

## Harry Asche's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ATS Presidential Address

Welcome to all ATS members and guests. Today we celebrate 50 years of a Technical Society that represents the Australian Tunnelling Industry, which I believe plays a significant role in improving the lives of all Australians.

Of course, our tunnelling industry goes back much further than 50 years. Water was the original reason for tunnel building and, according to a researcher at UTS, Indigenous Australians dug tunnels to gain access to springs. One of the earliest European tunnels in Australia was Busby's Bore, a sandstone tunnel, dug from Centennial Park swamps to Hyde Park, to improve water supply to the town of Sydney. This was from 1827-1830.

It is an irregular tunnel in terms of size and direction. The reasons were described by a later reporter:

*"Mr Busby's workmen were all gentlemen under permanent engagement to the government. These gentlemen were, in the main, most disagreeable. Mr Busby never cared to go down into the tunnel to direct the work."*

Relations between designers and constructors are always difficult, but I hope they are improving...

A different underground treasure was a major driver for the population in Australia to double in the 1850s as many people came to dig for gold. In WWI, Australians were known as "diggers." Tunnelling is part of our make-up.

As Australian cities grew, water supply, stormwater and wastewater tunnels were needed, and until the invention of the steam shovel, a cubic metre dug underground was not greatly more expensive than one dug out of a trench. Much of our cities' basic infrastructure was tunnelled in the early 20th century, and now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, trenchless technology is again becoming the norm.

In the 1920s, the Bradfield scheme was transformational to Sydney, and while the Sydney Harbour Bridge was the visible sign, the tunnels and underground stations in Sydney were the main drivers of change.

As everybody knows, the post-war era in Australia was crowned by the Snowy scheme, one of a number of hydro schemes in Australia at that time. In the 1960s, hydro work in Tasmania led to the first successful rock TBM at Poatina, involving David Sugden in the development of disk cutters. David is remembered in the ATS with the David Sugden Award. The Poatina TBM excavated 229m in a single week, at that time a world record for tunnelling progress for any size of tunnel.

In 1970, the OECD made a call to nations to start up a tunnel society, and Australia answered the call in 1972, hence our gathering today. In 1974, we had our first Australian Tunnelling Conference. The Melbourne Underground Rail Loop was under construction at that time. One of the key individuals in the Loop, and a driving force behind the ATS at that time was Allen Neyland who is remembered in the ATS for the Allen Neyland Award.

When you get your 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition of the ATS Journal, which is currently being printed and will be sent to all ATS Members shortly, you will be able to track the history of the last 50 years in tunnelling. It is an impressive history, and when you receive your copy, I am sure you will agree that it is a very impressive publication. I want to give a special mention to my predecessors in the role of ATS President, who, with their teams of volunteers, have made the ATS what it is today. Bill Bamford, Allen Neyland, Paul Howlett, Alan Chappel, Allan Henderson, Garry Ash, Peter Kessler, Tony Peach, Simon Knight, Ed Taylor, I hope I haven't left anybody off.

In mentioning the Anniversary Edition of the Journal, I would like to recognise the tremendous amount of work that has gone on for a period of almost a year in compiling this substantial publication marking 50 years of the ATS. Many people have contributed to this effort by either writing articles or researching the history of the organisation, much of which has not been captured in print before. We would not have been able to pull this all together without the expert guidance of Penny Jones, a professional freelance writer and editor, who has guided us through that process. Penny is a guest of

the ATS at our Sydney Function today and I want to offer her our particular thanks for her enthusiasm and tenacity in herding a bunch of tunnellers to create such an enduring record of our 50th Anniversary.

The ATS runs a variety of events for our members. We have regular technical sessions, one day forums, 2-day short courses and 3-day conferences. We hold non-technical networking events, including St Barbara's day celebrations. We want these events to be for our members and our sponsors. Please do not hesitate to contact your local committee if you want to suggest or help with any of these events.

ATS now has geographic chapters in QLD, NSW, VIC, WA, and special interest groups including the Young Members, Diversity in Tunnelling and Tunnel Systems subgroups. We have set up the special interest groups to provide coverage of some important aspects of our industry. Again, if you want to be involved in these, please reach out to your local committee.

Australia is an active participant in the ITA, and as you know, the new ITA President is an Australian. I think this is a good time for us to interact more with ITA. We are also seeking closer interaction with sister organisations. We have strong ties with the NZTS, but we are seeking closer ties with Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, US and the UK.

Before turning to the future, I need to make some acknowledgements.

Firstly, I want to acknowledge ATS volunteers, past and present. Those of you who have been in our chapter committees, our office bearers and who have been in the National Exec. Those of you who we have co-opted to do the things we do. Thank you, for your efforts make our society work.

I want to thank the Platinum Sponsors for their important support, and of course the Gold and Silver Member companies.

Finally, I must acknowledge the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Subcommittee for the work they have done, our chair Charles MacDonald, and his committee.

The future is challenging. We currently face war in the Ukraine, with a threat of nuclear weapons use. We face the challenge of climate change and the over-use of finite resources in the world. We are struggling to concentrate on anything for very long, due to the barrage of distractions designed into our mobile communications devices.

What can we do as ATS members? I haven't got any complete answers to these problems, of course. Not even close. But I believe we do several things already, and perhaps in the future we can put some focus on why we do these things. By providing better transportation, more resilient infrastructure and in the case of hydro and pumped hydro, power sources that do not contribute to conflict, we make our society more resilient and stable. In the same ways, we also help with the transition to a more sustainable future. Finally, by providing quality CPD and networking events where people come together and communicate meaningfully about important ideas, we create an oasis of focus in a world of distraction. Let's talk about this over dinner.

I hope you enjoy these celebrations. You, as a member of the Australian Tunnelling Industry, have a proud history and a bright future. You have the right to celebrate.