

My recollections of the early days at the HARVEY AGRICULTURAL JUNIOR HIGH - AGRICULTURAL WING - South West Highway, Harvey. 30/5/91

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The land and buildings of the Agricultural Wing were ceded to the Education Department in the early nineteen fifties. They were duly accepted by the then Director General of Education, Dr T L "Bluey" Robertson with the expressed intention of establishing an Agricultural Residential Wing to the Harvey Junior High School.

Prior to this the complex was used as a (C.R.T.S.) Commonwealth Rural Training Scheme to prepare ex-servicemen for the land. Photographs and other memorabilia were in evidence to support this use, plus anecdotal accounts of events. Before this it was used as an Internment Camp for Italians. They left stonework grottos and attractive statues of a religious nature in the environs. An earlier use was a Commando Jungle Training Centre for the preparation of troops to do service in the Second World War.

Dr Robertson had an enthusiastic vision that this complex would make an ideal site for an Agricultural Residential Wing. Having recently seen the present Agricultural Wing time has proven how right he was, his judgement has certainly been vindicated. He was fortunate in having Mr J H "Harry" Barton selected as its foundation Headmaster. Dr Robertson was able to imbue his vision of Agricultural Education to him. Before this time in the early fifties, agricultural education was limited to the Narrogin School of Agriculture (NSA), Denmark Agricultural Junior High School and the W A Department of Agriculture was responsible for agricultural education at Muresk (Northam) for older boys to Diploma level. Muresk is now operated by the Curtin University of Technology offering high quality programmes in agriculture.

Mr Barton was able to travel to most of the schools in W A that had the innovative potential for agricultural education. He was accompanied by Mr Jim Yates, the Superintendent of Manual Arts. The latter was able to institute farm orientated courses in woodwork, metalwork, technical drawing and farm mechanics to suit the needs of the boys attending the Agricultural Wing.

Mr Barton's challenge was to transmit this vision of agricultural education to his staff. Mr Brian Ozanne was Senior Master of Agriculture. He had previous experience at the Denmark Agricultural Wing where he had established a sound reputation for developing future farmers. He also boasted that he had taught at the old Fremantle Boys' in the very same room that Field Marshall Sir Thomas Blamey had taught prior to his illustrious service as a soldier. The room apparently bore his photograph! Brian certainly left his mark and influence on the pioneering days at the Agricultural Wing. I have always felt that he ought to have gone further in an agricultural education career.

Mr Jim Regan was Senior Master of Manual Arts. He was a very skilful teacher of woodwork and his students soon acknowledged this expertise with fine and useful models they designed and built under his tutelage. Jim had grown up in nearby Yarloop and was highly respected for his sporting prowess. He was among the best golfers at nearby Stanton Park golf links. He proved to be a good friend to both staff and boys.

He will be long remembered for attracting Mr Ron Goodson into Manual Arts at the Agricultural Wing - a man who rendered invaluable service to the school.

Percy Budd took the metal work. He was a very competent craftsman. The boys soon recognised his finesse by making a whole range of useful items for the farm. VIPs to the Agricultural School were treated to many fine demonstrations of his metal craft and were given a copper kettle as a memento. Perc's language was colourful at times to say the least! He could slip into the vernacular with ease! If the boys were restless and fidgetty, as boys are wont to be, he would admonish them for their inattention, "Steady boys, you're bouncing around more than a bull's arse in spring!" Ladies, pardon my French! Needless to say, Perc had a strong following at the Ag Wing because of his practicality.

Mr Geoff Brown took the technical drawing for many years. He developed into a polished performer in this field. His students soon recognised that he had a natural aptitude in the design field and they were able to bring to reality many creative and useful models that had been thought about and discussed in class. He was a big man physically, respected as a stalwart of the Harvey football side. He built his own home in Harvey and I understand that he is still living there with his wife, Marj.

Mr Alan Uhe was the first house-master at the Ag Wing. He was a recent graduate in Economics and English from UWA. He was a gifted teacher, a fluent speaker and debater. His witticisms to suit the occasion were legend. The boys really enjoyed his lessons in farm communication (English) and respected his caring nurture from day one. Alan developed into a gifted High School teacher and lecturer at Claremont Teachers' College. Unfortunately, tragedy struck in the late sixties and he died from a brain tumour. He was indeed nature's gentleman. He alerted me to the early history of this state and in particular Harvey, Governor Stirling's Cottage and the Australind Settlement. This is more ably told by A C "Charles" Staples in his "Story of Harvey" written in 1979 to commemorate the Sesqui-Centennial of our State (borrowable from any library).

Farm Supervisors were Ted Himble, ex-Fairbridge Farm School. Ted's wit and humour resounded - if he was lifting a heavy object he'd bellow that it was top heavy. "Boys, I've no joints you know!" to the merriment of the boys.

Ted's successor was Keith Haines, a man of sound practical background. He was wont to say that a good farmer needs to improvise and be resourceful - wise words, even today. Keith's holy trinity as an outback farmer were, I suspect, galvanised iron, barbed wire and roofing nails! The shine of his boots was akin to the shine of his sound character and good disposition.

Robbie (I cannot remember his surname) was the Ag Wing gardener. He did his gardening conscientiously, persuasively argued his socialist philosophy of life, especially union politics and the rights of the worker. We had many gentlemanly discussions on industrial issues. He would urge young people to seek promotion and advancement (growth). He was wont to have a "drop of the doings" at the Harvey hostelry and become convivial without being objectionable.

Johnny Parker was the Ag Wing cook. Of a gentle nature he was none-the-less able at his craft of cooking and preparing food. I would like to dispel here and now any myths and prejudices about the good we ALL ate! Mr Barton dined at refectory daily on weekdays. He insisted that staff and students ate the same food. There was to be no distinction. To me personally, I found the food to be very nourishing and sustaining. I was involved in a lot of competitive sport and travelled by bike or foot between the Ag Wing and the High School section of the Junior High School. Johnny was naturally very zealous of his cooking reputation and sensitive to some unfair barbs about the quality of the local food. He lived in Myola Road in Maddington and when I bought my first car, an Austin A40, I'd give him a lift home on his off-duty weekends.

John Betts was a local lad, he was a steward at the Ag Wing refectory, very obliging and courteous. On reflection, I feel John could have done with a measure of more self-esteem.

Of Matrons who tended the medical and some of the emotional needs of the boys, I can recall Matron Butcher from Recreation Road in Kalamunda, a concerned and supportive person who did her utmost to tend the needs of the boys. Her successor was Matron MacDonald, likewise able in ministering to the needs of the boys and the demands of the complex role. She had a recognisable list - Gipp-s-land. Her son was a top reporter on a Melbourne newspaper.

Of the 24 boys in the first intake of 1953 I must admit that I can only recall about three-quarters of them. Billy Dransfield, the inaugural dux, and Bruce White were to produce a photo of this august group, plus a newspaper cutting to support the names. Charlie Harnett was to verify this list on Reunion Day, 2nd March 1991. There was also a group of day boy students at the Ag Wing whilst awaiting the completion of the building of the High School section of the Junior High by local builders, Newby Bros. I will make reference to these issues at a later stage.

The boys were arranged in two groups of twelve. Twelve boys did theory classes for a week, the other twelve went to local dairy farms for work experience. I am unable to recall with any finite precision the content of the theory taught to the boys as I taught for most of the time at the High School section of the Junior High. However, I did take a group of day boys; Ronnie Kennewell, Geoff Brandis, John Templeman, Alan Brown etc., for Ag Science, Farm Bookkeeping and Farm Arithmetic. In my second year, 1954, I was to extend these subjects to all boys.

The value of work experience, I feel, should not and ought not be under-rated in the education the boys received. Jack Hindmarsh, a Harvey local, drove the boys to and from the farms in a covered ute. They left at 7.00 a.m. and were collected at 4.00 p.m. on. Jack knew all the back roads around Harvey like the back of his hand. He related well to the boys and was invariably good-humoured and cheerful. This programme of work experience was naturally instituted by Mr Barton and Mr Ozanne. I really believe that this was the underpin and crux of the course offered. Naturally it was nurtured, assessed and modified to suit need and circumstance. The vast majority of dairy farmers felt this was a privilege to be selected for the training of future farmers. The boys themselves enjoyed this aspect of their training and benefitted immensely from it. The boys learnt how to feed information back, compare notes on farms, and grow as a result. Some farms and farmers were more popular than others - over the course of events I was at the Ag Wing I felt it averaged out.

The Harvey dairy community felt the Ag Wing was an innovative novelty to begin with. As time went by and benefits accrued they formed a more supportive opinion of it. The Wokalup Research Station was nearby and it could be used for Field Days and other agricultural usage.

On a lighter side, nick-names were rife. Some complimentary, some not! Bruce White came from Fremantle, from the old Fremantle Boys'. He was affectionately known to all as "Jockey Joey" White. Having recently caught up with Bruce, one could not wish to meet a more sincere and decent person. A latter day Chips Rafferty!

Greg Wright was Captain of the Ag School football team. He was "Lefty" to his peers. He proudly lead his team to victory at an Interschool Junior Football Carnival in Bridgetown in 1954. The boys were so pleased with themselves they sang all the way home!

Ian Offer came from Bengier - where the famous potato growing swamp is. He was "Engery" Offer. He had a feel for nature and wild life and opened a Nature Reserve (Zoo) in Brunswick. I am sorry to learn that he is suffering from arthritis.

Alan Brown from Merredin was known as "Boof". I'm afraid I haven't caught up with him since. Michael Kent was from Kukerin. He was known as "Chimpanzee" or "Chimpie". He is now wheat and sheep farming at Holt Rock east of Newdegate. Brian Sutton was from Newlands near Donnybrook. Sir James Mitchell was from there too. He was referred to as "Moo Cow" Mitchell. He instigated the Group Settlement Scheme. Brian now manages Simpers' Hardware Store in Donnybrook. Brian was a very sound student. Bill Dransfield was from Collie. He is now a very successful crayfisherman at Geraldton. John Clifton, Charlie Harnett and Errol Poller are dairy farmers in the Harvey district. John Carpenter was from Kojonup. He is now a competent and successful apiarist of Kelmscott and travels a lot of this state. Edgar Taylor was from Busselton. He is now a Sergeant of Police in the metropolitan area. He was, of course, called "Googy".

Some skullduggery was indulged in by the boys and I will relate one example only. Returning from Church one Sunday morning the school bus was wont to lurch and jump forward in spits and spurts; funny it didn't behave like this on the way to Church. The boys would bellow in unison "Kangaroo petrol, kangaroo petrol". I was, of course, the unsuspecting driver. The joke was truly on a very puzzled me. I reported this irregularity in the bus's performance and by Wednesday of the week it wouldn't work at all. The petrol tank needed removing, cleaned and ditto to the fuel line. Then the plot unfolded. The culprits of this misdeed were duly summoned and punished for this misdirection of energy. Guess what went in the petrol!?!?!

In 1953 Mr Barton arranged for an interschool visit to the Narrogin School of Agriculture (NSA) in the school bus. I didn't accompany this visit but from all accounts it was a highlight experience. Royal Show time in September in Perth meant a visit to the "big smoke" city from their "country cousins" at the Harvey Ag School. The boys would lead animals around in the Grand Parade and generally make themselves useful at the Show. Visits were made to local Shows at Harvey, Waroona and Brunswick. Brian Ozanne would co-ordinate these visits, usually on a Saturday.

The boys themselves usually seemed very pleased with themselves, morale was great especially on Wednesday afternoons and Saturdays when they visited Harvey township in Uduc Road. Brylcream was assiduously applied to their hair, shoes nugged and brightly shone. They attended the pictures - "flicks" - on Saturday night. The local girls were quite appreciative of this personal attention to grooming, much to the chagrin of the local boys - some noses put out of joint! I am sure this would occur today, though Equity Education, that is, farm education for boys and girls, may have thrust a different light on this issue.

Regular socials and dances were held at the Ag Wing so that the boys and girls had an opportunity to display their new found social graces they learnt. Mr Barton and his staff were pleased to encourage this interaction as it helped to produce more socialised citizens; we all enjoyed these occasions.

Many visitors came to the Harvey Ag Wing for morning and afternoon tea and lunch, to stay too. They included the Director General of Education Dr Robertson, Mr Victor Box the Director of Secondary Education, Mr John Mack the Bunbury District Superintendent, Mr Dick Buchanan of football radio raconteur fame - he was the Superintendent of Teacher Recruitment, Mr George Young the Director of Junior Farmers, a most able man with rural youth programmes. Mr Jim Yates, the Superintendent of Manual Arts was very conscious of the practical needs that the boys required to be farmers. Mr Pearson was from the Agricultural Department. He was a wheat and sheep expert. Mr George Tritika, the Harvey vet, gave a weekly lecture on a Friday night to the boys. Professor Freedman Butts from the US lunched at the school one Monday. He proceeded to tell us the contents of his new book "Assumptions Underlying Australian Education", a tome most young teachers had to study for their Higher Certificates. Mr Frank Bradshaw, Mr Andy Boylen, Mr Hughie Laing were Secondary Education Superintendents. Mr Laing was a classical scholar in Greek and Latin. He contended the beef (meat) in Harvey was more athletic than in Perth! Mr Boylen's forte was French, the Alliance Francaise. Mr Bradshaw's fame was Ford and Bradshaw Junior Arithmetic with its graded examples. These and many more visitors were extended hospitality at the Ag Wing.

The first year of 1953 saw some cheerful improvisation of school accommodation. The new school building at the corner of Gibbs and Young Street wasn't open till midway through the 1954 school year. Year 8 were taught at the Ag Wing. Mr Hall and Mr Gilmour bussed them up. Mrs Barton taught the class very well. I had them for science. I recall Fiore Rando from Yarloop, now Principal of Morawa Agricultural District High School, Arthur Torr of Manual Arts fame, now Deputy Principal of Mt Lawley Senior High School, Brian "Shooey" Shoesmith from the Wokalup Research Station, a teacher but I don't know where he is, and also Betty Hough, Margaret Oliver and Robyn Hulm. Naturally this class of talented students added to the variety and spice at the Ag Wing while it lasted.

Mr Barton was rewarded for his pioneering efforts in Agricultural Education by being awarded with a Smith Mund Scholarship to America in the latter half of 1954. It was with regret we said farewell to him and his family. He was secure in the knowledge that he had established the foundation, "the rock", of the Harvey Agricultural Junior High School. Mr Barton was eventually promoted to the Director General of Education in this state. I feel that he never forgot the Harvey Ag School, nor its boys!

Mr George Sherriff, the Deputy Headmaster of the Harvey Agricultural Junior High School, became the Acting Headmaster for the rest of 1954. He carried on the activities and traditions of the school. He was well respected in the Harvey community for his service to the education of their children. George could rise to any occasion - early in 1955 (February) there was severe flooding in Harvey and surrounds. Residents of the Wokalup area had to be evacuated to the "new" school because of rising water.

George was to pioneer an Agricultural Wing in the (vacated) Air Force premises at Cunderdin. He was indeed a fine example to teachers, students and parents and we were all richer for the experience of having worked with him.

In 1955 Mr Stan White, known as "Snow White" to the boys at Ag Wing was appointed Headmaster of the Harvey Agricultural Junior High School. His forte was nature study and natural science. He was successful in furthering the goals of the school. Subsequently, Stan was promoted to a Superintendent of Primary Education.

His successor was Mr Jim West who I understand has written to the Harvey Ag School Ex-Students' Association with his reminiscences.

In conclusion, I state that these are my recollections. Some facts, after forty years, could be out of proportion, but when I see the current state of the Harvey Agricultural Senior High School Agricultural Wing I know that those who served proved their faith was not in vain.

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to all the ex-students of the Harvey Agricultural Junior High School - Agricultural Wing 1953/54, who assisted with production of this paper, especially to Mrs Pauline Carpenter who typed it.