There are similarities between universities and a five day cricket test match. To the uninformed observer, nothing exciting happens in either for long periods. The players are more interested in their own game than entertaining spectators. There is an air of timelessness over the proceedings. The controls over the performance are not obvious, the rules are obscure. The games are played by performers expected to behave like gentlemen.

If there is any truth in this comparison, then La Trobe University has only just started its first innings: one wicket down and a fair sized total of runs on the board. Universities are institutions whose lives are measured in hundreds of years (a view spectators at test matches sometimes share) and twenty-five years is a short period. As I write, I am about to travel overseas and during the trip will spend a few days at the University of Bologna to join the celebrations for its nine hundredth anniversary. La Trobe is still young!

In 1977, when I succeeded Dr David Myers as Vice-Chancellor, I gave an inaugural lecture entitled 'A View from the Bridge'. Twelve years on, it is worth recalling some of the content of that address. The title was intended to be a reference both to the Captain's role on the bridge of a ship and to the commanding physical view from the Vice-Chancellor's office.

How do those remarks look now? How much of that vision for the future of La Trobe University has been achieved during my custodianship? I talked about research and its vital importance to a university. I emphasised the importance of the teaching role of the university and of our graduates, together with the significance of the relationship between teaching and research. There were some observations about morale of staff and students, and of relations­ships with Government. Finally I stressed the importance of building a bridge between the University and the local community.

The purpose of this essay is not to provide a coherent history of the second half of the past twenty-five years. Instead, it will aim at some snapshots of the highlights and an overview of our achievements in the light of that 'View from the Bridge'.

The main characteristic of a university that distinguishes it from other institutions of higher education is the capacity to conduct research at a high level in a wide range of disciplines. Elsewhere in this volume are detailed accounts of our achievements. They are considerable and not fully recognised by the general public. Let it suffice to point out that La Trobe University now has a Special Research Centre, one Key Centre for Teaching and Research and a share in a second, all located here after intense competition between all Australian institutions of higher education. The gradual accumulation of these very visible centres over the last five years is a great tribute to the quality of the University's research.

But that is just the visible tip of our efforts. The very readable annual Research Report gives more details of the wide range covered; from herbicide performance on wheat to children's acquisition of aboriginal languages; from the detection of phenols in waste waters to Japanese economic and social change. The expenditure on research has mounted as the University has grown. In 1987, the University appointed a Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) to promote and co-ordinate its research effort. Increasingly we have been co-operating with industry and commerce, and obtaining substantial grants from them. This was an aspect of Australian academic life which barely existed in 1977 and whose absence I deplored. The University has a significant number of patents, and some are earning money for us.

With the growth of the University, so has grown the number of postgraduate students.
Building La Trobe University

Again, this illustrates the maturity of La Trobe, as well as the importance of the link between teaching and research. Browsing through the Calendars of other Australian universities, one increasingly sees staff with a first or second degree from La Trobe.

There is still one sad failure in our development that I view with dismay. In 1977, I pointed out that we were one of the few Australian universities with no central unit to promote teaching and learning skills. That is still the case. As always, the establishment of such a unit is currently being discussed and perhaps the situation is about to change.

The range of subjects taught at the University has widened considerably during the past twelve years. There have been two new schools, four new departments and three new divisions. Some have grown from earlier seeds, some planted from outside. For example, Italian was being taught in a relatively minor way in 1977, with considerable help from the University of Melbourne. The authorities in Canberra were none too keen to see another department of Italian in the Melbourne metropolitan area, yet it was obvious that there was an increasing demand from students of Italian background, let alone others. It was at this stage that the Vaccari Foundation wrote round to all the universities offering a prize for the best student of Italian origin. In common with the other universities, we were not much enthused by this somewhat discriminatory suggestion, but came back with some proposals to help students and staff study Italy and its culture through travel grants, gifts to the Library and so on. These were accepted by the Foundation.

So developed a growing relationship with the Vaccari Foundation and the Vaccari family, leading to modest but helpful research grants. It was at a dinner to express our thanks for their help that the possibility of founding a Chair was put to Signora Vaccari, next to whom I was sitting. In due course, the University received one of its largest ever grants to create the Vaccari Chair of Italian Studies and so form the Department of Italian Studies.

The Department of Computer Science started as an initiative by Dr David Woodhouse and his colleagues who had the foresight to realise that this discipline was not going to be contained as a part of Mathematics in the future. The Department was started without a professor by staff transferring from other departments. It was stated, although I am sure that no one believed it even at the time, that it would cost no extra money, but it was obvious that most of the University realised that some such move was an essential step. Of course, the Department quickly attracted students in large numbers. Very soon, it bid for a Chair of Computer Science. This was at a time when funds were very scarce and it became clear that the University had to decide on the priorities of founding this Chair or refilling the then vacant Tad Szental Chair of Electronic and Communication Science. Contrary recommendations rebounded from the School to Academic Board to Council where they were contested and bounced back. It was not, in fact, until 1986 that the Chair of Computer Science was filled.

These two examples illustrate the different ways in which universities expand into new areas. The Departments of Archaeology (1985) and Linguistics developed more conventionally from a few staff with a common interest to a division and thence to a full department with a professor. There was some argument as to whether the Department of Archaeology should be in the School of Humanities or Social Sciences but that was resolved relatively easily. During the same period, Divisions of Drama, Cinema Studies and Greek Studies have been established.

The creation of new schools is a more difficult process. During this period the addition of the School of Mathematical and Information Sciences and the Lincoln School of Health Sciences have brought the number of schools of the University to ten. Each in its way has a story behind its creation and each is indicative of the considerable indirect influence a Vice-Chancellor can have on the development of a university.

When the University was considering its triennial submission for 1985-87 to the Universities Council in 1982, I was perturbed by what seemed to be a rather unimaginative draft document. The University seemed to be asking for funding only for more of the same or for some rather exotic research centres which were unlikely to be successful in a bid for funding. In addition, the Science Schools had proportionately declined from the parity with the rest of the University envisaged in the early years. It seemed worthwhile to pursue a new initiative based on some of our strengths.

The Department of Computer Science was increasingly uneasy at being part of the School of Physical Sciences, feeling, rightly or wrongly, that it was not getting its fair share of funds.
Linguistics, Logic, Psychology, Mathematics were all strong areas of the University. There did seem a possibility of proposing an exciting new area of say, Cognitive and Information Sciences which could be very attractive to students. With a little encouragement, a group of academics in these areas prepared a proposal which was put in our submission at a late stage.

At about the same time, the Report of the Strategic Planning Committee for the School of Physical Sciences recommended that the University should consider splitting the School into two. The two ideas came together and resulted in the formation of the School of Mathematical and Information Sciences in 1985 with Departments of Computer Science, Mathematics and Statistics. This was not exactly what the earlier group had contemplated, but it does provide a base from which exciting developments can take off in future years. One such recent development is the joint degree program between the old rival Departments of Electronics and Computer Science. This attracts students of very high quality and is well regarded by future employers.

The School of Health Sciences became the tenth school of the University as a result of the amalgamation with the Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences on 1 January, 1988. That decision really deserves a whole book to itself and probably represents the biggest change to the University since the abolition of the college concept. Again the initiative was a personal one and originated around a dinner table in 1981. An apparently casual remark by Dr Jim Watson, then deputy chairman of the Victorian Post-Secondary Education Commission, whom I was entertaining to dinner, suggested that La Trobe should consider amalgamating with Lincoln. This was before forced amalgamations, let alone voluntary ones, became the vogue and really was a revolutionary suggestion. Certainly any preliminary moves had to be made with discretion. It became apparent, somewhat to my surprise, that the Director of the Institute was also interested and we initiated some early discussions. Within a few months, the era of forced amalgamations proposed by the 'razor gang' was with us and Colleges of Advanced Education were running in all directions.

We continued talking, however, and shared the proposal, in confidence, with the Chairman of VPSEC and the Universities Council. The former was enthusiastic, the latter unenthusiastic. We were told that the Council did not support mergers between colleges and universities in metropolitan areas. How times change! At this stage, we informed our Councils of our discussions and obtained approval to take them further.

However, they then foundered. Increasingly Canberra was indicating a lack of enthusiasm, any threat of forced amalgamation for Lincoln receded with a change of Government and the Institute became increasingly concerned in promoting development on its new site at Abbotsford.

In 1986, with the approval of the Academic Board and Council, discussions re-opened. It was timely for both institutions: it was apparent to Lincoln that the Abbotsford site was too small and capital funding was not forthcoming, while the paucity of professional courses at La Trobe was increasingly a matter of concern. There followed two years of discussion and negotiations, often heated and always protracted. Discussions at academic levels, at emotional levels, at political levels; of funding and economic arguments, of research and teaching considerations, of legal and constitutional problems; negotiations with Lincoln bodies, Unions and Staff Associations, La Trobe organisations, State and Commonwealth authorities. No sooner had one apparently satisfied the demand for an educational rationale than the argument would be transferred to financial grounds and thence to the most difficult area of all: titles. Department or division; Reader or Associate Professor; Lincoln School or just School?

However, on 1 January 1988, the two institutions became one by Act of the Victorian Parliament and the University had its tenth school. I have no doubts whatsoever that the decision will be seen as a major and successful step for La Trobe University. It will however be some time before the School of Health Sciences is fully integrated and accommodated at Bundoora in the main, if not completely.

In the development of relations with the community and the expansion of the cultural
activities of the University, we have achieved much. In the past twelve years, the University has opened an Art Gallery and a Museum, both of which have regular exhibitions. It has acquired the magnificent Four Seasons glass panels by Leonard French, installed under the David Myers Building, and accommodated the Dante Sculpture donated to Victoria as a 150th anniversary gift from the Italian community. The grounds are used for picnics, cycle races, bicentennial bonfires, paraplegic games. Our public lectures are regularly sponsored by the Cities of Preston and Heidelberg. We discussed with the City of Preston the possibility of a joint Performing Arts Centre and Great Hall on campus. The talks failed, but the seed is still there.

In my view, one of the great features of La Trobe University is its ability to consider change and adapt to changing circumstances. Dr David Myers and the early staff certainly displayed these attributes and it is still a strong characteristic. It is not true of all universities and it admittedly has its dangers. As a colleague once said at another university, ‘How can you expect a plant to grow when you keep on pulling it up to examine its roots?’ Nevertheless, it certainly makes for an active and exciting environment and it will be a sad day for the University if it becomes a staid old maid.

That environment has made the task of the Vice-Chancellor both easier and more difficult. Let me quote from the 1977 inaugural lecture. ‘There are many tasks and problems for the Vice-Chancellor. The burden of solving the day-to-day smooth running, the responsibility of ensuring that our teaching is of the highest standard, the need to see that our scholarship and research is equally high, all constitute a formidable demand of which I am well aware. The Vice-Chancellor must provide leadership and guidance, but perhaps his most difficult role is to provide the atmosphere of trust and concern in which these delicate plants can root and.

This role of the Vice-Chancellor is to my mind one of the two most important that the office has. I shall come to the second shortly. In an academic community, this is what leadership is all about. There is no way in which one individual can personally ensure the development of the multitude of teaching and research enterprises throughout a university. What can be done is to provide the right atmosphere and to wander in the garden, providing a little shelter for this special very delicate plant, obtaining a few seeds from elsewhere, realising that another plant will thrive on its own and discouraging (or occasionally, rooting out) weeds. In induction courses for new staff, I have regularly made the point that La Trobe University should be a place where new ideas do not receive the answer ‘no, we cannot consider that’ but at least ‘yes, let’s look at it’. I believe the developments that have been described indicate that there has been some progress towards that atmosphere.

The second vital role for a Vice-Chancellor is in the appointment of professors. I have chaired every professorial selection committee in the last twelve years and have been intimately involved in their processes. My contribution has ranged from a casting vote on one committee to telephoning someone who had not applied for the Chair to offer the appointment. The professors are the academic leaders of a university. In passing, let me make clear that I am using the Australian system of nomenclature, derived from the British, where the title is used only for a full, tenured professor, possibly only one in a department, but at most only a handful.

That brings me to another significant episode of the past twelve years: The ‘Reid’ Committee of Inquiry into University Government and its report. The committee had been established before I arrived and reported soon after. Professor Salmond in his article has given a detailed account of its recommendations, but it provided a major controversy during 1978 and 1979.

One of the major and most controversial recommendations was to remove professors from being automatic heads of departments. Chairpersons, of senior academic rank, were to be elected unless the department decided otherwise. For some professors, this was an anathema; for others it represented liberation from irksome routine toils. The Academic Board spent hours debating this issue, sometimes with considerable acrimony. The debate had its lighter moments, although I did not appreciate it at the time. During one discussion, when the
composition of the electorate for choosing chairpersons was being considered, a proposal that technical and secretarial staff should be included was put forward. Members of the Board were tired, tempers were frayed and in a moment of pique a member proposed that the University hairdresser, Renato of Venice, should be a member of all electorates. The mood was such that the motion might well have been passed, but it was fortunately time for an adjournment and the moment passed. Renato of Venice might have succeeded to the glories of the Doges.

In the event, this recommendation of the Reid Report was basically accepted by the University. Safeguards were built into the legislation to protect the leadership role of professors and to ensure that they were properly consulted. La Trobe University was one of the later universities to move to elected departmental chairpersons. The system works, it removed a number of very tense situations in some departments which were impeding academic work and gave some excellent younger staff administrative experience. It was right for the times, but it is not necessarily the ideal system. I am convinced that in no way does this system minimise the importance of the professoriate for the future of the University. As for heads of departments, there will be good and bad ones under either system, probably in about the same proportion. At least under an elective system, the bad ones do not last long.

Morale and image are two words that constantly occur in internal discussions and have been regularly brought to my attention over the past twelve years. Morale is virtually impossible to measure and is very subjective. Also what may be good times for academic staff may be bad for administrative staff. High morale is not necessarily associated with abundant resources and may not be at its lowest when funding is tight. Probably it is something that does not affect the majority of academic staff who pursue their teaching and research regardless. Nevertheless, good morale is essential in attempting to unify an institution like a university. On the whole, in my judgment, the morale of the University has been high during this period.

The image of the University is another difficult area which must remain subjective in the absence of large scale surveys. La Trobe University as the newest in the metropolitan area has had an uphill battle to establish itself in the public's eye. In addition to its newness, the University has had to struggle with two additional liabilities. The absence of both medical and engineering faculties has deprived it of the breakthroughs in research that are most likely to attract public attention. Before La Trobe University had been fully established, it was torn apart by the student troubles of the Vietnam period, a reputation that remained with it for a long time. These past failings are being shaken off. I was delighted at yet another dinner party to sit next to a lady who said 'Oh, La Trobe University. That's quite a sensible university, not like Monash'. We are realising that it may yet be to our advantage that we do not have the slightly old-fashioned and expensive disciplines of medicine and engineering but the new and exciting areas of health sciences and computer science.

It is good for the image of the University that some of our senior staff are very conscious of the media and their research is regularly reported. Although there is an understandable reluctance by many staff to popularise their discipline and become media performers, it is now a very necessary process in order to inform the public and the politicians, and to educate them in the essential purposes of a university. I believe my period of two and a half years as Chairman of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee has been beneficial in the publicity it has brought to La Trobe, if not in any other way. I have often heard complaints about the lack of publicity the University receives, but these are usually ill-founded. A few years ago, the then Vice-Chancellors of Melbourne and Monash told me, independently, that they were envious of the amount of favourable media attention we attracted. Nevertheless the image of the University is a very important factor and difficult to change in the short term.

One development over the past ten years which has altered our reputation overseas is the increasingly strong relationship with the Peoples' Republic of China. We were one of the first Australian universities to accept official exchange students under the Australian-Chinese
educational program, and our academic and administrative staff took great pains to make their stay profitable and interesting. Since then we have had a large number of staff and students from China and have sent staff and students there in modest numbers. The University has exchange agreements or relations with about a dozen Chinese universities and institutes. In connection with these agreements, I have now been to China four times and am always proud to hear La Trobe mentioned as the best-known Australian university. It is exciting that in 1989 we shall start teaching Chinese as a language. I believe all this to be a far-sighted policy on behalf of the University.

There is probably not much a Vice-Chancellor can do in persuading the Federal Government to provide more funding for an individual university, although a willingness to be cooperative has apparently often paid dividends. This has certainly been the case with capital grants. La Trobe University quickly built up a reputation for speedy and efficient use of building grants, which has stood it in good stead. As recently as 1987, we were able to respond to an invitation as to whether we could spend a capital grant of $100,000 for teaching accommodation in a few months. We were able to respond positively within days, to our considerable advantage.

At La Trobe the Vice-Chancellor is personally responsible for recommending to Finance Committee and Council the budget for the next year. Of course, this is formulated after intense consultation with the Deans and other Heads. It is a protracted process and is likely to result in inefficient compromise or stalemate unless the Vice-Chancellor takes a leading role. During the years of steady state or contraction (1977-83), the only way in which to achieve the essential redistribution of resources to developing parts of the University was by harsh cutbacks in other areas. That this was accomplished without extreme bitterness is a tribute to the good sense of those involved.

However, good sense is not always the hallmark of a university in handling its internal affairs. Those who have never worked in a university will not believe the amount of academic politics that occurs, although some recent novels give a very reasonable flavour. At La Trobe, I have seen irate academics come to blows, others have been sent to Coventry and not spoken to for perceived academic misbehavior, an administrator has been spat at, while libel suits, threatened or actual, between staff members have become increasingly common. I hasten to add that I know from my own experience that La Trobe is no worse than any other university. Academics have a single-minded passion for their discipline that is unsuspected outside universities and sometimes leads them into unfortunate actions. In such an atmosphere, the role of a Vice-Chancellor intent on providing leadership is difficult. I happen to believe in the collegial tradition that the academic staff of a university all have a part to play in determining policy, yet in the hard world outside, decisions are required speedily and responsibly. How to balance participation in decision making and authoritative quick responses is a major problem and is an increasing challenge to modern Vice-Chancellors. I can only suggest that diplomacy, cajoling and occasional firmness are necessary ingredients and that it is an exciting process. I can only recall two or three occasions when I did not eventually get my own way.

I would like to pay a tribute to the two Chancellors under whom I have served, the Honourable Sir Reginald Smithers and the Honourable Mr Justice McGarvie, the second and third Chancellors of the University. The role of Chancellor is a difficult one: to find the right compromise between always being available for independent advice when needed and yet not interfering unnecessarily in the day-to-day running of the University; to occupy a full-time demanding position outside the University and still fulfill the expectations of the University to chair Council meetings, preside at graduation ceremonies and speak or be present at numerous exhibitions, public lectures and other functions. As the first Chancellor of La Trobe University fulfilled these duties with quiet charm and efficiency, so have his successors. It was a proud moment when at the installation of Mr Justice McGarvie, the University presented honorary degrees to his predecessors, Sir Archibald Glenn and Sir Reginald Smithers.

The last twelve years have been interspersed with some magnificent moments of spark-
The Open Door

ling sunlight as well as the more solemn or sombre periods. Let me share some with my readers.

There was the occasion when I was entertaining some distinguished Chinese visitors to lunch in the anteroom to the Council Chamber. As so often happens, I had dashed in a little late and immediately felt obliged to fulfill my responsibilities as host. Seeing, in a flustered and short-sighted state, what appeared to be an elegant dish of butterfly prawns, and silently congratulating my staff on their foresight in providing such suitable food, I passed them to the impassive President on my right, who equally politely declined them. A few minutes later I tried again with the same result, amid a certain inexplicable muttering from the assembled La Trobe academic staff. Finally, I attempted a third time to persuade the President to take some prawns. A hoarse voice from a Dean cried 'No, you fool. They're flowers! The staff had decided to decorate the table with some orchid flowers floating in water, which I had mistaken for prawns. No doubt the Chinese thought that eating flowers for lunch is an old Australian custom.

One of the most memorable evenings was the public lecture by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1987. The Union Hall was overflowing, far beyond its legal capacity; there was a crowd outside of over a thousand watching on TV monitors. Everyone was overwhelmed by the quiet but passionate address by the Archbishop. After the lecture, I persuaded him to say a few words in person to the overflow crowd, who were enthralled by the gesture. It was then arranged that I should drive him round the inner campus while the crowd dispersed.

Now I rarely drive a car round the inner ring road, but set off resolutely with the Archbishop and his wife, followed in turn by the then Registrar in his car and then a police car. We first ended up at the Boiler House, where some efficient reversing soon lost the police car, but the Registrar hung grimly on. A slow but steady pace past Glenn College and over the Moat soon found us in the Agora, on the pedestrian walkway, squeezing past the Library with an inch to spare on both sides. It was there that we lost the Registrar. Out of the Agora, over a ridge and there we were on Science Drive. The Archbishop loved every moment.

I suppose one of the most farcical episodes is connected with a piece of angle iron in my office. I hope my successors will guard it zealously because it played an unusual part in the history of the University. From 28 February until 12 April 1981 the University, in collaboration with Preston Institute of Technology, accommodated the Australian Sculpture Triennial. It was an exciting event with many remarkable sculptures placed all over the campus. One was by a leading Australian sculptor, consisting of angle-iron welded into an expressive shape. Unfortunately, the night before the exhibition opened, someone pushed the work over, so that it toppled down a hill and into some bushes. The next morning, one of the gardener's trailers collapsed near the spot. It needed a piece of angle-iron to repair it, and the workshop had none. 'Oh', said the gardener, 'I know where there's a heap of old iron down there in the bushes.' So they cut a piece off, mended the trailer and proceeded happily on their way.

Later the sculptor arrived and created hell because his work was not on display. After a search, it was found in the bushes but with a piece missing. He threatened to sue the University, it offered to put the piece back, he said that would destroy the integrity of the work. The situation began to move towards the legal case of the century, but the insurers eventually paid up the full value of the work, some thousands of dollars. I must admit to a slight sadness that the case never reached the courts. The Whistler-Ruskin case would have paled into insignificance. I can imagine our learned counsel arguing that if the man-in-the-street (or a gardener) did not even know that it was a work of art, it could not be of any great value. Alas, we shall never know what damages, if any, would have been awarded.

There are moments of complete indecision. How do you cut off a graduation occasional speaker who has already talked for thirty-five minutes when asked to speak for ten minutes? Should a senior professor who has had a little too much to drink be tactfully removed from a committee meeting?

And there are moments of joy. Academic Board voting by an overwhelming majority that
the Vice-Chancellor should continue ex officio to chair is meetings. Having a shouting match with a senior professor that could be heard down the corridor and still remaining friends. A very solemn academic procession at graduation splitting in three directions as it enters the hall and wandering aimlessly to the dais.

It will not be long before this particular captain says farewell to his crew and the passing passengers with all their joys and sadness. Perhaps from the bridge I might point the telescope ahead to see what the future holds.

It is certainly foggy and the waters nearby are turbulent. As I write, the Federal Government’s White Paper on Higher Education is in the process of being implemented and the future is more difficult to predict than ever before. I see La Trobe growing by a process of amalgamation with other institutions, a process that will cause much heart-searching and take a long time before stability is reached.

This large University will then have to consider very carefully its activities. I foreshadow ten years of consolidation and difficult decisions. Some areas will close down or become only teaching departments, new areas will be created. There will be a need to identify the mission of the University. I would hope we have the foresight to get in at the beginning of some new areas of learning. I would still bet on cognitive studies; computer aided design looks a possibility and biomedical engineering looks promising. The University will have seriously to look at some courses that at the moment would cause raised eyebrows in universities such as tourism, banking and insurance studies.

What I am certain will prevail at the La Trobe of the future is the mission to provide a caring and supportive institution, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We should be proud that we have provided the people of Victoria with a university that is different, sensitive and excellent.

In my inaugural lecture, I ended with a quotation from Arthur Miller’s play A View from the Bridge. This essay I end with a sequel to the motto of La Trobe University ‘Qui cherche trouve’. After the words in St Matthew’s Gospel ‘Seek and ye shall find’ comes ‘knock and it shall be opened to you’. I have a feeling that the next twenty-five years are going to demand a lot of knocking, but I am confident that La Trobe will find the doors opening for it.