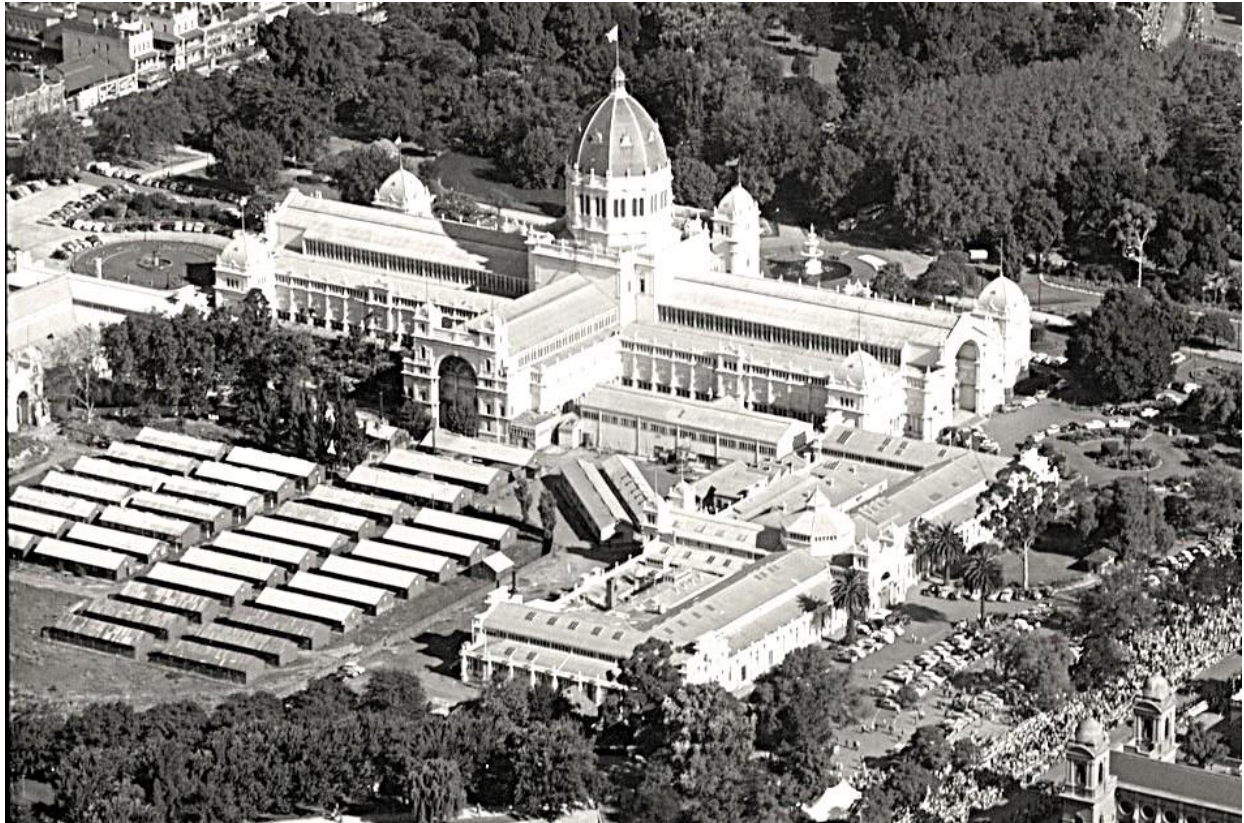


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*Membership of the Association is available to all who have been members of VicRoads or forerunner organisations or the spouse of deceased members and bestows on them all the rights of the Rules of Association. Cost of membership is a once only fee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



Dear Members

This picture of the Exhibition Building's<sup>1</sup> Western Annexe is part of a larger image on the Facebook site of *Victoria's History Australia* Group, which was posted by one of its members, Gary Joseph Oreo. It was taken in February 1954 when Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip were being driven along Rathdown Street towards Parliament House.

The Western Annexe, which once housed the CRB, the MRB and the TRB, was one of two major annexes constructed to provide supplementary spaces for major Exhibitions held in 1880 and 1888. It has an interesting history.

Most of us have seen Tom Robert's famous painting of the opening of the first session of the Australian Parliament at the Exhibition Building in 1901. Perhaps less widely known is that in its search for a suitable home, the newly created Federal Government decided that the Victorian Government's handsome establishment at the top of Bourke Street

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<sup>1</sup> It didn't become the *Royal* Exhibition Building until 1980, when Princess Alexandra gave it its current title.

would suit it just nicely - and possibly used its new powers to sequester it - pending the building of a new Federal Parliament House in a yet-to-be created national capital.

Whatever the arrangement was, the Victorian Government obligingly relocated itself to the then vacant Western Annexe of the Royal Exhibition Building, which was quickly converted into rooms and offices for them. They were to remain there for 26 years until the new Federal Parliament building was opened in Canberra.

Returning to its former Spring Street home in 1927, the State Government decided that the now empty Western Annexe would make a splendid new home for the Country Roads Board, which was then running out of space in the old Titles Office. Five years later, the Motor Registration Board, facing a similar accommodation crisis in its Lonsdale Street premises, was moved into the northern wing of the Western Annexe.

Incoming staff at the Western Annexe recalled that the previous tenant had done very little to maintain the building, which was in generally poor condition. Seaweed insulation was falling onto their desks from the ceiling, which had to be propped up in places to prevent it from collapsing. The skylights, covered by nearly 50 years' worth of dust, did nothing to illuminate the gloomy interiors.

During World War 2, four rows of timber huts were erected for military purposes on what had once been a football oval behind the main Exhibition Building. Immediately after the War these huts served as a demobilisation centre for Air Force members, and a CRB officer from that period also recalled a Navy canteen operating there.

In the 1950's most of the military huts were repurposed to function as a migrant receiving centre. I recall attending the CRB's 1958 Christmas Party in a building called the Immigration Hall. In this edition, Ray Brindle recounts living in one of these huts with his family after they had arrived as immigrants from the UK in 1955.

The two diagonally positioned sheds in the photo were also ex-military but were slightly roomier than the standard army huts on the adjoining oval and had larger windows, which made them suitable for use as design offices. Over the years, these 'tin sheds' housed staff in partitioned areas from Bridge Design, Plans and Surveys, Traffic and Location and other areas such as Printing. The 'tin sheds' were uninsulated and were not remembered kindly by those who worked in them because they were almost uninhabitable in summer and freezing cold in the winter.

Many of the CRB's luminaries worked in those sheds. Mac Wilkinson, Stan Hodgson, Gerry Masterson, Russ Sheldrick, Norm Haylock, John Glenn, Neil Guerin, Joe Delaney and John Loder - to name just a few.



The 33-year tenure of the CRB at the Western Annexe ended in December 1960 with the opening of its new Head Office in Denmark Street, Kew.

The staff of the Motor Registration Board and the Transport Regulation Board had to wait a further seven years until their new accommodation in Lygon Street, Carlton was completed. The Western Annexe was demolished in stages, with significant portions taken down between 1962 and 1967.

## WHATS COMING UP?

### Our 2026 event calendar

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Contact Person</b>
<b>Tuesday 31 March</b>	Sunshine Rail SuperHub presentation by VIDA followed by brunch/lunch nearby.	Iris Whittaker <a href="mailto:irisw25@bigpond.com">irisw25@bigpond.com</a>
<b>Monday 13 April</b>	12 noon for 12.30 pm Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
<b>Wednesday 27 May</b>	Tour of the Traffic Operations Centre, 110 Maroondah Highway, Ringwood followed by lunch at the Ringwood RSL	Allison Pinto <a href="mailto:Allison.pinto@hotmail.com">Allison.pinto@hotmail.com</a>
<b>Monday 1 June</b>	12 noon for 12.30 pm Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
<b>Monday 29 June</b>	12 noon for 12.30 pm Mid-year lunch at a new venue, to be advised. (The Glen Waverley RSL is no longer available due to a major fire).	Ken Vickery <a href="mailto:kenvickery@tpg.com.au">kenvickery@tpg.com.au</a>
<b>Wednesday 15 July</b>	Presentation and tour of the Alstom Dandenong site. Tour will be preceded by a lunch at the Dandenong Pavillion Hotel.	Jill Earnshaw <a href="mailto:jillmearnshaw@gmail.com">jillmearnshaw@gmail.com</a>
<b>Monday 4 August</b>	12 noon for 12.30 pm Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
<b>Mid-August</b>	Regional visit – Geelong including TAC presentation and potential visits to a local factory, Port of Geelong, etc.	Jill Earnshaw <a href="mailto:jillmearnshaw@gmail.com">jillmearnshaw@gmail.com</a>
<b>September</b> (a date in early September)	Visit to the Shepparton Art Museum to see the <i>Facing Modernity: Degas to Picasso</i> visiting exhibition and the Archibald Prize Exhibition.	Jim Webber <a href="mailto:jameswebber1717@gmail.com">jameswebber1717@gmail.com</a>
<b>Monday 5 October</b>	12 noon for 12.30 pm Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
<b>Friday 30 October</b>	Annual Golf Day at Green Acres Golf Club, Kew East	Jim Webber <a href="mailto:jameswebber1717@gmail.com">jameswebber1717@gmail.com</a>
<b>Monday 9 November</b>	12 noon for 12.30 pm Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
<b>Monday 8 December</b>	11.45 am for 12.30 pm Christmas lunch at a new venue, to be advised. (The Glen Waverley RSL is no longer available due to a major fire).	Ken Vickery <a href="mailto:kenvickery@tpg.com.au">kenvickery@tpg.com.au</a>

### Sunshine Rail SuperHub visit reminder

On March 31, instead of attending Young & Jacksons afterwards, we will now meet for lunch/brunch in Exhibition Lane, which is immediately behind the DTP building and has a variety of cafes and restaurants to choose from. We will provide additional details on the day.

I would also remind intending participants to firstly register with Iris Whittaker on [irisw25@bigpond.com](mailto:irisw25@bigpond.com).

## **WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?**

### **The 2026 Annual General Meeting**



The Association held its 47<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting at the Glen Waverly RSL on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March. Some twenty-two members and guests attended and thanks to the fifty proxy voting forms submitted by Members who were unable to attend, the meeting was able to meet the new quorum requirement of 10% of our Membership as required by our new Rules.

The President presented his Annual Report for the year ended 31 December 2025, and this can be found on the VRA Website at <https://vicroadsassociation.org/vra-agm/>

The Meeting passed Motions confirming the continuation of the current, one-off membership fee of \$50; the number of ordinary Members (12) holding office; the nominations for the Committee; and the appointment of Doug Thompson as Honorary Auditor for 2026.

The Committee for 2026 is:

President	John Wright
Vice President	David Jellie
Honorary Secretary	Jill Earnshaw
Honorary Treasurer	Ken Vickery
Membership Secretary	Iris Whittaker

General Committee members: Graham Gilpin PSM, Patsy Kennedy, Alan Mackinlay, Noel Osborne RFD, Allison Pinto, Nick Szwed and Jim Webber.

At the conclusion of the Meeting, Members gathered for lunch in the downstairs restaurant.

### **Breaking News – The Waverley RSL fire**

On the morning of Sunday 8th March, the Waverley RSL building was badly damaged by fire and will no longer be available for our functions.



The Association has been enjoying the use of the splendid Waverley RSL meeting room and restaurant since 2021 after the last Christmas Dinner was held in the Kew HQ building in December 2019<sup>2</sup>.

We were fortunate to have had the use of the Waverley RSL premises for our Annual General meeting only six days prior to the fire, which is now believed to have started through spontaneous combustion of items left in a drying cabinet.

We had been hoping to continue using the Waverley premises until early 2028, when it was due to be closed for demolition associated with the building of the Suburban Rail Loop station. Sadly, the fire, which has extensively damaged the building, has unfortunately brought this event forward. I understand that the Victorian Government had already purchased the property and that the RSL's plans to relocate to new premises are well advanced.

Nevertheless, at this stage, the Committee will be examining alternative venues for our mid-year and Christmas luncheons and will advise members appropriately.

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<sup>2</sup> Due to Covid, we did not have a mid-year or Christmas luncheon in 2020.

## Our very first AGM – from the President

At the opening of the 2026 Annual General Meeting I pondered as to whether the Association's first Annual Report might still be in existence – given that I was presenting the Association's 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Report.

Later, I was searching through our website's wonderful collection of photographs for an image of Ray Forde, whose story features in my continuing Work Odyssey. Lo and behold, there was this image of a celebration of the Association's first year in 1980. At that time, the Hon Secretary Eric Moncrieff delivered the Annual Report.

## CRB RETIRED PERSONS ASSOCIATION 1st Annual General Meeting

The anniversary of the formation of the CRB Retired Persons Association was celebrated on 11 March 1980 when sixty-eight members and their guests enjoyed a luncheon and chat in the Head Office Theatre.

The committee were re-elected to serve another term. They are:

<i>President</i>	Ted King
<i>Vice President</i>	Cliff Liddell
<i>Hon Secretary</i>	Eric Moncrieff
<i>Asst Hon Secretary</i>	Lois Lee
<i>Hon Treasurer</i>	Jim Farish
<i>Asst Hon Treasurer</i>	John Molnar

*Committee —*

Noreen Dunworth, Alf Lewis, Inez Lowry (elected for two years)

Bas Abery, Nancy Costelloe, Theo Lester (previously elected for two years)

Eric Moncrieff reported that reasonable progress had been made over the first year and that the objects of the Association had been achieved. The four luncheons and General Meetings had been well attended, and future activities and outings were being planned by the Committee for this year.

Association membership is currently 125, with eleven coming from distant country areas. A Geelong group has

just been formed; Geoff Zierk has details for any Geelongites wishing to join up.



*Pictured above are five RPA lady members: (from left to right) Irene Donnellon, Nancy Costelloe, Margaret Chomley, Marj Phillips and Doris Penrose.*

## MEMBER COMMENTS AND NEWS

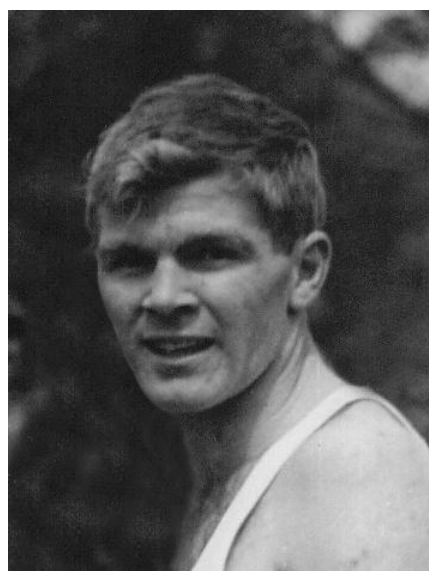
### 2026- The CRB and me – by Ray Brindle

My direct involvement with the CRB was in the 1960s, as a student cadet between 1962 and 1965 then in Traffic & Location between 1966 & 1969. But my close contact with the CRB/VicRoads and various morphs of the Traffic Authority continued to the end of my career, first as a consultant with Loder and Bayly in the 1970s, then with ARRB and its journal for the best part of three decades.

However, though I didn't know it at the time, I had a brush with the CRB long before that. I arrived [in Australia] with my parents at Port Melbourne in March 1955. Our luggage announced that we were heading for a place strangely named

Bonegilla, though we were thankfully diverted first to a “migrant reception centre” behind an ornate edifice we later learned was the Exhibition Building. Along with a few dozen others, we spent a week or so in former army huts, others of which were being used as interim offices by CRB staff, some of whom have recalled those days nostalgically in these pages. Did they know we were next door, I wonder?

I can't recall any interaction with these fellow-occupants; as a boy, I was too fascinated by the palm trees, the excessively vivid light, the heat and – marvels! – a newspaper that had coloured pictures (remember the Argus?). While I was off



Ray in 1960

exploring the wilds of Carlton, my father was sorting out our destination. Once it was realised that he already had a job to go to with Holeproof in Deepdene, we were assigned to the Nunawading migrant hostel, not Wodonga.

Six years later, I had finished high school and applied for several cadetships to help me get through university. One application was to the CRB, not that I was particularly interested in roads but it had a good cadetship scheme. The interview was a disaster; I was asked why I wanted to build roads (I didn't particularly), what did I know about road construction (zilch, but I had seen a big smelly machine spreading black stuff), what did I want to specialise in (um...) and so on.

So I missed out and started uni. on a Commonwealth Scholarship. I passed first year, unlike one or two of my classmates who had beaten me to a CRB cadetship. At the end of the year I applied again, The still-new smell of the Denmark Street building brought back memories of my embarrassing experience the previous year, but this man was built of stern stuff, and this time I was properly prepared.

In I went to the interview with all my answers, including a file on the Morshead overpass over Punt Road. I could tell them everything about the construction of the bridge and the pathetically short bit of “freeway” it was part of – but I needn't have bothered. There was just one question: “You passed first year, right? Good, we'll be in touch”.

The best thing about being a cadet, apart from the pocket money (I could run a car on my six pounds a week), was being rotated through various sections during vacations. Working with survey teams on the future Seymour bypass and the doomed Healesville freeway (a good way to learn how to play 500 and Canasta), being taught detailed design by Noel Anderson, and being “boy on the spot” for the work on Maroondah Highway past Ringwood Lake, where I learned from an old ganger that “if it looks wrong, it is wrong” and detailed plans can go out the window.

Paddy O'Donnell was The Boss through most of my time. Those were the days when anyone senior was called “mister”, you wore a tie (and a jacket when called upstairs), and the pseudo-military structure kept things ticking smoothly. One Christmas lunch, a bunch of us retreated out onto the volleyball deck by the canteen and had a singalong with a guitar. I have clear memories of young Tony

Fry and a short older chap, arms around each other's shoulders, swaying as they sang "Tit Willow". The older chap was Mr O'Donnell.

I was happy at the CRB, but became financially stressed when, with a child on the way, I was held back a year because I had taken time out to do town planning and a master's degree at Neil Guerin's encouragement. I hadn't even made it to Class 1-2, so I cheekily applied for a Class 3 job with the Bureau of Roads and miraculously got it. It helped that I now had a rare post-grad degree in transport engineering, and a planner to boot. Before I accepted, I told Robin Underwood and explained that I didn't want to leave but felt that I had been penalised by the Board for doing further study. He said he'd talk to Harry George and came back with the advice: "We can only move you to 1-2, but Mr George says take the Class 3 job". So I went off to work with Joe Delaney and economists for two years. My pay literally doubled overnight.



Ray in 2023

Looking back, there was very little specific technical knowledge that I brought to the CRB from my years as a student. Structural theory, the mainstay of civil engineering teaching back then, remained a mystery to me and I got through only on a faculty pass when I repeated second year structures. The Board was wise enough never to let me near Bridge Division.

The only real university "learning" I got was about how to analyse something, to know the "why's, how to get information, and how to work under pressure. Just about everything I came to know about how to do things was gained on the job, and the strength of the CRB/VicRoads was its technical hierarchy which had built-in mentors

and teachers. Young engineers were given responsibility so they learned under guidance.

I still have the route location report for the Bacchus Marsh bypass (the first, I believe, to use coloured land use maps, which I had prepared tediously by hand) that I prepared just two years out of university under Don Pritchard's oversight, which had gone up through the ranks to the Board for consideration. I know my experience was not unique.

This great asset of peer knowledge and training has all but gone, and evidence of the public's loss is there for all to see on the roads. Strangely, they still blame "VicRoads" for it all.

Ray Brindle [raybrindle@ozemail.com.au](mailto:raybrindle@ozemail.com.au)

## **Writing a Story with the Assistance of Artificial Intelligence – by Nick Szwed**

[Editor’s note. Nick is a regular contributor to the Newsletter and a Member of the VicRoads Association Committee. He also manages the VRA website.]



Writing your autobiography or someone else’s story can take a lot of time recording, writing and rewriting the material. Some people don’t enjoy writing or find it difficult.

Now with the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, AI Mode in Google Search and others, your autobiography (or someone else’s story) can be so much simpler to produce.

This is a set of instructions to help you get started.

Traditionally a story would be recorded by an interviewer who would write notes, then interpret the notes and type them up in a logical sequence or order. Then the draft would be shown to the

interviewee and adjustments made. The final stage would involve a focus on style and readability. This process may take many hours of writing and rewriting and editing.

Here is an alternative method using an electronic recorder and AI, which can be easier and quicker for some people.

### **1. Recording the story**

Acquire an electronic voice recorder (I have a National brand recorder) or use a “Recorder” app on your phone. The app I’ve used on my Android phone is called “Recorder” but there are several others. You can do a Google search for alternatives or to find a voice recorders for iPhone (I think it has a good built-in one).

Then this is the fun part. Sit down with your interviewee, turn on the recorder and start asking questions. If you are writing your own story then ask yourself the

questions. Start off with “where were you born” or “when did you start at VicRoads” and then just ask any questions that come to mind. You don’t have to ask the questions in chronological order but try to make clear the timing of the event you are asking about by asking what year it was or what other event it preceded or followed. Such clues will enable AI to pull all the information into a chronological sequence more quickly than you can say “when did that happen?”.

I recommend that you interview someone (or yourself) for 10 minutes the first time and process the recording to become familiar with the technique. Then download or save the recording (mp3 or mp4 file) to a suitable folder on your computer.

### **2. Transcribing**

Open a Blank Document in Word, click on Dictate and then on Transcribe. Then click on Upload Audio, find the file on computer and hit Open. Word will take a few minutes to transcribe the voice to text.

### 3. Working the text

The next step is to add the transcription to your document. You will have a few options, just try them all out until you know the best way to go. I think it's best to start with "speakers" if you are interviewing someone and only "text" if you are telling your own story solo.

Next click on Copilot. Then ask Copilot to "Make this document more concise". In a few seconds it will rewrite the transcription. Hey presto, you have made a start. You can then ask it to make it as a narrative story or anything you like. You can message Copilot and make your own request like:

"rewrite in narrative style in chronological order in decade sections". Try anything that comes to mind. Resist trying to modify the text yourself until you feel AI has done all it can. There is a lot of skill deciding the instructions to give AI. So keep experimenting and trying different options.

If you are writing someone else's story, give them your draft to review. Correcting details is easy for you to do. But if you are given lots more material, just ask AI to integrate or add it in. Once you feel you've mastered how to use this method, start recording longer sessions, as long or short as you like and put together a whole story.

### 4. Publishing your story

When you've written your story, send it to us and we'll publish it on our website: <https://vicroadsassociation.org/people/>

### Road Names – from Dr Max Lay via Nick Szwed



[Max is one of our most distinguished Members. He was Executive Director of the Australian Road Research Board before moving to VicRoads in 1989, where he was Director Quality and Technical.

He later became an independent Reviewer for the Melbourne City Link Project, Principal of Sinclair Knight Merz, Professorial Associate at the University of Melbourne and Chairman of the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria.

He recently sent this message to Nick Szwed.]

Hi Nick,

Following your kind words during my recent dog walk I thought that I would send you copies of some photos I was recently sent by a visitor to Modbury/Ti Tree in Adelaide.

50 years ago, the locals there had been grateful for some help I gave then in modernizing their subdivision design,

However, they thought that Lay Rd might be misinterpreted and asked if I would mind Maxlay Road. Of course, I agreed, as having a road and park named after you is a very nice thing even if it is an amalgamated name.

Best wishes

Max Lay



## John Wright's work odyssey - continued

### Business Administration Course

In 1978 I was looking at how I might improve my chances of obtaining a promotion. Head Office suggested that my chances might improve if I were to obtain a post-graduate qualification, such as a degree in business administration. Accordingly, I signed up for a Graduate Diploma in Business Administration at the Swinburne Institute at Hawthorn.

It was a real eye-opener, as most of the applicants I met at the course induction were older people like me (I was in my late 30's) looking for an edge over other applicants, or younger professionals like mining engineers whose chosen field had suddenly become bereft of jobs because of market changes - the bottom had fallen out of the mining industry at that time and two of these guys were driving taxis.

I was placed in a syndicate of five individuals to complete the various course tasks we were given. One was an English chap in his 50's who'd been a young scientist working in the desert on the Maralinga British atom bomb tests. Another was a bright lady in her 40's named Maruta, with a professional husband and a young family in Nunawading. The other two were the ex-mining engineers. We would occasionally meet at our homes or at the Nunawading Civic Centre out of work hours to progress our tasks.

One of the courses was entitled *Introduction to Market Management*, which I found fascinating because it illustrated how marketers in everyday retail situations played on hidden customer triggers to increase sales. One trick was to place untidy piles of slow-moving items in large, barrel-shaped containers at the ends of supermarket aisles, without changing the price. Customers, believing they were being discontinued, bought them in large numbers, thinking they were cheap.

We had a wonderful presentation by a man who's advertising agency, George Paterson, had devised a brilliant scheme to market flavoured milk, which had been languishing badly in sales volumes.



His Big M campaign encouraged males to drink flavoured milk via TV ads showing skimpily clad women with coloured, flavoured milk cascading over their breasts as they pranced to music (Must have been awfully sticky for them afterwards!).

Their very clever strategy was that every time men thought about bosoms, which the marketers knew happened frequently, they would also think about flavoured milk. Sales volumes rocketed, and the dairy industry had to scramble to keep up with demand. Come to think of it, I became rather partial to Big Ms myself.

The other course was *Administration of Organisational Systems*, which was equally interesting because it dealt with the fundamentals of labour and staff management and in particular examined classic management philosophies.

I managed to pass both of these subjects at the end of the year but decided not to continue with the course.

### **Newsagency goings on**

While I was working at Nunawading, the nearest newsagency to my home was taken over by a guy in his 30's and his young wife, who was a lovely lady and the financial power in the relationship. After their children arrived she left the business of running the shop entirely to her husband.

I got to know him to the extent that he felt compelled to confide to me that he had engaged a teenage high-school girl (of unspecified age but probably around 16) to assist him in the shop on Saturdays and during the late weekday afternoon peak period. He told me that she had become very friendly with him in the back of the shop after close of business, and he could scarcely believe his good fortune. I received several subsequent updates on his adventures when I called in after work to pick up the evening Herald newspaper.

However, as he was to discover, things that seem too good to be true, frequently are. Before long he found out that in addition to tickling his fancy, his young assistant had also been tickling the till and his takings had diminished considerably. When he told her she was going to be dismissed, she promptly threatened that unless he kept her on, she would tell her parents and the Police that he had molested her.

Realising that the only alternative was to allow the thefts to continue, he confronted the girl's parents and told them a slightly different story – one that included the thefts but denied their clandestine relationship – claiming instead that she was attempting blackmail to conceal her crime.

The girl's parents were apparently aware of their daughter's proclivities. She left, and nothing more was said. His adulterous activities continued, albeit with a somewhat more mature lady from the CRB who was then between husbands.

Eventually, the newsagent's deceived wife discovered (or more likely was secretly advised by the schoolgirl) of her husband's adulterous adventures and promptly divorced him. He disappeared from the newsagency and I met him several years later in Nunawading, where he was looking harassed and working as a salesman for a stationery company.

### **Preplanning for the Princes Freeway at Berwick & Beyond**

Between 1980 and mid-1983 I became heavily involved with the pre-planning for the Berwick Bypass and its continuation - the future Princess Freeway between Cardinia Creek at Beaconsfield and the Bunyip River at Garfield.

For my work on the Berwick Bypass, I was located in a tiny portable office on the rear lawn at Nunawading, which I shared with Paul Noisette and Ken Russell. Later, I was moved to the top floor at the front of the original 1927 building, where I would share a large room with Richard Murphy, Peter Ransom, John Nation, Garnet Gibbs, Bruce Gidley, Iva Ziska and others who were all working in John Glenn's Major Projects section.

From my desk on the 1st floor, I could see out across Whitehorse Road. To my left was a small but very posh store selling upmarket kitchen equipment. It was a source of continuing fascination for all of us because it was unlike any small,

suburban business any of us had ever encountered. The staff dressed like television stars, with the men in dark, tailored suits and the women in elegant, high fashion outfits. Inside the building was a large, framed photograph of the boss with some of his trusted aides, flanked by US and Australian flags. We were especially intrigued by the many well-dressed visitors in expensive clothes, often turning up in top-of-the-range imported sports cars and Mercedes, looking like they had just stepped off a Lear jet from the US.

Venturing into the store, I asked a high-powered sales lady the price of their magnificent cupboard doors. She frostily advised me, 'If you have to ask, you can't afford it'. We speculated that the business might really be a high-end front for drugs, as we rarely saw any actual customers, but we never found out. One Monday morning, we found the store closed and empty.

I often looked out the window and vividly remembered staring in amazement at the clear sight of a large aircraft taxiing at what could have only been Tullamarine Airport, about 30 km away. I can only guess that what I was seeing was the result of a temperature inversion, which acted as an atmospheric lens creating a mirage. When I called my workmates over, the plane had disappeared, and nobody believed what I had seen.

The strangest thing I saw was in 1983 when a huge, dark brown rolling cloud rapidly approached from the city at ground level. It was an enormous dust storm that blotted out the sun for hours after it had passed. It had originated in the Mallee and it left a strange, sulphurous smell in its wake.

## Ray Forde



Ray Forde in 1966

Ray was one of the 'older' guys who would regularly join 'long Jack' Ryan and others in the lunchtime card game in what used to be Bill Kendall's office out the back of the main office. Ray was a short, snowy-haired man who possessed a wonderful sense of humour and told great jokes. When he moved upstairs where I was working, I discovered he had been a World War 2 aircrew member who had gone to Canada with the Empire Air Training Scheme in 1943. He described some hair-raising antics crews got up to in flying training exercises over Canada's vast prairies, in which some pranks turned into tragedies when planes got too close.

Ray and I became friends and late in 1982 he told me that he was quite concerned about a family member's new relationship.

After a number of discussions about this I realised Ray had become quite obsessed with this situation and I attempted to counsel him and encourage him to step back. Matters unexpectedly came to a head one lunchtime when Ray was returning to the office after a lunchtime walk in Nunawading. On the gravel path beside the office, he had inexplicably lost his balance and struck his head on the brick wall of the office, opening up a deep cut.

Ray was not badly hurt but visited his doctor to have the wound dressed. Concerned that he might have had internal bleeding, the doctor ordered a scan of his head. The scan revealed something totally unexpected – a large brain tumour, which may have explained Ray's odd behaviour concerning a family member. He was admitted to St Vincent's Hospital for an operation.

When Edel Canas and I drove in to see him one evening after work, Ray was sitting on a chair in the ward passage as we entered, and we were embarrassed to discover that we had walked right past him without realising it was him. His head had been completely shaved and was covered in a large dressing. We had difficulty understanding him. Ray had to learn to speak all over again.

By the 1982 office Christmas party, Ray's speech had recovered significantly, but he was still unable to walk. Although confined to a wheelchair, he was determined to make a full recovery. By one of those cosmic co-incidences, my daughter was going out with one of Ray's young nephews. Sadly, by March 1983, Ray's cancer returned, and he died. In 2020 I found his grave in the Lilydale Cemetery, quite close to my parents' grave.

### **The Catholic Church property issue**

At a small town on the Princes Highway, east of Pakenham, a proposed future frontage access road<sup>3</sup> would take a 20-metre slice off the front of a long, mostly empty block owned by the Catholic Church. The church building was set back maybe 400 metres from the highway, so it seemed like a minimal impact situation to the freeway planners.

The Catholic Church obviously thought otherwise and set up a high-powered meeting with me at the Nunawading office, consisting of the Parish Priest, some parish stalwarts and a rather pompous lawyer. I should have realised something was up when they said they wanted to talk to me alone. Somehow or other they had found out that I was a Catholic (even if it was in name only) and that I had been heavily involved in the planning and design of the freeway.

I was more than slightly gobsmacked to discover that the meeting was to appeal to my being a good Catholic and thus to act in the best interests of the Church by moving the entire freeway north (and straight through a major service station on the opposite side) to avoid the Church's property. They said the land was vital to the future of the Parish, which would eventually build a school there.

I politely pointed out to them that the entire design of the highway/freeway at this point was predicated on preserving the existing, twin 30-inch high-pressure gas pipelines from Dutson, which crossed from one side of the highway to the other in the middle of the immediately adjacent road main intersection. I said that the cost of relocating these pipelines, which formed the main gas supply to Melbourne and would run into tens of millions of dollars, could not possibly be justified on the sole grounds of avoiding an empty paddock – regardless of its future potential. I think at that point, they realized that their long shot was not going to come off, and they left.

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<sup>3</sup> It would only be built when the duplicated highway became a limited access freeway - then thought to be 20-30 years' away - but it is still yet to happen in 2026.

## **Water level monitoring**

There would be several major cuttings on the new carriageway east of Nar Nar Goon, and I was tasked by the geotechnical people to monitor groundwater levels on a monthly basis over a long period to determine what measures, if any, might be needed to handle subterranean flows during construction. To facilitate this, long, slotted plastic pipes had been inserted into boreholes at these cutting locations that were maybe 50 feet deep. I would periodically visit these bores armed with a cylindrical brass device attached to a long tape measure, which I would lower into the holes. When the brass device encountered water in the tube, it would emit a whistle as the air was driven out of it. When the whistle stopped, the water would be at the end of the tape and I would record the tape measurement at the top of the bore.

One bore hole was on a property owned by the Wilson brothers near Back Creek. They were extremely old and had lived there as bachelor brothers in the home their parents built (Interestingly, their somewhat younger neighbours the Rupes, were also bachelor brothers living in their parents' home). Anyway, I was out taking my recordings one morning when one of the Wilson brothers came up on his ancient bicycle to see what I was up to. He would have been in his nineties and was as skinny as a rake. Even though it was warm, I could see his long underwear all the way down to his socks through the gaping waist of his oversize trousers, which were held up with braces.

Mr Wilson was a mine of information about the area's history. He pointed to a tall, very ancient pine tree in the corner of the paddock near the highway and said it had been a stopping place for the Cobb & Co coaches. Passengers and locals would often nail signs and notices on the tree, and over a long period it ended up with thousands of nails in its bark. We walked down to the tree, and I could see some remaining nails that had not rusted away. He invited me up to his dwelling, where I met his brothers and felt I had stepped back in time at least 100 years. The kitchen had a dirt floor, but there was a modern refrigerator. They made me a nice cup of tea, brewed from water heated on a cast iron wood stove top. The tree was removed for the new carriageway and I often wonder what became of the brothers.

## **Dark deeds on the Princes Highway**

I spent a lot of time on the Princes Highway on pre-construction activities. At lunchtime I would sometimes choose a secluded spot to enjoy my sandwiches and read my book without being bailed up by landowners or CRB supervisors wanting to have a chat.

One of these lunchtime spots was an old sand extraction area off Brew Road at Tynong, about a kilometre north of the highway. It was a very peaceful place with lots of low eucalypts, wattles and other wildflowers that had regenerated over the years. I was subsequently mortified to discover that others may well have been there with me during my lunchtimes. They were 3 women who had disappeared at different times from public areas around Frankston and Dandenong and had been brutally raped and murdered by a serial killer and dumped in the very same patch of scrub.

Police subsequently identified a former local man<sup>4</sup> as the most likely suspect but were never able to gather enough evidence to convict him. I was fortunate indeed not to have stumbled over their bodies when I left my car to relieve myself – and, given my regular visits there, perhaps even more fortunate not to have been rigorously questioned by the Police as a person of interest.

About a kilometre away on the Princes Highway, there was another area in thick bush beside the Garfield Rest area, where I also stopped for lunch on occasions. Another two of the killer's victims was also found there by a farmer dumping some dead sheep there.

Around the same time, missing Melbourne solicitor Roger Wilson was believed to have been murdered by the notorious hitman Christopher Dale Flannery and buried along the highway somewhere east of Narre Warren. I saw Police cadets testing the roadsides near Nar Nar Goon with long metal probes during an extended and ultimately unsuccessful search for his body<sup>5</sup>.

### **The motorcyclist**

I was driving out to Nar Nar Goon one morning when I encountered an accident scene on the Princes Highway about 2 km west of the town. It had recently been raining, and a motorcyclist had lost control of his bike after a close encounter with another vehicle. When his front wheel slipped on the white line, the young rider Greg Lee, disengaged himself from his bike, hurdled the handlebars and skidded for quite some distance along the wet road. His helmet, boots, gloves and leathers saved him from injury, and he was standing with local police at the edge of the road when I encountered him. His bike had shot off the embankment and was laying out of reach in the long grass on the other side of a deep drain.

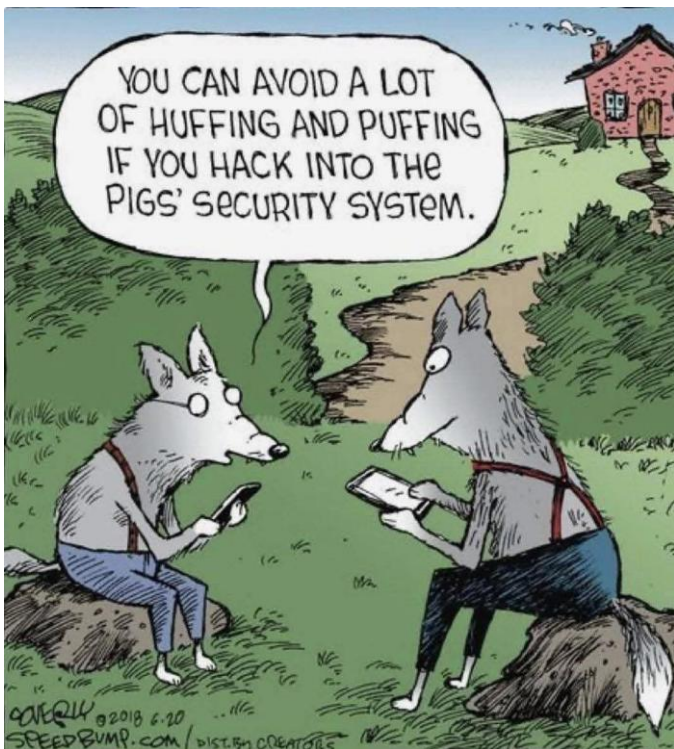
Greg had journeyed from Manly NSW and was waiting for a tow truck to retrieve his bike. Feeling sorry for him I gave him my card and told him to contact me if he needed any help. Later that day I received a call from him, saying he was in the City. The police had given him a lift to Nar Nar Goon, where they declared his front tyre unroadworthy and forced him to replace it. Buying it consumed all his cash and he asked if he could stay with us for the evening until his mother in Sydney could send him some money.

He duly arrived and we fed him. He was a nice lad and told us he was trying to see Melbourne on a shoestring. He had brought most of his food with him. We also discovered he was a reasonable flute player, and that he had brought this instrument with him. Greg contacted his mother, who sent him money and thanked us for our kindness. We never saw him again.

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<sup>4</sup> The prime suspect in the case, Harold Janman, who "often offered women lifts on the Frankston-Dandenong Road" continued to maintain his innocence. Janman died aged 88 in August 2020. No one has been charged regarding the murders, which remain unsolved

<sup>5</sup> According to a 2019 article by journalist Duncan McNab, 33-year-old Wilson was on his way home to his stud farm at Nar Nar Goon when he was intercepted on the South Eastern Freeway in Richmond by Flannery and Kevin Wilson, who were posing as Police. The pair allegedly drove Wilson to a quiet place east of Pakenham where Flannery shot Wilson and temporarily buried his body in an adjacent paddock. He later arranged for several associates (one of them was Alphonse Gangitano) to re-bury him on a construction site. His body has never been found. Flannery later disappeared in Sydney and his body is believed to be somewhere in Sydney Harbour.



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