



PLANNING DEMOCRACY

The Hon. **KELVIN THOMSON** - Convenor Email: **pleasant123@me.com**

CONVENOR'S REPORT No. 25 - APRIL 29 2023

SAVE OUR CANOPY TREES – COMBINED RESIDENTS OF WHITEHORSE ACTION GROUPS (CROWAG)

The Combined Residents of Whitehorse Resident Action Groups (CROWAG) held an excellent "Save Our Canopy Trees" Forum in Nunawading on 1 April. It was extremely well attended – over 100 people were present – and shows the genuine passion residents have for keeping our remaining tree cover.

Keynote speaker Dr Greg Moore said that maintaining tree cover was essential for our health and survival. The increasing heat island effect from the intensification of city and suburban built density is a threat to human health and survival. To be blunt, keeping our tree cover is a matter of life and death.

The meeting passed a number of motions directed at getting the City of Whitehorse to give more weight to the retention of its trees. It also passed a motion calling upon Council to liaise with the other 30 or so Councils that have an Urban Forest Strategy, to get them all to lobby the State Government to have their Urban Forest Strategies incorporated into their respective planning schemes.

This is a significant initiative. At present Urban Forest Strategies are accorded little weight by VCAT. According to the Croydon Conservation Society, Croydon has lost 25-30% of its canopy trees in the last ten years due to infill housing, poor design and developers who want to squeeze out the last dollar from their march across the suburbs. (see <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CroydonConservationSociety/>.) If we are going to stop the relentless destruction of trees on private land, we need Council policies aimed at protecting them to be part of the planning rules.

I encourage resident action groups to lobby their Councils and Councillors, and their State MPs, to have their Urban Forest Strategies incorporated into their respective planning schemes. Let me know how you go.



*This is a
significant
initiative.*

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO PLANNING AND HERITAGE PROTECTIONS

Unfortunately, our Legislative Councillors have so far failed to pick up the baton left to them by the last Parliament, and restart the Inquiry into the adequacy of Planning and Heritage Protections. The Royal Historical Society has reported to me a constructive meeting with David Ettershank MP, (Legalise Cannabis Party), who is the Deputy Chair of the Legislative Council Committee. Dr Helena Bender has reported constructive feedback from Tim Read (Greens).

I encourage resident action groups to lobby State MPs, particularly Legislative Councillors, to get this Inquiry re-established. A lot of great work was done by groups by way of submissions to the last Inquiry, but we need public hearings, and clear and sharp recommendations, to result from this. The need for this Inquiry to re-commence is even greater, given noises that the State Government is looking to give property developers an even freer hand than they enjoy already.

MELBOURNE TO GET DENSER

The Victorian Government is apparently working on plans to squeeze a million extra houses into existing Melbourne suburbs by 2050. Such a policy was not mentioned prior to the last election, and has no mandate. It has the enthusiastic support of the Property Council, but not of ordinary Melbournians, who know perfectly well that a million extra dwellings in existing suburbs will make our suburbs hotter, more congested, and less liveable. The Age reported one senior government insider saying "The government does not have a social licence for a higher-density city".

The Premier recently said that "Every day, we're a day closer to being Australia's biggest city, every day it's getting harder, particularly for young people, to either find a place to rent, let alone to save up and to be able to afford to buy a property and then, and then perhaps buy that property in a suburb of their choice".

This is indeed a serious problem, especially for young people. But increasing the number of dwellings on a fixed piece of land makes the land more expensive, and because the cost of land is a major driver of housing affordability, it makes housing less affordable than it used to be. This is not only a question of logic; it is also borne out by experience. The denser Melbourne has become, the less affordable it has become. The same thing is true of large dense cities around the world.

The State Government's plans apparently will involve a further reduction in the power of local Councils. This is bad. Local residents are entitled to a say in planning matters. Public confidence in democracy and political leaders is in decline. Taking away people's rights fosters cynicism and apathy, and creates a potent breeding ground for undemocratic demagogues, as we have seen in the United States.

Kevin Poulter, President of the Save Kingswood Group, points out that the Victorian Planning Authority says about itself that "It is the VPA's main task to make sure Melbourne and Victoria's regions remain great places to live". He says this is not what is happening in his area.

The Federal, State and local governments should all get off the "growth and development at any cost" wagon. It is delivering unaffordable housing, traffic congestion, declining open space and biodiversity, and a poorer quality of life for both us and for future generations.



PLANNING DEMOCRACY

Let me know if your group is doing something, or something is happening in your neighbourhood, that we all should be aware of.
Email: pleasant123@me.com

VALE BARRY HUMPHRIES



Barry Humphries was a comic genius who entertained generations of Australians and other people right around the world. He had an unmatched gift for satire, and made us laugh at ourselves, which is a good and desirable thing. If some of our world leaders took themselves a little less seriously, the world would be a happier and safer place. I always thought his satire of Melbourne suburbia, expressed through the musings of a Moonee Ponds housewife, was done with affection rather than malice. Melbourne suburbia has a lot going for it.

Indeed, Barry Humphries played an important role in the formation of Planning Backlash, the forerunner of Planning Democracy. When Mary Drost OAM organised a large rally on the steps of Parliament House to protest the overdevelopment of Camberwell Railway Station, her two celebrity speakers were Geoffrey Rush and Barry Humphries. They urged her not to limit her activism to the Camberwell Railway Station. They said there was a need to push back against overdevelopment right across metropolitan Melbourne. So, Mary established Planning Backlash.

For that, and for so much else besides, we are all in Barry Humphries debt.

Annette Cooper had a timely letter published in The Age, saying we should not be allowing "Rotherwood", on Riversdale Road, Camberwell, to be demolished. Rotherwood was built by Barry Humphries' father in the 1930s. It has nine units, off street parking, and a large established garden.

FITZROY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION PUBTALK MONDAY 8 MAY

I will be the guest speaker at the next Fitzroy Residents Association PubTalk, on Monday 8 May. I will be talking about the work of Planning Democracy, and the need to give residents a say in planning issues. The PubTalk will be at The Stone Hotel, between 6pm and 8pm. There is a \$20 cost which includes light snacks. Drinks are at bar prices.

Bookings are essential, through Eventbrite or the Fitzroy Residents Association.

Rally to "Stop the Great Wall"



Mistakes have been made in the past with overwhelming structures that have prevented us from making the most of our unique waterfront location. Are we about to make mistakes on an even grander scale by allowing far higher, view blocking and amenity robbing towers of 12, 14, 16 storeys in the Waterfront Precinct?

Join us!

Please come along to hear recognised authorities including planning experts Prof. Michael Buxton RMIT Emeritus Professor of Environment & Planning and The Hon. Kelvin Thomson Convenor of Planning Democracy speak on future plans for Frankston. Bring placards and signs to let Council know that we say "NO" to current proposals to allow excessive heights at the waterfront. We need instead a plan to showcase our greatest natural assets – the beach, waterway and prized views



Sat 13 May 2023, 10.30am

Corner of Wells Street and Kananook Creek Frankston

Follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/stopthegreatwall> or reach out to us at stopthegreatwall@gmail.com for more information.



STOP THE GREAT WALL OF FRANKSTON RALLY SATURDAY 13 MAY

I will also be speaking, together with Professor Michael Buxton, at a rally by Stop the Great Wall campaigners in Frankston. The rally will be on Saturday 13 May, from 10.30am, outside the South East Water high rise, 101 Wells St Frankston, corner of Wells St and Kananook Creek bridge (more details available from Stop the Great Wall of Frankston).

The Frankston Metro Activity Centre Structure Plan, which has been in draft since 2015 (!), will come before Council in June for adoption. Residents are concerned that it does not have mandatory height limits for buildings close to the foreshore, unlike other municipalities around Port Phillip Bay. Unless it contains mandatory height limits, the Frankston foreshore is destined to become a wall of high rise towers - cold, dark, drab and uninviting.

ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING AND CARLTON GARDENS WORLD HERITAGE ENVIRONS AREA

The Friends of Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens (Margaret O'Brien), Walk in St Kilda Road and Environs (Bea McNicholas), Australian Heritage Advocacy Alliance (Jackie Watts) and Protectors of Public Lands (Fiona Bell) have made submissions to the World Heritage Environs Area Strategy Plan for the Buffer Zone. The Victorian Heritage Council is shortly holding hearings concerning the Strategy Plan; this is the last phase in the re-writing process for the Strategy Plan. It is nearly 20 years since the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens were inscribed in the World Heritage list and placed on the National Heritage register. Unfortunately, since that time both the site and the buffer zone have suffered from adverse developments.

Permits given for high rise development in the Buffer Zone have damaged the values of the Royal Exhibition Building. One high rise development is 64 storeys high; unquestionably changing the context of the building. If this sort of thing goes on then over time the value of the site, and the listing, will gradually melt away.

Encouragingly, there are some recommendations in the Draft World Heritage Environs Area Strategy Plan that would help. For example, amending the City of Melbourne and City of Yarra Planning Schemes to remove the distinction between areas of Greater and Lesser sensitivity of the buffer zone.

The site and the buffer zone require new management and protection arrangements which reflect their World Heritage significance. We wish those representing resident groups who present to the forthcoming hearings every success.

BOROONDARA RESIDENTS WIN

Annette Cooper reports that VCAT has upheld Boroondara Council's rejection of a massive proposed development at 64 and 66 Glyndon Road Camberwell. The VCAT member Joel Templar said – *"I find that a lower intensity of development would be necessary under the current planning scheme and physical setting to gain support for a development of this type on this site. Issues such as the level of built form presentation to the street, lack of north facing windows, "designing out" the need for excessive screening of habitable room windows and greater opportunity for canopy trees would need to be addressed. These issues all point to a proposal that is seeking too much of the site and its context"*.

This is a great result for Boroondara residents. As Annette says, the phrase "a proposal seeking too much of the site and its context" is an excellent one, which could be used by objectors in future.

YARRA FLATS PARK ADVENTURE PARK PLAN ABANDONED

Banyule City Council has abandoned plans for a high-ropes obstacle course at Yarra Flats Park in Ivanhoe East from the company Ecoline, following a letter from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrong Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation. The billabong complex at Yarra Flats has been described as

"part of a landscape that for generations has been carefully managed by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrong people".

Banyule Council had previously supported the proposal, despite objections from local environmental groups.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO NATIVE BIRD SHOOTING

The Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting (RVOTDS) are encouraging Victorians to make a submission to the Select Committee on Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements *"Inquiry into Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements"*.

Like the RVOTDS, I made a submission, calling for an end to duck and quail shooting on environmental and animal welfare grounds. I also observed that claimed economic benefits from duck shooting are in fact likely to be negative, due to tourists avoiding areas where duck shooting is happening, and that local residents and landowners are adversely affected – even traumatised – by shooting in their neighbourhood.

You can go on the Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc Facebook page for more information. Submissions are due by May 8, and can be made by emailing nativebirdhunting@parliament.vic.gov.au. Please include your name, address and phone number for verification purposes – contact details won't be published, but your name will be, unless you request that it not be published.

WESTERN PORT WOODLANDS

Anne Heath Mennell reports that the Bass Coast Distinctive Areas and Landscape Hearings have now been held. One critical issue is the future of the Western Port Woodlands, and another is the proposed extension of town boundaries to enable housing developments.

Encouragingly, the Planning Department has acknowledged "the unique, significant and intrinsic biodiversity value of the Western Port Woodlands corridor as a whole, irrespective of land tenure". They also recognised "the potential for cumulative, permanent impacts associated with extractive industries in the region".

Save Western Port Woodlands member Catherine Watson says that the panel has asked various representatives, including those from conservation groups, to meet to see what they can agree on concerning the future of the Woodlands. The panel must submit a written report to the Planning Minister within 40 days of the end of the hearing. There is no timeline for the Minister to make a decision, but one is expected before the end of the year.



FRIENDS OF QUEEN VICTORIA MARKET INC.

QUEEN VICTORIA MARKET AND FOOD SECURITY

The Friends of Queen Victoria Market recently made a significant submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture Inquiry into Food Security.

They point out that food security means access to affordable, quality, food for everybody, and that the Queen Victoria Market (QVM) has been doing this for Melbourne for more than 150 years.

Friends President Mary-Lou Howie has urged both the City of Melbourne and the State Government to acknowledge the role of the Queen Vic in this regard, and to support it. She has called for "a well-managed and rejuvenated QVM, devoid of expensive infrastructure unwanted by the traders", to "continue to play a crucial role in Melbourne's food security".

MINISTERIAL INTERVENTION ON PRESTON MARKET

Planning Minister Sonya Kirkenny has announced that new planning controls, including a Heritage Overlay, will be introduced to "protect Preston Market's heritage and put beyond any doubt the importance of the market to the community".

A precinct-specific Development Plan Overlay will also be introduced. "This will mean that any future development proposal must consider the Heritage Overlay and Development Plan Overlay and show how the market will be protected – so it is preserved for future generations to enjoy".

"Height controls will be specified in line with the Committee's findings that mid-rise development is appropriate".

CAPE PATERSON ON THE WRONG PATH

Cape Paterson resident Dr David Hayward has told the Distinctive Areas and Landscapes Standing Advisory Committee that a plan to double the size of Cape Paterson, by adding 1000 houses, is a mistake. He says the problem started in 2005, when the Bass Coast Shire Council identified Cape Paterson for future urban expansion in its Bass Coast Coastal Planning Framework. The problem was compounded in May 2011 when then State Planning Minister Matthew Guy gave a green light to the Cape Paterson Ecovillage (George Orwell would have loved that word) project, against the advice of an independent planning panel. The "Ecovillage" amounts to linear urban sprawl along the coastal edge, which the Coastal Spaces Landscape Assessment Study of 2006 recommended against.

Professor Hayward says these mistakes should not be compounded by permitting further expansion of Cape Paterson. He says the fragile marine and coastal environment, and significant landscapes of the area adjoining Bunurong Marine and Coastal Park, are more important than residential development. "It won't provide affordable housing, it's not a solution for social housing, with no services or transport available, it doesn't offer long-term rentals, and it's not going to add to the diversity of housing stock..." He said opening up residential development to the north would result in overdevelopment of the town and a serious threat to the environment, especially from stormwater runoff.

BUILDING ON FLOODPLAINS – A CAUTIONARY TALE FROM THE MARIBYRNONG

Developers want to be able to build anywhere, including on areas subject to flooding. The Age has reported that elderly residents were left homeless after the Maribyrnong River flood in October last year inundated retirement village homes built on land previously considered flood prone.

A planning rules amendment requested in July 2015 proposed to increase the amount of designated flood-prone land over the riverside development. But the developer Tigcorp, which owns Avondale Heights retirement village Rivervue, argued that the flood boundary should be altered because of flood mitigation earthworks which had been undertaken. Melbourne Water then agreed to reduce the size of the flood overlay, and allow Tigcorp to build on all of its unit development sites. Had Melbourne Water's original proposal stuck, homes flooded in October might never have been built.

It is a cautionary tale. It needs to be borne in mind in locations like Kingswood Golf Course, which is the subject of a bid by Australian Super for a massive residential development. Kevin Poulter, President of Save Kingswood Group Inc., has warned that constructing buildings on the Kingswood Dingley Village flood plain is a recipe for inundating Dingley Village and downstream residents, just as Maribyrnong River residents have experienced.

THE RIGHT TO SUNLIGHT

The April edition of Planning News carries an article by Justin de Giulio commenting on the decision by Merri-bek Council to reject a 7 storey apartment building application in Dods Street Brunswick, on the grounds that it interfered with access to sunlight for their neighbours, which Council described as a human right.

The article observes that access to sunlight is a crucial component of human health and well-being, providing us with Vitamin D and improving our mood and mental health. Sunlight can help regulate the circadian rhythms of individuals with autism, which can improve sleep patterns and reduce daytime drowsiness. It says that the issue of access to sunlight is becoming increasingly important in land use planning, particularly in urban areas, where high-density developments are becoming more common. Thanks to Michael Petit, Protectors of Public Lands Secretary and Dods St resident, for this article.

SAVE COBURG HERITAGE SHOPS

The Coburg Historical Society has created a petition to foster awareness of the lack of protection for the heritage shopfronts of Coburg. It has posted Save Coburg Heritage Shops on Change.org. The link is <https://chng.it/GWqgDHhX>.

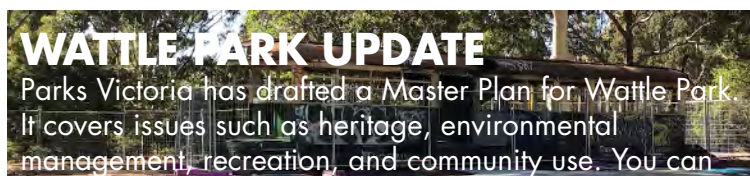
A development application for 477 Sydney Road has highlighted the precarious nature of Coburg's streetscape. The application seeks the complete demolition of an early twentieth century building that for many years functioned as a shoe shop and later as a bank branch.

Plans show a new structure of seven levels containing 20 "apartments" and a downstairs eatery. No provision has been made for the building to blend in with the surrounding area, no provision has been made for green space, and there is no provision for parking. Commercial, retail and industrial buildings from the past are important, just like residential ones, and can have heritage significance.

They are a form of community memory and deserve to be safeguarded.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

I attended, together with Brian Duggan, a Forum organised by the Accountability Round Table, Transparency International and the Open Government Partnership at the Multicultural Hub, Elizabeth St CBD, on 18 April. I raised the issue of government agencies like the Level Crossing Removal Authority hiding behind spurious grounds such as "Commercial in Confidence", to deny citizens the right to see the information on which government decisions are said to be based. Brian has the support of the Victorian Information Commissioner in his bid to see LXRA information, but the LXRA has appealed the Information Commissioner's decision to VCAT.



WATTLE PARK UPDATE

Parks Victoria has drafted a Master Plan for Wattle Park. It covers issues such as heritage, environmental management, recreation, and community use. You can visit the Engage Victoria website to read the draft Master Plan and respond to it.

Drop in events will be held at Wattle Park Chalet on Saturday 6 May between 10.30 am and 12.30pm, and Thursday 11 May between 4pm and 6pm. There is also an online presentation hosted on Microsoft Teams on Thursday 4 May from 10 am to 11.30am. For the record, I am not a fan of "drop in" and on line consultation arrangements, which are inferior to and less accountable than old-fashioned public meetings, where residents could both learn more, and have a better chance to make their views heard.

Local residents say the Master Plan should have been done before Parks Victoria spent over \$5 million on controversial playscape, lighting and cycleway works. They are urging Parks Victoria to restore the heritage protected Lily Pond and Fountain area, which has been allowed to deteriorate.

PARKS VICTORIA LAND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Parks Victoria's first Land management Strategy has been approved and published. You can view the Strategy at www.parks.vic.gov.au/land-management/land-management-strategy.

COMMONWEALTH BANK FAWKNER BRANCH CLOSURE

The Fawkner Residents Association is campaigning to save the Bonwick St Fawkner Branch, which the Commonwealth Bank has announced it will close. The closure would leave many Fawkner residents in a financial services vacuum – there are no other banks with branches in Fawkner. Local resident Hassan Gul and MP Kathleen Mathews-Ward are supporting a petition to keep the bank.

Fawkner Residents Association President Joe Perri says the words of the Bank's 2022 Annual Report, that "We want to create products and services for all our customers – from people with disability and those who are older, to those in remote areas and multicultural communities", ring hollow in the light of the planned closure.

BOROONDARA NORTHERN CYCLEWAY

Ian Hundley has written to Boroondara residents opposing the Council's proposed Northern Cycleway. He says Council has constructed a 3 metre wide corridor in Hays Paddock, and intends to double the width of the current path in Jacka Reserve, and construct a 3 metre wide corridor through Gordon Barnard Reserve and through Macleay and Myrtle Parks.

He believes Council also intends make changes in Hislop Park and Stradbroke Park to create a full cycleway linking Boroondara Parks to the Principal Bicycle Network along the Eastern Freeway. He says this would attract many more cyclists, travelling at speed, and lead to the permanent loss of these parks as safe and attractive places in which to walk and relax.

He is urging concerned residents to contact Boroondara Councillors.

KILMORE UPDATE

Mitchell Shire has formally issued a refusal to remove the reserve status from the land at East Street.

Its grounds are that the applicant has not satisfied Council that the land need not be used for the purpose for which the land is currently reserved or used, the applicant has not provided any information in relation to the likely future use or development of the land, and the removal of the reserve designation is not justified at this time.

The Kilmore Racing Club, via Ethos Urban, has appealed the decision to VCAT.

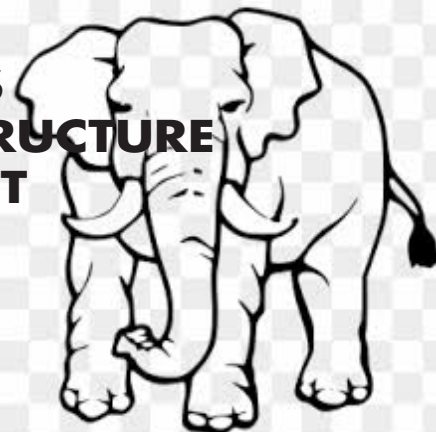
Mitchell Shire has carried a recission motion, after approving a Planning Permit Application PLP99/22 for development of land at 33 George St Kilmore for multiple dwellings. This leaves the status of the approval in doubt, and Council's next steps are unclear.

RYMAN HEALTH LIONSVILLE SITE

I participated in an online consultation meeting held by Moonee Valley Council into the application by Ryman Health for a five storey tower residential apartment complex in Essendon, on land bordered by Moonee Ponds Creek and Five Mile Creek. It is on the old Lionsville retirement home site, on the corner of Pascoe Vale Rd and Moreland Rd Essendon.

The Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek and local residents are opposing the development, on the grounds that it is too big, that it will reduce the amenity of the Moonee Ponds Creek through overshadowing, and that it is too close to the creek, which needs more open space. The site adjoins Merri-bek Council, which has voted unanimously to oppose the application. The site was largely Crown Land, was purchased by the Lionsville charity for about \$11 million and sold last April to Ryman Health for about \$25.9 million, according to a report in the Herald Sun. The Herald-Sun reported a local resident querying the transactions – "Public land has ended up with a foreign company and there's been no process and no consultation".

MEDIA IGNORES INFRASTRUCTURE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM



Several weeks ago, the media ruthlessly attacked the Federal Inland Rail Project, after an independent review found that its cost had blown out to \$31.4 billion, compared with an estimated \$16.4 billion in 2020. Fair enough I guess, though if you've tried to build a side fence recently you will know that tradies are a lot more expensive than they used to be.

But if the Inland Rail Project is fair game, what about the Suburban Rail Loop? As Macrobusiness points out, it has blown out from the original estimate of \$50 billion to be now \$200 billion. The withering critique of the Inland Rail Project could equally be applied to the Suburban Rail Project, which was not submitted to Infrastructure Australia, Infrastructure Victoria, or the Transport Department before its announcement.

COMING EVENTS

**Glenbervie Stationeers Planting Day,
Sunday 30 April,
10am- 12.30pm,**

Glenbervie Station,
Glass St and Napier St Essendon.
Bring a hat, water, and strong shoes. Gloves, safety vest provided.

**WAR ON PLASTIC
Sunday 7 May,
10am till 11.30 am,**

Community Clean Up, Five Mile Creek Essendon,
meet at end of Government Rd.
*Bring strong footwear, hat and water. Gloves, pickers and
bags provided.*

**Fitzroy Residents Association PubTalk.
Monday 8 May,
6pm to 8pm,**

Guest Speaker Kelvin Thomson.
The Stone Hotel.
\$20 cost includes light snacks, drinks at bar prices.
Bookings essential. Eventbrite.

**Rally to Stop the Great Wall of Frankston
Saturday May 13,
10.30am,**

Corner of Wells St and Kananook Creek bridge.
Speakers include Michael Buxton and Kelvin Thomson.

**National Trust's Botanica Festival
Sunday May 14, 10am – 3pm,
Rippon Lea Estate.**

**Now until 18 May – Australian Heritage Festival. For event details and to
book, see the National Trust website.**

**Now until October – “Tours de Force – Entertainers on the Front Line”, an
exhibition at the Shrine of Remembrance, Birdwood Avenue and St Kilda
Road Melbourne.**

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That's all folks, till next time. Keep up the good work!

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