

VicRoads Association

Newsletter No. 233



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Dear Members,

I was watching a film on SBS – ‘Finding Your Feet’ – where a group of older people from Britain went to Rome for a dancing competition. I was quite touched and amused by the film and I recommend it if you have some spare time to search around in SBS On Demand.

At any rate one scene showed the characters sitting on their hotel balcony looking out at the Eternal City. This epithet was first coined by a poet, Tibullus, in the 1st Century BC. His now iconic phrase has gained traction ever since. With film, literature and popular culture, the nickname doesn't show any signs of fading.

At any rate, this scene in the film set me thinking about cities. I think I am an urban animal at heart. I enjoy the energy of cities and their extensive infrastructure, arts, institutions and the interactions amongst their citizens. There is always something to see and do and they are the places where decisions are made and where news happens.

What could be a more beautiful urban metropolis than Rome? No high-rise buildings, no main roads choked with traffic (at least till you get to the ring road), a harmony of colour and

architectural style, a powerful sense of history and intrigue, intimate courtyards hiding behind doors, the piazzas and fountains, and the never-ending energy of its citizens going about their daily routines – including food, coffee and limoncello. It is very easy to love. And then elsewhere in Italy there is Florence, Sienna, Venice, Lucca, Assisi and just about every other city to enjoy.

But I also love other cities for entirely different reasons. In America, I especially enjoy Boston and San Francisco. The place in history of Boston intrigues me and any city that could spawn ‘Cheers’ can't be all that bad. Boston is one of the oldest municipalities in America and was a centrepiece of the American Revolution. It is the home of two of the world's most famous universities – Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). MIT's research and development budget is about US\$1 billion per year – higher than all of Australian universities combined. The old part of the city drips with nostalgia – such as Acorn Street in the photograph below. Did Paul Revere ride his horse down there to warn that the British were coming? No. Of course he didn't. But you can imagine it.

San Francisco has a distinct robustness sitting on the western edge of the USA – sort of proud of its distance from the east



Rome – the Eternal City.



Acorn Street in Old Boston.

coast. I remember it as a white city. I visited the Coit Tower once to get a panoramic view of the San Francisco skyline, San Francisco Bay and the surrounding landscape. It was a warm day and the white suburbs below sparkled in mirage.

In Europe, it is easy to fall in love with London, Paris, Copenhagen, Barcelona, Berlin, Amsterdam, Bruges, Venice, Dubrovnik, and countless other cities, all of which have their individual characters. I lived in London for nearly two years and it was the most exciting time of my life. I was young (and impressionable), in love, and almost overawed by everything in that huge city. It opened my eyes to the world of art, history and the pop culture of Carnaby Street, the Beatles, Jean Shrimpton and Twiggy. I remember too my introduction to the Observer and Sunday Times newspapers. On Sunday mornings I used to get up and walk down to the news stand (about 100 yards down North End Road from our front door) to buy the newspapers and spend most of the morning reading them – in bed during the winters. They were papers the likes of which I had never seen before. They had lavish magazines and world famous journalists. Clive James was the theatre critic for

the Observer and Kenneth Tynan – the *enfant terrible* of the British press – for the Sunday Times. I also loved the cricket reports. I am not sure whether it was the time of Neville Cardus – who was also a music critic – but the reviews were poetic and insightful.

Every weekend we did something different and I think you could spend a lifetime of weekends in London without repeating yourself. We queued up for tickets at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden and saw Joan Sutherland, Maria Callas, the tragic Australian soprano - Marie Collier, Tito Gobbi and Renata Tibaldi. And all this was done on the proverbial shoestring. I did my banking at Australia House and the sixpenny bus fare from my office in Victoria Street took me past Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, then up Whitehall to Trafalgar Square and along the Strand to Australia House. Sometimes I got off the bus at Trafalgar Square and ducked into the National Art Gallery to look at something for a quarter of an hour. As I got to know London better, it was like driving through history on the top deck of a red double decker bus.

San Francisco and Coit Tower.



When I worked with the Overseas Projects Corporation, I visited many cities in Asia and the Middle East. Cairo was chaotic, historic, and intriguing but on the island of Gezira in the Nile River there was relative peace, charm, antiquity and beauty. Zemalek, the Toorak of Cairo, is on its northern tip and huge fig trees erupt from the road pavement forming a natural road calming element.

In Asia, I always enjoyed visits to Hanoi, Vietnam (and its friendly people), Xi'an (central China), Hong Kong and Lahore. I have never experienced heat hotter than Lahore (52°C) or colder than Thimpu, Bhutan, where 'brass monkeys' could never survive. It was in December and I recall putting on all my clothes going to bed and I still froze. I went down to the foyer of the hotel to see if I could get a radiator, only to find the floor occupied by about 200 men sleeping – rustling and snoring – huddling together to get warmth. And yet the days were bright and sunny and the Himalayas glistened in the light.

But what I am really coming around to was my sense of anticipation returning to Melbourne. Many may think of these working trips as glamorous but, in fact, they were hard work. Some took me to places of great hardship and poverty, and in the cases of the Solomon Islands and Lebanon, to the recent aftermath of war. I was always dependent on interpreters, rarely had a day off for leisure, and I missed three family graduation ceremonies. On all these trips, be they for leisure or work, I loved settling into the seat of the plane taking me back to Melbourne in the knowledge that I would be home within hours. I mostly arrived in the wee hours but driving through Melbourne as it was awakening always gave me pleasure.

We are very privileged to live in such a secure, capable, vibrant and generous city.

David Jellie,
Chairman and Editor

What's coming up

Occasional Lunches at Shoppingtown Hotel 12 noon

Our next lunch will be held on Monday 20 June 2022. There is no longer a requirement to contact Kelvin York – just turn up. Future lunches are 8 August, 10 October, 7 November and 6 February 2023.

Annual Golf Day

Unfortunately, we have had to defer this until later in the year owing to work being carried out at Green Acres Golf Club in Kew. The club is replacing all the greens and installing a fairway sprinkling system. We expect to shift this day to October or November, depending on progress, or we may relocate to another course. We will keep you posted.

Warrnambool Trip 10, 11 and 12 May 2002

At present we have a party of 18 people for this trip. If you are interested in joining us please let me know immediately.

Dinner at Glen Waverley RSL 6pm Thursday 6 October

We will provide details closer to the date.

Benalla/Shepparton Trip

We will provide details closer to the date – expected to be September or October.

Christmas Lunch

This has been booked for Monday 12 December at Glen Waverley RSL.

Vale

We offer our condolences to the families and friends of the following colleagues who have died.

Raleigh Robinson

Raleigh died early in March just short of his 91st birthday. He was not a member of the Association.

Raleigh started at the CRB in 1953 after working for a few years with the then Vacuum Oil Company. He was appointed to a position in the Bridge Division and for the first couple of weeks he worked at the Exhibition Building. However, he was sent out on construction supervision of the Bell Street Bridge over Merri Creek and he was never to return to the Exhibition Building. It was a time of severe shortages of materials and some of the girders they used in the Bell Street bridge were from the old Cremorne Railway Bridge.

After completing that job he resumed in another CRB outpost - the old SEC office in Church Street, Richmond – where he worked on bridge design. In 1955 he was awarded a scholarship by the Federation of British Industries (FBI) where he was located in London and Scotland¹. On his return to the CRB in 1957 he became involved in the assessment of tenders for the King Street Bridge. He then worked on the construction of Kings Bridge primarily on the concrete works. He returned to Head Office as a bridge construction engineer working alongside John Waddell and reporting to Bruce Watson, the Bridge Construction Engineer.

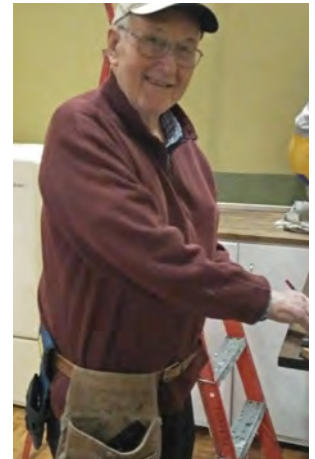
He transferred to Dandenong Division in the latter half of the 1960s as a Class 3 Engineer. In this position he actually supervised the legendary R.C. (Charlie) Jones. Charlie had once been a very senior engineer in the CRB in charge of the construction of the Stuart Highway in the Northern Territory during the Second World War among many other appointments. He was awarded an MBE for his outstanding contribution to roads. Charlie fought fearlessly for his ideas of road engineering and he was revered by his staff. However, a long time after his retirement Charlie decided to resume work and he came back to the CRB as a junior Class 2 Engineer – and he was allocated to Raleigh's group. However, Raleigh said that he was a law unto himself and .

In Dandenong Division he worked under Frank Docking (the Divisional Engineer) and with other luminaries such as Bill Brake, Ian Rennick, Stan Hodgson and Ron Angus. He remained working there until his retirement. Stan Hodgson paid tribute to Raleigh saying that he was a very supportive deputy to him for 13 years and that they got on very well.

1 A few other people from the CRB were awarded these FBI scholarships including Brian Head and David Jellie. The name later changed to the Confederation of British Industry – possibly to distinguish itself from another FBI and Jim Webber and Laurie Watson were awarded similar scholarships under that banner.

Raleigh had a great love for repertory theatre. He performed in the Peridot Company and he always seemed to be rehearsing for a role. He also loved singing and was a member of the CRB choir. The Peridot Company included the following tribute in their magazine.

'Long-time Peridot Patron and set builder Raleigh Robinson died in March after months of illness. Raleigh was 90.'



In a quote from his lovely wife Barbara, "Don't be sad for him just remember all the wonderful times he had at Peridot and rejoice in all the enjoyment he had associated with the theatre and musical theatre in particular. He led a full life and was grateful that he was able to continue his involvement with Peridot until COVID put a spanner in the works. Who would have thought when we got together in our early 60s that we would last until our 90s. It has been a wonderful journey for both of us."

Raleigh's cheeky humour, set building expertise and mentoring will be missed. We extend our sincere condolences to Barbara and family.'

David Reid



David died in March after turning 78 in February. He served his whole career from the early '60s in Plans and Survey and later in Metropolitan North West Region until his retirement in 2004. David was a very popular member of staff and highly respected by his colleagues. He was a member of the CRB Car Club and also served in the 22 Construction Regiment in the Australian Army Reserve.

His long-term friend and colleague – Howard Hughes – said that David, Alan Hamly and he had the hottest, early model Holdens in the CRB HQ staff car park in the early '60s, but that David and he graduated to the flashiest of Monaros in the late '60s. Alan and Howard were groomsmen for David at his wedding to Marilyn whom Howard described as the love of his life. Marilyn predeceased David.

Howard wrote this tribute about his friendship with David.

'My great friend of over 57 years, David Reid, died on 25th March at the age of 78 years of cancer-related causes following a relatively short period of suffering and hospitalization. His funeral was held in Woori Yallock.'

David served in road design with CRB/VicRoads for 40 years beginning in the early 1960's working under Les Kovacs. In these early years he worked with people such as Dick Coulter, Peter Nash and Alan Hamley. I first met David when I started work in Plans and Survey in January 1965.

A long time work colleague and recent 20 year neighbour of David's, Norm Bettess, describes him as having been: competitive, easy going, co-operative, caring, a very good road designer and team manager.

David retired from Metro NW in 2004. Although David never joined our Retirees Association because, as he told me many times, he was living in remote Yarra Junction and wouldn't be able to attend our functions.

Many of our Association Members will have known David and will be sorry to hear of his passing.'

New member



Patricia (Patsy) Kennedy

I wish to welcome Patsy as not only a new member, but also as a new committee member. Thank you Patsy for offering your services.

Patsy has more than qualified as a member. She served with the Transport Regulation Board, the Road Traffic Authority, VicRoads and the Department of Transport from 1976 to 2022. What a wonderful achievement!

News from members

Jim Webber

Jim was a member of the inaugural CRB cricket team and he wrote the following tribute after learning about the recent death of Noel Allanson. This story is about Noel playing cricket for the CRB, Essendon and Victoria. This is what he wrote:

'In 1962 the Country Roads Board sent cricket and tennis teams to Ulverstone in Tasmania for the inaugural competition between the CRB and the Public Works Department, Tasmania. In the case of cricket, the competition existed for around 30 years, with games played almost every year, alternating between various grounds in Melbourne and various cities in Tasmania.

In the first team, Noel Allanson was chosen as captain with Peter Hosking as vice-captain. Graeme Deany, another District 1sts cricketer, was also in the team, so the CRB had a formidable combination. Noel was a great choice as captain and the game was played in great spirit, with the CRB being victorious. He only played in this inaugural game. CRB made 267 with Bill Saggars making 93, Peter Hosking 65, Jim Webber 33, Max Palmer 29. Noel made 11. In reply, the PWD Tasmania made 185. The bowling figures for the CRB were Geoff Brown 2/11, Noel Allanson 2/11, Graeme Deany 2/13, and Peter Hosking 2/21.

Noel played a game for Victoria where he was awarded Victoria's Cap No. 577. The Melbourne Argus had an article on 14 January 1957 with the heading 'Allanson Gets His Big Chance'. It said:

Noel Allanson, Essendon right-hander, one of the most successful pennant cricketers last season is at last 'getting a go'. He has been chosen in the Victorian team against Tasmania at St Kilda next week.



1962 CRB Team- Ulverstone, Tasmania

Back row: Les Holt (umpire from CRB), Les Beecher (Secretary CRB Social Club), Keith Elliott, Ian Le Page, Gary Edwards, Jim Webber, Jock Langlands, Max Palmer, Jack Mackie (CRB Social Club), Jack Singleton (umpire from PWD - obscured). **Front row:** Morrie Johnson, Peter Hosking (vice-captain), Noel Allanson (captain), Gerry Masterton (Tour Manager), Graeme Deany, Geoff Brown, Bill Saggars.

The team contained many well-known cricketers, including three from South Melbourne - Keith Kendall (captain), Ian Quick and Lou Germaine - and two from Fitzroy - Jack Potter and Ron Furlong. Tasmania made 133 and 176, Victoria replied with 246 (Noel made 24 and took 1/64) for an easy win. This was an interstate match but not a Sheffield Shield game. Tasmania didn't join the Sheffield Shield competition until 1977/78.

To the best of my knowledge, Peter Hosking was the only other CRB/VicRoads cricketer to play for Victoria. He opened the bowling against South Australia at the Adelaide Oval in February 1958, 12 months after Noel's game for Victoria.

Noel played 180 Premier First XI games at Essendon across 18 seasons from 1942/43 to 1962/63. Thus, his CRB appearance occurred while he was still playing Premier League 1sts. He scored 4,463 runs at an average of 24.7 runs with four centuries (top of 110). He also took 20 wickets at 26 runs (best 4/22) and 72 catches. After retiring from the 1st XI, Noel captained the 4th XI for several seasons in order to coach the club's younger players.'

Brian Kemp

Max Palmer wrote a few comments about some identities from Bridge Division in days of yore and we passed them on to Brian. Brian wrote back to me saying:

'Thanks for passing on Max's anecdotes. Max made reference to Overseer Bob Humphries. I was Bob's supervising engineer on the construction of the bridges of the Albion Overpass. Jack Waters was the roadworks engineer. Bob never called me by name - he called me Mister, instead. He was a tall, big, man, and he had the absolute respect of the workers in his direct labour gang. He handled his crew very well indeed, and was interested in them away from the job. I recall he had trouble with his eyes (war injury), and one of his gangers, Ted Malcolmson, who was a close friend of Bob's, used to administer drops in Bob's eyes². I think Ted went on to become overseer of Bob's gang when Bob retired.

Max also had recollections of Overseer Bill Golding. Bill sported a toothbrush like moustache, and he regarded himself to be in the "officer" class. He used to recount to me his personal history and adventures, and when I added it all up, I concluded that he was several hundred years old. I was Bill's supervising engineer on the construction of the bridges of the Craighburn overpass, as well as the widening of the Murray Road bridge, Coburg, and the reconstruction of the Pascoe Vale Road bridge - can't

² Bob contracted trachoma on the troopship on his passage to France in 1917. Trachoma is an infectious disease caused by bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*. The infection causes a roughening of the inner surface of the eyelids. This roughening can lead to pain in the eyes, breakdown of the outer surface or cornea of the eyes, and eventual blindness. Untreated, repeated trachoma infections can result in permanent blindness.

remember the name of the creek. Bill did own a Ford Pilot car - the one with the spare tyre bump on the boot lid. He did own a kelpy dog, which had the habit of nipping your heels when you entered Bill's Stanley Hut office. Max was correct in the story of Bill being asked by a police officer to step out of his car, which he did, but didn't tell the officer about the Kelpy sitting on the back seat. The dog duly nipped the policeman, much to the officer's regret. Like Bob Humphries, Bill was a very competent overseer, and he knew how to manage, and have the respect of the men in his gang, but perhaps not quite up to Bob's level.

These were great times for me - I was only in my 20s. I was privileged to work with men of the calibre of Bob Humphries and Bill Golding. Those days are very valuable in my memory of when I was a junior engineer working for the Country Roads Board.

My health hasn't been too good of late - heart problems. Consequently I am rather limited what I can do. Joy keeps reasonable health, but likewise is limited in what she can do.

Thanks for the information about Bob and Bill. Very interesting. They were both very competent overseers. and I have fond memories of them. The days of bridge construction by direct labour, in the CRB era, are no more, and it's such a pity as it served an important role in allowing young engineers to get experience by working with such capable men as Bob and Bill.'

John Liddell

John wrote to me identifying one of the unknown faces in the Jumbunna Lodge photograph in the last newsletter. It was the person in the back row, fourth from the left - Bob Woodhouse. Bob was a few years ahead of John at Bairnsdale Technical School.

He also wrote about Sue Phizaklea (nee Pettit). When he started at the CRB on 10 January 1965 (he had just turned 19), Sue was in Human Resources and was the first person that he met. He said:

'We briefly talked to John Ring who had recruited me following a presentation at the Yallourn Technical College. Then she took me to Metropolitan Division on the second floor and I met Stan Hodgson. Metro was a great place to work with supportive staff and interesting work. Sue was very pleasant and helpful which was a good introduction to my first job and to a career of 45 years with the CRB and its successors.

Bill Sagers

Bill was the foundation Vice-President (and later, President) of the CRB Car Club. He provided additional information about the Club as follows:

'The CRBCC was formed in 1962 and, as David Miles has said in a previous Newsletter, provided competitive motor

sport activities and social interaction for staff and friends over a number of years.

Sporting activities included day, night and over-night car trials, treasure hunts and motorkhanas. Social activities included film nights and presentations by motoring luminaries speaking about local and international competitions, car maintenance, etc. Shell was a regular source of films and Harry Firth was always welcome to speak on national competition covering racing and rallying. As times moved to more modern video recording, Shell passed across three VHS films of early international motorsport history and coverage of the great Formula One driver, Juan Fangio. They have long since been transposed to CD and remain to hand.



The Club was affiliated with Australia's Confederation of Motor Sport (CAMS) to ensure the rigour of licensed participation was followed and necessary insurance was available. Brian Fleming's long experience with the Melbourne University Car Club was an important guide to the setting up and conduct of the Club. It was through that affiliation with CAMS that Peter Brock received his first CAMS Licence via CRBCC membership. After previously staging motorkhanas on an unused paddock off Queens Rd Altona, impending development meant looking for a new site. Alan Hamley arranged for access to a paddock in Eltham and introduced his tear-away local friend, Peter Brock, who savaged our more restrained efforts in our every-day cars. If not a Club member before an event, CAMS rules enabled the granting of a licence immediate post event and so Peter, the newcomer to our activities on that day, obtained his first CAMS licence.

In those early days, one Club activity involved bulk ordering of after-market Aveng seatbelts, lap belts only at first, then Britax lap-sash kits later on, that were on-sold to members and CRB staff some time before seatbelts became compulsory fittings.

Regular participants in those early days included Graeme Price, Gordon Cameron, Geoff Larkin and Geoff Newman from the administration area, a very competitive Alan

Mackinlay, Graham Brookes, Laurie Comerford, John Wright, Nils Anderson, David Miles, Russel Widdis and Ivor Newton from the technical area and Peter French from the Traffic Commission. Participants were accompanied by their friends or partners adding to the Club's social dimension. Annually, trophies were awarded for Champion Driver and Champion Navigator.

For a number of years, Lorraine Bishop was a keen and effective Secretary of the Club, adding to the diversity and interest in the Club and its activities. As time passed, and the Club's successful activities came under increasing notice, non-Authority-based membership and management grew. The outcome was that while the CRBCC continued under its established name for a number of years, its operation moved away from the Authority base.

In the years that followed Alan Mackinlay's early involvement in the Club, Alan moved on to being more heavily involved in CAMS for advice on safety and operational aspects of car racing circuits in Australia.

Much later, circa 1989, when the RTA and RCA merged to form VicRoads, the statutes relating to those organisations were being scanned and revised to ensure that the functions of the new entity were covered. In the process, it was discovered that CRBCC members, when competing in an authorised Club event, *had special exemptions from normal speed restrictions*. Needless to say, that status was not retained in the merged outcome.'

He added an additional note as follows:

'Separately, I was shocked to read of Sue Phizaklea's passing. It hits home at one's own mortality. In the early 60's, Sue joined the CRB as a friendly petite teenager who may have worked in the typing pool. At that time Sue used to support the Car Club and other Social Club activities. She may have been "AWOL" for a few years before returning to VicRoads in the mid 90's when I was especially appreciative of her friendship and support over lunch in the Cafeteria following my redeployment. Later in life Sue worked in a clothing wear shop in the Sorrento-Portsea area and on one occasion made herself known to Neil Guerin's wife, Joy, on a visit to the shop. She was a lovely person.'

Kel York, Peter McDonald and Bob Body

All three wrote to say that it was Alan Griffiths, Mechanical Engineer, Materials Research Division who was another unknown face in the Jumbunna photograph. I should have known that.

Lance Midgley

Lance wrote:

'Going through my photo library, I came across this old photo of a group of assumed promising CRB staff who attended a training course at Jumbunna Lodge up in the Dandenong's back in 1980.



Front Stairs from bottom to top: Peter McCulloch, John Seward, Graham Both, Mal Densten, Brian Leak, Arthur Ford. Back Stairs from left to right: Alistair Robinson, Steve Parsons, John Boston, Bob Billinge, Lance Midgley, Brian Harrison, Bruce Chipperfield, Andrew O'Brien, Graham Walter, Alex Evans, John Gunson.

Reg Marslen

Reg wrote:

'Here is a photo of the wedding of Mavis Wurm and Jack Ryan at St Joseph's Church in Benalla in the early to mid -1960s. The date escapes me, but it was after we moved into our new offices in 1962.

Mavis was the Senior Typist in Traralgon, Jack the D/E's Clerk, and it was before they moved to Melbourne when Jack went to Dandenong Division with Mr Docking. They lived in Springvale Road, just around the corner from the office.

Mavis was from Benalla and started in the CRB Office there, and went to Traralgon with Frank Docking and Tom Russell. Mavis was a niece of Dr 'Weary' Dunlop. She spent a short time with me in Benalla when her mother was seriously ill.

They were both very good friends of my wife Rose and myself. Our eldest daughter Lynne's first doll was given to her by Mavis, and of course was affectionately named Mavis.

Mavis had given all the guests a list of the things she would like as a wedding gift. It was rather surprising to view the table of gifts which contained about a dozen bedside lamps, one of which was from us. Apparently she gave the same answer to most people when they asked what she preferred and we gave her the first thing she mentioned, a bedside lamp. I never asked what she did with them.

I just happened to come across the photo doing some reminiscing. You may be able to use it with your 'Lest We Forget'. I know Jack served in the 2nd World War, I think in the RAAF, but I'm not sure.'



Mavis and Jack Ryan on their wedding day.

Andrew Bethune

Andrew wrote as follows:

'Well done on your newsletters. I have to admit I always enjoy a read of the stories. Mum passes it to me and it's a must read - keep up the great work.

I saw in your newsletter No.232 the passing of Sue Phizaklea. I was saddened as she was too young to pass away. In the text you noted you were a little unsure if she worked for VicRoads. I have some background below from my sketchy memory.

Sue's last role was as an Admin Officer for SprayLine in the Deepdene office and then Camberwell working for me as the General Manager SprayLine at that time. Prior to that she had worked in Head Office but had taken some time off while raising a family then she returned to work at SprayLine. She worked in SprayLine for well over 10 years and was fondly remembered as the mother hen, keeping us all connected and under control during some tough times as SprayLine was establishing itself in a commercial environment. She was always stylish, classy, determined and kept the SprayLine community and crews connected and organised. She retired in the early 2000's and moved to the Peninsula with Nick for a well-earned retirement.'

Mel Kersting and Ken Mathers

Both Mel and Ken wrote to inform me of the completion of the new Murray River crossing at Echuca-Moama. I sent a message around to all members on email to inform them of the family day which was held 10 April.

This project was first mooted in 1965 and Valerie Dripps also mentioned her happy memories in the Planning Investigations team in VicRoads working on the early studies for the project.

I propose to write an article about the bridge in a future newsletter.



The Echuca-Moama Bridge under construction.

Across the board

In the last newsletter, we invited any group who wanted to advertise an event or report on one, to contact me so that I could put it in the newsletter. I mentioned one being held for Syndal Workshop colleagues in April – which, at the time of writing this newsletter, has not yet been held. I put a notice in the last newsletter. It was being organised by Colin Pratt. Colin wrote to me as follows:

'I really appreciate your interest in our little reunion. It has made me realise that the CRB/RTA/VicRoads had a lot of fantastic people working for them. A pity it all went belly up.

From the feedback I am getting from my work mates, they have all said that it was the best job they ever had. We all enjoyed going to work, and we loved the comradeship. It's too bad these type of employment opportunities have been rubbed out by the government, whether it be State or

Federal. You and all your followers would surely agree, and I urge you to put it to them to reply.

I, personally, look back on my employment at the CRB with great fondness. It was a great preparation for my career ahead. Great people and fantastic memories. All the employees that I personally know would agree that it is an era sadly lost.

That is why I have asked these people to rejoice, and join me in celebration of the great start to our lives.

Sorry to go on, but we all love the memories, and that is why we have over 100 people attending.

Please keep in touch, as I think you are on the same page.

Colin Pratt - Cairns, Australia

LEST WE FORGET



Lieutenant James (Jim) Symons,

3133064, 258840



James (Jim) Symons, circa 1967.

Jim was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in June 1918. His father had served as a Sub Lieutenant on HMS Manxman in the Royal Navy during the First World War and died of tuberculosis - contracted during his war service - when Jim was eight years old.

Prior to his father's death, in 1923, the family emigrated to the USA, but his father's failing health prompted their return to Scotland where they had better support from their family.

After his father's death, Jim lived with his widowed mother, brother and two sisters in Rothesay on the Isle of Bute in Scotland. Jim and a young friend built a sea-going, two-person canoe in which they circumnavigated the island - a distance of over 50 kms. This was hailed as an admirable feat at the time, and an article about their exploit was written in the local island newspaper, *'The Buteman'*. Jim must have had a love of the water because later he qualified for the Bronze Medallion of the Royal Life Saving Society.

It was on the Isle of Bute that James was to meet his future wife, Nance Wilson, when they were both on leave from the military during the Second World War.

Jim started school in September 1923 at the Rothesay Academy before the family emigrated to the USA a month later. In America, he attended primary school in Syracuse which is a city in New York State near Lake Ontario but he resumed at the Rothesay Academy when his family returned to Scotland in 1926. He completed his primary and secondary education obtaining his Leaving Certificate in 1935 with passes which met the requirements for a 'Certificate of Fitness to enter a Scottish University'.

Jim's civil engineering technical education was undertaken through correspondence schools. This decision was most likely taken so that he could work to earn money to help support his widowed mother and his siblings. In 1936, he commenced working with the Royal Burgh of Rothesay as part of an engineering apprenticeship while, at the same time, studying civil engineering by correspondence with Trevor W. Phillips, 50 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London. This was a great grounding for Jim as he was able to gain valuable practical experience in all aspects of roads, surveying, sewerage and water supply, housing, and harbour works. His apprenticeship was considered completed at the date of his enlistment in 1940 having worked for over four years in engineering.

Jim enlisted in January 1940. He joined the 4th/5th Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers (Infantry Regiment) and saw action in France. He attained the rank of Sergeant. His Battalion, a Territorial Army unit, was part of the 156th Infantry Brigade sent to France in mid-June 1940 following the Dunkirk Evacuation, in an unsuccessful attempt to form a second British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Later in June 1940, the Territorial 4th/5th Battalion was evacuated from France along with the 2nd and 6th Battalions during 'Operation Aerial'.³



Portraits of Jim Symons during the Second World War.

The middle photo is when he was with the Royal Scots Fusiliers in 1940 and the other two - later in the 1940s - were when he served with the Royal Engineers.

The Allied forces of the First BEF had been overwhelmed by three well-armed and highly-trained German Panzer Corps which broke through the Allied lines at the Ardennes and surrounded and pushed the British, French and Belgian armies back to the coast. The BEF lost 68,000 soldiers during the French campaign and had to abandon nearly all of its tanks, vehicles, and equipment. The evacuation from Dunkirk (under Operation Dynamo) by the Royal Navy, the French Navy, the Canadian Navy and hundreds of yachts, fishing boats, lifeboats and pleasure craft sent over from England, is a famous chapter in British military history. Nearly 340,000 men were rescued from Dunkirk.

The Second BEF was a disaster from the start. It was hoped that these forces might be sufficient to help stabilise the French defence and, if all else failed, there was talk of creating a "redoubt" or fortified foothold in the Brittany peninsula. General Alan Brooke - a competent and distinguished general - was appointed Commander. He arrived in France on 13 June and quickly realised that there was little hope of success for the rest of his command, which included more than 100,000 logistic troops who had not been trained for combat. On 14 June, Brooke persuaded Churchill that all British troops should be evacuated from France without delay. 192,000 Allied troops and a large amount of their equipment were rescued from eight major sea ports on the south west coast of France in Operation Aerial. The only serious setback was the

³ This operation is sometimes spelt 'Ariel'.

bombing of the troopship *Lancastria* off St Nazaire, resulting in the deaths of about 4,000 of those on board.

The War Diary of the 4th/5th Battalion (in which Jim was serving) documents that it arrived in Brest, France, on 12 June 1940. The Battalion participated in limited enemy engagement and on 17 June it was evacuated from Cherbourg, France, to Southampton and Poole, England. So Jim Symons' service in France had lasted only five days.

The evacuation ports for Operation Aerial are shown on the map below. The combined number of men rescued under Operation Dynamo at Dunkirk and Operation Aerial was over half a million. Some authorities put the figure as high as 560,000 men.



Ports used in the evacuation of Allied forces during Operation Aerial.

Jim's Division (the 52nd) was evacuated from Cherbourg, which can be seen on the map as the most northerly of the evacuation sites. The evacuation was under the command of Admiral William Milbourne James, Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth. He directed the larger troop and cargo ships to operate from Southampton and the smaller coastal ships to use Poole. The rear-guard battalion was evacuated in the afternoon of 18 June; the first German troops were entering the outskirts of the town as the last ship sailed at 4 pm. In all, 30,360 men had been evacuated and taken to Portsmouth.

A Symons' family anecdote relates an incident that occurred during the withdrawal of Jim's unit to Cherbourg for evacuation. A suspected provocateur attempted to direct them towards the German offensive line instead of Cherbourg. Jim's knowledge of French and his ability to read the French road signs and maps enabled him to lead

his unit successfully to Cherbourg where they abandoned their vehicles in the harbour and were able to return to Britain. The suspected provocateur was arrested as a suspected spy. The War Diary contains an entry that, during the course of moving personnel towards Cherbourg for evacuation, "a man wearing the uniform of a French Officer was arrested on suspicion of being an enemy agent" and was later "handed to French Authorities".



British troops being evacuated from Brest during Operation Aerial, 16-17 June 1940.

Back in England, like most of the British Army after Dunkirk, the Fusiliers began training to repel an expected German invasion, which never occurred.

In June 1942, Jim was posted to the Corps of Royal Engineers and immediately joined 142 Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU) at Newark in Nottingham. In January 1943, he was discharged under King's Regulation 390, and immediately commissioned as a Second Lieutenant with a new service number - 258840. He was posted to the 618th Field Company, Royal Engineers where he was occupied in a wide range of military engineering works in the UK including the construction of camps, water supply, and bridges. In September 1944 he joined Task Force 135 which was the name given to the Channel Islands Relief Force.

The German occupation of the Channel Islands lasted for most of the Second World War, from 30 June 1940 until liberation on 9 May 1945. The Bailiwick of Jersey and Bailiwick of Guernsey are two British Crown dependencies in the English Channel, near the coast of Normandy. The



LEST WE FORGET



The Royal Scots Fusiliers, Sergeant's Group Photo, 1941/42 – James is in the 3rd row from the front, 2nd from the right.



39/2 Class R.E. (Field) OCTU. No. 2 Coy. Senior Class. Dec 1942. Jim is in the second last row, third from the left.

Channel Islands were the only part of the *de jure* British Empire to be occupied by Nazi Germany during the war.

On 15 June 1940, after the Allied defeat in the Battle of France, the British government decided that the Channel Islands were of no strategic importance and would not be defended. The British government gave up the oldest

possession of the Crown without firing a single shot. The last British troops left the islands on 20 June 1940, departing so quickly that bedding and half-consumed meals were left in Castle Cornet. The Islands were subsequently invaded and occupied by German military forces for the duration of the war.

On 8 May 1945 at 10:00 am the islanders were informed by the German authorities that the war was over. Winston Churchill announced that hostilities with Germany would end officially at one minute past midnight on the 9 May 1945. Jim was with the British forces that arrived on 9 May for the reoccupation of the Channel Islands after German forces on the islands accepted the terms of unconditional surrender.

German garrisons on the Islands comprised a total of 26,909 personnel who became Prisoners of War. German soldiers and engineers were used to assist in various civilian and engineering tasks required for the reoccupation as noted in James' personal records.

Jim was on the island of Guernsey and one day, while riding a motorcycle, was driven off the road into a ditch by a German truck and he suffered life threatening injuries. He was taken to hospital where a British Army doctor considered that amputation of his badly damaged leg would be necessary to save his life. However, a German Army doctor insisted that amputation was not necessary and his view prevailed. Jim's life and leg were saved and, although he was badly damaged and scarred, he was able to walk again. His disability caused by this incident was the reason that his commission – with the rank of Lieutenant – was relinquished on 26 January 1946 due to him being wounded in war service.

A week before his discharge, on 19 January 1946, James Symons married Agnes (Nance) Ross Wilson. Nance had enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in 1942 when she was 21 years old. She was a Leading Aircraft Woman (Service No. 2074988) and served in administration of equipment stores in England managing clothing and



various other items. They had met earlier on the Isle of Bute and Jim and Nance were able to obtain leave for a few days for their marriage in Kings Park Parish Church in Glasgow. James was married in his Royal Engineer's Officer's Uniform. Nance wore civilian clothes for the marriage but had to change back into her WAAF uniform and return to her base a few days later.

Jim and Nance Symons on their wedding day – January 1946.

Back in civilian life, in 1946, Jim commenced work with the Royal Burgh of Dunbarton (Argyll and Bute) as an Assistant Engineer. In 1947, he joined the Port of Glasgow as the Surveyor and later the Assistant Engineer. During all this time, Jim continued his engineering study through the Civil Engineering Correspondence College, Acocks Green, Birmingham. He passed the Associate Membership Examinations for the Institution of Civil Engineers (UK) in 1949 and was elected an Associate Member on 18 Dec 1951.

In November 1949, Jim and Nance left the UK so that Jim could take up a position with the Colonial Engineering Service as an Executive Engineer in the Public Works Department of the Gold Coast, West Africa. His salary was £650 per annum, with expatriate pay of an additional £200, but £90 was deducted for accommodation costs. For the first two years he served in the northern districts of Salaga and Tamale, followed by a year at Kumasi District, Ashanti. This was followed by stints in the Districts of Tarkwa, Dunkwa, Trans-Volta and Accra - the capital city. Later he became Assistant Director of Public Works in Togoland and the Trans-Volta Region.



Jim Symons seated on the left of the front row with staff of PWD – Gold Coast.

The British Crown Colony of the Gold Coast was located on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa. At that time, nationalists shared power with the British and, in 1957, it achieved independence under the name of Ghana. Their two children were born there; Philip in 1951 and Brenda in 1954.

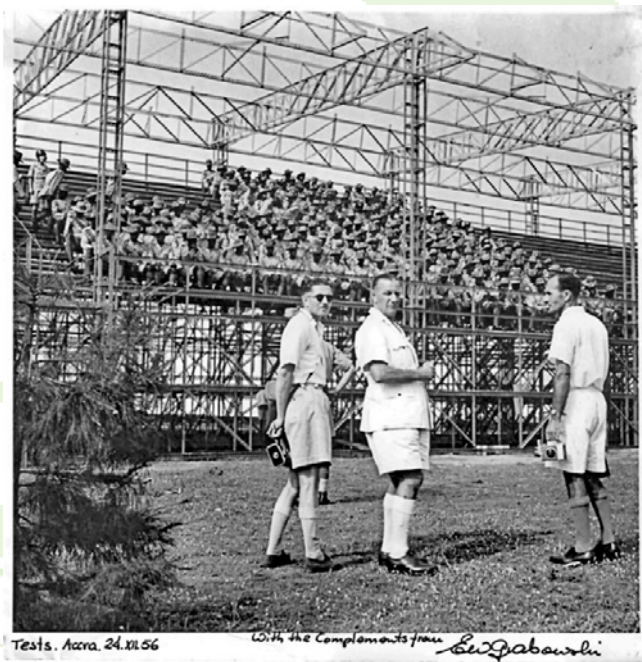
After the declaration of independence of Ghana, Jim and family returned to Scotland. They arrived back in Liverpool in June 1958 and stayed in Scotland for about six months before leaving for Australia. As part of Australia's 'Assisted Passage Migration Scheme', they departed Southampton on the 'Fairsea' on 22 January 1959 bound for Melbourne. They arrived on 24 February 1959.



LEST WE FORGET



Jim and Nance – 6th and 7th from the left – seated at the front – Gold Coast, 1956.



Tests. Accra. 24.12.56
With the Compliments from *Ed Jabawli*
Jim Symons (left) during testing of Accra grandstands constructed by the Public Works Dept. for Ghana Independence Celebrations in 1957. Testing involved Ghanaian soldiers marching 'in-step' repeatedly across the grandstand to proof test the stability and strength of the structure. Date of photo: 24 Dec 1956.

The family lived a short while in the Broadmeadows Migrant Camp before taking up residence at a Housing Commission home at 40 Ophir St, Broadmeadows for four years. The family moved to their new house that they had built at 1 Cole Court, Box Hill North in January 1963.

Jim joined the Country Roads Board in March 1959. He worked as an Assistant Engineer on road construction and maintenance and was later promoted to the position of Assistant Asphalt Engineer in the CRB's Asphalt Division. But there is a last, tragic twist to Jim's story. He died on 23 February 1968 at Wodonga District Hospital, Victoria, along with CRB engineers Colin Glare and Ronald Watt, as a result of injuries sustained when their vehicle was struck from behind by a speeding and unroadworthy truck at about the 180-mile post on the Hume Highway north of Barnawartha. They had been inspecting asphalt sealing works. Seven of his eight pall bearers were CRB colleagues – Ed King, Bill Brake, Don Houston, Frank Hopwood, Jack Parkinson, Peter Ager and Jack Ross.

In March 2022, I had the honour to meet Nance not long before her 101st birthday. While she was physically frail, her memory was still pretty sharp and she recalled going to the dances during the war. She loved ballroom dancing. Jim was not her only suitor apparently. She also recalled the kindness and support she received after Jim's death, from his friends and colleagues at the CRB.



Nance Symons flanked by her daughter, Brenda, and her son, Philip – 8 March 2022.

Jim's son, Philip (Phil), joined the CRB in 1974. He followed in his father's footsteps as an engineer and spent 38 years working for the CRB and its successors – the RCA and VicRoads. In addition to his initial engineering duties of road management and construction, road safety and traffic engineering, Phil also served in other corporate positions including corporate policy and planning, road information services, road network policy and planning, international projects, motor registration and driver licensing, internal audit, corporate insurance and risk management. He retired in 2012 as the Director of Risk Management.



And now for something beautiful

Space is short in this newsletter so I present one of the most beautiful things in my life – my grand daughter Matilda. She had been out bush-walking with her Dad and, obviously it got very tiring sitting on his back all day.



BOARD

Trivia and didactic whimsies

Tom's Test

Tom wanted a job as a signalman on the railways. He was told to report to the inspector at the signal box.

To find out how Tom would react under pressure, the inspector asked him: "What would you do if you realized that two trains were heading for each other on the same track?"

Tom said, "I'd switch one train onto the other track, thus averting a disaster."

"What if the lever broke?" asked the inspector.

"Well, I'd run down to the tracks and activate the manual lever," said Tom.

"What if that had been struck by lightning?"

"Then," Tom continued, "I'd run back into the signal box and phone the next signal box."

"What if the phone was engaged?"

"Well in that case," persevered Tom, "I'd rush down out of the box and use the public emergency phone at the level crossing up there."

"What if the public phone was on fire?"

"Oh well, then I'd run into town and get my uncle Bill."

This puzzled the inspector, so he asked, "Is he in the fire department?"

"No. He's never seen a train crash."

A Biblical Lesson

A minister parked his car in a no-parking zone in a large city because he was short of time and couldn't find a space with a meter.

Then he put a note under the windscreen wiper that read: "I have circled the block 10 times. If I don't park here I'll miss my appointment. Forgive us our trespasses."

When he returned, he found a parking ticket from a police officer, along with this note: "I've circled this block for 10 years. If I don't give you a ticket I'll lose my job. Lead us not into temptation."

It makes sense

The local radio station interviewed an 80-year-old lady because she had just married for the fourth time. The interviewer asked her questions about her life, about what it felt like to be marrying again at 80, and then about her new husband's occupation. "He's a funeral director," she answered.

"Interesting," the interviewer thought.

He then asked her if she wouldn't mind telling him a little about her first three husbands and what they did for a living. She paused for a few moments, needing time to reflect on all those years.

After a short time, a smile came to her face and she answered proudly, explaining that she had first married a banker when she was in her early 20s, then a circus ringmaster when in her 40s, and a preacher when in her 60s, and now in her 80s, a funeral director.

The interviewer looked at her, quite astonished, and asked why she had married four men with such diverse careers.

She smiled and explained, "I married one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go."

David Jellie

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