

# VicRoads Association

## Newsletter No.218



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. Visit our website at [vicroadsassociation.org](http://vicroadsassociation.org)

**Dear Members,**

**Before the pandemic there were fires. Remember?  
The damage is still being cleaned up and is likely  
to continue for some time to come.**



The Stony Creek trestle bridge at Nowa Nowa.

Timber bridges are commonplace In East Gippsland. Some of them carry traffic – usually on the timber extraction and tourist roads down to the coast or up to the high country north of the Princes Highway. Many are not trafficked but they stand as a tribute to the pioneer bridge builders of the past. And of course there are old railway bridges usually beside the highway that are a familiar part of the landscape.

The National Trust values these structures as part of our heritage and some of them have been classified on our Heritage Registrar. While many of them now have no purpose, nonetheless they contributed enormously to the development of Victoria and they thoroughly deserve their relaxed

retirement in old age. The overseers in some of the CRB's bridge gangs had licence to enter State Forests to harvest timber for bridge building purposes. So most of the bridges were built using local timber. Trees were cut down, dressed, trimmed and treated for use in the bridgeworks.

When I started working in Bridge Branch in 1961 there were hundreds, if not thousands, of timber bridges in Victoria's road network and I became involved in refurbishing some – but mostly replacing them. Most of them have now been replaced due to wear and tear, poor riding quality for fast traffic and high maintenance costs – not to mention diminishing expertise. When I was in Orbost in the 1970s building the bridges across the Snowy River Floodplain, I also became involved in strengthening and maintenance of timber bridges in the area – one of which was the timber truss bridge on the Princes Highway East over the Genoa River. We had to replace some of the main members in the truss while still keeping the bridge open to traffic. Quite a tricky business.

Timber bridges have three enemies – traffic, moisture and fire. I want to briefly show you what happened to some of them during the most recent bushfires.



McKillop's Bridge 1936 – taken in 1996.

McKillop's Bridge across the Snowy River on the Bonang-Gelantipy Road is an icon of East Gippsland. It combines a colonial era all-timber stock-bridge with the (then) latest welded-steel technology. CRB experimentation with electric arc-welding, combined with the necessity for economic innovations during the

Great Depression, resulted in the bridge being at the leading edge of world technology. The arc-welding technique was thought to be in advance of British technology at the time, and also created interest in America. It was claimed to be the longest arc-welded steel truss road bridge in the world, and regarded as one of the standing wonders of Australian road-bridge engineering. It remains in excellent condition.

However during the recent firestorm the timber deck ignited but fortunately a fire fighting crew was on hand and they were able to save the bridge.

But less fortunate was the Bete Bolong bridge which was close to where my family lived for our two and a half years in East Gippsland. It was totally destroyed. Within the boundaries of the bushfires 123 bridges and major culverts on the road network were inspected and repaired. Department of Transport engineers were assisted by engineers from the Australian Defence Force, travelling through the fire-ravaged areas in armoured vehicles to make on-the-spot assessments of the bridge stock. I am happy to report that the Stony Creek bridge at Nowa Nowa survived.



Wairewa's historic timber railway bridge was destroyed in the fire.



The deck of the Genoa River bridge caught alight.



After the trusses ignited the bridge collapsed into the Genoa River.



McKillop's Bridge was saved.



Bete Bolong Creek bridge was totally destroyed.

## VALE

We offer our sympathies and condolences to the following:

### **Nadia Mychajlysyn**

Nadia, Jaroslav's wife, died early in August.

### **Barry Gutteridge**

Although not a member of the Association, Barry will be remembered by many ex-Bridge Branch personnel. Barry died in July following complications after a stroke. He was 76.

### **Kevin Hine**

Although Kevin didn't work for the CRB and its successors, nonetheless he had close ties with some of our members on road planning issues and other connections. He was held in great esteem as an engineer and gentleman.

Kevin worked for Wilbur Smith and Associates as their point person on the Melbourne Transportation Study in the 1960s which culminated in the Melbourne Transport Plan 1969. Prior to that he worked for them on projects in India and Malaysia. Later, he joined the Ministry of Transport when Steve Crabb was Minister. He subsequently returned to consulting around 1986 when he joined Kinhill – eventually retiring in the mid 90s.

### **Judy Ager**

Noel Osborne informed me of Judy's death. Her husband, Peter, is well-known to many of our members. Peter started work at the CRB and worked on the Mulgrave Freeway in its early days, and then Major Projects Division and Contract Services until his retirement. Judy was a popular and talented artist with her own gallery.

## Our 2020 Program of Activities

**I wish to confirm that all our activities for 2020 have been cancelled.**

## New Member

**It is a pleasure to introduce a new member to our association, Trevor Boyd.**

Trevor retired in 2017 after 43 years of service. Trevor started his career in road design and then moved into construction and project management. Some of the projects he worked on included the Bell Banksia Link, Ballarat Bypass, Hallam Bypass, Pakenham Bypass, Craigieburn Bypass, Deer Park Bypass and more recently, he was the Project Director for the M80 Ring Road Upgrade, the City Link-Tullamarine freeway widening and upgrading the Monash Freeway.

Trevor is a member of the Melbourne Amateur Rocket Society, enjoys cross country skiing, is a reserve instructor with the RAAF and a CFA officer.

## News from our Members

### **Laurie Jones**

Laurie has written to me a couple of times and I must apologize to him because I have only just responded to him. His messages got lost in my system.

In his last note he said:

Hello again David,

It's only a few months since I wrote you about 4' 8 1/2" (the standard rail gauge) but your story about 6174 caught my eye, and I thought I'd pass on to you a few more sums you can amaze your grandchildren with, if you haven't already seen and used them.

I don't do that myself – all six of my grandchildren are much too busy – but I've got 14 great grandchildren (three teenagers), and some of them E-mail me (the youngest eight), and one 12 year old is currently finishing the last of the following four sums which are in a way like 6174.

I give them only the left side of the sums of course, but they soon get the drift of things, and if they use the same size font they can see the symmetry.

Regards, Laurie

I include two of his mathematical phenomena here and will drip feed you some more over time.

$1 \times 8 + 1 = 9$   
 $12 \times 8 + 2 = 98$   
 $123 \times 8 + 3 = 987$   
 $1234 \times 8 + 4 = 9876$   
 $12345 \times 8 + 5 = 98765$   
 $123456 \times 8 + 6 = 987654$   
 $1234567 \times 8 + 7 = 9876543$   
 $12345678 \times 8 + 8 = 98765432$   
 $123456789 \times 8 + 9 = 987654321$

$1 \times 9 + 2 = 11$   
 $12 \times 9 + 3 = 111$   
 $123 \times 9 + 4 = 1111$   
 $1234 \times 9 + 5 = 11111$   
 $12345 \times 9 + 6 = 111111$   
 $123456 \times 9 + 7 = 1111111$   
 $1234567 \times 9 + 8 = 11111111$   
 $12345678 \times 9 + 9 = 111111111$   
 $123456789 \times 9 + 10 = 1111111111$

I will put Laurie's story about the standard rail gauge in a future newsletter.

### Nick Szwed

Prompted by the previous stories of Papua New Guinea, Nick was reminded of a visit he made there in 1976.

He wrote:

'I arrived for work one morning in July 1975 on the second floor of 60 Denmark St Kew and sat down next to Peter Mitchell, the traffic signal designer, who sat in front of David Freeman's office (which was already full of pipe smoke). He asked me if I was interested in a flying trip to central Australia. His brother Gary had just gained his licence to fly and he wanted to do a trip.

I went home that evening and suggested to my wife, Jutta, that we should go. Jutta has had acrophobia (fear of heights) all her life and she immediately said no. I told



Nick's accommodation in the front yard of Lae Primary school.



Jutta visiting one of the villagers with the nun.

her that Gary Mitchell was a Catholic Priest and guaranteed a safe landing in this world or the next. I persuaded her to do a trial flight with Gary. That went successfully and we had a wonderful flying trip.

The following year Gary told us he would like to fly to Papua New Guinea. We decided to join him. I took a camera with me and would like to share some of the best photos.

### Greg Beeton

Greg and I had a brief correspondence about history matters and he wrote back to me as follows:

'Hi David

Unfortunately my squash and golf have come to an end again. Celia was quite put out that her extensive social calendar ended but I could still play golf twice a week. Now we are on an equal footing.

Fortunately for us, this year was the long anticipated year for house refurbishment. We are still living in Power Street. So we did not have any travel plans to be disrupted and now have ample time to get jobs done. The house has been repainted inside and out, but we were a bit delayed with the new carpet going down. It means that Celia can have her first ever new kitchen.

Why are we doing this to a house that is too big? Not sure. Possibly because we can. No structural changes anywhere. But it looks like we may be here for another five years to wear it in!

We did have a go at kitchen design five years ago but the process was somewhat like WW1. This time it is going a little better, with more innovation.

Yes, we are still going to Flinders Island. I bought another boat in March but I am unable to collect it as yet. They don't want to see us which is understandable.

Keep safe. Greg'

## Peter McCullough

Peter sent me an extract from the December 1978 Interchange magazine which featured the formation of the CRB Retired Persons Association – now VicRoads Association. It described the day as follows:

'It was a day of nostalgia when some of the CRB's oldest retired employees returned to the Board in late November to renew life-long friendships. More than 100 retired men and women met in the Head Office Theatre to form the CRB Retired Persons Association.

Among those at the function were Jack Thorpe (ex-Deputy Chairman), Win Drury (ex-receptionist), Nancy Costelloe (formerly Strover), Lois Lee, Cliff Liddell (ex-Deputy Secretary), Ted King (ex-Controller of Stores), Jim Farish (ex-DA Benalla), Daryl Carly-Salmon (Ex-Legal Officer) Eric Moncrieff (ex-Principal Traffic Officer) and John Molnar (ex-Assistant Chief Mechanical Engineer).

The nostalgic day began with the arrival of "the old folks" from 10 a.m. The more recently retired people took the opportunity to visit friends still on the job. They wandered through the building, accompanied by back slapping, hand shaking and broad grinning. By mid-day most people had gathered in the foyer and the theatre and they were joined by the three Board Members for lunch. Judging by the noise there was not much eating done.

At the start of lunch, there was one conspicuously absent person, Bert Davies, who at 94 years of age was to be the oldest person at the function. As lunch rumbled on, Bert suddenly appeared at the door. He apologised for being late and said to the welcoming party "I overshot Kew Junction on the tram which took me up to Glenferrie Road and I had to walk back from there. I can't walk as fast as I used to". Bert proved to be one of the real characters of the day. He retired in 1954 when he was 70 years old, but ran his own title searching business until two years ago. In typically humble fashion Bert said "The only bloody interesting thing about me seems to be that I am 94 ½ years old."

Bert is one of the two remaining founding members of Southern Golf Club, along with Frank Hosking who was the CRB's Advance Planning Engineer for many years. Bert still plays golf regularly but said a recent accident has put him out of action for a while. When asked about the future, he said, "Well I don't worry too much about that. My friends allege that my end will be at the hands of a jealous husband."



Bert Davies

Bert came to the Board with a wealth of experience in survey work. He was a foundation member of the Australian Survey Core in 1910 and during World War 1 served in Mesopotamia, Egypt and France. His memories go deep into CRB history. He started in 1925 when head Office was the Titles Office. Bert prepared Documents of Transfer for CRB land acquisition."

Peter also included an article from an old Herald-Sun about Victoria's most notorious criminal at the time – Russell 'Mad Dog' Cox. Cox was sentenced to life in jail after kidnapping two prison wardens in a failed escape attempt in the early 1970s, but that sentence was reduced to 29 years in jail. He broke out of the top-security Katingal division of Sydney's Long Bay Prison in 1977. In his 11 years

on the run Cox committed a series of armed robberies in Queensland (six between 1978 and 1983) and Victoria and was linked to three murders.

Now what has this rather sordid history got to do with our Association, you might ask? Cox was arrested in 1988 fleeing from police who had been tipped off that he was about to hold up an armoured van. It was a cops and robber chase ending in Cox crashing his car. Following his arrest, the police learnt that Cox and an accomplice had been seen slowly driving past VicRoads Head Office a number of times leading the police to assume that the VicRoads' payroll was going to be his next job.

## Tom Smallman

Tom rang me to say that he has published another book called The Watsons of Hastings; a family history that revisits the big Burke and Wills expedition fraud. You can download it as an e-book, free of charge by going to the webpage of the State Library of Victoria and putting the name in the search box. It is a long book so it will take a bit of time to download.

## Ted Goddard

Ted wrote to say I am mistaken. It is not him in the photograph at the ball. He reckons it is Brian Chandler.

***Bert came to the Board with a wealth of experience in survey work. He was a foundation member of the Australian Survey Core in 1910 and during World War 1 served in Mesopotamia, Egypt and France.***

# News from Major Road Projects Victoria

## Thomson's Road Upgrade, Carrum Downs



The new intersection of Thompsons Road and Frankston-Dandenong Road opened in July 2020. It was constructed in less than five weeks and the works included:

- Demolishing the old roundabout
- Building the new, bigger intersection
- Installing traffic signals
- Laying over 7,500 tonnes of crushed rock and 9,300 tonnes of asphalt

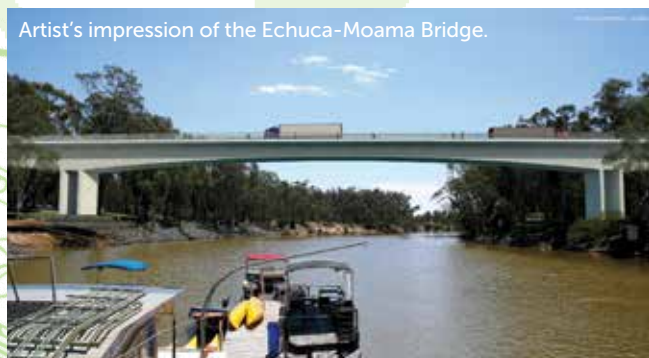
Crews worked around the clock, utilising a five week road closure to fast-track works. The new intersection has been widened to feature two dedicated right-turn lanes and three through-lanes on each approach to the intersection, as well as slip lanes so vehicles can turn left without affecting through traffic.

## Echuca-Moama Bridge

Stage 3 of the Echuca-Moama Bridge Project has been awarded to McConnell Dowell Constructors (Australia) Pty Ltd. This stage includes:

- a new road north of the new Warren Street roundabout in Echuca with one lane in each direction
- two new bridges over the Campaspe and Murray Rivers
- two new flood relief bridges
- a new separated walking and cycling path, providing a safe and scenic link between Echuca and Moama via Warren Street.

The new Murray River crossing will provide an alternative to the existing bridge which transports around 20,000 vehicles each day, including 1,500 trucks and heavy vehicles. The bridge will also improve cross-river access for emergency services and support high productivity freight vehicles, improving freight access through northern Victoria and southern NSW.



Artist's impression of the Echuca-Moama Bridge.

With one lane in each direction, the new bridges will meet traffic demands for decades to come. However, the design allows for additional lanes to be added when demand is needed.

Major works are underway and the project is expected to be completed in 2020.



The Project team have continued to provide accessible learning opportunities for future engineers. Together with the Campaspe Cohuna Local Learning and Employment Network, they presented to Year 9 students at Echuca College about careers in Information Communication Technology (ICT).

The Echuca-Moama Bridge Project team also visited local primary school students to give them an exclusive overview of the project. Students learnt about the environment around the site of the new bridge and were inspired to build habitat nest boxes to help shelter wildlife.





## Dunnings and Palmer Road Upgrade, Point Cook



Members of the Point Cook Action Group painting a noise wall to their own specification.

## Princes Highway West, Colac



The Princes Highway West team donated wood obtained from trees harvested during the project to the Colac Woodcrafters Guild so that it could be reused to make toys, furniture and instruments. Vegetation was also mulched for garden beds and landscaping.

## News from Regional Roads Victoria

### Roundabouts completed

Wet weather and inappropriate ground conditions has hampered earthworks and sealing works construction on the Geelong-Bacchus Marsh Road between Little River Ripley Road and Birds Road. The works have been put on hold until 22 September when, hopefully, the weather has improved.



Construction of the roundabout at the Ballan Road and Parwan Exford Road intersection.

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BOARD

## And now for something beautiful

In this segment, I propose to write about something uplifting that will transcend the pandemic and raise our spirits. It could be a piece of art, literature, music or poetry but whatever it is, it will bring us joy and wonder. In this edition, it is a painting.



It is a painting called *The Flower Market* by Ethel Carrick. It depicts a summery scene in a French market where the play of light and shade and the lovely colours of the flowers convey a sense of harmony and optimism. The gradation in colour gives the painting depth. There is no detail in the painting. The artist is conveying an impression of a moment (hence the term impressionist art) by painting on the spot out in the open air. It is as if you are seeing it at a glance, but I confess I could look at it for a long time with wonder. It is so simple ... and yet? I think it is wonderful and after the lock down is over you can go and see it at the National Gallery of Victoria.

Carrick studied music in London before moving on to the famous Slade School of Art. She married the acclaimed Australian artist E. Phillips Fox and they moved to Paris in 1913. She also visited Australia in 1908 and 1913 and,

with her husband, painted with the Heidelberg School. On the outbreak of the Great War they came to Australia where they raised funds for the war effort and the French Red Cross. Fox died in 1915, and Carrick then embarked on a twenty-year solo tour of the Middle East, India and Europe, returning to Australia intermittently to exhibit her work and to go on painting expeditions.

In her lifetime, Carrick's reputation was eclipsed by her husband's, in part because she spent a good deal of her time promoting his career rather than her own, lobbying Australian collectors and curators to buy his work and arranging exhibitions both while he was alive and posthumously. In recent years, her reputation has been rising, and critics today consider her work more adventurous than that of her husband.

She died in Melbourne in 1952.



# Trivia and Didactic Whimsies

## Those daring old men in their flying machines

Many of you know Iris Whittaker. She was the librarian at VicRoads and now she is working in the Minister's office managing Ministerial correspondence. Her father, Leonard Nahum Whittaker, was a farmer in northern Victoria. In his late eighties, he sat down and wrote his life story in long hand. It runs to 167 A4 printed pages and he started off:

*'I have already written this story once. But as I have some time on my hands and perhaps not much time left, have decided to do it again, perhaps better, perhaps worse.'*

**There was a small cabin for two passengers (£5 each) with a pilot, Captain Snooks, in an open cockpit in front. Many went out to see the wonder and a fortunate few enjoyed their first flight.**

What a start! He then proceeded to describe the story of his parents and his own life in a modest and self-deprecating way – through fire, drought and good times – painting a picture of family affection, humility and hard work.

By reading his story you can feel the honesty in the man.

As a boy, Len read a magazine called Chums and in one issue it described model aircraft building complete with instructions for building one. He tried to build one but he could not persuade it to fly. However it was the start of a life-long love affair with aviation. In his book, he describes how it started. It would have been just after the Great War and I guess that Len was about 15 at the time.

*'This was my first interest in aeroplanes, which grew with time. My first sight of one, which we saw flying north over Borah one evening, when we were milking, left me actually trembling with excitement. Sometime later, I saw an advertisement in a paper that offered to teach me to fly. I wrote to the firm, called Shaw Aviation School, I think, receiving a reply which said they would need a personal interview, so nothing more was done. I remember getting the letter in reply, the envelope having a picture of an aeroplane on it. There was no chance then of getting work in aviation in Australia, as there were only a few barnstormers. Most of the pilots were ex-warbirds who must have had enough money to afford an aeroplane.'*

He then describes the first plane arriving in Boort in 1919 to provide joy rides for passengers. It landed on the flats west of the town. He goes on to say:

*'The aircraft was a converted war time bomber, a Boulton and Paul biplane, powered by a 6-cylinder Beardmore engine. There was a small cabin for two passengers (five pounds each) with a pilot, Captain Snooks, in an open cockpit in front. Many went out to see the wonder and a fortunate few enjoyed their first flight. It had a small accident one day and needed some repairs to the woodwork, which were done by Mr McLaren, the local carpenter. In payment they took him for a flight over Barraport, where Andrew James' clearing sale was in progress. Mr McLaren was very impressed. He said he could see all of the people and the 'traps', as he called their buggies, lined up along the fence. A year or two later another aeroplane came, a BE 2E, flown by 'Pard Mustar'. By this time I had enough money for the 30 shilling, five minute flight. It was to be many years before I flew again.'*

After the Second War, Len and his wife, May, went to an air show at Quambatook. They took a joyride in a high-winged monoplane, a Lacoster, which was built in Melbourne. Len said it was quite comfortable with twin-control wheels just like the Baby Austin car in which they drove to the show. The following day there was a strong westerly wind and the Lacoster flew by Len's place en route to Charlton, making very slow progress at about 100 feet. It never went in to production.

After the War, the government began to dispose of surplus aircraft, most of them Tiger Moths. Len's brothers, Arthur and Mick, tendered to buy one for 350 pounds and they were successful. It was a wonderful chance for them to learn to fly. They arranged for Ron Annetts, an ex-instructor from the R.A.A.F., to teach them to fly. Another brother, Jim, was the first to gain his licence. One day, he and Mick decided to fly the Tiger Moth over to the paddock which was Boort's aerodrome.

Len describes the day as follows:

*'It was a fairly hot and humid day, the tank was full, and there was long grass on the hangar paddock. There was a strip on the eastern end which was hard and not very grassy, where we usually took off, getting airborne before reaching the long grass. But on this occasion, due to the weather and other reasons, they didn't get into the air before reaching the long grass, with the result they were still on the ground when 50 yards or so from the fence.'*

*Jim hauled back on the stick, hoping to lift over the fence, but she kept right on the ground, crashed through the fence, and over the channel, where it came to rest and caught fire. Fortunately, both boys were able to get out. They tried the fire extinguisher, which was hopeless against the petrol fire, and our beautiful Tiger Moth was completely destroyed. Mick sustained a very black eye but Jim was unmarked. They were very fortunate that they were not knocked out in the crash.'*

**Of the Westland Widgeon Arthur said it had two speeds – slow and damned slow – but he said it could beat a car if the wind was in the right direction.**

May and Len had gone out for afternoon tea when Arthur rang Len to tell him about the crash. He was crestfallen and lost his appetite. They called to see Jim and Mick on the way home and learnt that their wives had insisted they never fly again. Jim later refuted this – he said he grounded himself.

So this further postponed Len and Arthur learning to fly. Arthur eventually decided to attend a flying

school in Wagga and Len accompanied him on one or two occasions and had a bit of instruction but not to the solo stage. In the hangar was a Westland Widgeon with its wings folded back and unused for a long time. When Arthur got his licence, he offered to buy it for 200 pounds. It had a history of engine failure. One day the engine was misfiring but when it landed it was running perfectly. They examined the plugs which showed evidence of having been very hot indeed. So they enriched the mixture of the carburettor, put in new plugs and never had any more trouble.

It wasn't until 1959, when Len was 55, that he was able to learn to fly. He learned at the Victorian Royal Aero Club in Swan Hill. He had a hard taskmaster as his instructor – a Dutchman, Ross Rozier of the Royal Netherlands Airforce. Arthur recalls:

*'When flying circuits he was constantly criticising me, so one day I asked him to let me do one circuit without any comments from him. So I flew a circuit, not very well I admit, and when it was finished Ross said: "Well I suppose you could call that a circuit, now I'll show you a proper circuit." So he took off losing and gaining a hundred feet or so, while nominally at a thousand feet, then made a perfect approach, but he failed to see a marker on the side of the runway, which he hit with the undercart, demolishing the marker and putting a few holes in the wing. I had seen that we were heading for the marker and was trying to switch on the mike, which he always told me to switch off unless I wanted to speak, but the switch was a bit tricky, and before I had it on, it was too late.'*

After gaining his licence Len, together with Arthur, bought and flew in a variety of planes. Amazingly, Len and Arthur flew well into their eighties and Len eventually became the oldest licensed pilot in the world. He handed his licence in when he was about 85. Len farmed throughout this entire period while Arthur and Mick ran the local garage in Boort and Jim worked for them. They built a wedge-shaped hangar on Len's farm to house their planes. It was wide at the front and narrow at the back so that they rolled the plane in backwards.

Len owned two planes – a Topsy Nipper and then later, a Druine Turbulent. But he also flew Arthur's planes. Two or three times a week, he would take his plane up for a spin often with one of his four daughters aboard. Arthur's plane, a Westland Widgeon (1927) was once the oldest airworthy plane in the world. Iris said that Arthur flew it across to South Australia for an air show. At the end of the show there was a fly past of all the planes that participated. Jets swooped around showing off their sleekness and speed, and freight planes and bombers lumbered across the airfield displaying their might and power, but it was Arthur's Westland Widgeon that came put-putting along at about 80 feet above ground level and 70 mph which won the crowd's heart.

Of the Westland Widgeon Arthur said it had two speeds - slow and damned slow – but he said it could beat a car if the wind was in the right direction.



A one-seater Druine Turbulent (above) Topsy Nipper (below) similar to Len's. They were stored under the wings of Arthur's Westland Widgeon in the hangar on Len's farm.



Arthur Whittaker taxis VH-UHU on to the grass early morning at Parafield in September 1966, heading home to the family farm at Boort in Victoria after attending the two-day National Air Show at Adelaide.

Arthur's plane was also used in a film regarding the Coffee Royal Affair. It was made by the ABC and Arthur's plane was used because it was the only one of its type in Australia. On 31 March 1929, en route from Sydney to England, the Southern Cross with Kingsford Smith at the helm made an emergency landing on a mudflat near the mouth of the Glenelg River, in the Kimberley region of northern Western Australia. The Southern Cross was subsequently found by an overland party and rescued after a fortnight's searching.

While on their way to help with the search two friends of Kingsford Smith crash landed in the Tanami Desert in Central Australia and died of thirst and exposure on 12 April 1929. The pair, Keith Vincent Anderson and Henry Smith "Bobby" Hitchcock, had been flying a Westland Widgeon plane named Kookaburra. Many sections of the media and public felt that the forced landing of the Southern Cross, which was dubbed the "Coffee Royal" incident after the brew of coffee and brandy which the crew had drunk while awaiting



The flying Whittaker brothers in 1982 – Mick, Arthur, Jim and Len. Iris's sister, Nancy, took the photograph.

rescue, had been a publicity stunt and that Kingsford Smith was responsible for the two deaths.

Arthur's plane had to be repainted to match the insignia of the Kookaburra which was G-AUKA. Its real insignia was VH-UHU.



Arthur's plane re-numbered to resemble Kookaburra at Wangaratta Airport.

In 1995, Arthur and Len became celebrities. Len wrote:

*'Life had been quiet and uneventful, except when Channel 7 did a segment for the Willesee show, on the Widgeon, with Arthur and I as the old pilots. Then a journalist, named Chris Pritchard, came from Sydney to interview us for an American paper called the 'National Enquirer', the pictures for it being taken by Barry Weller. Some of Barry's pictures were eventually published in 'People' magazine, both in Australia and New Zealand. Arthur and I were asked to speak to New Zealand radio. The pictures and story were also published in the Ansett and Qantas in-flight magazines.*

Channel 10 also wished to make a picture for their 'Just for the Record', but due to floods and other hold-ups, only had time to do a very short bit, which was shown for 30 very expensive seconds. It seemed to us ridiculous to make so much of what was virtually nothing, but they were very persistent so we capitulated. The most recent was Channel 9, theirs featuring Arthur in the Widgeon and me in the Turbulent. This did not turn out quite as good as the Channel 7 one, but it seemed to please our friends.

Of course it was the age of the Widgeon which sparked things off originally, plus the fact that Arthur and I were both still flying when over 80 years old.'

The Willesee show is on Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAFecEKcjHQ>

And then Len finished his story.

*'Now I think I have come to the end of my story. When I look back, I think of the things I should have done, and the things I ought not to have done, with some regret, but I am grateful we were able to do what we have done. Whatever modest success that I, and my brothers, have*

*made was possible in the first place by the gallant attempt that Dad and Mum made to give us a better start in life than they had. They gave their all for us really and it is important that this be remembered.*

And I must also acknowledge May's contribution to our life's work, as we battled through drought and disappointments through the years when our family were growing up, until at last we were free of debt and able to enjoy our retirement here, where we were surrounded by friends.'

I hope there are Topsy Nippers and Westland Widgeons in heaven.



A painting of Arthur's Westland Widgeon by Peter Watkins at an unknown location.

## AFL Trivia

**In 1916, the Fitzroy Football Club had the unique distinction of being the Premier team and at the same time were the wooden spooners. It was Fitzroy's sixth premiership.**



The Fitzroy Football Club 1916.

In the 1916 season of the VFL, its 20th year of the competition, just four teams competed, due to World War I. They were Carlton, Collingwood, Fitzroy and Richmond. This led to the anomaly of Fitzroy having the distinction of winning both the wooden spoon and the premiership in the same year, finishing fourth out of four but progressing through to the Grand Final in the final four finals system and winning that match.

Dick Lee of Collingwood won the goal kicking with 48 goals.

Essendon, Geelong, Melbourne, South Melbourne and St Kilda all refused to play in the VFL competition in 1916 on "patriotic grounds", leaving only four inner-suburban teams of Carlton, Collingwood, Fitzroy, and Richmond (the home grounds which were all within walking distance of each other).

## Bingo

A man was feeling terrible and he went to the doctor. The doctor examined him thoroughly and said, 'Sorry, I have some bad news. You have Yellow 24, a really nasty virus. It's called Yellow 24 because it turns your blood yellow and you usually only have 24 hours to live. There's no known cure for it so just go home and enjoy your final precious moments on earth..'

So he trudged home to his wife and broke the terrible news to her. Distraught, she asked him to go to the bingo with her that evening as he's never been there with her before. They arrived at the bingo and with his first card he got four corners and won \$35. Then, with the same card, he got

a line and won \$320. Then he got the full house and won \$5000. Then the National Game came up and he won that too getting \$780,000. The bingo caller asked him up on stage and said, 'Sir, I've been here 20 years and I've never seen anyone win four corners, a line, the full-house and the national game on the same card. You must be the luckiest man on Earth!'

'Lucky?' the man screamed. 'Lucky? I'll have you know I've got Yellow 24'.

'Blow me,' said the bingo caller. 'You've won the meat raffle as well!'