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



Santa has a well-earned rest at the beach.

Dear Members,

This is the second time around that I have offered Christmas wishes to you for this year. It set me thinking about the ceremonies of Christmas in Australia – most of which are steeped in European tradition. You know the sorts of symbols I mean – snow, pine trees, holly, berries, stockings dangling from the mantelpiece, reindeers and sledges, and Santa Claus himself.

The legend of Santa Claus can be traced back hundreds of years to a monk named St. Nicholas. It is believed that Nicholas was born sometime around A.D. 280 in Patara, near Myra in modern-day Turkey. Much admired for his piety and kindness, St. Nicholas became the subject of many legends. It is said that he gave away all of his inherited wealth and travelled the countryside helping the poor and sick. One of the best-known St. Nicholas stories is the time he saved three poor sisters from being sold into slavery or prostitution by their father by providing them with a dowry so that they could be married.

Over the course of many years, Nicholas's popularity spread and he became known as the protector of children and sailors. His feast day is celebrated on the anniversary of his death, December 6. This was traditionally considered a lucky day to make large purchases or to get married. By the time of the Renaissance, St. Nicholas was the most popular saint in Europe. Even after the Protestant Reformation, when the veneration of saints began to be discouraged, St. Nicholas maintained a positive reputation, especially in Holland.

The name Santa Claus evolved from the Dutch name for St. Nicholas, Sinter Klaas. In 1804, John Pintard, a member of the New York Historical Society, distributed woodcuts of St.

Nicholas at the society's annual meeting. The background of the engraving contains now-familiar Santa images including stockings filled with toys and fruit hung over a fireplace.

Santa is generally depicted as a portly, jolly man with a white beard, often wearing spectacles. He wears a red coat with white fur collar and cuffs, white-fur-cuffed red trousers, a red hat trimmed with white fur, a black leather belt and boots, carrying a bag full of gifts for children.

This image originated in North America during the 19th century and has been maintained and reinforced through song, radio, television, children's books, family Christmas traditions, films, and advertising.

So, Santa Claus is an American construct but America's Santa Claus was not the only St. Nicholas-inspired gift-giver to make an appearance at Christmas. There are similar figures around the world. Christkind or Kris Kringle was believed to deliver presents to well-behaved Swiss and German children. Meaning 'Christ child,' Christkind is an angel-like figure often accompanied by St. Nicholas on his holiday missions. In Scandinavia, a jolly elf named Jultomten was thought to deliver gifts in a sleigh drawn by goats. English legend explains that Father Christmas visits each home on Christmas Eve to fill children's stockings with holiday treats. Père Noël is responsible for filling the shoes of French children. In Italy, there is a story of a woman called La Befana, a kindly witch who rides a broomstick down the chimneys of Italian homes to deliver toys into the stockings of lucky children.



A Victorian era illustration of Santa Claus

When I wrote my family history, *Decent People*, I had cause to think of my female ancestors and the sacrifices they made coming out to Australia from the other side of the globe. I mentioned, *inter alia*, their continuation of European Christmas traditions which still prevail today. I wrote:

‘There is just one other thing to say. Writing these words has made me realise the contribution my female pioneers made to family and nation. Women had no status at all in these years. It was a half to three quarters of a century later before they were even allowed to vote. I feel that their sacrifice to travel to a new world took even more courage than their husbands. They all had large families and knew the heartbreak of losing children in

childbirth and in infancy. They came to Australia – a strange land as far from their home as was possible – not knowing what to expect. They encountered conditions which tested and sometimes defeated them; relentless heat and dust, isolation, hostile wildlife, no access to medical facilities and never-ending, back-breaking work. Their comforts were sparse and their advantages meagre and most had little else but hope. But the nurturing and care these women provided to their families and, in a wider sense, to the communities they created, was the key to the survival and success of their emigration.

They also left behind the traditions and ceremonies of home. Imagine the fierce heat of an Australian Christmas never experienced before. For generations up to the time of my parents, they celebrated Christmas with piping roast dinners and boiled puddings with perspiration trickling down their backs. There was no cooling and it was common during summer for family members to sleep outdoors on the veranda. They walked long distances to worship or join in community activities. Their settlements were further apart than at home and the availability of goods was very limited. Darning and mending clothing was the order of the day. The news from home or from anywhere was scarce and they must have sometimes felt desperately alone in the world.

Surely some of these women must have complained about their lot but I could find no record in all my research. They toughed it out.'

Do we have any particularly Australian traditions for celebrating Christmas?

WHAT'S COMING UP

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

The table below shows a tentative summary of events for 2024. Some activities have not been confirmed but we will update details when they are finalised.

Date	Event	Contact Person
2023		
Tuesday 12 December	12 noon for 12.30 pm - Christmas Lunch, Waverley RSL	Ken Vickery
2024		
Monday 5 February	12 noon Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up.
Monday 4 March	1.15 pm – 3.00 pm - Peter Don, Rail Futures, <i>Growing Victoria's Regions- Rail the Catalyst for Regional Growth</i> to be held at the Phyllis Hore room at the Kew Library.	David Jellie
Thursday 14 March	12 noon Annual General Meeting followed by lunch at 1.00 pm, Waverley RSL	Ken Vickery
Tuesday 2 April	12 noon Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
Monday 13 May	10 am Shrine of Remembrance – highlighting the recent upgrade followed by lunch and a possible tour of Royal Botanic Gardens	Jill Earnshaw

Monday 3 June	12 noon Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
Monday 24 June	10.30 am TAC Geelong for briefing on road safety strategy followed by lunch with ex-VicRoads colleagues.	Nick Szwed
Monday 2 July	12 noon for 12.30 pm Lunch at Waverley RSL	Ken Vickery
Monday 5 August	12 noon Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
Monday 19 August	10.30 am West Gate Tunnel Project	David Jellie
Monday 7 October	12 noon Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
Friday 25 October	12 noon. Annual Golf Day at Greenacres.	Jim Webber
Monday 14, Tuesday 15 October	Regional trip to Traralgon (for lunch with ex-VicRoads staff), overnight in Orbost & then to Cooma to be briefed on the engineering and financial aspects of the Snowy 2.0 Project from 2pm to 3:30pm. Overnight in Cooma or other Snowy town, then return to Victoria via Canberra, Albury or other options on 16 October.	Jim Webber
Monday 2 December	12 noon Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
Tuesday 10 December	12 noon for 12.30 pm, Christmas lunch, Waverley RSL	Ken Vickery

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. Please note that the Occasional Lunches are held on the first Monday of the designated month except for the one on Tuesday 2 April. These coincide with our committee meetings and the committee meeting venue is not available on 1 April.

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.

This is the best event of the year to catch up with ex-work colleagues.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

We had a very interesting trip to Ballarat and Bendigo between the 15th and 17th November. A party of eleven people from Melbourne attended and it was great to catch up with members (and non-members) for dinner at each location. I will provide a comprehensive report in a mini-newsletter which I will send out before Christmas (I hope).

WILL THEY OR WON'T THEY?

I wrote the following letter to the Minister following a resolution of the Committee. Its contents are self-explanatory. I will let you know the outcome once I have had a response.

'The Hon. Melissa Horne MP
Minister for Roads and Road Safety
Level 2
1 Spring Street
Melbourne
Victoria 3000

31 October 2023

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you as President of VicRoads Association (VRA) regarding the closure of the CRB/RCA/VicRoads/DOT Head Office building at 60 Denmark Street, Kew.

The VRA is an Incorporated Association comprising people who worked for these organisations and our aim is to maintain and grow relationships we made with our colleagues during our careers. We also provide support to fellow members when required.

Specifically, the objects of the Association are to foster fellowship and harmony among members and to assist in the welfare and benefit of retired persons. We also strive to maintain a definite link with the road organisations.

The Association was founded in 1978 and our current membership is over 300 people. We organise activities and excursions each year to provide opportunities for members to catch up with each other. These include lunches and dinners, trips to regional areas to meet with country members and visits of a technical nature to road and transport projects. We also distribute monthly newsletters to our members as a way of keeping in touch with each other.

We have provided assistance from time to time to the road authorities by providing historical information and were major contributors to the VicRoads Centenary book, *Keeping Victorians Connected for 100 Years*, celebrating the formation of the Country Roads Board in 1913 – Australia's first State Road Authority.

We enjoyed considerable support from the management of the CRB, the RCA and VicRoads over the years which contributed to the continuing success of the organisation for retired personnel. Sadly, that support has not continued with the Department of Transport and Planning.

We have been expecting the closure of the Head Office at Kew for some time and are saddened that it seems to be going out with a whimper rather than a celebration of all the achievements of the road authorities of Victoria who served the State with such loyal and professional service.

Victoria could rightly boast that we had the best roads in Australia and we were recognised internationally as a leading authority in many areas of enterprise. Our management of road safety was one example. We introduced many initiatives that were the first in the world and our model of management, coordination and integration was known throughout the world as the 'Victorian Model'. Our expertise in sprayed sealing of pavements was also leading edge and

our involvement in Asia through the REAAA and AusAID, World Bank and Asian Development Bank was greatly appreciated by countries in our region.

We feel very strongly that there should be some acknowledgement of the excellence and service that our members (and non-members) contributed to the State and request that you give thought to how this might be recognised.

One suggestion might be to invite as many ex-members of staff as possible to the office for a morning or afternoon tea and to acknowledge their contributions. We would be happy to assist in any arrangements.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

David Jellie
President, VicRoads Association

VALE

We extend our sincerest sympathy to the families and friends of the colleagues. Listed below

Ian Mackintosh

Ian Mackintosh passed away on 12 September. I will include a brief obituary for Ian in the next newsletter. Ian suffered from dementia.

Ted Saunder

Ted died in July. I expect he was in his nineties. Ted worked with me in supervising the construction of the bridges on the Seymour to Euroa Section of the Hume Freeway back in the 1970s. Ted was a conscientious construction engineer and I enjoyed his companionship.

We had another connection. His brother, Athol, taught me at Colac High School.

Bruce John Beshara (always known as John)

John was not a member of the Association but he is remembered as kindly and generous colleague with a great sense of humour. The eulogy at his funeral celebrated “the memory of a loving, caring, supportive, funny, multi-talented, witty, and humorous (just to name a few) beautiful gentle man”.

John’s entire working life was spent at the Transport Regulation Board, the Road Traffic Authority and VicRoads. He loved work and never missed a day unless he was so bad, he couldn't move. When John retired, he had acquired over 2 1/2 years sick leave.

During his early days in Lygon Street, he met Wendy McGree and they married in 1970. Music dominated his life. He started playing in bands when he was 16 -starting with The Trojans and playing with Step Back as recently as June. Over the years John had played in a total of 16 bands - The Trojans, Windy and Warm, Whispering Grass, Libra, The Other Side, Oregon, Maradi Gras, Boston Manor, Calico, Rockin’ Time, Shindig, Flashback, Who Was That Cat, All Stars, Reflections, and Step Back.

He was also a huge fan of the Blues, and he went to Broadbeach religiously for 10 years to the annual Blues Festival. Along with the obvious, ... music was his life. However, after retiring John did manage to take time out to travel with Wendy making numerous trips to North America, Hawaii, a few cruises (he loved the American Queen and if the opportunity arose, he would join in playing with the band for a few numbers), The Ghan in Australia, and many organised tours.



Besides his interest in music and all that went with that, he liked reading books - especially biographies of members in notorious bands or celebrities. He was also a great lover of movies, especially comedies. He treasured the genre of the Marx Brothers and Laurel and Hardy.

In the early days, body building was a favourite interest, as apparently you could tell. He was always a keen photographer and he gave blood for over 50 years. He supported many charities, his favourite being Canteen for Kids.

He was addicted to collecting ... anything and everything - pens, rubber bands, butterfly clips at work. Collecting jackets and caps was also a favourite pastime but most of them stayed in the cupboard.

Everyone at his funeral were surprised that his first name was Bruce. He never let on.

NEW MEMBERS

I haven't kept you up to date regarding new members and I now wish to welcome the following new members who have joined us this year. They are:

John Harper, Robert Adams, Leon Szarski, Neville Schmidt, Neil Jones, Barry Mulholland, Paul Petridis, Geoff Jameson, Tony Hillman, Peter Carter, Heather Thompson and Raj Ramalingam.

Mario Fantin

Mario has just applied to join the Association. We worked together for many years in Bridge Design Division and I remember Pam and I attending his marriage to Izabella. Mario's father made the wine in his laundry and it was fantastic! Mario wrote to me with his application as follows:

'Hi David - Great to see you are still very active and producing very high standard newsletters. I hope you are well. Izabella and I are reasonably well. You will be surprised to learn that I am still working (part time). Spent quite a bit of time after my formal retirement working with the West Gate Bridge maintenance team in Port Melbourne. That work is coming to an end and I am now working with another group who are reviewing major project structures drawings prior to construction. You are probably thinking that I am crazy still working, but I enjoy it. Plus, it helps that I can work from home for most of the time.'

THE HISTORY OF HEAD OFFICE – 60 DENMARK STREET, KEW

The story below was written by Kevin Fox and published in Roadlines magazine. He wrote:

'The 15th February 1961 was a day of big moves in more ways than one.

Johnny Horton's, "North to Alaska" was moving up Melbourne's pop charts, the Australian XI were moving into a winning position in the 5th Test against the West Indies at the MCG, and in the Arbitration Commission, the ACTU's dynamic young industrial advocate, R J Hawke, was moving for a 49 shilling rise in the basic weekly wage.

But closer to home one of the biggest moves in VicRoads history was taking place.

It was on that day the Country Roads Board staff officially moved into its modern new headquarters in Denmark Street, Kew.

Since 1928 the Board's central administration had occupied offices at the Exhibition Buildings and other buildings scattered throughout Carlton.

According to contemporary reports their "...cramped and obsolete nature have caused many difficulties in administration and have militated against recruitment of adequate staff"



Conditions at the Exhibition Building.

A remedy for the situation was proposed when in 1959 a 98-year lease was obtained from the Victorian Railways for the site of the former Kew Railway station. In November that year, Lewis Constructions was awarded the contract to build the CRB's new home, estimated to cost £824,000.

The building design was radical for its time and the "H" configuration was selected to ensure that the office wings had full advantage of the northern and southern light. In total 41,000 square feet of office space was to be provided by the new building, adequate to comfortably house staff with a small margin above the Board's immediate needs.

At the time the CRB was engaged in a number of significant projects for Melbourne including construction of our first freeway, the Maltby Bypass and King's Bridge across the Yarra.

But as the new building rapidly took shape in Kew's skyline, the attention of staff was directed more and more to their future home.

Furnishing and fitting out the premises was to be a mammoth task, and in the months leading up to occupancy, much time was spent deciding on the final touches for the place to which many of us have become accustomed.

Naturally bringing the project in on cost was a major concern and a search of correspondence of the day gives some fascinating insights into the thinking at the time.

Chief Accountant, Russ Cooper, it seems was keen to lead by example and on the question of flooring for the Accountants Branch he wrote to the Secretary, R.E.V. Donaldson: "The only factors which needed to be considered are cost and efficiency. Carpets meet neither of these tests. At Kew I want not only an efficient office but also a business like, efficient looking office and this aim can best be furthered by having a standard floor treatment throughout the entire branch. It is recommended that the floor treatment in the Accountants Branch be vinyl tiles - no carpets to be provided".

With construction well advanced, planning for the opening got underway in mid 1960.

Tentative opening dates were considered and to ensure that it didn't rain on our parade, advice from the Bureau of Meteorology was sought.

A rather optimistic letter was despatched by the Secretary on 14 June 1960 requesting "... a forecast of the likely weather conditions in the week 12th-16th December"

The weather bureau was unable to give a forecast 6 months in advance but helpfully provided historic data on weather conditions in December dating back to 1856 which suggested Kew could expect temperatures in the mid-seventies (Fahrenheit). The shift from Carlton to Kew was sure to affect the commuting arrangements of staff and anticipating this, advice of the forthcoming move was forwarded to the Tramways Board.

History doesn't record whether our move led to a drastic upturn in patronage for the No. 42 tram to Kew Junction. With the opening date fast approaching, management turned its attention to protocol for the occasion.

The building was ready for occupation on the 5th December 1960 and it was decided to settle staff in prior to an official opening.

The move of equipment from the Exhibition Buildings to Denmark Street took place over the weekend from Friday night 2 December through till Sunday evening.

Arrangements were made for the "opening" to take place six weeks later on Wednesday 15 February. More than 300 invitations were despatched to staff and various dignitaries including all State politicians, Board members, the local police and fire chief and all CRB Officers of Class A and above. According to the guest list compiled at the time, "each gentleman will be invited to be accompanied by a lady." Staff who did not make the guest list were invited to a staff family day to inspect the new building. In anticipation of overwhelming interest admission was to be by ticket only.

The "draft" circular to staff noted that "Charitable donations by silver coin may be placed in boxes at the entrance. In the actual notice distributed however, the entrance fee was deleted. The official opening was to be staged in the front car park with a dais constructed for the occasion adjacent to the entrance foyer.

In the weeks leading up to the big event the seating arrangements for dignitaries in the official party were the subject of considerable debate, in particular whether wives of dignitaries should be seated on the dais. The views of many people were sought including that of Mr E Brown from the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission who had made similar arrangements for the openings of dam projects throughout the State.

A memo from the Secretary to CRB Chairman D V Darwin, noted Mr Brown's views: "He does not advocate having ladies on the dais. If the Premier's wife is invited all other wives will want to be on the dais too. It is usual practice...to reserve the front row seats immediately in front of the dais for wives of the official party".

After due consideration of the issue the CRB Secretary Donaldson concluded: "I see no disadvantage in permitting ladies to be present on the dais," thus in an early victory for equality of the sexes, the wives took their place.

Finally, the big day arrived and at 2.40pm on Wednesday 15th February 1961, CRB Chairman, D.V. Darwin welcomed the guests and introduced the Premier, Sir Henry Bolte, and the Commissioner for Public Works, the Hon. Sir Thomas Karran Maltby.



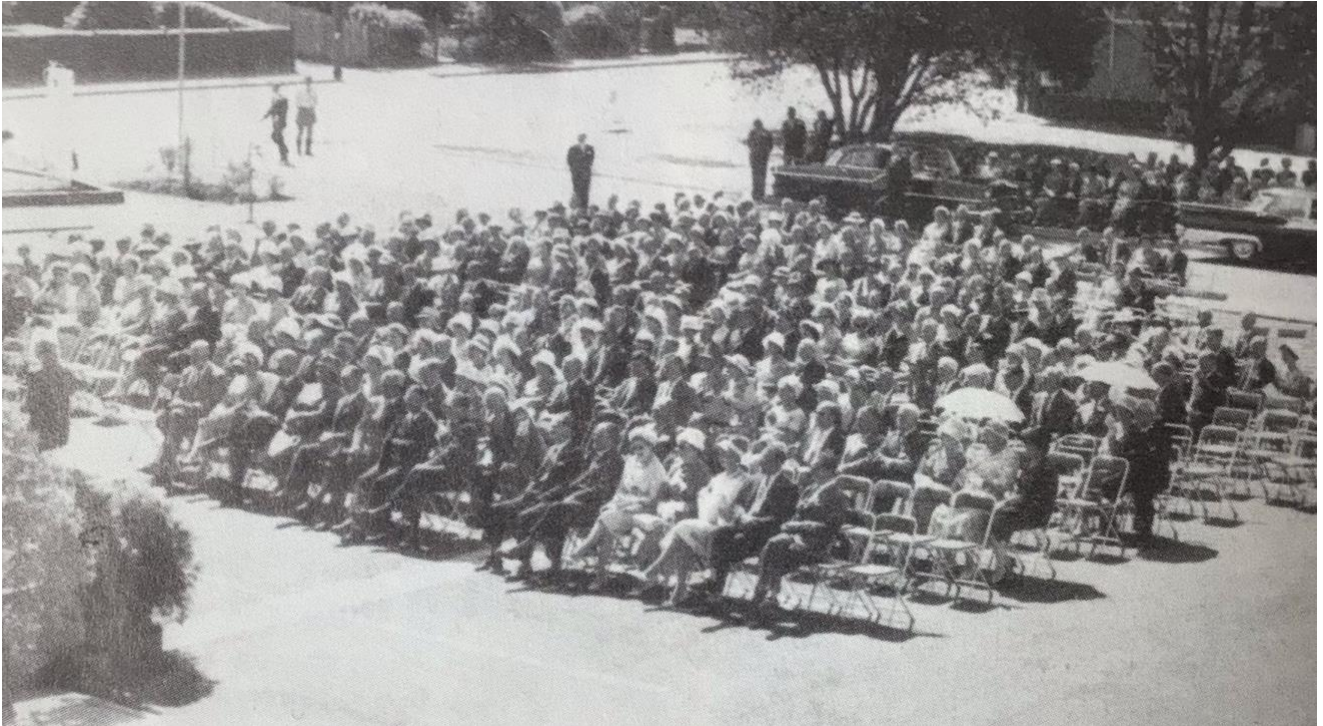
The Chairman, D.V. Darwin with Sir Henry Bolte seated on his right.

Speeches concluded and plaque unveiled, the guests adjourned to afternoon tea and pleasantries in a marquee on the lawns near the site of the present Materials Building. And the planners of the day had nothing to fear from the heavens.

The ceremony was bathed in pleasant sunshine and a temperature of 80F.'

John Pittard recalled that, according to legend, the Chairman, D.V. Darwin, took as the theme of his address the Board's crest. He spoke at length about the horse and the role it played in road construction in the early days, and as a means of conveyance. Afterwards someone

nudged Darwin and said, “It is not a horse on the crest, it is a kangaroo’. The Chairman was aghast at making such a *faux pas*.



Assembled guests sitting in the February sunshine – 15 February 1961.

BUILDING HEAD OFFICE

In the late 1950s, Stan Hodgson was seconded to assist with the construction of the new Head Office building. Paddy O’Donnell called him into his office one day and presented a very thick file to him and said, “Have you ever built a building before?” When Stan replied in the negative Paddy said, “Well you are about to build one. Study that file.”

Stan stayed in Paddy’s office and read the file. Paddy said, “We have appointed an architect, Leith and Bartlett, and we want you to be our liaison link with the Architect and in particular to supervise all the site work associated with the new building.”

Stan remembers the old Kew Station on the site (about where the northern car park is), the Baby Health Centre and the briquette depot (on the southern car park) and the railway line still existed up to Wellington Street where the Materials Research building was later built. Stan’s team had to develop a plan of all the site works in conjunction with the Architect’s design of the building. Assisting Stan was a Clerk of Works, Reg Hiscock, the father of Gordon Hiscock who was a draftsman in Plans and Survey. Reg was a retired City Engineer from the City of South Melbourne and he assisted by supervising all the preliminary works and parking areas.

Stan saw the very last train along the line, going back towards Hawthorn taking the rails and sleepers behind it as it went.

Stan remembers digging a deep hole to put the building in and they came across a big pit. He could not remember what it was used for but he can remember that, rather than excavating it or blowing it up, they buried it under the building.

The building was built using money allocated to road funds. The Opposition of the day opposed spending money on a new building arguing that the money should be spent on roads, and the Act (presumably the Country Roads Act) did not permit funds to be spent on it. The Act was duly changed to allow the construction of the building.

In liaising with the Project Architect – Gerard de Prioux - Stan had the problem of what to provide for the future. The Architect pointed out that there was a triangle of issues - cost versus area versus quality of finish and the CRB had to work within those parameters. Of course, the aim was to provide for a comfortable building with a pleasant working environment but the final plans had to keep expenditure under control. The total cost was around £820,000.

Air conditioning was discussed at length and in the end, it was discarded mainly on the grounds of cost. It was estimated to cost around £80,000. It was considered that Melbourne only about 10 days maximum where the temperature exceeded 100 deg. F and therefore, we should tolerate the discomfort. The bureaucrats didn't take into account that the windows could not be fully opened and once the glass building warmed up, it took a long time to cool down. It would have cost a lot more to retrofit the building with the unsightly boxes that were later fitted on the outside of the building.

John Matheison was Chief Engineer at the time. He was asked to give his opinion on air conditioning. He said that the building didn't need air conditioning – all it needed was movement of air. He suggested installing fans for summer time and radiators or water heaters in the winter. Later, of course, air conditioning was installed – firstly on the Executive Floor and then the Theatre and later, the whole building. So instead of the CRB building being the first Government building to be air conditioned, it was probably the last.

Keith McAvoy managed the internal fitting of the building. He liaised with the Architect on the finishes in the building, panelling and the furnishings. Part way through the construction a decision was made that materials were to be of Australian origin. The panels were Mountain Ash (which tended to discolour) and the stone in the foyer was sandstone quarried from Horsham Division. There was a bit of a row actually as the stone around the lift wells was Italian travertine. The Architects had committed to this early and had already purchased the material.

The Master Plan made provision for further expansion on the site but, apart from the construction of the Materials Research Building, the Board decided to lease local buildings in Princes Street and High Street to cater for expansion.

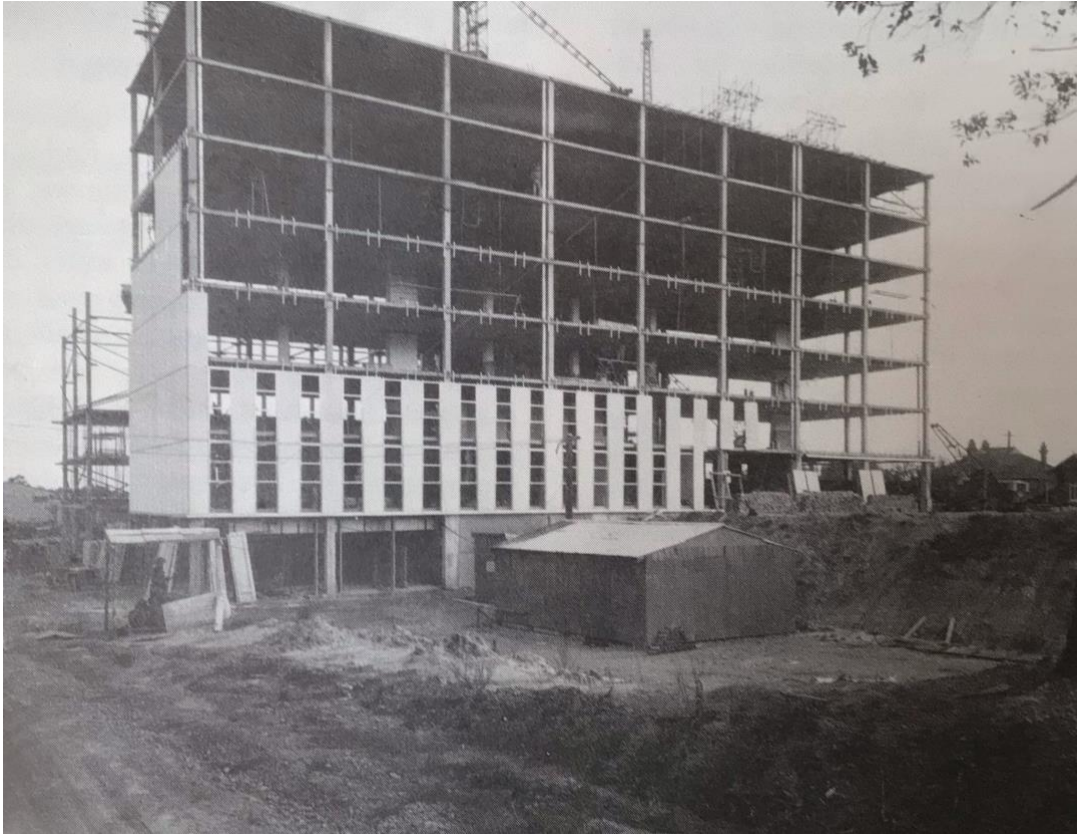
Since the completion of the building there have been a number of modifications – apart from the retrofitting of air conditioning. Because the building was of non-inflammatory type of construction internal fire escapes were provided but external emergency escapes and a sprinkler system were installed later to comply with more modern building regulations. There have been a number of fires in the ceiling involving the insulation batts catching alight because of electrical fittings.

Although Stan had contributed significantly to the building of Head Office, he was not of sufficient rank to be an official guest at the opening. Instead, he was an usher. I had a similar experience at the official opening of the Snowy River Bridges at Orbost. I worked on the project as Project Manager from go to whoa but on the day of the official opening I managed the car parking. All sorts of big wigs came down from Melbourne and Canberra many of whom I'm

sure had never been to Orbost before. Nevertheless, I think both Stan and I were quite satisfied with our achievements.

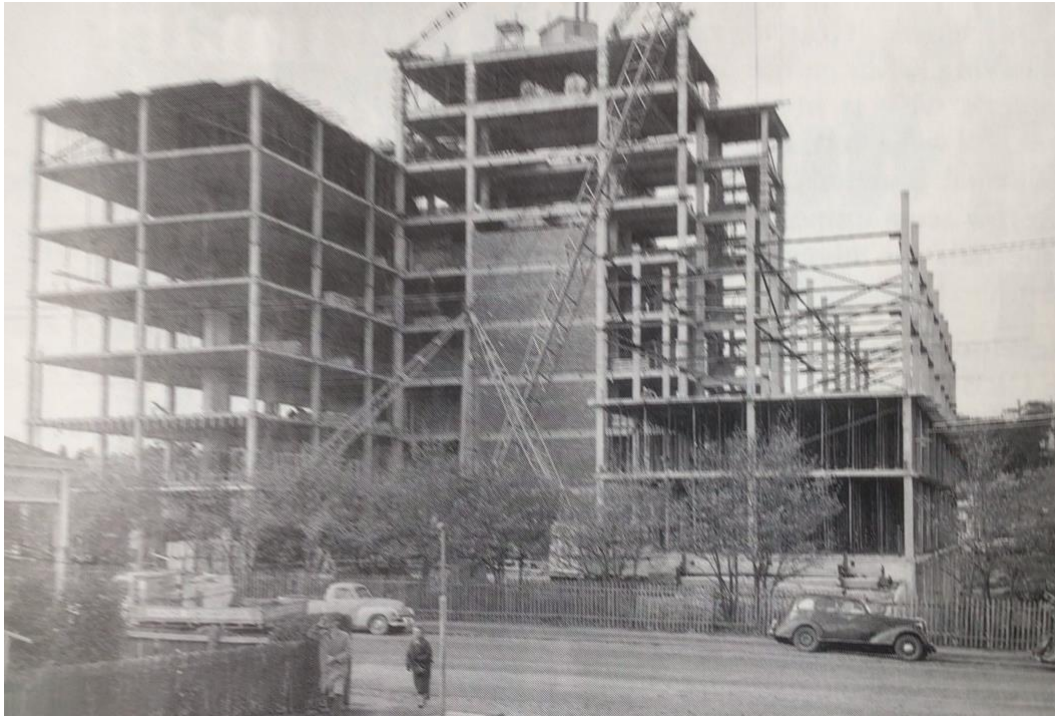
CONSTRUCTING THE BUILDING

The construction of the building was a conventional reinforced concrete frame with flat slab floors. Extensive earthworks as shown in the photograph below.



View looking south. The main entrance is on the right-hand side.

The external cladding was precast panels which had been water-blasted to expose the aggregate. This was a fairly recent development at the time but it stood the test of time pretty well.



The view looking east from Stevenson Street. Note the wooden picket fence.



The same view showing the external cladding being placed. It looks as if the ute was permanently parked in Denmark Street.

The building was modified a number of times during its lifetime. Apart from the installation of air conditioning and additional fire escapes, installing the traffic control centre on the Lower Ground Floor would have required significant changes.

The main foyer on the Ground Floor was considerably revamped. When I started there was a small reception desk located diagonally across the right-hand corner with just one receptionist. To the left of the main door was a room accommodating about six switchboard operators who

handled the telecommunications. There was also a public phone box in the foyer for the use of staff. I don't think I ever saw any one in it. Later the IBM 1620 (?) Mainframe computer was housed in a special space on the Ground Floor.

The offices on the right of the main entrance are fairly recent changes in the overall life of the building.

The library shifted a number of times and, if I remember correctly, certain limitations were placed on the position of shelving to prevent overloading of the floor slabs. Bridge Design Division was given the task of analysing the structure to make sure it was safe. The western wall of the cafeteria was demolished to provide an open flow into the library in its second location. It was originally located on the Third Floor near the Property Section. Finally, the Library moved down to the Ground Floor where most of its stock was filed using a Compactus storage system.

Likewise, the cafeteria had a number of makeovers. It was expanded to take over part of the landing between the North and South wings but the consistency of the meals and service was always pretty good. The Executive Dining Room behind the kitchen was removed and the 'nobility' of the organisation was, at last, forced to share tables with the riff raff. I think this was good for everyone all round.

There were changes to the occupancy of the building as organisational structures grew and changed but most of these merely involved picking up your things and shifting to another office. As the organisation grew, whole branches shifted out to other buildings nearby - to Princess Street and two buildings in High Street. They were really annexes of Head Office and we got good exercise walking between them for work and to the cafeteria for lunch.

Another modification to the building was the signage on the Denmark Street elevation. It was originally CRB, never RCA (I think) and later, the rather clunky VicRoads sign – which remains there today.

Another aspect standing in stark contrast to today was the total lack of security when the building opened – and this remained for many years. Anyone could walk into the building without invitation or interrogation to visit anyone they wanted to see. I remember insurance salesman coming up to the Bridge Division on the 2nd Floor flogging their wares – to the extent that we got to know their names. I can't remember anyone succumbing to their charm and the bosses seemed happy to tolerate them interrupting our work.

There was a reception desk outside the lift on each floor and I remember Dorothy Smith and Joyce Kerfoot being two wonderful typists cum receptionists in Bridge Division. If they were overloaded with typing requests, they sent us upstairs to a typing pool – an experience I felt quite daunting to be in a large room of women only.

I had another happy memory of Head Office. A number of people got together to form a Film Society. I went along to the initiating meeting and came away from it as the inaugural President. In those days, you could only get tickets to the Melbourne Film Festival held at the Palais in St Kilda if you were a member of an affiliated Film Society. I can remember Lillian Moon and Norma Jones were also original members. Ted Donaldson was the Chairman and he and his wife were very supportive.

We started one Friday night with *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* starring Tom Courtney. It was the time of the British kitchen sink dramas and we showed pictures like *This*

Sporting Life, Room at the Top, Billy Liar, A Taste of Honey and *Cathy Come Home*. I also remember *Ship of Fools* being very well received.

But the films I remembered most were the foreign language ones like *The World of Apu* directed by Satyajit Ray. This was the last of a trilogy of films - the others being *Pather Panchali* and *Aparajito*. They were simple films – shot in black and white - about the childhood and early adulthood of a young Bengali named Apu in early twentieth century India. I had never previously seen such understated yet fascinating films.

We also watched European films like *The Cranes are Flying* (Russia) and others from France and Sweden. Their names escape me.

We watched the films in the Theatrette on a Friday night and we had attendances exceeding 100 people. Tom Scott and his staff were the projectionists.



A 1960s view of Head Office with the CRB signage. The Baby Health Centre building is in the bottom left-hand corner of the photograph.

MOVING INTO THE NEW OFFICE

John Pittard was a Flying Instructor with the RAAF during the Second World War and after his discharge in 1946, he studied civil engineering at the University of Melbourne. He graduated in 1950 and commenced work with the CRB in 1954. John was given the job of coordinating the shift from Carlton to Kew over one weekend. The plan was that people left their desks in Carlton on a Friday night and arrived at their new desks in Kew the following Monday morning.

The Board had decided that all the existing furniture at Carlton was too decrepit and they decided to re-equip. Keith McAvoy (mentioned above) was Assets and Equipment Officer and

he was interested in the design of furniture. He designed a standard range of furniture and he convinced the Board to buy new furniture to this pattern. Keith had no draftsmen to call on to draw up the furniture but Gerry Masterton, the Chief Bridge Engineer, arranged all the drawings and specifications to be prepared and then called tenders and awarded contracts. This was how John got involved.

During this time, John had many meetings with the Board and he got to know the members very well. They were Donald Darwin, Caleb Roberts and Bill Neville. John described them as extremely competent in their fields.

A few weeks before the shift, John went out to Kew to supervise deliveries and the positioning of the furniture. The move from the Exhibition Building involved more than 300 people and John felt that it went smoothly. In fact, the only thing missing on that first Monday morning was John himself. He had injured his back and had to lie flat on his back for a fortnight afterwards. Another problem was there was no lift power available until just before the day of the shift and John said he lost 10 lb in weight!

I started work at the CRB a few weeks after the shift. When I was taken round to Bridge Design Division on the second floor there was no desk available for me. Someone rang the Building Manager and within five minutes my desk was delivered. It was in a flat pack and they provided me with a Phillips head screwdriver so that I could assemble my desk. I pre-empted IKEA by about 40 years.

RECOLLECTIONS OF HEAD OFFICE

Dr Graeme Turnbull

Graeme is not a member but he worked for VicRoads between 1986d and 1991. Prior to joining VicRoads, he was the Group Manager, Passenger Research and Administration with the State Transport Authority. He wrote:

‘David. Your newsletters are always a great read A couple of points regarding the demise of the Kew railway. As you have correctly noted the last regular passenger train ran in August 1952, thereafter the line continued for freight traffic - mainly firewood and briquettes. The last freight train ran on the 6th May 1957 after which the line was officially closed. In an unusual move the Railway Commissioners allowed a special train to operate on the closed line a week later.

On 13 May 1957, the Australian Electric Traction Association (AETA) ran a special train (a single one car motor 159ABM) to Kew as part of a tour which also included travel to Glen Waverley and Altona.

The photograph in the November issue of your newsletter (No. 250) is of the AETA special in May 1957, not the last regular passenger train in May 1952.

After official closure several steam trains operated to assist with the dismantling of the line.

Trust all this adds to the story of the site which became the Head Office of the CRB and ultimately VicRoads.

NEWS FROM MEMBERS

Robert (Bob) Lee

Bob wrote some time ago but I have only just found his message in my junk mail folder. Apologies Bob! He wrote:

“Hi David.

Birute Don has sent me a copy of Newsletter 237-September 2022 which mentions a number of matters about which I would like to comment.

I joined the Country Roads Board in March 1949 firstly for a year in Traralgon Division which was then in Head Office and then a year in Dandenong Division. I was an Engineering Assistant.

In the Dandenong Division I knew Jack Ryan very well. As I recall he was a clerk but I don't recall what his duties were. As you infer he was an extrovert par excellence and was full of stories about his activities many of which were almost certainly not true. He was the sort of person who would put his arm around the shoulders of the girls in the office and give them a hug. As I recall he was married, or so he said, and he lived in Mitcham or thereabouts. One story which may or may not be true was that during the war years in Sydney he received a medal for rescuing a girl who had fallen from a ferry.

I'm sure you must have received some comments about Paddy O'Donnell and Bob Eastick as they were very senior engineers.

I am not sure if the comment about the lack of air-conditioning in the Kew building was in this issue of the Newsletter but it was certainly an important issue at the time. It is certainly true that the Board saw it as a means of limiting expenditure on the new building. Indeed, they deferred making a decision about a new building for far too long as they considered they had an obligation to spend their income on roads. The accommodation in the Exhibition Building ultimately became so strained that a move was imperative. Much of my ten years there was spent in a hut out the back or on an enclosed veranda.

An issue which arose soon after moving into the new building was with the insulation in the ceiling. The batts were wrapped in tissue paper and a faulty light set fire to one area. Fortunately, no great damage was done but the mammoth task of unwrapping all the insulation was undertaken.

I have a story which you may like about my early days in the CRB. I first worked in Traralgon Division which was then in Head Office. The Divisional Engineer was Barney Oldfield an old timer and as nice a person you could ever hope to meet. In those days we were paid in cash, the paymaster came around every second Thursday with the wages made up in envelopes. One day as we were queued up to get our envelope Barney said to me “You know I think if they stopped the money I wouldn't come in anymore.” Barney was 65 the year I started work which was then the retiring age, but because he had little superannuation he was kept on for another four years.

I last saw Barney at a CRB function about 1975 and I introduced myself to him and in conversation I said I know you must be 91 as you were 69 when you retired in 1953. “Yes” he said “they stopped the money so I didn't go in any more”.

Kelvin York

Kelvin has continued to express his views to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding the construction and maintenance of Victoria's roads. The following correspondence is self-explanatory.

'Ms Melissa Horne
Minister for Roads and Road Safety

Dear Minister,

Please accept my commiserations on your appointment as Minister for Roads. You have certainly been given the poison chalice. You have inherited a crumbling road network that will continue to crumble at an increasing rate so long as the current construction and maintenance paradigm continues.

Attached is a copy of my letter of 8 December 2018 to one of your predecessors, Ms J Pulford, setting out the root cause of the dilapidation; that is, shoddy construction. Also attached is her reply which, in essence, says that because funds are hard get, there is no money available to ensure that the money available is spent wisely. A strange idea.

The dilapidation was evident well before the appearance of the current period of increased rainfall.

No matter how much money is spent on patching and repairs, the situation will continue to worsen. No matter how much lipstick is put on a pig, it is still a pig.

The only long-term solution to the problem is for the construction and maintenance paradigm to revert to that which served Victoria so well for much of the twentieth century.

Yours etc, Kel York'

This is the earlier letter that Kelvin sent to the previous Minister.

'Minister for Roads
The Hon Jaala Pulford MLC

Dear Ms Pulford,

I read with interest your announcement regarding a boost to funding for road maintenance. While this is a most-welcome announcement, it fails to address the root cause of the poor state of the Victorian road network. Shoddy initial construction is the cause, not lack of maintenance. A well-constructed pavement should have a minimum service life of at least twenty years, with minimal maintenance.

The Country Roads Board (CRB), established in 1913, was renowned internationally as a centre of engineering excellence. In 1983 its name was changed, sensibly, to the Road Construction Authority to better reflect its responsibility for urban and rural roads. In 1989 it was, very unwisely, amalgamated with the Road Traffic Authority, whose responsibility had been in the area of registration and licencing, to form the Roads Corporation, trading as VicRoads. The

functions of the amalgamating-authorities were very disparate, and led to a diminishing focus on road and bridge construction, and to a deskilling of the workforce.

The CRB and, in its early years, VicRoads put considerable effort and expertise in to ensuring that road and bridge design and construction were carried to a standard which would guarantee satisfactory performance. Whether the work was to be carried out by direct labour or contract, all materials and work were tested by the CRB and VicRoads to ensure that specified requirements had been met. There was a central laboratory in Melbourne, and regional laboratories in Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Benalla, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Traralgon and Warrnambool. Dedicated temporary laboratories were set up on major freeway projects. The materials tested included steel, concrete, bitumen, asphalt, soils, gravels, crushed-rock products, roadmarking paints, and reflective-sign materials.

Roadworks were tested to ensure that the specified levels of compaction were achieved in the pavement layers. Testing was also carried out on in-situ materials for the purposes of pavement and foundation design. All these services were also available free of charge to municipalities for any state-funded works undertaken by them, and at cost for non-funded works. At their peak, about two hundred engineers, scientists, technicians and clerks of works were employed in these laboratories.

In the 1990s, the cost of this testing was seen by the State government as a waste of money rather than a wise investment. In the name of so-called quality assurance, the responsibility for testing was given to the contracting industry in the form of self-regulation. The folly of that change is now evident throughout the State. The cost of the testing pales into insignificance when compared with the ongoing cost of repairs, which will continue to increase indefinitely so long as shoddy construction continues.

Setting up a new branch within VicRoads and spending hundreds of millions of dollars on maintenance works will be just sending money down the drain unless measures are taken to ensure that all new construction is carried to the correct standard. It will simply treat the symptom but continue to ignore the disease. There should be a return to a dedicated Road Construction Authority, and the reintroduction of a regime which will ensure that all works are constructed in accordance with the Authority's specifications.

With regard to problems with the current maintenance practices, some years ago it was decided that maintenance would be done by contract rather than by the long-standing practice of using VicRoads' direct labour force. Previous to this, patrol depots were strategically placed around the State, and the patrolmen resided in the local community. The patrolmen took great pride in maintaining their sections of road, and any deficiencies would be brought quickly to their notice by the community.

Maintenance by contractors is ineffective and inefficient. It is very difficult to specify intervention levels for maintenance, e.g. how wide and long must a crack be, how deep must a pothole be, how much damage to a road-sign is acceptable. It is even more difficult to monitor that the specified levels are being observed. It is said that a stitch in time saves nine, but in the case of road maintenance it saves many times nine. A small crack in the pavement surfacing is of no consequence if it is promptly sealed. If, however, it is allowed to remain, water will enter the pavement, and weaken the pavement material and the subgrade, leading to pavement distress, which will require costly remediation.

I write this having spent forty-one years in civil construction, the first thirty-four in the CRB and VicRoads, and the balance on the staff of The Office of The Independent Reviewer, Melbourne City Link Project.'

This is the response to Kel's letter to Minister Pulford.

'Thank you for your letter dated 8 December 2018, regarding the condition of Victoria's arterial road network and the need for improvements in construction and maintenance practices. I apologise for the delay in responding.

As you have noted, the boost to funding in road maintenance is recognition by the State Government of the value of the road network in supporting the unprecedented population growth, and the resulting increases in the movement of people and goods.

I acknowledge the extensive changes you have witnessed in the past thirty years. These changes have followed a national and international trend in road management practices. The highly competitive nature of demands on public funds means it is unlikely that this trend will reverse.

The Government has recognised the need to strengthen the delivery of transport infrastructure, especially given the massive infrastructure program now underway. Consequently, a new authority dedicated to project delivery has been established - the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority (MTIA).

As a result, VicRoads is now focussing its attention on strengthening its role as the State's long-term asset manager. This means building greater capacity in ensuring the quality, standards and performance of the works being delivered by MTIA and others on the State's road network.

I can assure you that the Government is firmly focussed on improving the State's capacity and capability to tackle the challenge of ensuring both the efficient delivery of a huge transport agenda, and ensuring it is delivered to the appropriate quality.

Thank you again for taking the time to raise these issues with me and for the brief history of the Country Roads Board. As the new Minister for Roads, Road Safety and the TAC, I appreciate the information you have provided.'

Reg Marslen

Reg wrote:

'Just to let you know that when I received Newsletter 251, I realised that I had not received either issues 249 or 250. I mention this in case there is a glitch in the system and other members may have missed out on two excellent newsletters. Not to worry though as I immediately logged into the website to read them. There is not much more work involved to do this and is an alternative method of issuing the newsletter provided we are told it has been posted.

I enjoyed the article on the Echuca Bridge as I spent many days on Municipal inspections with Tom Glazebrook looking at alternative sites etc. That was in the late 1970s and early 80s. The last three newsletters have highlighted what is wrong with the road system at present. We are all on the same page, the people in charge have absolutely no idea about building roads. This goes right down to the people repairing potholes. I shudder when I see the ugly patches that

are now appearing. Very few patches are squared out and appear to be premix thrown into the damaged area. This eventually gets squashed out and you get a bigger pothole.

Ted Barton's article was excellent and highlights what is missing in management at the moment - expertise and the passing on of knowledge. I remember the words of my son Terry when he left VicRoads in Bairnsdale in 2010. "Dad you wouldn't want to work here now." He left because he could not abide what was happening to the organisation then. He has worked with Crane's Constructions in Bairnsdale as the boss's executive assistant mainly in charge of the asphalt and sealing side of the business. You may recall the description of the system of maintenance given in Bairnsdale on our visit in 2011. Terry had been in charge of maintenance of the Princes Highway from Bairnsdale to the N.S.W border.

Kind regards - Reg Marslen'

Editor's note: One other person has informed me that he did not receive Newsletter No. 249. If any of you have had similar problems, please contact me and I can retransmit it to you.

Glyn Jones

Glyn wrote:

'Hi David,

I am unsure if I have missed some of the tributes you paid to ex-service people. In particular, I wondered about Pat Marr from the Plan Filing Section in Kew.

She made a wonderful and valuable contribution to the English in Intelligence there. She enthralled me with some of her stories over lunch a couple of times. Perhaps she did not discuss it with others as it would have been on a 'Secret & Confidential File' for some years after the war.

Pat was my 'Tap In Point' when I wanted to see plans of the latest bridges the CRB was planning. I finished up with a couple of large folders of the GA (General Arrangement) plans to base our future structures on. With assistance from Bob Morrison, we were allowed to do our own bridge drafting in Warrnambool and prepare our own specifications. Bottlenecks in bridge drafting were thereby minimised. Mike Verey and Bruce Addis gave us tremendous assistance in this area too. It was a good time. Having a good regional draftsman (Don Gleeson) rounded off the team.

Sorry to ramble!

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Christmas and New Year.

Regards, Glyn'

Editor's note: Glyn's letter enabled me to find out more information about Pat and her war time story is included below under Lest We Forget.

Jaroslav Mychajlyszyn

Dian, Jaroslav's daughter, has informed me that he has shifted into aged care and no longer can read the newsletter. He is 97 years old.

Juri Strante

In Newsletter 235 (July 2022) I included an article written by Juri Strante entitled 'On being Latvian in Australia'. It was a touching story and many readers responded to it. He migrated to Australia with his widowed mother in 1950 and together, they forged a new life in a new country – one of those unheralded success stories of multi-cultural Australia.

I have not met Juri – but we are both threatening to meet one day. He is now living up in Queensland. I have been sending him our newsletter and he often drops a line of appreciation. He has written again with what he terms as 'lots of reminiscent truths for my group born between 1930-1946.' This is what he wrote:

“Compared to what's going on now, last century was heaps better than the past 23 years of current century.

As you know I arrived in Australia as a six-year old and do recall milk being delivered in bottles to the front door (I lived in a boarding house in East St Kilda.) An "ice man" came in summer delivering blocks of ice for the communal ice chest we shared with other borders. A "Golden Crust" bakery cart, drawn by a horse gave me a warm fresh bread roll during the school holidays most times when I went to greet the horse. The local milk bar in Orrong Road made delicious "spiders" ~ice cream mixed with lemonade. Soda water came in syphons that were worth two shillings when returned empty. The tram fare from Orrong Road to Chapel Street (along Dandenong Rd) was one penny. I often walked to school in Hornby Street) to save the penny because a pie cost five pence (with sauce). Mum's payday was on a Thursday so I received one shilling for lunch on Friday.

Small milk bottles with a metal caps were delivered to school every day. When left out in the sun there was nothing worse than trying to drink warm milk. The metal caps were saved to put on the spokes of my second-hand red bike.

Sorry David. I meant to write a short three-line thank you letter, but this one per center had a sudden rush of memories that I never thought I still had after over 70 years. What a magic store house is our brain.

Thanks for the thought re Margit (his wife). She is from Hungary originally, escaped after the 1956 Russian invasion. Although she has not my Aussie memories, her memories are unique in other ways. I'm encouraging her to write her early years to amaze our Aussie neighbours. It's all been a wonderful life ~ *Juri*”

Bill Brake

Bill wrote to me some time ago as follows:

‘Dear David

I noticed in the last newsletter that you referred to Ernie Renz being at Bethanga in 1961 and you did not know when he joined the Board.

Ernie was my Clerk of Works for widening the bridges on the Midland Highway between Shepparton and Nalinga. It would have been in late 1953.

Keep up with the good works, Regards, Bill’

Readers might remember that I wrote about Ernie's experience in being one of the 'Dunera Boys'.

I have been remiss in not responding to this note earlier, and especially in not conveying our best wishes to Bill for his hundredth birthday – which I am sure was in March.



Bill is a legend in the annals of the CRB, being Chief Engineer between 1972 and 1974 before becoming a Member of the Board where he served until his retirement. Bill was also a long serving committee member of the VicRoads Association. Congratulations Bill on an outstanding career and a fulfilling life.

I have also included Bill's story from Roads to War in the section entitled Lest We Forget – later in this newsletter.

LEST WE FORGET

In this newsletter, I have included the stories of two people whom I have described as legends in the CRB – Pat Marr and Bill Brake.

The only woman I was able to find with any certainty who served in the war was Pat Marr. There may have been others but history has swallowed them up. In the Annual Report of 1954, 60 members of staff and 536 employees were listed as having served in the Second World War.

In that list, there was only one woman – Miss T. Storey. She was listed as a member of staff. I searched all the available archives and found only one woman called Storey – Aircraftwoman Valerie June Storey. In some respects, she fitted the bill. She was a comptometer operator which is an occupation that the CRB would have engaged. I included her story (no pun intended) in *Roads to War* but I qualified it by saying I was not the least bit convinced that it was the right Miss Storey. On the other hand, there are quite a few names incompatible with the rolls who proved to be correct.

The story of Pat Marr is very different and her role during the War may have affected the lives of many more people than anyone else in this narrative. I think you will agree.

Flying Officer Patricia (Pat) Mary Marr, 2033299, WAAF

Pat is the only woman in the CRB that I have found so far to have served – but it is likely there were others. She lived in England and joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) in June 1941. She emigrated to Australia, arriving at Melbourne on 13 November 1961 aboard the *Iberia*. Her address was given as 13 Cartwright Street, Glenroy, Melbourne. Her status on the ship's manifest was 'married' but she emigrated alone. She may have been joining her husband, divorced or widowed.

She remained in the Air Force after the war. I found her name in the Supplement to the London Gazette, 31 May 1949, promulgating her promotion to Flying Officer.

She was the Plan Filing Clerk at the CRB responsible for the management of the organisation's plans at Head Office. These included, *inter alia*, military maps and aerial photographs. However, during the Second World War, Pat had a far more urgent involvement with military maps and aerial photographs.

Noel Anderson (see Chapter 7) was a close colleague. His recollection was that Pat was a Flying Officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) and during the war she was engaged in interpreting aerial photographs identifying targets such as the launching pads for the V1 and V2 rocket bombs used by the Germans during the blitz of London. These bombs – called 'buzz bombs' – were first launched in June 1944. Over 6,000 were launched at Britain; 2,340 hit London causing 5,500 deaths and 16,000 injuries.

WAAFs did not serve as aircrew. The use of women pilots was limited to the Air Transport Auxiliary, which was civilian. Although they did not participate in active combat, they were exposed to the same dangers as any on the home front working at military installations. They were active in parachute packing and the crewing of barrage balloons in addition to performing meteorological, radar, aircraft maintenance, transport and communications duties - including wireless and telegraphic operations. They worked with codes and ciphers, performed intelligence operations and analysed reconnaissance photographs. WAAFs were a vital presence in the control of aircraft, both in radar stations and as plotters in operation rooms, most notably during the Battle of Britain. These operation rooms directed fighter aircraft against the Luftwaffe, mapping both home and enemy aircraft positions.



WAAFs in the operations room during the Battle of Britain.

Glyn Jones – once the Bridge Engineer in Warrnambool Division – remembers conversations he had with her. He said she made a valuable contribution to British intelligence during the war. She enthralled him with some of her experiences but she didn't discuss details because of 'secret and confidential' protocols which still prevailed after the war.

She told Glyn that her proudest achievement was the discovery of the V2 sites at Peenemünde when little was known where they were. A WAAF named Constance Babington Smith was credited mainly with the discovery but Pat assured him that Babington Smith was only part of the team who should have been given more recognition for their success. This work involved interpretation of photo reconnaissance from special camera equipped fighter planes.

Constance Babington Smith became a British writer and journalist after the war but she is best known for her wartime work in imagery intelligence. She was born into English nobility and her knowledge of aircraft took her into the WAAF. In April 1943, her unit in the Allied Photographic Intelligence Unit, was briefed by the Air Ministry to be on the look-out for a long-range gun, remotely controlled rocket aircraft and 'some sort of tube out of which a rocket could be squirted' and 'anything queer'.

Peenemünde was the site of a German research station on the Baltic Sea. Allied photographic reconnaissance from the air had indicated unusual activities there, possibly the construction of earthworks for testing rockets. In June 1943, one of Babington Smith's fellow interpreters made the first identification of two V2 long range rockets lying horizontally on road vehicles at Peenemünde.



1943 RAF photo reconnaissance picture of the Peenemünde Army Research Centre on the Baltic coast of Germany

Examining a photograph taken on June 23 1943 they spotted 'four little tail-less aeroplanes taking the air' which 'looked queer enough to satisfy anybody'. What they had seen, it turned out, were four Me 163 liquid rocket fighters. V2 long range rockets were identified from photographs of Peenemünde for the first time that month.

On November 13 1943, they were asked to look out for aircraft at Peenemünde which might be pilotless. Their search was under way when on November 28 a de Havilland Mosquito returned with a sensational photograph. As Babington Smith studied it through her stereoscope, she identified a ramp holding a tiny cruciform shape on rails. Her discovery, together with the subsequent examination of many thousands of photographs of other possible launch sites and storage depots, indicated that a flying bomb offensive was being prepared on the other side of the Channel.

The bombing of the launch sites was given urgent priority, under the codename 'Crossbow'. Babington Smith's unit had the task of providing photographic material to assist targeting by Bomber Command and its Pathfinder Force, and at the end of 1943 Allied air forces flattened the known launch sites.

Operation Crossbow is a compelling example of how critical the work of the reconnaissance squadrons and the photographic interpretation unit at RAF Medmenham was to the outcome of the war. The imagery taken then shows the extent of the search for test and launch sites, which involved taking over 1.2 million aerial photographs, the great efforts made by the Germans to camouflage the sites, and the dramatic response of the Allied air forces when targets were pinpointed.

Without this photographic intelligence, which was created at remarkable speed, the Germans could have launched potentially devastating attacks on Britain before D-Day that could have changed the outcome of the war.

But by the spring of 1944 the Germans had built less obvious emplacements in the Pas de Calais and in June Hitler unleashed the V1 assault on London and the south of England. The V2s began to fall on London in September.



A V1 flying bomb.

In the meantime, the unit had been pursuing another vital brief - watching out for new types of aircraft, especially jets. When Group Captain Frank Whittle, inventor of the jet engine, paid them a visit, he was much impressed by what they had found - notably the Me 163, He 280 and Me 262.

By 1945, the aircraft recognition section (L Section) had eleven staff – one of whom was Pat Marr.

To say that Pat supervised the Plan Filing Room is an understatement. She operated it with rigid efficiency and, consequently, earned the respect of draftsmen/draftswomen and engineers alike. The room was located on the Lower Ground Floor at Head Office. Once it was inundated with nine inches of rainwater following a heavy downpour. About 1,000 maps and statfiles became saturated but Pat saved them all with plastic and blotting paper spreading them out in the Theatrette on the Ground Floor. After her retirement, she threatened to write a book about her experiences working at the CRB. She said she would call it “Murder in the Plan Filing Room”.



Pat Marr on her retirement day – 1980.

Pat was a stalwart of the CRB's Drama Group who used to put on plays in the Head Office theatrette. Apparently, she had done a lot of work in the film industry in England and her role was usually behind the scenes as a director.

Pat died in June 2021. She requested that each person attending her funeral should bring a single flower.

Sapper William (Bill) Simpson Brake, VX96311 (V158054)

Bill was born in Camberwell in 1923 and enlisted in the Australian Army in February 1945. Bill attended Mont Albert Central School until 1936 after which he attended Scotch College until the end of 1941. He commenced studying civil engineering at the University of Melbourne in 1942 but at the end of that year he decided to join the Royal Australian Navy. He enlisted in December 1942, completed his medical and was awaiting call up when, on Boxing Day 1942, someone from the Manpower Directorate rang him to say that his enlistment was voided and that he had to continue his engineering studies.

Labour controls were introduced in 1942 to deal with the needs of the armed services and industry. Manpower regulations affected individual liberties and touched the day-to-day activities of Australians perhaps more than any other executive operations of government throughout this period. The first significant regulation introduced during the first two years of the war was to reserve occupations from military service. Occupations reserved were those which were essential for the production of equipment and supplies for the war effort. From the first of April 1942 engagement of all male labour was controlled and a national registration of both male and female labour was completed. The government had the power to say what every man should do whether in the armed services, war industry or civilian industry. The powers under the Manpower Regulations included:

- Power to exempt a person from service or prohibit their enlistment
- Prevent employers from engaging labour not authorised by the directorate
- Restrict the right of employees to engage in the employment of their choice
- Prevent employees from leaving their employment
- Restrict the right of the employer to dismiss his employees
- Power to direct any person to leave one employment and engage in another
- And compel individuals to register and provide information about themselves.

Such is the necessity of war, and young Bill Brake's destiny was set in history by these regulations. Likewise, at the end of 1944, Bill's studies were interrupted by the Directorate when he was ordered to enlist in the Army – which he did in February 1945.

He joined the Royal Australian Engineers and trained in Cowra for three months and then he went to Kapooka, near Wagga Wagga, in NSW to do a training course in bridging. He was there in May 1945 at the time of what has now become known as the Kapooka Tragedy. It is etched deep in his memory. Twenty six recruits lost their lives in a bunker where they were being trained in the use of explosives. The cause of the explosion is not known. The gravity of the loss is compounded by the fact that the war was drawing to a close - the Germans had surrendered and momentum was with the Allies in the Pacific.



Thousands of people lined the streets of Wagga Wagga to watch the funeral procession after the Kapooka tragedy.

At the war's end, Bill had nearly completed his training while working on the construction of the bridge over the Murrumbidgee River in Wagga Wagga. It was a Bailey Bridge supported on pontoons. He lived in a tent by the river. He recalled that in the winter, the still water in the river used to freeze over.

After his discharge in January 1946, Bill went back to university to complete his degree. In his cohort were other CRB stalwarts such as Tom Russell, Keith Moody, Laurie Jones and Max

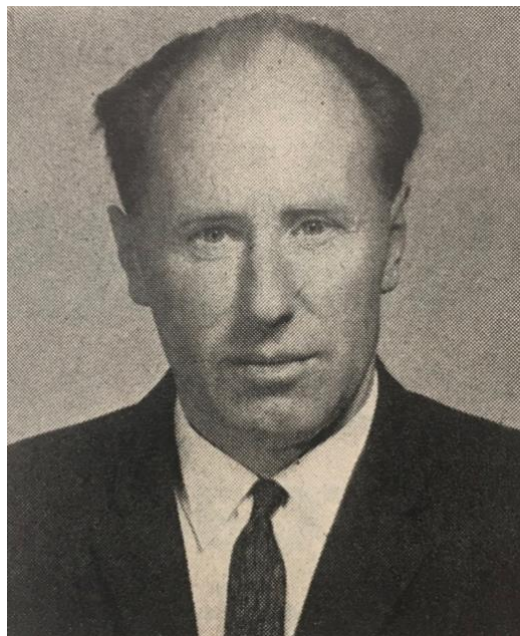
McPherson. He completed his studies at the end of 1948 and in 1949, he married Mona (Noni) Lesley McDonald.

Bill had a stellar career at the CRB. In 1949, the newlyweds went to Bairnsdale Division where Bill Dolamore was the Divisional Engineer. Bill was given responsibility for all the roads west of Nowa Nowa while Les Starling looked after those to the east. At that time, most of the roads were unsealed and they passed through some of the remotest parts in the State of Victoria. Bill had to travel up into the mountains and often had to stay out of the office for days on end. He recalled once, staying at a remote hotel in the high country where the hotelkeeper opened a tin of Irish Stew for his dinner. He didn't return.

I mentioned in an earlier newsletter how Frank Jackson and Les Starling carried the cash wages – and a pistol – to the remote camps in their areas of responsibility. When Frank was being shown how to take the safety catch off the pistol, it went off and put a bullet through the floor next to Frank's foot whereupon Frank jumped out the window. Bill also had this responsibility for staff under his control. He said he often carried up to £2,000 in a dilly bag on the seat of the car with the pistol in it. He would often have a line of detonators in the car to give to the road gangs he was visiting. At the hotel where he was staying, he would place the bag in the bottom of the wardrobe and go down for dinner with never a worry about it. In winter, he drained the radiator of his car as there was no anti-freeze available in those days.

After Bairnsdale Division Bill spent five years at Benalla Division looking after the Hume Highway, the Murray Valley Highway, and the Midland Highway. His last Divisional appointment was to Dandenong Division as Assistant Divisional Engineer to Frank Docking.

When Bill finished his career working in the Divisions, he was transferred back to Head Office as Deputy Chief Engineer Road Design. He served as Chief Engineer between 1972 and 1974 after which he was appointed as a member of the Board under the Chairmanship of Tom Russell.



Bill Brake – circa 1960s.

Much of this information was gleaned from an interview with Bill in October 2022 when Bill was 99 years old. Although he has become very deaf, his memory is amazing.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

In this newsletter, I include for you the most beautiful letter of love ever written. I first heard it in the compelling film, *The Civil War*, by Ken Burns. Please don't be ashamed if you cry. It is a letter from a man to his beloved wife - before he went into battle.

"July 14, 1861

Camp Clark, Washington

My very dear Sarah: The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days — perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more ...

I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans on the triumph of the Government and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the Revolution. And I am willing — perfectly willing — to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this Government, and to pay that debt ...

Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the battle field.

The memories of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me, and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them for so long. And how hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our sons grown up to honourable manhood, around us. I have, I know, but few and small claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me — perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battle field, it will whisper your name. Forgive my many faults and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless and foolish I have often times been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears every little spot upon your happiness ...

But, O Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the gladdest days and in the darkest nights ... always, always, and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath, as the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for me, for we shall meet again ..."

Sullivan Ballou was killed a week later at the First Battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861.



Major Sullivan Ballou.

Born March 28, 1829, in Smithfield, Rhode Island, Ballou was educated at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts; Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island; and the National Law School in Ballston, New York. He was admitted to the Rhode Island Bar in 1853.

Ballou devoted his brief life to public service. He was elected in 1854 as clerk of the Rhode Island House of Representatives, later serving as its speaker. He married Sarah Hart Shumway on October 15, 1855, and the following year saw the birth of their first child, Edgar. A second son, William, was born in 1859. Ballou immediately entered the military after the war broke out in 1861. He became judge advocate of the Rhode Island militia and was 32 at the time of his death.

When he died, his wife was 24. She later moved to New Jersey to live out her life with her son, William, and never remarried. She died at age 80 in 1917. Sullivan and Sarah Ballou are buried next to each other at Swan Point Cemetery in Providence, Rhode Island. They have no known living descendants.

Ironically, Sullivan Ballou's letter was never mailed. Although Sarah would receive other, decidedly more upbeat letters dated after the now-famous letter from the battlefield, the letter in question was found among Sullivan's effects when Governor William Sprague of Rhode Island travelled to Virginia to retrieve the remains of his state's sons who had fallen in battle.

BEWARE OF SCAMS

We are seeing an increase in sophisticated scams and fraud and I thought it appropriate to provide some advice to help you from being dragged in to the hands of scammers – who are nothing but criminals. They constantly change their tactics and we all have a part in being vigilant.

Scammers can use many media – internet, telephone and even knocking on your door.

Here are some simple tips.

- If something seems to be too good to be true, it usually is. Pause and check before acting.

- Use strong passwords and keep your computer and mobile devices secure.
- Delete suspicious texts and emails. Do not open them.
- Do not be pressured over the phone. It is OK to hang up. I would advise not to buy anything over the phone unless you have initiated a valid transaction.
- Avoid unusual payment methods and requests for money or personal information.
- Remember, not all door-to-door sales and services are legitimate. If you are tempted, seek independent advice or ring the organisation they purport to be representing. Don't do the deal on your doorstep.
- Be suspicious of anyone asking for your personal information or a payment.
- Be wary of unexpected links even if they appear from legitimate sources.
- Never give unsolicited callers remote access to your computer or your banking details. Call your bank and report it.
- Contact your bank immediately if you have sent money or shared your banking details with a scammer. Remember, your bank will never ask you for banking details over e-mail, text or phone. If you think you might be being scammed or if something doesn't feel right, contact your bank.
- If you feel something is a scam contact scamwatch.gov.au or call 1300 558 181.
- Report theft or fraud to your local police.

If you follow these rules, you should be safe.

John Gaffney's opinion piece in The Age

The following article appeared in The Age on 21 November 2023. I am sure that John and The Age won't mind me reproducing it in full.

'Weather playing a role in state's road deaths

Victorians are rightly concerned about the dramatic increase in road deaths across the state this year compared with last.

To date, 259 lives have been lost in 2023, compared with 214 in the same period in 2022, a 21 per cent increase.

But road safety is complex and it can be difficult to pinpoint the possible causes for the increase beyond the usual suspects.

To begin, there are two issues that cloud our understanding. The first is the aim of all state governments to achieve zero fatalities or serious injuries on our roads by 2050, which has created a distracting sense of urgency.

The second issue is about numbers – and small numbers in particular. Numbers in events like fatal crashes vary year to year.

At a glance, this year's toll compared to last year's looks like a disaster, but compared over a decade it's a different story. Sadly, the number of fatal crashes is not going down. Roughly the same number of people are dying on our roads each year as they were a decade ago. But the other part of the story is what is causing changes year to year: weather.

Research shows that years with higher road deaths in Victoria align with extremes in climate. Whenever we experience a strong or extended La Nina event, the road toll is higher, which happened in 2010-11, 2016-17, and this year.

Of course, climate and weather variability don't explain everything, but looking at five or 10-year rolling averages, the variations in fatalities match up with various climate cycles like El Nino, La Nina, the Indian Ocean Dipole and Southern Annular Mode.

When summers are warmer and drier, we see fatal crashes increasingly concentrate around 3 pm. This is the hottest part of the day during any summer, but when the heat is more extreme than usual, drivers experience heat stress, dehydration, fatigue and extreme sun glare. Road pavements also become softer and braking distances increase by 25 per cent (around 10-15 metres extra distance), which can be the difference between life and death. Significantly, if the warmer and drier El Nino conditions align with winter, we can expect lower road tolls due to dry winters.

But it is not just heatwaves or increased rain events alone that cause a higher toll. Weather events like cloud cover, increased atmospheric moisture and wind speed, more fog and more thunderstorms all contribute, causing damp pavements, slippery roads and soft road shoulders.

Another simple predictor of potential road toll is the amount of water flowing into dams. When our state's dams are emptying or low, the road toll is also low. When dams are filling or near capacity, the road toll is higher, which indicates the more moisture in the atmosphere, the greater the risk.

Data also shows that Victoria's fatal crashes vary geographically across the state each year. In 2019, which was hotter and drier than previous years, fatal crash locations moved more northward and westward. In the colder and wetter years, they can move southward and eastward. This suggests the environment plays a bigger part in road safety than many experts or state policymakers currently recognise.

There are many opportunities to improve road safety and attempt to reduce the tragic number of major crashes and fatalities. One simple way of doing this is to inform motorists on the risks of driving in the more extreme weather conditions.

It's not that only bad, careless or inattentive drivers are dying on our roads. Good drivers are dying for want of basic information and advice. Give them a tangible reason to drive with caution on certain days and chances are they will.'

John worked for VicRoads in transport and road safety and is now retired.

Road works during the Great Depression – 1930 to 1939

During the Depression, road works were carried out using primitive equipment. Earthworks were formed with horse teams drawing scoops, graders, planers and drags. Sideboards were set to line and level with boning rods and stringlines to define the edges of the pavement, the gravel spread by hand and shaped to camber with a template.

Patrolmen worked with a horse and dray on a 10-mile length of road. The allowance for the horse depended on the price of chaff, which was shown on the wages sheet. Some bituminous

surfacing was done by hand, the tar or bitumen being applied by pouring pots and screenings spread by shovel from heaps on the side of the road.



Circa 1936 – A patrolman's outfit for adverse weather conditions: dragging on the Serpentine Road in East Loddon Shire.

Government funds were provided for Unemployment Relief. On the Mount Hotham Road, a camp was erected on the roadside using bush poles, sawn timber, corrugated iron and hessian, the men being billeted in tents. Many of the men sent up from Melbourne were unfit or unaccustomed to manual labour and only stayed until payday. Others hardened to the conditions and work progressed quite well. The presence of copperhead snakes enlivened operations.

The supervising engineer, Frank Docking, had the task of surveying the section of road under construction during the day and preparing the plans for the overseers at night. He had a Triumph motorbike for transport from which he parted company on a curve one frosty morning.



1938 – Campsite for unemployment relief road workers on the Noojee to Erica Road in Gippsland



From 1938 – hand pouring seal on the Calder Highway



1937 – Building the cutting at Rosedale on the Princes Highway East – nearing the end of the horse era



Mid 1930s – Men of the East Gippsland roads at 'home' near Bairnsdale

TRIVIA AND DIDACTIC WHIMSIES

A good night out

It was Saturday evening and David said to his wife, Elizabeth: "Les go out to eat tonight." Elizabeth responded rather classically with, "I have nothing to wear."

So, David said to her: "Just wear what you had on the last time we went out darling, you looked beautiful!"

There they were in their local Chinese restaurant, David in jeans and a T shirt, and Elizabeth in her wedding dress!

Quick thinking

A man in Sydney walked into the produce section of his local supermarket and asked to buy half a head of lettuce. The boy working in the produce department told him that they only sold whole heads of lettuce.

The man was insistent that the boy ask the manager about the matter. Walking into the back room, the boy said to the manager, "Some old \$&*#\$%^ outside wants to buy half a head of lettuce".

As he finished his sentence, he turned around to find that the man had followed and was standing right behind him, so the boy quickly added, "and this gentleman kindly offered to buy the other half".

The manager approved the deal and the man went on his way.

The post turtle

While stitching a cut on the hand of a 75-year old farmer, the doctor struck up a conversation with the old man.

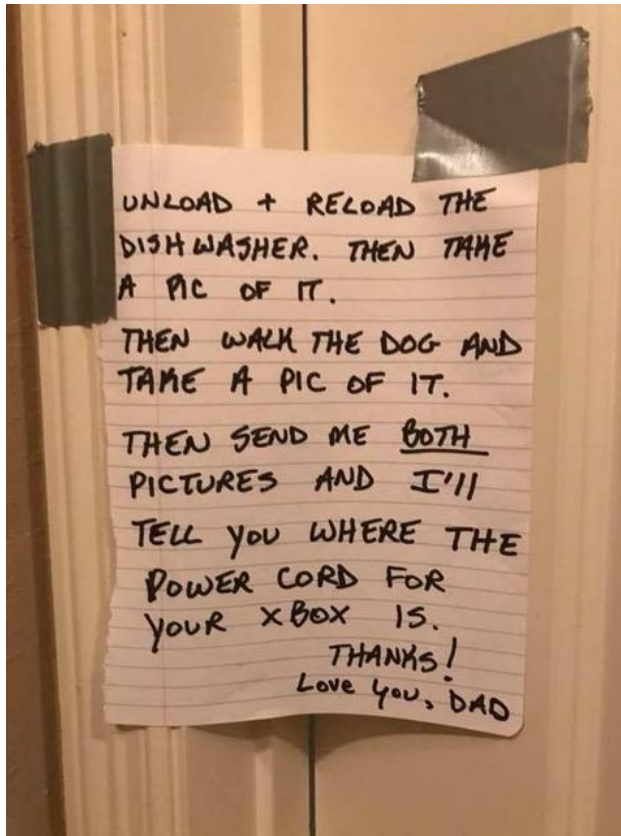
Eventually the topic got around to politicians and their role as our leaders. The farmer said, "Well, as I see it, most politicians are 'post turtles'." Not being familiar with the term, the doctor asked him what a 'post turtle' was.

The farmer replied, "When you're driving down a country road and you come across a fence post with a turtle balanced on top, that's a post turtle."

The farmer saw the puzzled look on the doctor's face so he continued to explain.

"You know he didn't get up there by himself, he doesn't belong up there, he doesn't know what to do while he's up there, he's elevated beyond his ability to function, and you just wonder what kind of dumb cluck put him up there to begin with."

Best explanation of a politician I've ever heard.



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