Retired Telecommunications Employees Association

## **RTEA NEWSLETTER**

## **Welcome to your Newsletter**

John Lane Welcome to your November 2023 newsletter, our last newsletter for the year. Looking back on the year, I think you could say this has been the first full year close to normal after the COVID-19

pandemic. It is heartening to see us adapt and thrive. I understand that COVID is still around and does affect our members. Joan and I had a recent infection. Be mindful of this and take the necessary precautions to avoid infection, especially if you have a compromised immune system.

I want to thank this year's committee for their tireless efforts. I anticipate that some of the current committee members may like to pass the baton. Therefore, more than ever, we will need fresh faces on our committee. New faces will invigorate our Association. I especially encourage country members to consider joining us on the committee. Do not worry about physically being at our committee meeting; Zoom video conference makes participation easy. Feel free to reach out for more information.

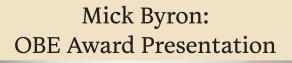
The committee meets once a month (second Thursday). I will be pleased to hear from you if you need more information about the committee.

I would like to thank the Petersham RSL for their ongoing support, especially when we hold our monthly meetings and Christmas Party. We had to move from the Financial Sector Union's building after they left their premises in the city. At the time, we were considering the prospect of hiring a venue, a costly item for the Association. Fortunately, Petersham RSL came to the rescue. It has proved to be a great venue, and after the meeting, members can enjoy a meal and drink together.

#### A CATCH UP

Last month, I wrote about our trip away to Merimbula. I overlooked mentioning how pleased I was to catch up with Ashley Fleming, a former workmate. Ashley followed our itinerary and was able to join us at one of our lunch venues. Bruce Coxall and I knew Ashley from our days at Redfern.

**Continued on next page** 



**NOVEMBER 2023** 

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I would like to share the cover page of the newsletter, letting you know that the Retired Telecommunications Employees Association awarded an "Over Bloody Eighty" award to an exceptional member, Mick Byron.

Members would know Mick from our annual trips away, and he is regular at our monthly general meetings. Mick is from Wagga. Over the years, we have valued and enjoyed his company. I had the honour of making the award to Mick at Merimbula during our trip away. I am confident all members will join me in congratulating Mick Byron.



Last Newsletter for 2023



Back in February 2024

## Welcome to your Newsletter (Cont'd)

Ashley would have left the job in the early 1970s; you can imagine how pleased we both were to see him once again.

#### **CWU NSW BRANCH CLOSURE**

I attended a fine luncheon with several other RTEA members to mark the closure of the CWU NSW Branch of our Union. The Branch is amalgamating with the Victorian Branch. Lee Walkington (an RTEA member) had an excellent idea for the lunch. While it was good to see fellow Union members, At times, I found the occasion sad. In its heyday, the NSW Branch comprised 40% of the national membership.

Despite the sadness, We had a great time remembering the good old days when our Union was an industrial force and a strong voice in how our workplaces should function and the hard-won gains for better pay and conditions. Well done, Lee; everyone appreciated the special day. Best wishes for the success of the new amalgamated NSW and Victorian Branch.

#### YEAR AHEAD

We introduced Zoom during the pandemic to stay in touch with members. The committee has decided to continue with Zoom as it was proving worthwhile, allowing more involvement, particularly for our country membership and those unable to travel to the meetings. While the Zoom coverage is not always perfect, we are committed to enhancing this experience. We have introduced multiple cameras. Please let us know if you have attended a Zoom meeting and got suggestions. We want to hear them! Our general meetings have proven particularly popular when we have guest speakers; we notice the attendance increase. This year, we had guests from the *Stroke Foundation, speakers discussing Wills and Services for the aged, Seniors Rights, "Doctors without Borders", and the NRMA*. I fear I may have omitted a couple. The committee will endeavour to have guest speakers at our general meetings throughout 2024.

Our monthly social functions are an essential part of our Association's activities. We were off to a great start with our historical Hawkesbury River ferry trip; we came close to fully booked. The good news is that we are planning a similar historical ferry trip early in 2024. It will be in a different location and cover a different historical topic—more news in early 2024.

The committee typically decides on its social calendar at its planning meeting in late January. If you may have a suggestion, please let us know. **Tip: our members like history.** 

I wish every one of you and your family a happy and safe Christmas and New Year. Please stay safe and well. I look forward to seeing you at our Christmas Party.

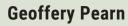


Trevor Anderson, John Bryce, Allan Fairbairn, Steve Flynn, Bob Hamblion, Vince Haywood, Terry Livingstone, John McAuliffe, Arthur McCarroll, Paul Rewhorn, Barry Robinson, Garry Masman, Ron Milosh, Warren Morley.











The Retired Telecommunications Employees Association is sad to advise members that Geoffery Pearn passed away on Saturday, 28TH October 2023. Geoff was 79 and would have turned 80 on the 3<sup>RD</sup> of December. A funeral service for Geoff was on the 13TH November, 2023, at Pinegrove Memorial Park, Minchinbury.

Geoff was a member of our Association for over eight years.

Geoff joined the PMG in 1959 at the age of sixteen.

Geoff worked at the Homebush SDC on subscriber maintenance and later at Bankstown. Geoff finished his career at Penrith with subscriber maintenance. He retired in a leadership role in 1998 after 39 years of service.

Geoff enjoyed his music, a lifelong passion. He was a keen supporter and follower of rugby league. He played in the API competition around the late 60s and early 70s. During the API competition, Geoff became good friends with Bob Clifford and John Davidson. He followed Manly, having season tickets for ten years. For 20 years, Geoff volunteered with the Brothers Penrith Junior Rugby League Club—the club awarded Geoff life membership in 2013.

Geoff was married to Pamela and Kristina. Sadly, Pamela and Kristina pre-deceased him. Geoff had five children: Jason, Justin, Nicole, Naomi with his wife Pamela and son Andrew with Kris. Geoff also had thirteen grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Geoff was a devoted husband and father. The family's favourite pastime was the Sunday trips to places around Sydney. He enjoyed the tram and train museums, the Blue Mountains, and the beaches at Thirroul and Stanwell Park, to name a few. Then, there was the annual two-week holiday to Burleigh Heads on the Gold Coast; the family took during the 1980s.

The Retired Telecommunications Employees Association extends its condolences to Geoff's children, other family members, and former workmates.



RSVP

MONDAY, 20TH

RTEA Christma

## 12 pm, Thursday, 30<sup>TH</sup> November 2023

This year, our Christmas lunch at the Petersham RSL. is an excellent opportunity to catch up with fellow members over a three-course lunch. The cost is \$60 (cheaper than last year and more courses).

Petersham RSL Club - 301 Trafalgar Street, just a 200m easy walk from Petersham Railway Station platform, parallel to the railway. Please note that there is now a lift at Petersham Station.

An electronic payment accepted (see below for details). The cost is \$60 per person. Once you have made your payment, please remember to text or email John Lane to let him know the number of guests accompanying you to the lunch.

The preference is for you to pay via Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). When using EFT, type your surname in the details. If EFT is unavailable to you, please pay at our General Meeting or post your cheque to Alan Bassman, Treasurer (see page 2 of the newsletter for Alan's address).

Please make the cheque payable:

"Retired Telecommunications Employees Association". Great Southern Bank - BSB 814-282 -eSaver Account No: 10642769

## **1958 Technician in Training** 66<sup>TH</sup> Year - Annual Reunion

### **Petersham RSL, Thursday - 11th January, 2024** Meet at 11 am for lunch

The RSL address is 301 Trafalgar Street, just a 200m easy walk from Petersham Railway Station platform, parallel to the railway.

If you have any further enquires , please contact Arthur McCarroll: Ph. 0409127051 or email: arthurmccarroll@bigpond.com







#### Robert (Chalky) Neville White

The Retired Telecommunications Employees Association is sad to advise members of the recent passing of Robert Neville White. Robert was known as Chalky to his workmates. Robert passed away peacefully on Thursday, 2nd November 2023.

A funeral service was held for Robert at the Richmond Chapel, Parkview Funeral Home, Ballina, on Tuesday, 14th November 2023.

Robert was a much-loved partner to Christine, father, father-in-law, stepfather, poppy and uncle.

Robert was born on the 20th of July 1946. Robert commenced with the PMG on the 20th of January 1964. He spent much of his working life on Country Installation in NSW and in the Training School. He also served two years of National Service in the Signals Corps.

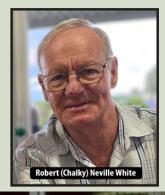
He was a member of our Association, joining in 2004.

The Retired Telecommunications Employees Association extends its condolences to Robert's partner Christine, children, extended family, and his many workmates.

#### Tribute:

I worked with Chalky as Instructors at the Training School, went camping, off shore fishing and enjoyed the odd and even drink of pure blonde beer with him and Agnes. A great friend and mate. Bye Chalk

#### Barry (Robbo) Robinson

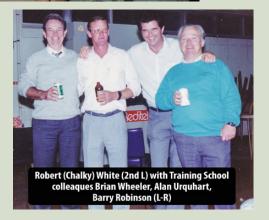




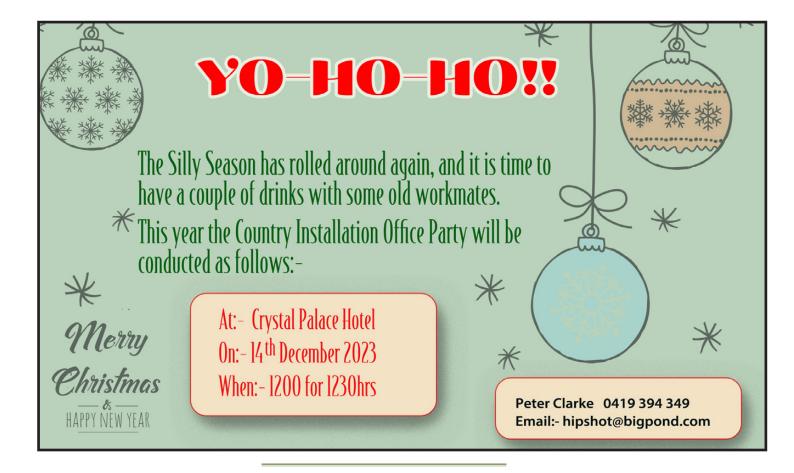
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Robert (Chalky) Neville White with Dennis Richardson ( Departed RTEA Member)







# TRUNK SERVICE Christmas Reunion Lunch

Greetings, former colleagues from Trunk Service! We invite you to join us for a Christmas lunch at the Combined Services Club (7 Barrack Street, Sydney), on Thursday, 14<sup>th</sup> December, starting at 12 p.m.

#### For further details contact:

Tod Mirgis Warwick Brodsky 02 99391935 0412729051



## GUIDELINES FOR SAFE ONLINE PURCHASES

The "Guidelines for Safe Online Purchases" article aims to inform members, especially those new to online shopping, on how to make secure purchases online, particularly during Christmas. The document highlights the increased risks of scams during this period and offers practical advice to help you avoid being scam victims.

The Christmas season is fast approaching; soon, you will be thinking about purchasing gifts. More than before, people shop online to save time and avoid crowds.

Many members are probably new to online purchases, and unfortunately, many scammers out there will catch those unaware. Hopefully, this article will increase your awareness about scams.

I have included several checkpoints for you to be aware of when dealing online or when you receive an email or text message. Most of the checkpoints come from the Australian Cyber Security Centre.

As well as reading through the checkpoints, I want to make an important point. The point is not to be rushed or panicked into responding to an email or text message. For example, a message may claim to come from, for instance, the Taxation Office or an online store wanting you to verify a purchase (you know you did not make) or for you to provide your personal information. Their message may inform you that you need to take immediate action. The message will be worded in a manner that wants to rush or panic you into a reply.

Most important, do not click on their message's link. Instead, make your own direct contact with sender mentioned in the email. If you prefer not use the telephone instead message or log in. Go to your contacts or records and type in the other party's email address. If you need to go to their website, again type in the address and log-in from there. Do not rely on message links.



The general precautions are:

#### **Check Prices and Store Policies:**

If an online store offers very low prices and lacks clear policies on delivery and returns, it might be a scam.

#### Safe Payment Methods:

Use secure payment options like PayPal or a credit card, preferably with a low credit or transaction limit, to protect your money while you shop online.

#### Ignore Suspicious Contacts:

If you receive unexpected messages or calls about an order, especially asking for personal information, it's likely a scam. Always verify through the store's official website.

#### Avoid Clicking on Unknown Links:

Do not click on links in unexpected delivery messages, as they might be fake and harmful. Contact the seller or courier directly for information.

#### Limit Personal Information Sharing:

Only provide necessary personal information on websites and question if extra details are needed for your purchase.

#### Beware of Fake Company Representatives:

If someone claiming to be from a well-known company asks for your personal or financial information, it is probably a scam. Most reputable companies will ask you to log-in to their website; they never provide a link for this purpose.

**Email Scam Awareness:** Be cautious of emails that look like they're from a big company, asking you to click on a link or attachment to update your account – these are often tricks to steal your information. Again, reputable companies will not provide a link within their message. They expect you to go to their website address.

**Membership Fee Scams:** If you get a call or message about a membership fee or problem you do not recognise, do not give out your payment details; it is likely a scam.



## FROM TELEGRAPH TO TELEPHONE

Paul Rewhorn

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In this month's newsletter, I would like to return to writing a further article about Australia's telecommunications history. I have probably mentioned before that the Australian National Museum has rebuffed our Association's proposal for the museum to have an exhibition showing how telecommunications transformed our nation.

Australia is spread over a vast geographic area, created what is termed *"the tyranny of distance"*. People have been living in Australia for at least 60,000 years. They relied on non-technological means through word of mouth, meetings and corroborees. Over longer distances, there was the horse, then trains and ships to send a written letter. Notice I said to send messages; they may have to wait weeks or months for a reply; in the mid-1800s, that began to change with the introduction of the telegraph. Better communications would be essential if a new nation were to succeed, with populations spread far apart.

While the various Australian colonies did some things like not having a standard rail gauge, they did see early the opportunities that telecommunications offered. The Australian colonies were early adopters of the telegraph and, later, the telephony. If the colonies had ignored or delayed the introduction of telegraphy and telephony, Australia's place in today's world economies might have been much different.

Before mentioning the introduction of telephony, perhaps a short review of the telegraph network just two years before the introduction of telephony, in 1859, telegraph cables linked Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Tasmania. Then, by the mid-1860s, regional centres in southeast Australia were part of this new telecommunications network.

The Australian continent became linked with the rest of the world after the completion of the overland telegraph between Adelaide and Darwin. In the nineteenth century's final years, Australians were sending more telegraphs per capita than the rest of the world. This month's article continues the evolution of telecommunications in Australia. We move on from the telegraphy era to telephony communications. The Australian colonies had been enthusiastic, wasting no time adopting and deploying telegraph communications. Two years before telephony's introduction, telegraph lines had linked all the colonies' capitals and major regional centres. At the end of the nineteenth century, Australians were sending more telegraphs per capita than any other nation.

Telegraphy and telephony were instrumental in overcoming the challenges posed by Australia's vast size. This technological leap significantly influenced the nation's development and position in the global economy, because of the transformative power of telecommunications.

The narrative delves into the introduction of telephony in Australia, highlighting the contributions of key figures such as Alexander Graham Bell and Almon Brown Strowger. There is Strowger's invention of the automatic telephone exchange and the rotary dial system. Additionally, the document discusses the role of Henry Sutton, an Australian inventor from Ballarat, who significantly contributed to the development of telephony in Australia and internationally.

Sutton's legacy is a testament to the innovative spirit that drove the early years of telegraphy and telephony in Australia.

#### **ENTER TELEPHONY**

Ten years after the construction of the overland telegraph, Sydney had its first public telephone exchange. As demand grew, more local telephone exchanges were built, and by 1900, there were 30,000 exchanges located around the country.

I do not intend to write about telephony much beyond the 1880s in this article. Instead, I want to start with Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone in 1876 and Almon Brown Strowger's invention of the electromechanical switch and rotary dial. Then, about an Australian or, more precisely, a Victorian named Henry Sutton (I refer to him as a Victorian as the federation did not occur until 1901).



## FROM TELEGRAPH TO TELEPHONE (cont'd)

Few Australians know about Henry Sutton unless they had lived at some stage in Ballarat. We have to thank our historians and museums for this disillusioning situation. It seems that compared with the Victa lawn mower, all of Australia's other achievements pale into insignificance.

Henry Sutton did not simply follow in Alexander Graham Bell's footsteps. He was indeed an equal and partner of Alexander Graham Bell.

More about Henry Sutton later; first, I would like to talk about a paranoid undertaker.

#### THE PARANOID MORTICIAN

You probably have heard of the expression "*necessity is the mother of invention*", implying that a problem

or need will encourage efforts to overcome or solve the problem. The expression suggests if there had not been a need or problem in the first place, there would be no subsequent invention. This introduces us to Almon Strowger, who invented the automatic telephone exchange to ensure fair and unbiased routing of telephone calls for his business.



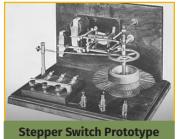
Almon Strowger

Strowger lived in Kanas City in the US state of Missouri in 1878. He was a former teacher turned mortician. You could describe Strowger as a paranoid and cantankerous person. Strowger had a strong suspicion that a telephone switchboard operator, was diverting business calls meant for him to her husband, also a mortician.

Strowger had decided on two actions to remedy the problem. First, he would contact the local Bell Company business office to rid himself of the switchboard operator. Second, he would change the telephone system by inventing a telephone switching system that would allow subscribers to call each other without the need for a telephone switchboard operator. Strowger complained about his service to the local Bell Telephone office, which dispatched a repairman named Herman Ritterhoff. Ritterhoff soon found the problem; it was not the competitor's wife. Instead, it was a sign just inside Strowger's premises. When someone opened the front door, it would allow the wind to move the sign bringing it into contact and disconnecting his telephone's wiring.

Strowger had already embarked on his second course of action. Strowger took the opportunity to show Ritterhoff his *prototype stepper switch*. He even

offered Ritterhoff the opportunity to buy shares in his invention. When Strowger showed Ritterhoff his prototype, Ritterhoff immediately laughed aloud. An offended Strowger ordered Ritterhoff to vacate his premises.



Strowger, like his brothers, started inventing from an early age. When their mother gave them a task, they would develop a device to complete the task without the later need for them to carryout the task.

Strowger, in 1891, teamed up with brothers John and Charles Ericson, Alexander Charles and Frank Lundquist. They formed the **"Strowger Automatic Telephone Company"**, later known as the **"Automatic Electric Company"**. They installed the first automatic exchange with 75 subscribers in Indiana in 1892.

For an automatic exchange to function, you needed a number selector device on the subscriber's telephone. At that time, subscribers' phone numbers comprised of just four digits. The number key device had four buttons for the thousands, hundreds, tens and units. The first button was to enter the first number of other subscriber's thousand's number. For example, if the thousand's number was six, the caller would press the first button six times; they then had to repeat doing the same the other buttons associated with the hundreds, tens and units, comprising the called party's number. Obviously, these early subscribers would dial frequent wrong numbers not mention their frustration.



### **FROM TELEGRAPH TO TELEPHONE (cont'd)**

A few years later, Frank Lundquist invented the rotary dial. The rotary dial was to remain in operation up until the 1970s.

Strowger sold his shares in the company early on for \$300,000 in today's money. The Bell Telephone Company later purchased the company for \$2.5 million in today's money. Years later, Ritterhoff remarked that his laugher at Stowger's prototype had cost him a fortune.

#### **BACK IN AUSTRALIA**

As I mentioned, Australians were early adopters of telecommunications, like the telegraph. Within two years of Bell exhibiting the telephone in 1876 at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, telephones appeared in Australia.

Australia launched its first telephone service in 1879, two years after its invention. The telephone service connected Melbourne and South Melbourne to the offices of Robinson Brothers, a Melbourne engineering firm.

Later, the *Melbourne Telephone Exchange Company*, a privately operated company, opened Australia's first telephone exchange in August 1880. Subscribers made nearly 8000 calls in 1884.

By 1911, there were 100,000 telephones in Australia, a threefold increase since the federation. The first automated telephone exchange opened in Geelong in 1912. Two years later, an automated telephone exchange opened at Newtown.



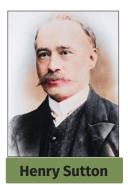
**Early Strowger Uniselector** 

Australians took up telephony and actively improved the telephone, as we will read later.

#### **HENRY SUTTON**

While researching the introduction of telephony here in Australia, I learned of Henry Sutton, a fascinating character from Ballarat. I doubt whether many Australians would know of Henry Sutton outside of his home town of Ballarat, where they still celebrate him today.

Henry Sutton played a central role in development and the introduction of the new telephone technology in Australia. His engagement with the telephone started soon after Graham Bell announced his invention in 1876. Sutton soon wrote to Alexander Graham Bell, commencing a lifelong personal and professional association between the two men.



Sutton immediately saw the possibilities. He first set up a telephone system between the three floors of the family's Main Road music store. By mid-1877, he had set up a connection between his music stores in Ballarat East and the new store in Ballarat, it became the first telephone system in Australia.

Sutton experimented and devised over twenty telephone models and eventually patented sixteen of them internationally. Among his innovations was the first telephone handset, allowing simultaneous speaking and listening without need to switch the receiver from ear to mouth, as was the case with the Bell telephone design.

Sutton generously shared his knowledge and designs in the hope that they would benefit the advancement of the telephone; he clearly understood its possibilities for future communication. He donated telephones to the Ballarat fire stations, making them the first in Australia with such a system, and he set up a telephone system at the Ballarat School of Mines, the first educational institution with this technology.

Sutton's innovations or inventions went beyond the telephone; he later made more technological contributions, later in his career; perhaps I will write about these in a further article on this Australian innovator.



## **RoboDebt Royal Commission: Reform Implementation**

**Paul Rewhorn** 

RTEA.NET AU

## Over the past two issues of the newsletter, I wrote articles concerning the findings of the Royal Commission's inquiry into the RoboDebt Scheme.

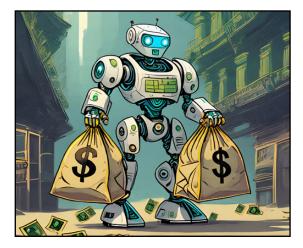
The good news just announced is that the government has agreed to all the recommendations coming from the RoboDebt Royal Commission which made a total of 56 recommendations.

The key recommendations were:

- Enhanced Human Touch: More face-to-face service support options,
- **Empathy in Action:** More social workers,
- Review processes: where decisions have come from automation,
- Independent audits: that come from automated processes.
- Time Cap on Debt: Setting a six-year limit for debts.

The current federal government while announcing the adoption of the Royal Commission's recommentations, stated that the RoboDebt was the most shameful chapter in Australian history, destroying the lives of innocent people.

Attorney General Mark Dreyfus stated that RoboDebt was not an innocent mistake. It was a deliberate, calculated scheme. In essence, people were traumatised on the off chance they might owe money.



Social Services Minister Bill Shorten is spearheading reforms. The federal government had already begun introducing reforms, including hiring additional service workers and ending the use of external deck collectors, a pivot towards a more humane approach.

ROBODEBT WAS THE MOST SHAMEFUL CHAPTER IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY, DESTROYING THE LIVES OF INNOCENT PEOPLE

Finally, I came across an interesting article by Peter Martin from the online publication "The Conversation".

An intriguing aspect of the scheme, as highlighted by *Peter Martin* was the engagement of *"behavioural experts"*. These experts were instrumental in designing the debt notification letters. **Centrelink** wanted recipients to quietly pay up or go online to provide years of back copies of their payslips. Centrelink did not want to have their switchboards jam up, with recipients asking awkward questions.

The "behavioural experts" first design review was the colour schema for the letter that went to receipents demanding payment for the alleged debt. However, in the end, the "behavioural experts" recommended staying with the regular black and white correspondence. You can only speculate how much these "behavioural experts" cost Centrelink and in turn the taxpayer.

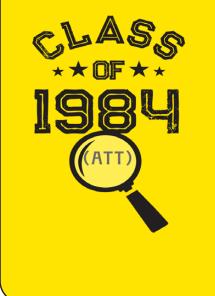
The "behavioural experts" did have one of their recommendations implemented: the omission of a phone contact number in the demand letter. The intention behind hiding the phone number was to force recipients to respond online, leaving those recipients who had no online access or unfamiliar doing online transactions- no place to turn.

In a twist, the Public Service Commissioner is probing the involvement of sixteen public servants in the design and execution of RoboDebt. The investigation could uncover the extent of bureaucratic complicity in the scheme.



		<b>S Historical Association</b> <b>V</b> (THAN Inc.)
	The Telecommunications Historical Association NSW (THAN Inc) operates the Communications Museum, Sydney. We are located at 12 Kitchener Pde, Bankstown for Heritage Telstra Ltd. The Museum is usually open on a Tuesday and Wednesday from 9.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. We are looking for volunteers to assist the Museum in the areas listed below:	
HELP WANTED!	<ul> <li>Administration</li> <li>Documents and Procedure Development</li> <li>Finance</li> <li>Script writer for guided tours</li> <li>Photography for cataloguing</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Web development</li> <li>Tour guide</li> <li>Welder for shelving and crates</li> <li>Library</li> <li>Research - our library, internet and elsewhere</li> </ul>
	if you'd like m contact us at t	ore information, you're welcome to museum@bigpond.net.au. be delighted to hear from you.

APPRENTICE TECHNICIAN, TELECOMMUNICATIONS



I am Greig Sheridan who is trying to contact the 72 ATTS (Apprentice Technicians, Telecommunications) who commenced at North Strathfield on the 31<sup>ST</sup> of January 1984 for a 40<sup>TH</sup> Year reunion in February 2024.

At the moment, we're still in the discovery phase. However, we have marked Saturday, 3RD of February 2024, as the most likely date for a catch-up to be held somewhere in Sydney.

We are using a Facebook group: (https://www.facebook.com/groups/attjanuary1984/) as our primary contact means, and I am also maintaining a separate e-mail list of those who don't use Facebook.

We are also looking for instructors who taught us across North Strathfield, Rhodes and North Sydney training schools.

For more information or if you would like to make contact, you can reach Greig Sheridan on 0402 033 044 or email gs@gisyd.com.