THE CRB

– PEOPLE AND PICTURES

By Peter McCullough

Front cover: “The Price of Progress”.
Victoria’s first road fatality, Sale area c1911

THE COUNTRY ROADS BOARD

During my last twelve months with the CRB/RCA it occurred to me that there were a number of existing and former staff members who had a long association with the organization and had fascinating stories to tell. With a borrowed recorder I set about interviewing these veterans and, some years after my departure, their accounts were published in 'Reminiscences of Life in the Country Roads Board'. I have recounted a few of my own experiences in previous pages, but I could not let the opportunity pass without relaying a number of the more interesting tales. A few stories have also been 'lifted' from the staff magazine 'Roadlines' (which morphed into 'Interchange') and also from a book 'The Road Builders' by Fred Ward (ex-Bairnsdale Division). Although I have tried to put the stories into some sort of order, this was no easy task and the result is something of a smorgasbord.

HEAD OFFICE LOCATIONS

The Head Office of the CRB/RCA/Vic Roads had three separate locations:

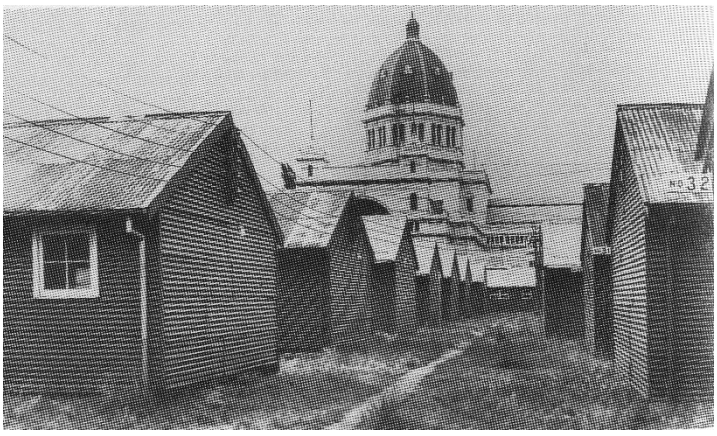
The Titles Office (1913-1927)

"In those early days, with the CRB barely 10 years old, it was a tiny organization. The total staff was about 50, occupying a couple of floors of a wing of the Titles Office building in Latrobe Street. There was also a storeyard in Montague from which plant and equipment for the Board's day-labour gang was provided. I suppose not more than 20 to 25 people comprised the Engineering Section, of which about eight engineers were professionally qualified." (Harry George, commenced 1923)

"As the Highways Section was being set up the Board established six regional offices headed by District Engineers…it was a golden age of engineering staff when one considers the ability of the men who were appointed to these positions." (Harry George)

The Exhibition Building (1927-1961)

"Working conditions at the Exhibition were very primitive. It really was a dreadful place to work, but it was probably a more close-knit organization in those days." (John Pittard)



"Everyone had to be early because there was a red line drawn on the book at 8-45 a.m. and anyone who came after that red line was drawn had to have a pretty good excuse." (Stan Hodgson)

As numbers grew, they built the tin shed in 1954: "In summer it was atrocious. The worst day we got was 100 degrees and we couldn't work there. A couple of blokes peeled down to their underwear.

The expression 'not a pen stirred' was attributed to me. We had a canvas waterbag for refreshments. They finally put a refrigerated fountain in the Exhibition main building." (Mac Wilkinson)

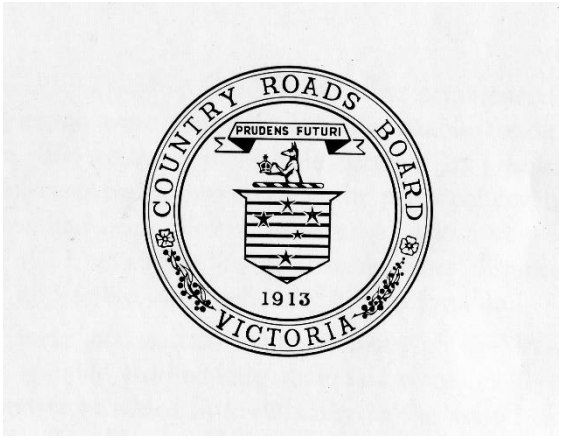
"We got three days in succession over 100 degrees and in the middle of the day it was about 110. Fred Pedelty used 6H pencils to do his drawings and that is terribly hard. Those three days were so hot that Fred's 6H pencils went soft in the heat." (John Pittard)

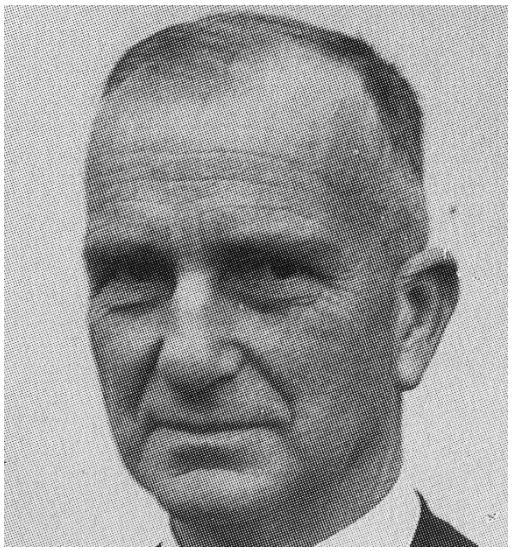
"Those immediate post-war years were important to the Board in tackling the backlog of urgent work, and they also made a lasting impression on the staff who contributed. They were part of a close-knit team, committed to doing a good job to enhance the image of the Board. A concerned, friendly group; an extension of one's own family, made up of those who appreciated comradeship, loyalty and decency." (John Gibney)

60 Denmark Street, Kew. (1961-present)

In 1959 a 99-year lease was obtained from the Victorian Railways for the site of the former Kew railway station. The Board decided, wisely, to equip the building with new furniture and, less wisely, not install air conditioning. The move of equipment took place on the weekend commencing Friday 2 December, 1960 and on the following Monday morning around 300 people started work at Kew.

According to folk lore, at the official opening the Chairman, **D.V.Darwin (below)**, took as the theme for his address the Board's crest. He spoke at length about the horse, the head of which appeared on the crest; he spoke about the role that the horse had played in road construction in the early days, and its importance as a means of conveyance. Afterwards someone nudged Darwin and said "It's not a horse on the crest; it's a kangaroo." The Chairman was apparently aghast at committing such a faux pas.





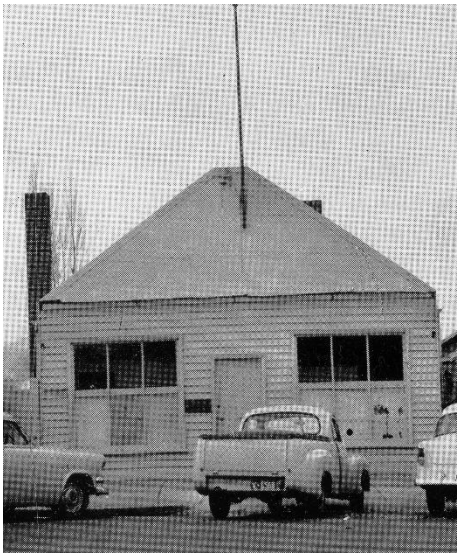
Before many years had elapsed there were 700 working in the main building, the Materials Research building had appeared, and additional office space was rented nearby: the Bridge Sub-Branch occupied 1 Princess Street and Road Design had moved to premises in High Street.

In the 1960's and '70's any visitor arriving at the front door who happened to glance across Denmark Street was bemused by the small food outlet which specialized in crepes. It was conducted by a gentleman named Alexander who traded, as you would expect, as 'Alexander the Crepe'. Eventually a new proprietor came along. His name was not Alexander so some initiative was required; he opted for 'The Crepe Escape.'

DIVISIONS.

Bairnsdale Division. This division abounded in stories, real or apocryphal, and even its formation was somewhat controversial:

"The Chief Engineer in the early '20's was Mr. Calloway and a story of how the Division came to be formed was that an overseer by the name of Parker working on the Orbost-Delegate Road (now Bonang Highway) got word that the 'time-keeper' was drunk at Orbost. He then sent off a telegram informing the Chief. The time-keeper happened to be a friend of the postmaster and got word of the telegram. He sent off a counter telegram "Overseer drunk at Delegate." The two telegrams landed on the Chief's desk the next morning so he decided to fill up the 'T' model Ford and head for the job to straighten things out. By the time he finally arrived in Orbost everything was running along smoothly. This appears to have been a typical example of the problems caused by all jobs being run from Melbourne and a lack of local headquarters." (Summer 1977 edition of Roadlines)



So in 1925 district headquarters were set up in Sale with Sid Gray in charge. In 1927 L.H.Archibald became District Engineer and in 1933 the headquarters shifted from Sale to an old hay and grain store in **Bairnsdale (at right)**. The staff received very little notice of the change and when the typist found that she couldn't fit into the Divisional Engineer's car, she had to settle on travelling up with the furniture.

L.H.Archibald was one of the Board's more colourful Divisional Engineers. Although he apparently flouted a few rules and upset some at Head Office, 'Archie', as he was generally known, ensured that the Chairmen (McCormack, and then Fricke) were in a forgiving mood by sending them fish at regular intervals and mushrooms in season. The Staff Officer (Bob Bell) was also looked after and in return he kept Archie well informed as to what was happening at Head Office. One thing about Archie was that he did not discriminate in his lack of punctuality:

"When the Board was still based in Sale, Joe Cousens was Patrolman-cum-Roadmaster; he was a sort of Jack-of-all-Trades. Archibald wrote to him and told him to meet him at the Swan Reach bridge on this particular Monday morning at 7-30 a.m.; he was going on a tour of inspection up the Princes Highway to Genoa and to the border, and then down to Mallacoota. He wanted Joe Cousens to go with him. Anyway, Joe Cousens was down at the Swan Reach bridge at 7-30 a.m. and he waited all

that day until 6 p.m. in the evening. Archibald hadn't arrived so he went home. On the Tuesday he was there again at 7-30 a.m. and waited all day but Archibald didn't turn up. Archibald came along that Tuesday night about 7-00 p.m. and Joe wasn't there so he went without him. Next time he saw Joe he roared him up and told him he was most unreliable. Joe Cousens said 'Well. I waited for two days and you didn't turn up' and Archibald replied 'He also serves who sits and waits.' " (Bob Baade)

"Another funny story concerning Alec related to the Gilbert's Gulch problem at Orbost. Apparently the CRB was going to be sued for altering the course of the river or something. Major McCormack, the Chairman, came up and Alec was to meet him at 9-00 a.m. on this particular morning at Gilbert's Gulch. He was a very peppery military man, Major McCormack; very fine man but didn't stand any nonsense. Alec was a most irresponsible bloke as far as keeping appointments. He was vague, often deliberately. I can remember this particular morning; he was supposed to be in Orbost but he was still in the office when we arrived for work. The phone rang. He picked it up and you could hear this blast on the other end. He hadn't spoken so he handed the phone to Edna Howlett who was his secretary. She said 'Yes, is that Major McCormack? Oh, no. Mr. Archibald has left' and he had just put his foot out the door at that minute. I had to go up with him. He had to come back in the Board car and I was to drive his car back. Did the Major let off steam when we hit Gilbert's Gulch. The next day Alec said, 'The Major got a bit out of hand, didn't he.' He had kept the Chairman waiting for an hour and a half." (Frank Jackson)

In November, 1947 **W.H. (Bill) Dolamore (at left)** became the third Divisional Engineer following a short period as Assistant Divisional Engineer before the war. He held the position for 27 years and the name 'Dolamore' was virtually synonymous with Bairnsdale Division. He built up the image of the CRB in East Gippsland and he was highly regarded in the community. There would not have been a school ground in all of East Gippsland that hadn't been improved, ostensibly by Bill Dolamore sending some CRB plant for 'testing'.

Bill Dolamore possessed old-fashioned virtues; those of us who visited his office in Bairnsdale will recall the quotation from Sir John Monash on his wall:

> I don't give a damn for your loyal support when you think I am right
>
> When I most need it is when you think I am wrong.

Although intensely loyal to the organization, Bill placed great stress on the autonomy of the Divisional Engineer. As a member of the Personnel Section in the late 1960's I well remember the battle the Board (and particularly the Chairman, 'Paddy' O'Donnell) had with Bill in attempting to get him to conform with the rest of the organization over the timing of the lunch break. While the rest of the organization took lunch from 12-45 p.m. to 1-30 p.m. and at least attempted to 'man' the phones during the break, the Bairnsdale office closed for lunch between 12-15 p.m. and 1-15 p.m. The Divisional Engineer would write to the Board explaining that life was different in the country; people had dinner in the middle of the day and it was necessary for them to go home for that purpose. Other less plausible explanations were thrown into the mix: the sun rises earlier in eastern Victoria and therefore an earlier lunch break was reasonable. The Chairman would vent his spleen, but Bill would

refuse to conform. Beneath all this was a mutual respect developed when they spent a number of years together in Changi prison camp. Because of this shared experience Bill knew that the Chairman would not 'pull rank' on him and order him to conform. In spite of his annoyance, the Chairman tolerated Bill's lack of conformity and Bairnsdale continued to operate a little differently.

Towards the end of Bill Dolamore's time as Divisional Engineer he was visited by one of the hierarchy from Kew (or 'HQ' as Bill would have put it) and, noticing the number of dead kangaroos by the roadside, he suggested that warning signs be erected. Whilst agreeing to investigate, Bill related the following tale:

"Some years ago, one of the Bairnsdale Roadmasters was following the road patrol truck into Genoa late in the afternoon. On a few occasions he noticed that the patrol would keep passing dead kangaroos on the road. The Roadmaster, being the conscientious man he is, stopped on each occasion, removed the dead animal and chased after the patrol truck. He finally caught up as the truck pulled up at the Genoa depot and, being rather browned off, he said to the Patrolman that he was not too pleased that the patrol had not removed the animals from the road, as is laid down in the good book. The Patrolman looked at the Roadmaster and said: "Well, we used to stop and pull them off the road, but no sooner had we got going the goannas would drag them back on again." (Autumn 1972 edition of Roadlines.)

Long-term employees like Bob Baade (the Roadmaster referred to in Bill Dolamore's story), Fred Ward and Frank Jackson had their stories to tell, but the stand-out raconteur in Bairnsdale Division was Les Starling.

"Les joined the Board in 1929 as a chainman and worked in many capacities during his service with the Board. One of his jobs, when surveying was not in demand, was that of steam roller attendant, whose task was to keep the supplies of wood and water up to the steam engines. This involved riding ahead of the steam engine on a bicycle collecting piles of firewood and finding suitable water-holes and dams. Les said that he gave up being a steam roller attendant after the roller ran over the sole of his shoe. This was a bit too close for comfort.

During the war he was concerned with airfield construction in the Bairnsdale and Sale areas.

Les developed great skill as a road location expert and because of his intimate knowledge of the East Gippsland area was of immense benefit to young engineers. Les gained his knowledge of the bush through walking lines and measuring catchment areas by walking the ridges with a compass and chain. Many nights were spent in the bush with as lump of corned beef and bread under a hollow log (or so he said).

Les had a sense of humour. An example of this humour was shown at his farewell presentation. Les was always a casual dresser and his appearance could almost be classed as rustic. Les, perhaps because of a rebellion against acceptable social standards, was well aware of his appearance and this was shown by his comment on receiving the presentation from Mr. Dolamore: 'Hope it's not a bloody looking glass.' " (June 1971 edition of Roadlines.)

A number of Les's former colleagues commented on his skills as a bushman: a person who could 'turn his hand to anything.' Among his skills were those of an axeman and his axe was "always sharp enough to shave with." (Frank Jackson) Perhaps his most outstanding characteristic was his dry sense of humour. His theory on road location, recounted by Bob Baade, is typical:

"Les's secret of doing a survey in a mountainous area was that if you wanted to get a good grade you watched a cow going down the hillside and the cow would pick the best gradient. Les later extended his theory: if you wanted to improve the gradient even further you waited for a sick cow."

Les himself claimed that this was a bit of a tall story; although it was good in theory, you could never find a sick cow when you wanted one.

In 1952 severe flooding damaged a number of bridges in Bairnsdale Division and a young bridge engineer named Norm Haylock was sent down to supervise repairs. Norm, who eventually became Chief Bridge Engineer, never forgot Les Starling's homespun philosophy:

"He had a Holden utility and I would be driving along the road at 50-55 m.p.h. with the off-road tyres singing along, and I would pass Les sauntering down the road to Orbost doing about 35 m.p.h. I must have been the object of some amusement for Les Starling the way I darted around everywhere. Then one day I happened to be in Bairnsdale Divisional office when they were having morning tea and he called me over. He said 'There is something that I want to tell you.' I went over, holding my cup of tea and biscuit, and he said 'I want to tell you a story. There were two bulls, a young bull and a very old bull, and they were trotting along the road and they came to the top of a rise. Down in the valley below they spied a paddock with a lot of beautiful young heifers, jumping around in the sunshine. Seeing this the young bull got very excited and yelled "Hey, Dad, let's charge down the road there to the paddock and attend to a few of those heifers." The old bull said "No, son, let's just saunter down and attend to the lot."' Later in life I understood what Les Starling had been trying to say in telling me that story. I saw that the people who went along steadily doing their job achieved a lot more than those who raced around in all directions."

Les Starling's account of his early days show how the men on surveys had to endure both the cold and the isolation:

"When I was working on surveys I never came back into the office. I would stay on the job right through which could be six months…We got our provisions in by pack-horse once a week. There was an old bloke from Omeo, Bill Long, who used to bring them in… We came back to camp one night and here is everything in disarray on the table and a note there 'Had a bugger of a trip.' So we opened up the bag and there was a pound of butter with other things all through it; there was charcoal and the bread was all breadcrumbs. If you wanted bread and jam you just mixed the bread in with the jam and ate it. That was because of the packs hitting the trees as he came through. We used to think that he practised hitting the trees. The charcoal came from rubbing against the trees that had been burnt in the bush fires. It was so steep at times that it was often difficult to find a flat place to sleep. We used to put in some forked sticks and put bark across them to make a platform to sleep on. On one occasion a fellow dropped off one of these into the fire, but luckily we pulled him out. He was standing up on the platform to stretch his legs and overbalanced."

Frank Jackson (at far left receiving an award from Ted Donaldson) another long-time CRB man, started his career in Bairnsdale during the height of the Depression:

"I left school at the end of 1935 and jobs were hard to come by. Alec Archibald was the Divisional Engineer in

Bairnsdale and he was looking for a junior draftsman. He came around to my home one day and asked me if I would like a job, and that is how I started my first two years with the Board. They were pretty grim days as it was the aftermath of the Depression; there was still a lot of unemployment. One of my earliest memories was going with Les Starling as an escort for pays. The Board had Unemployment Relief camps all over the Division, even in most remote areas. These fellows were called unemployables, but I don't think they were. The objective was to get them as far away from Melbourne and out of the pubs as possible. I think their wives received some sort of a chit payment for groceries etc. from the Government, and the men were given tobacco money. They had good messes which depended on what they wanted to contribute to the mess. I think they came up for three months at a time and then would be returned to Melbourne. Bob Baade would collect them from Suggan Buggan or other camps and take them back to Bairnsdale. They'd be fed and put on a train back to Melbourne. That day the replacements would come. After the war this system applied to migrants in much the same way."

At left, "Smoko for everyone". Frank Jackson's favourite photograph taken in 1936 at the Princes Highway East beyond Genoa, near the New South Wales border.

"My earliest memory was the famous incident when I was the escort on a pay with Les Starling. We used to draw the money from the bank on the afternoon of the day before we went so we could get an early start. We always covered a lot of ground and we had to be back at the office working the next day; you weren't very upset if you didn't get home until around 2-30 a.m. sometimes, even in winter. This day we drew the money from the bank as we were leaving early next morning; it would have been several thousand pounds. I decided it was time I learnt how to work these automatic pistols. There were about three in the office and they were kept in a safe. We had ten rounds for the whole lot and they were very carefully counted up every 30 June because the Government Auditor always wanted to know whether we had lost one, whether we had shot someone, or had a hold-up. I remember I asked Les to show me how the pistol worked when we were making up the envelopes on this big drafting table. One gun was a Browning and one of the others was a Colt and the mechanics of the two varied. I still don't know much about guns, but anyway Les decided to show me. He took the magazine out of each of them and said 'Now, when you take the magazine out of this one the safety lock comes on and nothing happens', and he demonstrated. Then he said 'The other one is different. When you take the magazine out the safety lock doesn't come on, just like that', and he thought there would be just a faint click. There was an unholy BANG as the thing went off and drilled a hole in the floor within an inch of my right toe. I jumped out the back window. I'll never forget it. That same day there were about 30 or 40 blokes out the front looking for a job. I used to keep the labour book and when there was a vacancy one of the blokes would fill it. These blokes would come every week - the same faces – and I would tick their names off to indicate that they had at least

reported. This particular day they disappeared because they all knew that there was money in the office, and they probably assumed it was a hold-up. So they blew through. The first person to turn up was Bill Dolamore, who was the ADE at the time. He said 'What happened? Anybody hurt?' Les was as white as a sheet, the room was full of smoke, and our ears were still ringing with this dreadful noise. The last person to come down was Alec Archibald, the DE. He popped his head around and asked 'Anybody hurt?' but he left it for about ten minutes as he was hoping someone would have cleaned up the mess if anyone had been killed." (Frank Jackson)

Frank Jackson made passing mention of Bob Baade and the gangs that worked in Bairnsdale Division during the Depression. Bob had his own story to tell:

"One of the fellows in those Unemployment Relief gangs, Richie Rowe, had a wooden leg. I think he lost it in the First World War. He had a peg leg from just below the knee; he was a terrific worker and had no trouble keeping up with the other men as they loaded the gravel with a shovel. Although he was a sustenance man, he was kept on because he was such a good worker. After he had been working in the pits loading gravel for some time, they put him out spreading gravel on the road because they thought they would get the benefit of better compaction from his wooden leg! Poor old Richie ended up on one of Tom Russell's jobs at Connors Plains on the Licola Road. While he was up there they had a break-up party one night and Richie must have got a bit full because someone took his wooden leg off. He was hopping around like a sparrow, trying to find his wooden leg. In the end he went to bed without it, thinking that he would find it in the morning. He got up and found it all charred and half burnt under one of the coppers. The cook's offsider had got up earlier in the morning and he was groping around for wood in the semi dark, and he found this hunk of wood to heat the water up. It was Richie's wooden leg."

A number of the men who worked in the divisions were keen fishermen; some used drum nets, others a stick of gelignite. Both methods were illegal. Rudy Cranburgh, one of the old-time plant operators in Bairnsdale Division, favoured the second method:

"Rudy at one time was camped with a road gang at Tamboon Inlet, which is near Cann River. The camp was all tents and each person cooked their own meals. Rudy had an old wooden boat and he used to supply fish for the camp. Rudy always got fish; everyone knew he used 'nobel bait', that is, a quarter plug of gelignite with a short fuse. The Fisheries and Games Officer for the area was young and very keen; he heard about all this in Cann River and thought he would catch the fellow. He had just started in the job and thought that no one knew him; in fact everyone knew who he was. He said to Rudy 'You go out fishing?' When Rudy replied 'Yes' he asked 'Would you like to take me out?' Rudy replied 'Yes. It would be a pleasure.' Out they go into the river. The fish were not biting. Rudy gets out some gelignite but he couldn't hold it and light the fuse. He said to the officer 'Could you hold this?' Rudy lit the fuse and it started spluttering, and the officer said 'What am I going to do with this?' Rudy replied 'I don't know what you are going to do with it but you had better do something quickly.' So he threw it overboard. There was a muffled bang and the officer said 'I've got you now.' Rudy replied 'Well, I didn't do anything. All those blokes on the bank can testify that you threw in the gelignite.' Rudy was never charged with this type of misdemeanour." (Ray Tomkins)

Some of Fred Ward's accounts of conditions were quite graphic, but there was the inevitable hint of Steele Rudd:

"Beyond the Little River Falls, viewing an awful precipice, you can see the debris from a rock fall which took away the road; it lies scattered down the precipitous slope far below. To re-open this road men had to hang suspended by ropes while drilling holes with jack-hammers. They drilled them in the vertical face of rock while hanging over that dreadful drop; doing this so blasting could cut out another roadway. These were the men of the CRB, for this was yet another of the roads the Board was responsible for. It is a hair-raising drive for those not used to mountain roads."

and

"They loaded everything onto our dray then set off with the spring cart loaded with those who had been snowed out of camp. Reg, who was driving, was a very good horseman but a reckless driver. Coming around an inside bend with a bit of pace, the off-side wheel collapsed spilling all hands onto the road. The horse panicked, apparently going down with the rest, and it started kicking like hell-just missing the head of Jack Considine. One of the blokes, an ex-boxer and wrestler by the name of Reg Roseblade got a headlock on the panic-stricken mare and subdued her - remarkably."

and

"Old Jack was complaining about his toothache. It was a hell of a long way to the dentist so he begged one of the truckies to pull the tooth… The 'dentist' got old Jack's head in the fork of a low tree and extracted the molar with his pliers."

and then some humour

"They were like that at Omeo. A local grazier sent his son out to see how the sheep were in the back paddock. While the lad was letting his horse go Dad said 'Well, how were the sheep looking in the back paddock?' The youth pushed his hat back on his head and scuffled the dust about with his boot before he drawled 'Well. Dad, some was lookin' up the hill and some was lookin' down the hill but the rest was lookin' at me dorg.' " (Fred Ward 'Road Builders')

Finally, before leaving Bairnsdale Division, I should mention Bill Miles who was the Traffic Officer in that Division when I joined the Board. Bill had a prosthetic leg and was a returned man so I naturally assumed that the leg had been lost on the battlefield. This was not so:

"Bill Miles worked before the war at the South Melbourne storeyard. Bill had had his right foot amputated in an accident. He decided he was going to join the army and got some other bloke to do his medical for him. So Bill got in and he used to stomp around on his artificial leg. He did his basic training, went to the Islands, and finished up 'in the bag.' He had a rough time in Changi and working on the Burma Railroad. The Japanese would belt Bill with bamboo staffs and with the butts of their rifles because they said he cut his foot off to avoid working." (John Gibney.)

Traralgon Division. When this Division was established in 1945 it was located in the old Head Office in the Exhibition Buildings. In the late 1940's the Board purchased land in Traralgon for a depot and in 1950 Frank Docking commenced duty as the first resident Divisional Engineer. Later that year he was joined by Tom Russell as ADE. One unusual feature of the Division's early history was that from 1947 to 1949 the Board operated the old brown coal mine at Yallourn on behalf of the SEC. The mine was worked 24 hours per day in three shifts and was supervised by Overseer Jim Hansford.

Frank Docking (at left) was a highly respected officer who first worked with the Board as a junior engineering assistant in 1927, spent time on the 'North-South Road', served as ADE in Benalla Division and was the Divisional Engineer in Traralgon from 1950 to 1963. He then became Divisional Engineer, Dandenong from which position he retired in 1974.Frank subsequently recorded his arrival in Traralgon:

"In 1950 my transfer from Benalla to Traralgon as Divisional Engineer was quite a circus with five children, a portable sleep-out, miscellaneous gear and Betty the cow in the trailer towed by the Stock Inspector. All went well until the Haunted Hills at Yallourn when the cow became restless. By the time we reached Morwell in the rain she was most obstreperous. I had to get into the trailer, hold her head to keep her on her feet, and in this fashion the new Divisional Engineer arrived in Traralgon. Fortunately it was dusk."

Tom Russell, later to become Chairman, was an engineer in Benalla at the time of Frank's appointment and followed him down to Traralgon. He, too, remembered Betty:

"Frank Docking first lived in one of the prefab homes adjacent to the storeyard and an extra room was added. He always milked cows in Benalla and he brought the cow down to Traralgon. When he went on leave Harry Smith, who was the storeyard foreman, looked after the cow. On one occasion the cow got sick and died, and poor Harry was in real trouble."

Even in his Traralgon days Tom Russell showed a degree of ingenuity which took him to the top job:

"There was a truck driver named Karl Schultz who was given the task of taking some of the men up to the MMBW camp (near Reefton Spur). As it was getting very late at night, I went up with Karl in the truck and when we arrived some of the men would not get out of the back. I got up into the back of the truck to try and get them out and a few started to swing punches. I thought discretion was the better part of valour, so I hopped down, got back in the truck, and said to Karl: 'Just tip the hoist.' So he tipped it and they were all spreadeagled on the ground. They soon made their way to the huts."

Jack Ryan (at left), who had started with the CRB in 1934, was one of the first to join Frank Docking in Traralgon:

"Traralgon Division had been based in the Exhibition Buildings. The Divisional Engineer had a new staff as Gippsland was not popular in those days; people thought it was soggy and not a good place. I got shanghaied down there…I anticipated getting some formal notification, by letter, but to my horror Roberts, the Chief Engineer, walked in and said: 'Right. Tomorrow you go, all of you, all this furniture, everything. We want this wing of the building. Dandenong is going to take it over.' I asked: 'How will I get there, Sir?' He said: 'You will go in the van.' So I arrived in the

van, along with the office desks and whatever could be fitted in the van. I was with the driver in the front. When we arrived it was about dusk. The DE was there and he said 'I'll help you unload.' There were only the two of us and we unloaded the desks and everything as everyone else had gone home.

We had some amusing times at Traralgon as a matter of fact. Frank Docking and his family were there when I arrived. There had been no welcoming party for him; it was just a new place with four acres of paddock where the workshop is now. There were a couple of empty houses standing on it. He said to me: 'We won't be doing much work in the office.' There was a shed there that the Bridge people had used for cement storage, and that was to be the office. We got going. He said: 'Come to work in the morning in your old clothes.' There was a patrol truck carting in gravel which the two of us spread all over the place. He was a good worker with the shovel; he kept me honest all day. We did a lot of things like that. It was a good way to get to know the Divisional Engineer - in his old working clothes. It was very informal.

We picked up a few men to help us with putting in drains. The DE's house, for the time being, was a duplex prefab, but the Board was to provide a house in town later on. In the meantime he was to occupy this place. With his fairly big family he said: 'We will have to put some extensions on,' so they added a couple more rooms. They were concreting around the back and he had been working in his old clothes with a pick and shovel for a few days. The local blokes that were helping us didn't know he was the Divisional Engineer; they thought he was someone like themselves. There was one old chap there when they were making a drain who said: 'Why don't you concrete all across the back there?' The boss said: 'Oh, no. I don't think the Board would approve of that. It is a bit elaborate.' The old chap said: 'Oh, well. They'll never bloody well know. The boss is not around; you might as well fix it up.' Here he was working with the boss."

Jack Ryan's doubts about the weather were soon to be confirmed:

"South Gippsland was a dreadful place for weather. We were a fortnight without work at all; every day it rained and rained. If it stopped raining you couldn't get out anyway; you would sink into six inches of mud. We didn't get paid if it was raining, although I think the overseer did get paid… When the 'wet and dry' pay came in it was considered to be a milestone. In an industry like the CRB when a lot of the work is in inhospitable climates and places it was really a breakthrough."

Both Tom Russell and Jack Ryan had great recollections of men in the field:

"We developed many top overseers: Fred Wallace who became a Roadmaster in Dandenong Division in later years, and Jack Campbell who became a Roadmaster in Traralgon Division. Jack was a tremendous worker; all the Campbells were tremendous workers out in the Strezleckis. I used to get a bit cross because he worked too hard and he wasn't watching what his men were doing. I remember driving down the highway one day and, on stopping, saw Jack working in a side drain with his men standing behind. Dirt and grass were flying everywhere because he was working so hard, and his men were working at about half pace. I yelled out: 'Drop that bloody shovel.' Jack jumped like a rabbit. I was continually having to get the new overseers to change their attitude, and to supervise rather than do the work themselves. It was a mentality they had grown up with in the Depression.

Mick Holland, a tough Irishman, was the Roadmaster in Traralgon and at one time lived in one of the prefabs near the storeyard. I went around to have a drink with Mick just before Christmas one year. The old tenancy agreements said you were not allowed to have pigeons or other animals in the

house. Anyway, we were sitting there having a drink and I could hear noises. I said: 'What is that noise. Mick?' Mick had about half a dozen chooks and a couple of ducks in one of the bedrooms getting ready for Christmas.

When the Princes Highway cracked up in the early 1950's during the rail strike we had a large road camp in the area. Because of the problems, Mick Holland went down there and co-ordinated all the activities. Mr. Mathieson was the Chief Engineer at the time and he had interviewed a man called Taffy Jones who, in later years, worked at Syndal storeyard. Taffy said that he was very knowledgeable about road construction, so he was sent up to Traralgon to work with Mick Holland. Overseer Frank Selzer was working on the South Gippsland Highway at the time, and when he went on leave we had to find a replacement. We said to Mick: 'What about Taffy over there?' Mick said that Taffy would be OK as they were a pretty reliable gang. Mick said to Taffy before he went: 'Well, Taffy, the first thing that you have to do is assert your authority. One of the important things is if you have any trouble with the cook, sack him. That is the only way to show your authority.' So Taffy duly went to South Gippsland and on the first weekend he went with the cook down to the Welshpool pub, and finished up having an argument. Taffy in due course sacked the cook who immediately left the camp. When I went over there next there was Taffy doing the camp cooking. He said: 'What that bugger Holland never told me was that when you sack the cook, make sure that you have a replacement.' That was a well-known philosophy: if you are going to sack the cook, have a replacement ready." (Tom Russell)

"Jim Porteus was a long time Patrolman, but he was a bit weak on his paperwork. We were always keen to have a look at Jim's paperwork when it came in. The patrol sheets would run from 1 to 31 and you were supposed to write down what you did on every day for the 31 days of the month. Jim solved the problem quite easily: he would write 'Patrolling', the second day 'Patrolling', 'Patrolling' all the way, 31 times. We had absolutely no idea what he did; what this 'Patrolling' consisted of. Another thing he did was to grab the first available piece of paper and write something on it. On one occasion he had the back of a Robur tea label and he had written on it: 'Please send me some stamps.' He put that in the official envelope and sent it up to the office as an official requisition for stamps. That was the kind of paper work he would do." (Jack Ryan)

Whenever a senior engineer was making a speech at his farewell he invariably paid tribute to the men in the field who served the CRB with great distinction. Reference would be made to particular overseers, patrolmen or roadmasters with whom he had a direct association in two or, perhaps, three Divisions. Every Division, of course, had its great contributors and, after attending a few farewell functions, one would hear all of the appropriate names. Bill Thomas, who retired in 1986 as Chief Planning Engineer, spent time in Benalla, Traralgon and Warrnambool Divisions: "…we had a very dedicated bunch of overseers, roadmasters and patrolmen. These men tended to train young engineers. They certainly looked ahead, some weeks ahead, not just the day-to-day running of the job so that they anticipated conditions before problems arose and they were excellent… They were dedicated chaps and they were certainly gentlemen. Outside work they were well respected in the community."

Benalla Division. This division, originally North Eastern Region, was established in 1925 and H.P.Wood (known as 'High Pressure'), one of the legendary Divisional Engineers, was in charge from 1926 to 1945. Hubert Sutherland Gibbs was then DE from 1946 to 1962 when he was appointed Chief Works Engineer and subsequently Chief Engineer. As with Bairnsdale, the early office accommodation in Benalla was quite modest **(at right)**.

"When I went up to Benalla I used to go into the office at the weekend and put my urgent reports on the top of his inwards basket, but when I came back the next week they would be back at the bottom. Hubert had a theory that some things required 'masterly inaction.' In many cases he was right and the problem would solve itself." (Tom Russell)

In his later years, when Chief Engineer, Hubert had a rather annoying habit. He would request a member of staff to come to his office immediately, only to keep that officer waiting for a lengthy period in the passageway while he conversed with the previous visitor or on the telephone. At his farewell Ian Rennick, Right of Way Engineer for many years, told how he countered this habit. Ian moved a small desk into the passageway near the Chief Engineer's office. Subsequently, when summoned, he would take with him several files, sit down at the desk and continue working until such time as Hubert was ready to see him. Hubert was not overly impressed by this display of initiative.

Benalla, like the other divisions, had its share of characters:

"George, the Bridge Overseer, was a rough diamond but a bushman who was expert in building good timber bridges. He camped on the job and did not worry about the primitive conditions. In order to improve matters a new sanitary pan was despatched to the job, only to find on the next inspection it was being used as a breadbin. On another job he was supplied with a tin bath for the ablution block. George was quite insulted and explained: 'What do I want that bloody thing for? I go home once a month.' " (Frank Docking).

Some young engineers who went on to have significant careers cut their teeth in Benalla Division:

"I remember Graeme Marshallsea was very much a person who had a terrific concentration, and when he was thinking of something he didn't let anything interrupt him. Graeme's wife, Nancy, tells about 1956 when, with the very heavy floods and a rail strike, the roads were deteriorating rapidly due to increased interstate transport. Graeme was looking after works on the Hume and Goulburn Valley Highways at the time. In bed one night Nancy was talking about getting some floor coverings for the house and said to Graeme: 'How many yards would we need?' After a pause Graeme replied: 'We would need 30 yards of spalls at Muddy Creek.'" (Bill Thomas).

"I hadn't been long in the Exhibition Buildings as a Junior Design Draftsman when I was told, on a Friday, that I was to be on a train on Monday morning to go to a camp at Kiewa on the Kiewa Valley Highway. I was also told that I would get a rail voucher and that someone would meet me in Benalla on the Monday morning. When I got there I was met by an old identity of the division, Allan Thompson. It was pretty early in the morning. Off I went to the Kiewa Valley Highway where I lived in

a tent on the side of the highway for two years at one of the first pre-casting depots. My tent was my office and living quarters with a bed, a straw palliasse, a table and stool, and a built-in fire place. That was a great character-building exercise because I was very young (about 19) and living in the camp with the men, and eating and working with them, was really very good experience and something that a lot of the younger generation don't experience as we don't have DL camps now. The overseer, Tom Mintern, and his wife and young family all lived in the camp in a caravan and annexe, and their children went to the local school each day on the school bus. That was one of my impressions of the field side of things." (Stan Hodgson).

Bendigo Division. This division, formed in 1925 like Benalla, also had its share of characters and story tellers:

"In 1938 the CRB wanted to employ someone for a fortnight to give a fitter a hand repairing a steam roller. At that time the Board used to rent part of the Bendigo City Council Depot to store plant (in those days mainly steam rollers with a cabin on behind) and equipment. My father was in charge of the Council Depot at that time and Mr. Butler was the District Engineer; he asked Dad if he knew of anyone. I was looking for work - it was still the Depression years - and Dad said that I was available for the fortnight. I started with the fitter and my job was to wash the roller clean using kerosene. There was a small storeroom (10x10 feet) at this depot and as jobs finished the field staff would pull up at the doorway and pelt their tents, hurricane lamps and everything else just inside the doorway, and away they would go. Mr. Butler wanted the store cleaned up and shelves put in. He said to me: 'What about it?' and I agreed. He thought it would be another fortnight's work. I straightened it up, put some shelves in, and got things sorted out; it just snowballed from there. From a 10x10 shed it grew to a 20x10 shed, then it went to 30x50. They put in a car wash and from there we went to the Depot which they bought in 1946. I finally finished in 1979; that completed a fortnight's work! I was never permanent; they were still extending the fortnight." (Tom Hughes)

"As far as the men in the camps were concerned, the Board provided a tent, firewood and water, and they had to find the rest. They would go away on a Monday morning or Sunday night stacked up with corned beef and some loaves of bread, and they would rough it for a week. They would have to provide their own food and meals. There were no showering facilities; conditions were really rough compared with nowadays. From my point of view it was quite alright. We had an A model Ford Roadster for the use of the ADE and the Survey party. The Roadster had a rack on the running board and one on the mudguard to which we used to strap the tripods and other equipment. We would load up the back with pegs etc. and away we would go. Being a Roadster we could cop a bit of the weather and we could get 60 mph out of it with the hand throttle; 58 mph with the foot throttle. If we were coming home at night in the dark we would have her going flat out, rough as the roads were. We would look down through the floorboards where the clutch and the brake were and could see that the exhaust was red hot." (Athol Thomas).

For Bendigo Stock Inspector Col Douglas well, it was one of those days:

"Col and his trusty dog Dusty were called out recently to round up a wandering bull. With the help of a local Shire Ranger the threesome managed to coerce it into a paddock. Unfortunately the self-willed bovine spied another bull in the next paddock, hurtled through the fence, and promptly started an almighty skirmish. The unflinching Col managed to separate the two and drove the instigator into a third paddock. When it objected and went through yet another fence, Col took pursuit. 'However I lost some ground when I ran into an electric fence,' said Col. Worse was to come.

A farmer pulled up to offer assistance with his dog. As fate would have it, the dog took a dislike to Dusty and the two became embroiled in another wrangle with Dusty coming out second best. After four hours Col, the Ranger and worse-for-wear Dusty managed to secure the bull in the stockyard, ready for the pound. You don't get that sort of entertainment with a desk job!" (Interchange, 1986)

It would be remiss to write about Bendigo Division and not mention long-time Divisional Engineer Tom Glazebrook ('the best view of Head Office is in the rear vision mirror'), Henry Hopetoun ('Harry') Harrison who was the Workshop Foreman for its first 20 years (1946-1965) and Henry Conrad ('Harry') Muller who retired as a grader driver in 1967 after starting in 1937 as a steam roller driver. His last steam roller job was the construction of the East Sale aerodrome in Bairnsdale Division. In Harry's words 'Many are the men I would have loved to iron out under my roller, with particular regard to overseers, to return them to their misled wives, like a newspaper under the door.' Although his formal education was very limited, Harry's ability to get his thoughts across were unparalleled. A keen fisherman, he was asked after one of his trips how many he had caught: 'Four', said Harry, 'three as long as my finger and a smaller one.'

Dandenong Division. In 1940 the old Central Division was split into Geelong, Metropolitan, and Dandenong Divisions. The history of Central Division was dominated by the legendary Charlie Jones, He worked for the CRB from 1926 to 1948 (including a period in charge of the Board's team on the 'North-South Road' in World War Two.) In 1948 he joined the Commonwealth Department of Works and became Assistant Director General to Sir Louis Loder who had transferred from the CRB in 1944. After his retirement Charlie contacted the then Chairman, Ian O'Donnell, who appointed him to an Engineer Class 2 position in Dandenong Division under his old pupil, Harry George. His practical, down-to-earth approach, and the regard he and many others had for men with practical experience, is reflected in this account:

"Charlie didn't believe in paperwork, but he gave the best bit of advice to a young engineer that has ever been given. We had a young lad, straight from the university with a very good degree; he was very bright and a conscientious young fellow. His name was Les and he had been given a direct labour job on the Princes Highway East beyond Dandenong. In those days it was all single carriageway and a lot of the work was reconstruction to a better formation width than was existing and perhaps even a 40-foot formation with a 24-foot seal. It was quite a big job in those days and Les came to Charlie and said to him: 'You are very experienced, Mr. Jones. Could you give me some advice on how I should tackle this job.' Charlie said: 'Certainly. You go out there, Les, you find your overseer, you introduce yourself as the Supervising Engineer, and you station yourself three feet behind his left shoulder and keep your mouth shut and eyes and ears open. You stay in that relative position to him. Come back in six months and I will tell you what to do next.'

Les was back in about a month and he said: 'Mr. Jones, I just seem to be signing requisitions all the time, or writing requisitions out and signing them for the overseer.' Charlie patted him on the back and said: 'You are doing a fine job. You are saving that overseer's time and he can build the road. You just keep on doing that and come back in another six months and I will give you some more instructions,' " (Harold Gray).

Dandenong Division, too, had its share of characters. This story about Jack Parkinson, a Senior Overseer who became a Superintendent of Works, ties in with the previous one:

"'Parky' was working down on the Princes Highway and a young graduate engineer roared up in a nice new car and said to Parky: 'Are you the overseer?' 'Yes.' 'Well I'm xxxxxx and I'm supervising the job.' Parky said: 'Oh, yes, good, righto boss, what do you want to do?' He said: 'I will get out the theodolite and the levels, and the staff and you can get someone to help me,' and out of the back of the Ford he took about half a hundredweight of plans which he unrolled by the roadside. He set everything up, had a look at it, and said to Parky: 'You've got that pegged all wrong - your horizontal curve and your super elevations - it won't work.' Parky said: 'OK, chief, we will do it your way.' So they set it all up and the engineer said: 'All OK now?' and Parky replied: 'Everything under control.' The bloke climbed back in his car and roared off back to Melbourne. He was no sooner out of sight when Parkinson said: 'OK, fellows. Kick all those pegs to buggery and put them back where we had them.' They did that, built the road, and when it was finished the young engineer came down and had a look at it and said: 'Lovely. I told you that you were out,' and Parky replied: 'Yes, chief. That's right.' " (John Gibney).

While a number of the field staff were real characters, some of the engineers in Dandenong Division were not without a sense of humour; Don Peckham for example:

"Don was a great one for assuming different voices and surprising people. He assumed the voice of a Taxation Commission investigator and rang up one of the engineers in Dandenong Division. This person had been skiting a little around the office about how he had wrung a few 'swifties' in his tax return, opening his mouth a bit wide. I don't know whether he actually had or not, or was just bragging about it. So, subsequently, when the Taxation Commission rang up and said that they wanted him to come in and bring all his papers over the last five years, he lost a bit of his bravado. He was at the point of going in when he got another call from the Commission saying that they had found a mistake and everything appeared to be OK. He breathed a sigh of relief." (Raleigh Robinson).

Finally, a few examples of the resourcefulness of field staff in Dandenong Division:

Pragmatic Approach No.1 "Dick Wills, our Workshop Foreman, is rarely seen at Pantons Gap Camp. However, if Dick has to visit the camp, he always arms himself with a length of 3 inch x 2 inch timber. Rusty, the camp pup, and Dick suffer from mutual disrespect." (Roadlines, Spring, 1970.)

Pragmatic Approach No.2 "Overseer Martin O'Shannesy was taking a bath in the wash tub at Matlock. Unfortunately, Martin is bigger than the tub and water suction prevented him from getting out. Being a quick thinker, Martin tipped tub and contents over in the hope that he would flow out with the water. Ray Baldry and Frank Uren, who arrived at this point, thought that they had discovered a new breed of giant tortoise." (Roadlines, Christmas, 1970.)

Pragmatic Approach No.3 "Due to the clamp-down on the hire of private plant for mowing grass (to decrease expenditure), Overseer George Strug has overcome the problem by obtaining the services of a goat." (Roadlines, Christmas, 1971.)

Ballarat Division. This was one of the 'new' divisions, established in 1948, when Stawell Division was 'broken up.' Frank O'Brien, who joined the Board in 1927 and who was ADE Bendigo from 1936 to 1948, was the first Divisional Engineer, Ballarat, a position he held until his sudden death in 1969. The first DE was a very forceful character who regarded Ballarat Division as his territory; woe betide any member of staff from Head Office should he visit any corner of the Division without letting Frank

O'Brien know. I first met Frank late in 1966 when Norm Roeszler (then Personal Assistant to the Chief Engineer) and I visited Ballarat to interview young engineers graduating from the (then) School of Mines. As we went up the steps to the new offices Norm said: 'Follow me,' and we walked past the receptionist and down the corridor to Frank's office. He looked up, startled, and said: 'How did you get in here?' He then proceeded to dress both of us down for our lack of protocol in not announcing our arrival to the receptionist so that she could inform the DE. Norm, who liked to stand on his dignity, said that he was the Chief Engineer's personal representative and he could go where he liked - announced or unannounced. I stood there, rather embarrassed, as these two old roosters went for one another. Eventually Frank noticed my discomfort, shook hands, and we chatted briefly about his staffing requirements. It was an introduction that I never forgot and thereafter I was always particularly careful to inform the DE if I was even just passing through his Division.

Horsham Division. Also formed in 1948, during its first two decades Horsham Division had three Divisional Engineers who were competent but somewhat independent in their approach: Clem Perrin, Bill Neville and Allan Pryor. Ian Gardner, an engineer in Horsham in the Neville and Pryor eras, had a host of stories:

Hot Enough: "'Butch' Pryor was a great Divisional man and he never wanted the guys up in Horsham to be seen as being in the backblocks; he wanted us to keep up with the latest developments in technology. 'Butch' came back from one DE's conference, gathered us all in, and gave us a rundown on what had been discussed, including a new road making technique. The material required was to be heated to 2000 degrees. Ray Valentine, a man with attention to detail, interrupted: 'Is that Centigrade or Fahrenheit?' 'Butch', a little annoyed at being interrupted, replied: 'At that temperature, it doesn't really matter.' "

Sick Leave: "There were a couple of classic comments on sick leave applications. In one instance where the form required the reason for sick leave to be shown, the applicant had stated 'Toothache'. The next question was 'Proof of ailment' and Albie Smith, in true military style, wrote 'Sighted cavity.' The other request involved a fellow who had been stung by a swarm of bees. In answer to the question: 'What were you doing 10 seconds before the accident?' the Cost Clerk wrote: 'Ducking and weaving.' "

Campbell's Kingdom: "The late **Rudd Campbell (at right)** was the Ranger at Wyperfeld National Park. The CRB built the road from the Park gate into the Wonga Hut and Jack Ritchie, David Haine and I spent quite a few days up there with Rudd, locating the road and planning its construction. Rudd was quite a character; he really was Wyperfeld National Park. The sort of comments that Rudd would make! I rang him at Yaapeet one day from Horsham, when we were doing the job, and I wanted to know what the weather was like. Had it been raining? Rudd said to me: 'Rain? You have no idea the storm we had here last night. I am associated with the local footy club and I was around at the hall helping the guys pick their side for Saturday's game, and the rain was falling so hard on the corrugated iron roof that we couldn't hear ourselves speak; so we went outside to pick it.' On one particular day when we were doing this road location we were in his Land

Rover and he insisted on calling me Eric. He was Ericking me this and Ericking me that so I said to Jack and David: 'I'll get this guy. I don't like being called by some other name.' So instead of calling him Rudd I referred to him as Rod, and I repeated it every few minutes. Eventually he could stand it no longer and he turned to me and said: 'Eric, you've got my problem.' I said: 'What's that, Rod?' He said: 'You just can't remember bloody names.' "

"On one occasion Bob Joyce (the Horticultural Officer) was out in the Land Rover with Rudd. The party stopped on the edge of one of the dried-up lakes for lunch and, on looking around, Bob remarked: 'This barren soil wouldn't even grow a noxious weed.' 'Be blowed,' Rudd was very quick to reply. 'You drive a 4 inch nail in here today, come back tomorrow and you'll have the best crowbar you've ever seen.' "

* I formed a close friendship with Rudd Campbell during my years in Rainbow (1961-1963) and he is mentioned a number of times in my memoir 'Stand Back. Let the Dog See the Rabbit'.

Metropolitan Division. Formed in 1949, the first Divisional Engineer was Norm Roeszler who was quite a character: "He loved his shiny black car. He almost drove the garage people up the wall getting it washed every second day and vacuum cleaned, because he suffered a bit from allergies and hay fever." and "Under Norm's office table was a series of buzzers and bells, and he used to play them like a piano. He would have us all jumping up and down at the press of a button. Jack Galbraith (the Assistant Divisional Engineer) had a passage worn out between his office and the boss's room." (Stan Hodgson).

Norm would attempt to delegate as much as he possibly could to his capable deputy. His phone would ring and the caller would have barely uttered a few words when Norm would interrupt with: 'Just a moment. Mr. Galbraith is handling that,' and the call would be switched across to Jack. With retirement looming, Norm was building a new house in Balwyn. On one occasion the rapidly transferred call was in fact the builder ringing to enquire about the tiles in the bathroom. Norm's transfer to the position of Personal Assistant to the Chief Engineer was in fact a ploy to enable the promotion of Jack Galbraith to the position of DE; he was doing the job anyway.

After Jack Galbraith retired Howard Hobbs became the Divisional Engineer after having been ADE at Warrnambool. Stan Hodgson, who had been seconded to the division in its early days, became the ADE and filled that role for a number of years, a role which included responsibility for the Lower Yarra Crossing Roadworks contracts.

Howard Hobbs later became Deputy Chief Engineer, Road Design. In my time as Personnel Manager I would often pass information on to the Board and this would sometimes relate to the death of a former officer. The Chairman would invariably say: 'We will have to be represented at the funeral. Could you and Howard Hobbs please attend?' Possibly the first time we went together was the funeral of Norm Roeszler but this seemed to set a precedent. Consequently, Howard and I attended a number of funerals over the years as the Board's representatives; I would sometimes joke that we were the Board's professional mourners.

Geelong Division. This Division was formed in March 1941 when the old 'Central District' was divided to form Metropolitan, Dandenong and Geelong Divisions. Initially administered from Head Office, the Division moved to its McKillop Street location in 1948.

Bas Abery was appointed Divisional Engineer in March 1941, after serving for a short period in the RAAF as a Commissioned Officer on airfield construction. The first ADE was Andy Elder, soon to be replaced by Les Elms (brother of Hubert, the long-time Shire Engineer at the Shire of Waranga.) In 1960 Bas Abery was appointed Deputy Chief Engineer Bridges at Head Office and Bill Neville (ex. DE Horsham) replaced him. In 1970 Les Elms retired and Neil Jephcott (ex. ADE Warrnambool) was appointed ADE. Then Bill Neville was appointed Assistant Chief Works Engineer and his position was filled by Graeme Marshallsea (ex. ADE Bendigo.)

Bas Abery played a significant role in the history of Geelong Division, which included direct responsibility for the construction of the **Avalon Airfield in the 1950's (at right).**

"However, above all, he is remembered as a competent, colourful man who, to put it mildly, had a mind of his own. If Bas thought the Board was wrong he would say that it didn't have all the facts. Once Roberts (Chairman) sent a direction down to Bas who wrote back and said that he didn't agree with the direction, and until he received further word he didn't intend to follow it. Roberts was ropeable, but Bas was like that. He was very dedicated none-the-less." **(Russ Cooper, at left).**

Tom Russell's recollections were not dissimilar: "He wrote lots of spikey reports, and often used to upset the Board, and a lot of other people. He would scribble out reports quickly; he didn't worry whether there might have been a few minor errors or not. Bas sent a report in once after the Board had asked him about something and the report started off: 'How stupid of the Board to suggest…' That was his approach. He didn't have much diplomacy in terms of writing."

Life was not easy for Graeme Marshallsea when he became Divisional Engineer Geelong as Bill Neville found it hard to let go when he took up his new responsibilities at Head Office. Personally, I found him friendly and helpful and was always intrigued by his special way of expressing things. One day we were discussing the Chairman's long association with the military. 'Yes', said Bill, 'the last time Paddy got into trouble was when he had a dirty bow at Hastings.'

Although Geelong Division may have not suffered from remoteness, field conditions were still harsh:

The Fun of Camping: “In the camp those days we only had a tent and a wire gate to sleep on with a straw palliasse. You put your foot on the ground in the morning; there was no carpet or anything. When you first went to the camp they gave you a dish to wash in, and a knife and fork because there weren’t any cooks and you had to cook with a kerosene tin out in front of your tent. Later on, we had eight men and we got a cook and a mobile kitchen. The shower was a kerosene tin tied up in a tree with a bit of hessian around it, and we had two coppers: one for washing that was our hot water system, and one for cooking. It was pretty cold. We were camped in the middle of the road from Lorne to Deans Marsh, up the hill there in the trees; conditions were very poor in those days. You worked a 48 hour week, including Saturday morning. There were no holidays or sick leave. If you missed a day you got docked. You lived in a tent and you had your dish out the front, and that is what you washed in of a morning. You had a kerosene lamp to read; it was very hard to read or do anything at night.” (Roy McLaughlin, who commenced in 1947.)

“There were some characters in those camps. They used to raffle everything in the pubs in those days to get a quid. One bloke killed a swan and shortened the neck. He raffled it in the pub as a duck and no one was any the wiser.” (Roy McLaughlin.)

Warrnambool Division. The first three Divisional Engineers were highly regarded and held their positions for extended periods: R.A.H.Cochrane (1928-1946), Bill Pascoe (1946-1966), and **Frank Lodge (1966-1983) (at right).** Reg Marslen, a long time CRB employee, started out in Warrnambool Division: “In 1951 I was looking for a job. A CRB gang was working at Yambuk at the time and I wandered down there and they fixed me up on the pick and shovel for a start. I showed a bit of aptitude with the pencil so they decided I should work in the field office part time. During my working lifetime I worked at about 40 or 50 places as a cost clerk as well as in Divisional Offices in Traralgon, Benalla and Bendigo.”

Here are a few of Reg’s stories:

A Trifle Damp. “I started on the verge of the tents-to-Stanley hut era (unlined Stanley huts, that is). Our office in those times was a tent. If you left the flap of the tent open, and the wind changed when you were out, all your papers were gone. That happened two or three times. At Macarthur we were on the sprayer and pitched out tents on top of a hill. It started to rain and it rained for a week. We didn’t do any work and finally packed up and went home. For that week I had a stream of water coming in one end of my tent and out the other, so I had cold running water for the full week. We didn’t have duckboards.”

Converted. “The roller driver from Warrnambool was on one occasion travelling with the tender truck driver towing the roller. There was a canopy on the roller. They were travelling down one of the

streets in Melbourne and came to an overhead bridge. There were no clearance signs in those days. He said: 'I looked back and the next minute the old roller was a convertible.' "

Problem Solved. "One of the boys in Warrnambool was bitten by a tiger snake and the form asked: 'Have you done anything to prevent this from happening again?' He replied: 'Yes. Killed snake.'

Tangling with a Heifer. Col Douglas, Stock Inspector in Bendigo Division, has provided an indication that life could be tricky. On one occasion his counterpart in Warrnambool had a narrow escape and submitted a detailed but gripping account:

"I wish to report that on 30th July, 1969 at 2-45 p.m. about 3 ½ miles east of Mortlake on the Hamilton Highway, I found one 3-year-old Hereford heifer without some person in attendance. I made two enquiries re ownership of this heifer without success. I then commenced to drive her to the Mortlake Pound, a distance of 2 miles. After travelling a distance of one mile she turned into a side road. I then sent my dogs to bring her out of this grassed lane. After returning to the highway again and travelling a short distance towards Mortlake, she turned on my dogs and after they had been horned a great deal they took refuge in the back of the utility and continued barking.

This heifer then charged the back of the utility scratching paint from the left-hand back corner. I drove away and quietened the dogs down. I then returned and commenced driving this heifer with the stock whip and after I had followed this procedure for another ½ mile she decided to charge me. I took refuge behind the trunk of a cypress and eventually turned her off with the aid of a few good belts over the head with the whip.

I then went back along the Hamilton Highway towards Darlington and spoke with Patrolman B. Brady and asked if I could get some assistance. He agreed and said that Neil McKenzie, a Patrol Assistant, would come also. I advised them to bring long-handled shovels as the cow was dangerous.

I then drove to the Mortlake Pound and opened the gates and temporarily repaired the fence leading into the Pound paddock. I then drove down the hill from the Pound and the heifer was running towards a low portion of fence on the northern side of the highway. I drove towards this fence but she jumped the fence and with three other cattle in the paddock she galloped around madly. Neil McKenzie and myself went into the paddock to retrieve her and she had almost climbed back over the fence onto the highway but decided to turn back into the paddock at the same time, becoming entangled by the horns and head through some old five-line ring lock cyclone.

She then stampeded back into the paddock. We were in the middle of this small paddock and she laid her ears back, dropped out her tongue and charged me again. With much shouting and whip swinging I managed to drive her off. We eventually got her back onto the highway through a gate. She returned to the southern side of the highway alongside three cows inside the fence. The heifer turned to face us and I had just said to Neil McKenzie not to be frightened to belt her over the head with the shovel if she came towards him, when she charged straight at Neil. He stepped back, but her right horn caught the slack of his trouser leg and tore the fork clean out of his trousers. They were completely ruined. He suffered no injury to the body but was slightly shocked.

After Neil had time to get over this fright I said we would try again. I had just belted the heifer over the head to turn her towards the Pound and she charged me again. This time I was unable to fight her off and had to run for my life. I could feel that she was very close to my back and I took a

sudden jump to the left and she cleared me by about 2 feet. I then made towards another tree and she decided to turn to where there were cattle in a paddock.

I then left the scene and went to the Mortlake Police Station to have this heifer destroyed. I spoke to S/Constable D. Bannera who was relieving there at the time I called. He agreed to shoot this heifer. However, he said he would ring Terang Police Station and find out a pig farmer's name who would come and take the body and was told that he could not shoot this beast as it was not a bull or bull stag under the Permits Act and that it was a matter for the Shire of Mortlake, unless the heifer was injured, diseased, abandoned or decrepit. I had a conversation with Mr. Gray, the Shire Secretary, and he felt, as I felt, that the police had powers to destroy this heifer. However he informed his ranger to go out and endeavour to find an owner.

I then officially informed the police that I had to abandon the impounding of this beast because she had become so ferocious. It was quite impossible to move her any further and she still had some wire around her neck. I have replaced the trousers that were badly damaged, this cost was $ 6-50. I had spoken to Mr. Oppy prior to the purchase of the trousers. I spoke to Mr. Gray again on 4th August, 1969 and he told me that the heifer had been taken by persons unknown overnight. He read to me Section 67 of the Police Offences Act 1958, relating to ferocious animals. Mr Gray feels that we should be armed for this purpose as on 28th July, 1969 the Shire had to have the police deal with a ferocious bull after it had horned a car into a gutter at the side of a main road in the Shire.

I spoke with Constable Hawkins of the Colac Police about this Section 67 of the Police Offences Act and he told me that it had been repealed and replaced by Section 14 SS (1) of the Protection of Animals Act, 1966.

I have spoken to Mr. E. Moncrieff in Head Office on 31st July, 1969 and he is to arrange a suitable meeting with the four Stock Inspectors on the use of tranquillizer guns. I feel myself that these guns would be of much more value in handling cattle than that of risking death or serious injury."

PLANT and STORES.

South Melbourne. The 'Workshop' was for a time under the control of Mickey Anderson and, when he left, Bas Abery was Acting Plant Engineer for several months. Then Leng Challenger Tupman, who joined the CRB in 1934, was appointed in May 1938. He was succeeded by George Langham in 1940 with 'Tuppy' retained as a supernumerary for twelve months. Conditions were very primitive at South Melbourne; when Hartley Sargent started in 1937 the workshop still had a dirt floor.

"The South Melbourne Council rat catcher came in every six months. With all his little fox terriers he would try and clean the place up a bit. In the workshop the only heating was fire buckets; 4 gallon tins full of coke. If you got a bit cold you went over and threw a bucket of kero on it; everybody moved away then." (Bob Swift.)

"The first time I went to Licola it was train to Heyfield, then a tip truck to Greens Gully. You would report to old Stuart Gardner who would say: 'You want a bed, son? Alright, over to the shed there (which was an old cow shed), pull yourself up a palliasse, that's your bunk.' This was when we went out to repair some plant." (Eric Piper.)

"There were some tough characters down at South Melbourne. I remember a fellow called Harry Muller who confided in me one Friday afternoon that he would not be in on the following Monday. There was no such thing as sick leave but I guessed it was some sort of medical matter that had to be attended to. Harry was back at work on the Tuesday. I discovered later that the reason for the absence on the Monday was that he had his appendix removed." (Des Chapple.)

Just as every pack has a joker, so too did South Melbourne Depot. His name was Charlie Chandler:

"Rumour has it that Charlie Chandler's most famous practical joke involved the calling of a mid-week race. Some of the boys liked a punt and when a particular race was being run a few would slip quietly across to the canteen, lean in a window, and turn on the radio. On this particular day one of the fitters had a sizeable sum on a long shot and he moved anxiously to the canteen near starting time. Charlie had got wind of this and disconnected the radio. When the fitter turned on the (disconnected) radio Charlie called the entire race from a crouching position below the window. What a race it was! Catastrophe followed catastrophe until all horses had fallen except the fitter's long shot. As it entered the straight it stopped and the jockey could coax it no further. Meanwhile another jockey had caught his fallen horse, remounted, and started to overtake the stalled long shot. The fitter died a thousand deaths as he urged his horse to resume the race. Eventually it moved off again but was overtaken on the finish line by the remounted horse. However there was a photo-finish, which the fitter's horse lost, followed by a protest, which the fitter's horse won. The fitter eventually staggered back to his bench, exhausted from the drama, but thinking that he had won. The Herald that evening told a different story." (Roadlines, 1972.)

Started at South Melbourne: Three of the characters who I have featured in this little compilation started their working lives at the old South Melbourne Depot: Des Chapple, Bob Howard and Ted King. Des moved to Mt. Eliza shortly after I joined the Board and was my travelling companion for many years, while Bob was a workmate in Personnel. In spite of their long association, these two never got on. Des had a second name of 'Rupert' which was rather antiquated and he was sensitive about. Bob's full name was 'Robert Charles Swanwick Howard' which was grandiose for a boy who grew up in the back streets of Port Melbourne. To upset Bob, Des would address him as 'Swanny', his abbreviation of 'Swanwick'; Bob would respond by calling his old acquaintance 'Rupe'.

Ted King, who finished his career as Controller of Stores, almost tossed it in after a few days:

"I started on wages sheets in the Storeyard in October, 1934. I nearly left the first week I was there. In those days when steam rollers went to the country they had to be escorted out of the city area. A man was to walk in front of them carrying a red flag. This was supposed to warn people riding or driving horses. The steam roller was leaving the Storeyard this day, the escort had not arrived, so I was sent off with the flag to escort the roller, decked out in new suit, hat, etc. The escort was to catch me up and take over. There is nothing more embarrassing than walking in front of a steam roller carrying a red flag. So, we started along Montague Street. I thought: 'If the escort isn't here by Spencer Street station, I'm getting on the train and going home.' Fortunately, he caught me before we got that far. Going back to when I was interviewed for the job, Mr Jansen (then the Secretary) said I would have to wear a suit and hat. I asked: 'Why do I have to wear a hat?' He said: 'It helps to keep the furriers in business if all public servants wear hats.' So I wore a hat until the war, and haven't worn one since."

As alluded to, Ted spent a number of years in uniform including some time in the Middle East. Diplomacy was not always one of his strong points, as illustrated in this story by one of the ladies who would qualify for the 'veteran' classification: "During the war years we used to pack parcels to send to the boys: tobacco, fruit cake, and a pair of long socks. I used to hate knitting those socks. I would plod away and knit them on the tram. I remember when Ted King came home, the first time he came into the Filing Room to see us he was in uniform and he said: 'Thanks for your parcels,' and I said 'That's good. I had to sweat blood knitting those socks.' 'Those,' he said 'we used to sell them to the Gypos for a zac.' They never wore them. I could have killed him." (Nancy Costello, nee Strover.)

Syndal (later known as Glen Waverley). In the early 1960's the CRB purchased 35 acres fronting onto Coleman Parade in Syndal and a new, modern workshop, complete with floor heating, replaced the cramped and dilapidated establishment at South Melbourne. George Langham remained as Chief Mechanical Engineer until his retirement in 1975 when he was replaced by Peter Jeffreys who started with the Board in 1963.

George Langham was highly respected in the organization and Des Chapple confided to me one day that there was only one person in the CRB who he addressed as 'Mr.' and that was 'Mr. Langham.' Be that as it may, "George Langham played his cards close to his chest. When he went out he often wouldn't tell anyone where he was going. He got a new secretary and she felt she should know what Mr. Langham was doing and where he was. In fairness to her, she was probably entitled to know. Apparently she approached George and he said: 'I let people know; you can ask either Mr. Ashcroft or Mr. Williams and they will know where I am.' A few times when she saw George going out the door she sang out to him: 'Oh, Mr. Langham. Mind telling me where you are going?' and he would say: 'Mr. Ashcroft knows' or 'Mr. Williams knows.' George wasn't going to tell her. I happened to be over there one day and George came out of his office and started walking to the door. The girl sang out: 'Oh, Mr. Langham. Could I ask where you are going?' George said: 'Out. I am going out,' and kept walking." (Russ Cooper.)

At Des Chapple's farewell.

L to r: Peter McCullough, Noel Allanson, Peter Hosking, George Langham and Tom Russell.

ADDITIONAL ROLES

During its existence the CRB performed well in its principal task of designing and building roads and bridges. However from time to time it became involved in other matters. I have previously alluded to the fact that for two years it operated the Yallourn coal mine, but it was most conspicuous in the war years when it constructed aerodromes at Laverton, Point Cook and Sale. However its most significant contribution was the construction and sealing of 'the North-South Road' (now the Stuart Highway) between Alice Springs and Larrimah in the Northern Territory.

Late in 1941 the CRB was given approval to undertake this work. Volunteers from the Board's staff and field personnel were called and by November 1942 as many as 580 were on the job. In all, the Board applied bituminous surfacing to 1265 kilometres of the **Stuart Highway (above and right)** between 1942 and 1945.

The original work, centred on Tennant Creek, was administered by Charlie Jones and Harry George who were the DE and ADE of the Northern Territory Division. Field work was supervised by young engineers Frank Docking and Alan Jacka, and in January 1943 a survey team arrived headed by two newly-qualified engineers: **Tom Russell and Keith Moody (at left).**

In addition to the road work, the Board also carried out various constructions on airfields and landing strips and put up encampments for the military. Later, during the 1950's Bas Abery, Divisional Engineer Geelong, was given supervisory responsibility for the construction of the new airfield at Avalon.

THE BOARD'S IDIOSYNCRACIES

Ted Howlett provided a first-hand account of the Board's reluctance to delegate and old-fashioned conservatism:

"In reply to an advertisement late in 1947 I applied for the newly-created position of 'Senior Clerk', the principal duties being to assist the Secretary and act as Minute Secretary at Board meetings, conferences, deputations etc. Following an interview in the Board room by the Chairman, Mr. W.L.Dale (who had been the first Secretary of the Board when it was formed in 1913), Board Members Mr. F.M.Corrigan (ex-Shire Engineer, Alberton Shire) and Mr. D.V.Darwin, plus the Secretary (Mr. R.F.Jansen), the recommendation for my appointment was forwarded through the Minister of Public Works to the Governor-in-Council. As far as I was aware, all applicants for staff positions were interviewed by the Board and the Branch Head concerned and such appointments required the approval of the Governor-in-Council."

"At that time there was no delegation of authority whatever; even minor decisions were made by the Board at its weekly meeting, the agenda usually having as many as 300 items or more. The Board meeting usually started around 10 a.m. on Monday and quite often it did not finish until 6 p.m. on Friday, and even then as often as not several items would be postponed until the next meeting, "

"Letters in reply to inward correspondence had a standard format: 'With reference to your letter of…I have to inform you that the Board…etc.', often all in one sentence in one paragraph of as many as twelve lines. Reports to the Board were submitted on paper which was pre-printed with 'I have the honour to report' at the commencement and 'I have the honour to be, Sir, your obedient servant' at the conclusion. This archaic form of writing remained until perhaps the 1960's when, gradually, letters and reports were written in clearer and more modern form." The irascible Divisional Engineer Geelong, Bas Abery, possibly led the way; any reports that he submitted to the Board had the pre-printed sections crossed out!

As I have mentioned in my sections on the Personnel and Estates Sections, there was occasionally an item of correspondence which caused a smile. One such story emanated from the Correspondence Section where they had a number of standard acknowledgement letters from which to select a suitable response to inward correspondence. On this occasion the MMBW had forwarded plans showing the route of the new South Eastern Trunk Sewer, and a reply was not required. The standard acknowledgement which was sent stated: 'Thank you for the plans of the South Eastern Trunk Sewer the contents of which have been noted.' Many thought that this was open to more than one interpretation.

On another occasion a resident had written in complaining about the condition of a rural road. The Board responded: 'The matter has been referred to the xxxx Shire Council, as the road in question is under the control of that body.' The letter was returned with the comment: 'The xxxx Shire Council is not a body; it is a corpse and should be buried. There will be no mourners.'

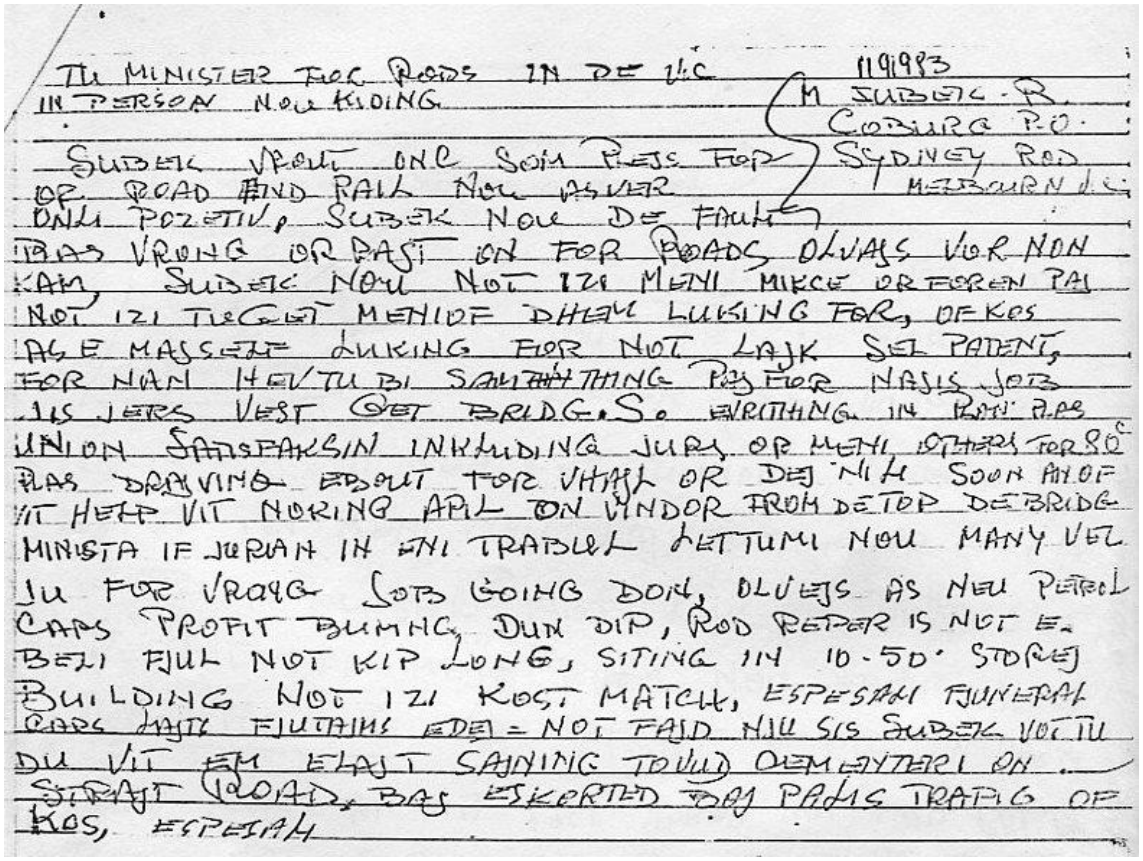
Some even thought that the subject heading of the following circular could be misinterpreted:

COUNTRY ROADS BOARD
60 Denmark Street
KEW VIC 3101

CIRCULAR NO.	: 77-A-5
SUBJECT INDEX NO.	: 1.53
FILE NO.	: 77/3521/3
DATE OF ISSUE	: 11 Aug 77

SUBJECT: NATURAL DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES - ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE BOARD (77/3521/3)

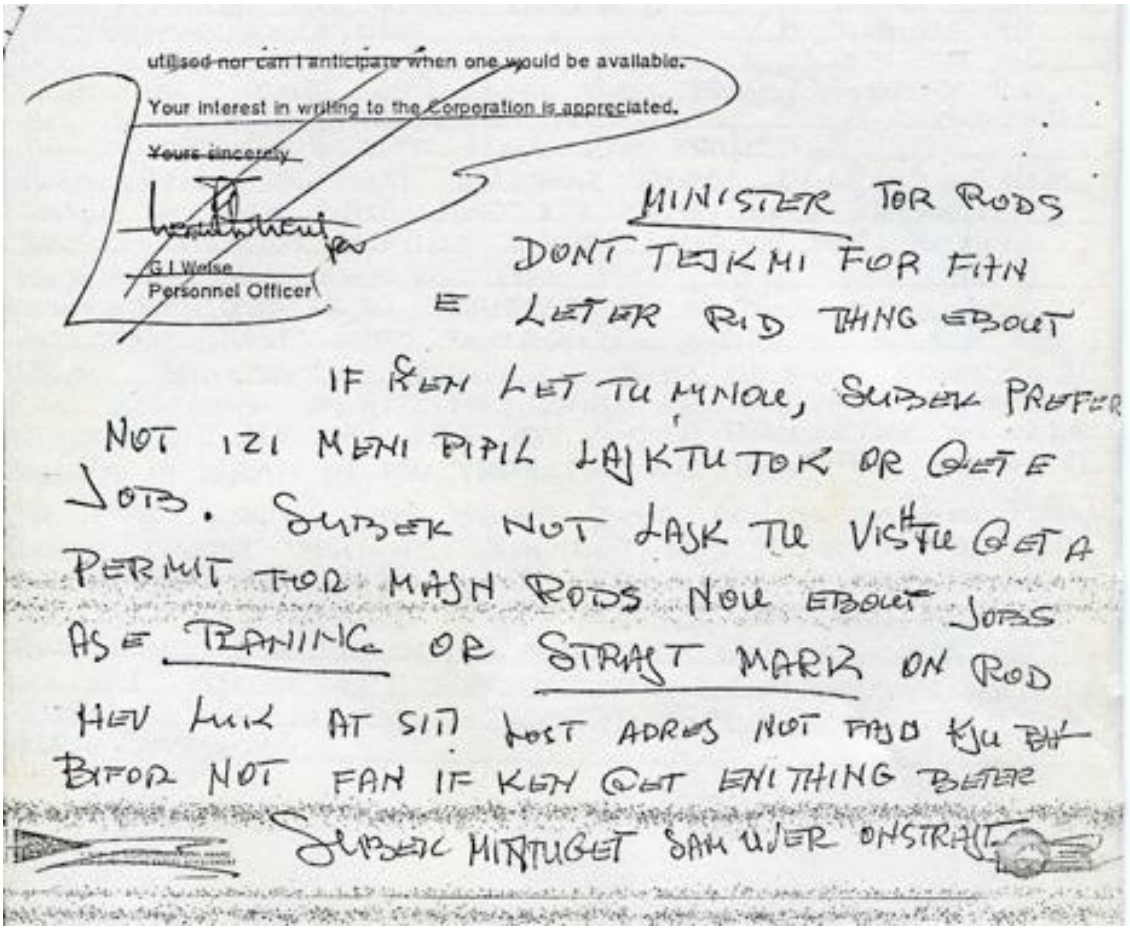
As with Estates, the Correspondence Section also found it hard at times to decipher correspondence. The letter from 'M JUBEK – R', sent to the top ('THE MINISTER FOR RODS IN DE VIC IN PERSON NO KIDING') could well have been written in some form of code. Obviously paper was in short supply in the Jubek household as his follow-up letter displays evidence of recycling:



TU MINISTER FOR RODS IN DE VIC
IN PERSON NO KIDING

11/9/83
M JUBEK - R.
COBURG P.O.
SYDNEY ROD
MELBOURN VIC

SUBEK VROT ONE SOM PLES FOR OP ROAD AND RAIL NOW ASVER ONLI POZETIV, SUBEK NOW DE FAUL IBAS VRONG OR PAST ON FOR ROADS, OLVAYS VOR NON KAM, SUBEK NOW NOT IZI MENI MIKE OR EGREN PA NOT IZI TU GET MENI OF DHEM LUKING FOR, OF KOS AGE MASSEZ LUKING FOR NOT LAJK SEL PATENT, FOR NAM HEVTU BI SAMTHING PUS FOR NAJS JOB JIS JERS VEST GET BRIDG. So EVRITHING IN KAN PAS UNION SANSPAKSIN INKLUDING JURY OR MENI OTHERS FOR SO PLAS DRIVING ABOUT FOR VHAJL OR DEJ NIL SOON AN OF VIT HELP VIT NORING APL ON VINDOR FROM DETOP DE BRIDG MINISTA IF JURIAN IN ENI TRABUL LETTUMI NOW MANY VEL JU FOR VRAYG JOBS GOING DON, OLVEJS AS NEW PETROL CAPS PROFIT BUMING, DUN DIP, ROD REPER IS NOT E. BEJI FUL NOT KIP LONG, SITING IN 10-50' STOREJ BUILDING NOT IZI KOST MATCH, ESPESAM FUNERAL CORS WITH FLUTHING EDE = NOT FAID NIL SIS SUBEK VOT TU DU VIT EM ELAJ SAYING TOWD OEM AYTHERI ON STRAJT ROAD, BAS ESKORTED BOY PADS TRAPING OF KOS, ESPEIAL



A little group that went about their task effectively and unobtrusively were the floor controllers. They came under the supervision of the officer on the Fifth Floor (Guy Baxter, then Hugh Walter, and later Barry Wilson) and some of them were real characters. One who liked to play a practical joke if the occasion arose was Alan Hodgson on the Lower Ground Floor. On one occasion he brought in a toy which, when wound up, emitted an hysterical scream. Alan, at a quiet stage one morning, wound this up, placed it in a basket in the goods lift which ran adjacent to the floor control points, and sent it to the Sixth Floor. There the young lady, who was in on the joke, took the toy out, rewound it, placed it back in the basket in the goods lift, and sent it back to Alan on the Lower Ground Floor. The screaming generated considerable excitement amongst the various floor controllers as it progressed to the Sixth Floor; most of them rang Hugh Walter and, in excited tones, told him that someone was stuck in the goods lift and had gone hysterical. Shortly afterwards, as the basket made its return journey, they were back on the phone: 'There it is again, Hughie.' For the rest of the morning floor controllers were to be seen shining torches into the goods liftwell, looking for some poor soul who had become trapped in the innards of the building.

Barry Wilson (centre) flanked by Bill Thomas and Andrew Houghton at Lillian Moon's farewell.

One of Barry Wilson's proteges was a chap named Jack xxxx. He was a distinguished looking man with a full head of wavy silver hair and it seemed appropriate that, after he had spent a short time on Floor Control, he should move on to better things: he became a Clerical Assistant in Traffic Engineering. It was Jack's daily task to file all the incoming correspondence. After eight months someone realised that Jack had not been filing the various reports, correspondence etc.; he had been putting them straight into the rubbish bin. Jack was dismissed. Years later, some wondered whether Jack was really a fool or just a man ahead of his time - the originator of the paperless office.

An interesting incident which involved Barry Wilson was the bomb scare. One morning in the early 1980's I received a call from Brian Negus at the RTA; they had received a call saying a bomb had been planted but the caller kept referring to Denmark Street. Brian was of the view that, in his excitement, the caller had misread the phone book and his message was intended for the RCA. I rang the Kew CIB and was told to check all the entrances for a mysterious looking parcel and also check the Mail Room; they would have someone down in about ten minutes. I spoke briefly to Peter Hosking, the Group Manager–Technical and General Services, who occupied the office next to mine, and we set off to visit the entrances. Barry Wilson joined us and, after checking both entrances for suspicious parcels, we went to the Mail Room. Barry set about running the few parcels through the metal detector and one triggered the alarm. Barry looked quickly at me and asked what he should do with

it. I told him to place it on the front lawn as quickly as possible and well away from the main building. Meanwhile, I would ring the person, an engineer in Traffic Engineering, to whom the parcel was addressed. Barry set off, holding this parcel at arms' length. His arms seemed to grow an extra foot as he attempted to hold it as far from his body as possible, and his legs moved so quickly that they were almost a blur; it was like something out of an old-time movie.

Meanwhile, a detective had arrived; his view was that it was almost certainly a hoax but the decision rested with us as to whether or not we should evacuate the building. He added that it was most likely that the caller would be placed nearby waiting to observe the excitement of the evacuation. Furthermore, if we did evacuate, we could expect more bomb scares in the future. We decided not to evacuate and the detective departed as the engineer from Traffic Engineering arrived to pick up his parcel. He was rather bemused to discover that his collection of harmless cassettes was resting at the far end of the front lawn. This little saga had a sequel when, at the conclusion of a Board meeting, I said "By the way, we had a bomb scare a few days ago but after discussion with the police we decided it was a hoax and did not evacuate." The Chairman was aghast: "We should have been told." The Deputy Chairman (Robin Underwood) tried to calm him down by saying that we had made the right decision as nothing had eventuated. However Tom was not happy; as I said to Peter Hosking later, Tom obviously felt that the Board should have evacuated even if the rest of the staff remained at work.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for a public servant was dealing courteously with a citizen who believed that he had the answer to the Board's problems. During the 1970's when the Board was widening the Nepean Highway north of Mornington it incurred the wrath of Councillor Tom Hast who fought valiantly to preserve a row of elderly but diseased poplars. So forceful were his protests that this gave rise to the axiom amongst the engineers in Dandenong Division: 'More Hast, less speed.' After fading into obscurity for some years, the same Councillor got his dander up in 1985 when he wrote complaining of delays at the Wooralla Drive/Nepean Highway intersection in Mt. Eliza when school children were being dropped off. The answer to the Councillor was obvious:

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Mornington
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(059) 75 1033
A.H.: (059) 75 3292
(059) 75 4584

8th. July, 1985.

The Secretary,
Road Construction Authority,
60 Denmark Street,
KEW. 3101

Dear Sir,

On Wednesday last, 3rd. July I waited seven minutes from 8.43 to 8.50AM at Wooralla Drive, Mt. Eliza in a stream of traffic to cross the Nepean Highway from the Peninsula School. When I finally crossed the traffic still reached behind me as far as I could see.

Behind me were Mrs. James Osmond c/- Beleura Hospital and Mrs. Johnson of the "Wool Shop", Main Street, Mornington in successive cars who had also delivered their sons to the school and can substantiate these times.

This waiting is absolutely outrageous. It is caused by two lanes being compressed into one outside the Mt. Eliza Primary School which is stupid and pointless.

Traffic wishing to turn right into the Primary School or right at the lights towards Frankston cannot move except perhaps at the change of lights. Moreover they block all other traffic going straight ahead or turning left because of this insane single lane.

When are you going to be reasonable about this? I have been jammed into this traffic since February I have seen your men standing day after day at that intersection, staring at God knows what.

If there were no solution I could understand the inaction but the answer is quite obvious:- two lanes created right along the Peninsula School boundary and a right hand turn period in the traffic lights cycle, not all day - just for the critical period morning and after school time.

I cannot understand why it has taken you five months to reach a simple solution. Perhaps you will tell me.

Yours faithfully,

T.I.HAST

tih/jmd

Then a Camberwell Councillor wrote to the Minister in 1984 pointing out that the newly-installed cat's eyes in High Street Road, Ashburton, did nothing for road safety but were very successful in keeping residents awake at night. With the skill of a real journalist he concluded:

> *Parenthetically, some Camberwell councillors now occasionally use a very unkind expression: "engineers logic". It covers the reasons sometimes given by relevant experts and authorities why they have done or not done something. It is used when the stated logic for the doing or not doing seems evident only to the person giving it and to no one else, sometimes not even any other expert or authority.*

The divide between engineers and 'other' was always apparent and, when I first joined the Board, there was an annual 'Engineers v. Admin.' football match which was fiercely contested. Because of my work with the engineering staff - and there were about 500 of them in the organization - I was well accepted. One even suggested, rather condescendingly, that he regarded me as an 'honorary engineer.' In 2018 I attended the funerals of two men for whom I had a lot of respect: Dr. Keith Moody (the former Chief Engineer) and Robin Underwood (the former Deputy Chairman). The fact that I was the only non-engineer at both funerals said something.

On a lighter note, Interchange of February, 1985 contained this little story: "Barry Fielding, a Scientific Officer, was reading his son's sixth grade workbook when he came across the following: 'Put the word CLERK in a sentence.' The son wrote: 'A clerk is a person who files things and does other stuffing around.' "

CHARACTERS OF THE PAST.

The collection of reminiscences published by the VicRoads Retirees Association contained some fascinating reflections by employees on members of what might, for want of a better word, be referred to as the 'hierarchy'; it also contained many other stories about people who made up the bulk of the organization and who left a lasting impression. The list below starts with senior officers and segues into the 'other ranks.'

<u>Arthur Callaway</u> (at right) was the first Chief Engineer and, while capable, his driving skills were in short supply: "The Chairman, the late Mr. Calder, was returning from a Gippsland inspection with Mr. Callaway, Chief Engineer. Nearing Melbourne, via Dandenong Road, Mr. Callaway took the wrong traffic lane and found himself on the ballasted tramway track in the raised centre part of the roadway. It was not long before he was conscious of a clanging tramcar bell, and noticed a tram bearing down from the rear. Seeing a break in the garden plot, Mr. Callaway jerked his steering wheel violently to the left, at the same time exclaiming: " 'old 'ard, Mr. Calder! 'old 'ard! ". It took but a second for the T Model

to traverse the short distance when it bounced over the rockery and bounded onto the actual roadway, landing luckily right side up. When Mr. Calder had recovered his power of speech, which, as can be imagined, had momentarily vanished, he exclaimed: 'I'll never ride with you again, Callaway! I'll never ride with you again!' And he never did. "(Roadlines, 1950)

"**Tom Pritchard (below)** was Patrolman at Lightning Creek, north of Omeo. The Chief Engineer used to come up and he knew old Tom. When his horse died he sent a telegram to the Chief Engineer: 'Horse dead. Send instructions.' Callaway replied: 'Bury horse.' That would have been in the mid 1920's." (Les Starling) (Lightning Creek is on the Omeo Highway, about half way between Omeo and Tallangatta. Curiously, it was the first highway declared after the Highways Act was passed in 1924 and Callaway would have encountered old Tom when inspecting the road prior to its declaration.)

W.L.Dale (below) was the CRB's original Secretary and held the position for 16 years. In 1929 he became a Board Member, filling the position of Chairman between 1945 and 1949. Some of Dale's personal qualities were open to criticism: "Les Dale was so frugal it was unbelievable. In those days they used to come around and take your order for lunch and somebody would go out and buy the lunches. Pies cost 3d each which is the equivalent of about 2 cents. The Motor Registration Branch had a small kiosk and we could always get our cheap butter and sweets and things. Nelson Foster had something to do with the kiosk. They used to have a Public Service Branch of the RSSAILA and Nelson was the CRB representative. I think later on Peter Hosking's father, Frank, became the rep. John Turnbull was also involved. This day Leslie Dale ordered a pie. Nelson always told the junior: 'Don't give him the pie until he gives you the money. If he says he hasn't got the money, don't leave the pie.' This day he took the pie and paid his 3d. Right on lunch time a phone call came from Les Dale to Nelson: 'Listen. I've just got an invitation for lunch, so I won't need the pie. Will you send one of the young fellows around and see if he can sell the pie for me?' Nelson told him what he could do with his pie." (Des Chapple) (Nelson Foster had worked at South Melbourne as Central Stores Officer

when Des Chapple was the Paymaster down there. Des once said about his old colleague: 'He was a bit of a rebel; he was frightened of no man, from the Chairman down.' It would be fair to say that Des inherited a few of Nelson's characteristics.)

Louis Loder (at right) joined the Board in November, 1923 and by 1928 he was Chief Engineer. He became Chairman in 1940, resigning in 1944 to become Director of Works with the Commonwealth. Later a knighthood was conferred on him in recognition of his service and achievements. "Loder was largely responsible for the development of stage construction and the so-called low cost techniques. His philosophy was that if you didn't have a certain failure rate you were overbuilding." (Harry George)

Although very capable, decorum had to be maintained at all times. Ted King, who was Controller of Stores when he retired, had two unfortunate incidents to relate. The first was when Loder was Chief Engineer:

"Dress rules were very strict at that time. You had to come in to work in a suit. You had to be properly dressed at all times. In those days I ran with St. Stephen's Harriers on a Saturday afternoon. We finished work at 12 noon on Saturdays. Our dress at St. Stephen's was cream pants, black shoes, black blazer, white shirt, and red and black tie. 'Very smart,' I thought. I came one Saturday in my St. Stephen's get-up, ready to go and run at Olympic Park that afternoon. I had no sooner sat down when the Chief Engineer's buzzer went. I went into Mr. Loder and he asked: 'Where are you going? To a fancy dress party?' He said: 'Go home and change.' I went home to Elsternwick and arrived back again about 11.30. The staff got the message."

A year or two later Ted was secretary of the Social Committee and responsible for running the CRB ball:

"At the ball Louis Loder came into the bar; he was a strict teetotaller. He came to me and said: 'Well done, Ted, it is going well.' I said: 'Thanks. Have a drink.' 'Yes. I will have a lemonade.' I replied: 'Come on, Louis, have a beer, be a man.' With that, people disappeared everywhere, leaving me with the Great Man. He was thought to be almost God; the Board was next to God. Next thing he said: 'King. See me in my office in the morning.' This was Friday night; we worked on Saturday mornings. I wasn't too well but I got into work. On arrival I had to present myself to the Accountant, Mr. E.J.Hicks. He wanted a balance sheet of the ball right away. On returning to my office I had to go and see Mr. Loder. He said: 'Mr. King, under no circumstances, now or in the future, will you ever call me Louis.' So I went out, tail between the legs, and produced the balance sheet, took it around to Mr. Hicks, which he certified. Then I found that the Storeyard had ordered 5 pounds worth of tickets which they had not taken. Now I had to find 5 pounds, more than a fortnight's wages. I borrowed it from Mum."

F.M.Corrigan was the only 'outsider' to join the Board before the 1980's. Prior to his appointment in 1940, he held the position of Shire Engineer, Alberton. Corrigan was a Board Member until 1955 but was never accepted by old timers such as Nelson Foster:

"Nelson Foster was in charge of the Trade Claims Section. He used to pay all the telephone bills like they do now and he would ask for everyone to put in their 'conscience money' for private calls.

Nelson asked the Member, Frank Corrigan, and he kept saying: 'Yes, I will do that. I will get around to you.' The final bill came in: 'Unless paid by ……' so old Nelson didn't pay and the next thing we know about it was Mrs. Corrigan ringing up from a public phone to her husband saying: 'The phone has been cut off.' Francis stormed around to see Nelson and asked: 'What's going on? The phone has been cut off.' Nelson said: 'You didn't put in the money for your private calls so I told them to cut it off.' " (Des Chapple.)

Caleb Roberts (at left) was the only child of the famous artist, Tom Roberts, and, although born in Australia, he was educated at St. Paul's School in London and the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. He served with the Royal Engineers in World War One in Palestine, France, and then against the Bolsheviks in Northern Russia. For his contribution he was awarded the Military Cross.

In 1925, after working for the British Ministry of Transport, he returned to Australia and joined the CRB as Assistant Highways Engineer. By 1928 he was Highways Engineer and served in the CMF in Military Intelligence. During World War Two he was Director of Military Intelligence, Army Headquarters, before taking on the role of Controller of the Allied Intelligence Bureau under the command of General Douglas McArthur.

According to folk lore, Roberts appeared in his office on the Friday before the war officially started, dressed in the full uniform of a colonel, cleaned up his desk, and announced that it would be some time before he returned. That was the last anyone saw of him until one morning in 1945 when he reappeared at his desk.

Roberts became Chief Engineer in 1945, a Board Member 10 years later, and Chairman in 1962-63. "Roberts had a most logical mind. I think it was his military training which brought this to bear. He was a man who walked in a hurry. I remember him forgetting to turn and walking through a wall at the Exhibition Buildings." (Harry George.)

This story of him walking through a wall was recounted by Ted King although two other contemporaries (John Pittard and Stan Hodgson) told the story of him walking through a plate glass door. Perhaps he did both.

From the various accounts, Roberts was a particularly capable engineer who didn't tolerate fools gladly. "Roberts was a volatile character. In one issue of The Sun in the 1950's there appeared a column headed, I think, 'The Ballad of Caleb and John.' This referred to Caleb Roberts and John Mathieson. What had happened was that they were driving in the Chief Engineer's car to an Institution of Engineers meeting and had become involved in a minor accident with another vehicle. They got out of the vehicle and the fellow who was driving the other car was jumping up and down and throwing his arms around. He was very excited and Caleb thought that he was going to attack them, so he 'dropped him with one blow' according to The Sun. This thing wound up in court and the court reporter for The Sun turned it into a little joke and wrote 'The Ballad of Caleb and John.' Roberts

was Chief Engineer at the time. The cutting appeared on every noticeboard in the Exhibition. Roberts and Mathieson were not sighted in the corridors for a few weeks." (John Pittard.)

Harry George joined the CRB as a pupil engineer in 1923 and was Deputy Chief Engineer for some years prior to his retirement in 1970. As mentioned, I worked closely with him when selecting cadets and, as we both had a keen interest in cricket, we enjoyed one another's company. Harry was a great raconteur and, while some of his stories have already been included, here are a few more:

Surveying of the Acheron Way. "On arriving at Cement Creek on a miserably cold day with snow flurries, we pitched camp late in the afternoon. We had to make our bunks using four forked sticks driven into the ground. Two saplings were then selected, which were threaded through chaff bags to form a palliasse filled with straw and bracken ferns. The resulting bunks, when placed on the forked uprights, were not all that comfortable. Meals were rough and ready. As a pupil engineer I received 8 shillings a week to pay for food, and my salary in the first year was 15 shillings a week plus the camping allowance. A considerable amount was spent on suitable clothing, such as waterproof slickers, stout boots, leather leggings and riding breeches. We were required to work under all sorts of weather as we attempted to complete a mile of permanent survey a week. This was difficult to achieve in mountainous country with heavy undergrowth. On many occasions we had to have our food supplies brought in by pack horse and usually we had to 'bach.' "

Pay Day on the Great Ocean Road. "I had only been with the Board for a few months and Callaway, the Chief Engineer, said: 'Harry we have a construction gang down on the Great Ocean Road and I want you to take the pay down.' I was only a kid of 17 or 18. I set off. I didn't know what making a pay was. I remember going into the bank at Deans Marsh and picking up a bag of money. I was given a revolver and some bullets and went down in a road drag from Deans Marsh to Lorne along a muddy unmade road, and then walked several miles south from Lorne and made the pay. I then went out into the forest and had a few shots with the pistol. On going back to the office I was in trouble for using the gun."

Planning the Great Ocean Road along the existing bridle path.

Working on the Great Ocean Road

The Great Ocean Road. “I did quite a lot of survey work down there. Roly Selover was in charge and I was Survey Assistant at the time. I can remember being caught in a bushfire there and we raced for our lives down the gullies to get back to safety.”

Wesley Williams. “He was the Chief Draftsman and was somewhat of a mystic, a Theosophist, and skilled in the casting of horoscopes. I can well remember him sending me down to the bank one day to bank some money for his work in connection with that religious group and I was appalled when I heard the name called out - ‘Order of the Star of the East’ - and I had to go forward and collect the bank book.”

A Day with Archie. “Archibald was not always helpful. On one occasion I was sent to do a survey in almost the most remote part of Victoria one could find: near the headwaters of the Murray. We had to locate a road from Benambra up to a place called Mount Pilot. This was to provide an access to some gold-digging operations which were taking place in that area. Archibald knew the country but he didn’t give me any assistance at all. It took me about a week to find out where I had to go from and where I had to go to. I do remember a journey in that region, with Harold Wood in the car and myself; we were driving up a steeply inclined muddy track with Archibald at the wheel. We got partly up to the crest of this road and Archibald found the going was hard and he opened the driver’s door and leaned out truck driver fashion to reverse down the slope. He lost control, and jumped out! Here we were in this unpiloted car with Harold Wood in the front seat, who put his head between his knees. I was in the back seat and grabbed the wheel and frantically tried to get the car to veer at right angles to the slope of the road and down we went, through the fence and past the trees and then came to a halt. Nobody was killed and nobody was hurt, except the vehicle itself. And here was Archibald saying: ’That was nasty wasn’t it Harry?’ I had to walk about three miles to the nearest farmhouse to get some horses to haul us back onto the road. That was Archibald.”

Jack Ryan, who finished up as DE’s Clerk in Traralgon Division and then Dandenong Division, spent many of his early years in the field. This is a story from his earlier years: “When I was with Bridge people we had a job to do at Broadford – a big culvert – just outside the town where the overhead railway crossing is. Superintendent Costello was in charge of the roadworks there. One day Costello said: ‘I understand you have done a bit of shooting with gelignite,’ and I said: ‘Yes, I have done a bit. I have done the powder monkey course and shot a bit of stuff, but I don’t do it regularly as I don’t like it much.’ He said: ‘To save me having to get someone from Melbourne and so on, would you mind doing a bit of shooting, doing a few pops for us?’ So I agreed. He said: ‘I will get some gelignite sent down from the patrol depot up the line, and you can do it next week if you like.’

The patrol truck arrived in a few days with three or four cases of gelignite and a whole lot of fuse and a dozen or more tins of detonators; everything I needed. I thought: ‘I really don’t want anything to do with this stuff’ as I didn’t want to become involved in making a safe place to store it. There were all the regulations about the place: you had to dig a hole in the hill and put a door on it like the Bank of England to stop it from being stolen. So I took the easy way out and put it under the bed. A tent camp it was. I didn’t think any more of it – all this stuff stored under there – and I would go out and load up these shots twice a day and fire off 50 or 60 shots. Everything went well, breaking up the rock for them.

Harry White was the Cost Clerk for the road people. I had known Harry for many years, but I didn't say anything about this stuff; where it was stored or anything. Harry would come into my tent and talk every now and again. One day he said: 'That stuff is very dangerous, that gelignite.' Harry had a very inflated idea of the danger of gelignite, more so than anyone who used it regularly. He said: 'I suppose it's all safely put away. It's all in the book where you have it?' I said: 'Oh, no, Harry, you're sitting on it.' Harry took one look under the bed and I didn't see him for two days. He bolted up the other end of the camp. He tried to get them to shift it out of my tent, but no one was interested in it. No one else wanted it. I had been using it for a couple of weeks by this time and the job was nearly finished. Harry told everyone he ever met how mad I was and how I used to sleep on several cases of gelignite, enough to blow up all of Broadford and surrounding districts. Harry didn't know whether it would or not, but he certainly didn't aim to find out."

Freddy Fisher occupied a middle management position in the Chief Accountants Branch and was one of the slightly more eccentric members of staff at Denmark Street in the 1960's and 1970's. Freddy had been a medical student in Germany or Austria prior to World War ll but left when Hitler came to power. He was unable to continue his medical studies in Australia but always retained his interest by reading medical journals. Russ Cooper recalled how on one occasion Freddy came across this article showing a strong correlation between beet growing areas in Europe and a low incidence of cancer; thereafter Freddy regularly enquired of the Chief Accountant as to whether he was eating his beetroot. It may also have been his medical reading which convinced Freddy that smoking was hazardous to the health and he attempted to dissuade smokers from the habit – long before it was fashionable to do so.

Siesta Time: Another of Freddy's slightly unusual habits was that of lying on the floor of his office at lunchtime to have a siesta in true Latin style; this, too, may have been considered by Freddy to be a medically sound practice. There are no actual recordings of anyone having stood on the prostrate Freddy but some near misses did occur; had anyone stepped on him this practice no doubt would have been given up as medically unsound. On several occasions new starters in the Chief Accountant's Branch were heard to gasp when they first noticed Freddy stretched out on the floor, assuming quite naturally that they were witnessing a public servant in his death throes. New members of staff were also confused when walking past Freddy's office at other times to hear animal-like noises coming from the vicinity – cat and dog noises were, I think, the extent of Freddy's repertoire. This was Freddy's attempt at levity and there does not appear to be any medical basis for the practice.

Hang On! : Apart from this slightly eccentric behaviour, there are two habits for which Freddy will be long remembered. The first is his driving skills – or lack thereof! One of the staff members of the Sixth Floor at Denmark Street told how Freddy, hastening back to Kew in a Board car late one afternoon, grew impatient with a tram in Glenferrie Road and swept past it on the wrong side. It was part of the folk lore that the finger prints of the junior officer who was travelling with Freddy on that occasion remained embedded in the vinyl covering of the dashboard for months afterwards.

On Your Marks: The second habit of Freddy's, and the one for which he is undoubtedly best remembered, is the speed with which he departed the building at knock-off time. Freddy was always first to sign the sheets (in the old signing off days) and woe betide anyone coming up the stairs at 4.51 p.m. You were likely to be bowled over by Freddy, sweeping down at high speed. During those hot summer days it was a frequent practice on the Sixth Floor for the lights to be left off; this was done to

keep the area 'cooler', but was more likely to be psychological than real in effect. On one occasion Freddy came out of his office about 4.40 p.m. and switched on the lights in the corridor. This prompted the Chief Accountant to look up and say to Freddy: 'Leave the lights off, Freddy. It's too hot to have them on.' A stunned Freddy pointed at the clock in the passageway outside the Chief Accountant's office and said: 'But I can't see the clock if the lights are off.' True? I don't know but that was the story that filtered down from the Sixth Floor at the time.

Ball Up!: This fetish of Freddy's for a rapid departure caused him to be the target of a practical joke on one occasion. As well as his anxiety to be first out of the office, Freddy was just as anxious to be first out of the car park. To achieve this end he always went down at lunchtime (before siesta time) and moved his car up to any vacant spot in the south car park or, if no such spot was available, further up 'the cutting.' Moreover, in winter time he would quietly slip down to his car around 4.40 p.m. and warm up the engine. On this particular occasion Freddy was just leaving his car at the top end of 'the cutting', having warmed the engine, when a football came down from the Xavier oval and landed at his feet. Freddy looked around; no one was in sight so he quickly threw the football into the car, locked the door, and walked briskly back to the building. Watching all this from a window on the south side of the main building was a little cockney named Vic Williamson who at the time worked in the Correspondence Section. Vic took it upon himself to teach Freddy a lesson for this little indiscretion so next morning about 10.00 a.m. he rang Freddy. 'Mr. Fisher?' 'Yes, my friend.' (Freddy was inclined to address perfect strangers as 'my friend') 'This is Father Stephenson from Xavier College,' said Vic, 'I understand you are looking after one of our footballs.' 'Yes, my friend,' but the words had a different tone to when he uttered them seconds before – slightly confused, very puzzled. 'Well,' said Vic 'would you mind returning it?' 'Now?' said Freddy. 'Yes, now,' said Vic. There were many faces at the windows on the south side as they watched Freddy scurry to his car and proceed out of the carpark, around into Barkers Road, and up the long Xavier driveway where he presented a football to the undoubtedly puzzled Father Stephenson.

Norm Stevens was one of the real characters in the latter years of the Exhibition and during the first 20 years at Denmark Street. In his younger days Norm was something of an athlete: he ran with Coburg Harriers, was a bike rider of reasonable ability, and was a slow-moving ruckman with Coburg 2nd XVIII. It was in this latter role that Norm achieved some notoriety for, in the heat of the moment one day, Norm struck the umpire. A lengthy sentence was handed down: some versions said 10 years, some said 'life.' Striking an umpire was not bright, but then Norm was not noted for his intellectual capacity. This shortcoming, however, was made up for by a great deal of native cunning. While ruing his impetuosity, Norm read somewhere that the young Queen Elizabeth, about to embark on her first tour of Australia in 1954, was expected to grant pardons to some prisoners and remissions to others. Norm wasted no time. When the Queen stepped onto Australian soil, amongst the correspondence awaiting her attention was a letter from Norm, confessing his 'crime' and requesting a pardon. To the horror of the VFA Commissioners this request was taken seriously and the end result was that Norm was able to resume his otherwise undistinguished football career.

Apart from his sporting achievements, Norm had another reputation which was hard to match: "On one occasion we were discussing how much beer you could drink and Norm came up with the statement 'I could drink 36 beers in 3 hours.' I had five pounds on that and in the end he was up for about 12 pounds with all the small bets. Norm went across to the Bowling Green pub but after 29 beers he slowly collapsed to the floor." (Mac Wilkinson.)

In this regard Norm, usually a fair-minded chap, could be an opportunist. Apparently, as told by Des Chapple, it had been a long-standing tradition that each year at Christmas the TRB, with whom the Board shared accommodation at the Exhibition, would receive a Christmas gift from CUB in the form of a barrel of beer. On one particular Christmas eve the CUB driver stopped to ask directions and Norm, who happened to be in the right spot at the right time, directed the driver to deliver it to the area where the CRB Christmas party was about to commence. And so started a tradition which lasted for the remainder of the Exhibition years: the CRB received a barrel of beer from CUB for no apparent reason.

Later, at Denmark Street, hard living caught up with Norm and he was advised to lose weight. Norm invested in an exercise bike which he used to pedal furiously in the lounge room, a large plastic sheet collecting the drops of perspiration. Many of his colleagues felt, however, that it was hardly worth the effort for Norm, harking back to his old bike riding days, had strapped two drink containers to the handles of the exercise bike. Each container neatly held a can of Fosters which Norm contentedly disposed of while pedalling.

The hard life also tended to make Norm drowsy, especially on hot summer afternoons. Accordingly, Norm would doze off, pen in hand, while reading a deviation file (Norm had found his way to the Estates Section). Norm, however, claimed that he was endowed with a sort of radar (and some of his colleagues have witnessed this special sense) which enabled him to detect when a senior officer was approaching. Consequently, he would resume writing the sentence that he had commenced some minutes before fatigue overtook him.

After some years in the Accounts Branch (as it was then known) as an Admin. Officer Class 2, Norm felt that promotion to Class 3 was warranted. Like an inexperienced duck shooter who fires off dozens of cartridges to keep the birds circling in the hope that one will eventually fall, exhausted, nearby, so Norm fired off dozens of applications. Each unsuccessful application was followed by an appeal direct to the Chairman; this was in the days before the organization boasted a proper Appeals Committee. Eventually, to the surprise of all except Norm, an exhausted duck fell within his grasp in the form of an Admin Class 3 position in the Estates Section. Norm attributed his earlier lack of success to the fact that he had got offside with the hierarchy in the Admin areas when, at the time of the move to Denmark Street, he had made a unilateral decision that all letterbook copies of correspondence should be destroyed. (The 'letterbook copy' was an additional copy of all letters sent from the Admin areas in Head Office in case a file was lost). Twenty years later, when the Archives became overcrowded and new technology made letterbook copies redundant, there were some who felt that Norm was a man who arrived before his time.

Before his 'ill health' retirement in the late 1970's Norm spent a decade or so in Estates in friendly rivalry with Assistant Estates Officer Merton Morgan (a retired Lt. Colonel imbued with old-fashioned virtues such as punctuality and diligence). Norm's position was that it was better not to exert yourself unless forced; Merton was of the view that hard work, although novel, would do Norm no harm. Norm seemed to have a friendly medico who supplied him with medical certificates which, on submission, would cause Merton to move to a state of apoplexy: 'Norman has been sea-sick,' said one, while another said 'Norman has eaten a very bad cray.' Merton saw them as self-inflicted injuries and not acceptable, and it was only Norm's strong links with the MOA which ensured their final acceptance.

Perhaps Norm's greatest achievement in those years was to test the Workers Compensation Act to its fullest extent. Norm submitted workers comp. claims with almost the same frequency as he submitted job applications a decade or so earlier. His most widely publicized success was when he fell off the bus one year on his way home from the Board's Christmas party. However his most unusual claim – one which caused Merton's apoplexy to reach new heights – arose one day when someone behind him sang out 'Hey, Norm.' Norm turned quickly and his ample corporation dragged across the front of his desk, collecting several large splinters. The success of this claim was seen by some as the death knell for the old Workers Compensation scheme.

Much of Norm's record was summed up in a little verse which was read out on the day of his official retirement. Although some of the references are 'in-house' in that they refer to cases which only Estates people would recognise, it may bring a wry smile to others who knew Norm.

ODE TO STORMIN' NORMAN.

Hark! The Estates angels sing
Norm's pedalo bike is just the thing
To reduce the distance round the middle
To get him fit as any fiddle.
But, alas, Norman really got no fitter
For strapped to the handles were cans of bitter.
And so the certificates kept rolling in
And Merton stopped to scratch his chin.
One said 'Seasick out in the bay.'
Another 'Norman has eaten a very bad cray.'
No matter how hard they checked and pried
No matter how hard they tried and tried
Norman always had the knack
Of turning up an unethical quack.

Then back to work to pursue a case
Such speed - Robbo couldn't maintain the pace
For the northern suburbs were Norm's delight
Serving notices, left and right.
Sleigh and the Commonwealth to name just two
Theodore and Chalmers - there were quite a few.
Notice served on Pentridge - a proposal which failed,
Michaelis Hallenstein where Merton was nailed.

Then Norm forwarded to a department a plan

Which proved unauthorized and lost him a fan.

But Norman, old chap, all of this must end

Your decisions in future will be which elbow to bend.

Or 'Will I barrack for the Essendon Bombers

If they're competing against Coburg for VFA honours?'

But pause for a moment for a favour we ask.

No! Perhaps not a favour but a very small task.

Before you depart for life's greener pastures

Write the name of your doctor and the amount that he charges.

<u>Des Chapple</u> (at left) was my travelling companion for many years and, on his retirement in 1986, I was the MC and main speaker. There was plenty of raw material with which I was able to entertain the audience. What follows are a few extracts from my remarks.

Bringing Le Mans to Kew: Des had cut his teeth at the old South Melbourne depot and then, on 16 May, 1952 he received a memo from the Secretary which said: 'With reference to your application for the position of Principal Assistant in the Earnings, Tax and Leave Records Section, I have to inform you that the Board proposes to approve of your appointment at your present salary. All other applicants have been advised of this proposal and appeals close on the 26th inst.' So, shortly afterwards, the Head Office era began with Des as Principal Assistant, first to Fred Williams who was acting in the position and then for a short time to Russ Cooper. In Des's eyes this switch was a case not of from the sublime to the ridiculous but from the ridiculous to the sublime.

Then one day the Accountant called Des in and told him that it was proposed to appoint Nelson Foster as Earnings, Tax and Records Officer; he apologised to Des and said they were appointing Nelson because Des, they thought, was the only person in the organization who could handle Nelson. Nelson Foster had become one of those legendary fellows and most people who knew him had a favourite story. My favourite, recounted previously, involved him instructing the PMG to disconnect the home telephone of a particular Board Member who, Nelson thought, was too slow in paying for his private phone calls. Des, I think, learnt a few tricks from Nelson, and perhaps even improved on Nelson's method of knee-capping the tall poppies.

Nine years after his move to Head Office, Des was appointed Senior Trade Claims Officer on 10 July, 1961. He was in that position for nine years also; Des's life seemed to move in nine-year cycles. Late in 1966 the Chapple family moved to Mt. Eliza and I became Des's travelling companion. What an experience that was; every trip was an adventure in itself. Maureen had provided Des with this ancient green Volkswagen for commuting purposes. I was never sure whether or not it was the one you see in that photograph taken at Wolfsburg in 1935 with Hitler in the back seat – but if it wasn't the first Beetle to roll off the assembly line, it was one of the first.

In spite of its age, great things were expected of this Volkswagen. Any driver who tried to overtake was seen to be issuing a challenge – and challenges were never ignored. In those 'Give Way to the Right' days you tended to use private streets a lot more and when Des was driving we would enter Barkers Road via a side street; the one with the service station on the corner. Des would go sailing up and there would be about ten cars waiting for the opportunity to slip out onto Barkers Road. He would come up behind the last car at some speed, no doubt causing the occupants to brace for a collision, but then veer left through the service station, passing the pumps and the startled attendant who never got used to Des's manoeuvre. It was very hard on the poor old attendant who would pass comment on Des's ancestry as we swept past. Des would respond with advice as to where the attendant might proceed to next and then he would lean back inside the car and say 'What's wrong with him?' This manoeuvre was not performed every day; just infrequently enough to catch the attendant off guard. The odd thing was that Des seemed to able to accelerate across the service station and find a gap in the normally congested Barkers Road.

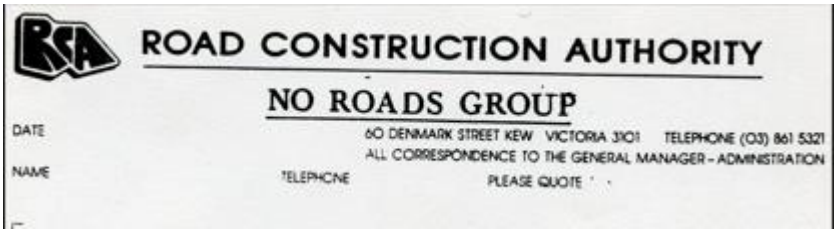
Des's piece de resistance, however, occurred one morning when we were taking the (supposed) short cut which went through the then farming area of Heatherton and along Old Dandenong Road, past the Oakleigh Drive-In. Then came the tricky bit: the T intersection with Warrigal Road where we turned right and headed roughly in the direction of Kew. Warrigal Road carried quite a bit of traffic and some care was required. When we pulled up at the intersection this morning only one vehicle was waiting to venture out; it was being driven by a very cautious gentleman of some vintage. To be fair to Des, this driver had missed several chances to make his move out into Warrigal Road. Des grew increasingly impatient. Then, when he saw what he perceived to be an opportunity, he stuck his head out the window of the little Volksie and shouted loudly: 'Go now, mate.' Acting on Des's instruction, the nervous driver shot out into Warrigal Road, only to be cleaned up by a tradie coming with some

speed from his right. The impact, which took place near his rear wheel, spun the vehicle around 180 degrees. Very quickly, Des negotiated his way through the debris – bumper bar, glass etc. – and turned right into Warrigal Road. This was not difficult as all other traffic had stopped. As he skirted around the damaged vehicle I glanced across at the nervous driver who was in shock: his eyes were glazed, staring straight ahead, and his extended arms had a vice-like grip on the steering wheel. Des, having sent this gentleman to his doom, couldn't resist the temptation to offer a comment: 'You stupid bugger. You shouldn't have gone.' He then accelerated quickly along Warrigal Road leaving behind the shocked driver and other motorists who were asking awkward questions like: 'How did it happen?' Besides, the event had set back Des's schedule and time had to be made up.

Kneecapping the Tall Poppy: You sometimes hear cricket commentators use the cliché: 'Cricket is a great leveller.' You might get a couple of 100's and then a duck next time, or a bag of wickets and then you get carted all over the ground. Those commentators would never have come in contact with Des Chapple. Occasionally, people are described as having a rapier-like wit but Des's brand of humour has been more the broad sword or the club. No one has been spared his sense of humour from the newest arrival to the Chairman; all have been considered fair game. Des's most virulent attacks have been aimed at those three groups that he has always considered to be occupants of the lowest rungs of the animal kingdom: child molesters, Labour politicians and Personnel Managers – in that order. Personnel Managers were invariably seen by Des as being 'broken down': my predecessor was always described by Des as 'that broken down Burroughs salesman', I was always 'that broken down school teacher' and in more recent times I have often been able to assess the level of Des's blood pressure by the way he described the present incumbent, Ron. If Des was getting on very well and he wanted to be kind to Ron then he would describe him as 'that broken down Namatjira.' There was almost the hint of a compliment there, or about as close as Des would ever get to handing out a compliment. If things were a bit strained then Ron became 'that broken down Padre.' But, more commonly, things weren't going all that well and Des used language that mixed company and the libel laws prevent me from repeating, other than to say that it was always very descriptive and very colourful.

However, the advent of the Labour government a few years ago took some of the heat off Personnel Managers. In case you are not aware of it they are responsible for the bad weather, the Swans' move to Sydney, the chooks not laying, and Des being stung in the face by a killer bee. Perhaps a little more accurately he always blamed them for the demise of the CRB. Des has shown a dogged resistance in the last few years to accept the fact that the RCA now exists. It is only recently that he has stopped crossing out the letters 'RCA' on all incoming correspondence and substituting 'CRB.' In fact the wall map in his office still has CRB on it and if anyone from Survey came to change it over to 'RCA' Des sent them packing.

Des, feeling quite strongly that the Labour government was more interested in self-promotion than building roads, even arranged for a special stationery letterhead to be printed:


ROAD CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY

NO ROADS GROUP

DATE

NAME

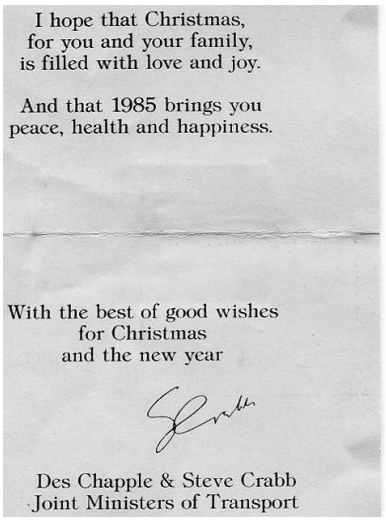
TELEPHONE

60 DENMARK STREET KEW VICTORIA 3101 TELEPHONE (03) 861 5321

ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO THE GENERAL MANAGER - ADMINISTRATION

PLEASE QUOTE

The contempt Des held for the government was widely known and for the Christmas prior to his retirement a specially doctored Christmas card found its way to all corners of the organization:


I hope that Christmas,
for you and your family,
is filled with love and joy.

And that 1985 brings you
peace, health and happiness.

With the best of good wishes
for Christmas
and the new year

Des Chapple & Steve Crabb
Joint Ministers of Transport

At one point it was thought that the organization should attempt to develop a corporate image and as a first step we should have an RCA tie. As ties go the result was not unattractive and every male officer who had been with the organization for five years or more was provided with a tie. A few weeks later the Chairman said to me: 'I have never seen Des wearing his RCA tie.' I hedged a bit and finally replied: 'He has passed it on to someone who he thought could put it to better use.' 'Oh', said the Chairman, thinking perhaps that Des had given it to some young fellow who didn't have a tie, or perhaps a former colleague. Then he looked up and asked: 'Who did he give it to?' This put me on the spot: 'Well, actually, he gave it to the Brotherhood of St Lawrence,' I replied. Those attending Des's farewell were assured that if they were wandering through the gardens and happened to see an old derelict whose trousers were being held up by an RCA tie, they shouldn't worry too much. It wouldn't be an old Accounting type down on his luck, or even an engineer who left before the restructuring reached his level; it would be Des's tie with its new owner.

Des, with some of his colleagues, at an informal presentation in the Correspondence Registry.

Des's coup de grace really occurred a short time after the Labour party came to power and we were 'honoured' to receive a visit from the new Minister of Transport, Steve Crabb. He was being taken on a walking tour of the main building by the Chairman and they were on the Ground Floor, just near the north stairs. Suddenly, Des appeared from the Mail Room at the other end of the passage. It was too good an opportunity for Des to pass up; he sang out: 'G'day, Tom. Who's your little mate?' The Chairman, sensing trouble, immediately ushered Steve Crabb into the stairwell, hopefully out of earshot. Des entered the south stairwell, whistling loudly, very satisfied with his score of the double: the Minister and the Chairman hit with the one arrow!

ONE LAST SMILE

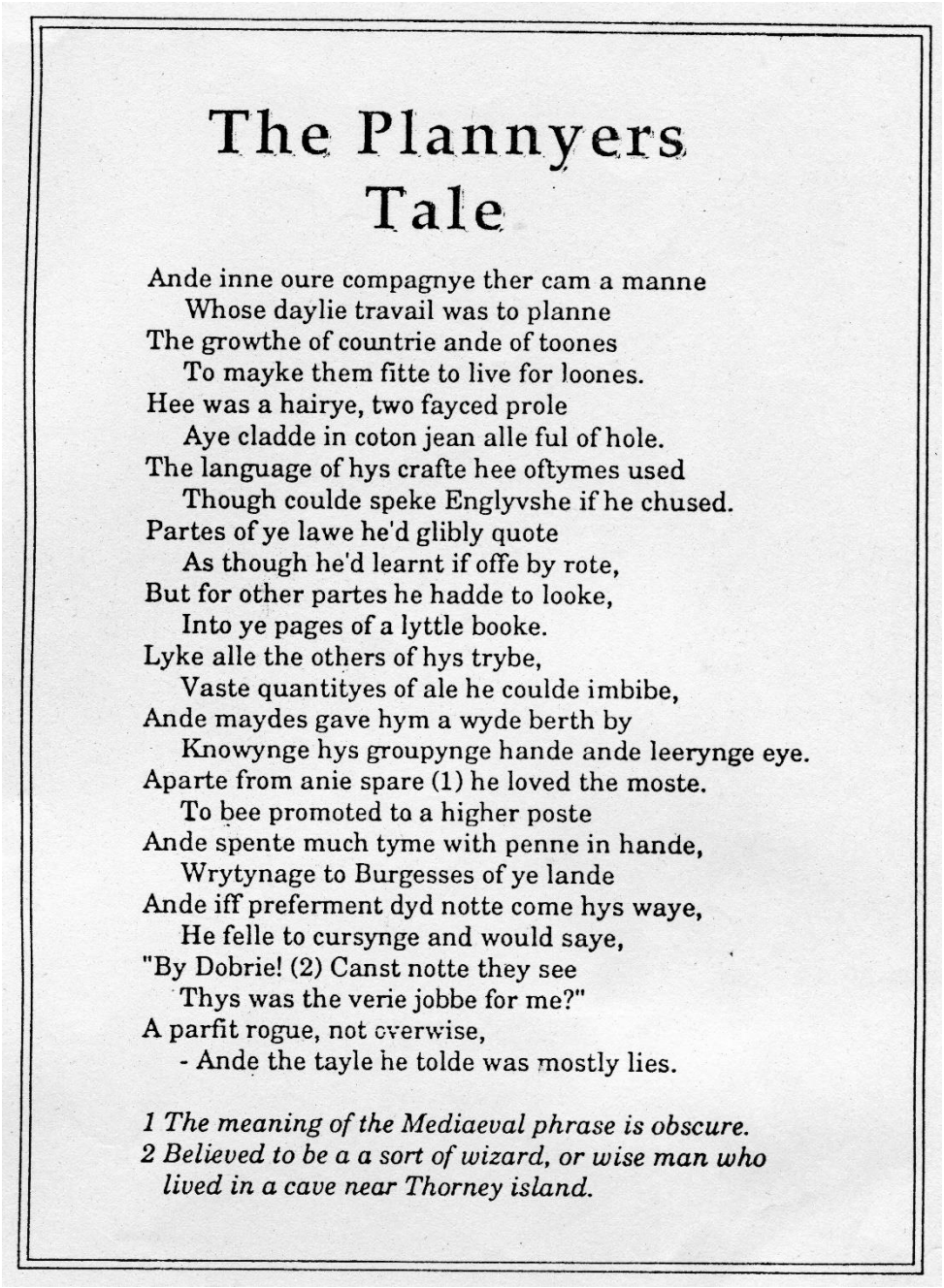
Occasionally an incident would occur which involved comparatively senior officers and details would be recounted to the amusement of staff throughout the organization. Towards the end of my time with CRB/RCA work had started on the Albury – Wodonga Bypass; in charge were two capable and likeable engineers. They were the two Bruces: Cochrane and Phillips. Because of the project's border location extra care had to be taken to ensure that the two road organizations involved were on the same page. At one point a matter required urgent resolution and the Board contacted the Project Engineer and his Assistant, requesting them both to attend a conference at Head Office at 11 a.m. on the following morning.

It was very short notice and a number of matters had to be attended to before either man departed. They travelled down separately as both had other things to attend to while they were in Melbourne. Bruce Phillips was first to hit the road and, running late, he was exceeding the speed limit. Half way down the Hume Freeway he was pulled over by the highway patrol. Bruce explained his predicament, adding that his boss would be along shortly and would verify the information provided. "What is his name?" enquired the officer. Bruce replied but was admonished, given his ticket, and sent on his way.

Ten minutes later another vehicle came speeding down the Hume; it was also pulled over by the highway patrol. The officer walked back to the by-now stationary vehicle, leant on the roof and enquired of the driver: "Mr. Cochrane?" "Yes", said Bruce hesitatingly. "I've been expecting you," said the officer as he wrote out another ticket.

AND A NOD TO CHAUCER.

I feel compelled to conclude this collection with a literary masterpiece. The author is unknown, but he (or she) must have laboured over 'The Canterbury Tales' in the classroom.



The Plannyers Tale

Ande inne oure compagnye ther cam a manne
Whose daylie travail was to planne
The growthe of countrie ande of toones
To mayke them fitte to live for loones.
Hee was a hairye, two fayced prole
Aye cladde in coton jean alle ful of hole.
The language of hys crafte hee oftymes used
Though coulde speke Englyvshe if he chused.
Partes of ye lawe he'd glibly quote
As though he'd learnt if offe by rote,
But for other partes he hadde to looke,
Into ye pages of a lyttle booke.
Lyke alle the others of hys trybe,
Vaste quantityes of ale he coulde imbibe,
Ande maydes gave hym a wyde berth by
Knowynge hys groupynge hande ande leerynge eye.
Aparte from anie spare (1) he loved the moste.
To bee promoted to a higher poste
Ande spente much tyme with penne in hande,
Wrytynage to Burgesses of ye lande
Ande iff preferment dyd notte come hys waye,
He felle to cursynge and would saye,
"By Dobrie! (2) Canst notte they see
Thys was the verie jobbe for me?"
A parfit rogue, not overwise,
- Ande the tayle he tolde was mostly lies.

1 The meaning of the Mediaeval phrase is obscure.
2 Believed to be a a sort of wizard, or wise man who lived in a cave near Thorney island.

GALLERY 1: CRB CLASSIC PHOTOGRAPHS circa 1913

The Board, bogged between Hospital Creek and Orbost, October 1913

Schoolchildren admire their first car, Bullumwaal, 1913

Consulting plans at East Tarwin bridge, Mirboo South 1913

Board on horseback, Grand Ridge Road, 1913

Lending a hand at Cape Schanck, 1913

Getting a tow, Sea Lake to Ouyen Road, 1914

Passing wagon on sharp bend, Yackandandah to Bright Road, 1913

Inspecting bridge over narrow gauge railway, Belgrave, 1914

Austral Hotel, Korumburra, 1914

Inverloch-Wonthaggi Road, 1913

Hurstbridge-Kinglake Road, 1913

Bass River, South Gippsland, 1913

Bridge over Bemm River, Gippsland, 1913

Hume Highway - a rare passable stretch, Benalla, 1914

Hume Highway - heavy going, 1913

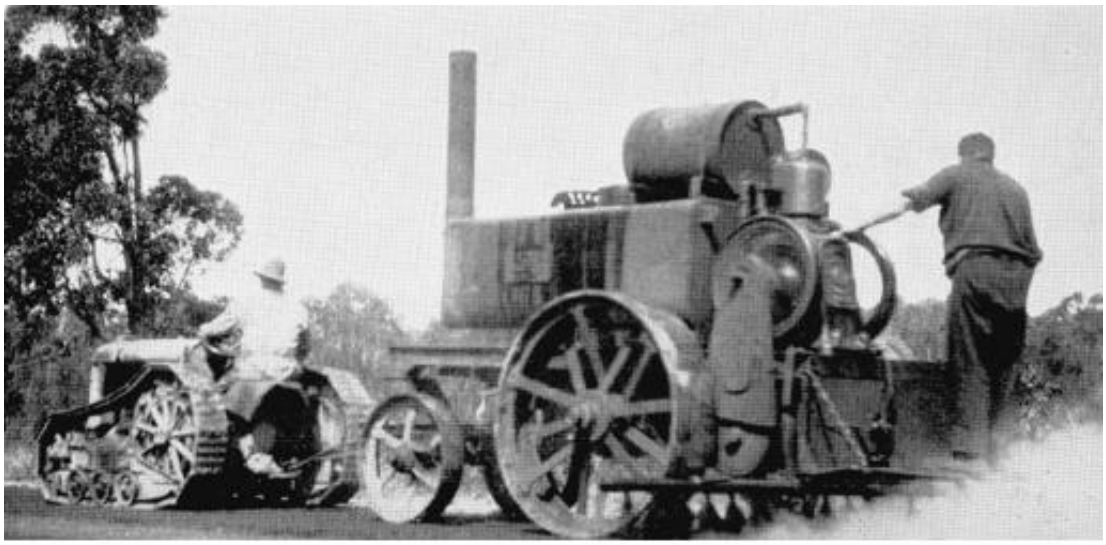
Old Sydney Road, near Avenel 1914

Travel in Gippsland c1913

Vickers Road, Nagambie, 1914

Main Street, Kyneton, c1913

Early horse drawn sprayer

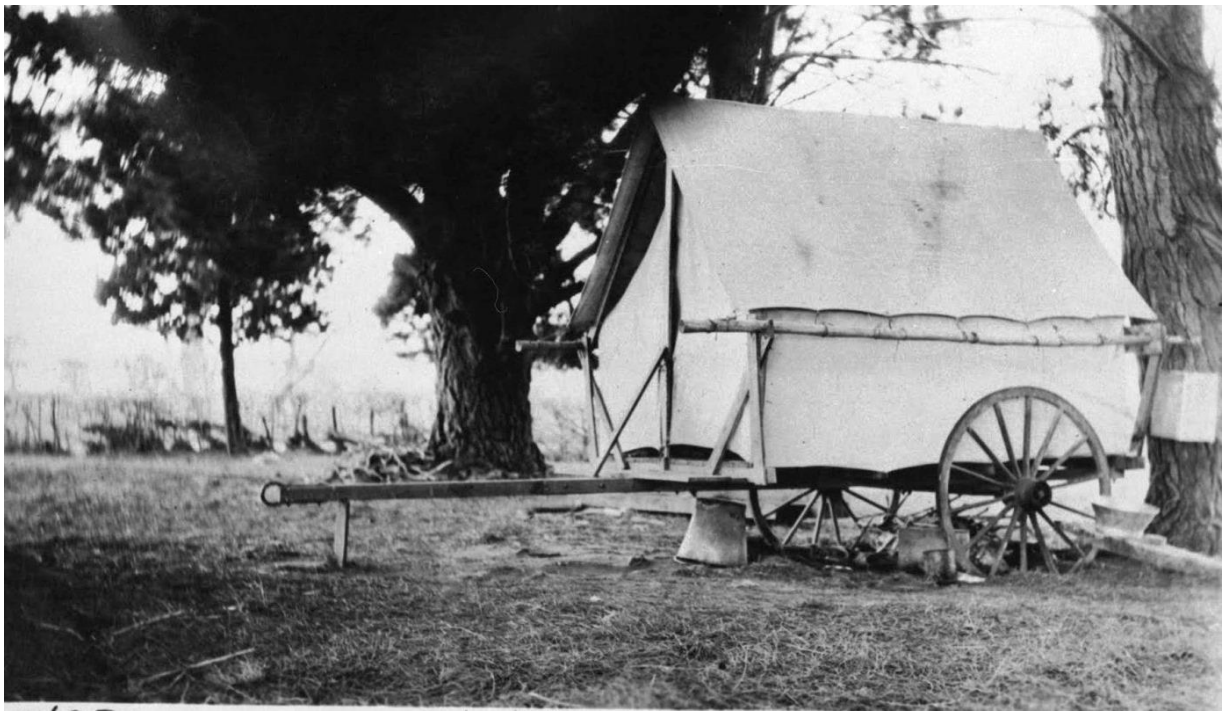


Testing new tar sprayer, Main Healesville Road, 1914

Unloading toppings for tar spraying, Fairfield 1914

Market Day, Dandenong, 1913

Cart being loaded with binding material, Dandenong Road, 1913



Maintenance tent, Cranbourne-Dandenong Road (S Gippsland Highway) 1914

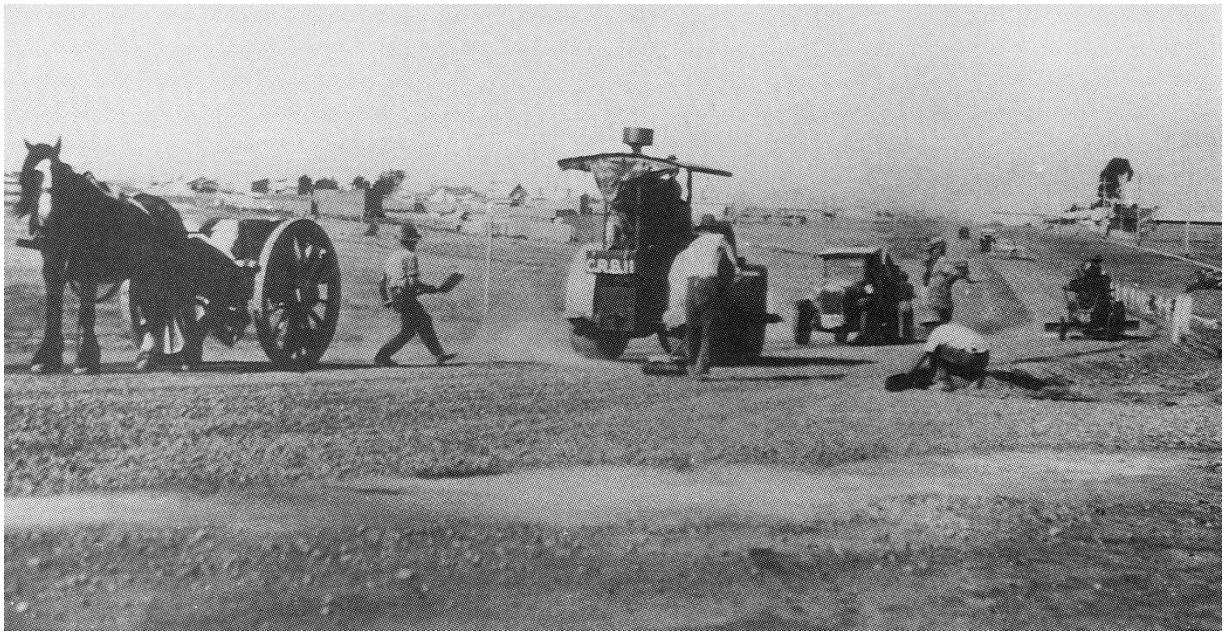
Construction works between Melbourne and Geelong, 1913

Surface painting with asphalt, Ararat, 1915

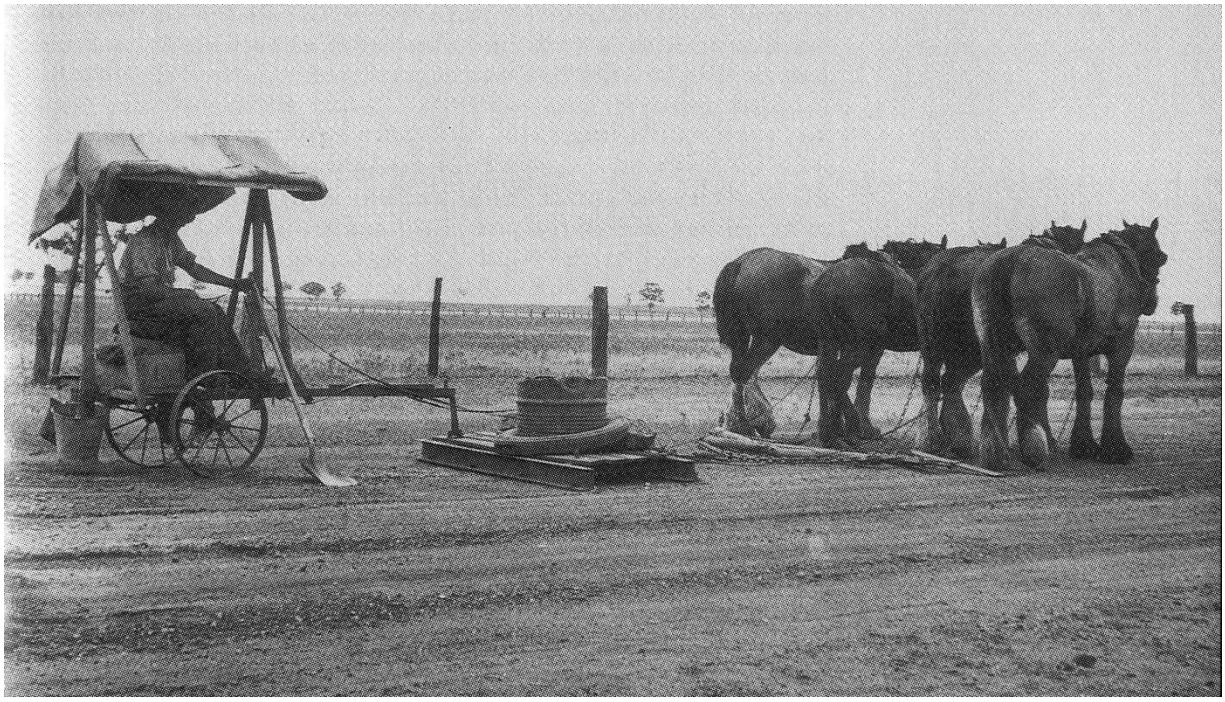
GALLERY 2: CRB CLASSIC PHOTOGRAPHS FROM LATER YEARS

Bengworden Road at Tom's Creek, 1930

Western Highway, spreading base course at Burrumbeet, 1930



Princes Highway, surfacing with heavy seal, 1931

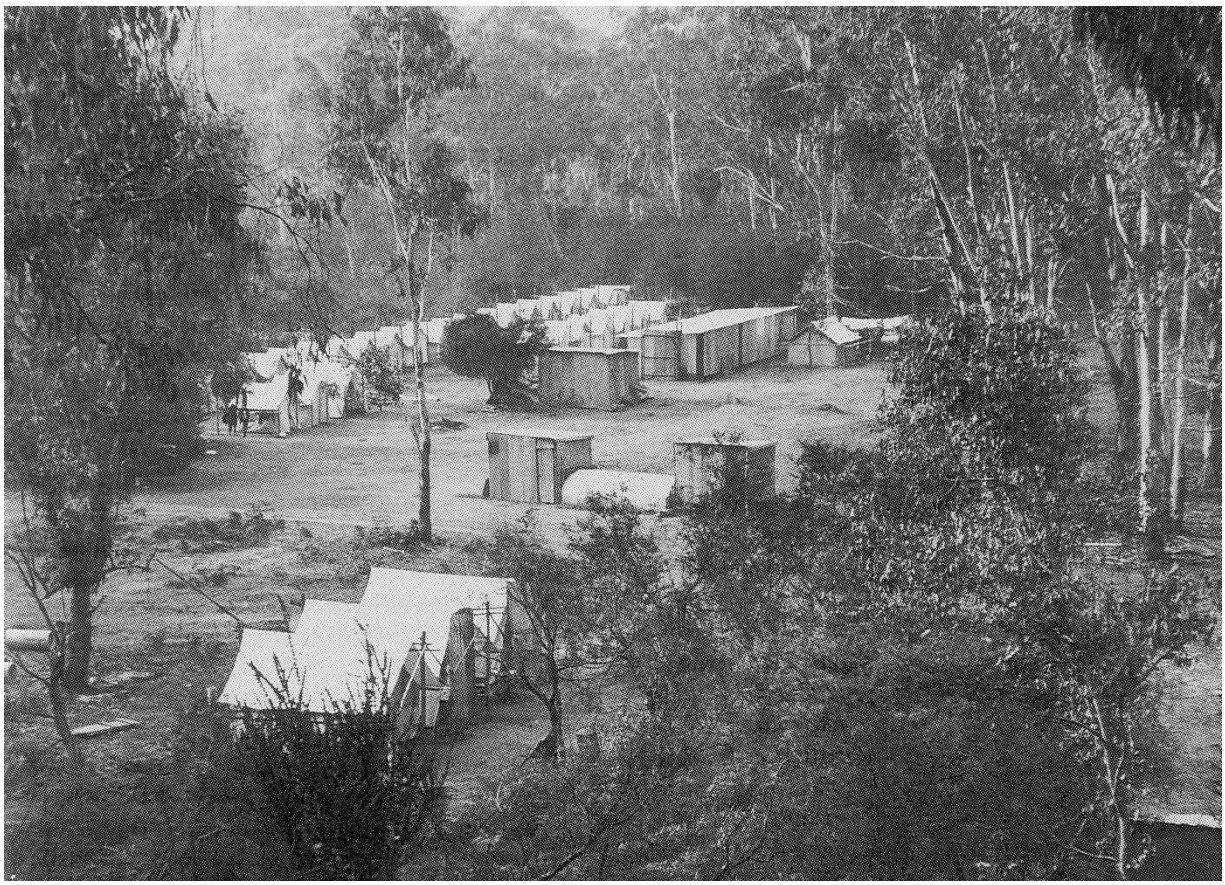


Patrolman dragging on Serpentine Road, 1936

Bullock team at work, Grampians, 1936

Bullock team in Wilson's Promontory prior to construction of the road, 1936

“Pony Patrol”, 1938



Typical road camp, Upper Kiewa Road, 1938

W Calder, posthumous oil portrait painted c1928 by Tom Roberts, hung in the boardroom at 60 Denmark Street, Kew.