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VicRoads Association
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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**

Dear Members,

During the lockdown I have written a few extracurricular stories about the early maritime explorers of Australia and e-mailed them to members in our e-mail database. If you are not on that database and only receive a hardcopy newsletter, you will have missed out. The stories are too long to send by snail mail. We would be stretching the generosity of the Department of Transport too far.

For those of you who only receive the hardcopy but have access to e-mail, please get in touch with me and I can send them to you if you wish. This will not compromise you continuing to receive the newsletter in the post.

Today, I want to start with a difficult discussion about a subject that was in the news a few months ago, precipitated by the killing of an African American man, George Floyd, in Minneapolis, USA. The world was shocked and, among other things, it started a wave of destruction and disfigurement of statues of figures who history now shows, committed unspeakable offences against others.

The most notable example was the statue of Edward Colston which was torn down and thrown into Bristol Harbour in England. This was motivated by the Black Lives Matter movement. In the 17th Century, Colston was a wealthy merchant, philanthropist, and Tory Member of Parliament who made his money in the American slave trade. He was actively involved in slaving being the deputy governor of the Royal African Company which exercised a monopoly of the English slave trade. During his membership of the company, it is estimated that 84,000 men, women and children were transported to the Americas and 19,000 died during the passage.

This is truly monstrous and it is amazing that in 1895 – 174 years after Colston's death - the citizens of Bristol saw fit to erect a statue in his honour. As a philanthropist Colston endowed schools, houses for the poor, alms-houses, hospitals and churches in Bristol, London and elsewhere, and his name features widely on Bristol buildings and landmarks. It would appear that as recently as the beginning of 20th Century Britain, his slave trading – which would have been well-known – was not sufficiently strong enough reason to counter the good of his philanthropy.

And it reinforces the notion that winners write history and to Hell with the losers!

A depiction in every school book of Cook landing at Botany Bay in 1770.

Then move to Australia where many people are advocating tearing down statues of Captain James Cook - not so much for his treatment of aboriginal people in Australia and other lands, but more for what was to follow him in the colonisation by the British. We of British descent who have 'owned' Australia for over 250 years take umbrage at those who consider this was an invasion, but if you think about it dispassionately, how else can you describe it? We weren't invited here and Cook was given instructions to take possession of new territories in the name of the King of Great Britain "with the consent of the natives". He didn't receive consent.

President and Editor: David Jellie Tel. 9077 1136, Mob. 0418 105 276, email pdjellie@hotmail.com
Secretary: Jim Webber Tel. 9817 4182, Mob. 0412 064 527, email jimwebber@optusnet.com.au

A sketch of two Indigenous men waving spears at Captain Cook's arriving ship.

The main reason for Cook's first voyage to the Pacific was to observe the transit of Venus moving across the face of the Sun from Tahiti. The information he gained from this would assist European scientists to work out the size of the solar system. In Tahiti he was instructed to open an envelope that contained secret orders to search for the 'great unknown southern land'.

The following story was posted on the ABC NEWS web page on 29 April 2020:

'The tale of James Cook sailing the Endeavour into Botany Bay is familiar to most Australians. But 250 years on, the descendants of the Aboriginal people who first spotted the English explorer's ship say the history books got at least part of the story wrong.

Our understanding of the events that unfolded on the afternoon of April 29, 1770 come mostly from the journals of Captain Cook and his crew. They describe sailing into the harbour and being threatened and warned off by the Indigenous people on the shore.

Sydney Parkinson, a young artist employed on the ship, wrote in his journal that local men made threatening gestures with spears and yelled the words "warra warra wai." He presumed that the words meant "go away," and so for many years his diary entry defined the story of first contact between Aboriginal people and the British.

Now the Dharawal people are sharing their story. They say the real meaning of those first recorded Indigenous words has been misinterpreted. "Warra is a root word for either white or dead in our language," said Ray Ingrey, a Dharawal man and La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council deputy chairperson.

"Over time, because of outsiders trying to tell our story for us, it's just being translated into different parts as 'go away'. If you are outside our community and trying to look in, you will think it means 'go away' but for us it means 'you're all dead'," he said.

While those words might sound threatening or morbid, Mr Ingrey said it was likely just a warning to other locals at the time.

"When our old people saw the Endeavour coming through, they actually thought it was a low-lying cloud because all they could see was whiteness," he said.

"In Dharawal culture, that low-lying cloud means the spirits of the dead have returned to their country and so they saw almost ghosts. So when the two men opposed the landing, they were protecting the country in a spiritual way, from ghosts. There is no taking away of the significance of James Cook, clearly as an amazing explorer. However, history shows that when lands are invaded a lot of the true history is either wiped out or misrepresented," Mr Ingrey said."

Cook, in his writings, disputed Dampier's view that Australian Aboriginal people were 'the miserablest (sic) people in the world.' He said: "The natives of New Holland, they may seem to be the most wretched people on Earth, but in fact they are the happiest people I have ever witnessed". He wrote with admiration of the lives he had witnessed, relatively free of the oppressive hierarchy and work of European society.

"The natives of New Holland, they may seem to be the most wretched people on Earth, but in fact they are the happiest people I have ever witnessed."

But Cook was not squeaky clean. He was significantly more empathetic in his attitude towards indigenous people than the majority of his contemporaries, but the record shows that he shot one of the two aborigines who confronted his landing at Botany Bay. He fired the shot before they had even reached land. He wounded the man in the leg but apparently the wound was only slight.

Cook is arguably Australia's most revered hero (for non-indigenous Australians) and memorials to him abound throughout England, Australia and the Pacific but statues of him have been defaced in England, Australia and New Zealand.

But can you compare Cook to Colston? I think not. And can you rectify wrongs in history by retelling stories? I think so. By casting Colston's statue into the sea, the pain of the past is eased today but it also eliminates the reminder of the horrible behaviour which was deemed acceptable in the colonial past. There is little doubt that the attitudes of our ancestors to racism, misogyny and nationalism were embedded in their culture – exacerbated by ignorance, fear and a lack of understanding of other cultures. It was just plain horrible, but had I lived then, I may have felt the same.

Keep in mind too that the cruelty meted out to slaves was carried out by the ruling, wealthy class so the greed of capitalism was also a factor as it still is today in some parts of the world.

We now judge the past with a far more enlightened vision, but we still have a long way to go. I am only one generation away from both the Great War and the Second World War and all the other horrible events up to now. There was more cruelty meted out in these obscene wars than is imaginable but it is important that we never forget them by eliminating them from scrutiny.

Captain Cook statues, London and Hyde Park, Sydney.

Cook's imprint on the Australian psyche is palpable. He was brave, curious, cool, precise, innovative, obedient, loyal, conscientious and altogether the perfect colonial figure in history. The fact that he died brutally in service to his King also adds to the nobility of his image. But many Australians blame him – for his exploration of the far more enticing east coast of the continent compared to the west – for setting off the wave of settlement that was to follow that so damaged indigenous Australians.

Indigenous Australians see this wave of settlement as an invasion of their land and that can't be disputed. The British took their land away from them and in doing so, killed many aborigines by guns, germs and steel. The oldest civilisation on Earth was decimated.

The President of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV), Professor Richard Broome, wrote recently:

> *"Destroying symbols of the past doesn't repair the wrongs of today. The weight of our past will continue to press upon us until we acknowledge and correct the present injustices it has brought upon us. Until we prevent deaths in custody and police brutality; until we give our First Nations peoples a fair say in our society; until Indigenous children have just as realistic a hope for a decent life as other Australians; we are all diminished.*
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> *"For 111 years, the RHSV has stood for preserving our history and heritage in order to face it and improve upon it. We have stood for and stand today for the preservation of historic sites of all kinds because heritage keeps us in touch with our past, both positive and negative, and because destruction of heritage causes pain, as so spectacularly in the appalling present destruction of the Juukan Gorge caves, which was perhaps Australia's most ancient heritage site.*
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> *"In the years since the RHSV was founded, however, much has changed. Women have gained the vote and entered the public sphere, nearly all nations have signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, civil rights movements have challenged racism, and the United Nations has forged many other rights, including those of Indigenous peoples, refugees and children. These new rights have emerged because we have changed. Those in the past may have looked like us, but they thought very differently from us."*

He went on to suggest that the removal of a monument which caused such pain, as that of Edward Colston, and which has no other value, could be removed – to a museum perhaps – and be re-commemorated in such a way that we do not forget our grim past. In some cases it may be appropriate to add inscriptions that explain different aspects of the legacy of the individual concerned. A figure such as Churchill comes to mind. He was such a flawed character in many ways. I can never forgive him for the role he played in the partition of India and yet I acknowledge that it was his dogged determination during the Second World War that inspired and gave hope to the people of England during those dark times. History should record both sides of his character.

There is a museum in Berlin called the Zitadelle (Citadel) which installed a permanent exhibition in 2016 called Unveiled. Berlin and its Monuments. The display contains monuments which were once part of Berlin's urban landscape but have been removed because of their connection to racism, cruelty and evil in the past. Some depict the tyrannical Brandenburg-Prussian rulers, and others are from the National Socialistic (Nazi) era. What is normally not allowed in a museum can be found here. Remembrance of the crimes and injustices of the subjects are provided via interactive media which provide a contemporary historical context. It displays uncomfortable realities in a challenging but educational way.

What I am trying to say is that we should not forget the past but we should recognize the injustices from it and rectify the ledger. In other words, history should continue to evolve as we gain further understanding through research and scholarship.

I think that Captain Cook's statues should stand in peace but we should provide alternative contexts where appropriate.

VALE

We extend our sympathies to the families of the following members who have died recently.

Russell Matthews

We have just learned of Russell's recent death in Queensland from lung cancer at the age of 84. He had many friends in the transport planning area. He was a much-loved and highly respected member of the team. He had great skills in interacting with people and working in a team environment. He lived life to the fullest through simple pleasures; imbibing a glass of wine, chatting with friends, snacking, reading the newspaper; and playing Santa Claus at Christmas celebrations.

I am grateful to Bridget Cramphorn for providing the following tribute to Russell.

'Russell was born in Queensland before World War Two. He often talked about how he and his mother were evacuated during the war from their country property in the far north for fear of attack by the Japanese.

Russell arrived in Melbourne in the early 1970s and started work at the then CRB as part of a new group established within the Freeway Planning Division. It comprised a town planner (Russell), an economist (King Bush) and a sociologist (Ian Thompson). It became known as CSIG (Community Impact Study Group). This was an initiative of Don Pritchard's, who had seen similar groups operating in the US. There was considerable agitation in Melbourne at the time about the potential impact of freeways and he saw that a group like this could help to address some of the problems.

In 1974 Ian left the group and I replaced him as sociologist. Shortly thereafter the group was renamed ESG (Environmental Studies Group) and Robin Saunders became the leader of the group. We worked as a cohesive team both identifying the effects of freeways and looking at ways to mitigate them. Public participation became a popular concept at this time.

Russell was always an active member of the group bringing his good humour and wisdom to bear on many situations and after some time, he became the leader of the group. He took a particular interest in the noise effects of roads and freeways on adjacent properties and his work led to the first set of noise guidelines and standards employed by VicRoads. Noise barriers were also of great interest to Russell as a means of mitigating freeway noise and he researched the benefits of many different forms of barriers.

Russell remained at VicRroads until his retirement in the late 1990s, after which his main desire was to return to his beloved Queensland. He ultimately left Victoria in about 2000 and has lived in Queensland ever since.

In his time in Victoria he made many friends across the transport and road planning world, and became a particular friend of mine and my family, playing Santa at many of our Christmas celebrations.'

Jim Webber and Russell were close colleagues and Jim has provided the following tribute.

'Russell died at age 84 near Caloundra in Queensland in late September. He qualified in Surveying and Town Planning at the University of Queensland. After working in Queensland and England he joined the Country Roads Board in Victoria in 1972 where he played a leading role in environmental aspects of road planning.

He built up a small but talented multi-disciplinary group with expertise in land use planning, traffic noise, air and water quality, sociology, public consultation, flora and fauna. This was at a time when public consultation on major road projects was virtually non-existent, being generally confined to confidential discissions with the City Engineer.

The group was heavily involved in Environment Effects Statements and other environmental and social impact studies and policies, while also having an educative role in the organization. The group also had the expertise to adequately brief and engage specialist consultants, a situation which appears to be lacking today. Very few EES's were unsuccessful. Russell played a lead role in the work of this group

When I worked with the Highways group in the consulting firm Mott. Hay and Anderson's London

Office in 1976 I realised that the CRB's work in this area was on a par with anything I came across in the UK.

After his retirement in the late 1990s Russell returned to Caloundra.

I, along with many other former colleagues across a number of disciplines who worked closely with Russell over many years, greatly appreciated his good nature, expertise, advice and integrity.'

Peter Balfe also contacted me with the following tribute.

'I have very fond memories of Russell and unfortunately many of them have him smoking! He was a great professional and a great supporter of the people who worked with him. He was also unfazed by the 'powerful' around him and was genuinely committed to his personal set of values.

I remember Russell telling me how he got his name. Born beside the Russell River in the shadow of Mount Bartle Frere, Queensland's highest peak. A great character, and a very principled professional.'

Bob Barron

Bob was a stalwart of our Occasional Lunches in Doncaster and he will be sorely missed. He was a thoughtful and considerate man with wisdom and good humour. Roy Gilmour worked closely with Bob and he has provided the following testimonial.

'Bob Barron joined the CRB after spending some time as a geologist at Mt Isa Mines. He was already part of the Materials Research Division culture when I joined the Country Roads Board in 1965. Bob oversaw the Soils Laboratories and lived in an office on the ground floor.

I was very much the new boy on the block in 1965, tasked with the job of establishing a CRB Metallurgy Laboratory to implement a recommendation of the Royal Commission into the failure of the Kings Street Bridge. The Materials Research Division was an exotic place at that time. Filled with characters with diverse backgrounds. Many will remember Elmer Nyoger who was often seen with a raincoat draped over his shoulders like a cape marching to work and who was reputed to have assisted many of the Hungarian Olympic Team seek political asylum during the Melbourne Olympics. There was also our chemist, Karl Pallagy, who was also reputed to have had his own chemical business in Germany before the war and a personal railway carriage to take him from client to client. The story I heard was that Karl had been recruited by Dr Keith Moody from his then current job in Australia cleaning toilets.

I recall first meeting Bob, and getting to know him, during the daily lunches in the MRD lunchroom. Discussions during lunch ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous. Politics was always on the agenda - one of Bob's favourite subjects. But footie was not which was a relief to me as I only understood the round ball game. I do recall Harold, our Chief Chemist, advocating that the most efficient way of burying people was a vertical shaft with the bodies stacked head to toe. Extraordinary that after all these years that story comes to mind. Bob was prominent in all the discussions with his gentle humour prominent.

From a technical point of view Bob was very much involved in the development of the Division's expertise in soils testing methods and also represented the organisation on Standards Association Australia committees. Bob was also a very active member of the Association of Professional Scientists Australia and I believe was involved in the amalgamation of APSA into the Association of Professional Engineers Australia in 1991 to form the Association of Professional Engineers and Scientists, Australia. I do remember Bob's amusement when he found he was to be in the Australia Who's Who because of his involvement with APSA but had to pay to be included which I suspect he was not prepared to do.

Bob loved to travel and not only back to New Zealand. I recall him visiting Albania when most people struggled to know where it was. On another occasion he managed to travel on a cargo ship that visited various ports in the USA. He often wondered what would happen if he revisited the USA because his passport only showed him arriving in the USA. There was no date of departure, so he had overstayed his visa. On one occasion I was on holiday in Scotland and knew that Bob was on a trip from China through Russia through Europe and finishing In London. I persuaded him to spend a few days in Scotland. When I picked him up at the Glasgow Central Railway Station, I realised we had a problem. Bob's back was playing up and he was in agony. He recounted how he was in such pain while in Russia that he often had to lie down. This did not go down well with the local constabulary who kept moving him on or he would be carted off to the local lock up or to some Gulag in Siberia. As a result, our short tour of Scotland ended up being a one-day trip to Largs on the Scottish west coast with many stops for Bob to stretch out his back spasms. I think on his return to Australia but had a spinal fusion operation which seemed to fix his back problem.

In retirement Bob was involved with the University of the 3rd Age.'

Elaine Malseed

Elaine, Les's wife, died late in September. We extend our sincere sympathies to Les and family.

News from our Members

Peter Newitt and Richard (Dick) Williams

Each month, Peter Newitt who works in Eastern Region, sends me old copies of Roundabout magazines. These blasts from the past were the staff magazines of the Traralgon Region of VicRoads during the time that Norm Butler was the Divisional Engineer. In his latest message he said:

'Hi everyone.

Well it's been over two months since I forwarded the previous Blast from the Past. I apologise for my tardiness in this respect, however I've not been to the Traralgon Office during this time in order to scan the old Roundabouts for you. I'm unlikely to be back in the office for some time. As things stand, access to the office is becoming more and more restricted in the current climate. This is a most disturbing situation for everyone – but we get enough 'news' on the radio and television so let's focus on some lighter stuff.

Have I got a treat for you today, I'm sure you will agree that it been worth the wait after reading the update from Richard (Dick) Williams below;

"Hi Peter,

It's great that you send the old Eastern Region Roundabouts to interested staff. I really enjoy a trip down memory lane when I read about the work and social activities that took place in the 10 years I was in the Region. Thanks again for taking the time to send them out via email. You asked me about what I have been doing since retirement, I don't think that I have been undertaking activities that would be particularly interesting or would change the direction of the world, but having said that, I seem to be busy (doing nothing) and at the end of the day or a week, I could not say that I have been bored.

For about seven years I undertook a role working back at VicRoads - starting with full time then moving to part time - enabling me to transition out of work altogether. It was a great way to ease into retirement and I am very grateful that colleagues in VicRoads still held the view that I could contribute and allow me to exit on a gradual basis.

Now fully into retirement mode I sort of follow activities that were of interest to me away from road engineering and road safety etc. I have interest in live theatre, music, watching films, reading, catching up with old friends and of course the odd lunch out from home.

I have never really been a keen traveller but Sandra and I did a North & South Island New Zealand trip in March last year. The scenery was beautiful and we were lucky that the travelling group all got on well. Unfortunately, one of the fellow tourists brought a cold with him and it went through the whole bus group. Even the tour guide caught it but the driver was spared. We have also talked about a trip to France, Spain, Italy or even to the USA, but COVID 19 has certainly put that on the "wait and see" list. I have to say that now being in the older age group that would be affected most by this insidious disease, I am happy to wait.

I became a member of the VicRoads Association. They undertake trips to Regional offices every year and so it has been very enjoyable catching up with Regional Program directions and of course Regional Staff when visiting, particularly when we have a dinner at a local pub. So far, I have renewed acquaintances with fellow VicRoads staff at Eastern, Bendigo and Ballarat Regions. We had a visit scheduled for Geelong and Warrnambool this year but it had to be cancelled. Not only do we visit Regions but the VRA committee has been able to arrange visits to construction projects. These are very popular activities and of course bring out all the retired engineers, techos and project managers. A great way to revisit old friends as well. These have also been cancelled this year. We have visited a wide gamut of projects - road, rail, Victoria's infrastructure plan, tunnel works and even the VicRoads Traffic Control Centre. Usually after these presentations I often think it would be good to be back at work with all the interesting activities that are happening.

I like to go to the pictures on a regular basis depending on what films are playing. Being retired allows you to go during the day. So a film and a bite to eat later, along with a bit of retail therapy and that's the better part of a day gone.

Live Theatre has always been a favourite activity of mine to watch - along with live bands, so I take every opportunity to attend those. Usually I go to the matinee which can be on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Saturday. Once again lunch is usually involved and travel into the City so the best part of a day is once again taken up. I also take the opportunity to watch live touring concerts when I can but these are at night of course. I can enjoy a bit of time just by listening to music via a CD or MP3.

We like old TV shows and I have a fairly large collection of DVDs and downloads - old stuff like NYPD Blues, CSI and all the offshoots, Cheers, Frasier and the like - so I consume time every day watching something. Newer shows are included too, but I have to watch them after

they have been on TV or streaming services, due to a back log.

I also enjoy reading and try to make some time every day to relax and take in a chapter or two. I like crime novels mainly but read other genres. For example, at the moment I am reading the saga of "A Song of Ice and Fire" by George R.R Martin, which of course became the "Game of Thrones" series on TV streaming. So with six separate continuing books in that story it will keep me busy for some time.

Because of business shutdowns due to the virus, only the old TV shows and reading are our main activities. But we make a point to walk every day in an effort to maintain some level of fitness.

You might recall many years ago when you and I were working in the old Plans & Survey Department - Peter where did that last 40 years go? I used to play in a band and road engineering was so much of a turn on that it out-shone being a rich, overpaid rock star, so my playing music fell by the wayside. OK - alright it's true having no talent helped as well! Well now as a hobby and to fill in some time, I have indulged in some music making at home. I can't find any old codgers to play drums with, so I have been trying to sing over backing tracks to produce a cover version of whatever song that takes my fancy at the time. Mostly older material that I grew up with 50s, 60s and 70s mainly. Limitations on talent stop me from really difficult songs but it helps to pass the time and satisfies a technical need when attempting to mix them.

Being in Melbourne and being a member of the MCC give me access to some great AFL footy of course so I try and attend games at the "G" when I can. Being a Hawks supporter, I have been very fortunate to see four grand finals in which they played. I go to other teams' games also as it is a terrific day out with lunch, a quiet drink, and of course a great spectacle to watch. The Anzac Eve game between the Demons and the Tigers has become a special event to attend. The Last Post, a Soldier riding around on horseback, main ground light off, the crowd with their phone lights on, dead silence, is a very solemn and moving event. Any finals series are worth attending as well as they are usually played at a frantic pace and the crowd input is intense. But no attendance in 2020 will be possible, I think.

Anyway mate that's about it, I hope you and your family are well along with Regional staff who are trying to deliver important programs during this pandemic.

Regards

Richard (Dick) Williams"

Then Peter said:

'Now I want it put on the record that I commenced with the then RCA at the end of January 1986 which is nowhere near 40 years ago! But I agree with Dick that the time has gone very quickly.

Dick, or should I say "Little Richard" Dick Williams has also been generous enough to share with us some of his music. He sent me six songs he has produced and I'll forward only two at the moment with a promise of the others being forwarded in subsequent editions of A Blast from the Past. I must say that I was surprised by Dick's talent and it made me smile – which is great at the moment.'

Noel Osborne

Noel wrote to me as follows:

'I joined the Country Roads Board at its Benalla Divisional Office on the 4th of January 1965 and commenced my career in Civil Engineering fresh out of Bendigo School of Mines and still very damp behind the ears.

I worked my last day in my chosen field with VicRoads on the 4th January 2013. Yes, I thought it fitting to stop on my anniversary 48 years later in VicRoads' Anniversary year.

I am very proud of my service with VicRoads during all its name changes, building a better road system for the benefit of Victorians and the nation, and although my part in it was very small, collectively with my colleagues and predecessors we have provided a good legacy.

In the later years I enjoyed my role as a mentor to many of the new generation of engineers and have at times been surprised at being asked to recall some of the stories from times past. This has also led to their mirth as I explained the extent of reporting that we had to write and have typed by others, and the custom of commencing reports with the phrase; "Sir, I have the honour to report" and finish with "And I remain your obedient servant".

In our centenary year I reflected on those who were my mentors. Some are now deceased but some are still living. Many are my contemporaries, friends and colleagues, as we would often discuss work, thoughts, stresses and trials together.

I count myself lucky to have had mentors such as Jim Harvey (Superintendent of Works), Tom Hayden (Road Master), Wally Dyall (Senior Bridge Engineer), Ted Oppy (Senior Road Engineer) and Tom Glazebrook, (then Assistant Divisional Engineer), to guide, mould and point me in the right direction. Yes, and sometimes fixing my mistakes too, as Tom would be able to reflect on.

I still can't travel on any road or cross any bridge without looking and admiring, seeing the blemish or the maintenance need. Often to the amusement of fellow travellers overseas as I stop to photograph a road sign, pothole, patch, culvert or roadworks under construction while they take photos of mountains and beaches.

I recall many stories from the years, but will share just one with you today.

One of the training courses that I attended in my first year was a one-week explosives course run by the SEC. I passed the test and was then put in charge of the CRB Magazine at Saw Mill Settlement at the base of Mt Buller. The CRB was spending a lot of money upgrading the tourist road and this, in turn, required a lot of rock blasting and heavy earthworks. On the day I commenced, I went to the magazine with Jim Harvey, armed with the key to check the magazine. I undid the padlock and pulled open the heavy door. To my horror as I pulled the door open, I saw this goo flow out onto the ground. I stepped back pushing Jim back with me unable to get a word out for a few seconds and just getting across to Jim by pointing to the goo from about 10 metres.

There were 20 or 30 sticks of gelignite that had been left in the magazine for a number of years and as happens to gelignite, it had deteriorated... It was still highly explosive and extremely unstable.

Yes, there were 20 or 30 sticks of gelignite that had been left in the magazine for a number of years and as happens to gelignite, it had deteriorated and the nitro glycerine had seeped out and covered the floor and found its escape when I opened the door. It was still highly explosive and extremely unstable. Jim agreed to stand guard at the magazine while I called the local fire brigade to come and hose out the magazine from a safe distance.

This was achieved (fortunately) without setting off the explosive and the detonators stored in the same magazine (tsk, tsk, I hear you say) that had, unbeknown to me, been buried in the goo.

Bill Saggers

In response to my extracurricular stories of exploration mentioned in the introduction, Bill Saggers was moved to write to me about an intrepid story of Australia's Antarctic exploration. He wrote:

'In Australia's history, a story that is often passed over about Sir Ernest Shackleton's 'escape' to South Georgia, is the experience of his Ross Sea Party that was charged with laying stores for the back half of Shackleton's intended crossing of Antarctica. What that party endured for an unrealised outcome was extraordinary. Even when reading of their exploits you can't come to terms with the hardships they endured and overcame after being marooned down there over two winters. Yet they accomplished their task, hauling sledges laden with stores for over 2,000 kilometres to lay depots not knowing that Shackleton would never come.

My Principal at the School of Mines, Ballarat (SMB), Dick Richards, as a 21-yr old physicist seeking adventure, was a key surviving member of that party. In recognition of his heroics in the 1914-17 heroics, he received a George Cross in 1974. Normally that award is given for a particular act of bravery; but Dick Richard's medal was awarded for the three-year long ordeal he underwent.

A number of texts have been written about the Ross Sea Party, with Dick suggesting to me in 1983 - when my family visited him - that the definitive work would come from New Zealand and this eventually occurred. This was Polar Castaways, The Ross Sea Party of Sir Ernest Shackleton published in 2004.

The accounts of the shore party expose the overlooked failings of Shackleton. As Dick said when our family visited him in 1983, Scott was a great organiser but not a good leader of men; Shackleton was a great leader but a poor organiser. The party would not have survived but for the provisions that Scott had left behind. When eventually their lost supply ship was refitted and dispatched from New Zealand in the hope of recovering the Party, Shackleton was allowed to accompany the voyage provided he had no say in the operation. I understand that there is a full size bust of Dick Richards in Christchurch, NZ.

There are a couple of stories from my time at the SMB (1952-5) that involved Dick. He was our lecturer in Physics 1A and 1C and at one time we engaged in a difference of opinion about the swinging ball in cricket. My collaborator and lifelong friend in this debate, Ron Furlong, went on to become a 37-game opening batsman for Victoria who incidentally debuted in the same match as Noel Allanson.

My older son had read a book about Dick's feats in Antarctica written by Leonard Bickel. The name of it escapes me but I know Dick didn't like it. In 1983 I arranged to meet up with him in retirement in Point Lonsdale. When I wrote to ask to see him, I mentioned that I always remembered our difference of opinion on the swinging ball. His reply came back, almost as a thumbnail dipped in tar on a torn page:

"Fancy remembering that. When I was in Scott's hut down in the Antarctic I found a magazine with an article by a British physicist on the moving ball".

Our younger son Andrew, 15 at the time, was not looking forward to the visit, seeing it as meeting with some senile old bloke from his father's past. Dick engaged both boys in conversation and on the way home Andrew couldn't stop talking about him.

When we parted, he said: "I won't come out to the car with you, my knee is a bit dicky these days."

Aged 87 and a survivor from manhandling loaded sledges for hundreds of kilometres through snow up to his knees. My wife was blown away.

Some of the things that the sea party had to do to survive are a testament to human endeavour. Their supply ship, Aurora, broke free from its sea anchor, taking many supplies with it. The leader of the sea party was an enigmatic Scot - McIntosh by name. He took the sea party out of Hobart so as not miss his schedule, but he did so before all their stores - including their snow boots - were loaded. If you were not UK born you could not lead a sledge, even if you were fitter and stronger than the other blokes. Near the end of their plight, Mclintosh and one other disappeared crossing sea ice against the advice of his fellow party members. The party's dependence on a reconstructed kerosene lantern for melting ice for life-saving water was just one knife edge to their existence as well as making boots and clothing from seal skins.

The expedition started just before the outbreak of the Great War and more or less spanned a good part of it. On his return from his heroic acts in the Antarctic, Dick Richards received an anonymous letter that contained a white feather.

One of my classmates at SMB was always getting into trouble – seriously – but he was a fine baseballer. He especially clashed with a toffee-nosed lecturer. When I caught up with Dick Richards in 1983, I mentioned that I was still in touch with Jim at the Melbourne University Baseball Club. He replied: "Jim gave us a lot of trouble at school. The staff wanted to send him down but I thought the lad had too much to offer so I got rid of the teacher."

Some four-five years later Jim was the leading research physical chemist in the country in his field, the superheating of metals, and had a stint with NASA in 1959 when they were looking into space travel for the first time.

On the wall in Dick Richard's home he pointed to a painting by Jim's mother who was institutionalised back then. Dick's wife, as a member of the renowned Greenhalgh art family, conducted art classes at the institution. Victor Greenhalgh was the sculptor for eight of the iconic statues of Prime Ministers in the Ballarat Botanic Gardens and the sculpture of King George V in Sturt St, Ballarat. He was a renowned teacher at RMIT.

Dick recalled another student at SMB. His name was Frank. Frank was the clearly the top student at the Junior Tech at the end of 1951. In one subject, in two exams a year for four years he scored 799 out of 800. His family were struggling a bit, so Frank gave up on going on to a Diploma course and sought an apprenticeship instead. When we arrived at Senior school for the opening day in 1952, Frank was there.

In surprise, someone asked Frank: "I thought you were going to get an apprenticeship?"

"Couldn't get a bloody job", came the reply.

Bust of Dick Richards by Victor Greenhalgh. Federation University collection.

To have Frank continue his schooling, Dick Richards had gone around Ballarat asking industry leaders not to take him on. As compensation he gave Frank a weekend job of cleaning up his laboratory. On one occasion Dick Richards opened up a tobacco tin and Frank had to rush to an open window to escape the stench. It was a tin of seal blubber from his Antarctica days.

Frank completed his Mechanical Engineering Diploma, spent a long time undertaking some unusual research work in Canada, and ended his career as a lecturer at the Launceston campus of the University of Tasmania.'

Ian Goldie

Ian wrote:

'Hi David,

You mentioned the Gould League lovers of birds, in your last email. I think I may still have my membership book somewhere in the Memorabilia box. It would be over seventy one years old.

When I think of it, the boy members of the Gould League were helping to make our birds extinct. The League's book taught how to identify bird's eggs, how to blow the eggs, and how to store them in cotton wool in a box. We must have killed thousands of potential baby birds, by blowing the eggs, thus reducing the bird population.

Cheers,

Ian Goldie'

I know you weren't on your own Ian. I had schoolmates who were in to it too.

News from Regional Roads Victoria (RRV)

All fire-affected roads in North Eastern Region now open for traffic

All arterial roads affected by last summer's bushfires across North Eastern Victoria were re-opened by the end of June following months of recovery works to clear fallen trees and debris and reinstate hundreds of kilometres of damaged road infrastructure. In all, 520 kilometres of roads were affected.

The last stretch was a stretch of 25 kilometres on the Benambra-Corryong Road near Nariel Valley, a task that was impacted by several landslides that tore through the area in the months following the fires.

The works were a joint effort between RRV, Towong Shire Council, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Forest Fire Management, Victoria Police, Parks Victoria, VicForests and the Australian Defence Force.

The bushfire recovery response included more than 250 road signs repaired or replaced, 3,795 guideposts replaced and 20 kilometres of tree trimming or removal along arterial roads in north east Victoria. RRV's North Eastern Region also joined forces with Towong Shire Council to repair and reopen 67 council-managed roads that were affected by bushfires.

Community gateways

Many of you travelling on regional roads will have noticed a new treatment on the edges of towns. Most of Victoria's towns connect to high-speed roads, and drivers and riders are required to significantly lower their speed when approaching built up areas. Many motorists miss conventional speed signs as they enter a town, causing them to travel over the speed limit increasing their chances of prosecution.

As part of RRV's road safety strategy, community gateways are being installed on major roads to help motorists identify the safe speed required as they enter regional towns.

Community gateways include:

- large signs on green backgrounds, displaying the speed limit and town's name
- eye-catching painted lines on the road, leading into the gateway

These new signs and line markings make it easier to see speed limits and slow down, improving safety for people living in and travelling through regional communities.

So far, more than 150 towns have had community gateways installed across Victoria.

News from Major Road Projects Victoria

I went for a walk down to the Yarra River at Chandler Highway last Sunday (early September). It was a lovely, sunny day and I enjoyed walking over the old bridge and under the new one. In fact the treatment under the bridge was very good. It was open and colourful and there were lots of kids shooting around on their bikes and scooters. There were ramps as well as stairs and lots of interesting views. In fact the new bridge is more exciting to view from below than it is driving over it.

Here are a couple of my photographs.

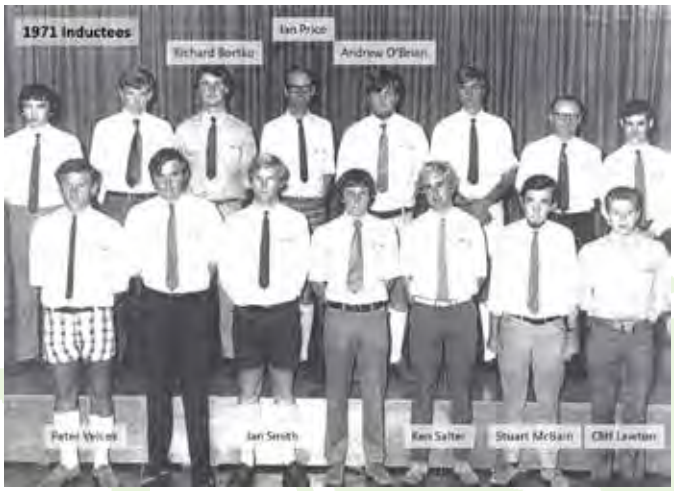
A view showing the bridge piers on the Kew side and the old bridge on the right.

Aboriginal style artistic treatment on the walls under the bridge.

And here is an aerial view of the bridge – which I didn't take.

From the Archives

Nick Szwed is busy with our archives and he is seeking assistance in trying to identify the people in the following photographs. Can you help?



Roadside Mileposts

Mileposts have been an integral part of roads going back to ancient times. John Tunn is the Heritage Advisor (Roads) in the Department of Transport and he sent me the following article.

'An interesting component of our roadside heritage are the various mile markers, or mileposts, that remain in place across the Victoria road network. These historic features are sometimes difficult to see when travelling around the road network. They are formed in different materials - carved stone (usually basalt), cast-iron, timber (very rare) and reinforced cast concrete. The current versions are generally incorporated into plastic guideposts. The images below show the variation.

The early stone mile-posts were installed prior to the 1870s and are linked to the development of the Cobb and Co routes. They predate the cast iron posts and are an intact and visual reminder of the imperial measuring system previously operating in Australia. Interestingly, during WW2 and after the fall of Pearl Harbour in 1941, most mileposts were dug up and buried a few metres behind their original location; they were removed or hidden in an attempt to thwart enemy forces in the event that Australia was invaded.

Many of these mile-posts have been identified by Heritage Victoria as significant to the State and are incorporated into the Victorian Heritage Database and protected by state heritage legislation. When planning works, the DoT Heritage and Native Title team provide advice regarding these and other historic roadside features, and establish legal responsibilities when working around them and how to avoid or minimize adverse impact.


Wooden


Stone

Cast iron


Stone

Concrete (Princes Highway 1954)

Concrete (Loddon Valley Highway)

And now for something beautiful

This is going to be hard. I want to describe some music and I have never done this before. I have read critiques of concerts and recitals and, to be honest, I have never understood them. Music has the power to move me to tears. I have found a lot of comfort during the COVID lockdown listening to music and I want to share three pieces of classical music with you.

I am also aware that music is a very personal experience and my taste for classical music is very mainstream. I like what I like but others will differ. Music can bounce off my emotions and my mood often dictates how I receive it. And it doesn't necessarily have to be classical music. Later in this segment in a future newsletter I am sure to describe other forms of music.

But first of all, I want to talk about teamwork. Sporting coaches emphasise the importance of teamwork but, apart perhaps from rowing, most successful sporting teams rely on the decision-making and skills of the individual players in the team. In rowing however, the most important ingredient for success is the harmony between the crew members. The cliché of pulling together could not be truer, for if one rower is slightly out of kilter with the rest, the boat's progress will be affected.

The same is true with music. An orchestra can have up to 100 players of instruments from different families such as strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion and keyboard. The conductor leads the orchestra by controlling the tempo, shaping the sound of the ensemble and guiding the players in the interpretation of the music. Every performer has a precise role but it must be carried out to perfection for it to meld with the other performers to coalesce effortlessly and seamlessly. I can think of no better example of teamwork.

Having never played a musical instrument, I am intrigued how the various instruments waft in and out of a composition to create a harmonious whole. How difficult would it be to listen say to the bassoon's score separately, and then the oboe's, to identify the composition? I think it would be impossible.

The first piece of music I have chosen for you is a 20th Century piece. It was written by the Russian composer, Aram Khachaturian, for the Spartacus ballet, in 1954 and was first staged by the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow in 1958. Khachaturian was born in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, in 1903 and he died in 1978, so much of his work was created during our lifetime.

During most of his career, Khachaturian was approved by the Soviet government and held several high posts in the Union of Soviet Composers from the late 1930s, although he joined the Communist Party only in 1943. Along with Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich, he was officially denounced as a "formalist" and his music dubbed "anti-people" in 1948, but he was restored later in that year. Despite his restoration after the denunciation, Khachaturian only succeeded in composing one internationally acclaimed work in the last 30 years of his life, the ballet Spartacus. Spartacus was popularized when the "Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia" was used as the theme for the popular BBC drama series The Onedin Line during the 1970s.

Khachaturian in 1971

Recently, I visited an old friend – a flautist – and I showed him the following recital on YouTube on my phone. Admittedly we each had had a glass of whiskey but halfway through it we were both in tears. I can only describe the music as voluptuous. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

For those of you connected to the internet, it can be found by copying the tag below and putting it into the search bar of your browser.

Aram Khachaturian - De Espartakus - Adagio.m2ts

The second piece is from the 19th Century and it is the intermezzo from the opera, Cavalliera Rusticana by Pietro Mascagni. It is a one act opera and so is often staged with another short opera, Pagliacci, as a double bill. It was first staged in Rome in 1890. I first saw it as a callow youth at Covent Garden in 1964 when I knew absolutely nothing about opera.

Mascagni (centre) with his librettists, Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti (left) and Guido Menasci.

It was written in response to a competition for a one-act opera organised by well-known Italian Musicians and music critics. Seventy three operas were submitted for consideration. On the night of its premiere, the house was only half full bit it was a success from its opening notes. Following the leading tenor's aria of the Siciliana behind the curtain the audience leaped to their feet with a thunderous applause not heard for many years. The Siciliana was encored as were several other numbers in the opera. It was a sensation, with Mascagni taking 40 curtain calls and winning the First Prize.

The opera became very popular in America especially among African American audiences and during a performance in Chicago, Louis Armstrong performed the trumpet solo coming out of the orchestra pit and mounting the stage to play it. The most recognisable piece is the Intermezzo. It is another piece of music that pierces my vulnerable heart.

It can be found on:

MASCAGNI CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA INTERMEZZO - Lucca Philharmonic - Andrea Colombini Vienna

My third piece of music takes us back even further to the Baroque period. I am sure you all know this piece as it is still a favourite in classical performances. It was composed by Tomaso Albinoni. He was born in Venice in 1671 – into a wealthy family – and despite his stature in music through the ages, very little is known about his life. Most of the archives relating to him were lost because they were held in the Dresden Library which was destroyed by the Allied bombing during the Second World War.

Tomaso Giovanni Albinoni

He was a prolific composer of operas and instrumental works but most of his operatic works have been lost - possibly because they were published after his death. He was the first composer of note to write music for the oboe as a solo instrument.

The famous Adagio in G minor, the subject of many modern recordings, is thought by some to be a musical hoax composed by Remo Giazotto. However, a discovery by Giazotto's last assistant before his death, has cast some doubt on that belief. Further provenance has refuted this theory.

You will find this piece at:

Tomaso Albinoni - Adagio (best live version)

All three of these works transcend my imagination. Music such as these pieces move me more than any other man-made creations. I am not a religious person but on hearing music like this it reminds me of the beauty in life. If you can listen to them, I want you to do just that – listen. Don't do anything else. Don't read the paper, don't fiddle with the phone; don't even have a cup of tea. Listen only to the music. You are allowed to close your eyes. You will be rewarded with the richest experience of your day.

I think the next beautiful thing I talk about will be poetry.

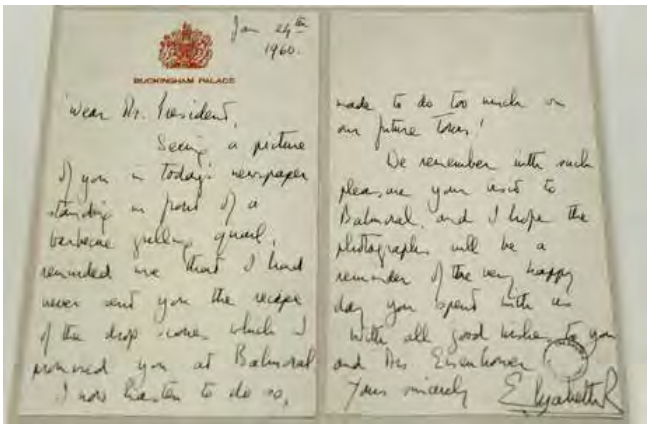
Trivia and Didactic Whimsies

The Queen and the President

In 1957, a young Queen Elizabeth made her first state visit to the US as guest of President Eisenhower. Two years later, the favour was returned when the Queen entertained Eisenhower and his wife, Maime, at Balmoral in Scotland. We will never know what they did or discussed but there is one thing that historians can be sure of, Eisenhower fell in love with drop scones.

This is perfectly understandable. My mother used to make them on a flat iron on top of the wood stove. We kids hung around and scraped the little droplets off the iron as they turned into mini drop scones. Besides, Mum always made some extras for us. Eating them hot with honey is an unforgettable memory of my childhood.

We know that Eisenhower loved drop scones because five months after the visit to Balmoral, the Queen wrote a personal letter.



Jan 24th 1960.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Dear Mr. President,

Seeing a picture of you in today's newspaper standing in front of a barbecue grilling quail, reminded me that I had never sent you the recipe of the drop scones which I promised you at Balmoral.

I now hasten to do so, and I do hope you find them successful. Though the quantities are for 16 people, when there are fewer, I generally put in less flour and milk, but use the other ingredients as stated. I have also tried using golden syrup or treacle instead of only sugar and that can be very good too. I think the mixture needs a great deal of beating while making, and shouldn't stand about too long before cooking.

We have followed with intense interest and much admiration your tremendous journey to many countries, but feel we shall never again be able to claim that we are being made to do too much on our future tours!

We remember with such pleasure your visit to Balmoral, and I hope the photograph will be a reminder of the very happy day you spent with us,

With all good wishes to you and Mrs Eisenhower.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth R

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Seeing a picture of you in today's newspaper standing in front of a barbecue grilling quail, reminded me that I had never sent you the recipe of the drop scones which I promised you at Balmoral.

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With all good wishes to you and Mrs Eisenhower.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth R

Tunisia

This is a recollection about Tunisia written by a friend, Bill Rush, in response to another friend's writing about Algeria.

'Bernard's writing from last week, recalling his time Algeria, brought to my mind a holiday I had in the neighbouring country of Tunisia in 1998. I travelled in more comfort than Bernard as I was on a tour organised by British Museum Travel and we stayed at comfortable hotels. I am not a keen photographer but I would have taken some slide shots with my Petri 35mm camera when I was there. Where they are now, I have no idea.

The areas of both Algeria and Tunisia were important parts of the Roman Empire. North Africa provided much of the grain and olive oil needed by the emperors in Rome to keep their restless populations from starvation and revolt. Many of the farmlands in this area were granted to long serving soldiers in the Roman Army on their retirement – a sort of superannuation scheme which kept them loyal while defending the Empire.

Towns, as centres of civic life and administration, grew up as well. One of the largest was Dougga. We visited the ruins of this city with much of its Roman infrastructure still apparent - though now fallen and scattered. That this was a place of great sophistication could be seen in the substantial remains of some of the houses, at least those which would have been lived in by the upper class. These were on two levels – two houses in fact with the same floor plan – one above, and the other an exact copy below ground. In winter, the residents lived on the top level. During the scorching summer they moved to their subterranean home below. The floors of both levels were covered with elaborately tiled floors, some still in place. The most spectacular of these floors are now in Tunis, in the famous Bardo Museum.

The city of Tunis is the site of ancient Carthage, obliterated by the Romans on their third attempt. I don't remember much of my schoolboy Latin, but I remember that Scipio, a Roman senator, used to harangue the Senate with the words Carthago delanda est – Carthage must be destroyed! And so it was in 146 bce.

I have seen many museums over the years but the Bardo stands out as one of the most memorable. Its collection of mosaics is spectacular and evidence of the luxury in which these provincial citizens – well at least some of them – then lived. These floor 'paintings' were meant to be looked at as well as walked on. Their subject matter was extensive: incidents from daily life, animals, birds, fishing scenes, games in arenas. The most famous mosaic in the museum is of the Roman poet Virgil, flanked by the Muses. I am glad that my visit to the Bardo didn't take place in 2015, when on one day, twenty-three visitors to the museum were shot dead by terrorists.

My third abiding memory of Tunisia is of sheep. Tunisia has a population of 10 million people and 6.5 million sheep. In May, when I was there, sheep were everywhere – in town markets, in city streets, and on the verges of country roads. I learnt that many of these sheep would disappear in a few weeks when the religious observance of Eid began. This event is called the Festival of the Sacrifice, when extended families gather together to slaughter, and then enjoy roast lamb. I was told that this major celebration recalls Abraham's sacrifice of a lamb, in the place of his son, Isaac.

Here in Melbourne, we are fast approaching the season of Eid, which runs from July 30 to August 3. As we now we have a substantial Islamic population, don't be surprised if you catch the smell of barbequed meat through your mandated mask.

Bill'

There's a tiger in the garden

I worked in the office of an engineering firm in Victoria Street in London back in the 1960s. The firm was Rendel, Palmer and Tritton. Among other roles, it was the official engineering consultant to the Government of Ceylon (as it was in those days) as well as some other countries. It was also the consultant to the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) in England and it designed the major power stations in the UK administered by the CEGB.

A tiger is loose in South London.

For about 18 months I worked in the head office in London on the design of Ironbridge B Power Station located on the Severn River at Ironbridge, Shropshire. Later I shifted to the site on construction management duties.

While working in London I became good friends with another engineer, David Stacey, and we remain good friends today. We are kindred spirits in many ways.

We both paint and each of us have recently published books. He will be very embarrassed to read this – I send him the newsletter – but I admire him greatly and lament that we live so far away from each other.

David's daughter, Kate, wanted to brighten up her yard and she asked David if he would paint one of the walls for her. This is what he painted.

Doing my bit to help

John Wright sent this to me.

> I've volunteered for the Russian vaccine trials for COVID-19 in Melbourne. I received my first shot yesterday and wanted to let you know that it's completely safe with no side effects whatsoever, and that I feelshki xoroshó я чувствую себя немного странно и я думаю, что вытащил ослиные уши.

Editor's note: This is not a lot of claptrap. Iva Day studied Russian at school in Czechoslovakia over 70 years ago and she told John that many words in Czech and Russian are similar. She said: 'I can understand what it says. In Czech donkey is considered a symbol of stupidity, so in Russian probably too. It fits well with the text. It says... with no side effects whatsoever and that I feel well but feel a little strange and think that I grew donkey's ears.'

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