

# VicRoads Association

## Newsletter No. 242



Bethanga Bridge

Membership of the Association is available to all who have been members of VicRoads or forerunner organisations or the spouse of deceased members, and bestows on them all the rights of the Rules of Association. Cost of membership is a once only fee of \$50. Enquiries about membership or receipt of the Newsletter by e-mail should be directed to the Secretary, VicRoads Association, PO Box 80, Kew 3101 or by phone or e-mail as shown in the footer below. Visit our website at [vicroadsassociation.org](http://vicroadsassociation.org)

### Dear Members,

#### What do Australians really think about our attitudes to society?

Social and economic inequalities continue to be a major drag on social cohesion in Australia. Financial well-being is strongly related to individual expressions and perceptions of social cohesion, with people who are struggling or 'just getting along' having lower levels of belonging, happiness and personal well-being, social inclusion and justice. Young adults, and people who experience discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnic origin, or religion, also express a weaker sense of social cohesion.

Each year, the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Monash University, the Australian Multicultural Foundation and the Australian National University conduct a study of social cohesion in Australia. The report for 2022 can be downloaded from the website of the Scanlon Institute.

The 2022 Mapping Social Cohesion Report provides the most significant and detailed profile of social cohesion in Australia today. It reveals our perceptions of immigration, trust



in government, multiculturalism and our neighbourhoods. Importantly, it enables each of us to better understand how we can strengthen bonds between people and build a welcoming and cohesive society.

Around the world, social, political, and economic turbulence has seen social cohesion emerge as a critical global issue. In 2022, the experience of war, economic uncertainty, the coronavirus pandemic, and widespread political divisions and protests potentially adds to existing long-running pressures. Recent events in the USA and Brazil show alarming trends in social cohesion threatening democratic institutions.

Three key findings emerge from this year's results:

- Social cohesion in Australia increased during the pandemic but is now declining. As we readjust to life after the pandemic, we are at a crucial tipping point where we can solidify and strengthen social cohesion or allow it to further weaken.
- Australia's population-wide support for multiculturalism is high and growing, and it is an enormous advantage in responding to the pressures placed on social cohesion.
- The degree to which we feel a sense of belonging and connectedness in our neighbourhoods has been high and growing since the start of the pandemic. However, our sense of pride, belonging, and social justice in Australia are declining and are now at their lowest levels since 2007. How do we draw on the strengths of our neighbourhoods to improve national cohesion?

The state parliaments of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia have legislation and an act that enshrines multiculturalism. In the case of Victoria, the act serves as an important legislative function that requires all Victorian government departments to deliver initiatives and report to the parliament on how they support multicultural communities. Since the act was introduced in 2011, government departments have implemented a number of initiatives including

interpreting and translation services, cultural diversity plans, encouragement of multicultural community representatives to join government boards and committees, developing consulting programs to seek the views of multicultural communities on government policies and address the specific needs of migrant and refugee communities.

The federal government has a specific policy entitled *The people of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy*. It recognises that Australia's multicultural makeup gives the nation a competitive edge in today's globalised world. It also supports the rights of Australians from multicultural backgrounds to maintain, practice and celebrate their cultural traditions while promoting social inclusion and

a commitment to Australia, its democratic institutions and the rule of law.

I, for one, am proud of the breadth and diversity of Australian society, and government initiatives for a culturally diverse and socially cohesive nation. These complement our national ethos of equality and a fair go for all and our commitment to democratic values.

Do any of you wish to express your views on cohesion in Australia's society?

**David Jellie,**  
*Chairman and Editor*

## Award for John Rebbechi



John Rebbechi

I am pleased to inform you that John Rebbechi – a committee member of VicRoads Association – has received an Austroads Special Commendation Award 2022 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to Austroads and to the road surfacings industry for over 50 years.

John has worked in many sectors of the industry including the government sector with the former Country Roads Board in Victoria; private industry with Emoleum; with what was then Australian Asphalt Paving Association (AAPA) as an asphalt and road surfacings expert; and currently he is a consultant operating his own consulting business (Roadcor).

John's career has included significant contributions to Austroads committees and projects at many stages, in particular during the past twenty-five years as a technical editor for many Austroads publications including the Work Tips series.

He has also served as a member of the Austroads Bituminous Surfacing Technical Group (Surfacings Group) and the Austroads Bituminous Surfacing Technical Group (Binders Group) where he has been a valuable contributor whose opinions have been regularly sought.

Throughout his long career John's values and standards have always seen him recognised and respected at a national level, and he has also been sought to offer advice on several significant international projects in countries such as Thailand and Pakistan.

## New members

I have been very remiss over the last few newsletters by not welcoming new members to the Association. I want to fix this oversight by extending a warm welcome to the following members who have joined recently. They are:

John Scully, David Austin, Ronald Hawken, Kenneth Sinclair, Graeme Newman, Robert Morgan, John Clinch, Joseph Klopfer, Lester Watt, Birute Don, and Swarnalata Bharatula. Forgive me if I have missed out anyone

## Vale

### Gary Liddle

I am saddened to inform you that Gary Liddle died on 22 February after struggling over the last few years with Motor Neuron Disease. We extend our sympathies to Meredith and family. This news came as this newsletter was being prepared for printing so I will include a eulogy in the next newsletter.

## What's coming up

### **Occasional Lunches at Shoppingtown Hotel 12 noon**

Our next lunch will be held on Monday 13 April 2023. There is no longer a requirement to contact Kelvin York – just turn up. Attendances at these lunches is increasing. We had 28 people attend the last one.

### **Annual General Meeting followed by Dinner at Glen Waverley Hotel, Thursday 16 March at 6.00 pm**

At this meeting I will present our Annual Report and we will also elect committee members. If you would like to join the committee, please contact our Secretary Jim Webber at [jameswebber1717@gmail.com](mailto:jameswebber1717@gmail.com) (Jim's new email address) or 0412 064 527.

We will also receive the Treasurer's report, confirm our auditor for 2023 and confirm our fees – all as required by our Rules of Association.

I will try to make it as interesting as possible and promise it will not go beyond 6.30 pm!

Ken Vickery is our contact for this function. If you would like to come, please contact Ken on [kenvickery@tpg.com.au](mailto:kenvickery@tpg.com.au) or 0409 561 168. Family and friends are welcome.

### **Annual Golf Day Friday 14 November 2023**

We will provide details later.

### **Briefing on Road Management in Victoria – Monday 20 March at 10.30 am**

David Barton, Chief Engineer – Roads, Assets & Engineering Division, Department of Transport and Planning has kindly offered to host a briefing for VicRoads Association members and friends about road management in Victoria. Fiona Green, the Director of Metro Capital Delivery and Paul Rogers, the Director of Metro Maintenance Delivery have both agreed to join him in this presentation.

The session will commence at 10.30am on Monday 20 March for 30-40 mins of presentations followed by about 45 mins for questions. The presentation will include: Structure of the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), relationship between DTP and the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority (MTIA) and the delivery of major projects, Assets and Engineering Division, capital delivery and road maintenance.

We are still awaiting confirmation of a venue. David is trying to get permission to use the Theatre at Kew. However we will inform you later whether it be there or at another venue. In the meantime, if you want to attend, please register your interest with our Secretary, Jim Webber, on: [jameswebber1717@gmail.com](mailto:jameswebber1717@gmail.com)

Please note that this is Jim's new email address.

### **Other events**

We are currently negotiating a visit to Anzac Station on the Metropolitan Rail Project.

Details and a date has not yet been finalised but we will let you know once arrangements have been fixed.

### **Ballarat/Bendigo Trip November 14 to 17 November 2023**

We will keep you informed on the progress of details – but we will be seeking a briefing on the planning for the 2026 Commonwealth Games.



## News from members

### Jim Winnett and the Snowy River Bridges

Jim wrote to me regarding the story in Newsletter 239 about the design of the temporary bridge across the Snowy River following the flood of 1971.

He agreed with me whole-heartedly that Phil Read was able to design a bridge on the 'back of a cigarette packet' – but he pointed out that Phil did not smoke. He also agreed about Phil's immaculate copperplate handwriting and draughting style "in complete contrast to my scribbly detailing". Jim also recalled how the two senior officers in Bridge Branch, Tom Russell and Norm Haylock, were so impressed by his detailing style.

However Jim expressed his doubts about the 1971 Snowy River flood having the highest discharge of any other flood recorded in Australia – but he thought it would probably be one of the highest in Victoria. Jim said that he was the engineer involved in assessing what was required for the new bridges on the new alignment and he was given information that the 1870 flood was the highest in recorded history. He also thought that there would be floods in Queensland, NSW and Western Australia that were probably higher due to cyclonic effects.

As far as I am aware, there is no consistent method of reporting on floods. I have spent a lot of time trawling around the internet and could not find one reference to the 1870 Snowy River flood – although I do believe there was a flood then. In those days, the flats were described by early settlers as a mosaic of swamp and rainforest and, in places, as a 'jungle'. They were not cleared and drained until the 1880s – so the flooding behaviour of the river then would have been quite different to subsequent ones after the land was cleared.

Most reporting on floods use criteria other than discharge. For example, in 2017, *The Age* reported on the history of Victoria's major floods, considering them to have had the greatest impact at the time. They were:

- The Yarra River in 1839, 1860, 1863, 1891, 1923, 1934, and 1972.
- Campaspe, Goulburn, Murray and Ovens Rivers in 1870.
- Maribyrnong River in 1906.
- Avoca, Barwon, Hopkins, Loddon, Merri and Richardson Rivers in 1909.
- Glenelg River in 1946.

These were reported on the basis of the extent of the areas of flood, loss of life, damage to property and the like. Mentioned in Melbourne's floods – and probably

the worst one – was the flood of 1934. On 29 November 1934 torrential rain began to fall in Central Victoria and Gippsland, with 140mm falling in Melbourne within the 48 hours ending 1 December. In South Gippsland, east of Melbourne, over 350 mm fell.

Roads were submerged, houses inundated and bridges, train and tram lines were washed out. As a result of the storm the Yarra and other rivers burst their banks in flood and, in some cases, isolating towns. The Yarra Valley, Latrobe River District and South Gippsland areas were all flooded.

There was a huge loss of livestock, property and crops. Every suburb of Melbourne suffered damage and winds in the Central Business District reached up to 110 km per hour. As many as 400 houses and buildings were damaged. There were 36 fatalities in the storms and subsequent floods. 18 people drowned, and 6,000 people were made homeless.

Flooding of the Snowy River was not mentioned in their list – probably because it occurred in a remote area far from Melbourne, no towns were inundated, and it was restricted to a relatively small area because of the topography of the flood plain. But there can be no doubt that a huge volume of water rushed out of the steep Snowy River Valley on to the river flats at Orbost in 1971. Perhaps the best way of picturing this can be illustrated by the photograph of McKillops Bridge below. This is the only other bridge crossing the Snowy River. It has six spans and is 255 metres long.



McKillops Bridge

During the 1971 flood, the flood water flowed at a height just level with the bottom chord of the truss. It created a standing wave about two metres high on the downstream side of the bridge. Furthermore, this bridge is about two thirds down the length of the Snowy – a 150 km drive from Orbost - so that there would be a further increase in discharge down to Orbost due to the saturation of the catchment downstream of the bridge.

### ***During the 1971 flood, the flood water flowed at a height just level with the bottom chord of the truss.***

In 2021, Orbost's newspaper, the *Snowy River Mail*, remembered the drama of 50 years before. These are just a few of the recollections – heavily edited.

'This week marks 50 years since Orbost's most damaging flood ripped

through the town. The February floods of 1971 will live long in the memory of those who saw them.'

It then reproduced the article published at the time of the flood.

'Desolation and destruction followed in the wake of a major flood – a record in the history of Orbost and district – which over last weekend, claimed the life of a well-known townsman, caused the loss of many hundreds of head of stock, ruined bean and sweet corn crops and pastures, destroyed miles of fencing, washed out roads and culverts, swept away bridges and caused a subsidence in the Orbost end of the Snowy River bridge and covered many square miles of the rich, fertile Jarrahmond and Orbost river flats, besides disrupting telephone, rail services and the electric power supply – in fact, within the space of a few hours, turning the district into a disaster area.

The same picture prevailed in other parts of the shire when the Cann and Genoa rivers, and other streams, rose rapidly, covering surrounding farm lands, and left a trail of destruction as the waters made their mad dash to the sea.

Some faint idea of the turbulence of the Snowy in one of its angriest moods, may be gleaned as the water recedes from the river flats, where mud, silt and debris covers miles of what were once lush pastures and crops (almost to splendid maturity) making an awe inspiring picture tinged with a great deal of sadness for those that suffered from the river's wrath.

The full extent of the destructive power of the Snowy in flood was only beginning to be realised, for the day before, February 6th, the river at Orbost had risen to an all-time record of 33 feet. During the Saturday, reports on the hour were received from Amey's 20 miles upstream, by Mr Don McKenzie, Snowy River Improvement Trust secretary, and relayed to police and farmers. These readings gradually rose, at first by six to seven feet an hour, and climbed to an unbelievable 50 feet 8 inches.

With about three to four hours travelling time from Amey's to Orbost, farmers had little chance of rescuing stock and belongings. Realising the enormity of the coming disaster, police and ambulance men swung into action and a helicopter under charter to Esso in Bass Strait was supplied for evacuation. All day Saturday morning the aircraft was used for this purpose and was a great assistance to those marooned by flood waters. The surf rescue boat from Lakes Entrance also rescued many people and was a familiar sight on the swollen river. The craft suffered damage when a large branch went into the turbine of the jet engine. Repairs were effected and the craft and its crew of four returned to Lakes yesterday.

Almost 300 people were evacuated from the Snowy River flats area and billeted with friends in Orbost.

In response to an appeal for beds for the homeless, almost 200 offers of accommodation from Orbost residents were received by police. Many of these were not required.'

The quantity and force of the flood water scoured straight through the huge sand dunes at Marlo where the river swept out to sea. The dunes normally deflected the river's course so that it flowed some considerable distance parallel to the shoreline before entering the sea at MOTS Beach – so named because it is the Mouth of the Snowy. So violent was the force during this flood, local fishermen reported that live cows were swept many miles out to sea and they were seen still battling in the water. Tragic as it may seem, the fishermen shot them. Also, many cows drowned on the river flats due to snagging in trees.

So when it came to design a new crossing of the Snowy River at Orbost, there was much debate regarding what waterway provision should be made. When I wrote the entry 'Bridge Over Troubled Waters' for the VicRoads Centennial publication, I obtained the design files from the State archives and I reported as follows.

'In the initiating report for a new crossing of the Snowy River and its floodplains, the Divisional Engineer – Bairnsdale said, "As is well known, the Snowy River when roused is the biggest river in the state and as a result, bridges across it have had a fairly turbulent time." He noted that major floods had occurred in 1870, 1893, 1934, and 1952. He went on to say, "Information about the first two is based largely on memory and uncertainty concerning the peak flood levels makes computation and hence comparison of flood magnitudes, difficult. In addition, in common with most rivers, it is probable that a change in river propensities over the last 100 years has rendered information about floods in the early years unreliable. The 1934 flood was larger than the 1952 one and had a peak flow of 245,000 cusecs (cubic feet per second) at Jarrahmond. For the purposes of design, a peak discharge of 300,000 cusecs (or 8,495<sup>1</sup> cubic metres per second) with a recurrence interval of about 100 years is considered

<sup>1</sup> This is the equivalent of a 20 metre cube of water passing every second.



### News from members continued

necessary." This was written in 1968 before the maximum flood ever recorded in February 1971 occurred. He also said, "For the design flood, it is considered that bridging across the flood plain at Orbost should provide about the same waterway as the railway viaduct. This would keep the average velocity to about 7.3ft/sec; a higher velocity than this would cause scour of the rich alluvial flats." After much further investigation and calculation, his recommendations were adopted for the final design.

Jim also pointed out that he was sent down to Orbost to produce a drawing of the splayed end of the bridge – required by the sharp turn at the end of the bridge. The Bailey Bridge did not extend to the end of the bridge so the last span had to accommodate the road curvature. He also said that he was not Flash Gordon or Superman – it took a bit longer than half an hour to design.

Jim also inspected all other damaged bridges east of Orbost down to the border.

Jim added a post script.

*'It is with great pride to me that I was so involved in the greatest design project in my time of 30 years in the service of the CRB and RCA and being involved with you, David, in the \$6 million project (1976 prices) when you were the Project Engineer supervising construction. Would you please include a photograph of you taken at that time? A very handsome, unshaven man at the time.'*

I feel a bit embarrassed about this but I have to keep Jim happy.

I want to reciprocate Jim's sentiment because I too, was grateful to have the opportunity to work on the Snowy River Project. It changed my life. My peers were flabbergasted that I chose to leave Head Office to go to such an out of the way place but it turned out to be a wonderful decision. My family loved living in Orbost. We lived in a run-down house on the river flats at Bete Bolong. We pumped water from the river for our personal use. This was a bit of a problem because every time

there was a flood alert I had to wade out into the river to retrieve the foot valve – otherwise it would be buried in sand. Our house was surrounded by market gardens and our generous neighbours allowed us to step out any time to pick beans, lettuce, sweet corn and all the other vegetables they were growing for the markets in Melbourne. At that time, most of the farmers were growing beans for the



Yours truly – circa 1975. A wild looking man from Snowy River.

frozen food industry but about ten years later that collapsed and they reverted back to dairy farming.

I was asked to play for the local footy team but I refused on the grounds that I was too old, but really I hadn't played in years and I was a bit frightened of making a fool of myself. So I joined the excellent golf club and continued to make a fool of myself for the entire time we lived in Orbost. I saw much more of my family than before. Besides we spent many of our weekends exploring the eastern part of Victoria. Orbost enjoys a mild climate and there were many beaches and National Parks to explore. Visitors were regularly dragged along to McKillop's Bridge, Point Ricardo, Cape Conran, Pearl Point, Carringle Beach, the Erinundra Plateau and Mallacoota. We bought a tent and to this day, we still camp every summer at Saltwater Creek which we found in those days. I have given up because of old age but as I write this, all my children and grand children are down there making me rather maudlin.

The project had many challenges. The nearest concrete mixing plant was in Bairnsdale, too far away to transport concrete so we had to establish a new concrete plant on site. CRB geologists surveyed the district and found suitable rock for quarrying at Young's Creek – about six kilometres out of Orbost – and sand at Reed Bed Creek down near Cann River which was about 80 km away. We established quarries at both sites, including a crusher at Young's Creek.

The nearest asphalt plant was at Traralgon nearly three hours away so we could not use asphalt as a regulation wearing course on the bridges as was the usual practice. Instead, we had to be especially vigilant in setting the screeds used to form the deck levels when casting the concrete deck. The deck beams were pre-tensioned concrete and, when the prestress forces were transferred to the hardened concrete, the eccentric force caused the beams to bow upwards. These had to be measured for every beam in the span and the screed levels determined after keeping in mind that the mass of the unhardened concrete caused the beams to deflect downwards – and stabilize once the concrete set. If we botched this, motorists would have a very uncomfortable 'bouncy' ride when driving across the bridges at high speed. With the considerable assistance of a competent contractor and their project manager, Adam Hudson, we achieved an excellent result. After the deck concrete had achieved initial set, we etched the surface at right angles to traffic with wire brooms to provide good skid resistance in wet weather.

This was also the first time we used precast U-beams – now commonly used in Victoria. We established a pre-casting yard at the western end of the project and made the 212 beams, 100 feet long for the Snowy River Bridge and 70 feet long for the two floodway bridges. One beam was made per day with the aid of steam curing overnight which accelerated the setting of the concrete. After all the beams were manufactured, the casting yard was buried underneath the road embankment.



Construction of the bridge across the Snowy River – circa 1976. The old bridge is in the foreground.

There are three bridges crossing the flood plain. Ashby's Gulch Bridge is 600 metres long, Watt's Gulch is 215 metres long, and the bridge over the Snowy River is 370 metres long.

I wrote a technical paper about the project and said, 'The successful completion of the project was made possible by the close cooperation of the many individuals involved in the design, construction and supervision teams.'

This is how it should be for every project. CRB people involved in the design office included Keith Opie, Bruce Addis, Jim Winnett and Max Schultz. Neil Jephcott was the Divisional Engineer at Bairnsdale and Stan Jervis supervised the road works. Engineers Ron Glasser, Adrian Bond, Peter Ryan and David McInnes, and Clerks of Works Bernie King, Bill Grant, Gerry Wyckelsma, John D'Concy and Ron Smith supervised bridge works. As the Project Engineer, I reported to Bruce Watson at Head Office. Adam Hudson was the Project Manager for the main contractor – Pearson Bridge.

Thank you Jim, for bringing these memories back!

Not only was Jim involved in one of the biggest bridge projects in Victoria, he was involved in one of the smallest in NSW. On a recent trip to Canberra, I stopped in Holbrook to take a photo of it. It is in the park and carries a model train (of about an eight inch gauge) across the pond. As the memorial plaque indicates, the bridge was a family effort because Jim's brother Walter built it.

It was Phil Symons who took the photo of the plaque. He added:

*"Apparently Jim was born in Temora and his family moved to Holbrook where he and his brothers grew up.*



Jim and Watty's bridge at Holbrook.

*He has clear memories of his and his brother's design and construction of the very narrow gauge model railway system in the park, and I am sure he would love to elaborate for you. I understand that instead of sleepers for the track they developed and installed substantial concrete blocks to support the track for the rest of eternity.*

*Robyn (Phil's wife) and I had called into the park in December 2020 to view the weeping willow trees that were planted along the creek by Robyn's grandfather in about 1910.*

*Jim also mentioned that he had a role in the placing of the submarine into position that is located further up the road in Holbrook."*

## Nick Szwed

Nick has been exploring the theme of Australia's first roads for some time and this is his story. He has an extensive list of references which I won't publish because of space limitations, but they can be found in the story posted on our website. Nick also wishes to acknowledge the assistance he received from a friend, historian Joe Ribarow. As you will see, Nick has invited comment from anyone who can enhance his narrative.

### Australia's First Roads

The first 'roads' in Australia were developed by the first migration of people who arrived on this land between 60,000 and 120,000 years ago. These roads were walking routes – now referred to as songlines - a term that I had not understood until a few years ago. Following my research into songlines, I believe I understand them reasonably well but if anyone can add further information or clarity, I would welcome it.

After reading the book *'Songlines, The Power and Promise'* by Margo Neale & Lynne Kelly (Thames & Hudson Aust 2020), I now realise that songlines were ever so much more than a detailed map of the country and its trading routes. Songlines were the knowledge system, library and



### News from members continued

archive of the people. They contain all the knowledge that was passed on orally to future generations. This was done through song, storytelling, dance and art.

I was once told that songlines were like a Global Positioning System (GPS) today but I now realise that songlines were so much more – more like today's Wikipedia. The wayfinding aspect was just one element of songlines. They were maps, parables, allegories, scripture and oral history connecting the people to the land.

Many books had been written about the development of roads in Australia but most of them start with the arrival of Europeans. So I have prepared the following short note about Australia's first roads for the purpose of completeness. Comments are welcome.

### Songlines

The ancestors of the first people to come to Australia left Africa between 130,000 and 180,000 years ago. They migrated eastwards through India and then south through what is now Indonesia to Australia – arriving there about 50,000 to 65,000 years ago. During this time the sea level was much lower and most of maritime south east Asia formed one land mass known as Sunda. Migration continued southeast on the coastal route to the straits between Sunda and Sahul, the continental land mass of present-day Australia and New Guinea. This is shown on the map below.

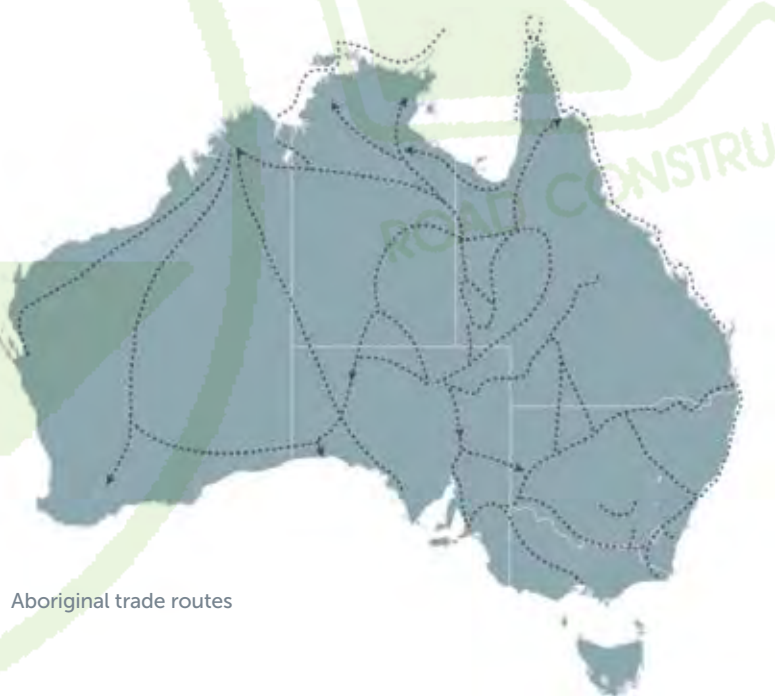
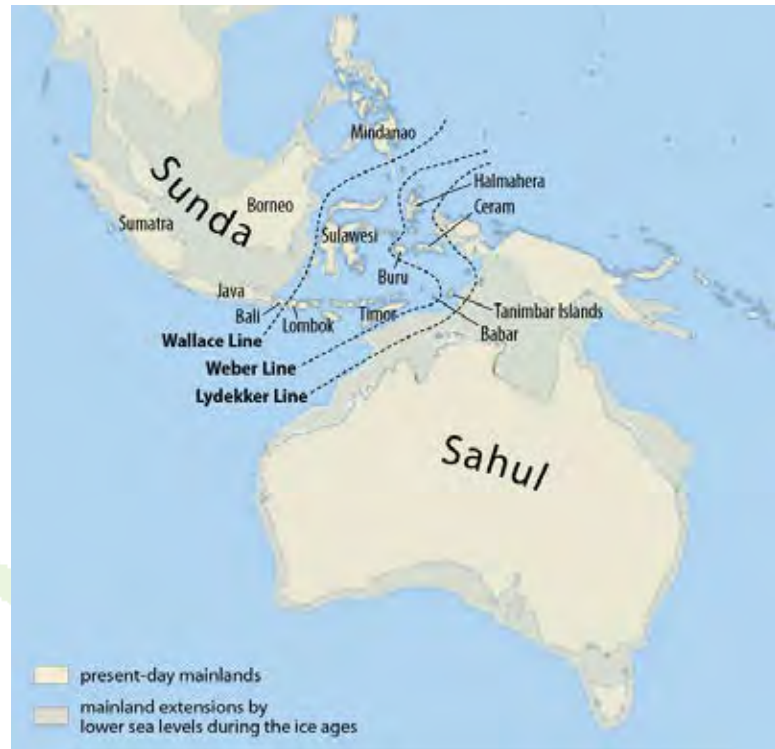
The gaps between islands are up to 90km wide, so the migration to Australia and New Guinea would have required seafaring skills.

They moved around according to seasons, sources of food, and social ceremonial purposes. They navigated through their tribal lands, which had boundaries that were respected and protected, using passed-on knowledge of astronomy, geography, landmarks, and rock-art maps. The media for recording knowledge and culture were the traditional song cycles, stories, dance and art. The people were the libraries. Accurate learning was very important and only bestowed on those capable of accurate recall.

So it seems that songlines were a rich description of the environment through which people navigated and would have included information about landmarks, vegetation, water sources, astronomical features and everything else known about that part of country.

By singing the songs in the appropriate sequence, Aboriginal people were able to navigate long distances, often travelling through the deserts of Australia's vast interior. The songlines not only showed them the way across the land but told them everything that was known about it and their connection to it.

The continent of Australia contains an extensive system of songlines, some of which are of a few kilometres long while others traverse hundreds of kilometres through lands



Aboriginal trade routes

of many different Aboriginal nations. Some were used as trade routes and others guided them to ceremonial places. By singing while they travelled, they passed-on an understanding of the country they traversed to the younger members of the group.



These routes through the landscape came to be believed to have been travelled during the Dreamtime (or Alcheringa). They featured a series of landmarks thought to relate to events that happened during this time.

In areas of denser occupation, such as along rivers or routes leading to resources, there would have been visible, well-trodden paths which could be travelled without song. But on less travelled routes, songlines were the means of navigation.

In Victoria, Geelong Road, Western Highway (Ballarat Road), Calder Highway (Bendigo Road), Hume Highway (Sydney Road), Plenty Road, Heidelberg Road, Maroondah Highway, Burwood Highway, Dandenong Road and Nepean Highway were all Aboriginal songlines.

## European Roads

When Europeans arrived in Australia, they used the visible paths made by Aboriginal people. Later, farmers and pastoralists looking for easy access through forests and mountain ranges, sought assistance from Aboriginal guides and trackers. They passed on their songlines knowledge and it is believed that this is how some of the stock routes were developed. There is also evidence that early explorers used knowledge about songlines.

The Europeans lived in denser communities and travelled on horses, used carts and had other hooved stock and so they quickly formed much more visible paths and obliterated evidence of the original paths. As traffic increased, the demand for better roads grew and the construction of all-weather roads began. The rest is well-documented history.

## LEST WE FORGET



In this newsletter, I include only one story from Roads to War – that of Ernie Renz.

### Lance Corporal Ernst (Ernie) Fritz Albert Renz V516640



Ernie Renz's portrait in his Certificate of Registration of Alien – September 1940. His internment number is draped around his neck.

Ernie was the Specifications Engineer in Bridge Branch in the 1960s and it was widely known that he was born into a famous German circus family. Circus Renz was established in Berlin in 1842 by Ernst Jakob Renz. It existed until 1897. It was not a travelling circus but it operated in buildings in Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, Breslau and Vienna. Today several circus companies in Germany still use the family name Renz. Among them are Circus Universal Renz and Zirkus Renz Manege – the two biggest.

I was told by one of his colleagues, Ozzie Kayak, that Ernie had been in Africa and that he had said that he had never fired a shot at any time during the war. Ernie had a severe limp which caused him to walk with an

exaggerated rocking motion. He told Ozzie that he broke his leg when he fell from a truck.

I found Lance Corporal Ernst Renz on the DVA nominal roll. He was born on 23 November 1904 and when he enlisted in the Australian Army in September 1944, he gave his home address as Berlin, Germany. You can imagine

how that would be received. It was crossed out in pencil and overwritten by '77 Little Flinders Street, Melbourne'. The DVA nominal roll said that he was born in BLN (Berlin)-Charlottenburg in Germany in 1904 and that he enlisted in the 8th Employment Company. His next of kin was Mathilda Pickenbach. She was probably his mother as no one had ever heard of Ernie being married.

I also found a record of Ernst Renz – born in 1904 - who departed from Hamburg in Germany in 1933 bound for Lagos, Nigeria, aboard the *Reggestroom*. The passenger list stated that he was an engineer. I am certain it is our Ernie.

Ernie's full story is contained in his file at the National Archives of Australia. Apart from the details already mentioned, it showed that his occupation was 'engineer' and his religion was 'Church of England'. This latter claim, I suggest, is false. I think it is more likely that he was Jewish – for reasons explained below. His health was poor. During his service, he was medically classified as 'D' – which is the least healthy category in the army – and it states 'coronary sclerosis'.

The archive also contains his Certificate of Registration of Alien issued by Special Branch. It was issued on 12 September 1940. It gives the date of his arrival in Australia as 3 September 1940 and his former place of abode as '6 Labuyot (?) Street, Lagos, Nigeria'. His nationality was stateless (formerly Germany) and he arrived in Melbourne on 3 September 1940 aboard the *SS Dunera*<sup>2</sup>. His current place of abode was

<sup>2</sup> The Certificate of Registration incorrectly named the ship *SS Dunera* where the prefix stands for Steam Ship. However the correct prefix is HMT – meaning Hired Military Transport.



## LEST WE FORGET



'No. 2 Internment Camp Tatura'. On the back of the card were listed changes of address. They were all Internment Camps.

This record shows that Ernie disembarked in Melbourne whereas the majority of the refugees went on to Sydney arriving there three days later. Ernie was one of 94 men who disembarked in Melbourne. These were mainly the politically active Category 'A' German Nazis and Italian Fascists but also included other 'doubtful' refugees. Some of the most remarkable of all the Dunera Boys were in this group. Nobody knows for sure why they were put off in Melbourne. They may have been chosen at random knowing that there was not room for everyone in the final destination of Hay Camp, which was still under construction. This group was entrained to Tatura in Northern Victoria.

HMT *Dunera* was a British passenger ship which became notorious for the controversial transportation of thousands of 'enemy aliens' to Australia. The British government had set up processes to investigate these aliens in order to distinguish Nazi sympathisers from refugees who had fled Europe from Nazism and Fascism. About 65,000 were regarded as 'friendly', another 6,800 had restrictions placed on them but were left at liberty, and about 600 were declared 'unreliable'. However, when the war reached the stage where Britain stood alone against the Axis powers, fears arose about the possibility of invasion. The British press howled for all aliens to be interned, regardless of their status, and Winston Churchill decided they should be deported. He was concerned that they may help the Germans to plan the invasion of Britain. Australia agreed to take some, turning back the clock over a hundred and fifty years to receive unwanted people from Britain to be gaoled on the other side of the world.

The *Dunera* left Liverpool in July 1940 with 2,542 enemy aliens – including 450 German and Italian prisoners of war and about 20 Nazi sympathisers. The remainder were German and Italian civilians who were anti-Nazi and mostly Jewish refugees. This is why I suggest that Ernie was most likely Jewish rather than Church of England as stated later in his enlistment papers for the Australian Army. I doubt there would be many Anglicans in Germany at that time – if ever. A few of the refugees were making a second voyage. Their first attempt on the SS *Arandora Star* was a disaster. The ship was torpedoed en route to Canada resulting in a great loss of life. The *Dunera* set sail a week later.

Despite the horrors of the persecution of Jewish people by the Nazis, xenophobia existed in some parts of Australian society at that time. In a letter written to the Prime Minister in 1940 the correspondent stated, '...we have enough of the scum here already, too many in fact. I am not a vindictive woman, these Aliens are God's creatures just the same as we are. All the same I sincerely trust that U-boats get every one of them.' So much for Australian Christian values!

The voyage of the *Dunera* rivalled the original convict ships to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land in terms of overcrowding and ill treatment of its passengers. Over 300 poorly trained members of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps and the ship's crew swelled the complement on board to almost twice the *Dunera's* capacity as a troop carrier of 1,600. The passengers were not informed of their destination and it was not until the ship first docked in Africa, that they had an inkling they were headed for Australia.

The commander of the escort troop was Lieutenant-Colonel William Scott – a veteran of the First World War. He was promoted from Major to Lieutenant-Colonel on his appointment to the *Dunera* command. First Lieutenant John O'Neill VC MM was Scott's assistant. As a Sergeant, he was awarded the VC in 1918 in France for conspicuous gallantry. Scott remained aloof from his scruffy prisoners, leaving O'Neill to do most of the dirty work. Many of the troops under their command were 'Soldiers of the King's Pardon' who had been released from prison to help in the war effort, but others were regular soldiers from other regiments.



Lieutenant-Colonel Scott (left) parading his men at Sydney Showgrounds in September 1940 and First Lieutenant John O'Neill VC MM.

The ship was grossly overcrowded. Toilet and bathing facilities were inadequate and dysentery was rampant. Many had to sleep on the floor or on tables. Beatings from the soldiers was a daily occurrence and one prisoner was bayoneted in the stomach when he attempted to go to the toilet on deck – which was out of bounds to the internees. The British guards robbed the internees of any valuables and threw most of their baggage overboard.

Using the tune "My bonnie flew over the ocean ..." learned from their British warders, internees regularly sang "My luggage went into the ocean, My luggage went into the sea, My luggage was thrown in the ocean, Oh, bring back my luggage to me!". Most internees were kept below decks throughout the voyage, except for daily 10-minute exercise periods, during which internees would walk around the



deck under heavy guard; during one such period, a guard smashed beer bottles on the deck so that the internees would have to walk on the shards. In contrast to the Army personnel, the ship's crew and officers showed kindness to the internees, and some later testified at the soldiers' courts martial.

One shining light among the British was the medical officer aboard, Lieutenant A. Brooks. He said; *"The first thing that struck me on the wharf at Liverpool was a colonel- it was Scott – standing on the brig like Nelson, or some other admiral, taking the salute, supervising a crowd of civilians with battered suitcases as they trooped on board."* Brooks' wonderment increased when he witnessed the treatment of the passengers. Brooks had a 100-bed hospital on board but only one assistant – a sergeant – but he was able to recruit three doctors from the internees one of whom was a distinguished heart specialist. He also recruited a few medical students. It was a tribute to his dedication that only three internees died on the voyage. One committed suicide (by jumping overboard), one as the result of a fall (although some thought he had received a beating) and one from a pre-existing condition (died from cardiac arrest). Brooks also arranged for a chute to be rigged up to force fresh air down to the internees below deck.

Because their luggage had been jettisoned, the refugees did not change their clothing for the entire eight weeks of the journey – much of it through tropical climates. As a result of washing in salt water, the clothing became ragged and Brooks was prevented from finding fresh clothing by one of the Army captains.

To illustrate Lieutenant-Colonel Scott's attitude towards his charges, at the end of the voyage, he recorded his views thus:

*"I would now like to give my personal views on (a) Nazi Germans, (b) Italians and (c) German and Austrian Jews.*

*(a) Having warned this group prior to sailing of my methods should trouble arise through them, their behaviour has been exemplary. They are of a fine type, honest and straightforward, and extremely well-disciplined. I am quite prepared to admit however, that they are highly dangerous.*

*(b) Italians. This group are filthy in their habits, without a vestige of discipline, and are cowards to a degree.*

*(c) Can only be described as subversive liars, demanding and arrogant, and I have taken steps to bring them into my line of thought. They will quote any person from a prime minister to the President of the United States as personal references, and they are certainly not to be trusted in word or deed."*

I don't know the circumstances of Ernst Renz boarding the *Dunera*. The ship stopped at three places in Africa – Freetown (Sierra Leone), Takadori (Ghana) and Cape Town (South Africa). Takadori is 600 kilometres from Lagos but

there are two countries in between – Togo and Benin. His card cites his previous place of residence as Nigeria so I doubt if Ernie went to England before joining the ship. Of the three African stop overs, Takadori is the most likely place he boarded ship, solely because it was the closest to Nigeria. However, if this was the case, there are many questions unanswered. How did he know that the *Dunera* was on its way? How did he get aboard seeing that the ship was dangerously overloaded and the plight of its passengers was so deplorable? How did he talk his way aboard? Perhaps I am wrong. He may have left Africa earlier to seek refuge in England where he became an enemy alien.



The route of the HMT *Dunera* – 1940.

When the *Dunera* arrived in Sydney in September 1940, the first Australian to board the ship was an army medical officer, Alan Frost. He was appalled at what he saw and submitted a damning report to the British authorities.

After disembarking the ship, the wretched refugees were put on a train to travel the 750 kilometres to the rural town of Hay in central New South Wales. Their treatment on the train was in stark contrast to the horrors of the *Dunera*. They were given food and fruit, and Australian soldiers offered them cigarettes. There was even one story of a soldier asking one of the internees to hold his rifle while he rolled his cigarette.

Meanwhile, Lt-Col William Scott and his seven officers were lauded by the press and public officialdom in Sydney, attending parties and soirées as the guests of honour. The British soldiers were offered free public transport and entry into cinemas: they were also taken on excursions to the Blue Mountains. This largesse was to change dramatically on their return to England.



## LEST WE FORGET



News of the dreadful voyage gradually leaked back to Britain and heated exchanges were conducted in the House of Commons. Colonel Victor Cazalet said: *"Frankly I shall not feel happy, either as an Englishman or as a supporter of this government, until this bespattered page of our history has been cleaned up and rewritten."* Churchill also came to regret the hasty deportations and he established a fund to compensate the *Dunera* passengers for the loss of their belongings.

A secret court of enquiry was held in Chelsea on 20 May 1941 but an embargo of 100 years before the release of details means that it is far too late for justice and no one will care about it. The reports of the Australian Medical Officer Alan Frost, and from Australian Quakers led to a court martial for Scott and two of his officers. Not one other officer responsible for the cruel treatment on board the *Dunera* faced any charges.

Lt-Col William Scott was found guilty on just the one charge, that of failing to hold a proper enquiry into the violent treatment of one internee (just the one). His punishment was a 'severe reprimand'. No other charges were ever brought against Scott or his men.

Regimental Sergeant Major Albert Bowles was the most brutal officer aboard. Twenty one charges were brought against him mainly relating to the theft of property. Not one charge of assault was laid. He was found guilty of only two charges and was reduced to the ranks, jailed for a year and then dismissed from the army. Another, Sergeant Helliwell faced four charges, two of assault, one of failing to safeguard internees from ill treatment and one of disobeying orders by failing to supply blankets and water. He was found guilty only of disobeying orders, and received a severe reprimand.

Not one internee was summoned as a witness for the victims of theft and violence, or to relate their own experiences to the court. This farce of a court martial was described by members of the House of Commons as *"a hushing-up operation"*, and *"a complete cover-up"* of the true facts.

In Hay, the internees set up and administered their own township with 'Hay' currency (which is now a valuable collectors' item) and an unofficial university. When Japan entered the war in 1941, the prisoners were reclassified as 'friendly aliens' and released by the Australian Government. About a thousand volunteered to join the Australian Military Forces and, having shown themselves to be loyal, were offered residency at the end of the war. Some returned to Britain, many of them joining the armed forces there. Others were recruited as interpreters or into the intelligence services. Not all of them suffered the barbs of prejudice mentioned above. Many of them expressed appreciation of the Australian families who welcomed them into their homes and the kindness extended to them. They were able to attend the local dances and some enjoyed assignations with local girls.

I have not exaggerated this brief history of the Dunera Boys for dramatic effect. In fact I have been deliberately restrained in describing these events. The book by Cyril Pearl mentioned in the bibliography is a thoroughly researched history. Another, also in the bibliography, is a more modest work but it provides an excellent potted history of the saga. It was written by Roy Wilcock for the Quakers.

As mentioned earlier, Ernie was interned in Tatura in northern Victoria, and it was from here that he enlisted in the 8th Employment Company. The Employment Companies were not armed. They were sometimes referred to as soldiers without guns. Some were located on the border of New South Wales and Victorian, where the folly of 19th Century state rivalry led to the stupidity of different rail gauges between the states. Employment Company soldiers worked on the trains at the border off-loading and re-loading military supplies including food, fuel, armaments and ammunition. Across the country, parties of Employment Company men worked in factories and on the wharves, repaired roads, drove trucks and undertook all the other tasks required to support the Army. But the Employment Companies barely rate a mention in the history of the war, and the 15,000 men who worked in them have been forgotten in history.



An 8th Employment Company working party unloading goods at a military warehouse in Melbourne.



Ernie Renz, a German engineer born in Berlin, worked in this company and was later to become a respected servant of the Country Roads Board. He lived a contented life in a single-fronted cottage in Johnson Street, Hawthorn, where he indulged his passion in growing roses.

He certainly would not have fired a gun in the 8th Australian Employment Company. This was one of 39 Employment Companies raised during the war, comprising about 15,000 men. The 8th worked in Victoria and Southern NSW. The men in these companies carried out the hard physical labour on the home front to support the national war effort. Sometimes they were called Labour Companies or Works Companies. Eleven of these companies comprised 'aliens' or non-British citizens.

The 8th Employment Company was probably the best-known of these companies because of its connection to the 'Dunera Boys'. The companies were considered to be part of the Citizen Military Force (CMF) and Ernie served 870 days up to his discharge in February 1947. His archive is only two pages long. It shows him being 'attached to strength' on 19 September 1944 with a few brief periods of hospitalisation. One of these – a broken finger – was caused during duty when a brass rod fell on his hand. Another, more ominous, was when he was admitted to hospital for cardio-vascular treatment and his health status was down-graded to 'D'.

Ernie was discharged on 5 February 1947 and I presume that he was also discharged from internment at about the same time. I am not sure when he joined the CRB but it is certain that Ernie was involved in the raising of the Bethanga Bridge in 1961. The Bethanga Bridge is a steel truss road bridge that carries the Riverina Highway across Lake Hume, an artificial lake on the Murray River. It crosses the border between NSW and Victoria linking the towns of Bellbridge and Bethanga in Victoria with the city of Albury in NSW. It was built between 1927 and 1930 as a joint venture between NSW and Victoria as part of the Hume Dam project. It consists of nine spans of 82 metres, each span being supported between double reinforced concrete pylons by a riveted steel camel back Pratt truss plus a 14-metre approach span on the Albury side.

The bridge is also unusual in that it was a major bridge built by other than a state road or rail authority. It was erected by the water authorities of Victoria and NSW, organisations which otherwise were only responsible for smaller bridges needed to cross the drainage and irrigation channels in their jurisdictions.

In 1961, the bridge deck and truss structure was raised 300 mm in response to the upgrading of Hume Dam to increase its storage capacity. Because of its unique location, over the waters of a dam with the border running down the centre of the body of water, the Bethanga Bridge is the only built structure shared by both NSW and Victoria - all the other Murray River bridges are in NSW. Ernie played an on-site

role in this process when the Country Roads Board was allocated this work on behalf of the Victorian State Rivers and Water Supply Commission.

He died on 15 August 1969 in the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital after a long illness.

By 1947, of the 2,562 refugees deported on *Dunera*, 913 remained in Australia – settling mostly in Melbourne. Thirteen had died and the remainder were repatriated to England or elsewhere. Their contribution to Australian society is significantly over-represented in fields such as music, art, mathematics, photography, writing, history, engineering, philosophy, film, sport, education and politics. The influence of that one ship of poorly-treated refugees on Australia was enormous.



Bethanga Bridge in 2007 during drought.



## And now for something beautiful

After the last newsletter I was asked to include a map of the Middle East and the one below shows the counties (coloured) which are generally recognized as 'The Middle East'. In the course of my work for the Overseas Projects Corporation of Victoria Ltd, I had occasion to visit Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Egypt, Lebanon and Bahrain.



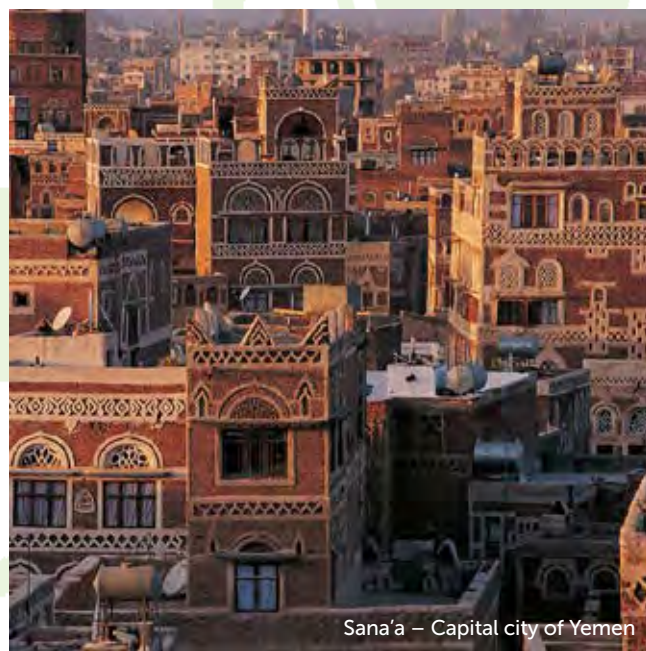
The term 'Middle East' was originally coined in the late 19th century by the British, along with other Eurocentric geographic terms such as the 'Near East' (the eastern Mediterranean regions closest to Europe) and the 'Far East' (China, Japan, Korea, and other East Asian entities much farther away from Europe). When you think about it, it is rather arguable – naming regions by their position in relation to the centre of the world i.e. the British Empire.

The Middle East is a relatively new construct. The start of the First World War in 1914 was a pivotal year, during the Middle East's gradual transfer from 500 years of Ottoman rule to 50 to 100 years of European rule. Western Europe was getting richer and more powerful as it carved up Africa, including the Arab states of North Africa, into colonial possessions. Virtually the entire region was ruled outright by Europeans or Ottomans, save for some parts of Iran and the Arabian Peninsula divided into European "zones of influence." When the war ended a few years later, the rest of the defeated Ottoman Empire would be carved up among the Europeans. The lines between French, Italian, Spanish, and British rule are crucial for understanding the region today – not just because they ruled differently and imposed different policies, but because the boundaries between European empires later became the official borders of independence, whether they made any sense or not.

The following map shows what the Middle East and North Africa looked like in 1914.



In the last newsletter, I showed some of the stunning landscapes of the Middle East. In this issue I show some of the stunning man-made edifices which make this such a fascinating part of the world. I have chosen sites that will be mainly unknown to you, rather than the blockbusters of the Pyramids in Egypt and Petra in Jordan.



**Sana'a** has a population of 2.5 million people. Situated in a mountain valley at an altitude of 2,200 m, Sana'a has been inhabited for more than 2,500 years. In the 7th and 8th centuries the city became a major centre for the propagation of Islam. This religious and political heritage



can be seen in the 103 mosques, 14 hammams (9 Turkish baths) and over 6,000 houses, all built before the 11th century. Sana'a's many-storeyed tower-houses built of rammed earth (pisé) add to the beauty of the site.

The Walled city of Shibam in Yemen



**Shibam**, which is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is known for its distinct architecture. The houses of Shibam are all made out of mudbrick, and about 500 of them are tower blocks, which rise 5 to 11 stories high, with each floor having one or two rooms. This architectural style was used in order to protect residents from Bedouin attacks. While Shibam has been in existence for an estimated 1,700 years, most of the city's houses originate from the 16th century. Many, though, have been rebuilt numerous times in the last few centuries.

Bahla in northern Oman



**Bahla** is notable as the home of one of the oldest fortresses in the Oman, the 13th century Bahla Fort. The fortress and the town are enclosed by extensive remnants of a 12km long fortified wall. Most buildings are constructed of traditional mud brick, many of them are hundreds of years old.

Isfahan, Iran



**Isfahan** is the pinnacle of Islamic architecture. It was once one of the largest and most important cities in Central Asia, positioned as it is on the crossroads of the main north-south and east-west trade routes that cross Central Asia. The city was the splendid capital of the Seljuq and Safavid dynasties, and is renowned for its beauty, which has given rise to the Iranian saying that "Isfahan is half the world". Iran was the home of the Moghuls who controlled most of India from the 16th to the 19th centuries. They brought their distinctive and elegant architecture (and gardens) to India – the most prominent example being the Taj Mahal. It is a magical site – even more beautiful than its photographs.

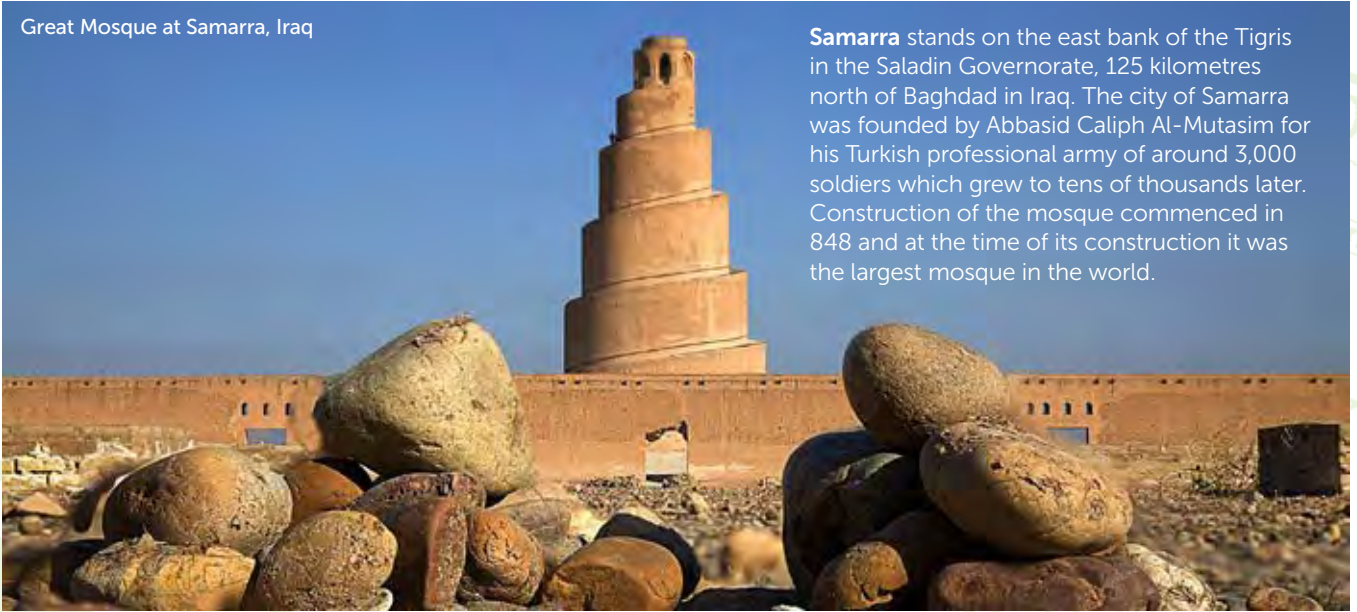
Palmyra, Syria



An oasis in the Syrian desert, north-east of Damascus, **Palmyra** contains the monumental ruins of a great city that was one of the most important cultural centres of the ancient world. From the 1st to the 2nd century, the art and architecture of Palmyra, standing at the crossroads of several civilizations, married Greco-Roman techniques with local traditions and Persian influences. The site has been under threat because of war damage. ISIS has destroyed many of the tombs and temples at Palmyra and other sites in Syria.

And now for something beautiful continued

Great Mosque at Samarra, Iraq



**Samarra** stands on the east bank of the Tigris in the Saladin Governorate, 125 kilometres north of Baghdad in Iraq. The city of Samarra was founded by Abbasid Caliph Al-Mutasim for his Turkish professional army of around 3,000 soldiers which grew to tens of thousands later. Construction of the mosque commenced in 848 and at the time of its construction it was the largest mosque in the world.

## Trivia and didactic whimsies

### Living Hell

An Englishman went into his daughter's bedroom and saw a letter addressed to "Mummy and Daddy" on the bed. With a heavy heart he opened it and read:

Dearest Mummy & Daddy,

It is with great regret and sorrow that I'm telling you that I've eloped with my new boyfriend. I've found real love and he is so nice - especially with all his piercings, tattoos and his big American motorcycle.

But it's not only that, I'm pregnant but I am sure that we will be very happy in his caravan in the bush. He wants to have many more children with me and that's one of my dreams, too. I've learned that marijuana does not hurt anyone and we'll be growing it only for our own use. In the meantime, we'll pray for science to find a cure for AIDS so he can get better. He really deserves it.

Don't worry, Mummy, now that I'm 15 I know how to take care of myself. Someday we'll visit you and Daddy so that you can meet your grandchildren.

Your loving daughter,

Sarah

P.S. Daddy, it's not true - I'm watching television with Jessica and her parents next door.

I just wanted to show you that there really are far worse things in life than England losing The Ashes.

### Commonwealth participation

King Charles III thought it would be a good idea to appoint a new group of footmen to walk beside his carriage for his coronation. He also thought it would be good if they came from different Commonwealth countries so he interviewed two blokes from the Australian outback who applied to the advertisement in the newspaper. They were very happy to be flown to London for an interview with His Majesty.

King Charles said to them: *"Because my footmen must wear long white stockings, I must see your ankles to be sure they are not swollen or misshapen."*

After they showed him their ankles, the King said: *"It is also important that you don't have knobby knees, so I need to see your knees too."*

Once he had seen their knees, he said: *"Now everything appears to be in shape, so I just need to see your testimonials."*

They didn't get the job because of a lack of education.

### Obvious

A tourist up on the Great Barrier Reef asked a diver: *"Why do Scuba divers always fall backwards off their boats?"* to which the diver replied: *"If they fell forwards, they'd still be in the boat."*

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