



WATERY SAUCES OLDIES AND BOLDIES

Newsletter No 58

March 2009

Newsletter of the WATER RESOURCES RETIREES ASSOCIATION

Positions Vacant

Enclosed with this newsletter is a notice of the Annual General Meeting to be held in the Public Service Club (as usual) on 24 April. Members are invited to join together – and bring their fellow retirees – for the meeting and a convivial lunch at the Association’s expense.

Potential attendees are especially requested to consider taking on office on the Management Committee. Lee Rogers has now served the customary two year term as President and would like to be superseded. Eric Davis who is Past President until there is a new President is on Lee’s side.

John Connolly has now been a most efficient secretary for six years – which he thinks is an adequate contribution – and would like to welcome a successor.

All other positions are also available for anyone who would like a go at them, although the incumbents have generally indicated their willingness to continue.

The Web

Thank you to those members who responded to our circular concerning the possible establishment of a WRRR website.

In order to progress the matter, a small sub-committee has been established to consider the submissions and further comments from management committee members to get a fairly concise and precise definition of our needs before proceeding to the actual task of setting up the site. Sub-committee members are Lee Rogers, Peter Bevin and Geoff Eades.

One possible benefit of posting our newsletters on the web is that there could be better photographs – perhaps even in colour – from time to time. Our current reproduction by photocopying does not lend itself to quality pictures.

More news will be provided as it comes to hand.

From the Editor’s Chair

Retirement is supposed to be a relaxing time when people can relish the fruits of their lifetime of work in comfort. Certainly most former public servants have planned their futures and, through compulsory superannuation, provided for at least part of their financial needs.

How galling then that the world economic crisis has wreaked havoc on stocks and shares. And more recently the Reserve Bank has drastically reduced interest rates, which has been claimed will be good for the economy overall. But not for self-funded retirees with cash investments! No wonder there has been an upsurge in applications for pensions.

We are assured that Australia is better placed than most world economies and that things will eventually recover provided we can just hang in there. WRRR certainly wishes all our members the very best of luck with their hanging!

Everone will be aware of a recent retirement from the world stage of one who will certainly be remembered – if not for his political achievements, at least for his infelicitous choice of phrase. He may be a footnote to history, so I have footnoted just a few of his most memorable statements as a constant reminder for you all.

For now, au reservoir.

Ian Pullar, Editor

People’s History

As I have previously reported, the Department no longer holds copies of the *People’s History* it published in 2001. Yet there are still reasonably frequent requests for copies. So if any members have copies surplus to requirements, could you please let us have them back so that we can satisfy this ongoing demand. WRRR will be happy to reimburse the cost of the postage. Please contact me or Lee Rogers (in my absence overseas) if you can help.

Late News

The State election on 21 March returned the Labor Government and made Anna Bligh the first female premier to be elected to that position in Australia.

She undertook a major reshuffle of her Cabinet. The appointment of most interest to us was that of Stephen Robertson to Natural Resources (with the added responsibilities of Mines & Energy, and Trade). I’m sure he’ll be welcomed back.

Subsequently, EPA and NRW were amalgamated into the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) and John Bradley, CEO of the Queensland Water Commission, was appointed Acting Director General. More news later.

I have opinions of my own – strong opinions – but I don’t always agree with them. - George W. Bush

Out and About

Members have been observed at the Christmas luncheon (45 attendees) and the Public Service Club lunch. Good times had by all. At least the 16 members and wives who congregated at the Public Service Club on 24 February thought so. The staff of the Public Services Club must have been delighted to welcome us as we were virtually the only diners. We will, of course, be back for the AGM and hope many more members will join us. These are a simple, popular and pleasant way of renewing acquaintances. And we learn more of our colleagues e.g. Trevor Sleep has become a golf addict, Malcolm Pegg is a Twitcher and Neville Ablitt has gone from retirement into service with Seqwater.

New members (always welcome) are Don Gardiner and John Potts (both lassoed from Local Government), Brian Shannon who retired from SunWater as a General Manager, Ken Watson who was an engineer in Designs and Planning who has recently returned to the consulting world with Connell Wagner, and Keith Mackenzie who left Planning 24 years ago to pursue his love of flying. Dave Dempster has retired as a groundwater hydrologist in Bundaberg after 40 years and announced his intention to join.

I recently attended a Unifem (International Womens Day) breakfast at which the (most impressive) guest speaker was Geraldine Mackenzie (Keith's wife) who is now Dean of the Faculty of Law and Pro-Vice Chancellor at Bond University. I had a most enjoyable chat with Keith (see also p. 3).

I was also present at the opening at the Ipswich Girls Grammar School of the Senior School Complex – the Peter Phillips Building. Our colleague Peter has been recognised for his contribution of 31 years as a Trustee, nine of them as Chairman of the Board. A thoroughly deserved tribute! The (impressive) opener was Penny Wensley, Governor of Queensland (and, more importantly, sister-in-law to Geoff Eades and the late John Ward).

On 13 February, there was a gathering at the Irish Club (organised by Allan "Butch" Mayne) of around 30 former draftsmen of Project

Planning. Few are still "on the boards" and many work for other organisations or have ventured into retirement. The fact that the stayers were seen still soldiering on well into the evening was testament to their enjoyment which Phil Sternes described as "a bit taxing on the health but enjoyable nonetheless".

A reunion of a different type was held at Inglewood in July 2008. Organised by the Inglewood & District Historical Society, it marked 40 years since the completion of Coolmunda Dam. A Dinner Dance was held at the Inglewood Civic Centre on Friday 25 July. Denis Gilbard had organised a photographic display from construction days. The keynote speaker was John Moreton, who alluded to the large number of locals who had worked on the project and who were still in the district and to the interaction of Commission staff and locals in work, sport and play. The following morning a morning tea and sausage sizzle completed the celebrations. Other "retirees" who attended were Jill Moreton, Bob Hitchcock and Rod Kingston.

Similar celebrations are planned locally later in the year for Tinaroo. Walkamin State School's 50th Anniversary and Back to Walkamin Celebrations are planned for Saturday 18 April. More celebrations of the Tinaroo project are planned for later.

Vice-President Heather Clark was more than somewhat disconcerted on a trip to NSW when her husband Arthur took sick on Christmas Day and had to be taken to Gosford Hospital. After an angiogram, he was transferred to Royal North Shore hospital where he underwent quadruple bypass surgery. After a lengthy convalescence he was allowed to return home to Brisbane where he is making a good recovery.

The Pullars are heading off overseas again (so I will miss the AGM), this time to Britain and Italy. The Rogers are planning a trip around September to France and Spain. The Marleys and the Shannons are off again to the ICOLD meeting in South America, and will also be taking in such wonders as Machu Pichu. Reports on other travellers can be found on page 6.

Very sadly, I have to report the passing of several people.

Wally Charles, cableway operator at Tinaroo, Moogerah and Leslie dams, passed away late last year aged 84 years. Wally was well known to all Construction employees and is the father of Des Charles, who currently works for SunWater in Bundaberg.

Bob Sloman passed away on 22 November 2008. Bob worked for the Department in various evolutions including time in Charleville in the '80s and Ayr in the '90s.

Grazia (Grace) Russo, wife of Ben, passed away in February. Ben is a dam designer, par excellence, who is still in harness with SunWater, although now in his ninth decade.

Our condolences to their relatives.

Old men may walk slow BUT they think FAST

An elderly man in Queensland had owned a large property for several years. He had a dam in one of the lower paddocks where he had planted mango and avocado trees.

One evening the old farmer decided to go down to the dam to look it over, as he hadn't been there for a while. He took a ten litre bucket to bring back some fruit. As he neared the dam, he heard voices shouting and laughing with glee. As he came closer he saw it was a bunch of young women skinny-dipping in his dam. He made the women aware of his presence and they all went to the deep end.

One of the women shouted to him, 'We're not coming out until you leave!' The old man frowned, 'I didn't come down here to watch you ladies swim naked or make you get out of the dam naked.'

Holding the bucket up he said, 'I'm here to feed the alligator.'

Moral: Old men may walk slow, but they can still think fast.

The vast majority of our imports come from outside the country. - George W. Bush

Feedback

The last Newsletter produced several interesting responses. Phil Sternes was able to answer one of Andy Winkler's questions. - Ed.

The 'Charly' Andy refers to in his letter is one Charley Kotyza. Charley was a real exotic to a country kid like me, being large in stature, voluble by nature and totally unintelligible. I remember he used to be the Santa Claus at the IWS Xmas party each year without the need for a pillow. He was married to an Australian woman who he used to refer to as "the Doris" and either during or just after he left the IWS, purchased a café in St George which subsequently burnt down and the Nindigully Hotel from our family which didn't burn down as country pubs were prone to do in those days.

I'm not sure, but I think someone told me that he turned up at Coolmunda or some other construction job after that. The buzz around St George was that Charley had a "past" and Andy's letter seems to confirm that to some extent.

What a multi-cultural organisation the IWS was in those days even before it became fashionable. In any case he is in the attached photo with a lot of other watery notables.



Back Row: Don Spence, Jim Cannell, Kevin Dohle, Bernie Credlin, Charley Kotyza, Mick Moore, Harry Plint
Front Row: Barbara Jameson, Wally Stevenson, Pat Grace

And also, from Phil.

Jim Ole's Memo

What a pearl and so typical of his wit though I doubt the recipient would have got it. Reg Miller and I flew in the actual Cessna 172 mentioned while also taking aerial shots of Beardmore (one of which featured in an annual report of the era) while Denis Gillbard actually flew it on several occasions when doing his currency hours.

I think Jim describing the pilot Mr Parsons as "leading" does not do him justice. The locals would more likely use the word legendary when referring to him. A meticulous man, he was still doing aerial spraying in his sixties and (perversely) was killed in car accident after a lifetime of flying. His daughter Joan Meecham currently works for NRW in Greg Claydon's area.

The Mr Thomas referred to is still alive and kicking in St George. His daughter Tricia worked for us in the St George office during the seventies.

Dave Morwood contributed a note about Keith Mackenzie.

I had one enjoyable meeting with our No1 pilot, Keith McK. I flew home to Brisbane from Emerald several times of course, but on one trip we had a very very rough ride. The lady in the seat next to me was physically sick all the way to Thangool, where we stopped briefly. Out of the cockpit came Keith, who ambled down the aisle in his resplendent uniform and saw me. After exchange of greetings I told him the ride was too rough. "Can't you do something about it?" He offered me a seat up front with him for the rest of the trip, but I knocked it back; I was too close to being sick myself.

We took off from Thangool and had one of the smoothest plane rides I've ever had to Brisbane. The lady beside me was extremely grateful for my divine intervention, of which of course a respectable married public servant couldn't take advantage.

Afterwards I asked Keith what he did to effect that change. He said, "No problem Dave, we knew there was a weather change coming and just had to wait a little while in Thangool for it to pass."

You probably also remember the accolades in the news about the pilot who had a failing engine on landing approach at Archerfield. He bounced the plane off the road outside the fence so that it cleared the fence, and then made a second touchdown for a smooth landing with no power at all. That was Keith. Quite a guy, even if he did work in Planning.

A side of algae with your salad, sir?

It sounds like an unusual salad mix but tomato and basil plants are being tossed through with blue-green algae. And acting as a salad bowl is a central Queensland dam that supplies the Kestrel coal mine with industrial and drinking water.

A system of floating gardens allows the tomato and basil plants to compete for the same trace elements the algae needs to survive. By growing the plants, the algae bacteria are denied the nutrients they need.

Blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria, produce toxins that are harmful to humans. But employees at the mine, 50km from Emerald, drink and shower in the water, which is also used for coal processing and fire fighting.

Miner Rio Tinto, which pumps water to the dam from an outside source, previously had a reactive approach to controlling the algae.

They would have to wait until water tests showed elevated levels of bacteria before treating the water with chemicals, which was a costly and time-consuming process. The new system is proactive, relatively simple, cost-effective and provides a sustainable, environmentally sound long-term solution to managing bacteria levels.

**"Water politics can best be summed up like this: everyone upstream from you is a water robber, and everyone downstream of you is a big whinger."
Lawrence Springborg**

The problem with the French is they ain't got no word for 'entrepreneur'. - George W. Bush

Sternes Smatterings

Phil Sternes achieves 40 years of service this year and has committed some of his reminiscences to paper. Here is the first very welcome episode. To be continued. - Ed.

Boy racer

In the current work environment much is made of teamwork as though it is some recent construct devised to lead us to an unimaginable productivity nirvana. But from the start of my career at Beardmore Dam, great teamwork prevailed, fostered by the subtle leadership style of project engineer John Moreton – “The Trump”.

For example, in early 1970 our property team from Brisbane (led by Tommy Ham?) came out to commence negotiations with landholders whose land was affected by the dam. Most of these landholders were represented by local solicitor Ian Coutts who had just become the proud owner of an impressive royal blue V8 Ford Fairlane – a most desirable motor vehicle.

Negotiations had dragged on late this day when John came and handed me a \$2 note with instructions to go over to the camp store and put petrol in Mr Coutts’ car to ensure he made it back to town.

The opportunity to drive such a vehicle (if only one block to the store) was not to be missed by one so young so I carefully drove the Fairlane to the store to be confronted by a group of my former labouring mates who were hanging out there. Much good-natured bantering was forthcoming along the lines of “shiny bum”, “moving up in the world”, “paying you too much” etc.

After putting \$2 worth of fuel into the Fairlane (remember how far you could travel for that amount of money in those days) I hopped into the car to return to the office. Calls of “gun it” rang out from the assembled group and overcome by the moment, I obliged.

Now the roads in the camp were sealed with a smooth mix of bitumen and sand so even the application of a moderate amount of throttle could have unfortunate results – a situation potentially magnified by the V8 power of the Fairlane.

Fish-tailing down the street towards the office, screeching to a halt at the intersection and still in the moment, wheeling into the loop outside the office, I became aware of the Trump leaning over the rail of the office landing. Sheepishly handing him the keys, I walked past him into the office with his only response being an almost imperceptible shake of his head. Message received John.

P.S. Just before Christmas last year I overnighted in St George and noticed he still drives a Fairlane though these days it’s a more pedestrian white in colour.

Please be seated

After serving in an organisation for forty years you’re bound to tick all the boxes for having worked with the good, the bad and the ugly. And the strange. One such person in this category was Peter Scott, a staff surveyor who came to us at Beardmore Dam.

Our staff mess had two dining tables, one quite large with soft upholstered seats and the other smaller with less soft seats. Generally the pecking order was that the older hands sat at the bigger table and the newer at the small table which to me was all quite logical. Peter, being a newer hand, was relegated to the smaller table – a situation not to his liking.

Amongst other things Peter despised people who did not drink or smoke, rationalising that those who didn’t were getting a free

ride from the government on the back of his addictions. Particular venom was reserved for one staff member who didn’t drink, smoke or swear, a combination perhaps unique on our construction jobs.

Anyhow Peter was of the view that, as the highest classified mess member, he deserved to sit at the “big” table. This was a recurring theme during his late-night “musings” in the mess and came to a head late one evening when he became quite distraught at this obvious slight to his status and held forth about the injustice of it all. Things weren’t helped of course by Bryan O’Callaghan choosing to debate some of the finer points of Peter’s views with him.

We eventually left Peter to his own devices this particular evening with him vowing to remedy the situation. This he obviously did as next morning when I came in for breakfast the positions of the tables and chairs had been reversed. This had our cook Mrs O’Brien quite perplexed and being so early in the morning I was unable to adequately explain to her what had led to the rearrangement of the furniture.

Order had been restored to the pecking-order universe – at least as far as Peter was concerned – though not for long. When we came in for lunch, Mrs O’Brien had quietly rearranged things back to normal and we never heard from Peter about this issue again.

Careful who you offend

Generally speaking public servants are a conservative lot but that’s not to suggest that they can’t go a little outside the square when it comes to their choice of motor vehicle and so it was with Laurie Pappin. Laurie, as some will know, was once the owner of a red E Type Jaguar which he brought with him to St George in the early 1970s.

I was very impressed and more so when Laurie informed me that he had completely stripped and rebuilt the motor himself. My benchmark was a couple of mechanically talented locals who had previously tried the same thing with a Jag motor with sub-optimal results.

Anyhow if a Concours d’Elegance had been held in St George at this time only three contenders would’ve qualified for entry. Laurie with his Jag, Norm Dendle, the local newspaper owner with his Rolls Royce (actually he had two – a newer one for trips and an older model for around town) and Mike McDonnel, a local doctor with a new Volvo of which, by all accounts, he was very proud.

Now Dr Mike was a pretty competitive fellow who didn’t like being bested in anything – least of all by a public servant driving a Jag and an E Type at that. Laurie happened to drive past Dr Mike’s house one day while he was watering his footpath and received a spray from his hose as he passed. Obviously such impertinence on Laurie’s part was not to be tolerated. I wrote a little poem about the episode (*slightly abridged. - Ed.*)

*It appears Dr Mike did not welcome the intrusion
Of a man with a car that destroyed his delusion
That he drove the best when it came to a car
His position usurped by the red Jaguar.*

*Now Dr Mike was a man of considerable passion
He now sought revenge in a devious fashion
Numerous ploys in his wild mind arose
But all he could manage was a splash from a hose.*

*Now it’s said Volvo drivers are rather sedate
Dr Mike was one but how he could hate
After this Laurie never ventured afield or afar
With the top down on the red Jaguar.*

If we don’t succeed, we run the risk of failure - George W. Bush

Reminiscences of the Early Days of the Emerald Irrigation Area

Peter Bevin and Bob McDonald have been moved by their Muse to pen these fascinating notes. Thanks, chaps. There will be more to follow. -Ed.

The following random notes are some of the things we remember about those early days of the Emerald scheme, particularly those related to the irrigation design office in Emerald in the late sixties and the very early seventies. Time has obviously clouded our recall of some of the detail after nearly 40 years (so that's our excuse for any mistakes or oversights we may have inadvertently made in the following). It has also softened some of the memories, but nevertheless it was an experience that's not easily put aside.

Background to the scheme

Briefly, for the benefit of those not that familiar with the scheme, Fairbairn Dam was built on the Nogoia River in Central Queensland in the late sixties and early seventies to irrigate lands downstream around Emerald. At that time, its storage volume of 1.3 million megalitres made it the largest storage in the state.

The scheme was funded by both the Commonwealth and State Governments and the ultimate aim in those days was to establish some 130 new farms, each of which would have around 200 hectares of irrigable soils. Later on, the dam also serviced the massive coal mining areas downstream of Emerald when that industry exploded on the scene in the early seventies with the signing of major coal export contracts.

Settling into a small town.

When we went there in the late sixties, Emerald was one of those typical country towns (four banks, three hotels, a council office and a hospital) that had been established around the turn of the century and had grown up to service a significant regional part of Queensland away from the coast. It was built at a major road and rail hub and, with its own town weir, was able to support a population of a little over 2000. Today, its population is probably nearer 12000 or 13000.

The railway yards and the shire council provided a lot of the local employment along with the cattle industry, plus the tourist and gem mining area to the west (Anakie and Rubyvale). Cash sales of sapphires in the main street to tourists and locals were common and many of us were introduced to the world of coloured and star sapphires via that process.

There were no supermarkets in the late sixties and, for a while, we would post a shopping list off to a food barn in Rockhampton (some 300 km to the east) and they would send back cartons of groceries on the goods train. It was doubtful we saved much money doing that but we felt better by being able to choose from a wider range of products. Some of us

also banded together to buy a side of beef or a hindquarter from time to time for around 70 cents a kilogram.

Dust storms regularly blanketed the town and, to newcomers like us, they were stunning in their intensity – obviously due to the severe drought being experienced in central and western Queensland and with all the dry land around the town. It was amazing how the dust could always find its way into every part of a closed up house. The locals laughed it off, saying it was pointless to keep cleaning up, and that we would get used to it after the first year or so.

The closest TV station was Rockhampton so TV was off the entertainment menu unless you erected a monstrously high aerial – and then it was only just viewable if the cloud cover was exactly right. So we didn't see the TV pictures of man walking on the Moon until six months later when we took Christmas holidays down the coast.

The original office

Frank Learmonth, then Chief Construction Engineer, has been credited with selecting the first Emerald District Office during a visit to the project. It was rental premises next to Campbell's furniture shop in Ruby Street just off the main street. The office was a new Besser block, low set building with around 100 square metres of open space. Probably the original intention was to make it into a showroom for the furniture store but the lure of renting it out proved too hard to pass up.

Office folklore had it that the first occupant of a chair in the office was a young girl who Frank fronted in the main street with a "Do you have a job?", "No", "Please take these keys and go and sit in that office over there". Apparently, she didn't sit there for long as a short time later Judy Carrington was employed to sort us all out and turn the place into an 'office'.

Judy was working at Campbell's next door as the one and only assistant to Mrs Campbell when the office opened. Wilton Boyd and Tony Bucknell were there when Bob arrived on 6 January 1969. Peter came a few months later and for six months commuted between there and Bundaberg office – spending a week or a fortnight at each in turn until Adrian Muller was appointed District Engineer, Bundaberg.

The hot summer days, with only overhead fans to keep things bearable, meant the time you could work over a drawing board was limited. A few drops of sweat on tracing paper and it was virtually worthless.

Just up from the office was a small park that was the original town cemetery. During our time in this office, the council removed the headstones to the new cemetery; but not before we noted the names on the old headstones for naming a lot of the new roads to be built in the irrigation area.

To be continued.

We have a firm commitment to NATO. We are part of NATO.

We have a firm commitment to Europe. We are part of Europe. - George W. Bush

We rang to ask “Hawaii”?

John and Laurel Connolly and Col and Pat Cooney travelled together with the rest of the *River City Clippers* Barbershop chorus to the triennial Pan Pacific Convention in Hawaii. We found out in the Honolulu competition that our Clippers chorus standard is low B grade but learnt how to raise it in a teaching seminar. The next Pan Pacific Convention is in Brisbane in 2011 and will be hosted by the *Clippers*.

The weather was ideal. It was neither hot nor cold; and the water temp. seemed slightly cooler than our Gold Coast.

The industries in Hawaii are: tourism, defence, and agriculture in that order. All the islands are volcanic and are ringed by coral reefs. We checked out the Pipeline Beach where surf riders brave the giant waves, but it was subdued on that day. John and Pat are snorkelling enthusiasts and found coral, fish and a sea turtle. However Hawaiian hard corals are not as profuse and colourful as our soft corals on the Great Barrier Reef. Maybe also they have suffered from too many tourists, especially near Honolulu.

We all had a great time. Laurel shopped and swam in spite of a coughing virus which we all got in varying degrees; and Pat is always a travel addict.

The ship cruise on the *Pride of America* was perfect and it was comforting to know that we were never far from any of the islands which, presumably, the ship could hide behind in rough weather. We sang a concert on the ship to a full theatre which was fun for the singers and warmly appreciated by the audience.

John became a karaoke singing addict on the ship and the American compere would always say “Good Jarb, Jarn.” Col had one go at night at 9 pm just before the ship came in view of a stream of molten lava from a vent on the slopes of Mount Kilauea. When he finished singing, everyone scattered to the ship’s railing before the compere could say “Good Jarb, Kole”.

All in all, a most enjoyable holiday with lots of pleasant memories.

Col Cooney

Chinese torture?

Finally had a tour to China, 28 days over October. Went with AsiaQuest. Picked this mob as they only have small groups and all meals are paid in advance. Only 16 tourists in all.

Started at Beijing, to Xian, Wuhan, Yichang, Yangtze River Cruise, Kunming, Dali, Guilin, Yangshou, Hangzhou and departed Shanghai.

Tour could not go to Panda Research Station due to Earthquakes. Tourists now forbidden.

Highlights are too numerous to mention but I would recommend a tour of China to anybody.

We toured the Three Gorges Dam project. Massive! The trip through the locks (5 in all) took 160 minutes.

Got conned at the Brisbane Airport exchanging to Chinese currency. Very poor rate. Would advise others to wait until they reach China and exchange at Hotel. Conned buying Terracotta Warrior figurines. Paid 50 RMB when others paid 5. Conned into buying Chinese medicine to help back pain. After foot massage by Reflexologist, Kay was advised she suffered from insomnia, sinus and heart problems. All new to her. I won’t tell how much all this cost but it wasn’t funny.

Have you travelled anywhere else you could recommend? We are looking for places other than Asia as I don’t want to visit another temple or pagoda or eat rice for quite some time.

Dave Dewar

Travellers’ Tales

Terry Loos recently went on a holiday of the major ‘Danube Countries’ (plus Italy). He’s collected a few stories and bits of historical information from the non-stop patter of the various Tour Guides. None of the few following has been corroborated, but it is all verbatim (only the words have been changed). Some excerpts have been taken from Wikipedia.

Horsemeat.

Horsemeat is readily available in butcheries and restaurants in Verona, Ljubljana (and Paris). The ‘Hot Horse’ Restaurants in Ljubljana serve only horsemeat. For main course at posh restaurants in Ljubljana one can choose, “Slices of foal on rocket salad with radicchio and young cheese”, or “Foal slices in Teran wine sauce with baked polenta” each Euro 16.90. (I didn’t try any, for fear it would give me the trots).

St Vitus – 4th century?

Saint Vitus is the patron saint of Prague, dancers, young people and dogs. He was a Sicilian priest who was martyred because his miraculous cures were attributed to sorcery.

He and two supporters were placed in a cauldron of molten lead – from which they emerged unscathed – however, the ‘shakes’ he experienced at the time gave rise to the term St Vitus’ Dance – an acute disturbance of the central nervous system characterised by involuntary muscular movements of the face and extremities.

Defenestration

Prague Castle is built on a precipitous hill overlooking the old town. (The castle precinct comprises several majestic buildings including St Vitus’ Cathedral). One of the many inventive ways of putting people to death in Prague in days of old was simply to chuck them through a window and over the cliff. (There is no record on how many of the Czechs bounced.)

Charles Bridge

Bridges over the Vltava River in Prague had a history of flood damage. So, they laid the foundation stone of the current structure at the palindromically auspicious time in 1357 on the 9th day of the 7th month at 5:31 a.m. Apparently Charles IV chose this time so that history would record that the stone was laid at 1-3-5-7-9-7-5-3-1. It has worked. The bridge still stands.

Ich bin ein Berliner.

‘I am a jam doughnut’. Some people argue that President Kennedy should have said “Ich bin Berliner” to mean “I am a person from Berlin.” By adding the indefinite article *ein*, his statement implied he was a non-human Berliner. A Berliner was a doughnut variant filled with jam or plum sauce that is thought to have originated in Berlin.

I stand by all the misstatements that I’ve made. - George W. Bush

Travelling Round

Hein Van der Heide had kindly continued his account of what was obviously a fabulous trip he and Francoise had. And there's more to come! - Ed.

Camooweal to Darwin – June 2008

We left Queensland along the Barkly Highway, via Camooweal, with a lunch stop at the Barkley Roadhouse and onto the Threeways (just north of Tennant Creek). [Diesel was \$2.24/L and a litre of milk was \$5.60 – you can charge what you like when there are no other options !] The next day we stopped over at the iconic Daly Waters Pub and had their “beef & barra” meal, plus some typical bush entertainment. Then we left the desert drylands and entered the ‘Never Never’ country.

Our next stop was at the Elsey Cemetery and Elsey Homestead Site, to enhance the word pictures in *We of the Never Never*, which I was reading at that time. We came across many of the creeks, rivers & place names mentioned in the book. We stayed at the Mataranka Homestead Caravan Park. Adjacent to the Park is the replica of the original homestead, which was built for the movie of the book which is shown in the Caravan Park kiosk every day at noon - and yes, we did watch it.

Just inside an entrance to the Elsey National Park is the Rainbow Spring. This spring gushes out water at a rate of 30 million litres per day, at a constant temperature of 32°. A stone lined pool has been constructed just downstream of the spring, and it is of course very popular with the campers, day trippers and tour coaches. On the northern side of the Town of Mataranka is another similar spring called Bitter Springs – also popular, but just a natural water hole. We went for a drive into the National Park, fronting onto the Roper River – a wide mostly freshwater stream at this location, but inhabited by salt & fresh water crocs

At Katherine, we went to the Gorge Tourist Centre and browsed through the informative displays, followed by a walk to a lookout high on an escarpment above the first Gorge. Next day we went on a Three Gorge boat trip. Quite a ‘WOW’ factor. Hard to describe and even harder to photograph. It has to be on anyone’s ‘to do’ list here. Several km downstream of the Town of Katherine (in the opposite direction to the Gorge) is another thermal spring (but not as good as the one at Mataranka). Just a bit further downstream is an impressive park – Low Level Nature Reserve – the water is tempting, but croc warning signs are everywhere. A few more km down the river road is the Springvale Homestead – the first established property in the Top End (in 1888).

Some 60 km NE of Katherine is Edith Falls – part of the Katherine Gorge National Park. A 3 km circuit walk over some quite rocky / boulder strewn tracks, rather steep in places, gave breathtaking views of the upper falls. We went for a swim in the lower plunge pool, temp 34°, but cool & refreshing after the walk.

On to Kakadu and a trip into the Gunlom Waterfalls (40 km of corrugated gravel road, but a spectacular waterfall, plunge pool & scenery above the waterfall); at Yellow Water (Cooinda) we did a sunrise boat cruise (fantastic birdlife, plenty of saltwater crocs and a few Jabirus); a walk through the Nourlangie Rock Art Site, and contemplating the sunset at the Ubir Lookout (plus more rock art).

Then ten days in Darwin – a great city to visit (during the dry season). We did lots of walks along the many places where you can access the harbour & ocean foreshore. Then there were the many WWII sites – it was amazing to see / read about all the war time activities at the Top End. The NT Art Gallery & Museum was fantastic, as was experiencing the sunset at the Mindil Beach Sunset Markets.

Darwin to Broome – July 2008

After Darwin we went to the Litchfield National Park. The Wangi Falls, Buley Rockhole & Florence Falls were the standouts. On the way back to Katherine, we stopped at the Adelaide River War Cemetery – a very solemn and interesting site. We had an overnight stop at the Victoria River Roadhouse, where we went on 2 (challenging) walks in the Gregory National Park, where we were amazed at the brilliant red escarpments.

Then on to Kununurra for an 8 day stop. We did two scenic flights (expensive, but fantastic). The first was a ‘fly, drive & walk’ tour of the Bungle Bungle National Park. We flew over Lake Argyle (Ord River Dam) and the Argyle Diamond Mine on our way to the Bungle Bungle ‘beehives’ and then landed at the ‘Wilderness Resort’, where we were driven to, and then walked into, the Cathedral Gorge & the Echidna Chasm – some of the most fantastic sights we have seen on our trip – so far! Our second flight was to the north-west over the Kimberly coast – the views were breathtaking and the water was crystal clear (even from a height of some 500m). We landed at Kalumburu – an Aboriginal Community & Mission Station – probably one of the most remote localities in Australia (some 300km NW of Kununurra). The Mission has been there for 100 years and it has just opened a ‘museum’ to show off its memorabilia that has been collected over that time. We then flew further west to take in the Mitchell Falls (spectacular), a landing at the remote Drysdale River Station and back to Kununurra after a low level flight over the El Questro Resort.

We did a day trip to the Ord River Dam – a great dam site, where a relatively small structure holds back a massive volume of water. Another trip was to the Port of Wyndham, where there is a great lookout over the junction of five large rivers entering a gulf.

We had an overnight stop at Halls Creek, where we saw the ruins of Old Halls Creek township (first discovery of gold in WA). On the way we stopped to view the ‘China Wall’, an outcrop of nearly pure white quartz some 3m high & 1m wide stretching some 500m before dropping out of view over a ridge line – very unusual in an otherwise dry and brown countryside. At Fitzroy Crossing we did a boat tour of Geike Gorge – again very spectacular escarpments lining the gorge carved by the Fitzroy River – which carries some of the largest flows recorded in Australia.

At Derby the Fitzroy River empties into King Sound. At the jetty you can see some of the highest tide ranges in Australia. An all day tour to the Windjana Gorge NP and then the Tunnel Creek NP was the highlight here. There are massive escarpments at the gorge, with hundreds of freshwater crocs sunning themselves on the sand bars. At Tunnel Creek, a creek has carved a 700m tunnel through the range (some 100 m high) – you can walk through the tunnel by negotiating knee-deep pools of water and clambering over rocky sections.

We travelled on to Broome – our first view of the west coast. Broome has an interesting pearling & WWII history. It is now mostly a tourist town and it strongly promotes its “Chinatown’ precinct. Cable Beach is great, but the surf & sand don’t compare to our Queensland beaches. Tourist resorts & holiday apartments are going up at a great rate of knots. We did a camel ride on Cable Beach. (*To be continued.*)

We are ready for any unforeseen event that may or may not occur. - George W. Bush

As part of the Australia Day Honours, Greg Claydon, Executive Director of Strategic Water Initiatives in DNR, was awarded a Public Service Medal for his contribution to water planning and management in the state of Queensland. He is currently Queensland's representative on the National Water Initiative Committee; he was Queensland Deputy Commissioner for the Murray Darling Basin Initiative; and has been the Queensland Commissioner for the Dumaresq Barwon Border Rivers Commission. His previous roles have included General Manager for Water Planning and Regional Director for South-West Queensland, in the then Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

Other "watery officers" were honoured by the award of Queensland Australia Day Achievement Medals – Peter Gilbey, Ken Davis and Kel Holmes. Peter has just stood down as Director of Regional Water Supplies (Richard Priman has returned from the Queensland Water Commission to replace him) while Ken is Director, Executive & Administration Services and Kel is Director, Home and Garden Waterwise Rebate Schemes. Congratulations to all these deserving officers.

The departmental library now provides a wonderful daily service by email. The media are scanned for items relating to water news and the stories are consolidated and circulated. It appears, however, that the method used is a keyword search. In January a headline was "Murray has the key to break the drought", but the story concerned Andy Murray who it was thought may have what it took to become the first Brit for many years to win the Australian Open tennis!

An invitation was recently sent by email to members of a working group asking "Please advise (name supplied) of your availability for the workshop at your nearest convenience." Does this mean the workshop was to be held in a toilet?

Some months ago a number of departmental people travelled to a workshop in a provincial city. The group comprised a Malaysian Chinese, an Indian born in Fiji, a Sri Lankan, a Serb, two Englishmen, an Irishman and your editor – the only Australian-born Anglo-Saxon. I thought this was a wonderful advertisement for the multi-cultural society Australia has become.

So what's new?

In 250 BC Li Bing had been appointed governor of the province of Shu – modern-day Sichuan – under the kingdom of Qin, during the unstable period of the so-called Warring States, and shortly before the formation of the unified Qin dynasty, from which the name China is derived. Like everyone, he was only too well aware of the River Min's deadly caprices. It was a river that either ran half-dry in the summer, leaving the paddy farmers of the plains starved for water, or else, more commonly, flooded uncontrollably and caused a swath of destruction and death all the way to Chengdu and beyond. The river needed to be brought to heel. Li Bing, after winning permission from the king of Qin, undertook what would in time be described as "the largest and most carefully planned public works project yet seen anywhere in the eastern half of the Eurasian continent."

To control the river, he decided to cut a new spillway and channel any excess water through it with a specially designed, adjustable diversion dam. It took him seven years to break through the mountain: he managed this by having workers burn piles of hay on the surface of rocks to make them hot, and then pour cold water to cool them down rapidly, letting the nearly instant contraction crack them open. This cutting eventually led to an opening seventy feet wide, and the Min River waters, which were shifted toward it by Li Bing's clever fish-shaped dam, began to course through it the moment the final wall was broken open. The anniversary is still celebrated each year: a ceremony called the "breaking of the waters" is held every summer, commemorating an eastern engineering feat that was undertaken more than 2,000 years ago, when westerners (though not Plato, Aristotle, the Egyptians, or the Mesopotamians) still coated themselves with woad and did little more than grunt.. - from "*Bomb, Book and Compass*". See back page.

SunWater Snippets

New gonyah, same tribe! That's the description given of SunWater's move to new premises at 179 Turbot Street, next door to the Suncorp building. The premises also have the advantage of being much closer to the EPA as well as being more spacious. It could be mere coincidence, but shortly after SunWater relocated, the Victory Hotel proprietors felt that it was safe to reopen their doors.

It isn't quite true that it's the same tribe. There have been so many changes of personnel over the years, caused largely by retirements, that the familiar faces are fewer and farther between. Albert Navruk, who had been on secondment for a couple of years, recently ventured into Regional Water Supplies in NRW and remarked that there were more familiar faces there than in SunWater (and there aren't too many in RWS!). I hasten to assure members that Ben Russo and Errol Beitz are still seen in SunWater, but Bob Geddes has now retired (again).

Although the economic downturn is expected to have some impact on the organisation, particularly with those projects related to the mining industry, work continues apace.

SunWater, in an alliance with Transfield, Lucas and GHD has been involved in delivering (part of) the Western Corridor pipeline and pump station which are now nearing completion. SunWater is also responsible for delivering the pipeline that will save Cloncurry from total failure of its urban water supply – and will deliver once the problem of too much water altogether is overcome!

Officers are busily engaged in preparing designs and business cases for the Water to Bowen Project, Nathan Dam and Connors River Dam and the raising of Burdekin Falls Dam (which could incorporate a hydro-electric generator). Additional water supply for Rockhampton/Gladstone is still under review.

South-East Queensland water supply, which remains the subject of a certain amount of political disagreement, is not exempt from SunWater's purview. Queensland Water Infrastructure Pty Ltd is being assisted by SunWater in relation to the selection process for a construction entity. And SunWater has taken on the role of owner's agent for the raising of Hinze Dam.

It's a busy life!

A low voter turnout is an indication of fewer people going to the polls. - George W. Bush

Water Challenge

In 2008, Saudi Arabia ceased to be self sufficient in wheat production. It is looking to access land overseas to grow crops, possibly in Pakistan or the Horn of Africa. China is acquiring agricultural land in Southern Africa for similar purposes.

And Daewoo Logistic is looking to lease land in Madagascar, to grow food for South Korea. Other countries in South Asia and the Gulf are considering similar moves.

Scale of problem

None of these countries needs the land for the sake of territorial expansion. What they need the land for is more fundamental: food. In all these cases, it is a shortage of water that has prompted this move.

The experience of Saudi Arabia, China and South Korea today could be a foretaste of what will follow elsewhere.

It stems from the failure of national governments and the international trade system to address the looming water crisis. Without changes, we face a scramble for water over the next two decades.

When water availability drops below 1500m³ per person per year, a country needs to start importing food, particularly water intense crops.

Saudi Arabia faces this problem. Twenty other countries fell below this threshold in 2000, and another 14 will join them by 2030.

Industrialisation

It is not just about absolute water scarcity, however.

For many of the fast growing economies in Asia and the Middle East, there are trade offs.

As economies expand, governments have to choose whether to allocate water to agriculture, or to expanding cities and industries instead. This is a challenge that China and South Korea face.

When a country devotes 40% of its renewable water resources or more to irrigation, it starts to face these water allocation issues.

By 2030, under business as usual, all of South Asia will reach the 40% threshold; the Middle East and North Africa region will have hit 58%.

Agriculture almost always loses out to the industrialising economy, especially to the energy and manufacturing sectors, in such water allocation decisions. Current trends suggest that by 2030, demand for extra water will soar.

Rapidly industrialising economies across South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, which support approximately 2.5 billion people, will be forced to look elsewhere for water-rich land for their food.

Deep problems

Why is finding the water for agriculture becoming such a profound issue?

First, we have been incredibly wasteful with our agricultural water over the years, and now face shortages of groundwater in many parts of the farming world.

Second, as we grow richer, we tend to eat more meat, which requires more water.

Third, trying to reform water use in agriculture is often deemed political suicide, so inertia prevails.

Fourth, we have an outdated global trade system for agriculture.

While over 70% of the world's freshwater withdrawals are used for agriculture, historically this water has been heavily subsidised and therefore free or hugely under-priced. It has been used wastefully as a result.

More than a quarter of India's harvest, for example, could be at risk by 2025 as groundwater is depleted beyond recovery; already 10% depends on water mined from unsustainable groundwater sources.

Water scarcity may soon cause a loss of global crop production of 350 million tonnes, almost equal to all the grain the US grows.

Different diets

Food demand is projected to grow by 70-90% by 2050. But more than 25% of the increase in grain demand will be due to changes in diets, rather than to population growth. A typical meat-eater's diet requires about 5,400 litres of water a day to produce, double what a vegetarian requires for the same nutritional value.

Global production of meat is projected to more than double from 229 million tonnes in 1999/01 to 465 million tonnes in 2050, notably across Asia.

Ironically, while more "crop-per-drop" is required to meet future grain demand, the fastest-growing nations are also diverting more and more water away from agriculture to support growing cities and industry, compounding the problem.

Volatile prices

Making agriculture more water-efficient commonly involves government intervention to re-assess historical allocations to farmers, raise water prices, and implement technological change.

Most politicians choose to avoid addressing such issues.

And there is no correlation between the places that are best suited to grow different foods and those that actually do in practice.

Three of the world's top ten food exporters are water scarce, and three of the top ten food importers are water rich.

There is less overall global trade in agriculture, when we need more. Food prices have become much more volatile, as recent price rises showed.

Bilateral alliances

Without bold water reforms in national agricultural policies or reform to the global trade system, bilateral land-for-water deals will inevitably increase.

Such deals may seem rational now, but the scale of the problem in the next two decades demands a global solution.

Under business as usual, by 2030 we could see multiple countries from South Asia and the Middle East competing with each other to secure bilateral land-for-water deals: cash-rich, water-poor nations competing to secure deals with water-rich nations around the world.

A rapid retreat from a globalised 21st Century world, back into a 19th Century style network of bilateral alliances and trade deals, with all of the associated political and economic complications, is likely.

The scramble for water has begun, and governments must react; the implications of doing nothing are too profound to contemplate.

- from the BBC

Quite frankly, teachers are the only profession that teach our children. - George W. Bush

HEALTH *and beauty*

You can't be too careful with your health, can you? So we should all be very grateful for the warnings manufacturers sometimes place on their products.

Like the sunglasses that carried the warning "Do not wear sunglasses while driving at night".

Like the rash vest with a high UV-protection rating bought to protect a child from the sun's rays while going for a dip which carried a warning that the effectiveness of the garment was reduced when wet.

An advertisement in a newspaper classifieds section offered for sale a "delusted" wedding gown.

But here is a genuine cautionary tale as reported in the *Courier Mail* on 9 December. A 20-something girl from Zhuhai, in southern Guangdong province, went to hospital completely deaf in her left ear. Her boyfriend had ruptured her eardrum during an excessively passionate kiss. A doctor at the hospital was quoted as saying, "The kiss reduced pressure in her mouth and pulled the eardrum out." On a hopeful note, the doctor expected her hearing would return to normal after about two months. "While kissing is normally safe, people are advised to proceed with caution." So be warned, all you passionate lovers out there.

With the local outbreak of dengue fever in the north, we are all warned to be particularly vigilant to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. Perhaps the warning should have been heeded by a man in Finland. Police recovering a stolen car found a blood-filled mosquito inside it. The DNA of the blood matched that of a man already known to police and he was duly arrested!



Bodies

It is 1944 and the stream of vital war-related paperwork threatens to engulf a Major Parkinson. Then disaster strikes. The chief of the base goes on leave; his deputy falls sick and the 3-I-C is called away on urgent business. Major Parkinson is left to soldier on alone. At that point, an odd thing happens – nothing at all. The paper flood ceases; the war goes on regardless. As Major Parkinson later mused: "There had never been anything to do. We'd just been making work for each other."

This led Major Parkinson – in civilian dress, C. Northcote Parkinson – to invent "Parkinson's law", first published in 1955, which states: work expands to fill the time available for its completion.

Parkinson based his ideas not just on his war experience, but also his historical research. Between 1914 and 1928, the number of administrators in the British Admiralty increased by almost 80%, while the number of sailors they had to administer fell by a third, and the number of ships by two-thirds. Parkinson suggested a reason: in hierarchical management structures, people in positions of authority need subordinates, and those extra bodies have to be occupied – regardless of how much there actually is to do.

Parkinson was also interested in other aspects of management dynamics, in particular the workings of committees. How many members can a committee have and still be effective? Parkinson's own guess was based on the 700-year history of England's highest council of state – in its modern incarnation, cabinet. Five times between 1257 and 1955, this council grew from small beginnings to a membership of just over 20. Each time it reached that point, it was replaced by a new, smaller body, which began growing again. Recent research indicates that groups with fewer than 20 members tend to reach agreement, but those larger than 20 generally form subgroups that agree within themselves, but become frozen in disagreement with each other.

One curious detail of the research provides an intriguing slant. In computer simulations, there is a particular number of decision-makers that stands out from the trend as being truly, spectacularly bad, tending with alarmingly high probability to lead to deadlock: eight.

Where this effect comes from is unclear. But Parkinson had anticipated it, noting in 1955 that no nation had a cabinet of eight members. Intriguingly, today's committees charged with making momentous decisions tend to fall either side of the bedevilled number: the Bank of England's monetary policy committee has nine; the US National Security Council has six.

Perhaps we all subliminally know what Parkinson highlighted and computer simulations have confirmed. Charles I was the only British monarch who favoured a council of state of eight members. His decision-making was so notoriously bad that he lost his head.

Exercise those Brain Cells

The puzzles in last edition were a precursor to this puzzle which, I think, is about the most challenging in my collection. Not even Hector Macdonald has solved it.

Find the next member of the sequence

10³ 10¹² 10⁴⁸ 10² 10⁰ ?

Here's a hint: an Englishman would probably have a better chance with this than a Frenchman or an American.



Solutions to last edition's puzzle

- a. One Two Three Four **Five** Six Seven Eight **Nine** Ten
- b. God Save Our Gracious Queen Long Live **Our** Noble Queen
- c. 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 20 22 24 31 100 **121** 10,000 1,111,111,111,111

All the numbers are 16 to bases, from the right, 1 to 16. Hence the missing number is 16 in ternary.

It isn't pollution that's harming the environment. It's the impurities in our air and water that are doing it. - George W. Bush

How Come – ?

Numbers play a special part in our lives. Not only do they help us to do the calculations we need to survive – (did anyone watch the recent ABC television programme about the number 1?) – they take on mystical significance in many cultures and feature in numerous everyday expressions. The numbers of special significance can be numbered by the dozen.

The ancient Sumerians were particularly fond of the **dozen**, having introduced the sexagesimal system and used sixty for minutes and seconds which is, of course, five times twelve. Twelve was particularly awesome because of its multiple divisibility by 2, 3 and 4 and that it combines the mystic qualities of 5 and 7. Christians later found special religious significance in the fact that its digits, when added, represented the holy trinity.

Twelve appears frequently in many cultures. There were the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve apostles in the New Testament and the twelve labours of Hercules. A jury is usually “twelve men good and true”. The twelve signs of the zodiac resulted in the division of the year into twelve months. Days and nights have twelve hours each. The Twelfth Night – made more famous for us by Shakespeare’s play – is the twelfth night after Christmas or Epiphany. The play was so named because it was first performed as part of the celebration of that night.

Prior to decimal currency, the English system of currency was based on twelve pence to the shilling. Twelve, as a number, was hard to beat so anything greater was an anticlimax – one of the reasons 13 was considered unlucky.

Dressed up to the nines is an expression applied to someone clothed elegantly. In the traditional scale of values, rising from one to nine, nine was the closest to perfection so those dressed up to it were nigh on perfect! In classical times, the world of art, literature and science was controlled by the nine muses. Nine was three times three, the figure Pythagoras regarded as “the perfect number”. People dressed up to go and play ninepins were dressed to the nines.

Perhaps a better origin is that elegantly attired people were dressed “up to the eyes” (remember our common phrase of being “up to the eyeballs”?) “To the eyes” in Old English was *to then eyne*. When grammar changed, it was forgotten that *eyne* was the plural of eye and the n from the obsolete *then* got attached to the *eyne* to become “the nines”.

Rather the opposite of the Old English snake called a *nadder* which became *an adder*.

Cheers and Booze

Go drink and be merry
on wine, Scotch or sherry,
it’s always the season of cheer.
But in your libation
use some moderation –
don’t get carried away on the bier.

A Sign of the Times

On the road between Timaru and Christchurch, NZ –

**No doctor, no hospital,
one cemetery.
Slow down!**

Those were the days

The following was submitted anonymously. I cannot vouch for its accuracy. - Ed.

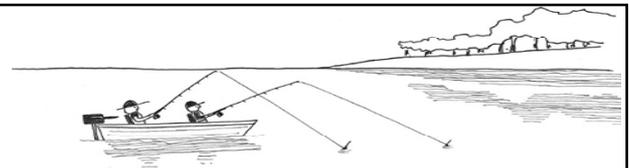
After being married for 44 years, I took a careful look at my wife one day and said, ‘Honey, 44 years ago we had a cheap apartment, a cheap car, slept on a sofa bed and watched a 10-inch black and white TV, but I got to sleep every night with a hot 20-year-old gal. Now I have a \$500,000 home, a \$45,000 car, nice big bed and plasma screen TV, but I’m sleeping with a 65-year-old woman. It seems to me that you’re not holding up your side of things.’

My wife is a very reasonable woman. She told me to go out and find a hot 20-year-old gal, and she would make sure that I would once again be living in a cheap apartment, driving a cheap car, sleeping on a sofa bed and watching a 10-inch black and white TV.

Ashes to Ashes

Fans of English literary giant Jane Austen are arranging to have their ashes scattered at the cottage that was her home in the early 1800s. Austen lived at Chawton, Hampshire (*we have visited!*) from 1809 to 1817 and wrote or revised her novels there.

But management of the cottage is not happy and want the practice to stop. It doesn’t help the gardens and it is distressing to see mountains of human ash in the grounds.



*I think I’m going to divorce my wife. She hasn’t spoken to me in two months.
I wouldn’t be too hasty if I were you. A good woman like that is hard to find.*

I have made good judgements in the past. I have made good judgements in the future. - George W. Bush

Book Club

LBJ, Architect of American Ambition (Randall B Woods)

I chanced across this biography of Lyndon Johnson in the remainders section of QBD and seeing it fitted one of my main criteria for buying a book – that it must cost less than \$10 – I purchased it. I had previously read and enjoyed other biographies of him and thought this might provide a different perspective. I was not disappointed.

This biography takes you through his life in a traditional way and nothing much new is revealed in the process. However, even if he had not become President, by any standards LBJ lived a huge and, in lots of ways, an improbable and entertaining life.

It is the book's discussion of the big issues of his presidency that attracted me. His anguish over the Vietnam War, civil rights and poverty seem at odds with his public persona of a large, loud, brash one-dimensional Texan. But LBJ was an idealist and a liberal, attributes not normally associated with a son of Texas, and the way he sought to give expression to his principles is one of the fascinating parts of this book.

The issues that troubled and motivated LBJ are valid today with the war on terror, the election of an African-American president and poverty again advancing in the US. I couldn't help think while reading this book that the US had difficulty in understanding the world in which it found itself the leader then and that not much had changed. This was the main message I took away with me which is why the subtitle seems odd. To me "discovering the limits of American ambition" seems more appropriate – though granted a touch revisionist.

This is no hagiography and Randall Woods does an excellent job in balancing the contradictory nature of Johnson who was well known for being a naughty boy when the mood took him. I'm reminded of this by an anecdote published elsewhere about LBJ.

During his presidency he visited Harry and Bess Truman at their home and found them not coping very well. LBJ arranged for an army valet to be assigned to their household to help them. Later, back in Texas and out of office, LBJ entertained a visitor who found an army valet dancing attention on the former president. When questioned about when this perk had become available to former presidents, LBJ replied, "Well, Harry Truman had one."

If you are interested in the world we inhabit and seek to understand why some things are the way they are, this book throws some light into the corners of the domestic and international events of LBJ's era which still resonate with us today.

- Phil Sternes

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The future will be better tomorrow. - George W. Bush

Simon Winchester is a prolific author whose books I have always found eminently readable - memorable works such as *The Meaning of Everything*, *The Surgeon of Crawthorne*, *The Map that Changed the World* and *Krakatoa. Bomb, Book & Compass* with its subtitle *Joseph Needham and the Great Secrets of China* is no exception.

Needham was a charismatic biochemist at Cambridge, who, along with his wife, became a Fellow of the Royal Academy. When a young Chinese student came to Cambridge to study with him in the 1930s he fell in love with her and Chinese culture. She became his mistress (his wife seemed perfectly happy with the arrangement) and he immersed himself in Chinese language and history.

During World War II, the British government needed someone to serve as a link with the exiled Chinese government in Chungking and chose Needham. He was there for several years and became fascinated by the number of inventions claimed by the west that had actually originated in China (including gunpowder and toilet paper).

He set out to write a book about it and got serious about the task when he returned to Cambridge. By the time he died at the age of 94, he was up to Volume 24 of *Science and Civilisation in China* and still not finished.

His wife died when he was 87, whereupon he married his mistress. She died two years later and he proposed to two other ladies who both turned him down.

It was a fascinating read. The eleven page Appendix listing Chinese firsts is in itself amazing.

- Ian Pullar

Credits

My thanks are once again due to Helen; to Graham Bauer who printed this; to the contributors (who made this a bumper edition); to Ajanthi Ranasinghe and Rebecca Wall who made it available to departmental staff; and to Harvey Yates for his cartoon (page 11).

