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Dear Members,

On behalf of the VicRoads Association, I want to wish you a happy Christmas and best wishes for the New Year.

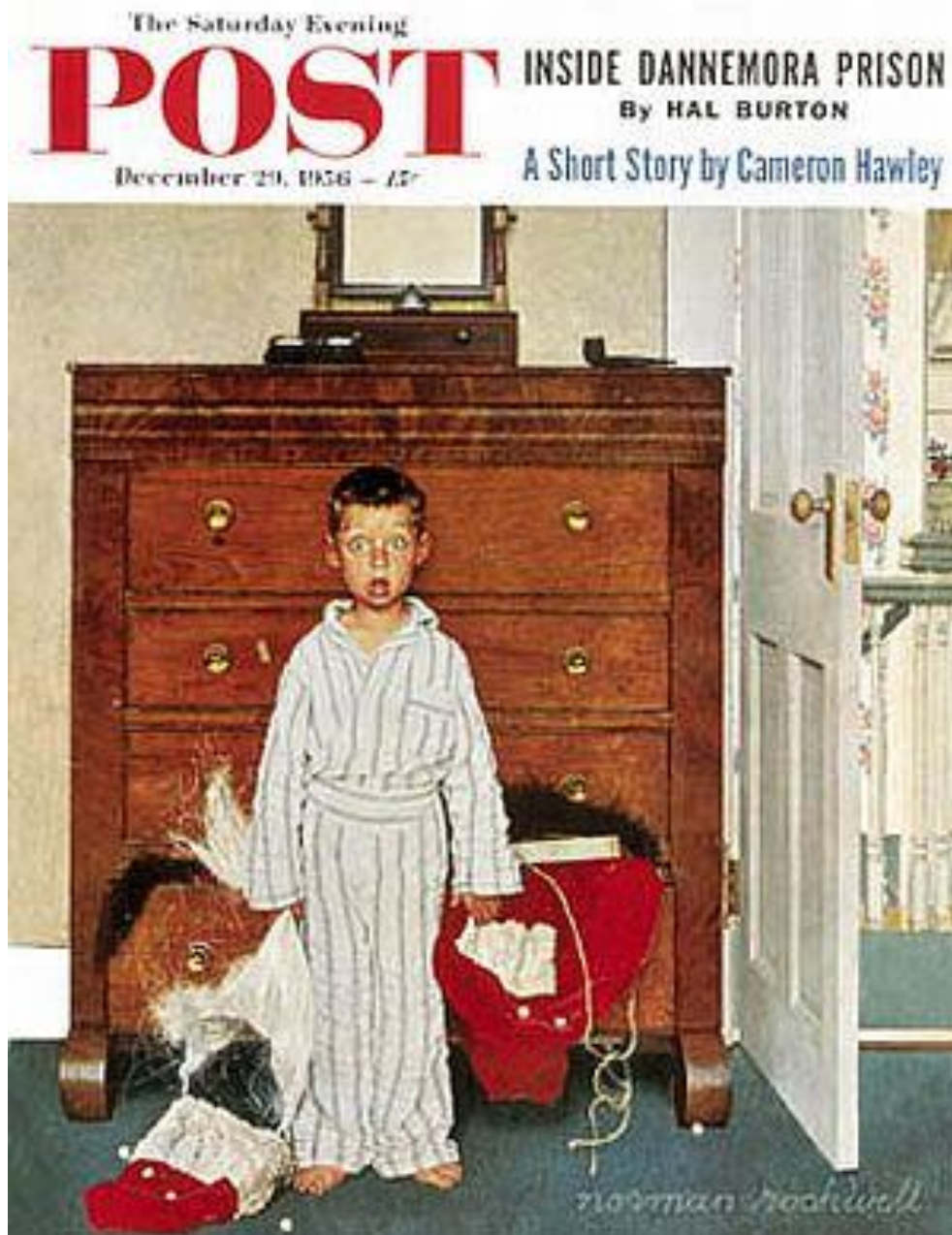
I have always enjoyed Christmas because of the joy it brought to my kids and now, my grandchildren. And I love the awful puns that appear in the Christmas crackers. The cornier they are, the better. You know – What do you call a greedy elf? Elfish. What is every parent's favourite carol? Silent Night. What does Santa do when the reindeers go too fast? Hang on for deer life. How did Joseph and Mary know the weight of Jesus when he was born? They had a weigh in a manger. Where do you find a Christmas tree? In between a Christmas two and a Christmas four. I must stop.

All roads lead to home at Christmas. It is a time when families unite and create new memories. I don't know if I have told you before – forgive me if I have – but my cousin bought one of the first movie cameras when I was a child of about eight, and he filmed Christmas day on the front lawn of our house with all the families being given their presents by Santa (another cousin). The Christmas tree was a tall, thin cypress by the front gate festooned with streamers, balloons and baubles. We decorated it on Christmas morning with another cousin.

And can you remember when your belief in Santa Claus waned? Or do you still believe in a sort of vicarious way? I happily entered into the conspiracy with my children and theirs. There were many important decisions to be made such as removing the fire screen to enable Santa's easy access to the Christmas stockings and his preferred snack. The Santa I knew always preferred a bit of fruit cake but, over the years, he had chips and hedgehog – and one year, a carrot. He often consumed a can of drink or a tot of whisky and he was meticulous in leaving crumbs behind to prove he was there. But on Christmas morning, the crumbs meant little. The stuff in the stockings was all that mattered. The crumbs were just insurance.

I can remember when doubts set in about Santa but I didn't tell anyone. After all I had a younger sister who still believed. I started to doubt because of conversations I heard at school

and an evolving wisdom accompanying maturity. I started to work things out for myself. Luckily, I didn't find out the hard way as depicted in Norman Rockwell's *Truth About Santa*.



Norman Rockwell's "Truth About Santa" captures the complete surprise of a crestfallen young boy who has discovered his Dad's Santa suit.

I should also acknowledge Mrs Santa Claus for her deceptions and skills to ensure that Santa's gifts arrived safely to their destination. When I was working down at Orbost, Mrs Santa Claus arrived in her Volvo station wagon sledge to pick me up from work for a drive to our home town of Colac – a drive of about seven hours. The kids started asking when we will we get there while we were still on the Snowy River flats. The sledge was packed full of luggage and all the other regalia needed for two adults and three small children. There were no gifts in sight but when we arrived at last in Colac, I was amazed to see two bicycles and a stack of other stuff emerge from underneath. It was a Christmas miracle!

The joy and laughter of the day wrapped us in a blanket of happiness and today, when I wake up on Christmas day, I rather wish I was still a child. Christmas day is a time of innocence. It is a time of eating together, sharing stories and nostalgia – when we think of everything we have loved. But while we think of the past, it is also a time of looking to the future and, in this regard my world has darkened a little.

Christmas is an annual festival celebrated on 25th of December and, for Christians, it commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ in a stable in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is located on the West Bank of the Dead Sea in the state of Palestine – a predominantly Islamic country. Christian families that have lived in Bethlehem for hundreds of years are being forced out of their homes – not by the Muslims but by the Israelis. Their land has been seized, their homes demolished and thousands of new homes have been constructed for Israelis. Palestinians have been separated from their farms and Christian communities from their places of worship.

I don't wish to end on a sad note. I would love the spirit of Christmas to invade Bethlehem today so that everyone can live in peace whether they be Christian, Muslim, Jewish or atheist. This is the real meaning of Christmas.

Peace on Earth, good will to all men and women and children!

Since I wrote this, the Middle East has exploded. Woe is me!

WHAT'S COMING UP

Please remember that partners and friends are always welcome to our events.

Occasional Lunches at Shoppingtown Hotel, 12 noon.

Our first lunch for 2024 will be held on Monday 5 February. There is no need to register – just turn up.

Christmas Luncheon at Waverley RSL – Tuesday 12 December at 12 noon.

If you have not yet registered, please contact Ken Vickery on kenvickery@tpg.com.au or 0409 561 618. The cost is \$50 per head.

Trip to Snowy River Hydro Scheme – March 2024

We are currently planning a trip to the Snowy River Highway Scheme commencing on Tuesday 26 March 2024. We plan to meet at Traralgon for a briefing by Regional Roads Victoria and drive on to Orbost where we will stay overnight.

The following day (27 March) we propose to drive to Cooma and in the afternoon visit the Snowy Hydro Discovery Centre. We would stay at Cooma the next night.

We have not yet finalized the completion of the trip. One option is to go on to Canberra before returning to Melbourne.

We will keep you informed in later newsletters about the itinerary but, in the meantime, we would like you to pencil these dates in your diary should you be interested in joining us.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

We had a wonderful dinner at the Waverley RSL on 5 October 2023. Many commented on the excellent meal. My paella reminded me of Spain! We had an attendance of 32 and it was so successful that the Committee has decided to have three dinners there next year instead of the usual two. It was pleasing to see some new faces there – including Robin and Gernot Schubert and Raj Ramalingam. I introduce Raj to Ted Barton because I knew Raj originally came from Malaysia and Ted worked there for many years with JKR – The Public Works Department. As it turned out, they worked together there many years ago.

Our first dinner at Waverley RSL for next year will follow our Annual General Meeting on Thursday 14 March 2024.

We also had another record turn up for our lunch at the Shoppingtown Hotel on 9 October. We also had some new faces - Raj Ramalingam, David Austen, and Robyn Robb – forgive me if I have left anyone out.

VALE

I am saddened to report the death of Peter Evans. Peter was an engineer who worked in Dandenong Division during the 1970s and '80s. He was not a member of the Association.

We extend our sincere sympathy to Kathy and their two children, Jonathon and Annabelle.

THE HISTORY OF HEAD OFFICE – 60 DENMARK STREET, KEW

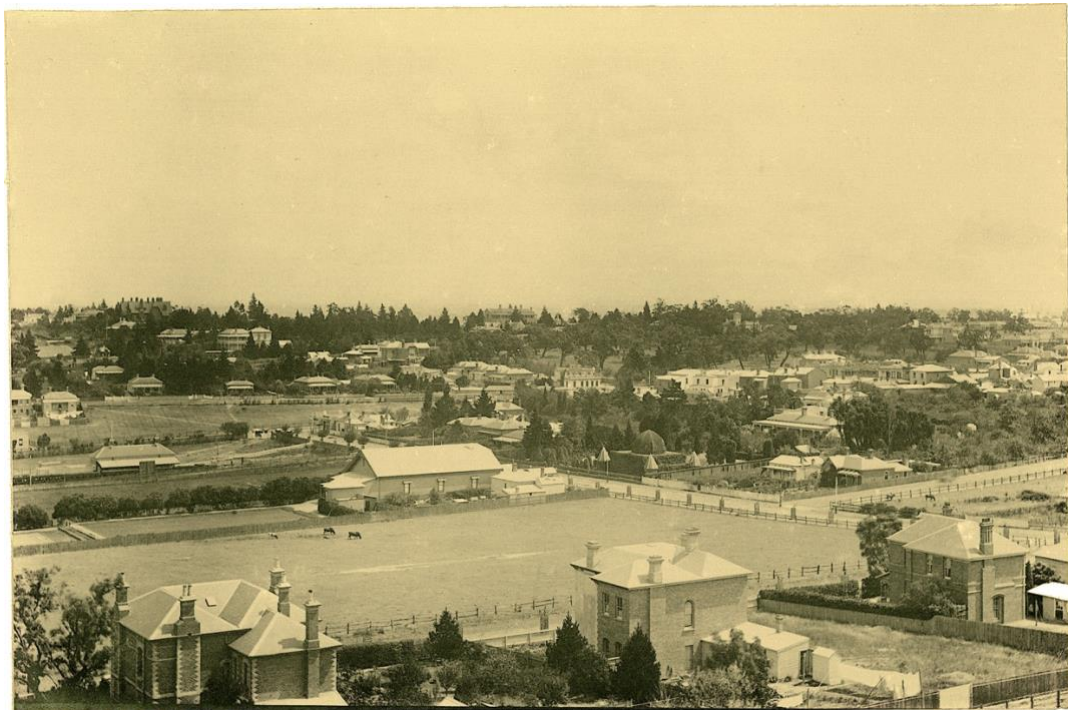
In this newsletter, I want to linger further on the early history of Kew – especially its history of tramways, railway and later, roads, through the connection with the Head Office building of the Country Roads Board. I hope I am not being too indulgent, but I am inspired by some wonderful photographs of early days in the collection of the Kew Historical Society. I also confess I am stalling a bit, as I am awaiting Kevin Fox's return from a holiday so that he can forward to me the story he wrote about the design and construction of Head Office.

I found this wonderful image of Kew Junction taken in 1891. It is taken looking up High Street from the junction and, in the distance, you can see the Post Office on the top of the hill on the right-hand side.



Kew Junction - 1891.

There are tram tracks and, nearing the top of the hill there is a tram bound for Boroondara Cemetery. The tramway was horse-drawn. The first horse tramway in Melbourne was built in Fairfield in 1884. The tramway started operating through Kew in 1887 – the same year that Kew Railway Station opened. As is the case today, the tramline encouraged growth along its route and the remoteness of Kew Station – when compared to the convenient access to the tramway along the roads – was almost certainly a factor in the eventual demise of the railway line.



View of Kew from the roof of Xavier College extending west towards the rise of Studley Park - 1891.

This view faces to the west. The houses in the foreground face the southern end of Gellibrand Street. Wellington Street is at an angle to the camera with the Queen Street intersection on the near right. The wooden building behind the large horse paddock on the other side of Gellibrand Street is the Kew Recreation Hall, built in 1888 and demolished 1960. The bowling green at the rear of the Hall belonged to the Kew Bowling Club. It still exists although it is not used now.

The Kew Railway Station on Denmark Street – the site of VicRoads Head Office - is on the left at the mid-height of the picture. You can see that it is not really close to residential areas and is relatively isolated.



Panoramic view of Kew looking east along Wellington Street – 1891

This view is taken in the opposite direction to the previous photograph and very few of the natural or built features remain – apart from Xavier College in the distance. The open land between High Street South and Denmark Street, then known as O’Shannessy’s Paddock, was to become a residential subdivision at the beginning of the 20th Century.

At mid-height on the right-hand side of the photograph is Kew Railway Station - the site of the CRB Head Office. It is on the far side of Denmark Street, bordered by a picket fence. Further east, the large building with the flagpole is the Kew Recreation Hall, which was the centre of civic life in Kew for almost a century. The building was used for dances, civic functions and exhibitions. A bowling green, tennis courts, and a cricket ground surrounded the hall.

The dominant building in the photograph is Xavier College, founded in 1872 by the Society of Jesus. The first classes for pupils were held in 1878.



Chandler Highway Bridge – 1891.

The 137 m long railway viaduct (now the old Chandler Highway Bridge) linked East Kew and Fairfield Railway Stations via Fullham Grange and Willsmere. The viaduct is significant as the most substantial extant engineering remnant of the Outer Circle Railway Line. The viaduct crossed the Yarra River in four spans, supported by three red brick piers.

The bridge is a lattice truss girder structure with diagonal members. Construction commenced in February 1889 and completed in November 1890; the supervising engineer was a young John Monash.

Opening in March 1891, this steam-era suburban railway line of 16.6 kms ran from Fairfield to East Camberwell and then south along the current Alamein line to Oakleigh. By 1893 sections of the railway had closed down, including the Fairfield Park (later Fairfield) to Riversdale Line which incorporated the Chandler Highway Bridge. By 1897 the entire Outer Circle Railway Line was out of service. The project attracted much public controversy for government mismanagement and overspending, and was widely seen as a failure with much of the infrastructure becoming redundant.

The bridge became a well-known folly in Melbourne for 37 years during which time it remained open to pedestrian traffic. In 1930 the bridge was converted to accommodate vehicular traffic and became part of the road known as the Chandler Highway. It was again closed in 2019 when a new bridge alongside it was opened to traffic and the old bridge once more reverted to pedestrian traffic.

In the foreground of the photograph are the grounds of what was then the Kew Lunatic Asylum. They extended down to the Yarra River and eastward beyond the viaduct.

The landscape surrounding the Asylum was planted with traditional exotic trees such as Oaks, Pines and Cedars, and landmark trees from northern Australia such as the Hoop Pine. Remnant indigenous trees such as the River Red Gum, Yellow Box and Lightwood were scattered around the site, including beside the Yarra River.



A view of High Street looking down to the junction with the Clifton Hotel in the far distance.

The photograph shows horse drawn vehicles and a horse drawn tram. Since then, the southern side of the street (on the left) has been demolished in order to widen the street. The ES & A Bank building on the right still exists.



High Street, Kew - c 1920s.

This photograph is taken in the 1920s looking up High Street from the junction. The street has been widened and the tramway has been electrified. Tram travellers are standing on the road waiting to board the tram.

Melbourne's first trams were horse drawn and then powered by cable and later, electricity. The advantage of a horse tram over a horse omnibus is that it provided a much smoother ride, together with the ability to haul much greater loads, due to the lower rolling resistance of iron wheels on steel rails as compared to rough road surfaces. However, horse trams were not ideal, as the horses left an unwelcome trail of manure and urine in their wake. This aspect of horses contributed to the distinctive odour of 'Smellbourne', as an un-sewered Melbourne was known to Sydneysiders at the time.



MTOC horse tram outside depot at the corner of Auburn and Riversdale Roads, circa 1910.

During the planning of the Melbourne cable tram system the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company (MTOC) took a very hard-headed approach towards the proposed routes. Extensive surveys were made of population density of municipalities, as well as reviews of patronage of its existing horse omnibus routes. This approach was taken due to the high capital cost of cable tramways, and a desire to ensure an adequate return on capital.

As a result, two of the proposed MTOC lines were planned as horse tramways – the Kew and Hawthorn lines. The first of these lines opened in 1887 from the Victoria Bridge cable tram terminus to Boorondara Cemetery in Kew. Due to the life expectancy of the time, particularly infant mortality rates, cemeteries were popular destinations and could demand consistent patronage of public transport.

The second of these lines ran from Hawthorn Bridge via Burwood Road, Power Street and Riversdale Road to Auburn Road, opening in 1890. Both of these lines were much more soundly financial than other Melbourne horse trams, and operated without incident, with one dramatic exception.

After midnight on the morning of 18 August 1901 the Hawthorn horse tram was held up by four masked men as it was proceeding east along Riversdale Road just after leaving Power Street. One of the men leapt on board and held a revolver to the cheek of the driver, Thomas Taylor, demanding that the tram be stopped.

Taylor complied, but pleaded with his assailant that he be allowed to apply the handbrake to prevent the car from rolling backwards and dragging the horses with it. He was allowed to do so, but was then thrown into the saloon to join the seven male passengers inside, together with a solicitor who was smoking on the end platform.

The urban bushrangers, all wearing slouch hats and tweed coats, demanded that the passengers and Taylor hand over their valuables. After assaulting one of the passengers, they stole £2.10.0 in fares from Taylor and £21.19.0 in cash from the eight passengers, as well as a number of watches and watch chains.

They then disappeared into the night, leaving Taylor to drive the horse tram to the terminus at Auburn Road, where he reported the crime to Hawthorn police. The horse tram bandits were never captured. It was hypothesized in newspapers of the day that they were after a certain individual who regularly travelled on the line, and who was in the habit of carrying large amounts of cash.

The Kew line was purchased by Kew Council in 1914 who replaced it with an electric tramway in 1915.

Consolidation of all of the systems occurred with the formation of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (MMTB) in 1920, who eventually took control of all the lines. The MMTB continued the expansion of the electric tramways and began the process of electrifying the cable network, which began in earnest by the mid-1920s. Though many more lines were planned, the Great Depression and World War II slowed the process of construction. The electrification of the cable network was effectively completed by 1956 with the opening of the Bourke Street lines. However, by this time, the increasing popularity of the motor vehicle and the anti-tram Bolte government prevented any expansion in the following years, and overall patronage began to decline.

Kevin has sent me the information I requested so I will write about the building and opening of Head Office in Kew in the next newsletter.

RECOLLECTIONS OF HEAD OFFICE

Our Second Last Meeting at Head Office

Here is the VicRoads Association committee convening for our second last meeting at Head Office – on 9 October 2023. We are valiantly ignoring the inevitability of being homeless in 2024.



Left to right: Noel Osborne, Jill Earnshaw, Iris Whittaker, Ken Vickery, David Jellie, Jim Webber, Graham Gilpin, Alan Mackinlay and Patsy Kennedy.

Max Palmer

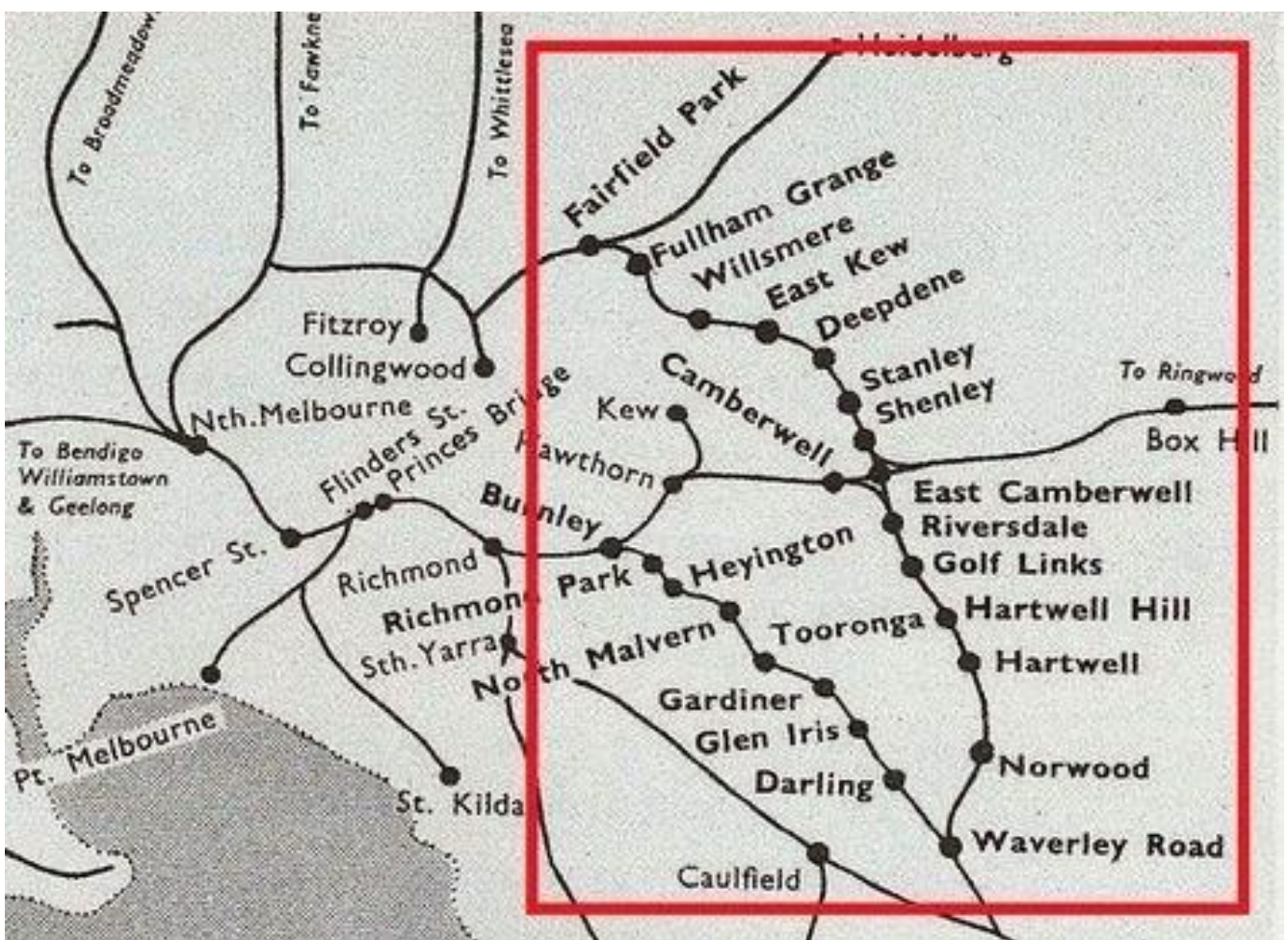
‘Great article so far on CRB head office. I started at the laboratory in Drummond Street Carlton before transferring to Bridge Division construction at Head Office working with Bob Gooch.

With regard to the rail alignment from Hawthorn to Kew, I had the impression it was proposed to continue on via a tunnel to connect with the Chandler Highway bridge, which I think was designed as a railway bridge, across the Yarra River near the paper mill.

In days gone by there were a number of inner and outer circle railway lines proposed in the Melbourne system; some were constructed and some were not, but land for the alignments can be seen on some old maps and street directories.'

Editor's note:

Max was nearly right. The Fairfield Park to Riversdale section of the Outer Circle railway line opened on 24 March 1891, running from Fairfield station onwards through Riversdale to East Camberwell station, and eventually south to Oakleigh. It closed shortly after in 1893 from service cuts due to a lack of passengers, leaving behind a disused railway bridge crossing the Yarra River. After the rails were lifted from the bridge in 1919, the remaining single-track railway line, running from Fairfield station through the middle of the Heidelberg Road-Chandler Highway intersection, became the Australian Paper Manufacturer's siding; the siding was later removed in the mid-1990s. The bridge was re-purposed as the Chandler Highway in 1930, crossing the river and subsuming the length of Fulham Road south of Heidelberg Road the former railway had cut through.

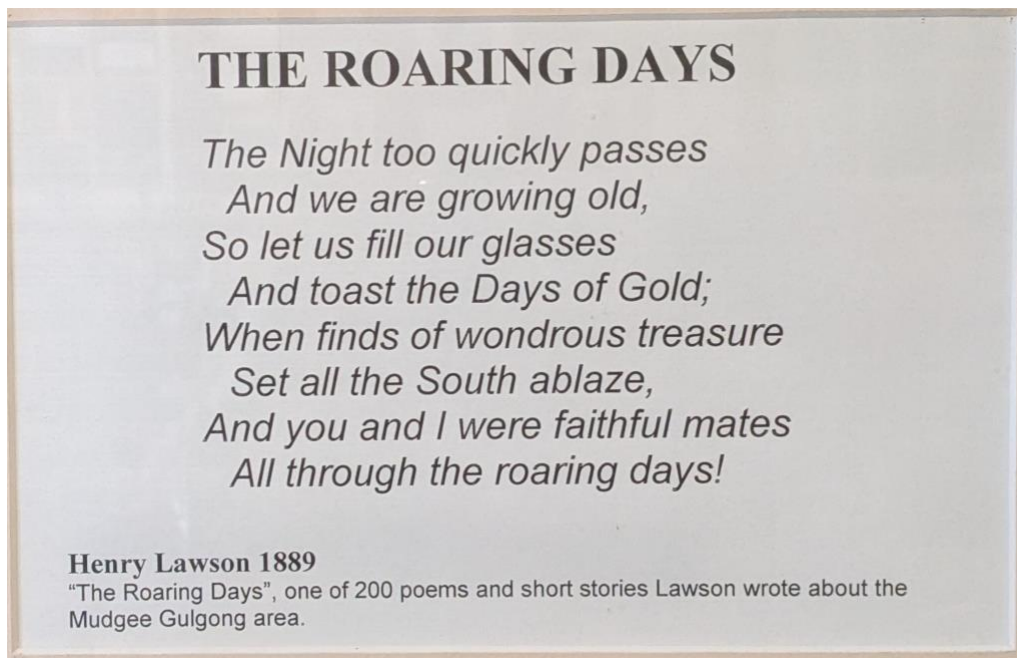


Map of the Outer Circle Railway.

Maurice Burley

'Thank you for your regular newsletters. They are not only interesting but inspiring in many ways.'

Your opening article about the end of an era will strike common thoughts and memories for many. I recently visited the Henry Lawson Museum in Gulgong, NSW, and took the attached photo which laments passing days (although about the days of gold in that area) – but more broadly I think the poem reflects our shared memories and past, with much to celebrate during our careers over the years.'



Richard Roberts

Richard is not a member of the Association. He is a personal friend of my family and the grandson of the ex-Chairman of the CRB – Caleb Roberts. He wrote:

'Hi David - thanks for the email reading the latest newsletter made me immediately think of what we all called that building in Denmark Street - I can't remember who came up with the phrase, but when driving past it one day, one of us kids described it as 'Grandpa's School' when Dad said that was where grandpa had worked and the name stuck! I believe that was the building where after a break-in and a routine search, the police found a loaded Luger in Grandpa's top drawer in his desk!'

Editor's note:

Caleb's service during the First and Second World Wars is described later in this newsletter under Lest We Forget.

Robert Morgan

Robert is a collector of old Victorian Railways tickets and found this one – dated 12 August 1898. Thank you, Robert, for sharing it with us. I am sure it is rare – if not unique.



Graham Gilpin

'Smoking

I too was there from day one and recall the lack of air conditioning etc. One thing you didn't mention was that this problem was also exacerbated by the fact that we were still in an era when smoking inside was accepted practice and non-smokers just had to accept it.

Printing

As a then Bridgie, I'm sure you'll also recall the metal trough that you could call up out of a hole in the wall to send plans down to the printing section on the Lower Ground Floor [to be printed via an historic process] and then returned to the Second Floor via the "coffin" which rolled out of aforesaid hole with considerable noise.'

Tea ladies

Every morning and afternoon tea time, tea ladies would leave a trolley at selected locations on each floor for staff to help themselves to morning and/or afternoon tea. The trollies contained two gigantic tea pots – one with tea and one with hot water. We were also provided with milk [in a bottle], a cup and saucer, tea spoons and sugar. This was quite a step up from Exhibition Building where we were not provided with a saucer, or teaspoons and it was bring your own sugar!

Sign on sheets

All staff below a certain level had to sign on in the morning and off in the evening. The sheets were provided on each floor outside the lifts. 15 minutes after starting time the sheets were removed and taken to "Personnel" [later H.R.] on the fifth floor and if you were late you had to go up there to check in.

Class 1 engineers certainly had to sign on. I'm not sure about Class 2.

Class distinction

You could readily tell where a person sat in the corporate hierarchy as each level was provided with different standard of furniture and office space. As you climbed the ladder you got a better chair, better desk, separate office with glass walls, separate office with timber walls, carpet instead of hard flooring etc etc.

Service station

The CRB did its own servicing and maintenance of the passenger vehicle fleet with a service station at LGF level on the east side of the building. Most cars in those days required a service/oil change every 1000 miles, so it was kept pretty busy. We also had our own petrol station for CRB vehicles [red plates] although it only stored "Standard" fuel. I'm a bit hazy

about this but I seem to recall many Holdens of the day needed to run on “Super” and we got around this by installing an extra head gasket to lower the compression ratio and hence allow to vehicle to run on standard fuel.’

Editor’s note

Graham’s recollections evoke many comments from me. First the smoking. I am appalled when I remember this. I reckon about half the people smoked then and we left filthy ashtrays on our desks for the cleaners to tidy up at the end of the day. No area was out-of-bounds for smokers. We even smoked in the cafeteria. I confess I was a guilty party until July 1984 when I was working down at the West Gate Freeway Office in Moray Street, South Melbourne. During our project meetings, everyone put their cigarettes on the table and we made important decisions in a haze.

Graham also reminds me of the printing process. Plans were produced on tracing paper and these were fed through a printing process and finally passed through a chlorine bath. They were then hung out to dry. There was often an unmistakable aroma of chlorine in the Printing Room and in the newly printed sheets of drawings.

Which leads me on to our first photocopier. It was located in Plans and Survey on the Third Floor. It was a ‘wet’ printer and the technology was deemed too complex for ordinary people so a person was put in charge. All prints were done by her via a requisition and I remember how amazed I was to receive the prints. They were on a heavy, plastic sort of paper and if the prints were exposed to too much light, the images disappeared. Even if they were filed under cover, the images gently faded into another world!

The tea ladies were wonderful. Always friendly. I learnt a lot about work and life in the tea circle. We discussed moment distribution, shear forces and anchorage lengths for reinforcement as well as football and cricket. I can’t remember talking about politics but a few talked about shares. One of my colleagues, Don McRae, became very wealthy when he made a killing on Poseidon shares. He reverted from being a bridge designer and became a stock broker.

Graham forgot to mention that there were also biscuits provided at afternoon tea. They were not free - you had to pay a penny for them. I remember a very senior member of staff approaching the tea table patting his pockets all the while claiming he had no small change on him, asking others to throw in a penny for him. All of us were conned.

I lived in East Ivanhoe and each morning, Colin Roy used to pick me up. We were always a bit late. Colin dropped me off at the Lower Ground Floor entrance and I leapt up the three flights of stairs three at a time, in order to sign on for Colin and myself. It would kill me now. Peter de Jong. The Chief Bridge Engineer’s clerk was invariably standing there with a ruler and red pen waiting to draw a line across the register at the appointed starting time. To be fair to Peter he usually provided five minutes of grace.

The other distinction about class was in the cafeteria. The cafeteria served excellent food and was very popular. I remember they served a ‘cold collation’. I was a boy from the bush and had no idea what that was – only to learn it was a vegetarian salad with lots of cheese. The fish and chips on Fridays were very popular – no doubt satisfying those in our midst who were Catholic. At 12.45 pm, the start of lunch time, the queue in the cafeteria snaked out of the room and into the hallway. However senior members of staff (all men) walked straight past the queue into the small dining room at the rear of the kitchen (out of bounds for mortals) where they received

table service for meals that were heavily subsidised by the Board. Mind you, our meals were similarly subsidised and you'd have to have rocks in your head to eat out.

NEWS FROM MEMBERS

Trevor Phillips

Trevor wrote to me regarding the traffic and road safety issues mentioned in Newsletter 249. He deplored the Government's transport policy relating to roads saying the intention was to make the populace walk or ride a bike. He said that one day he might rupture his spleen in which case I will be denied any further communications from him.

None of us want that, Trevor.

In relation to the report on Plenty Road being Australia's most dangerous road he said:

'If you look at the road layout over the districts adjacent to Plenty Road north of the Metro Ring-road you will see that there has been a sad lack of planning of the road network through what was grazing land which has been converted in the last 30 years to reasonably medium density suburban living.

The spacing and capacity of North-South arterial roads is very variable both East and West of the Hume highway. The only one of any significance is the Hume Freeway north of Mahoney's Road.

What adds to the problem of Plenty Road is that there are virtually no East-West arterial roads that have continuity across the district. In other words, East-West travel has to share the North South travel in Plenty Road adding to the traffic demand. This infers significant traffic movements at all arterial road intersections with Plenty Road.

The strip shopping centre at Settlement Road and the two University campuses add to the demand at adjacent arterial intersections but are not the fundamental cause of the safety issues.'

He also said:

'I was encouraged to read the contribution from Graeme Walter. Without a doubt the technical expertise of VicRoads has to be questioned. The appointments of non-qualified staff to what were previously senior engineering appointments is seen by many as the beginning of the end of that technical expertise. There are similar knowledge gaps in many municipal appointments created by senior managers not knowing they don't know. I am aware of at least three VicRoads Regional Managers who were variously Administration Clerks, Council librarians or Emergency Services operatives, none of whom had any relevant technical knowledge regarding roads or transport systems.

One is tempted to include comment on the total over-kill of continuous multiple wire rope barriers on some freeways and even some highways. These were introduced by a government entity which had only one criterion to consider – road safety. No knowledge of freeway design where batter-slopes were mainly constructed at slight-slopes so a vehicle leaving the pavement had a reasonable chance of recovery. Add to this the refusal to clear vegetation re-growth within and beyond the shoulders perhaps provides some insight into the frequency of vehicles

colliding with trees and wandering animals and not providing appropriate sight-distances at intersections.

Safety primacy has been supplanted by environmental emotion.

David, I now challenge you to publish these comments as there is no ongoing necessity to kow-tow to the pressures of the Department of Transport. Alternatively, you could publish the current State Government Transport policy regarding roads which would help all ex-employees understand what is happening (or not happening) to a road system that made a lot of people proud to come to work.

Very few would seek to be re-employed under the current regime.'

Robert Morgan

'Newsletter No. 249 is my idea of a good newsletter – full of traffic and road safety discussion! I worked out years ago that the best way to become a grumpy old man was to start out as a grumpy young man. After all, there's no substitute for experience.

When I worked with the City of St Kilda through the 1980s I used to say that the only reason parents parked right outside the school gate and over the children's crossing was that the gates and the front doors weren't wide enough for them to drive inside the building to drop off or pick up their precious darlings. My solution (not adopted, oddly) was to ban parking within a kilometre of all schools. My second option was to implement expensive congestion charging schemes around all schools at the start and end of the school day, local residents excepted. At least this would set up a black market in resident permits, resulting in a redistribution of wealth.

Many of the aspects you mentioned are outside my area of expertise, but are certainly within the scope of government regulation: tailgating, mobile phone use, the attraction of large vehicles vs smaller ones, and so on. Then there are the issues that are in my area, but beyond the ability of what's left of the state road authority to recognise, consider or solve, due to the unrelenting downsizing and deskilling of VicRoads by successive state governments – and the rise of managerialism. To paraphrase the Captain in the 1967 film *Cool Hand Luke*,

"What we've got here is failure to govern."

Some people in power you just can't reach, so you get what we have here, week after week: big announceable projects that provide photo opportunities, with no care about a well-functioning society or road and traffic system.' (I went a little off the script here).

Removing parking from arterial roads, actively managing congestion, reducing traffic-generated pollution, providing an adequate grid of arterial roads in new suburbs (to avoid congestion), banning distributor roads with driveways (for safety), replacing most Stop signs with Give Way (unfinished from Ted Barton's initiative in 1990), double-cycling pedestrian signals (so pedestrians use them), and so on. All these and much more would be part of an effective transport plan, but state governments don't like plans because they will be held to account. So, while your comments about poor behaviour and a lack of community concern by road users are quite valid, are these not just a variation on the way our state government treats us all, with opportunistic disdain?

I agree with everything Ted Barton said about the Hume Freeway needing to be brought up to full freeway conditions. The lack of action is symptomatic of the politically-engineered decline in state road authority skills and capabilities – down to what Graeme Walter rightly refers to as ‘a technically incompetent organisation’. Again, there is no plan to achieve any effective action on the Hume by any set date. I was at a national road safety conference in late September where a few ‘bright young things’ from the TAC were complementing themselves on what a great job they’d done installing wire rope barriers up the Hume Freeway and other routes. Problem solved! By the way, it’s called a freeway as it was built under freeway provisions of the Act, which deny adjacent landholders access to the road (unlike in NSW). It is certainly time for action. In 2011 Andrew O’Brien analysed crash data at wide median treatments and showed that the crash rate goes up dramatically where total side road entry volumes exceed around 250-300 vehicles/day. This volume is indicative of where only familiar locals are accessing the intersections from the side roads. The four older people involved in the Chiltern crash were not local. We also know that older drivers have more difficulty assessing conditions like those at Chiltern. I’ve investigated other sites where the truck driver has said the side road driver (who was older) had stopped, then suddenly pulled out, giving him no time to brake. As you say, considering that the Hume is a National Highway, for which federal money can be obtained, it is a disgrace that the Victorian Government is asleep.

Ted makes an interesting point about how some freeway drivers respond to side-road-activated 80 km/h warnings in a potentially dangerous way. Part of this is because of the low speed enforcement tolerance regime in Victoria and people’s fear of getting (yet another) speeding ticket for being even 1 km/h over the limit. When the skills are lost in the state road authority, the well-meaning road safety zealots fill the vacuum with simplistic solutions. The first of these treatments, on the Glenelg Highway west of Dunkeld has resulted in no reduction in crash severity because (in my assessment) the causes of the original crashes were not identified; the cure-all of slowing drivers down was seen as the solution. At the same recent conference, the people at Adelaide University’s Centre for Automotive Safety Research discussed a ‘lite’ (and cheaper) version of the side-road-activated speed reduction technique they have developed. It consists of flashing lights and an *advisory* lower speed ‘when flashing’. This may actually work better in Victoria, where fear of a speeding ticket is high. Interestingly, even when that sign is not flashing, main road drivers ease up on their speeds through the intersection.

As I have stated often, Victoria does not need yet another parliamentary inquiry into road safety; it needs a high-level, independent and adequately resourced inquiry, akin to a Royal Commission.’

David Blore

‘A great read, as always. We’re very disappointed that we won’t be able to make the Christmas lunch this year, as it clashes with our local Probus Club luncheon (Gary Edwards may have a similar problem as he is also a member). We greatly enjoyed the lunch last year not only for the food and venue but importantly for reconnecting with so many familiar names, if not always faces at first sight!

Reminiscing at such times is wonderful. We had the best of times I think in our employment in an organisation where people were valued and the quality of our professional work was paramount. Focussing on the development of expertise, technical skills and excellence in project delivery in the service of the Victorian public rather than the quick buck, while possibly not to the bean counters’ taste or the developing political ideology, was in my mind conducive

to far better outcomes when social, environmental and economic considerations were all included. That's enough of a rant!

Re the Newsletter, I was highly amused by your two jokes and wondered if I could pass them on to our Probus President (I'm Secretary this year) as he likes to entertain with a joke or two - and yours are certainly less off-colour than the last ones he told! Naturally I'll ask him to appropriately attribute them.

I haven't forgotten your request for a quick summary of my military and CRB/RCA/VicRoads experience. Thankfully we are near the end of an arduous pre-poll and polling period - only four more days to go.'

I gave David permission to use the jokes without attributing them – telling him that laughter is free!

DOCTOR JELLIE'S HEALTH TIPS FOR HOT WEATHER

El Nino is upon us. It has been announced recently that the world weather patterns have revealed that we are liable to undergo very hot and dry weather over the next few years as a consequence of the El Nino effect. In fact, *The Australian* describes it as a Super El Nino as it appears it has the potential to be stronger than others in the past.

El Ninos can cause drier than normal conditions that tend to encompass large regions of eastern and parts of northern Australia, often leading to warmer than average daytimes. It also increases the likelihood of bushfire and is the type of weather that increases the risk of fires spreading rapidly.



It also increases frost risk and increases coral bleaching but reduces the likelihood of tropical cyclones.

During extreme heat it is easy for your body to overheat through dehydration. This can lead to heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heatstroke. Heatstroke is classified as a medical emergency which can lead to permanent damage to vital organs – and even death.

The death toll from heatwaves in Australia has exceeded that for any other environmental disaster, including floods, bushfires and cyclones, and the same is true for Europe and the USA. In Victoria, in early 2009, the heatwave that preceded the Black Saturday bushfires resulted in 374 more deaths than would otherwise be expected (excess deaths), while 173 people perished in the fires themselves.

After a four-day heatwave in Victoria in 2014, 222 deaths were examined by the coroner. Of these, 94 (56%) were considered to be heat-related. In that study, older people were more at risk of dying, as well as those with cardiovascular disease, mental disorders or lung disease.

Victoria is the most vulnerable state in Australia - with 50 per cent of deaths and South Australia has 25 per cent of deaths. The worst zone in Victoria is from Ballarat and Bendigo in the west, to the Murray River in the north, and to Traralgon in the east. Melbourne is the epicentre.

Everyone is at risk during extreme heat, but special care is needed in the following people and circumstances:

- The aged – their increased vulnerability relates to several factors including an impaired bodily response to heat, reduced thirst awareness, diminished ability to sweat and the presence of chronic disease.
- People who have a medical condition such as diabetes, kidney disease and mental illness.
- People who have problematic alcohol or drug use.
- Taking medications which affect the way the body reacts to heat. These include diuretics, many blood pressure and mood stabilizing drugs, anti-histamines and anti-cholinergic drugs (used for treating a variety of conditions including movement disorders and bladder problems).
- Reduced mobility – limited access to fluids due to disability or being bed-ridden, including nursing-home residents.
- Social isolation where cognitive impairment or language problems limit access to support or emergency alerts.
- Low socio-economic status – lack of air-conditioning, limited housing and transport options.
- Outdoor work or recreation.
- Sustained, strenuous exercise. Even fit, healthy people can develop heat stroke. Fatalities have occurred among bushwalkers, especially tourists.
- High humidity levels – these reduce the ability of sweating to cool the body.
- Over-heating may occur on extremely hot days that are not necessarily within a defined heatwave but with similar harmful effects if there has been little chance to acclimatise.
- Recent arrivals from cooler climates.

The following advice applies to everyone:

- Increase fluids, especially cool water but avoid alcohol. Drink water even if you don't feel thirsty.
- Wear light, loose clothing and a hat.
- Modify activity, stay indoors where there is air-conditioning or go to a cool environment such as a shopping centre or local library.
- Stay in touch with friends and family, especially the elderly and those who are socially isolated.

- Modify medication on medical advice. Store medications in a cool area.
- Open windows when it cools down.
- Use wet towels and cool (not cold) showers to cool down.
- Stay out of direct sunlight during the hottest part of the day.
- Do not leave anyone in cars, especially children and pets. Provide adequate water and shade for pets.
- Tune in to emergency advice, by phone app or radio.
- Plan ahead for hot weather, including power outages.
- Phone '000' in a life- threatening emergency.

I will bulkbill all of you for these tips – on condition that you observe them.

LEST WE FORGET

In this newsletter, I tell the stories of two soldiers who served in the First World War and one of them played a critical role in the Second World War.

Corporal Norman Sinclair Bissett, 1401

There is a photograph taken in 1930 of the staff of the CRB in which many of the men are wearing RSL badges indicating that they are returned servicemen. There are some in the photograph who were yet to serve – such as Ian O'Donnell, Frank Hosking, Wilfred Dolamore, Jack Thorpe, Sid Atkinson, Bill Neville and Roy Rough. Their stories are told in *Roads to War* on our website. But there were others who obviously joined the CRB after the war and one of them is identified in the photograph as N. Bissett.

There are four men in the National Australian Archives named Bissett who have the first initial 'N'. They are Norman Bissett from Liverpool NSW, Norman Sinclair Bissett, an accountant from Bendigo, Norman Hopetoun Bissett from Serpentine (near Bendigo) a farmer, and Norman Harry Anderson Bissett from Sydney. Of the remaining men named Bissett, none of them had another name starting with 'N'. I think it is fairly likely that man in the 1930 photograph of the CRB staff is Norman Sinclair Bissett.

This detective work has proven to be correct as I have found an extensive biography of Norman in *Pioneers of Australian Armour in the Great War* by David A Finlayson and Michael K Cecil.

Norman was born in Sandhurst in 1877 and joined the AIF on 13 November 1914. His Attestation Form stated that his hair colour was grey – which matches the photograph below. He was an accountant employed by the Bendigo Permanent Land and Building Society.



Photograph of N. Bissett in the 1930 photograph of the staff of the CRB.

He was attached to the 1st Reinforcements 16th Battalion with whom he embarked from Melbourne on the HMAT A35 *Berrima* on 22 December 1914 for Egypt. They arrived at Aden before travelling up the Suez Canal to Egypt. The Battalion was located in camps at Maadi on the Nile and Mena, situated near the Pyramids of Giza. The training was arduous: marching through sand, digging and attacking trenches for eight hours a day, six days a week.

From a letter written home to his family he refers to his location at Camp Abassia which is located near Mena. He said in the letter that “... a native made a bet of 5/- to run down the biggest pyramid from top to bottom in two minutes. He surprised them by doing it in a minute and a half.” This shows the naivety of the Australians. Surely the Egyptian would not have challenged them unless he was confident he would win?



Mena Camp west of Cairo – 1915.

The archive does not record when he re-joined his battalion or when he arrived at Gallipoli but it is likely he reached the Dardanelles about August 1915. At Gallipoli he developed a septic hand and was evacuated to the 1st Australian General Hospital at Heliopolis on 10 November

1915. After a period of convalescence, Norman returned to his unit in February 1916. In March 1916 he embarked on HMAT A64 *Demosthenes* at Suez to be returned to Australia as an escort, disembarking at Port Melbourne on 19 April 1916. After a brief period of leave, he returned to duty.

It is likely that another Bendigo soldier, Sergeant John Langley, recruited him into the Armoured Car Section. At his own request, Norman reverted to the rank of private and joined the 24th Depot Battalion at Royal Park. He was posted to the newly formed Armoured Car Section as a motor transport driver and embarked, for the second time for overseas service on HMAT A13 *Katuna* on 20 June 1916. He served continuously with the Armoured Car Section – later to become the 1st Australian Light Car Patrol - throughout the Egyptian and Palestine campaigns. In August 1916 he was promoted again to Corporal.

The unit fought against the Senussi¹ in the Sudan and Western Desert. As their original three vehicles became worn out from hard use in the Western Desert and were irreparable due to shortages of spare parts, the unit was re-equipped with six Ford light cars. Extra drivers and motorcycles were provided. These were traded in for six new Fords on 11 December 1917.

In May 1917 the unit was redeployed to Palestine by rail, and served throughout the campaign there. It was used to conduct long range reconnaissance and patrol duties, often operating well in advance of forward cavalry units. By November 1918 they had reached Aleppo where they were believed to be the furthest advanced Australian unit at the conclusion of the campaign.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

B00054

Members of No. 1 Australian Light Car Patrol, in two T model Ford cars, each carrying a Lewis gun, returning from the Jordan Valley to the Dead Sea Post, in Palestine.

¹ The Senussi were members of a religious order in Libya and Egypt. They were courted by the Ottoman and German Empires. In the summer of 1915, the Ottomans persuaded the Grand Senussi to declare jihad, and attack British-occupied Egypt from the west and to encourage insurrection in Egypt, in order to divert British forces.

In November 1919, the following letter was sent to Norman's father in Bendigo.

"Dear Sir,

I have much pleasure in forwarding hereunder copy of extract from Third Supplement No. 31383, to the "London Gazette," dated 5th June, 1919, relating to the conspicuous services rendered by the undermentioned member of the Australian Imperial Force.

MENTIONED IN DESPACHES

A despatch has been received by the Secretary of State for War from General Sir E. H. Allenby, GCB, GCNG, Commander-in-Chief, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, submitting the name of the undermentioned whom he considers worthy of mention for services rendered during the period from the 19th September, 1918, to 31st January, 1919:- -

No. 8. Corporal N. S. Bissett"

Norman embarked on the HT *Kaiser-i-Hind* at Suez in May 1919 and was discharged in Melbourne on 15 August 1919. He married Rita Jackson in 1922 and in the mid 1920s he joined the CRB as an accountant. He died suddenly on 23 December 1940 (aged 54) in St Kilda.



Corporal Norman Bissett of the 1st Australian Light Car Patrol – circa 1918.

Lieutenant (later Colonel) Caleb Grafton Roberts, MC

Caleb was the only child of the famous Australian impressionist painter, Tom Roberts, of the Heidelberg School fame. Although he was born in Australia (in 1898), he spent most of his early life in England where he attended St Paul's School, London, and the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich.

He joined the British Army in 1916 and rose to the rank of Lieutenant.



Tom Roberts modelled this portrait of his son, Caleb, on the eve of his ninth birthday – 1907.

He was a good scholar and excellent sportsman, playing Rugby Union at international level for the British Army. He was commissioned in the British Army in August 1916 and served in Palestine (1917), the Western Front (1917-18) and northern Russia (in 1919 in the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War).



Lieutenant Caleb Roberts, MC.

He won the Military Cross at the Battle of St Quentin Canal where American, Australian and British troops breached the Hindenburg Line for the first time, ultimately convincing the

German High Command that there was little hope of a German victory. The citation for his Military Cross reads:

'Lt. C.G. Roberts, 23rd Fd. Coy, R.E. For conspicuous gallantry and skill near Maissemy, Sept,17-18, 1918, in taping the forming-up line on two occasions under heavy shell and machine-gun fire. His section was also employed repeatedly in consolidation under fire. On all occasions he set a fine example of courage.'

After the war, Caleb studied engineering at the University of London and graduated in 1922 with a BSc Eng Hons and became an Assistant Engineer with the Ministry of Transport.

Caleb's father and William Calder, Chairman of the CRB, were friends. In fact, Tom Roberts painted a portrait of Calder – reputedly from a photograph - which was hung on the wall outside the Boardroom at the CRB head office in Kew. Caleb must have been in touch with Calder while the latter was on a study trip to England in 1924. Calder wrote to Caleb as he was returning to Australia while on board the Cunard Line's RMS *Scythia*.

"Dear Sir,

Yours of the 14th June reached me after I left London and I had no favourable opportunity of replying. Should you decide to risk a move to Australia I shall be pleased to hear from you at any time and may be able to proffer some advice.

My inquiries in England elicited the fact that professional men, particularly those in higher end positions, were being paid better salaries than in Australia i.e. relatively.

With best wishes for your success and advancement.

*Yours faithfully
W Calder"*

Caleb took that risk. With no prospects other than the promise of a chat with William Calder, Caleb and his family arrived in Melbourne in 1925. That year he began his employment with the CRB as an Assistant Highway Engineer. Three years later he was appointed Highways Engineer. His responsibilities included the modernizing of road-making techniques and the introduction of cheaper construction methods. In 1937 he prepared the Board's first 10-year plan for highway development and was appointed Chief Engineer in 1939.

In 1931 he joined the Citizen Military Forces as an engineer officer. He was gazetted acting Major in 1939 and called up for full-time duty in the Second World War. He was offered the post of Second in Command of the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion but he was upset because the offer was withdrawn when he was declared unfit because of his health.

However, he was transferred to the Australian Intelligence Corps and, while serving at Army Headquarters, Melbourne, he was promoted to temporary Colonel and made Director of Military Intelligence in February 1942.

He was appointed controller of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) at General Douglas MacArthur's Headquarters, South-West Pacific Area. The AIB spread propaganda and conducted espionage, sabotage, infiltration and guerrilla operations in enemy-held territory. By 1944 Roberts had charge of an organization comprising some 2,000 men from Australia, Britain, the Netherlands, the United States of America and countries occupied by the

Japanese. It was a daunting job and he had to reconcile the aims and allegiances of the various national groups, and to deal with some highly individualistic and temperamental members of his staff.



Colonel C. G. Roberts MC – circa 1943.
Controller Allied Intelligence Bureau.
South West Pacific Command.

Official statistics credit the AIB with a total of 264 missions. Commando and other para-military operations accounted for more than 7,000 enemy killed, whilst nearly 1,000 surrendered following propaganda efforts by the Bureau. It also rescued more than 1,000 individuals of different allied services where it operated. The US Army Deputy Controller of the Bureau, in the book *“Spy Ring, Pacific”*, said that Colonel Roberts was regarded by General McArthur’s Headquarters as a man of “integrity, tremendous energy and fearless loyalty”.



Caleb Roberts – Chairman of the Country Roads Board – 1962.

After the war, Caleb resumed with the CRB as Chief Engineer. Following a study tour in America and Britain, he recommended the formation of a permanent road research agency which led to the establishment of the Australian Road Research Board in 1959. He was appointed as a member of the Board in 1956 and became Chairman in 1962.

Ted King worked as an assistant to Caleb for many years and admired him greatly. He said that he had an ability to do many things at once. He said,

“On one particular occasion I was discussing a problem with him and Paddy O’Donnell came in needing an urgent decision on a bridge problem. Just as he finished, in rushed Harry Gray with another problem on bituminous work. He dealt with that, and immediately turned to me, and gave me his decision.

He wrote marvellous reports, the essence of clarity and simplicity. He was the clearest thinking man I ever worked with.”

Ted once saw a citation for Roberts for an award recommended by the American army. *“It was the highest award that the Americans could give a non-American. The Labor Government would not agree to any of these awards. Not bad for a man who was considered to be medically unfit.”*

He retired in 1963 and died in 1965 at the age of 67 of a rheumatic condition he acquired during the First World War.



Caleb and his wife Nora (nee Watson) circa 1941.
Norah's father, William Watson, was the Curator of the Kew Gardens in London from 1901 to 1922.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

Because this is a Christmas special, I thought it would be appropriate to explore different Christmas themes interpreted by famous painters through the ages – starting in the Renaissance period up to the modern day. Some of them are a bit controversial but I hope you don't mind.

Before Christmas was Christmas, there was a Roman winter festival called Saturnalia. In ancient Scandinavia a similar celebration called Yule was held at around the same time. Neither celebrated the birth of Christ.

In the early days, Christians of the Roman Empire celebrated local winter festivals, or at least hung the obligatory holly on their doors to prevent being singled out for persecution. As early as the 2nd century, Christians privately celebrated the Feast of the Epiphany, or Three Kings' Day, on January 6th. This was the day they honoured the Magi and to a lesser degree, Christ's baptism. After Rome fell and Christianity began to spread, Christian leaders (mainly Constantine the Great) set out to eliminate Saturnalia and other pagan celebrations that competed with Epiphany.

Phasing out the pagan winter festivals turned out to be quite a challenge since they were so deeply entrenched in Roman and European culture and society. Winter Solstice, Yule and Saturnalia had to be replaced with something familiar and equally as fun. So, Christians adopted the most acceptable pagan holiday traditions and gave them a religious spin, adding their own new traditions along the way.

Prior to the 4th Century there was no formal celebration of Christ's birth due to the lack of an actual recorded birth date. For reasons known only to him, Pope Julius I (337-352) decided that December 25th was the special day. The nativity was certainly celebrated from that point on, but didn't become an "official" religious and civic holiday until Emperor Justinian declared it as such in 529 AD. The formerly quiet and reflective ancient celebration for Epiphany was extended twelve days to begin on December 25th and it ultimately overpowered the pagan

holidays. These twelve days were named Christmas (Christ Mass), a blend of old traditions and Christian theology.

I can't recall many paintings by the masters depicting the celebration of Christmas except for the religious works of the Middle to later ages. After searching the internet and other sources I have come up with this great variety of interpretations of Christmas in art.

The first depicts the feasting that accompanied Christmas for the rich people of the Middle Ages. I suppose there were no equivalent depictions for the peasants because there was little to see. The last day of Advent was Christmas Eve, and each day after that until Epiphany became more and more grand. In the early days, Epiphany was a much bigger deal than Christmas Day, and soon became intertwined with the pageantry and entertainment of Twelfth Night, which was the last day of feasting. Twelfth Night (January 5th or 6th) was especially popular for the wealthy few who had the means to keep partying with gusto into the new year.



Twelfth Night celebration from the January calendar page in *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*.

January was a month of gift giving and we can see some of the wealthy friends of the Duc de Berry bringing new year's gifts to their lord (who can be seen seated on the right at a banquet table in a striking blue robe decorated with gold fleurs de lys - indicating his support for the French monarchy). He sits before a large fire which warms the group from the January cold.

Behind him and to the right are two young men wearing black head gear who may be the Limbourg brothers who painted these scenes under the patronage of the Duc de Berry. On the wall behind the revellers is a large tapestry which shows a scene from the Trojan War (although the soldiers are dressed in 15th century uniforms). It might also be a reference to the war which was currently being fought against King Henry V of England who defeated the French at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415.

The book is in the Musée Condé, Chantilly, France.

Another great example of Christmas art is *The Nativity* by Giotto – a fresco in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua – northern Italy. It was painted between 1303 and 1305.



The Nativity by Giotto

There is a significance about this painting, because Giotto was one of, if not, the first painter to develop beyond the two-dimensional stylized formality of Byzantine art. He sought more realistic settings with flowing folds in the robes of his subjects, a depth of perspective and people facing away from the viewer to create more space.

His work also creates emotion unlike the more formal art that preceded him. The mother gazes at her child with a sadness that seems to foreshadow the loss of him one day. In Byzantine art, the birth of Christ was often depicted as taking place in a cave, but Giotto places his Nativity in a shed, with livestock that eat, breathe and move like real farm animals that have wandered in for warmth and food.

This painting, and all the others in the Scrovegni Chapel are one of my most treasured memories. If you visit that region you will have to book well ahead as they strictly control the numbers of visitors at any one time.

The painting below also has a connection to Christmas. It is called *The Census at Bethlehem* by Pieter Brueghel the Elder. It was painted in 1566.



The Census at Bethlehem by Pieter Brueghel the Elder.

This painting is probably the first to show a white Christmas. It is an intimate snapshot of 16th Century village life in Europe – it is definitely not Bethlehem – and it hides the main subjects in its hundreds of individuals. An inconspicuous Joseph is leading Mary on a donkey in the lower foreground of the picture. There is so much symbolism in this painting it could take a whole newsletter to explain. It is a truly beautiful work of art.

Joseph and Mary have come to Bethlehem because of a decree from Caesar Augustus that people be taxed in their own city – and they have come to be registered and pay their tax there. Joseph was of David's house and lineage in Bethlehem. It is described in Luke 2: 1-5 thus:

'And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered ... so all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.'

The painting is in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels in Belgium. It is one of the first paintings in Western art to feature a significant snow landscape and was painted in the aftermath of the winter of 1565, which was one of the harshest winters on record.

Adoration of the Shepherds by Michelangelo Merisi (aka Caravaggio) was painted in 1609. I have cropped the upper part of this painting to concentrate on the detail of the Nativity. The painting is housed in the Museum of Messina.



Adoration of the Shepherds by Caravaggio.

Caravaggio's work is starkly different from his Renaissance predecessors. These divine figures are represented as ordinary people of the times - they are barefoot and dressed in simple robes. There is nothing to show that there is a divine event occurring. Instead, the background is extremely dark with only a small single light source, possibly a candle. The clasped hands of the shepherds are the only hint of any religious importance in the painting. Mary is seated on the ground and Caravaggio depicts nothing overtly marvellous about the birth of Christ. He renders this aspect perfectly.

Caravaggio was probably the most revolutionary artist of his time for he abandoned the traditional artistic rules which idealised the human and religious experience. By doing this, he was hounded by Popes and the Inquisition of the Catholic Church.

He was notorious for getting into brawls and duels and in one escapade, he killed his opponent, Ranuccio Tommasoni, and was banished from Rome. Trouble followed him wherever he went – Naples, Sicily, and Malta. But wherever he went, he produced masterpieces to the extent that he single-handedly introduced the Baroque style of painting which was to follow.

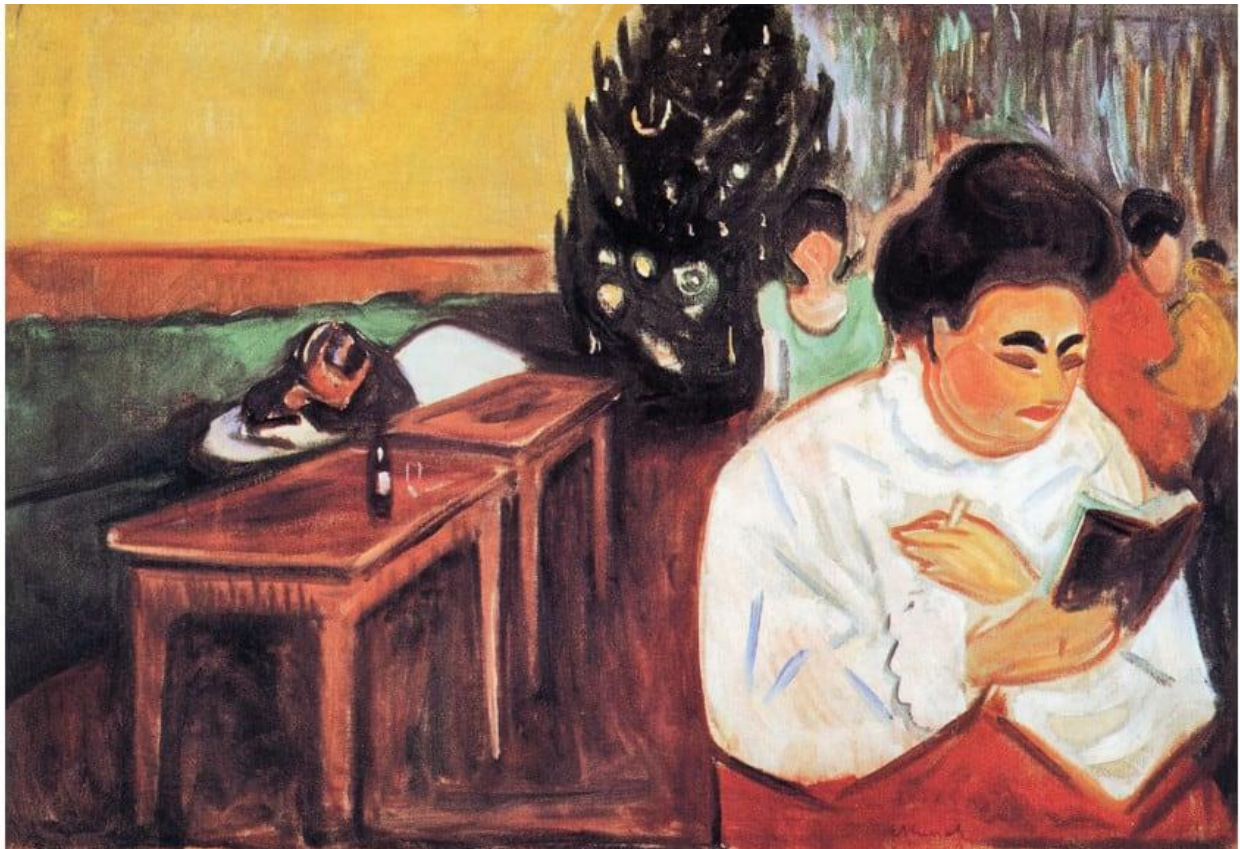
Caravaggio had a fever at the time of his death, and what killed him was a matter of controversy and rumour at the time, and has been a matter of historical debate and study ever since. Contemporary rumours held that he had been killed in revenge for some of his earlier transgressions – or even by the Inquisition. Caravaggio's remains were buried in Porto Ercole's San Sebastiano cemetery, which closed in 1956, and then moved to St. Erasmus cemetery, where, in 2010, archaeologists conducted a year-long investigation of remains found in three crypts and after using DNA, carbon dating, and other methods, believe with a high degree of confidence that they have identified those of Caravaggio. Initial tests suggested Caravaggio might have died of lead poisoning—paints used at the time contained high amounts of lead salts. This may also explain his violent behaviour as it was well documented that lead had such an effect.

Vatican documents released in 2002 support the theory that the wealthy Tommasoni family had him hunted down and killed as a vendetta for Caravaggio's murder of their gangster son, Ranuccio.

I recently saw a wonderful film at the Italian Film Festival called *Caravaggio's Shadow*. It portrays how the Catholic Church condemned the sensuality of his art and banned his paintings from public view – at the same time realising they were masterpieces and so were hoarded by the Pope and other church dignitaries. If the film comes out on general release, I thoroughly recommend a viewing of it.

And now for something very different.

The picture below shows the universality of Christmas even in the lower echelons of society, It is called *Christmas in the Brothel*.



Christmas in the Brothel by Edvard Munch.

This rather charming painting was done by the epic Norwegian painter Edvard Munch. It was produced at a difficult time for Munch – the commission of a portrait in Hamburg was cancelled, and the artist suffered great anxieties. Therefore, this composition comes as a result of his visits to a brothel in Lübeck. The painting features working girls in a brothel who have just finished decorating a Christmas tree. Like other paintings of the period, it represents Munch's association with Fauvism.

Munch is most known for his painting, *The Scream*, commonly known as the visual embodiment of anxiety, but while on the surface *Christmas in the Brothel* looks fairly serene, it holds a sad undertone of those who are cast out from families or have no one else to turn to, so seek paid company.

Born in December 1863, Munch's childhood was shrouded in illness, bereavement and the fear of inheriting a mental illness that ran in the family. While studying at the Royal School of Art and Design in Kristiania, Munch started to live the Bohemian lifestyle and fell under the influence of the nihilist Hans Jaeger, who encouraged Munch to paint his emotions, commonly known as "Soul Painting", this is where his very distinctive style emerged.

What I find fascinating about this picture is how unexpected it is that this is a brothel. Without the name of the painting, you wouldn't know that it was one. The painting has a melancholic aura and I think it is only really the title that really gives away the true undertone of this

picture. Women who have created their own family through their work being visited by lonely men who are paying for their company.

I thought carefully about whether to include this painting or not as I thought some of you may be offended by the theme. However, I thought it is all too easy to forget those in need at this time of year, as we are surrounded by family, friends and festive fare.

The painting is in the Munch Museum in Oslo, Norway.



Journey of the Magi, 1894

Journey of the Magi was painted by Jacques Joseph (James) Tissot, a French painter famous for depicting fashionably dressed women in his native country but he did create several religion-themed artworks as well.

In this realistic artwork he focuses not so much on the religious aspect but more on the scenery surrounding Christ's birth. The artwork depicting three magi in search of Jesus is dominated by the glorious mountains rising above the narrow path.

The *Journey of the Magi* was created after the second of three trips that the artist made to Palestine between 1886 and 1896 to gather sketches and photographs of the people, costumes, topography, and light of the region.

Complementing the narrative of the venerations by the humble shepherds, the Magi, guided by a moving star, travelled separately from their individual lands in the east in search of the newborn Jesus. Tissot depicts the Magi at the moment when their retinues meet in the vast,

arid landscape of the volcanic hills on the shores of the Dead Sea between Jericho, the Kedron Valley, and Jerusalem. In his commentary, the artist notes that their flowing saffron robes—a luxurious counterpoint to the simple woollens of the shepherds— signal their status as astronomers.

His religious painting was inspired by a vision he experienced in later life leading to him resuming his Catholic faith, and he spent the rest of his life making paintings about biblical events. However, *Journey of the Magi* was painted before he experienced this epiphany.

The painting is in the Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA.



Baby (Nativity Of Tahitian Christ) - 1896.

The French artist, Paul Gauguin, painted the image of Madonna during his sojourn in Tahiti. Gauguin was desperate to escape the conventions and demands of the western ‘civilised’ world, and he looked for that escape in the ‘savage’ land and culture of Tahiti, including in its religious practices. The idea that the Holy Family should be represented as Tahitian ‘savages’ would have been shocking to French society at the time.

The painting is a bit of a conundrum. The focus of the painting isn’t the baby, or the woman holding him, or even the angel standing next to her. The nativity scene in the middle of the painting seems to be pointing to the woman in the top left. Although it isn’t painted very

clearly, it looks like a woman lying on a bed on the other side of the stable, with a kind of halo around her.

The painting is in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia.

Could there be two nativities going on here? The characters in the bottom right are looking at the woman on the far side of the stable as she gives birth, so that actually there are two nativities, two births happening – one has just happened, and another is about to. In painting it like this, the nativity becomes much less remarkable. Babies are born all the time.



Christmas Eve, Henri Matisse – date unknown.

Matisse originally designed this piece for a stained-glass window that was never realised during his lifetime. The work aligned with the art sacré movement – an attempt to get the best art by the best, not necessarily religious, artists into the church. Matisse himself was known as a humanist before anything else, saying “I would like to accomplish that people who are tired, strained, broken may find rest and peace in my paintings”. It seems like he accomplished his goal with this piece – its explosion of colours and stars offers something for everyone.

The work is a maquette made in cut paper to create the design. It was commissioned by the Time Life Company and the original is in the collection of the Matisse Artists Rights Society in New York.

It was eventually realised as a stained-glass window and was exhibited in the Rockefeller Centre in New York. A commentator said: "If you have a chance to see it you will agree with me that a maquette for a stained-glass window and the window itself are like a musical score and its performance by an orchestra."



Joseph and Mary Can't Make it to Bethlehem, Banksy

World famous street artist Banksy isn't exactly one to let a chance for political commentary pass him by, and he packs a punch with this Christmas card. The work shows Mary and Joseph's passage to Bethlehem being blocked by the infamous wall that separates Israel from Palestine and the West Bank, creating unsettling parallels between Mary and Joseph's refugee status and today's refugee crisis in the Middle East.

Banksy's pieces have pushed the boundaries of political and social activism and have been made a spectacle of whenever they appear in some of the world's most highly populated cities. Banksy's tags have been seen in London, New York, Paris and Sydney to name a few. His work is usually as a critic of current society or an exploitation of known political taboo. He is a revolutionary with a spray can.

By this Christmas card going viral, it has brought Banksy's name back into circulation and hopefully is enough to bring him out of hiding to give the world more of his ground breaking street art. Banksy's last venture was to the United States where he created a media frenzy. Hopefully, the art world will be blessed with a Christmas miracle and Banksy will make his

presence known once again. Until then, we have thousands of prints, photographs, paintings, and sculptures of his to hold us over.



The Procession of the Magi by Benozzo Gozzoli.

This painting is called *The Procession of the Magi* by Benozzo Gozzoli. It is in the Medici Riccardi Palace in Florence. I love the pomp and colour of this painting.

It displays a cavalcade of the great and good (including the rich and powerful), and not only of the three kings (the Magi), winding its way down a steep valley to Bethlehem. Deer, hounds and horses cavort in the background and Gozzoli, acutely aware of where his wages came from, includes a throng of Medici godfathers and their hangers-on. The artist himself is among the portraits. The image commemorates real events – the annual Epiphany procession in 15th-century Florence – as it tries to make biblical events real for contemporary viewers. It's the high point of the Magi chapel in Florence.

As I said earlier, I could not find any examples of contemporary art about Christmas. Perhaps this is not surprising. Most of the examples given above were painted at a time when all art had a religious or classical context. The church and the stories of the bible were all that people knew so it was inevitable that art reflected this scenario. Artists were dependent on the rich and powerful for commissions, and no-one was more powerful than the church.

It wasn't until the Reformation that Dutch artists broke away from these shackles and started to paint common people doing ordinary things – as well as landscapes. The Protestant Reformation banned images in church so artists had to reinvent themselves.

The Reformation also promoted the development of printing. Artists like Holbein and Cranach designed illustrated pages for manuscripts. Besides Bible translations, Protestants used other printed documents, such as pamphlets, to spread their ideas. Printed images were cheap, and everybody could understand their meaning, so they were an essential element for educating the mainly illiterate population. Unlike painting, this kind of art could easily reach a more significant part of the population.

As they were forced to change, artists focused on non-religious themes such as still life, landscape, portraiture, and genre painting. Reformers had no objection to art in public spaces or historical art. Artists even reinvented the depiction of religious subjects, choosing other themes to represent the doctrine of the reformed faith.

However, I did find one charming modern painting of Christmas. The artist is Olivia Thomason from Georgia in America and the scene depicts the annual parade held in her town every Christmas. I think it is quite charming with its giant Christmas tree and angels of the night.



Christmas Parade by Olivia Thomason.

TRIVIA AND DIDACTIC WHIMSIES

Tragic News

Australia's worst air disaster occurred early this morning when a small two-seater Cessna plane crashed into a cemetery. Search and rescue workers have recovered 2,826 bodies so far and expect that number to climb as digging continues into the night.

No hoax

John Wright passed this story on to me from Scotland.

Many, many years ago I received a letter in the post. It was a recorded delivery and I had to sign for it to confirm delivery. I was intrigued and opened it immediately. It was a summons to appear in our local small claims court. I was being sued for £6,000. There were no details about the charges or any explanation of what the case was about other than the name and address of the complainant. I was mystified as I didn't recognize the name. Let's call him Mr Smith.

In the three weeks before the stated date I convinced myself that one of my sons was playing an involved joke on me. I quizzed them all mercilessly but nobody would admit to knowing anything about it. As the date drew nearer, I determined to go to court just to find out which of my boys was the perpetrator of this rather involved joke.

Court day arrived and I went into the court building and presented my summons to an attendant, still expecting to be told it was a forgery. I was wrong. I was politely directed to a small waiting room and told my case would be called in 10 minutes. I was stunned.

When I was escorted into the courtroom the Sheriff (a lay judge in Scotland) asked me if I had a legal representative. I explained how I thought that the summons was a joke and I had no lawyer. He said that I could ask for a deferment to get legal advice if I choose but he didn't think that was necessary. I sat down still stunned and confused but by now rather scared.

The Sheriff now asked the other side to outline their case. I listened in stunned amazement as the story unfolded.

Apparently some 6 months previously I had sold Mr Smith a tenpin bowling ball and drilled the ball to suit his hand. I had explained to him the need to keep the ball clean of lane oil on a regular basis. Mr Smith had taken me at my word and had left his bowling ball soaking in a bathtub of hot soapy water overnight. Feeling that the finger and thumb holes were wet when he fished the ball out of the bath he had decided to dry out the ball. Fifteen or twenty minutes in the microwave should dry it out nicely.

Some time later the ball exploded. The force of the explosion was enough to destroy the microwave and send the door of the microwave flying upward with enough energy to punch through the ceiling and the floor of the room above his kitchen. Unfortunately, the room above his kitchen was his neighbour's bathroom. The microwave door not only punched through the floor but punched through the actual bath. Unfortunately, the poor woman was taking a bath at the time.

She was suing Mr Smith for the damage to her bathroom from the flying microwave door as well as the water damage to her carpets from the bath full of water. She wasn't suing for the shock of a microwave door suddenly puncturing her bath although it must have been a terrific shock.

Mr Smith was suing me for the same amount on the basis that I had sold him a bowling ball without specifically telling him not to put it in the microwave.

By this stage several people in the gallery were laughing and the sheriff was definitely smiling. I was still worried but feeling considerably less scared. We all sat politely until Mr Smith's lawyer had finished. The Sheriff then drew himself very straight and without a trace of a smile said, 'I'm here to apply the law of the land and not to educate idiots. Case dismissed.'

A Christmas Turf Story

The jockey was riding the favourite at a race meeting, and was well ahead of the field. His horse rounded the final corner, when suddenly the jockey was hit on the head by a turkey and a string of sausages.

He managed to keep control of his mount and pulled back into the lead, only to be struck by a box of Christmas crackers and a dozen mince pies as he went over the last fence.

With great skill he managed to steer the horse to the front of the field once more when, on the run in, he was struck on the head by a bottle of sherry and a Christmas pudding. Thus distracted, he succeeded in coming only second.

He immediately went to the race stewards to put in a protest claiming that he had been seriously hampered.

True to his word

The family of a deceased businessman was awaiting the reading of the will.

"To my loving wife Rose," the lawyer read, "who stood by me in the rough times as well as the good, I leave the house and \$2 million."

"To my daughter Jessica, who looked after me in illness and kept the business going, I leave the yacht, the business and \$1 million."

"And to my cousin Dan, who hated me and thought I would not remember him in my will, you were wrong: Hello, Dan!"

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