



PERRYSCOPE 49

PERRYSCOPE 49, December 2024, is an issue of a personalzine published mostly monthly by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: perry@middlemiss.org
Available for the usual or download at efanazines.com with thanks to Bill Burns, and FANAC.org with thanks to Joe Siclari and Edie Stern. Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me.
Cover photograph by Catherine Middlemiss, Maida Vale, London, September 2024.

INTRODUCTION

As often happens at this time of year I find time getting away from me and myself rushing to get this issue out in the month designated. As usual I tried to set things in motion early, getting the bulk of it completed by mid-December only for Christmas-related activities to come along and throw the schedule out of alignment. You'd think that I'd have learnt by now.

New Year's activities don't normally affect me as I'm not especially interested in staying up until midnight to see in January 1st, though I do admit to doing so to see in the year 2000. And, yes, I am aware that wasn't the start of a new "millennium" or even a new decade, but you have to admit that a year ending in two zeroes doesn't turn up that often. Otherwise, I just find it a bit ho-hum.

I don't look forward to a new year with any great expectations other than thinking it will probably be about the same as the one I've just been through. My 2024 was quite reasonable, thank you. I didn't have any major personal or familial crises or traumas and I had a good holiday in the United Kingdom with the family, with all four of us in London together for a week; something that I really don't expect to happen again.

I will be travelling again in 2025. This time to South America where Robyn and I have long wanted to visit. There will doubtless be more on that in a future issue of **Perryscope**.

And speaking of that, I don't see any change to the publishing schedule moving into 2025. The January issue will feature my Best Books review of 2024, and February will follow with the Best Film and Television; the usual sort of stuff.

I have no major plans for the rest of 2025's issues. I'll just let it flow as seems appropriate at the time. Somehow or other I seem to find things to write about each month and I'll just allow that natural process to continue.

Looking back on the past year I do want to express my gratitude to my regular contributors, Julian Warner and Martin Field. I hope they keep writing for me. Their work certainly interests a number of my correspondents, as it does me.

Thank you also to the others who have written for me, and to all the letter writers who have taken the time to read and reply. Such notes are always appreciated.

Cover notes: Robyn and I standing out the front of "Wymering Mansions" in Maida Vale, London (see my major piece in this issue). Our apartment (or "flat" if you prefer) was the one you can see on the ground floor left. The apartment itself was probably a little smaller than the ones above though being at street level meant that we had access to the garden area at the back of the block. Perfect.

LONDON CALLING by Perry Middlemiss

Sometime back in the mid-1980s I got the thought into my head that I would like to live and work overseas. I have no idea where this notion came from, I had never even travelled outside Australia by that stage of my life. However it was a thought that stayed with me.

I was living in Canberra at the time, trying to both get over the end of a long relationship and work out how I could move to a bigger city. Canberra was doing nothing for me. I was drinking too much, work was tedious and going nowhere, and the city just didn't seem to offer anything that held my interest. I couldn't see any sort of future in the place.

By the end of 1985 I had finally managed a move to Melbourne and two years later I spent three months travelling in the UK and Europe with my then partner, and now wife, Robyn Mills. I'd liked what I'd seen there. I knew some people in London and that seemed to be the best possible destination for me.

The trouble was I didn't know how to arrange it. I was thirty-two by this time, too old for any sort of working-holiday visa as they expired when you hit thirty. I was also stuck in a permanent position, and while I was developing a specific set of IT skills that would be transportable to the UK I thought I would probably need to have some contracting experience of short term project work to set myself up properly. My difficulty was that I didn't know anyone who had done or was doing this. It was something that I was going to have to work out for myself.

The first big push came when I returned from my long holiday in December 1987, walked into work on my first day back and quickly realised that none of my work had been looked at while I was away. It was all in exactly the same situation as when I left. The implications were clear.

It was also becoming evident that the Australian Public Service Department, for which I worked, was planning to move its operations, and its personnel, from Melbourne to Canberra. There was no way I wanted to be a part of that. I liked living in Melbourne, and I wanted to stay there long-term. Remote working was not an option back then. And I had no intention of going back to a city I had worked hard at trying to leave.

So I started looking around for alternative work, contract work, at the start of 1988. By the end of February, in fact the 29th February 1988, I was employed on a 6-month contract at the Australian Wheat Board. And there I met someone who was doing exactly what I wanted to do, but in the opposite direction.

John Basevi was a British computer programmer, with a similar skill-set to mine, who had decided to live and work in Australia for a year or so. He had the advantage that he was still under thirty so the working visa wasn't a problem for him. I must have mentioned this to him over a quiet beer or two one night, and he then told me about an option that I had never heard of previously and which would, eventually, solve a lot of my problems.

"Could you get a UK passport?", he asked. No that was out, I was born in Australia. "Any parents born in the UK?" Again No. "What about grandparents?" Well, I thought that both of my mother's parents had been born in the UK. "That'll do", he said. "Go to the British consulate in the city and see what you need to do."

So I did and discovered that I would be eligible to work in the UK practically for as long as I wanted if I could prove the right connections. I needed the birth certificates of my mother's parents and my

mother, I needed my mother's marriage certificate and my birth certificate, and all would be good. That took a few months to figure out, sending enquiry letters to Somerset house in London, filling in the forms and send off the required bank cheques to payment for the certificates and postage, and doing something similar for the Birth, Deaths and Marriages authorities in South Australia. Armed with all of that documentation I was good to go.

But what about Robyn?

By this time we were in the second half of 1989 and I was starting to get worried that we might not be able to travel together. And then a solution came to me. I discussed it with a friend who seemed to think it would work. So I drove around to Robyn's apartment one evening and knocked on her door.

"I've been thinking over this problem of working in London and I think I know how we can arrange it. Will you marry me?"

This was obviously something she wasn't expecting. "Do I have to?" she replied.

Which was something that I certainly hadn't anticipated. "I'll ask you just one more time." Which I did, and which she accepted, and five months later, in March 1990 we were married. A week after that we were off on a 2-month honeymoon through Egypt, Italy and France, aiming to arrive in the UK in mid-May.

Neither of us had a job lined up in the United Kingdom before we left; we were just winging it. Luckily Eve and John Harvey told us we could stay with them until we got settled which was the best piece of luck we could hope for. We will be forever grateful to them for looking after us for about 6 weeks before we found a place to move to. By that time Robyn had a job and I was starting to get some interviews.



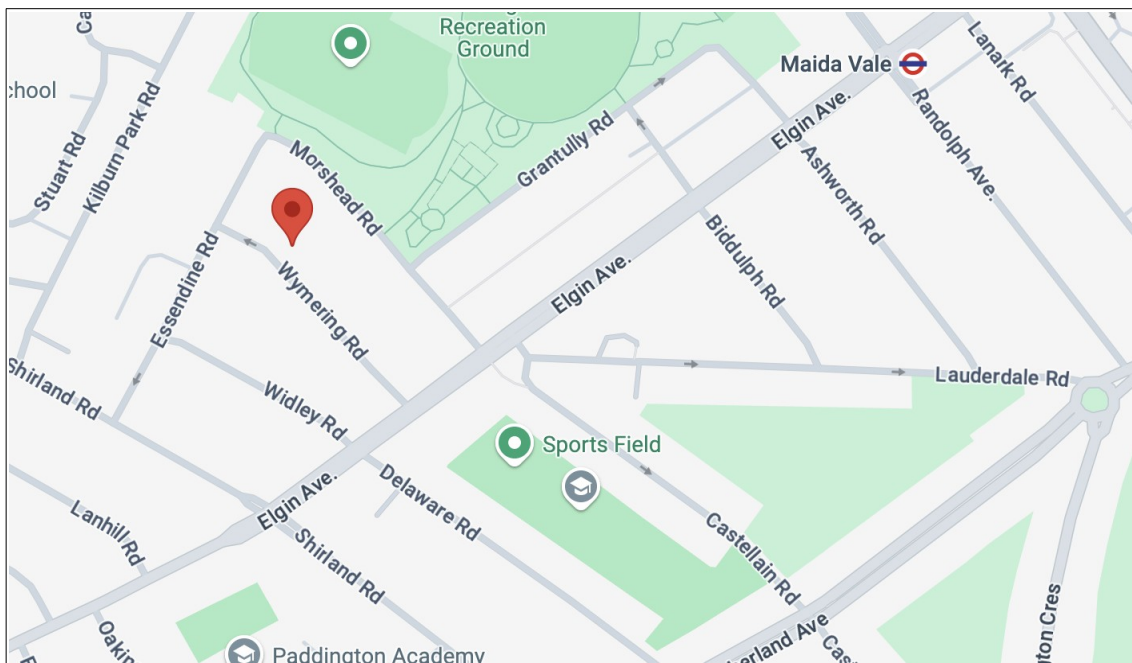
Location of the Wymering Road apartment in relation to the centre of London

We had originally planned to move to somewhere in London, assuming that there would be a lot more opportunities to get work there. The original plan was Hampstead Heath in North London on the basis that we would have access to a small village-like retail centre and still be close enough to Central London to make any transport problems surmountable. We must have looked at four or five apartments in the area and finally decided on one only to be told by the rental agent that the owner had changed their mind and had decided to sell rather than let the property. So it was back to searching all over again.

Someone, somewhere, mentioned the inner West as a possible area, specifically Maida Vale. I'd never heard of it prior to that, but a wander around the district showed us that it might well be a place where we could live. And it only took one or two inspections to decide that the two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment at 101 Wymering Road was the place for us. It was fully furnished, including all furniture, cutlery and crockery. We hadn't seen anything better.

A few weeks later we moved it. I'm sure the Harveys were happy to see us go.

On the work front Robyn was always going to be fine. Being a solicitor her skills and qualifications were recognised and she found work at the Royal College of Nursing near Oxford Circus. That was also fortuitous as she could take either a bus or Tube train from near our new apartment to very near her office location. She had no inter-connections to negotiate. As it turned out she stayed in the one job for the entire period we were living in the UK.



Location of 101 Wymering Road, with the Maida Vale Tube station top right

My work situation was something else entirely. By the time we arrived in London I had about four years' experience working with a software package known as ADABAS/Natural (I won't go into the details as they are way too boring). This package was in much wider use in Europe than in Australia, to the extent that there were as many sites using it in the greater London area (within the circle of the M25 motorway) as there were in the whole of Australia.

Unfortunately when I arrived none of the companies I was interested in seemed to be recruiting. Luckily for me, my English friend John Basevi had returned to the UK at the end of 1989 and

mentioned that his company, Prudential Insurance, was gearing up a new set of projects and put my name forward. A week or so later I had a job.

As I noted earlier Robyn stayed in the one position for our entire stay in the United Kingdom, up to September 1992. I moved around a lot, was out of work for a few periods, but was employed for the bulk of the time. We stayed at 101 Wymering Road for two and a half years, and we now look back on it with a lot of affection and good memories.

* * *

In September 2024, at the end of our driving holiday around Scotland, Robyn, my daughter Catherine and I decided to stay for about a week in London before heading home. Given that it had been over 30 years since we had lived in the area we decided to find accommodation in Maida Vale, mainly so we could look over old haunts. Luckily enough that week coincided with the first week of our son's European holiday so we persuaded him to join us in the 3-bedroom townhouse that Robyn found for us.

One of the major things we wanted to do, as we have on a couple of other occasions of the years, was to wander back around to Wymering Road to see the old place, to see if anything had changed over the years.

We were standing outside in the street, taking photos and talking about our time living there when a woman wandered down the road. She was about to turn into the front entrance when she stopped and asked: "Is there anything the matter?"

"No," I said. "We were just explaining to our children here that we used to live here thirty years ago?"

"Oh, which one?"

"The bottom one; 101," I said.

"That's where I live. Do you want to have a look?"

And so we did.

It's a funny thing looking at the flat after all these years. Especially since the current owners had carried out a major renovation on the place, opening up the main bedroom to the backyard, switching the kitchen from the back of the flat to replace the main bedroom and vice versa. It was strangely familiar and yet remarkably different at the same time.

It was just of those peculiar occurrences that happen from time to time when you travel. It was our second last day in London and topped off the trip to perfection.



WANDERINGS AND READINGS – An Occasional Column by Julian Warner

DE-VALUING MUSIC?

As a person committed to listening to music recorded on Compact Discs, having invested heavily in the format, I was becoming alarmed by the disappearance of CDs from shops. At the same time, I have been surprised by the continued increase in interest in buying vinyl long-playing records. No, they are not called 'vinyls'!

Until I started to do a bit of reading about music sales in general, I wasn't aware of just how ignorant I have been of the dominance of 'music by subscription' in its many forms.

A BBC article by Brandon Drenon in March 2023 noted that 'Vinyl record sales outperformed CDs in the US for the first time since 1987'. This was interesting to me but in the same article, it notes that 'music by subscription' accounted for 84% of recorded music sales in 2022.

The Recording Industry Association of America has a most instructive graph which gives a clear picture of music sales in differing formats over the years. [<https://www.riaa.com/u-s-sales-database/>] By clicking on individual formats we see that:

- the LP record effectively disappeared from the market for two decades, from 1990 to 2010;
- vinyl singles disappeared around 1990 and have never made a comeback;
- 8-track cartridges formed a healthy part of the market until the 1980s!;
- cassettes were a big part of the market until around 2000;
- CDs were almost all of the market for a decade centred around 2000;
- Super Audio Compact Discs, the SACD, have never achieved any significant sales — they have been a permanent flatline;
- digital music downloads had their decade from 2006 to 2016 but have decreased in market volume since;
- Since 2016, streaming and paid subscription services have taken over the market.

The RIAA also notes some sales from 'Synchronization', an explanation of which requires a whole article unto itself.

In January of 2024, a site named MusicRadar published an article titled: '2023 stats show that music fans are falling in love with CDs again, but will sales ever eclipse those of vinyl?'

The article is rather disingenuous in quibbling about relative sales of CDs and vinyl in what is now a backwater compared to the mighty ocean of streaming (mixed metaphor?).

Regardless of that article, CDs are simply becoming harder to buy. The size of the CD section in JB Hi-Fi stores has dwindled recently whilst LP racks have increased. (DVDs and Blu-Rays are also losing shelf space as well but that's another discussion for later.) Readings bookshops will no longer stock CDs. Stores which specialised in selling CDs have ceased operations. There are probably less than five independent stores left in Australia which provide a good service in selling new CDs. I don't think that there are any shops left which specialise in classical music.

So one goes online. There's always Amazon but I've been avoiding them as much as possible. Discogs, which I've written about before, provides a reasonable online gateway to independent CD

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and record stores and private sellers. There's also a few specialist online retailers, like Presto for classical music.

Record shops however are burgeoning. New record shops keep appearing on Sydney Rd in Brunswick or High St in Northcote/Preston. They're springing up in all the suburbs. Op Shops are stocking records again to get the youngsters in.

I spent decades listening to LP records and I got very tired of the surface noise, hisses, crackles and pops and the short playing time. Vinyl is a fragile medium, easily scratched, smudged or otherwise compromised. LP records are big, with space for artwork, legible text and they are a sign of relative wealth. A new LP can cost anywhere from \$50 to \$120, whilst the cost of CDs has stayed stable for a long time. The manufacturers, of course, are creating as many new "collector's items" as they can, so that they can command even higher prices.

Quoting the BBC article: "Last year's vinyl record sales demonstrate that vinyl is 'cementing its role as a fixture of the modern music marketplace,' RIAA Chairman and CEO Mitch Glazier said in a post on Medium. 'Music lovers clearly can't get enough of the high-quality sound and tangible connection to artists vinyl delivers,' Glazier said, 'and labels have squarely met that demand with a steady stream of exclusives, special reissues, and beautifully crafted packages and discs.'"



Konono No. 1

Hmm. That's only high quality sound if you also spend a lot on a decent hi-fi setup rather than a cheap turntable and a set of headphones — which seems to be the usual playback system.

As I've never used streaming services, I can't comment on the quality of the sound but I would note that .mp3 is still the basic format of delivery. For all that I could get snobby about sound fidelity, I would say that .mp3 offers a reasonable sound quality that many could not differentiate from an LP record. There are high fidelity streaming services using higher quality file formats but they are a negligible part of the market.

I wonder about whether music is now devalued by the whole streaming process. Younger people seem to regard music as a nearly-free resource. Except perhaps younger people who are trying to

make a living out of making music. Articles about streaming services abound with stories of artists having disputes about royalties and the low paid rates. The few artists whose works are streamed in the millions daily would be arguing over more millions of dollars but struggling artists are only ever going to see a pittance.

Live music seems to exist completely outside of the world of streaming. There at least, music has value. Prices for live concerts continue to increase to alarming levels, although 'emerging' artists are still playing in Scout Halls and dodgy pubs for next to nothing. Ironically, despite the best efforts of sound engineers, you are almost always paying more money to hear low quality sound in a live context — except, of course, for entirely acoustic music. When's the last time you heard a live concert with no amplification at all? I should possibly engage Martin Field in a discussion on the merits of live sound.

Earlier today I was listening to a live recording of a most rambunctious Congolese group who play loud, distorted thumb-pianos. The recording was made when they were on tour with a Dutch punk band. The leader of the punk band made apologies for the 'rough and ready' quality of the recording. I laughed.

I shall continue to listen to my CDs. For music listening in the car I have graduated to using a solid-state music player* which connects to the car stereo via Bluetooth. This involves ripping CDs to the computer in .flac format and then transferring them to the music player. It's fiddly but I do it anyway. Perhaps the extra effort adds more value to the music?

* For the sake of completeness, the music player is a Fiio M11 Plus. Made in China but not connected to the internet!

ANOTHER ROAD YARN by Martin Field

So, having returned to London forever in 1971, I found that it wasn't going to work out. How was I to return cheaply to Australia with my remaining cash?

Then I saw an ad in **Private Eye** magazine, seeking travellers to share transport to New Delhi. About two weeks later there I was, on the infamous Hippie Trail, travelling along European highways with a bunch of people in an old Vega bus. It looked like it was ready for the wreckers, bits were held together with wire, and it ran on re-treaded tyres and a clunky suspension.

The travellers were a bunch of university students on long vacation, plus an assortment of raggle-taggle hippies. The bus driver, Peter, was originally from Delhi. He had married an English lass and she and their two under five-year-olds made up the complement of passengers.

Our generally easterly route was via Western Europe to Turkey, then onwards through Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to our destination, New Delhi.

Nobody had much money so we slept where we could, on roadsides, on the bus, on its roof, the forecourt of an abandoned hotel, on sand dunes. Generally, wherever the bus driver stopped — but rarely in paid accommodation.

Afghanistan was a highlight of the trip. We stayed at bedbug-ridden doss houses in Herat and Kabul, US20 cents for a bed, 10 cents for the floor. Leaving Kabul one afternoon, the driver headed via the Khyber Pass towards the Pakistan border. En route we stopped at Landi Khotal, a lawless

town where fierce-looking Pathans wandered round with rifles and bandoliers. (Over the years Landi Khotal has figured in lists of the 100 most dangerous destinations in the world.)

Anything and everything banned in the rest of the world was on sale, cheap. Carl, an American in our group, bought a locally made revolver and a few dollars' worth of cocaine in the bazaar. (I wonder what became of him?)



Martin's travel map, London to New Delhi

We headed on towards Peshawar and stopped when it was dark and camped in a steamy valley situated between bushy hills. As we unpacked sleeping bags, out of the undergrowth came a Pathan tribal type in full kit. He carried the obligatory rifle, and his shoulders were criss-crossed with bandoliers.

Peter spoke Hindi but couldn't understand the local dialect. However, the rifleman, a friendly chap, was happy to share a couple of joints of prime Kabuli hash. Then he looked up suddenly and disappeared into the scrub. Next thing, up drove a Pakistani army Jeep with a lieutenant and a couple of off-siders. They told us it was unsafe to camp there, "Too many bandits." We insisted we were too tired to move on, so they went off and came back later with six more soldiers (and a jerrycan of drinking water) and stayed the night with us. No one had much sleep. Next day we drove on to the village where they said they'd sourced our water. The well, someone noticed, was full of scum and algal bloom...

The entire trip to New Delhi, transport, food, etc. cost me 60 English pounds.

From Delhi, Alison (a student) and I took a third-class train to Calcutta. I flew on to Singapore and then to Darwin and hitched from Darwin back to my home in Melbourne. Alison wrote later that she went to Senegal to assist in refugee camps. A few years after returning to Melbourne I recognised one of the bus passengers as the guy serving me at a drive-in bottle shop. His nickname was Yosemite Sam, due to a likeness. He related that at the end of our trip, he'd been medically evacuated from a Delhi hospital to Melbourne. That he still harboured a colony of amoebic dysentery the medicos could not eradicate. He was very thin and we wondered if the cause of his illness was that scummy water we drank in the valley near Peshawar.

THE MOOCH OF LIFE by Perry Middlemiss

LIFE IN NOVEMBER

November 1-10

As November rolled around again I realised that I needed to get to my dermatologist for another skin check; it's been about a year. I wrote about my skin problems in **Perryscope 36** in September 2023 and noted that I had three or four Basel-cell carcinomas removed and a few other spots burnt off. I was told at the time that I needed to get a full check every 12 months or so as the long-term damage to my skin might take some time to manifest itself and become evident. It was best to be on the safe side and just get checked out.

But I had a sneaking suspicion in the back of my head that I probably needed a referral from my local GP again. So when I dropped in to see him about some blood work I asked if one was required, especially as I'd already been to that skin specialist and had been told by them to come back about this time.

"Yes," he said, "the referrals generally only last a year."

"What!" I thought. This is, frankly, ridiculous. It's not as if it's a new condition that I'm getting looked at. I can only assume that this is some sort of setup by the medical fraternity to ensure you make more visits to the local doctor for, in this case, no reason. Given that people are struggling to find appointments due to the shortage of GPs and a lack of available time-slots you'd think they'd try to make life a little easier for everyone by streamlining their processes and removing unnecessary visits. Not so it seems.

So I now have an appointment for late March in 2025. Maybe my best option is to go see my dermatologist every 11 months. At least that way I can get two checkups for the one referral letter.

November 11-20

Last month I wrote about one of my little side projects, sorting through a bunch of fanzines in the Special Collections unit of Monash University. In a similar vein I am also helping my old friend Irwin Hirsh sort through a cache of letters originally belonging to Melbourne sf fan John Bangsund. John's wife Sally, at some time in the past few years, bundled up all of John's letters into six archive boxes and gave them to Irwin for safe-keeping, with the understanding, I suspect, that they would be sorted, catalogued (scanned?) and deposited somewhere safe. We originally didn't have much of an idea of where that deposit might be, though with the continuing work at Monash University we may well have discovered a suitable destination. Though we haven't broached that with Monash as yet.

Irwin and I started our sorting task a year or so back but got rather distracted by holidays and Irwin's move from one house to another. We got back into it a few months ago and have been tackling one box a month since. This usually takes both of us an afternoon's work, looking through each piece of paper to determine: a) if it is a letter or something else (we have found some small Bangsund fanzines in the boxes which have been of great interest); and b) the date.

The decision on whether something is a letter or not is rather easy, as you can imagine, though figuring out the date is something else again. On a number of the letters there is no date at all, or if

there is, there is no year. We are left to make an educated guess based on what is in the letter or what other letters were around it in the original pile. There appears to have been some sort of order in the letters at some time, but subsequent moves have resulted in something approaching randomness.

We are sorting the documents, in this first run, into purely year order with one year per manila folder, and putting unidentified sheets into a separate folder again. We have so far finished this initial sort of four boxes; two to go.

When we finally finish that (estimated to be March 2025) we'll then sort at the year level to ensure that all letters from 1965, for example, are together from each of the six boxes, and then work on sorting within each year. We have a long way to go.

These are rather pleasant afternoons. The work isn't so onerous that it becomes exhausting, though it does take about 3-4 hours per box. Anything more than that and I might just decide to chuck it all in. And I don't want that to happen.

November 21-30

It has been an interesting spring. Made even more interesting by the fact that we've actually had one.

Over the past few years we've seen the main seasons of winter and summer starting to creep earlier and later, squeezing autumn and spring into a much shorter time period. But not so this year.

Like most country-raised Australians I will always complain that we don't get enough rain (until we do, then of course I'll complain about that) though this year we seemed to get reasonable rain bursts at about the right time. I usually determine this by how often I have to water the garden, and that little exercise hasn't been required as much this year.

The heat has been within its usual bounds for this time as year as well; not too hot (a few days into the mid 30Cs) and not too cold (most days hovering somewhere between 20-30C).

But the oddest thing, for me, has been the absence of hayfever. There has been the odd touch or two though nowhere near the usual bouts of nasal congestion and sneezing that I get afflicted with at this time of year.

I have to say I have actually enjoyed it.

A SPRING IDYLL by C. J. Dennis

I cried unto my love the other morning
"Let us away! Spring comes on shining wings,
With melody and mirth the bush adorning
For bird, for bee and — other stinging things."
"Oh, I duddo," said she. "I feel so queer.
I'm devver right at this tibe of year."

"Come forth!" I urged. (We went)... "Behold!" I
carolled.

See how the bush with color is aflame!"
By Spring's swift alchemy in joy apparelled.
Queen of my heart, art thou not glad we came?
Nay, sweet! Does so much beauty move to grief?
"No," sniffed my love. "Forgod my hadkerchief."

"See!" I enthused. "How sunlight woos the wattle,
Bending above the stream like golden foam."
"I wish," said she, "That I had brought that boddle
Of eucalybtus thad I had at hobe."
Said I: "Dwell fairies here, do you suppose?"
She said: "The bollen's gedding up by doze."

"Mark you," I asked, "yon swallows gaily wheeling
Over green gums athwart cerulean skies?"
She answered, "I've got such a fuddy feeli'g."
I saw the love-light in her dewy eyes,
And breathed, "Sweet, would we barter this for
cash?"
"Ah!" cried she fervently, "Ah! Ah! ARRASSH!!"

First published in the *Herald*, 2 October 1933

WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

Codes – F: format (e for electronic, blank for paper); R: rating, out of 5.0.

Abbr – 1001: 1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die; Anthony: Anthony Award for Best Novel; Aust: Australian; Coll: single-author collection; Gdn: Guardian's 1000 Best Novels; Trans: translated; YA: Young Adult.

November 2024 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>"G" is for Gumshoe</i>	Sue Grafton	Crime	Nov 5		3.6	1990	Anthony
<i>The Bone is Pointed</i>	Arthur Upfield	Crime	Nov 13		3.8	1938	Aust
<i>Inconstant Moon</i>	Larry Niven	Sf	Nov 20		3.3	1973	Coll
<i>The Book of Doors</i>	Gareth Brown	Fantasy	Nov 28		3.8	2024	

Books read in the period: 4

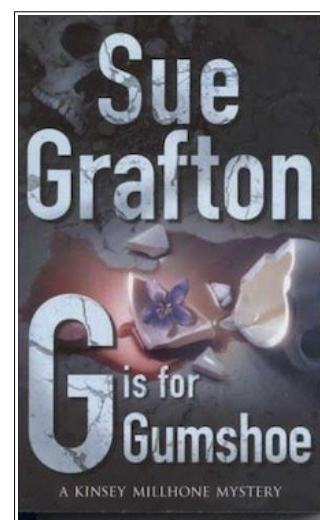
Yearly total to end of period: 60

Notes:

"G" is for Gumshoe (1990) – This is the 7th in the author's Kinsey Millhone series of novels.

[This novel won the 1991 Anthony Award for Best Novel.]

Millhone has just turned 33, she's still single and she's still a PI. The novel starts with her being firstly contacted by a woman who wants her to check up on her mother who loves out in the desert, and with a notification that a she is now on an ex-con's hit list. She doesn't take the second of these too seriously but when she heads out to check up on the missing woman and has her VW forced off the road by a man in a truck, things start taking a turn for the worst. She follows up on a suggestion to hire some protection in the form of a security-focused PI and the two start working together to track down the missing woman and the hitman who is out to get her. Another excellent instalment in this interesting

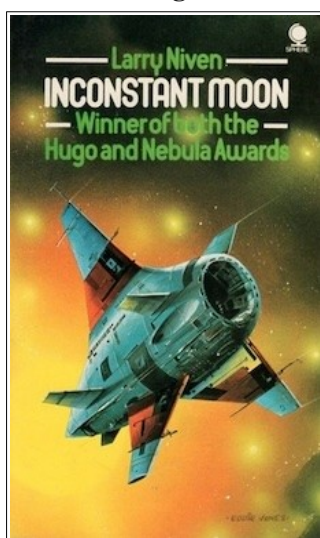


series. Grafton continues to build the Millhone character and is very deft at utilising various Californian locales as a vital ingredient of each novel. R: 3.6/5.0

The Bone is Pointed (1938) – see major review below.

Inconstant Moon (1973)

This collection by Larry Niven was released in the UK in 1973 and contains stories from his "Known Space" series as well as others. Niven has always been considered a "hard" science fiction writer (when he is writing sf) and this collection provides seven arguments for why that may be the case. Each of them posits a scientific problem, of sorts, and follows the protagonist (always male) trying as best he can to solve it, generally using analysis techniques that would not be out of place in any science establishment.



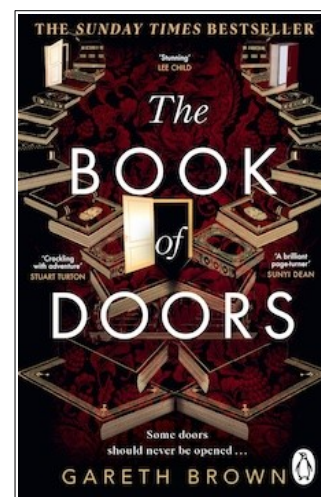
The title story won the Hugo Award for Best Story in 1972 and finds the main character trying to work out why the moon suddenly seems incredibly bright. “Bordered in Black” doesn’t fit into the author’s “Known Space” series though it does incorporate the “blind spot” anomaly of faster-than-light travel later used in the series’ many stories. “How the Heroes Die”, and its sequel “At the Bottom of a Hole” are both “Known Space” stories, and the scenarios they relate, concerning a human base on Mars, are specifically mentioned in the later Niven novel *Protector*. “One Face” follows a group of human travellers whose ftl-drive malfunctions sending them into the far-distance future, and “Becalmed in Hell” finds a manned mission to Venus stuck on the surface after an equipment failure. All of these stories present the characters with major problems to solve, mostly life-threatening. The best of the stories is the last, “Death by Ecstasy”, which is the first of the author’s “Gil the ARM” sequence. This is also a puzzle story but specifically a murder mystery where Gil has to determine how an old friend from the Belt came to die of direct electric stimulation of the brain’s pleasure centre.

This is a strange mishmash of stories from this author and was probably thrown together to cash in on the author’s Hugo Award win for the title story. Regardless of that it does show off the author’s abilities, and limitations, and is a good broad introduction to the type of story he is known for.

R: 3.3/5.0

***The Book of Doors* (2024)**

Cassie Andrews lives a quiet life in New York, working in a bookshop and sharing an apartment with her friend Izzy. She enjoys her life although she does feel that she is missing something. Then, one day, an old customer of the bookshop dies in the shop and Cassie finds a small book he left her. She is intrigued by the inscription in the book (“This is the Book of Doors. Hold it in your hand and any door is every door.”) and soon discovers that she is able to open any door as if it were any door she had previously seen and could remember. And so she starts travelling the world, seeing again her old haunts from a long European holiday. What Cassie doesn’t realise is that her Book contains powerful magic and that there are a number of people, some very dangerous and evil, who will do anything to obtain it. Because the Book doesn’t just open doors in the present world, it also opens those in the past, and such a Book in the wrong hands would be a very dangerous thing indeed.



This contemporary fantasy novel is a debut by this author and it is quite intriguing. I’m normally wary of any novel that touts itself as a page-turner but this one actually fits the bill. Brown has fashioned a thriller in fantasy clothing, keeping the pace turning over from chapter to chapter, providing multiple (but not too many) points-of-view sections, having a wide range of characters, and slowly introducing the whole back-story behind this Book and all the other similar Books that are out in the world. He has done an excellent job here, leaving enough mystery about the origin of the Books, filling in their history, and tying up all the loose ends of the plot at the end of the novel. It will be a hard act to follow for this author though I will be interested to see where he takes us.

R: 3.8/5.0

WORD OF THE MONTH

obelus (plural noun: obeli)

1. a symbol (†) used as a reference mark in printed matter, or to indicate that a person is deceased.
2. a mark (– or ÷) used in ancient manuscripts to mark a word or passage as spurious, corrupt or doubtful.

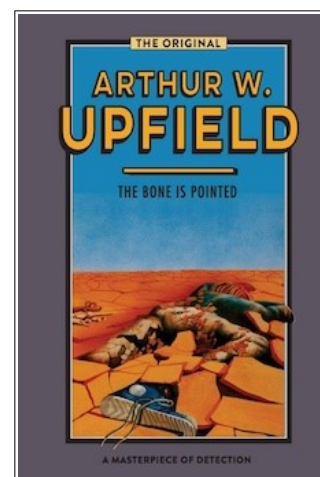
REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

The Bone is Pointed (1938) by Arthur Upfield

Genre: Crime

(This novel is the sixth of Upfield's series featuring Inspector Napoleon "Bony" Bonaparte.)

If you wanted to generalise about the way Arthur Upfield sets up his plots and how he introduces Inspector Napoleon "Bony" Bonaparte it would be safe to say that Bony is called into the investigate of a crime relatively shortly after the crime has occurred (not straight away, of course, but soon after the local police have hit a dead end), and he comes on the scene in some sort of disguise, that is not readily recognisable as a police detective. With this novel, Upfield turns both of these generalisations on their heads.



Five months before Bony's appearance on the Karwir cattle station in the Channel Country of the Diamantina River in Queensland, a white man had gone missing and no trace of him has been found. Jeffrey Anderson was a big man, a big angry man. He had a reputation of being brutal, delivering "punishments" to the local indigenous workers with whip and fist. One day he went out on his horse to ride the fences and never came back, the horse returning home some hours later. A wide search of the area where he was headed revealed nothing.

So the Queensland Police send Bony in to investigate, expecting that he will either solve the puzzle quickly or find nothing and give it up, equally as quickly. However, Boney is not so easily deterred. He arrives on the scene, announces his presence and before long he is out in the field carrying out his customary forensic examination of the area around where he believes the man disappeared. Although it is not just forensic evidence that he uncovers: there is the burgeoning love affair between young John Gordon, manager and owner of the neighbouring station, and Diana Lacy, daughter of the owner of Karwir station; and the important tradition of the Gordon family protecting their indigenous population from external influences.

Boney realises he is on to something when he determines that he is being followed by a local aborigine using long developed techniques to avoid detection. At first he isn't sure why this is happening and then is certain of it when he starts to feel ill, and works out that someone has "pointed the bone" at him and is now willing him into illness and possible death.

It all works out of course, as you know it will. The pleasure is in watching Bony go about his work under immense stress and scrutiny; someone is try to kill him by "magic" and his superiors are demanding he give up the case and return to Brisbane.

Upfield has crafted an excellent detective novel here, incorporating what may well be the first detailed description of the bone-pointing ceremony and effects in a novel of any sort.

R: 3.8/5.0

This fanzine acknowledges the members of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which it is produced in Hawthorn, Victoria, and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

Television

Codes – Sn: season (blank for mini-series); R: rating, out of 5.0.

Abbr – Aust: Australian

November 2024 television

Title	Sn	Eps	Genre	Platform	R	Rel Date	Notes
<i>Ludwig</i>	1	6	Crime comedy	BBC	4.2	2024	
<i>The Lincoln Lawyer</i>	3	10	Crime	Netflix	3.8	2024	

TV shows watched in the period: 2

Yearly total to end of period: 36

Ludwig (Season 1 — 6 episodes) (2024)

Platform: BBC

Genre: Crime

John Taylor (David Mitchell) is a reclusive puzzle-maker who uses the pseudonym Ludwig. His identical twin brother James is a successful detective with the Cambridge police force. James's wife Lucy (Anna Maxwell Martin) rings John one night and tells him that James has gone missing and that she has sent a taxi to bring John to her house to help track him down. That mainly seems to involve going to James's office in Police HQ, convincing everyone that he is really "James" and not John and retrieving some documents from James's office; simple really. And it looks like it will succeed when the detectives are all called out to a murder scene and John now finds himself faced with a situation he could never have imagined. Needless to say John uses some innovative puzzle-solving techniques to identify the murderer and all seems well. Except that when he finds John's notebook he realises it is all in code, and that the key to the code is probably back in James's office, somewhere.



This is an amusing crime detective series with an interesting premise and set-up which could probably be best described as a "cosy" mystery. Mitchell is perfect in the lead role and Martin excels as the harried wife and mother attempting to get her family back together again. I'll certainly be looking forward to the second season. R: 4.2/5.0



The Lincoln Lawyer (Season 3 — 10 episodes) (2024)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Crime

At the end of season two Mickey Haller had identified the body of Gloria Days (an ex-client of his) and had been engaged by her pimp, Julian la Cosse, who had been charged with her murder. This season follows Haller's defence of la Cosse, and his attempt to identify the real killer in the face of an unhelpful police force and obstructionist District Attorney's office. Along the way he gets involved with a public prosecutor and somehow finds himself the lawyer for a major drug cartel boss languishing

in jail, his ex-wife and work colleague Lorna passes the bar exam and someone tries to kill him a few times. Par for the course really.

This third season continues on the good work of the first two and is based on Michael Connelly's 2013 novel *The Gods of Guilt*. Haller's best work is done in the courtroom but there is a lot else going on here and the episodes don't get bogged down in too much courtroom legalese. Definitely worth watching. R: 3.8/5.0

Film

Codes – P: platform (c for cinema, blank for home); R: rating, out of 5.0.
Abbr – 1001: 1001 Films You Must See Before You Die; Subs: subtitles

November 2024 films

Title	Director	Genre	Date	P	R	Rel Date	Notes
<i>The Hidden Fortress</i>	Arkira Kurosawa	Drama	Nov 2	c	4.0	1958	Subs
<i>Witness for the Prosecution</i>	Billy Wilder	Crime	Nov 2		4.0	1957	
<i>Blood Simple</i>	Coen brothers	Crime	Nov 6		3.8	1984	
<i>Killer's Kiss</i>	Stanley Kubrick	Crime	Nov 7		2.3	1955	
<i>The Holdovers</i>	Alexander Payne	Drama	Nov 9		4.1	2023	
<i>Yojimbo</i>	Arkira Kurosawa	Drama	Nov 11	c	3.8	1961	Subs
<i>Ford v Ferrari</i>	James Mangold	Drama	Nov 14		3.7	2019	
<i>L. A. Confidential</i>	Curtis Hanson	Crime	Nov 15		4.2	1997	1001
<i>Sanjuro</i>	Arkira Kurosawa	Drama	Nov 18	c	3.8	1962	Subs
<i>Heat</i>	Michael Mann	Crime	Nov 24		4.2	1995	1001
<i>Mr. Turner</i>	Mike Leigh	Bio drama	Nov 29		4.0	2014	
<i>The Duellists</i>	Ridley Scott	Historical drama	Nov 30		3.4	1977	

Films watched in the period: 12
Yearly total to end of period: 70

The Hidden Fortress (1958)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Drama

[Japanese with subtitles.]

After two peasants sell all their possessions and enlist in the army of the feudal Yamana clan, they are mistaken for soldiers of the defeated Akizuki and set to work digging graves. They are released and decide to head to the neighbouring state of Hayakawa by way of the Yamana state. Along they way they discover some Akizuki gold hidden in a hollowed-out stick. They also encounter a mysterious man (Toshiro Mifune) who leads them to a secret camp in the mountains, the Hidden Fortress of the title. There they learn that the mysterious man is a famous Akizuki



general, Makabe Rokurota, who is trying to lead Akizuki Princess Yuki (Misa Uehara) to safety. Rokurota recruits the two peasants and co-opts their travel plan. The Princess is asked to pretend to be a deaf-mute as it is thought her voice and mannerisms as a princess will give her away. And so they set off on their journey disguised as wood-cutters taking their load of cut firewood home; the firewood, of course, being the cut wood that holds the rest of the Akizuki gold.

This is another in Kurosawa's *jidaigeki* adventure films which includes a lot more humour than his previous works. The two peasants here were used as a model for George Lucas's robots in the original Star Wars film, and their constant bickering and arguing helps to lift this film above what it might have been. It is visually very impressive and you get the impression that Kurosawa had been watching a number of technicolor westerns from America in the lead-up to this production. That's not a bad thing by any means, it just shows the way that films from very disparate genres can have an impact on each other. This was also the first feature that Kurosawa filmed in the widescreen TohoScope format.

Mifune seems to have bulked up somewhat for this role and he plays the very masculine, loyal general to perfection. But everyone here is good, as usual for a Kurosawa film. R: 4.0/5.0

***Witness for the Prosecution* (1957)**

Platform: DVD

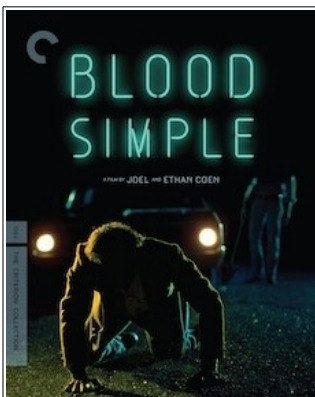
Genre: Crime

Based on the Agatha Christie play of the same name this film is set mostly in the Old Bailey in London and must rank as one of the best courtroom dramas ever filmed.

Leonard Vole (Tyrone Power) is accused of murdering a wealthy widow who had just left him her fortune in her will. He denies it and is persuaded by his solicitor to engage Sir Wilfrid Robarts (Charles Laughton) as his barrister. Robarts has just returned to work after a heart attack and there is a running gag throughout the film about his need to pay attention to his emotional and stress levels. Needless to say, he fails badly on both counts. Vole's wife (Marlene Dietrich) provides her husband with an alibi but soon after the trial commences she appears as the titular "witness for the prosecution", and the defence case looks lost.



The film follows Robarts's courtroom tactics as he attempts to extract the best he can out of the case which appears, on the face of it, to be fairly simple; there are some interesting twists at the end. Laughton and Dietrich are terrific. R: 4.0/5.0



***Blood Simple* (1984)**

Platform: DVD

Genre: Crime

When the manager of a sleazy Texas bar (John Getz) discovers that his wife Abby (played by Frances McDormand) is sleeping with one of the bar workers, he hires a private investigator, Loren Visser (M. Emmet Walsh), to track the two and find out what is going on. Visser gets the required photographs and the two hatch a plan to eliminate the couple. But then things start to go a little awry; Visser has plans of his own, and Abby and her lover start to have doubts about each other.

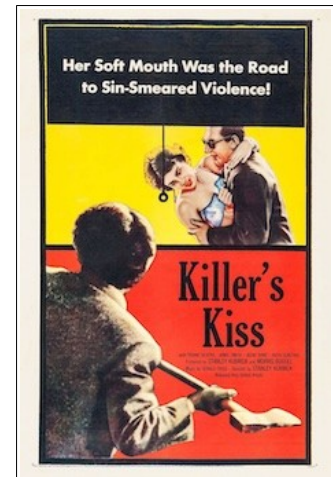
As a debut film this is pretty damn good. It falls firmly into the neo-noir genre and hits all of the major tropes: a cheating wife, a jealous husband, a PI, lust for money, deceit and revenge, etc, etc. And while some of the film-making techniques are rather crude in places there are some excellent touches. The choice of Walsh as the PI, and of using him as the voice-over in the introduction, was an inspired one, and you can begin to see what sort of actor McDormand would later become; this was her debut as well. [The title is taken from Dashiell Hammett's novel *Red Harvest*.] R: 3.8/5.0

***Killer's Kiss* (1955)**

Platform: DVD

Genre: Crime

Stanley Kubrick's second feature was produced from a story by him and a screenplay by Howard Sackler, who was uncredited. (This seems to have been a standard practice of Kubrick's in his early years.) It follows the story of veteran boxer Davey Gordon (Jamie Smith) which he relates in a flashback as he waits for a train to take him from New York to Seattle. Gordon lives in an apartment building across from Gloria Price (Irene Kane); he spies on her and she spies on him. One night, after losing what might be his last fight, Gordon sees Gloria being attacked by her boss from her dance studio and hastens over to intervene. The two hit it off, decide to leave New York together and arrange to both get their final payments, him from his manager and her from her dance studio boss, outside the dance hall. But Gloria's boss doesn't want her to leave and sets his goons on the man standing next to Gloria in the street (who they think is Gordon but is actually his manager). The manager is killed and Gloria kidnapped. Gordon tracks her down and attempts to get her away.



Overall it's a rather straightforward, simple plot without a lot going for it. The main area of interest here is to see early examples of Kubrick's camera use (he is credited with the cinematography), his set-ups and the way he is able to make an interesting shot out of very little material indeed. At 67 minutes it is also very short indeed. R: 2.3/5.0



***The Holdovers* (2023)**

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

[This film was nominated for Best Picture at the 2024 Academy Awards.]

In late 1970 at Barton, an exclusive boys' school outside Boston, Paul Hunham (Paul Giamatti) has been tasked with looking after the boys who have nowhere to go for the 2-week Christmas break. Hunham has a reputation as a strict, humourless classics teacher and the five boys left under his care, and that of housekeeper/cook Mary Lamb (Da'Vine Joy Randolph), are not at all happy to be spending their vacation with him. After a day or so the father of one of the boys arrives in a helicopter and agrees to take the other boys away with him, so long as their parents agree. Unfortunately, Angus Tully (Dominic Sessa) can't contact his mother or stepfather and so is left behind. As the days pass, Mary slowly gets

Hunham to ease up a little and the three decide to take a "field trip" to Boston. What happens there will have a profound effect on all of them.

This is a coming-of-age story, from two points-of-view. Hunham was an old Barton boy who went to university and then returned to teach and has never left. He really knows nothing of life apart from what he has read in books and his time with Mary and Angus will give him some idea of why other

people act the way they do. Tully's mother has abandoned him to the school after his father had a mental breakdown and was committed, and he tends to rage against authority and is lazy in his studies. We learn that he has been kicked out of several schools previously and his stepfather is now threatening him with military school, which seems like a surefire way of being sent to serve in the Vietnam War. But he also learns some life lessons and his future looks markedly brighter after this vacation period.

This is a warm gentle drama with an excellent script and acting performances from the leading three players. Randolph won the 2024 Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress. R: 4.1/5.0

Yojimbo (1961)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Drama

[Japanese with subtitles.]

A wandering ronin (Toshiro Mifune) stumbles upon an isolated village in feudal Japan and soon learns that the town is controlled by two warring factions who are vying for control over the local gambling trade. The ronin, who takes the unlikely name of Kuwabatake Sanjuro (meaning "mulberry field, thirty-years old"), decides to play one gang off against the other, reasoning that the town will be better off when both sides are wiped out.



The plot of the film is very similar to that of Dashiell Hammett's novel ***Red Harvest***, though there the unnamed protagonist (generally referred to as The Continental Op) is called in to the town to clean things up rather than just arriving unannounced. Here Sanjuro takes it upon himself to do the job, first working with one side and then the other, helping some captives to escape, getting himself into trouble and getting out of it.

This doesn't have the epic quality of some of Kurosawa's earlier works and is more a study of a character under extreme tension and stress. Mifune has moved away from his earlier laughing and ridiculing technique and here is quieter and more in command of the situation. In many ways he fits the classic template of a *knight errant*, arriving in a place with no ambition other than a determination to do the "right thing".

The storyline here was stolen outright by Sergio Leone for his Clint Eastwood film ***A Fistful of Dollars***. Toho, *Yojimbo*'s production company, successfully sued and earned more from that suit than they did from this film's release in Japan. George Lucas also paid homage to the film in ***Star Wars***, utilising one of the fights scenes from this film as a template for the fight in the cantina.



In any event *Yojimbo* is a classic of its type, extremely influential and very entertaining. R: 3.8/5.0

Ford v Ferrari (2019)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

[This film was nominated for Best Picture at the 2019 Academy Awards.]

Something very strange was happening in the world around the mid-1960s: JFK had been assassinated in 1963; the space race between the USA and the Soviet Union was gearing up in earnest; the Beatles were

moving from their teenie pop phase into something more complex; and the US industrial complex had not yet fallen completely under the sway of the US military. And in 1963 the Ford Motor Company in the US started to look a little beyond its own backyard at Europe and the dominance of Ferrari in the major touring car races, particularly the Le Mans 24 Hour race, ushering in a period when brute power was deemed to be more important than aesthetics, especially in motor sport.

In the early 1960s Ferrari was in trouble financially, and, getting wind of this, Ford sends Lee Iacocca to Italy to make Enzo Ferrari an offer for his company. As much as Ferrari listens attentively he uses Ford's offer as leverage to obtain a buy-out from Fiat. Henry Ford II takes this rejection to heart and is persuaded by Carroll Shelby (Matt Damon) to build a car to challenge Ferrari in these big races. Shellby won Le Mans in 1959 driving an Aston Martin and was, at that time, the only American to have won the race. Shellby recruits British driver Ken Miles (Christian Bale) as his main developer and driver and the film then follows the design and manufacture of Shellby's car for the 1965 Le Mans race, the scheming and back-stabbing inside the Ford Motor Company as rival executives scramble for the approval of Henry Ford II and the 1965 Le Mans race itself.

This is more a man and project management film rather than a strictly racing one. Yes, there are a lot of scenes of cars driving very quickly during development and at race tracks but the main thrust of the film is the way Shellby and Miles are able to keep going in the face of ambitious men who will do anything to obtain business power in a major company. Rather like *Moneyball* (2011) this is more about the people who inhabit a sport than about the sport itself. R: 3.7/5.0

***L. A. Confidential* (1997)**

Platform: Disney+

Genre: Crime

[This film appears on the list of 1001 Films You Must See Before You Die and was nominated for Best Picture at the 1997 Academy Awards.]

Based on the James Ellroy's 1990 novel of the same name this film examines police and political corruption in Los Angeles and Hollywood in 1953. The title refers to the 1950s Hollywood scandal magazine *Confidential*, here re-titled *Hush-Hush*.

As the film starts smart, career-oriented Police Sergeant Edmund Exley (Guy Pearce) starts work in the detective division run by Police Captain Dudley Smith (James Cromwell). Smith makes use of the brutal Bud White (Russell Crowe) to help keep criminal suspects in order, which Jack Vincennes (Kevin Spacey) plies the Hollywood beat, earning extra cash for dropping tips to the editor of *Hush-Hush* Sid Hudgens (Danny DeVito). At the same time a high-class pimp Pierce Patchett (David Strathairn) is running a string of call-girls who have been cosmetically altered to look like movie stars; among them is Lynn Bracken (Kim Basinger) who naturally bears a strong resemblance to Veronica Lake. When an ex-policeman and one of the call-girls are found among the victims of a massacre in a coffee house Exley and Vincennes begin to investigate, slowly drawing White in to help. But the body-count begins to rise and Exley and White start to suspect that the perpetrators may lie within the LAPD.

Both Pearce and Crowe were little known to American audiences before this film and their performances here helped their subsequent careers immensely. Crowe plays the hard man with a soft spot for women victims to perfection and Pearce is just right for the tightly bound Exley.

The novel was thought to be almost unfilmable due to its plot complications, however director Curtis Hanson and screenwriter Brian Koppelman reduced the number of plot threads down to something



manageable and the end-result recalls the noir films of the fifties with 1990s filming techniques and more naturalistic lighting. The pacing is tight, and the action and violence come about as a result of the plot and the interplay between the characters. It's one of the best films of its kind. R: 4.2/5.0

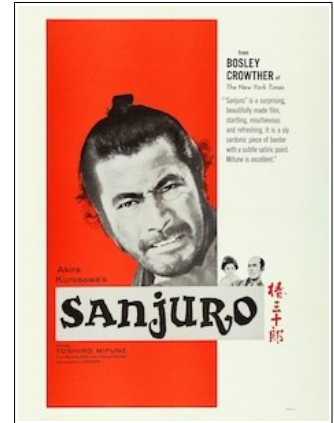
Sanjuro (1962)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Drama

[Japanese with subtitles.]

A group of young men meet in a temple to discuss the corruption surrounding their clan. The uncle of one of the men is the clan's head and he seems to be capitulating to the criminals who are trying to seize power. They resolve to take matters into their own hands and begin to gather themselves to confront their opponents. As they are about to leave they are interrupted by a voice from the back of the temple telling them to stay where they are. The voice is revealed to be that of a lone ronin (Toshiro Mifune) who has listened to the men's discussion and informs them that their clan's head is playing a long-game, aiming to draw out the usurpers before confronting them. The young men take some persuading but eventually agree to follow the ronin's plan, part-way at least. The ronin is continually working to keep the young men in line, helping them rescue the head-man's wife and daughter, and to bring the criminals to justice.



This is another of Kurosawa's *jidaigeki* films set during Japan's feudal period. It was originally intended to be a stand-alone film based on the Shūgorō Yamamoto novel *Hibi Heian*, but which was adapted to include the Mifune character Sanjuro from Kurosawa's previous film, *Yojimbo*, after that film's success. Mifune is, of course, perfect in the lead role: taciturn, explosive, intelligent, respectful and domineering when required.

This film is at a similar level to *Yojimbo* and acts as a perfect companion piece. R: 3.8/5.0



Heat (1995)

Platform: Disney+

Genre: Crime

[This film appears on the list of 1001 Films You Must See Before You Die.]

Michael Mann's heist neo-noir thriller is really a vehicle to allow the viewer to watch Al Pacino and Robert de Niro go head to head, and it is certainly worth watching.

Neil McAuley (de Niro) is a life-time criminal who meticulously plans his robberies and who is looking for one last score so he can get out with his girlfriend and change his life. Vincent Hannah (Pacino) is the overly-dedicated, twice-divorced, LAPD detective who is determined to stop him. When McAuley attempts to sell some stolen bank bonds back to their original owner the transaction goes bad and McAuley and his crew have to foil an attempted ambush. This brings Hannah and the LAPD into the picture as they begin to closely monitor McAuley. The next robbery of a precious metals depository is foiled and Hannah forces a meeting with McAuley over a cup of coffee. And this is the scene, reportedly unrehearsed to allow for more conversational spontaneity, that is one of the highlights of the film, as Pacino and de Niro calmly discuss themselves and their work. McAuley undertakes a tricky bank robbery in broad daylight which results in a massive shoot-out in a public place and things start to go awry.

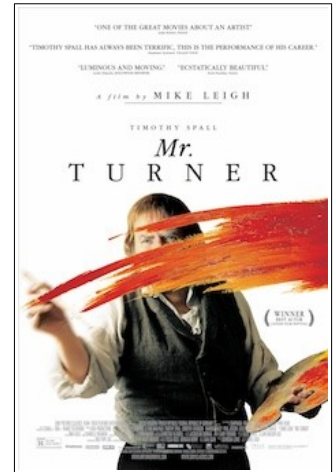
Filmed mostly on location this film has the look and feel of real life. All the characters get a chance to shine and, while the two mains are the bulk of the reason why we watch this, you need to keep an eye on what is happening around them to really appreciate why this film is so good. R: 4.2/5.0.

Mr. Turner (2014)

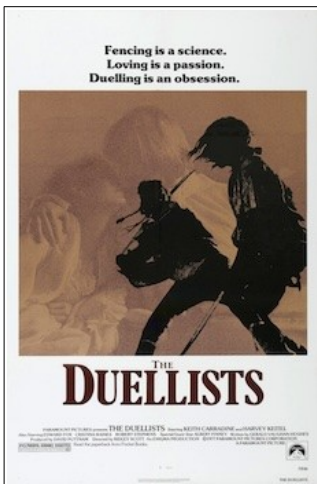
Platform: Britbox

Genre: Historical drama

Mike Leigh's film about the life of renown English painter J. M. W. Turner covers the period from just before Turner's father's death in about 1825 to his own death in 1851. Turner (Timothy Spall) starts travelling to Margate to paint. While there he stays at the boarding house of a Mrs Booth and takes on a pseudonym to avoid overt attention. This continues for some years before Mrs. Booth's husband dies and Turner starts a relationship with her. She discovers his true identity but seems totally unconcerned about the matter, offering to move to a house in Chelsea so they can be closer together. And so Turner spends the last years of his life alternating between his own home and that of Mrs Booth, painting as much as ever and causing some level of havoc whenever he goes to exhibit at the Royal Academy.



Spall is wonderful in the role here, showing Turner's highs and lows, his selfishness, his kindness, his joy and his despair. You might want to criticise the film for some of the liberties it takes, and some of the assumptions about Turner's relationships, but that is all part of the game with biographical films of this sort. R: 4.0/5.0



The Duellists (1977)

Platform: DVD

Genre: Historical drama

Ridley Scott's directorial debut is based on Joseph Conrad's novella "The Duel" and features Harvey Keitel and Keith Carradine as the two French soldiers who fight a series of duels over a 20-year period during Napoleon's wars in Europe. Gabriel Feraud (Keitel) is an obsessive duellist who, after fighting and defeating the nephew of the mayor of the city of Strasbourg, is placed under house arrest by Armand d'Hubert (Carradine), under the orders of their commanding officer. Feraud takes this as a personal insult and fights d'Hubert immediately. And so begins the series of duels whenever the two cross paths across Europe over the next twenty years.

Scott has noted that he based his approach to this film on Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*, which also has a duel as a major plot point, setting scenes to emulate Kubrick's scenic cinematic approach, mainly filmed out-of-doors. Scott has an eye for the dramatic and for the perfect natural setting and there are some wonderful locations featured in this film. The duels aren't too bad either. R: 3.5/5.0

PERRYSCOPE Responses

Perryscope 47:

John Newman: “I enjoyed 47, including some deep chuckles over the thought of a fish flavoured Mars Bar. Just prior to receiving 47 my two brothers had returned from a 'driving around Britain' holiday and it was interesting to read of and compare your experiences. They were disappointed to find that when driving in those famous hedge lined roads it is difficult or impossible to see the scenery!”

[**PM:** The high hedges are very much a feature of southern England. Didn't see any in Scotland. I've certainly done my fair share of driving through those high hedges and it's not only the scenery you can't see but also the oncoming traffic. I've been run off the road at least once. Through no fault of my own, I hasten to add.]



Perryscope 48:

Lucy Huntzinger: “That's quite a reversal of decision on where you retire, but what happiness that you can afford to stay. John and I have been assuming we'd have to retire outside the Bay Area because it's so expensive here. Our house is not ideal, either, being small with too many stairs, the street out front is busy, and we have no privacy from two out of three neighbors, though the third neighbor is a church which is very private except for Sundays. With the idea that we'd be selling soon after he retired this year we have had the interior of the house painted and new carpeting put in. Which makes it a lot nicer inside than it's ever been, but I still want to move to someplace quieter. The problem? We considered and rejected several states, deciding to stay in California, and then considered and rejected most parts of California as being too prone to wildfires, too prone to coastal erosion, too conservative (we would not enjoy being political outliers), or too far from everyone we know. Also, John has been a collector of books and magazines all his life and absolutely dreads coming to terms with moving all his Neat Stuff.



“Which leaves us with trying to find the mythical house in a part of the Bay Area we can afford. It's not looking too good. I've decided if we can't find a reasonable location within three years we're going to have to accept this house is where we spend the rest of our lives. At which point I'm going to demand a complete kitchen renovation and that's going to really test our patience. But if I have to put up with nosy neighbors, cars gunning up and down the street day and night, and all those stairs in my old age then I want to be able to cook in comfort. Which I have not been able to do for the 24 years we've been in here. So I guess we'll find out which disruption John dreads more, renovation or moving. :)”

[**PM:** Robyn and I renovated this house in the late nineties so most of the trauma of that event is now lost to me. I've been thinking that maybe I should ask Julian Warner to write about his current renovation project but I think the pain of that event, still on-going as I write, is probably too much to ask of anyone. It will severely test your patience, with the project and with each other, so you have to be aware of a lot of things going in. You will find that the decision-making process blows up so much that it becomes just as difficult to make a small decision (what taps to have in the kitchen) as it does to make large ones (what

colour to paint the house). I decided early on that Robyn was far better at decoration decisions than me so I let her have the final say in just about everything. It seemed to work out pretty well.]

Mark Olson: “Your discussion of relocating for retirement was fascinating. It does not mirror our own thinking at all, which makes it all the more interesting.

“About five years before I was likely to retire, Priscilla and I looked around our house — the house we bought when we got married — and took note of the bookshelves in every room save the kitchen and one bathroom, with overflow stacks of books on the floor in front of most of them and decided that it was time to upsize. Our first house was in a quiet, green neighborhood in central Framingham, an area which was still pleasant, but which was squarely in the way of development if Framingham continued to grow. (As it turned out, downtown didn’t grow in that direction and is unlikely to anytime soon, but we didn’t know that.) It was time to move.

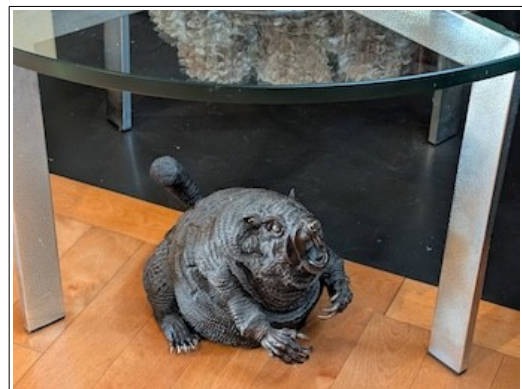
“We decide we'd look elsewhere in Metrowest (the western suburbs of Boston beyond the inner ring road), but we kept focusing back on Framingham. We'd picked Framingham when we got married because it was one of the few affordable towns that could be called convenient for both of us. (I worked in Cambridge, which absent historical accident would have been part of central Boston and Priscilla worked in Worcester, about thirty-five miles west of there.) Prices had risen quite a bit in Framingham, but just as much or more everywhere else, so we again focused on Framingham.

“Priscilla found a really nice, significantly larger house in a much quieter neighborhood with twice the land. It cost twice what we got for our old house, but was still a bargain. (You know all about expensive real estate!) The larger house meant a more comfortable home for our books and the larger yard meant a bigger and better garden.

“We did not hope to raise enough fruit and vegetables to supply ourselves, but did look forward to eating our own produce. Reality turned out to be different. We had not counted on the variety of pests who also made their homes near us. Deer are the worst. They are vermin which overpopulate the whole East Coast — estimates are there are twice as many now as there were in 1620, but only 15% of the forest land — and they overgraze the woods killing young trees and pretty much everything else under 5' from the ground and devastate suburban gardens. (And as a special treat, in the late Fall during Deer Suicide Season they lurk near roads at dusk waiting to jump out and hit passing cars. This is a serious problem.)

“I put a fence around the main vegetable garden, but as it was only about 3' high, deer could jump over it. They never did, but if they had, my plan was to add a lot of sharpened stakes... Venison is quite tasty.)

“But worse than deer were groundhogs, a large, cute (if you're not a gardener) rodent that looks a lot like a wombat and seems to fill the same ecological niche as wombats, that of being run over on roads. They will eat just about anything as long as it's a vegetable we're trying to grow it. (They don't like tomatoes, but keep trying, so that we find dozens of tomatoes on the ground, each with a single bit out of them.) They're not only rapacious, but brazen. Deer, at least, tend to wait until twilight or full dark to invade your yard. The groundhogs are out there all day, fat and happy and daring us to try to stop them.



“I couldn’t stop them, but for Priscila's 70th birthday, I got Vincent Villafranca to create a bronze sculpture of a demonic groundhog showing its true, inner self. (He did a very nice job — see the photo on the previous page.) We were thinking about putting it outside in the garden, but never got around to it, so it lurks under a table in the living room occasionally startling a visitor.

“As bad as the groundhogs and deer are the squirrels and chipmunks (a small ground squirrel) which get under, through or over every fence I've been able to construct and nip the new green shoots of pretty much all our vegetables.) They also devastate our fruit trees and grapes, eating the fruit before they are ripe enough to be palatable.

“The only veggies that we were ever able to grow successfully were eggplant (which both the groundhogs and I consider inedible) and hot peppers (which do not a diet make).

“I can't imagine moving a long distance from here. While Framingham is not very near our local friends, they are so dispersed that no where else would be better. And moving out of the Boston Metro area is even less attractive, since I have located excellent bakeries, superb sausage makers, cheese shops and the like. How can I say goodbye to them?

“(And let's not even speak of the work involved in packing and then unpacking a houseful of books and c/r/a/p/ other wonderful stuff.)”

[**PM:** Yes, let’s not talk about that elephant in the room.

Other than the native and non-native birds flying around the only animals we get in our backyard are rats and possums. Both are liable to eat fruit, and possums will attack just about any green shoot that pops up so you have to be wary. I do notice that they don’t go anywhere near chilli plants!]

“I loved *The Name of the Rose* and found its picture of the late middle ages fascinating. And who can't love a detective named ‘William of Baskerville’? The film was pretty good, but drifted too far from the historical and into mythologized history.”

Nic Farey: “Not to downplay yer own contributions, all well good as usual, Chong's review of *Some Desperate Glory* was astonishingly goshwow — I hope this gets the feedback it deserves and I wish I had a bit more nous to go into it (and the rest of the ish) at greater length. As usual you'll have to put up with the brief review in 'Fanzines Received' in **This Here... #81** (due out on the 30th). Warner's good an'all, and as for yer larrikin self I can make interesting comparisons/ differences with your retirement domiciling situation. It's well different for those of us with no dosh who merely rent...”

[**PM:** Yes, we were lucky enough to get into the real estate market here in Melbourne at the right time, ie the early 90s. This city is now one of the most expensive in the world for housing and this doesn’t look like changing any time soon. Every time the Australian Government comes up with a scheme to supposedly help every commentator in the media is quick to point out just why it won’t work. The only “real” solution here seems to be to increase the supply though with Melbourne already covering a land area about the equivalent of London the best solution is to go up. And that is meeting with major opposition from existing suburbs. It is slowly changing but not really quickly enough.]

Marc Ortlieb: “Sigh. What am I doing writing you a note about **Perryscope 48** when I should be finishing my ANZAPA Mailing Comments? Who knows? Perhaps its the fact that 34 pages are less daunting than the umpty ump pages of **ANZAPA** I still have to go.

“So I’m pleased to see that you aren’t joining the tree changers. It’s all very well for Dr Edmonds to make his monthly trek from Ballarat to Monash Uni but he’s far more single-minded about the need for such things.”

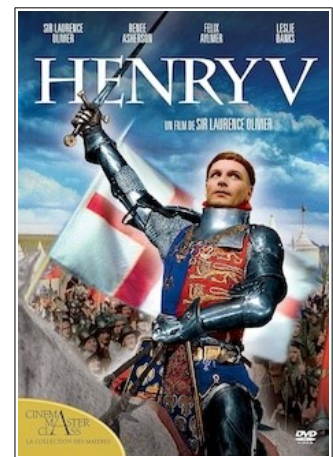
[**PM:** I had this vague recollection, probably from a conversation or two when we were both living in Canberra in the early 1980s, that Leigh wanted to move to somewhere rather warmer than the nation’s capital. His move to Perth seemed to fit that criterion and then he moved back to Victoria to Ballarat, one of the coldest large towns in the state. I suspect because it was close to where he grew up in Dimboola and he still had relatives there.]

“Julian Warner and I clearly live in very different universes. When visiting chez Ortlieb you’re lucky to get a cup of tea and, if you’re very lucky and don’t mind shuffling through the kipple, you might even get a chair. Whisky? I doubt that there’s a bottle in the house, apart from a couple of tiny ones that looks as though they might have been filched from a hotel mini-bar but which were probably just donated to me as part of an end-of-year Christmas Party. We do have dusty old bottles of wine, but I doubt that they are particularly drinkable — despite all the nonsense about wine being aged, I don’t think its supposed to be fossilised.

“I remember a load of my Adelaide mates in the 70s used to rave about *The Little Prince*. I read it and didn’t see the attraction, but then a lot of said mates also liked the saccharine sweet music of Cat Stevens. I’m afraid I’m totally unfamiliar with any of the other books, film and television that you review although I did once see the film version of *Goodbye Mr Chips*. Again a bit much for a cynical teacher.

“Bugger! That was a short LoC. Maybe I will get back to ANZAPA but I’m more likely to go and make lunch and then turn on the TV and watch the Indian Bowlers dismantle the rest of the Australian lower order.”

Joseph Nicolas: “Responding to various comments in the latter about Olivier’s film version of *Henry V*, you say that you ‘should always think of when a film was made to fully understand it’ — and that is especially so with this film. Although it was released in November 1944, the bulk of it was shot in 1943, a year when the tide of war in Europe was turning in favour of the Allies: a huge German army had been surrounded and defeated by the Russians at Stalingrad, and US and British forces (having evicted the Nazis and their allies from North Africa) had begun rolling up Italy. Anticipation was spreading that an invasion of northwest Europe would happen at sometime in the next year or so, and although none of the cast and crew, never mind the public at large, could know the details of when or how, this anticipation structures the film. It begins in a theatre, aka the Home Front; remains there as details of the invasion of France for the continuation of the Hundred Years War are elaborated;



and finally moves outside for the climactic Battle of Agincourt, at which the outnumbered English defeat the numerically superior and heavily armoured French — aka a post Dunkirk-style reference to Britain fighting alone. Although the preparing-for-invasion theme may have been somewhat muffled by its release nearly six months after the D Day landings, when it was clear that the Germans were in full retreat, it was dedicated ‘to the Commandos and Airborne Troops of Great Britain, the spirit of whose ancestors it has been humbly attempted to recapture’ (although why only commandos and airborne troops rather than British soldiers generally is unclear — was Olivier focused particularly on the glider assault on Pegasus Bridge on the night of 5 June 1944?).

“Kenneth Branagh’s film version (note that his surname only has one ‘N’, not two) is a very visceral

and mud-level depiction of what medieval armed combat may have been like, but of course doesn't have any of that politico-military context: it's just a very good film version of the play.”

[**PM:** Point taken. Though I still prefer the blood-and-mud-and-guts of the Branagh version.]

“I smiled to myself at the conclusion to your saga of finding somewhere else to live in retirement, and realising that you were already where you wanted to be; that was our experience too. We had vaguely thought of leaving London once the big Six-O rolled around, toying with a location in east Dorset such as Wareham or Dorchester where we'd have reliable and frequent train services to and from London, but quickly realised that without a car — and having no driving licences, no hope of acquiring one — we'd be pretty much trapped there. (Post the 1963 Beeching savaging of the railway system, it is difficult to travel anywhere in England by train without going through London, while the privatisation of bus services in the 1980s has decimated rural bus routes.) So we turned our attention instead to setting up our existing house for retirement — we'd already had part of the attic floored, so got the rest of it floored and had a staircase put in to make it more accessible (and thus usable as a proper storage area); we'd had some of the aluminium-framed double-glazed windows replaced with wooden frames, so did all the rest; we put a conservatory on the back of the house, expanding the living area and for the first time giving us a view of the garden from the interior; and installed solar panels on the roof. Then Judith died seven years later, and for the past three years I've been retired here all on my own. Several neighbours asked me, in the wake of her death, whether I'd be moving away, presumably thinking that a three-bedroom terrace house would be too large for one person; but how could a smaller house accommodate the thousands of books and CDs that we have? (And why give up the solar panels and the conservatory, never mind the garden we'd created?)”

[**PM:** We were certainly okay on the driving front, as both of us have driving licences and both are used to driving long distances in the country. We do, though we probably feel we'd rather not be doing it on a regular basis.]

Also, the prospect of moving everything, as mentioned by Mark Olson above, was also a contributing factor. You spend a fair proportion of your adult life accumulating “stuff” and having to cull that accumulation was not something I was looking forward to. I've decided it's probably better to let my kids have the joy of figuring it all out.]

“It's a wet and windy Saturday here — Storm Bert is the name given to it by the Meteorological Office, which sounds suitably working class (or ‘wer kin glass’, if you can say that in Estuarine English, with an inserted glottal stop) — and heading into the afternoon, so I should be thinking about some lunch. Possibly soup and anchovies on toast. And I should remove a meat product of some nature from the freezer as the basis for dinner later. I used to leave all the fancy cooking to Judith, but (having stepped up) have discovered that I quite enjoy it. Boop!”

[**PM:** Robyn is by far the better cook of the two of us, though I do find myself enjoying the process as well. Most of my cooking is done outdoors however. My indoors repertoire is rather limited.]

John Newman: “Certainly, in **Perryscope 48**, it is interesting to see that if you live in a home that suits your needs, graced with transport and many other services, moving may just not be the best option!

“Chong's writing on *Some Desperate Glory* has made me keen to move the book up my 'to read' list. And your reviews will keep me in readings for the future!”

[**PM:** I think Chong wants me to read it as well. Maybe over summer.]

William Breiding: “Just a brief note. I didn’t want to let pass telling you how interesting I found your piece on wrangling the idea of retiring elsewhere, and your final conclusion to remain in your wonderful neighborhood. You did leave a cliffhanger, though: were you able to cancel the down payment on the apartment being built or did you lose that money?”

[**PM:** Once we had made the downpayment and signed the contracts we were committed to the purchase. The problem was knowing what to do with the apartment afterwards. When it was built we still had the idea of retiring to the country so we decided to hang on to it to see what we might decide later. Luckily for us our daughter decided she wanted to move out so she is renting it from us. So we have a tenant there we trust and we’ll just hang on to it for a few years more until she finally works out where she wants to live.]

“Does Australia really expect to keep phones out of the hands of pre-16 year olds? It’s the wrong battle, and already one that is lost.”

[**PM:** You are referring here, I believe, to the plan by the Australian Government to ban children under sixteen years of age from all forms of social media. I have no idea how they think this is going to work. The underlying aim is a good one, the process of making it work is another matter entirely.]

I also heard from: Mark Linnemann; Rob Gerrand; John D. Berry; Kim Huett; Marcin Klak; Heath Row; R-Laurraine Tutihasi; Martin Field (who noted: “Loved the tortuous route you and Robyn travelled to find that, like Dorothy, “There’s no place like home.”); and **Barbara O’Sullivan** (who recommended the film *Lee*, featuring Kate Winslet); thank you one and all. ■