



SEMANTOGRAPHY SERIES NO. 144

SEMANTOGRAPHY SYMBOLS AND ROAD SAFETY IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Since 1949 when I had finished my 3 books, I started to approach the authorities in New South Wales which are responsible for road signs and road safety. I also approached the Transport Division of the United Nations. The many letters which I wrote are dispersed in my files and piles of correspondence and it would be too tedious to present them all in one issue. Here below is one instance which maddens me every time I think of it.

I proposed my symbol of the walking legs in 1949 to supersede the unwieldly PEDESTRIAN CROSSING signs in New South Wales. I tried to interest Professor Elkin, as Chairman of the Road Sign Committee. He ignored all my approaches (see Semantography Series No. 113). It happened then that he saw a sign showing a pair of walking legs (and much similar to my sign) in Ceylon and this he introduced in New South Wales. There was an article in the Herald and a heated controversy in letters to the editor. The Minister for Transport in New South Wales also entered the field. Here below is the story which has an incredible ending. The following article appeared in the Herald on July 6th, 1953.

EXPERTS ARE TESTING MANY NEW ROAD SAFETY SIGNS

The exotic yellow stripes of "Zebra" pedestrian crossings have appeared tentatively at the corner of Alison Road and Doncaster Avenue, Kensington, and at William Street, King's Cross.

A third "Zebra", similarly formed by a series of parallel stripes 20 feet long and two feet wide, will soon ornament a crossing at the corner of Macquarie and King Streets, city.

The Transport Department, which is conducting these experiments will also test a circular pedestrian sign emblazoned with a pair of trousered legs. Furthermore, the department's officers have, for several months past been observing the effect on motorists of a flashing amber beacon suspended above the intersection of Roseville Road and Wakehurst Parkway, French's Forest.

All these tests are being made at the request of the Road Signs and Traffic Signals Sectional Committee of the Standards Association of Australia, a committee concerned with the improvement and standardisation of road signs and signs throughout Australia.

The "Zebra" marking has been borrowed from Britain, where, in association with "Belisha" beacons, the stripes have helped reduce pedestrian casualties.

SYMBOLIC LEGS

The symbolic legs, studded with reflector buttons, resemble a similar sign observed in Ceylon by the chairman of the committee, Professor A. P. Elkin, who is Professor of Anthropology at Sydney University.

The beacon at French's Forest, which flashes in four directions once every second, is being tested as the result of a request to the committee from Victoria for an economical warning device at hazardous intersections.

The 26 members of the Sectional Committee include representatives of police departments, road transport authorities, Chambers of Manufactures and Commerce, the Australian Optometrical Association, automobile associations, and other national bodies concerned with road safety.

Although the Standards Association is not a Government authority, State Governments usually adopt suggestions by the Road Signs Committee which their representat-

ives, as members of the committee, have already approved.

In 1935, the Standards Association published its first Road Signs Code. The 1946 edition of this booklet is now being revised by the Committee. The Secretary of the committee, Mr. J. H. James, this week explained some of the changes being made to the code.

THREE SIGN TYPES

First, though, he pointed out that there are three types of road sign: Mandatory signs, which are generally backed by law ("Keep Left", "No Parking," and "Slow 15"); warning signs ("Crest," "Curves," and "Subway"); and informative signs ("Kempsey 65," "Hunter River," and "Jenolan Caves").

"The shape of the sign must be significant," said Mr. James. "Because of its importance, only one sign - 'Stop' - will have an octagonal shape in the new code. All other mandatory signs will be circular, warning signs will be diamond shaped, and informative signs rectangular or square.

"Mandatory and warning signs will be painted black on yellow, the colour contrast most easily seen. The colour and design of signs in the new code will conform generally to the signs contained in the United Nations 1953 Protocol on Road Signs and Signals.

"The Australian Transport Advisory Council, consisting of State Ministers for Transport, recently asked the committee to express an opinion as to whether Australia should sign this Protocol.

"The Committee has indicated that Australia could, subject to minor reservations, introduce the U.N. system on Australian roads. It would necessarily be a slow job because we could replace existing signs only as they wear out. But we could do it in time."

Asked to explain further, Mr. James said the United Nations had prepared an earlier Protocol in 1949 which relied far too heavily on the European system.

"It was quite different from the Australian system," he said. "Other countries felt the same way, too, so the U.N. appointed a group of experts from Turkey, India, Southern Rhodesia, the United States and Chile to revise the Protocol.

"Their report showed influence of the American system which emphasises symbols rather than words. As our system is virtually based on the United States system, the report swung our way too."

The Road Signs Committee gathers specification data for the standardisation of materials used in road signs. Mr. James drew a strip of painted metal from a drawer and proceeded to scrape off the coarse paint with his penknife.

"That's called susceptibility to mechanical damage," he said in an apologetic tone. "We are gathering data on that and on the optical and weathering properties of materials.

"One particular system used in road signs is known as beaded reflection. Millions of minute glass beads applied to the paint reflect light from headlamps."

C.S.I.R.O. TESTS

Optical properties of sample road signs have been tested at the C.S.I.R.O. National Standards Laboratory at Sydney University. "They project a beam of light on to the sample and measure the reflected light on a test instrument. The whole thing is called a reflectometer."

Weathering properties have been tested at the Defence Research Laboratory, Alexandria, on a similarly named machine - the weatherometer."

"The sample is placed in a machine designed to accelerate the natural weathering of paint," said Mr. James. "An electric arc subjects the sample to ultra-violet radiation. The sample is also sprayed intermittently with water, and baked at a temperature of 140 degrees Fahrenheit."

I wrote the following letter to the editor:

Sydney, 7th July 1953

The Editor,
Sydney Morning Herald

ROAD SIGNS AND ROAD DEATHS

Sir, - The daily tragedies make your article (Herald, July 6) highly significant. As pointed out, the Road Signs Committee favours now symbols rather than words, and its Chairman, Prof. A. P. Elkin has recommended a symbol of legs (to replace the complex PEDESTRIANS CROSSING) which he has observed in Ceylon.

He need not have gone to Ceylon to copy this symbol. It is one of the logical road symbols of Semantography, of which the N.R.M.A. stated in 1950: "This Association is of the opinion that the adoption of this system throughout the world would contribute towards much safer traffic conditions in international motoring."

However, the N.R.M.A. is not an official body and maintains that whatever the official bodies do, is too little and too late. Already in 1949 I asked the Road Sign Committee to be allowed to demonstrate the road symbols of Semantography. I was not invited and my personal letter to Prof. Elkin was ignored. Of all other departments approached, none was interested even to see the symbols, although Bertrand Russell and other authorities abroad (see Herald January 1, 2, 1952) have praised a work to which an American paper referred to as an Australian invention.

In the face of daily deaths occurring, allow me to express my fervent, though futile protest.

Pagewood

C. K. BLISS

and supported it with an additional letter:

Sydney 7th July 1953

The Editor
Sydney Morning Herald

Sir,

I ask you to support an Australian pioneering work and to publish the foregoing letter to the Editor. I am not sure you will do it, because I am considered by some as a disgruntled and quarrelsome crank, instead of an Australian pioneer who has gone through many bitter experiences. Nemo propheta in sua patria honorem habet.

However, the value and historic significance of my work has been recognized abroad and some of the most important American libraries have placed standing advance orders for anything I write in my fight for Semantography. These orders have been placed with Angus & Robertson. I don't know of any Australian scholar who has been accorded a similar honour, that even future writings about his work are booked in advance. The Sydney Morning Herald articles about Semantography of January 1 and 2, 1952 are already in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., Harvard University and other libraries and I shall be pleased to add the foregoing Letter as visible proof for your aid to an Australian pioneering work. With thanks in advance I am

Yours sincerely,

C.K. Bliss

However, my letter was not printed. Instead a letter of a Mr. K. G. Levell was printed in which he protested against the "ugly sounding" sign of a pair of trousered legs. To this letter the Minister for Transport, Mr. C. E. Martin answered in the following letter to the editor:

To Editor:

PEDESTRIAN SIGNS

Sir, - The opinion of your correspondent, Mr. K. G. Levell ("Herald," July 7) concerning the new circular sign to be tested at pedestrian crossings started me.

My decision to test this sign, a disc 24 in. in diameter with reflectors showing a pair of legs walking between pedestrian crossing-lines, was made after its adoption by a very responsible body. The Road Signs Committee of the Standards Association, which has Commonwealth-wide representation, has recommended the use of the sign throughout Australia and I believe I should be failing in my duty if it were not tested in New South Wales.

It is difficult to grant your correspondent's claim that the sign "an ugly sounding novelty", will not do what other signs have failed to do. Experiment alone can give a proper answer to that.

I do not know of any amount of money which may properly purchase a human life, and similarly the small amount of trouble involved in an experiment which may lessen human suffering is surely justified.

C. E. MARTIN
Minister for Transport.

I wrote the following letter to the Minister:

Sydney 15th July 1953

C. E. Martin, Esq.,
Minister of Transport,
SYDNEY.

Sir,

Your letter to the Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald (July 8,) concerning a road symbol of legs, which should replace the sign PEDESTRIANS CROSSING closes with these words:

"I do not know of any amount of money which may properly purchase a human life, and similarly the small amount of trouble involved in an experiment which may lessen human suffering is surely justified."

I beg you to take the small amount of trouble involved in studying this letter and act upon it.

I am the author and inventor of "Semantography" which has found high praise with eminent scholars, as for instance Bertrand Russell. Semantography consist of a system of simple pictorial symbols and the leg symbol is among them. It has special application for traffic signs and any meaning can easily be expressed in the semantographic symbols, many of which are almost self-explanatory. The idea behind Semantography is already in practice on the deadly highways of the world, where word signs are taken down and replaced by symbols. A bent arrow means a CURVE in all languages of the world. The symbol is easily distinguishable even in rain and darkness.

Please be informed that already in 1949 and later, I approached the Road Signs Committee, the Standard Association, the Transport Ministry, the Commissioner of Transport, the Road Safety Council of N.S.W. and other bodies. I presented a recommendation of the N.R.M.A. which reads:

"This Association is of the opinion that the adoption of this system of symbol writing throughout the world would contribute towards much safer traffic conditions in international motoring."

In all my approaches to the abovementioned official bodies I asked only to be allowed to demonstrate my symbols. I regret to inform you that I have not received any invitation. None have taken "the small amount of trouble" involved which (to use your words) "lessen human suffering" and which "may properly purchase a human life."

You will readily imagine my feelings when I read that a symbol will be copied from Ceylon, which I have offered years ago together with a complete system for any other traffic needs. Why cannot an Australian be heard on a matter which yearly costs hundreds of lives, and thousands of injuries?

You, and your officers may assume that I am one of the many motorists who come forward with all kinds of suggestions. My work however is found in the most important libraries of Australia and abroad. Bertrand Russell wrote that

assistance given to my work means "performing an important service to Mankind," I have lectured a number of times at Sydney University and once at the University of Technology about Semantography. Moreover, a number of eminent librarians have already recognised the historic significance of my struggle for a new idea and have given standing advance orders for anything I or others write about my work, and be it one sheet only.

I beg you therefore to realise the significance of my approach to you, after years of frustration and to treat this approach as an historic step. I ask you to give me the opportunity to demonstrate the symbols of Semantography not before one man of your Department, but before a selected group. One man may easily come to a conclusion which would then be accepted as final by all other persons interested. I ask you that you yourself should interest yourself in an idea, which will go out from Australia to be copied by the rest of the world. We here, need not copy from Ceylon or other places.

Awaiting your decision, and thanking you in anticipation, I am

Yours sincerely,

C.K. Bliss

Minister Martin then advised his Secretary to have the Department of Motor Transport and the Police Traffic Department investigate my proposals. I received the following letter:

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

New South Wales

53/96B/4992

Mr. C. K. Bliss,
5 Maroubra Bay Road,
PAGEWOOD.

Sydney July 30, 1953

Dear Sir,

The Minister for Transport has directed me to acknowledge receipt of your letter of July 15, suggesting the use of Semantography in relation to road signs.

Enquiries are being made and you will be further advised as early as practicable.

Yours faithfully,

Secretary

And later on:

DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR TRANSPORT

New South Wales

53/M88/1279

Mr. C. K. Bliss,
5 Maroubra Bay Road,
PAGEWOOD.

24th August, 1953

Dear Sir,

The Minister for Transport has referred your letter of the 15th July, 1953, suggesting the use of "Semantography" in relation to road signs to my Department for attention.

My Traffic Facilities Engineer (Mr. H. A. Peach) will be the Officer who in the first instance will be dealing with the matter and it is suggested that you might get in touch with him at your convenience by ringing telephone MA-7442 or MA-1868.

Yours faithfully,

W.A. Walsh,
Superintendent.

The Police Traffic Department did not write to me. Instead Inspector Gribble (now in 1955 Superintendent for Traffic) visited my home. Unfortunately I was not there. I contacted him by telephone and we arranged a meeting. It was my bad luck

that he was not available at this date and another inspector talked with me. After showing him some of my symbols I said to him that I want only one thing: to be given the opportunity to demonstrate my symbols before the competent officers of the Police Traffic Branch. He promised to report this, but nothing happened.

Of all the many approaches which I have made since 1949, the only one in which something happened was when Inspector Gribble came to my home. However, even this led to nothing.

Although I wrote to the Minister that I did not want to talk again to one official only, the Superintendent of Motor Transport nevertheless wrote to me to get in touch with a Mr. Peach. I tried to contact him by telephone twice without luck and went twice to the Department, both times he was out. Somehow I was fed up, especially when I thought they should be after me and my idea for improved road safety, not I should be after them. This thought was strengthened later when I received the following letter:

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

53/96B/4992

New South Wales

2nd October, 1953

Mr. C. K. Bliss,
5 Maroubra Bay Road,
PAGEWOOD.

Dear Sir,

The Minister for Transport has directed me to write to you again in connection with your suggestion for the use of semantography in relation to road signs.

The Minister has been informed that on 24th August last the Superintendent of Motor Transport wrote to you, asking you to get in touch with Mr. H. A. Peach, Traffic Facilities Engineer of the Department of Motor Transport with a view to arrangements being made for a demonstration of your system.

As you have not done so, the Minister regrets he is unable to take the matter further.

Yours faithfully,

Secretary

The end of the letter suggests that it is simply my fault that road safety is not improved in New South Wales. I maintain that it is their duty to follow up and be after every new idea in road safety and I wrote the following letter:

Sydney, 12th March, 1954

The Secretary,
to the Minister of Transport,
New South Wales
Box 1620, G.P.O.
SYDNEY.

Re: Semantography Your letter October 2, 1953

Dear Sir,

With your last letter you have stated that the Minister regrets that he is unable to take the matter further. I wish to inform you that I have tried to contact Mr. Peach a number of times either by telephone or by a personal visit. In both cases I could not reach him. I left my address. However, I understand your position and accept your verdict.

In the past a number of people have urged me to approach the Minister. They have asked me time and again what the outcome was. Whatever I said was coloured by my disappointment. The only fair thing to do is to give me the permission to copy your letters in which you have stated the case for the Minister. In order not to cause you any further expense I enclose herewith a stamped envelope and shall be grateful for your earliest reply. Please accept my thanks for the time you have taken in the past.

Encl. Envelope.

Yours sincerely,
C.K. Bliss, B.Sc.

I received the following letter:

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT
New South Wales

53/96B/4992
17th March, 1954

Mr. C. K. Bliss, B.Sc.,
The Institute for Semantography,
5 Maroubra Bay Road,
PAGEWOOD.

Dear Sir,

I am writing in reply to your letter of the 12th March, further in regard to your suggestion for the use of semantography in relation to road signs.

Following upon the receipt of your letter an endeavour was made to make contact with Mr. H. A. Peach, Traffic Facilities Engineer of the Department of Motor Transport, in view of your statement that you had tried on a number of occasions to get in touch with him either by telephone or by personal visit.

Unfortunately Mr. Peach commenced three weeks' annual leave as from Monday last the 15th March, and it has not been possible, therefore, to speak to him in the matter. From inquiries made of his assistants, however, it would seem that Mr. Peach was expecting you to get in touch with him and it can only be assumed that you did not announce your identity when you rang or called to see him.

With regard to your request for permission to copy the correspondence that has ensued in this matter, there will of course be no objection to your doing so and using the copies for any purpose you desire.

Yours faithfully,

Secretary

Meanwhile Dr. Everingham independently of my efforts and not informing me about his own approach, wrote to the Minister. At that time Minister Martin was dead and Minister Wetherell had taken over. Everingham received the following 2 letters:

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT
New South Wales

54/96B/4030
19th May, 1954

Dr. D. N. Everingham,
115 Virgil Avenue,
CHESTER HILL.

Dear Sir,

I have been asked by the Minister for Transport to thank you for your letter of 8th May, concerning the pedestrian crossing sign and referring to research carried out by Mr. Chas. K. Bliss, of 5 Maroubra Bay Road, Pagewood, into the case of symbols for public notices.

Mr. Wetherell is having some inquiries made in this matter and you will be further advised as early as practicable.

Yours faithfully,

Secretary.

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT
New South Wales

54/96B/4030
1st June, 1954

Dr. D. N. Everingham,
115 Virgil Avenue,
CHESTER HILL.

Dear Sir,

The Minister for Transport has asked me to reply to your letter of the 8th May, suggesting that the use of symbol type traffic signs as proposed by Mr. C. K. Bliss

be extended.

The position is that following upon Mr. Bliss making representations relative to his proposals last year, he was asked to make contact with the Traffic Facilities Engineer of the Department of Motor Transport with a view to arrangements being made for a demonstration of his system.

However, Mr. Bliss has not yet been in touch with the Engineer as suggested.

Yours faithfully,

Secretary

I intend to protest one day to the Premier and the people of New South Wales against the handling of this case in which a good idea was simply not followed up because, as the pretext is, I have not approached Mr. Peach (though I have done so). I believe that their duty is to be after me and my work and not vice versa.

The death toll in New South Wales is increasing every year and almost nothing is done.