

Robert “Bob” Meggs Story

“This summary of Bob’s career was written by David Jellie and published in the June 2017 Newsletter”.

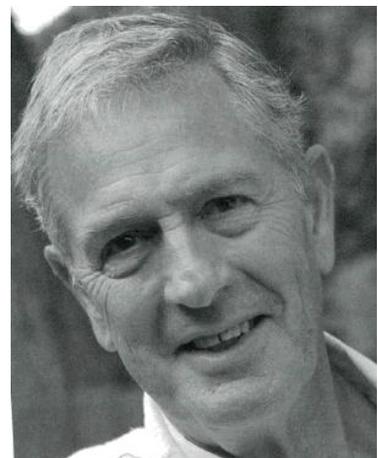
Robert was always known in the organization as Bob. He died suddenly of a heart attack, in April, at the age of 77. He was still working as a structural design engineer for the engineering firm of AECOM.

Bob was born in Ararat but when he was an infant his family moved first to South Melbourne, then Malvern and then later to Doncaster – which he always referred to as home. He spent his childhood there when much of the area was orchards and farms. He went to Swinburne Technical College and the University of Melbourne. I first met Bob on the football field at Glenferrie Oval when the Gordon Institute of Technology played Swinburne. Little did we know then that we were destined to become close colleagues and good friends. We both started work at the CRB at around the same time – as design engineers in Bridge Sub-branch.

Bob loved the science of structural design. He was to my mind a brilliant designer who understood the behaviour of structures and he was a leader at the time in the design of box girder bridges. If I recall correctly, Branco Tavcar designed the first post-tensioned, pre-stressed box girder bridge at the Lancefield Road Overpass on the Tullamarine Freeway but Bob further developed the design to produce what was then the longest spans on the Kilmore interchange on the Hume Freeway. These are my recollections and no doubt there may be someone who has a better memory than I.

To further develop his expertise, Bob undertook a Master’s Degree at the University of Melbourne investigating shear lag in box girders. Again, dredging through my memory of years ago, Professor Len Steven’s commented that Bob’s thesis was one of the best pieces of research work that he had assessed.

His other passion was sport – especially football and later tennis. He and I were both March champions training with the Hawks at Glenferrie Oval but he returned to Doncaster where he played for many years in the Eastern Suburbs League competition. In a way his football style was very similar to his engineering – precise and considered. This was also the way he played tennis and after we went our different ways for many years, we resumed our friendship on the tennis court both as partners and foes.



Bob was truly a gentleman. He was calm and considerate with everybody. He would listen carefully to what was being said and if he disagreed with a point, he would gently make his view known without raising his voice. This self-effacing approach was very powerful, and he commanded a deep respect with all those with whom he had dealings.

Although Bob's heart was in bridges (and especially in bridge design) he did serve in other areas of VicRoads. He was the Materials Engineer in which position he managed the engineering research projects within VicRoads. After retiring from VicRoads Bob at the age of 57, he joined Hardcastle and Richards and later the American firm of URS, working in their Melbourne office in Southbank. URS were consultants to VicRoads for the maintenance and strengthening of the West Gate Bridge. This was a job made in heaven for him and he supervised this work with distinction. URS was taken over later by AECOM who were only too pleased to have his expertise at their disposal – he worked there until his sudden death.

Many people have contacted me on learning of Bob's death. Peter McDonald said 'Very sad to hear of Bob's death. A true gentleman pretty much of the old school. Humble too but very smart.' Gary White said 'Thank you David for letting us know about our long-time friend Bob. I remember our first connection with Bob was when we played sport with the Gordon and Swinburne. What a great person, engineer and support he was to us all in the regions'. Ted Barton said 'Many of you will have known Bob and I'm sure, like me, are saddened by his passing. I remember him as a very nice person, an excellent engineer and a great contributor in discussions relating not only to bridges and structural work but also to traffic and road management matters generally in the CRB/RCA VicRoads that I was involved with at the time'.

Bob had to give up tennis because of his heart condition. But he still supported his beloved Hawks with a passion - what a great last decade he has had – and he loved gardening, art, wine and food. Bob was an excellent water colourist – a pursuit he took up about 40 years ago – and according to his family he became quite a coffee snob in his later years.

Bob's death has taken a little bit of me with him but I will always remember this calm, measured and gentle person as a giant in the bridge fraternity in Australia.