to those who know China because it would be a huge loss of face.

But we can safely assume that it all started in Wuhan – a city that many of us have never heard of before.

A friend recently asked my opinion about the veracity of a film of Wuhan doing the rounds on the internet. It shows a glittering, modern city with stunning buildings and modern transport systems and freeways carrying streams of traffic. This is true, but there would also be many suburbs of undistinguished buildings and market areas where sanitation and general living conditions might be less than desirable. But there can be no doubt that, in the last 30 years, Wuhan has seen a transformation the likes of which can only be seen in other cities in China – nowhere else. I have only been to Wuhan once, back in the 1990s, and then it was a dusty, grey industrial city with few redeeming features, like many other cities in China at that time.

Wuhan is the capital city of Hubei Province in central China. It has a population of 11 million people (the ninth largest city in China) and lies on the confluence of two of China’s major rivers – the Han and the Yangtze. It was here that the Wuchang Uprising occurred in 1911 ousting the Qing dynasty and laying the foundation for the Republic of China. It was briefly, in 1927, the capital of China, and again in 1937 during the Second Sino-Japanese War. It is the most influential Chinese city – in every way – in central China. The world’s largest power station, located on the Three Gorges Dam, is nearby.

Melbourne would envy Wuhan’s transportation systems. Two light rail corridors were opened in 2013 which cater for six services and the network is expanding to cover a total length of 200 km. High speed railways connect Wuhan to Beijing, Shanghai, Hefei, Nanjing and Guangzhou. The latter is the fastest train in the world and it has been clocked at 394 km/hour. Wuhan is also central China’s hub for regular train services for passengers and freight.

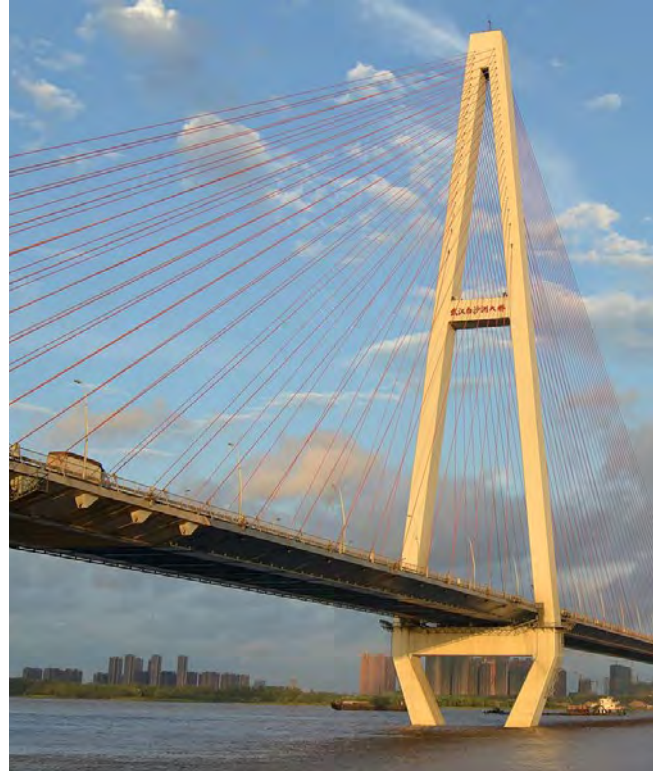
The Wuhan Metro has a system length of nearly 350 km but plans to increase this to 1045 km which will make it one of the largest systems in the world. Currently it serves 228 stations and carries 3.5 million passengers daily.



A Wuhan Tram



The Yingwuzhou Yangtze River Bridge, Wuhan (2.1 km long)



Baishazhou Yangtze River Bridge, Wuhan (3.5 km long)

Wuhan has two international airports and a number of domestic ones, various ferry services mainly for crossing the Yangtze, an extensive road and freeway network and the largest bicycle share system in the world – 150,000 bikes.

Wuhan has three bridges crossing the Yangtze and a number cross the Han and there are more in the pipeline.

Back in the 1990s, the Overseas Projects Corporation of Victoria (OPCV) with whom I worked, in partnership with RMIT University, developed and delivered an Associate Diploma of Business in International Trade at the Wuhan Yejin University of Science and Technology. The course was offered at the University's China Iron and Steel Industry Training Centre, and was a joint project between the Australian and Chinese governments. Yes, in those days, Australian was giving development aid to the Chinese Government.

And in those days Wuhan was essentially a sprawling, grey, steel city with very little charm and character – nothing like what we see today. My first visit to China was as a tourist in the mid 1980s. Anne and Peter Balfe were in our party and we had a wonderful time. We made up our own itinerary and visited Guilin, Xi'an, Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou and Wuxi – among other places. There were few cars on the roads but millions of bicycles and there was lots of evidence of poverty and hardship wherever we travelled. How different it is now?

After I joined OPCV in 1988, I travelled to China fairly regularly up to my last visit in 2001. Over that time I saw remarkable changes taking place especially in Shanghai – now 22 million people. I always stayed at the same hotel and each time I looked out the window I would see half a dozen new skyscrapers that weren't there on my previous visit 12 months ago. I recall meeting in Melbourne the mayor of a new town being developed near Guangzhou. He invited me to see him next time I was in that region. I did so, and he took me up to his office on about the 30th floor of a building. It was early evening and I looked down on the construction of a complex road overpass being built under lights. He said they would complete the job in four weeks. They worked all round the clock and there were thousands of workers scurrying around like ants.

He explained that the city had been built from scratch in two years to accommodate two million people. This was quite common elsewhere in China. In the last generation China has lifted 800 million people out of poverty to prosperity under their highly controlled political system – a euphemism for communism. I don't think they could have achieved such spectacular results under a free market system. Look at the only comparable country to China – India. India is the world's largest democracy but despite some improvements most of its citizens still live in poverty. They also have an indecent number of millionaires – a product of capitalism.

I don't think there has been a transformation of a country in such a short time as we have seen in China. There are many things about China which disturb me such as the lack of civil rights (especially for ethnic groups like the Tibetans and Uighurs), capital punishment (they kill more of their own citizens than the rest of the world combined), concentration of power in old men, no free press or freedom of speech, and political secrecy, but you can't deny that their system has made most of their population very happy. Every year, 23 million Chinese voluntarily leave China to travel overseas on holidays and all of them return home indicating that they are happy with what the government has done for them.

The outbreak of the pandemic has tarnished China's image and while it presents a glittering picture of modernity it still retains much of the old – almost medieval – traditional practices and superstitions. Many well educated Chinese people still believe in exotic foods like shark fin and rhinoceros horn for their healing properties. But paradoxically, the COVID-19 pandemic has also shown up frailties in America's image. I won't comment on its

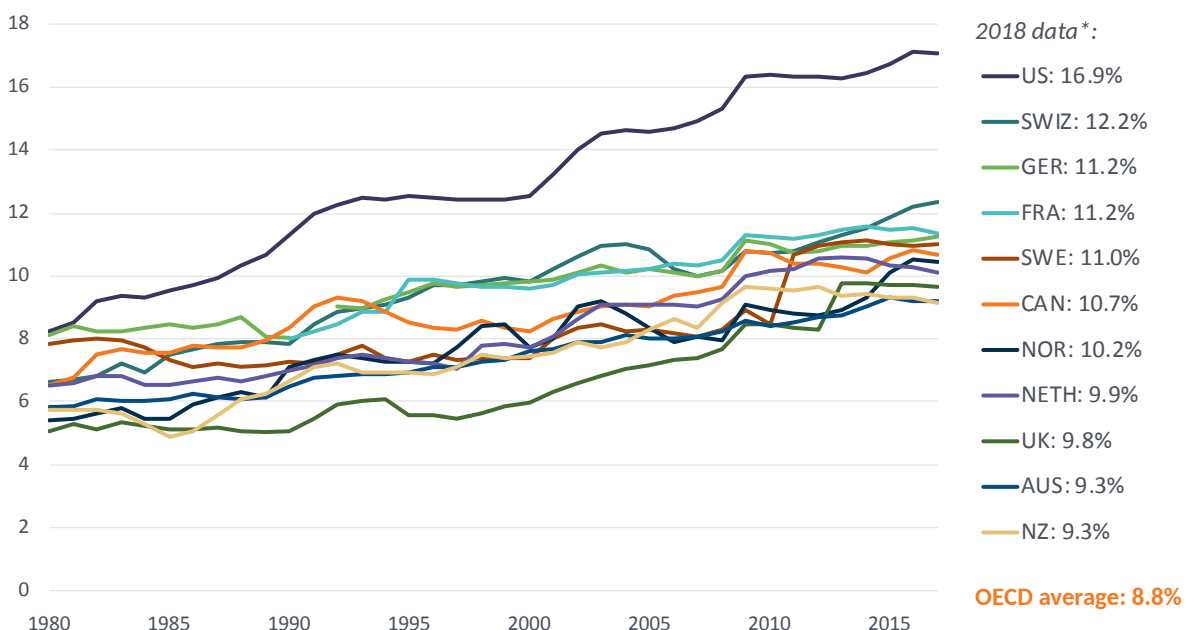
leadership – I don't need to – but all the messages coming out of America are of a fractured society almost at war with itself. It shows a huge divide in class and ethnicity and the strong libertarian ideals of some groups in American society are worrying to say the least. To make matters even scarier, these libertarians are the ones with the guns. America's unfair, confusing and undemocratic electoral system is also cause for worry. The world's most advanced nation has messed up its handling of the pandemic almost to the point of embarrassment. I feel so sorry for the doctors, nurses and paramedics (and all the other ancillary services) in the front line trying desperately to save lives. The following article exposes weaknesses in America's health system.

So what am I saying? I think it is inevitable that China will supersede America as the world's most influential power and we will have to adjust to this change. My guess is that it will occur within decades. I think we should be brushing up on our knowledge and understanding of Chinese history and culture. We've got to get used to the idea.

The high cost of health in the USA


Health care spending as a percent of GDP, 1980–2018

Percent (%) of GDP, adjusted for differences in cost of living



Notes: Current expenditures on health. Based on System of Health Accounts methodology, with some differences between country methodologies. GDP = gross domestic product. OECD average reflects the average of 36 OECD member countries, including ones not shown here. * 2018 data are provisional or estimated.

Data: OECD Health Statistics 2019.



My daughter, Clara, works for the Institute of Health and Welfare in Canberra and she recently sent me this information which I have extracted from a paper written by The Commonwealth Fund.

'A 2015 Commonwealth Fund brief showed that — before the major provisions of the Affordable Care Act were introduced — the United States had worse outcomes and spent more on health care, largely because of greater use of medical technology and higher prices, compared to other high-income countries.

By benchmarking the performance of the U.S. health care system against other countries — and updating with new data as they become available — we can gain important insights into our strengths and weaknesses and help policymakers and delivery system leaders identify areas for improvement.

Compared to peer nations, the U.S. has among the highest number of hospitalizations from preventable causes and the highest rate of avoidable deaths

This analysis is the latest in a series of Commonwealth Fund cross-national comparisons that uses health data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to assess U.S. health care system spending, outcomes, risk factors and prevention, utilization, and quality, relative to 10 other high-income countries: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. We also compare U.S. performance to that of the OECD average, comprising 36 high-income member countries.

- The U.S. spends more on health care as a share of the economy — nearly twice as much as the average OECD country — yet has the lowest life expectancy and highest suicide rates among the 11 nations.
- The U.S. has the highest chronic disease burden and an obesity rate that is two times higher than the OECD average.
- Americans had fewer physician visits than peers in most countries, which may be related to a low supply of physicians in the U.S.
- Americans use some expensive technologies, such as MRIs, and specialized procedures, such as hip replacements, more often than our peers.

- The U.S. outperforms its peers in terms of preventive measures — it has the one of the highest rates of breast cancer screening among women ages 50 to 69 and the second-highest rate (after the U.K.) of flu vaccinations among people age 65 and older.
- Compared to peer nations, the U.S. has among the highest number of hospitalizations from preventable causes and the highest rate of avoidable deaths.

Triumphant symbol or unwelcome intruder?

Amidst the period of lockdown, the State Government has recently approved the construction of what will become Australia's tallest tower, the Southbank by Beulah development at 118 City Road. It has been designed by UN Studio (from the Netherlands) and Australia's Cox Architecture. The development consists of two twisting towers reaching 365 metres (102 storeys) and 250 metres (59 storeys). They will contain 789 apartments, more than 27,000 square metres of office space, more than 32,000 square metres of retail space including hospitality venues and a supermarket, a childcare centre, conference and exhibition centres, and a 322-room hotel. It will cost \$2 billion.

As populations grow and cities become more crowded, there is pressure throughout the world to construct ever taller buildings to provide accommodation and offices. Many people object to such developments citing social, aesthetic, ecological and physical dangers. Is this development good for Melbourne?

Skyscrapers are a feature of modern cities in the world. They provide much needed accommodation as both homes and businesses. Tall buildings can offer a solution to the problem of overcrowding that blights many of our cities today. They can accommodate large numbers of families in a relatively small area therefore allowing for other amenities such as parks and leisure facilities to be provided at ground level — or within the building. Businesses can also take advantage of skyscrapers as it gives them the opportunity of having their premises located in the centre of a city ensuring that their employees can easily access their work. A final and not insignificant benefit of skyscrapers is that they can provide light and airy spaces for city living and working offering spectacular views of the city which can be beneficial to health and well-being.

Opponents of skyscrapers say they create new problems including congestion through increased population, environmental pollution, and reduce citizen access to fresh air and sunlight. They shatter the human scale, steal the light and create wind.

Certainly they consume a lot of power to operate lifts, climate control, lighting, and safety systems. They increase greenhouse emissions. They create another set of problems



Southbank
by Beulah
development
at 118 City Road

such as difficulty of maintenance and repair, problematic internet and TV connections and difficulty in keeping pets. There can also be a sense of crowding in that residents have neighbours living in close proximity on both sides as well as others living across the corridor.

It has also been shown that as the air at higher altitudes is colder, it can create chillier micro-climates when downdraughts from skyscrapers reach street level. This can

be welcome during hot spells, but less so in winter. And, as buildings go higher, the speed of air hitting them rises, increasing ground winds below.

Another concern about tall buildings is the danger of people becoming socially isolated as it is more difficult to meet people than it would be at ground level and within a private garden.

What do you think? Is this good planning for Melbourne?

6174

What is so special about the undistinguished number of 6174? I am sure you will amaze your grandchildren with your mathematical skill and a little bit of magic when you show them. Here is what you have to do.

Take any four-digit number using at least two different digits. Leading zeros are allowed.

Arrange the digits in descending and then in ascending order to get two four-digit numbers, adding leading zeros if necessary.

Subtract the smaller number from the bigger number.

Go back to step 2 and repeat – and repeat again until you get the magic number of 6174.

6174 is known as Kaprekar's constant named after the Indian mathematician who identified it.

The above process, known as Kaprekar's routine, will always reach its fixed point, 6174, in at most 7 iterations. Once 6174 is reached, the process will continue yielding because $7641 - 1467 = 6174$.

For example, choose 3524:

$$5432 - 2345 = 3087$$

$$8730 - 0378 = 8352$$

$$8532 - 2358 = 6174$$

$$7641 - 1467 = 6174$$

The only four-digit numbers for which Kaprekar's routine does not reach 6174 are those where the same four digits are used such as 5555 or 7777. In maths, these are called repdigits. They do not work because the result is 0000 after a single iteration. All other four-digit numbers eventually reach 6174 if leading zeros are used to keep the number of digits at 4.

Every number series can have at least one Kaprekar constant. For example, for three digit numbers it's 495, for four digit numbers it's 6174, and for five digit numbers there are three: 83952, 75933 and 59994.

Some other really useful facts about 6174 are that:

It is a Harshad number – meaning it is divisible by the sum of its digits:

6174 can be written as the sum of the first three degrees of 18:

$$183 + 182 + 181 = 5832 + 324 + 18 = 6174.$$

Your grandkids will be very impressed!

Easter Bunnies

My son Hugh sent me the following email on Easter Sunday.

Jack and Matilda got about 20 Easter eggs each... so far we have re-hid and found them about six times today... the gifts that keep on giving!

Rewards in Heaven

A cat died and went to Heaven. God met her at the gates and said, "You have been a good cat all these years.

Anything you want is yours for the asking." The cat thought for a minute and then said, "All my life I lived on a farm and slept on hard wooden floors. I would like a real fluffy pillow to sleep on".

God said, "Say no more." Instantly the cat had a huge fluffy pillow.

A few days later, six mice were killed in an accident and they all went to Heaven together. God met the mice at the gates with the same offer that was made to the cat. "Well, we have had to run all of our lives: from cats, dogs, and even people with brooms!" said the mice.

"If we could just have some little roller skates, we would not have to run again."

"Done," said God, and all the mice had beautiful little roller skates.

About a week later, God decided to check on the cat. She was lounging on her fluffy pillow. "Is everything okay? How have you been doing? Are you happy?"

"Oh, it is wonderful," said the cat. "I have never been so happy in my life. The pillow is so fluffy, and the Meals on Wheels was a nice touch."

Contract Bridge

My cousin plays bridge regularly with seven other women, most of whom are 70 or older. Recently they celebrated the birthday of their oldest member by taking her out to lunch. When the waitress came to take their order, one of the women said to her, "This is a very special occasion. It's Elsie's ninety-fifth birthday."

The waitress made seven instant enemies and one fast friend by asking the question, "Which one of you is Elsie?"

A few corny puns doing the COVID-19 rounds – for which I won't accept responsibility

Nineteen blokes turned up to the cinema. The ticket seller asked "Why so many of you?" One replied, "The advertisement said 18 or over."

Just got back from my mate's funeral. He died after being hit on the head with a tennis ball.

It was a terrific service.

I made some rocket salad yesterday but it went off before I could eat it!

I said to my mate "I'm thinking of buying a Labrador. "Blow that" he responded "have you seen how many of their owners go blind?"

My neighbour knocked on my door at 2:30 this morning. Can you believe that, 2:30 am?! Luckily for him I was still up playing my bagpipes.

Statistically, six out of seven dwarfs are not Happy.

Construction of the Swan street Bridge, 1951



This photograph shows workmen placing reinforcement for the beams and deck of the bridge.

Safe distancing?

The maths teacher was lecturing on map reading using co-ordinates.

After explaining latitude, longitude, degrees and minutes the teacher asked, "Suppose I asked you to meet me for lunch at 23 degrees, 4 minutes north latitude and 45 degrees, 15 minutes east longitude...?"

After a confused silence, a voice volunteered, "I suppose you'd be eating alone."

The English Language

I will finish this newsletter with a few facts about the English language. The shortest complete sentence in the English language is "I am." Or similarly "I will" or 'I do' etc. The most used letter in the English alphabet is 'E', and 'Q' is the least used.

Floccinaucinihilipilification, the declaration of an item being useless, is the longest non-medical term in the

English language. *Goddessship* is the only word in the English language with a triple letter.

The sentence "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" uses every letter of the alphabet but "Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs" uses every letter of the alphabet and uses the least letters to do so!

Rhythm and *syzygy* are the longest English words without a vowel.

The longest word in the English language is *pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis* which describes a lung disease caused by breathing in particles of volcanic matter or a similar fine dust.

In the English language there are only three words that have a letter that repeats six times... *degenerescence* (six e's), *indivisibility* (six i's), and *nonannouncement* (six n's).

The only three words in the English language to have two consecutive u's are *vacuum*, *residuum* and *continuum*.