



A PUBLICATION
OF THE ALUMNI OF
WAGGA TEACHERS

TALK ABOUT



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The Eva Copland Cup

Many of our Alumni would recognise this impressive trophy, the Eva Copland Cup.

It has been awarded continuously since 1933 by the Wagga Wagga Eisteddfod Society for the Grand Choral Contest.

The Wagga Wagga Teachers College dominated the contest between 1948 - 1970, winning the trophy 17 times!

Since 2012 three members of our Alumni, Jock Currie, John Ferguson and Chris Fox have kept this strong choral tradition of the WWTC alive. The three are members of the Wagga City Rugby Male Choir which performs regularly throughout the Riverina.

The choir is the current holder of the Eva Copland Trophy.

Those who attended the celebrations of 70 years since WWTC opened will remember the wonderful singing of this choir at the Dinner.



Across the Secretary's Desk - Lesley Forbes



Reunion Cruise Opportunity June 2024

See page 13

A super opportunity to share a few days

Judy Morrison (Noble 1959-60)

I so clearly remember arriving by taxi at the gates of WWTC with my friends Judy Price and Laurel Pearson - all of us from Wollongong High School. As we pulled our huge heavy suitcases out of the cab at the main gate, we could hear the swish, swish of the sprinklers near the rose garden. We looked and felt the worse for wear after that long train ride from Moss Vale as we headed for the admin block.

First stop was to Miss Bridges, as I recall, and she assigned us all to Jarrah dorm. After we dragged those heavy suitcases to our rooms, and had a bit of a look around, it was dinner time. I can't remember everything that was served, but there was definitely a frankfurt and a hard boiled egg. That was a shocker. Is this what we were to exist on? Actually, it turned out to be a one off. Although the meals were not haute cuisine, they were a step up from this ghastly offering.

The fact that attendance at breakfast was mandatory on weekdays, made not attending on weekends a real luxury. We revelled in the extra sleep, and often headed downtown on the bus for a cappuccino or a Vienna coffee at the Lumeah coffee shop. A slab of their coffee cake was de rigueur when you had the cash.

Our monthly allowance from the department was £17 and 2 shillings. We lived high on the hog for the first week, indulging in those delicious long hot dogs, or the amazing Four and Twenty pies from Ray and Gloria's college shop. As the month wore on, we hoped for packages from home to provide a little luxury to supplement the train smash, yellow death and battered nothing from the dining room.

We had so many laughs, so many fun escapades with dorm mates, many of whom became lifelong friends. Although I now live in Canada, I am still in touch with friends I made at WWTC. Being thrown together 24/7 for two years made for powerful connections. In 2019 my husband and I went on a cruise of the Orient with Joan Kirkham (Robinson) and Jim Roche - both from 59/60. We had a wonderful time. Then, in 2020, just days before the WHO proclaimed COVID a pandemic, we had a great visit with Lea Hurst (Owen) in Kent, England.

For the friends and the memories we made, we thank you WWTC.

Janette Thomas (Saunders 1960-61)

Thank you for publishing my article and for all the work you do. However, there is a clerical error re my name and years attended college. My married name is Jan(ette) Thomas and my maiden name, Janette Saunders. I was in college during 1960-61

Thanking you.

Mark McCulla (1960-61)

I'm sorry to have to tell you that Mark died on June 14 2023. He had been suffering with Alzheimers for some time, and also more lately with Parkinsons Disease. His three daughters and I were with him when he passed. His memorial service was held on July 28th.

Regards,
Erna McCulla

Gwen Ferguson (Roberts 1947-49) passed away 21 May 2023

I don't know if my niece knows of our group but I thought that I should let you know that my aunt **Beth Smith (Denton)** one of the 1947 pioneers passed away last week in Lockhart after many years of living with dementia.

Her husband **Arthur Smith**, also a pioneer was my mother's younger brother and he predeceased her by many years.

Cheers

Gary Flanigan (1960-61)

Sue Martin (de Rome 1966-67)

Thank you for all the work you do. I enjoy reading *Talkabout*. I have just paid \$50, not knowing how much in arrears I am for eMembership.

You may be interested in the attached which my hoarder husband just found.

I remember Hale as a most unpleasant bully. It is fascinating that he tracked me down to Murrumburrah Intermediate High to demand payment of 55 cents for one meal. I can't remember anything about why I departed WWTC owing 55c.

It reminded me that prior to arriving at WWTC I had completed all the paperwork and also applied for a blazer. When I arrived at WWTC, I realised that no one wore blazers! As money was very tight, I went to the office to ask for a refund. I was

told to write a letter to Mr Hale, which I did. For some reason, perhaps nervousness because I am a good speller, I spelt *payed* rather than paid. Shock horror! Anyhow a few days after leaving my note at the office, I received an order to report to Mr Hale at a certain time. Everyone warned me that this was not good. I knocked as directed and heard *Come!* from inside the room. I entered and stood as, of course, he ignored me for quite some time. Finally, he raised his head from his very important paperwork and said, *Ah, Miss de Rome, I wanted to see the person who was unable to spell correctly and yet wanted to train as an English teacher.*

He was a charmer.

Norma Cooke (Jenkins 1948-50) has passed away

Janice Thompson (Reid 1964-65) has moved from her home in Hanwood. Maybe someone knows where she has moved to and could let me know.

Grahame Keast (1963-64)

Wow! You've done it again!

Firstly thanks heaps for advertising the **Carnival cruise** next June. Already Bruce and Cecily Chittick (Bruce was 1964-66) have jumped on board. They're from near Gosford. We already have Lamberts from Albury, O'Briens from Singleton, Keasts from Sussex Inlet, Warfields from Bathurst plus 4 ladies - Marion Giddy, Helen Smith, Janice Fitzpatrick and Judy James. All these are from 62-65. Helen Smith is Merv Smith's widow. Merv was 1963-65, yes a 3 year man. (Bruce and Lesley Forbes have since booked.)

I've just transferred \$21 to the WWTC ALUMNI ASSOC. I am sure I owe at least \$20, and

thought if I made it \$21 it'd stand out a bit! Hahahaha!

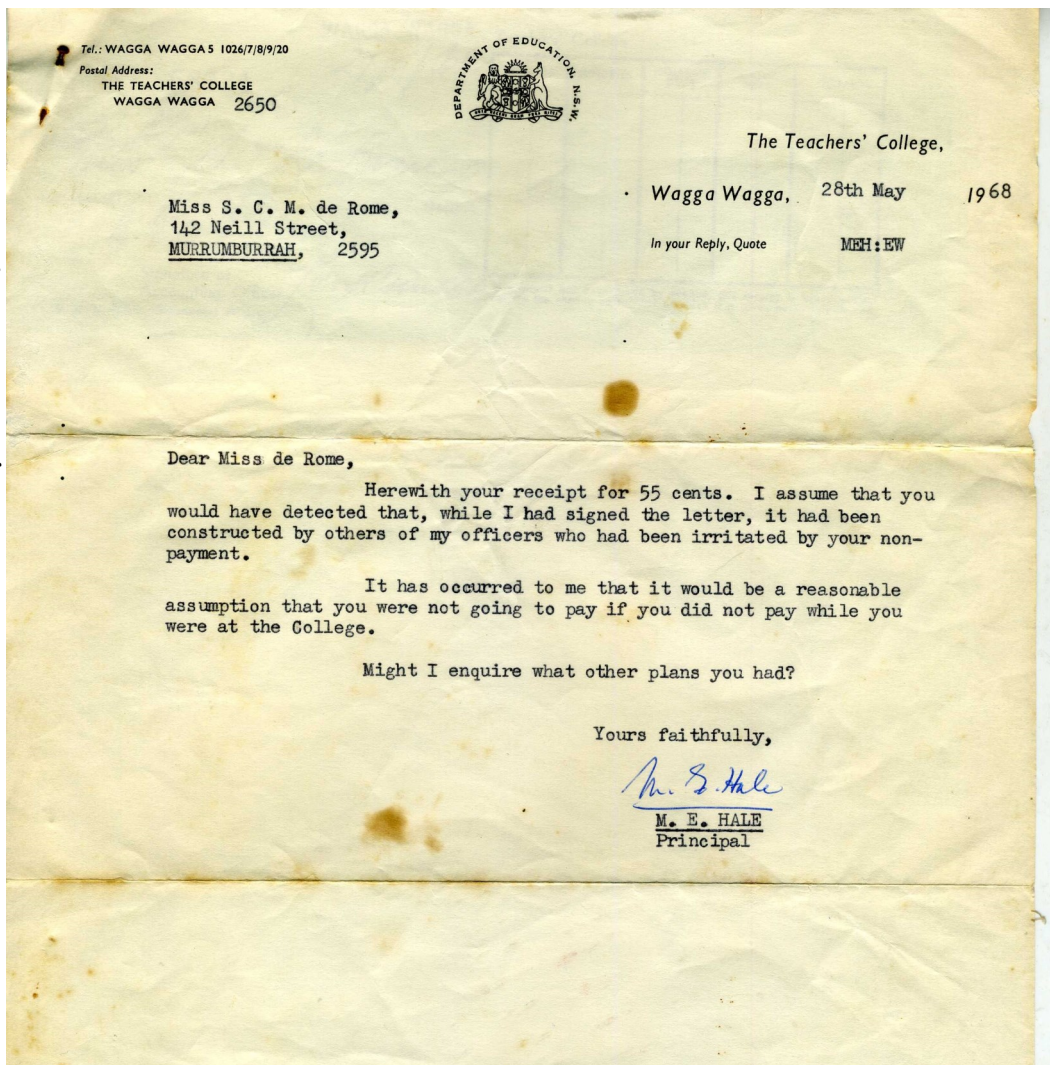
Congrats on the latest *Talkabout*. We have been out of it during August and September.

Firstly we flew to Perth and on to Broome (despite missing our initial flight out of Sydney). There we joined a bunch of folk (all younger than Fay and I) on a KIMBERLEY WILD EXPEDITION (on land). Slept in a swag after putting up our tent. Way to go! Up at stupid o'clock so we could get into the gorges to get the best views. Yes, brekky was often around 5 am! (And some would remember that Fay is NOT a morning person.) We checked out Emma Gorge, Little Mertens River, Mitchell Plateau & falls, Lake Argyle, Kunnunurra, Fitzroy Crossing, El Questro, Zebedee Springs plus heaps of Aboriginal art. Two fabulous weeks!

After this trip we flew to Perth, caught up with some old friends and then did the INDIAN-PACIFIC back to Sydney via Cook, Adelaide and Blue Mountains.

As if all that wasn't enough, we then embarked on a 10 day Carnival cruise from Sydney to Cairns and back. We've just had a few days camping at Sandbar which is not too far from Forster, north of Newcastle. Isn't it good to be home. Now I need the grandkids to come and get the house and yard back in order!

Chris & Jenny Blake (Beck 1966-67) Received this lovely report from Kate Nelson today. (see p7) Very positive. While in Canberra last week we were told that Tony Orriell had passed away the previous week. Not sure of his years in Wagga but probably in the sixties. *Editor's note: Tony was 1962-63*



The Roads Travelled 1961-2023

Liz Meertens (Tuttlebee 1961-62)

The beginning of that journey, a country town Wagga Wagga, 1961, a car journey of 4 hours from Goulburn, where I had grown up and gone to school. Memories flood in. The meeting of similar *lost souls* and the accommodation in the old barracks, the common room in Ipai where we girls congregated, the first lights out and the voices whispering, home sickness at first, the 5 am wakeup call to be put through physical exercises, beds short sheeted, the first letter home full of woe but fortunately never sent. The beginning of 2 fantastic years was set when my roommate, Maureen Foley and myself ended up seated at a dining table with four delightful young men full of humour and banter. Those of you from those years will remember, Adrian Young humourist and great artist, Bill Howitt, later to receive an Australian Citizenship Award from the Governor General in 2012, John Joyce and Roger Griffin. We were invariably the last table out of the dining room sharing laughter while the slow eater, me, cleaned the platter clean.

Who would have thought that that road from my home town of Goulburn to the still further inland town of Wagga would one day lead to a life in Heemstede, The Netherlands. The choices we young folk made at the tender ages of 17 still amaze me. No, I did not want to take up that scholarship to University or go to Canberra and take up a job in the Public Service, the appeal of a 2 year study at Teachers' College and the possibility of travelling after the three year teaching bond was completed, became the decision maker. This from my perspective now sounds rather opportunistic but perhaps from the viewpoint of a 17 year old not so unusual and can be forgiven.

WWTC turned out to be, as I guess most of us have experienced, the foundation of an approach to teaching, second to none. Lifelong friendships were made and although we certainly had our grievances with rules we considered archaic, we students gained a lifetime experience. Who of the 1961-1962 years does not recall the scooter race,

269 miles on a child's scooter through Coolamon, to Beckom and from Ariaiah Park, Junee, to Wagga, raising money for Kurrajong School for Retarded Children Hostel? Headlines in the Wagga newspaper and a photo of Estelle Willak receiving the winner's shield. Headlines once more when we students took off on a protest march through Wagga venting peaceful displeasure with various archaic rulings such as obligatory lights out and no free movement in dorms etc.

In our own way we were teenage rebels, spirited and critical, yet at 19 years of age, (with a few older exceptions), and graduation behind us, our future paths took us to all corners of NSW, taking on the responsibility attached to the somewhat daunting career of teaching children.

My own teaching path began at Narrabeen North Primary School in the Infants Department.; a delightful school set in a bush setting, sand and surf close by. My survival in that first year of teaching a kindergarten class of well over 35 children, many from a non-English speaking background, was an enormous challenge and without the figure of Margaret Warning, (who was later to become principal of Mosman School for Handicapped children), I may not have lasted the distance in my new found career.

The job of fending for oneself in a small flat in Harbord, often hitch hiking to or from work and lacking experience to deal with the attention clown in the class, were unforgettable times. I can still visualize the moment the curly headed clown poked his head through the spokes of the back of his chair only to become well and truly stuck. The only solution being to saw the spoke out, entailing a walk of a couple of hundred yards across the playground, his now ruddy face and swollen head poking through the back of the chair, in full view of the older primary school children. After that we all enjoyed relative peace in the class and some of my fondest memories are of children that crossed my path at Narrabeen North, including that clown!

After two years of sand and surf, I was transferred to Bourke Street Primary School in Goulburn. A completely different setting, 800 children and a large staff of highly experienced teachers with inestimable practical knowledge to share. From here on in my teaching future was paved.

Disciplinary saving meant that at 21 I was able to take a trip to New Zealand and Fiji, awakening the travel bug.

In 1967 that travelling dream came into reality when together with Bernie Skinner, at that time a High School teacher in Canberra, we sailed off on board the *Marconi* on our 6 month trip of Europe, the UK and Ireland.

Needless to say it was a great travelling experience which in my case also led to the meeting of my husband to be, Karel, an Amsterdam University student working as a guide for Heineken brewery whose fluent English led me to believe he was Canadian. A long distance romance culminated in our marriage in Amsterdam in 1969.

Although the Dutch are renowned for their ability in speaking fluent English it became a must for me to understand them in their own language and feel at home in this part of the world. That said I took on various jobs with the aim of picking up the language and essentially to build up my own circle of friends. Maybe some of you have heard of Excerpta Medica, a publishing company that produced excerpts in English for the medical world. It was to become my first Dutch employer. There I became involved in setting up a computer coding system, in the days of punch cards, all useful but boring and with little Dutch language involvement so I switched to a job at Schiphol Airport selling diamonds. There two of us, one native speaker and myself had a quiet spot in the departure lounge and when not selling loose diamonds, my sales companion and I took on the battle of the Dutch language.

The arrival of our daughter, Caroline, in 1972, somewhat altered my working direction and in 1974 I began a tertiary course to enable me to teach English at High Schools. As often happens 2 years further on I decided family and study did not combine and the decision to discontinue the course came when the Dutch professor told me I would have to abandon my Australian accent if I was to pass the final exam! Impossible!. In the meantime I have *infected* scores of Dutch students, now in all walks of life, with my Aussie English pronunciation plus a few notable Aussie adjectives .

Somewhat unexpectedly in 1980 the local school our daughter attended asked me to take on relief teaching. All went well for a couple of years then the school inspector arrived and discovering that there was no reciprocal recognition of degrees between Australia and The Netherlands so my relief teaching days were over.

Next direction? The Volksuniversiteit were asking for native English speakers for conversation lessons. They were not so bothered about my Australian accent. The next 20 years I enjoyed giving evening classes to enthusiastic adults and by this time with our teenage daughter attending the renown 600 year old Stedelijk Gymnasium in Haarlem, I was being approached to help children of friends who had difficulties with their English studies at High School or at University. I would never have dreamt that the teaching element in my life would also kick in with my hobby of painting. Years of arranging art exhibitions at various locations in Haarlem and having had a few of my own art exhibitions, found me saying yes to giving art lessons to a small group of happy amateurs. That wonderful outlet of emotions and art appreciation, became an integral part of my life for the next 20 odd years and it was in 2017 I decided that before my dedicated pupils, some 85 plus, fall down my atelier staircase I had better stop!

Where is the teaching now? Well there is a road 7 kms from Heemstede (literal translation is "Home town"), leading to our grandchil-

dren living in Zwaanshoek ("Swans Corner"). After completing primary school our grandson, attended a Lyceum until 2021 where English was the lingua franca for the first 3 of the 5 years of High School. His advantage of having an Aussie nanna helped him to claim the top award at his school for an English profile subject, The Dowding System. The luck of having the old Wagga gal perhaps gave him a somewhat unfair advantage! Currently his sister attending an Athenaeum is under my wing making sure she continues the Aussie English vocal currency.

No school system is perfect. We have our complaints about the Dutch teaching system which we feel changes too frequently and never for the best. Politicians seem to lack foresight. Music and art appreciation have been lost in their savings budgets. The profession of basic school teachers is not held in high regard and salaries are well below other tertiary level trained people. As a result few men are willing to teach in a primary school. When my granddaughter left primary school in 2020 it had over 1000 pupils but there were only two male teachers!

Perhaps it is interesting for you to know that the school system here is divided into various categories, the idea being to accommodate all levels of abilities and interests. There are Technical schools at two levels, general studies at two levels, then 3 types directed at achieving the goal of a

higher academic study. You can imagine the end of year traumas of children and parents alike after a comprehensive primary school examination designates the future path of your child from that one momentary test called the CITO test.

A High school student heading for University in the final examination year (6th year) is examined in 8 subjects, Dutch and English both being compulsory languages plus mathematics and 5 other subjects chosen from various fields of interest!

The COVID years were lean and mean particularly for the elderly and school age children, just as the world over. Gaps in knowledge and psychological problems are still evident amongst school aged children in The Netherlands. Artificial Intelligence really took over in the COVID years appearing to compound the lack of physical connections and initiatives of present youth. Am I being too hard? A book by Johan Hari titled, *Lost Focus* is an excellent read and one in which we can recognise this present dilemma of AI, written with truth and humour.

At the age of 80, with osteoporosis knocking down vertebra at will, I am nevertheless happy to say there is still much to enjoy. Good books, Ceramic classes, which result in cries from Karel, *oh no not another one*, and Tayasui art (à la David Hockney on ipad) being part of that picture.

Apart from very regular contact with my good friend, Bernie Body, (Skinner), the annual contacts with Adrian Young and



Fred Stubenrauch from the good old WWTC days, keep the memories of those wonderful, fulfilling years, alive. Both Adrian and Fred together with their wives, Audrey and Sue have in the past met up with Karel and myself here in Heemstede or Amsterdam as did a few years back, our illustrious president and secretary of *Talkabout*, Lesley and Bruce. Should this epistle appear around Christmas I wish you all good memories and vitality with plenty of good cheer.

Maybe the photo (on the previous

page), taken at the end of our street, will be the scene in our December in Heemstede 2023!



Liz & Karel with the Staubenrach's 2018

Teaching: A True Calling

Alice Lane (McFaul 1953-54)

I grew up in the country near Bega so the move to the big city of Wagga Wagga was an adventure.

The rules for students at the Teachers College were strict but designed to guide young adults fairly. We had opportunities for entertainment and could walk around Wagga Wagga township on weekends. Some lasting romances started here and led to later marriages.

My first teaching appointment in 1955 was to Grafton, which was one of my three electives for which I had applied. This was then a girls' only school with a separate boys' school nearby with its own headmaster. There were 48 students in the fourth class which I was given: high by today's standards, but not unusual then. The pupils took part in the annual Jacaranda Festival and competed in the local eisteddfod. The school year was divided into three terms. At the end of the second term of my second year I was transferred to the school at Glendale, Newcastle.

This was a living area devoted to the housing of migrant families, many of

whom had escaped from Russia's invasion of Yugoslavia. Some of these children did not speak English. I had a lovely girl called Yuta, who interpreted for me. On one occasion, she refused to interpret a boy's remark but would only say, *He very naughty boy*. Best left alone!

The school was very crowded. My class was held in a weather shed formed by three wooden sides and with one complete side open to the weather. An infants class had to walk up the main road to use a church hall. The following year I had a transition class in the weather shed.

At the beginning of 1958 I was married and transferred to Sydney where I was living by that time. Teaching only lasted a few months until family matters took over.

My next appointment was as a casual teacher in a Brisbane school which closed down for one afternoon so that we could watch the television coverage of the Moon Landing. From here I went to Ipswich Girls School until they combined with Boys Central. Then followed a few years of *Supply Teaching* in and

around the Ipswich district.

At the end of the 1990s, I joined a group called *Volunteers for Isolated Students*. These volunteers were matched with families living in isolated areas, such as on cattle stations of the Northern Territory. The volunteers gave six weeks of their time to teach the students who were on Correspondence or School of the Air. Families provided board and lodging. Travel each way was at first provided by Deluxe Coaches which supported the scheme. VISE expanded over time including itinerant families on the Show Circuit, each of whom had a regular run. I taught those at Batemans Bay and Tumut.

I also had an appointment as a volunteer to Goodna Christian School. It was here that I learned about autism from a fellow teacher who had autistic twins. I have followed up my interest in this, working with autistic children and families to the present day.

I am still in touch with some people from Wagga Wagga Teachers' College; a friendship of over seventy years is worth having.

As I was compiling this issue of *Talkabout*, I received an email from Paul Bittar, to let me know that his Dad, Lex Bittar, (1953-54) had passed away. Lex was such a stalwart of the Wagga Community that he was recognised with being awarded an OAM, particularly for his 18 years of service to Meals on Wheels of which he was chairman. A tribute to Lex will be a memorial service held at Charles Sturt University on the 18th of December 2023.

Lex was highly regarded for his warmth and generosity in all circles, educational, sporting and community.

A School Placement

Kate Nelson 2023 Scholarship Recipient

.Just wanted to reach out and share with you that I have just completed my first-ever high school placement! And it wouldn't have been possible without the generosity and support of the Wagga Teachers' College Alumni Association scholarship.

It has been a full-on four weeks, but it is finally over and I can happily say that I have learnt a lot. To no surprise, there is more to teaching than just standing in front of the classroom and deliver-

ing the content. I taught a mix of classes from years 8-10, and I have learnt a lot about the teacher that I want to become in the future throughout this process. I am actually now leaning more towards teaching high school after the completion of the degree, as I have been able to witness how rewarding it is when the students get what you are teaching. Even in the tough classes I taught (year 9 mostly), by the end of the placement I was able

to develop a better relationship with them than my supervising teacher had the whole year and got them to do work, and stay in the classroom!

It has been a great experience, and I am really thankful for the support from you both (sic: Jenny and Chris Blake), as well as the wider Wagga Teachers College Alumni Association because I wouldn't have been able to do it without the support.

President's Report - Bruce Forbes



maintain three editions of *Talkabout*. A few further adjustments will be needed as our financial system phases out cheques which have enabled many members to contribute membership fees, donations to scholarships and *Talkabout* subscriptions. It is apparent that electronic fund transfer will become the norm.

For those of you who have been using cheques, and do not do electronic banking, the Post Office or bank will deposit money for you in the account:

WWTC ALUMNI ASSOC
CBA Casula NSW
BSB: 062 329
A/C No: 10073789
Reference : Member's First Initial, Surname and first year at college e.g. BForbes65

2023 has been another year with a difference as the committee only met on two occasions to transact business, establish future pathways and

You can still fill out the form and send to the Secretary to let her know of the deposit. Our generosity in establish-



ing a scholarship for education students at CSU is well appreciated. However, it would be great to leave our legacy as a perpetual annual scholarship which will require some additional funds.

It is pleasing to continue to receive articles and stories for publication which identify pathways taken by our members but also sad to receive news of loved ones



who have passed away. Please be reminded that your editor is always seeking new articles. Enjoy this edition of your magazine (albeit a little later than usual), choose to reflect on the past as you peruse the articles and *don't forget to give thanks to those who support you.*

Keep safe, enjoy family and friends this Christmas and into the New Year.

Meeting the Governor General

(Adapted from the *Southern Riverina News*)

John Smith (1966-67)



John with the Governor General receiving his medal

John Smith (WWTC 1966-67) was amongst eight NSW Rural Fire Service members awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal in the Queen's Birthday honours list. It is awarded for distinguished service by a member of an Australian fire service, and is the highest NSW RFS award that can be bestowed.

While John displayed his immense gratitude for the award, he couldn't help feel guilt for the thousands and thousands of forgotten members who weren't receiving an award.

John joined the Coleambally brigade in 1976, taking on the captain's role the following year. What was only meant to be a quick viewing of a 1926 Dennis fire engine and a Blitz truck, quickly turned into a 44 year commitment to the community.

It's a funny story actually, John said. I attended my first fire at eight years of age as I was the only one in the family who could drive the Blitz.

When I moved to Coleambally in 1976, I was walking past the fire station and saw those two beautiful trucks and fell in love.

I asked these three blokes if I could have a look and they all gave me a big grin... six months later, I was captain.

In 1999, John became a deputy group captain, and then group captain in 2003.

During his service, he led several strike teams to out-of-area incidents, including the Black Saturday fires in 2009, in Canberra and Tumbarumba and into Springwood the day after the town was devastated by fire in 2013.

He also joined four strike teams in various locations in the 2019-20 fire season.

Outside the RFS, John was a science teacher at Coleambally Central School. He assisted with the Secondary Schools Cadet and Kids Fire Wise programs.

I enjoyed and got a lot of satisfaction from teaching groups of kids basic fire fighting, he said. It was pleasing to know that I was teaching these kids practical skills that would be useful for the rest of their lives.

John said that out of the groups he taught, many of the students returned to volunteer themselves in later years.

He said, *Like many organisations, our members are ageing and it is important to grab the youth who have a lot to give.*

John's background in science also aided his progression in the fire brigade. He became a fire investigator in 2008. He said that it is kind of like CSI but a whole lot slower.

John recognises the commitment that comes with being a volunteer firefighter but it is worth it, knowing you are

helping to protect the community.

The majority of firefighters are pleased with what they do, but they don't get carried away. They know it has to be done.

There's an awful suspense during those days when the temperature is north of 40 degrees Celsius and the humidity is south of 10%, the wind is howling from the northeast at 60 clicks, the sun is glaring at you personally, and the western horizon is smeared with dust — or is it smoke?

And there's a sinking feeling when the phone rings at three in the morning, in the middle of winter.

John paid tribute to members and founders of the Coleambally brigade and to their spouses, partners and family members, especially Gini, Sarah and Julie, who have had to put up with the sudden absences from family meals, long silences from loved ones whose whereabouts and welfare are unknown.

John has recently left Coleambally, for the south coast where he is still volunteering, fighting fires and helping the community at the Basin View brigade.

His citation reads, *displays the finest attributes of volunteer spirit and commitment.*

Reaching Gowrie Public School

Bruce Wells (1955-56)

When my session completed Teachers College at the end of 1956 we were given notice of our first school appointments to be taken up at the beginning of Term 1 1957. However, because I did my National Service Training in the RAAF, I still had 77 days of flying training to complete in Jan/Feb/March 1957, so my first appointment was after Easter to Sans Souci Primary School, with the date of appointment *at the conclusion of National Service Training*. I knew it would be a temporary position, as the usual first appointment postings for male students were to one-teacher schools or remote country schools.

Sans Souci Primary School had three sections, the Infants, the Boys and the Girls departments. While the Headmaster was in overall charge, the Heads of the Infants and Girls departments were very protective of their domains, and there was certainly no crossing over between infants, girls and boys playgrounds. I think I was about five years younger than any other teacher at the school, and the headmaster was very happy to have me there. I was given the 4B boys class, with 45 boys in it. The boys in my class were quite well behaved, and happy not to have another fill in teacher as they had had from the beginning of the year. I found lesson preparation and especially book marking quite a challenge, but I really enjoyed the face to face teaching. However, I was very much aware that I would not be left there very long.

In those days teachers were paid fortnightly by cheques posted to the headmaster, who would give them to the teachers. At Sans Souci we each had a tobacco tin or similar, and each payday we would put our cheque in the tin with a rubber band around it. At recess teachers took turns to take all the tins to a nearby bank where they were cashed.

All was well until the first pay after the May school holidays when my cheque didn't arrive. The headmaster rang The Department and then gave me the news. I had been posted as teacher-in-charge of Gowrie Public School, and my pay was up there waiting for me. The Department assured him I had been sent a telegram with all the necessary

information, and that my cheque was up there waiting for me! He allowed me to ring the Department from his office. *No*, they said, *they would not issue another cheque*, and that as I had been doing National Service Training I should have kept enough money to tide me over. They gave me my transfer posting information over the phone.

My instructions were *Train to Tamworth, then mail car to Gowrie. The mail car runs from Tamworth to Gowrie 3 days each week. Board is available with Mr and Mrs Richard Reading*. No advice as to which three days the mail car ran, or where the Readings lived. I had a BSA Bantam motor bike and decided to rail my bike to Tamworth as freight, taking it a couple of days to arrive. I'd catch the train to Tamworth, take a cab to Gowrie, and hitch a ride back to Tamworth a few days later to pick up the bike.

The next day I boarded a train, dressed in a good suit (first impressions, you know) and arrived at Tamworth just after dark on a cold May evening. The first thing I saw on Tamworth station was my Bantam. I found a taxi, and explained that I wanted the driver to take my luggage to Gowrie while I followed him on my Bantam. His response, *Where's Gowrie mate?* did not fill me with confidence, but he said he'd ask a mate while I was fuelling the bike. When I returned to the taxi the driver said we were to drive to Duri, then follow sign posts to reach Gowrie.

So we headed off down the Duri Road. I was wearing my suit and had no gloves, helmet or goggles. After half an hour or so it was dark, the bitumen ran out at Duri and I was freezing. Then we headed off on dirt roads. When I stayed far enough behind the taxi to keep out of its dust, I couldn't see what road forks it was taking. When I stayed close enough to see what forks it took, I was blinded by dust.

After about 45 minutes we reached a house, and the taxi driver went in to ask directions. The Cook family who lived there had a daughter at Gowrie

School. They offered to give me dinner and run me to the Readings, where I would be able to board. So I met my first parents. I was covered in dust, half blind, nearly frozen, shaking, shivering and dribbling as I tried to say hullo and thanks. Talk about first impressions!

After a very welcome hot meal I was driven to the Readings in a ute with my bike in the back and was told I could have come from Tamworth straight down the New England Highway to the Gowrie turnoff, a total trip of under ½ hour! (I went looking for that taxi driver the next Saturday when I went to Tamworth, but none of the drivers I met could tell me who he might be.

Mr and Mrs Reading had a room ready for me, and were very welcoming. Over the years I spent with them I came to know them as Aunt and Uncle Dick, names that were used by most of their family and most of the neighbours.

The morning after I arrived at the Readings, I walked up to the school, crossing the shallow Spring Creek and arriving at about 8.00am so that I could have a look around before the pupils arrived. I found a letter on my desk from the school inspector saying he had called to see me the previous week, asking where I was, and had I submitted the school's entries for the PSAAA Sports Carnival which, apparently were due that very day.

Just before 9.00am the first pupil arrived. By 9.30 I had met eleven very polite pupils and their parents who asked similar questions to those put by the School Inspector. I managed to assure both pupils and parents that I had everything in hand, and that I was ready and eager to continue their education. Somehow I got through the day, checking the roll, working out class loads across the kinder to grade 6 range, and putting together a PSAAA events entry list. There was no phone at the school, so I rang the District Inspector from Reading's phone when I returned there after school and was able to placate him. He assured me he would be out to see me early the following week.

The next four or five weeks are just a

blur. Getting to know the children, their personalities, their learning potential, their likes and dislikes was quite a challenge. There was one girl, then in 5th class, who was so shy that she would not talk to me at all, but looked down whenever I came near her. She could hear me OK, and conversed with the other children. I only reprimanded her once, and then very gently, but she spent the rest of the day weeping. She did her work well, and otherwise was never a problem. It was nearly two years before she was conversing freely with me. Planning lessons, deciding on an Upper Division and Lower Division split to allow teacher attention to be most effective, and selecting what we now call work stations all helped me cope with the individualisation of teaching that was my aim. I must confess that balancing teaching, school management and Departmental paperwork made me consider my career choice from time to time during those weeks.

However, after the first couple of months I seemed to find my groove. I became aware of the pupils that needed to be gently encouraged, those that needed a more direct approach, and the one that really needed a *back of an axe to the forehead*, or at least the promise of it. By then I realised that there was no other way I would want to spend my working life. Happily, that feeling has stayed with me.

My connections with the parents and the Gowrie community paralleled my teaching progress, and so my happy years as teacher-in-charge Gowrie Public School began and progressed smoothly from then on with such local functions as association meetings, card evenings and kitchen teas.

The school had been built in the 1880s, and by 1957 it was showing its age. It was cold and drafty in winter, and hot and stuffy in summer. We (the children and I) coped with this by undertaking learning experiences around working conditions. We did high concentration activities in the morning session – activities such as mathematics, spelling and essay writing, for example. After recess we focused on social studies, reading and comprehension. After lunch was the time for sport, PE, art and craft. We usually began the school day with a few songs and news items, and I always tried to end the day by

reading a story, often a few paragraphs from a book to be continued tomorrow. One aspect of teaching was a priority. During my college course male students took a *small schools* subject while female students took an *infants* subject. We had often heard it said that teachers need to teach reading well for self-defence. The idea was that children who can read can learn by themselves, but those who can't read need constant attention. It is a good rule of thumb, especially in a one-teacher school. I well remember one pupil who had great difficulty learning to read. I tried for about three years to teach her. I tried all my techniques – phonics, look and say, pattern recognition, words in colour ..., but with little success. Gee really wanted to be able to read. I thought we had it, one day, as she brought out her reader and read every random page I selected. Then I closed the book, and asked her to read the third page. She was word perfect – she had memorised the book.

Then one day she came up to my desk and said, *Please Sir, I can read.*

I said, *Let's see, Gee*, and reached behind me to get a book at her level that she had never seen. I opened it at random, pointed to a paragraph towards the end of the page, and said *Read this*. She read it, and smiled at me. I said, *Gee, you can read!* and smiled at her. I'm sure she walked back to her desk, with the new book, without her feet touching the floor. I know I walked home from school that afternoon and didn't feel my feet touch the ground. In my nearly five years at Gowrie, only one of my pupils did not learn to read. He was a wonderful boy, happy, good natured, neat and never a problem. He could write beautiful little stories, neat and careful writing with well made letter formation. Unfortunately his words were nonsensical – they were like enigma code. He was unable to translate them, just as he was unable to read any written words. Today we would refer him for diagnosis, but then that was not available. He later worked with his father on the farm, married and had a farm of his own.

I am not a sporty person by most accounts (if you exclude flying and target shooting). After the first local parents cricket match at Gowrie I was politely overlooked from the team. However, I found, as I did with playing musical

instruments, being unable to play doesn't mean you can't coach. From that first PSAAA event I enjoyed sport with my pupils. One aspect of sport I insisted on was that everyone competed – exercise and enjoyment rather than competition were the prime purposes of school sport, just as they were with PT. We used the handicap approach widely, from running to vaulting to soccer. I remember one day an event was races from the bed of the dry Spring Creek at the back of the school up the hill to the school fence. We had one little girl I always thought of, but never described as a whinger. This particular day she was running nearly last as usual when she suddenly took off, and passed me still accelerating. As she went by I could hear her breathlessly saying *sss...snake*. That's when the children showed me their method of dealing with a snake where it's not wanted. One of the older children called *Rock it!* The older children formed a large circle around the snake, while the younger ones collected large stones. Then the children in front of the snake threw rocks at it. As the snake moved, so did the circle, until the snake was going the way they wanted it to – in this case, back down to the creek. Then they got out of its way, and sport resumed, with a good look out maintained. We all came to enjoy our PT – the children particularly enjoyed medicine ball games such as tunnel ball, and movement games such as *Here, There and Where*. Just one addendum, at one PSAAA carnival it was not possible to have all the children enter events, as teams were to be chosen for inter-district events. Some of the parents complained that it wasn't worth going if some kids couldn't take part. A quick ring around to other small schools resulted in a special *Small Schools Event* at the carnival.

I have mentioned that the old school building was subject to weather conditions. I complained to the School Inspector on one of his visits that you could see through some corners of the unstable walls, but he felt that it was still a satisfactory building. About twelve months or so after I started teaching there a windstorm shook the walls, pulling wiring out of power points in showers of sparks. I rang the Inspector who changed his belief that the school needed only minor repairs,

He told me to get the pupils out of the school if there was a wind storm, and informed me that urgent action would be undertaken. A second-hand building soon arrived on a truck. It was reconditioned, lined and painted and the old building was demolished. I suppose 1884 to 1958 is a reasonable life time for a weatherboard school building.

Harking back to the horse drawn era, Gowrie had a School Bus. In my time, the school bus was a car or van driven by one of the parents. The Department of Education paid for the bus and one of my monthly duties was to certify and forward to the Department the claim from the current bus provider. This was a well paid and sought after duty, as six to twelve months of bus duty was enough to buy the operator a new vehicle. One time after submitting a claim, it had not been paid at the usual time. We waited until the next month then submitted the new claim, attaching a copy of the previous one. Still no payment, so at the end of the next month I submitted that claim, plus copies of the previous two. By then I was getting annoyed, so I attached a covering letter, requesting advice on what was or was not happening to the claims. By mistake I used a green ballpoint as I thought it was the blue one I normally used.

I received a letter by return mail. It advised me that there had been a problem with the person handling bus claims. That person was no longer working with the Department. A cheque for the outstanding amount was in the mail. I should avoid using green ink, as it was reserved for Departmental auditors.

I have made mention of the District Inspector. During my Gowrie years, this was a much respected person. The District Inspector (DI) kept a close watch on all the schools in his Inspectorate. (A DI was rarely a woman in those days, except that there were special Infants Inspectors.) The then Tamworth DI visited his small schools fairly frequently, and Gowrie several times a year. This was because I was still on probation. A condition of my Teachers Scholarship was that I had to go where I was sent for the first three years after College, and be assessed as a satisfactory teacher in each of those years. In 1959 I was informed by the DI that he would be at my school on a particular day to carry out

my Teachers Certificate assessment. I arrived early (8.00am for a 9.30 am school day) at school that day to find him sitting outside the school in his car. He accompanied me inside and asked me to give him my administration books, including the stamp, bus voucher, program and lesson preparation books. He told me to go on with my normal teaching day, and that he would speak to the pupils individually. As I went about my teaching he called the pupils to him at the back of the room with all of their work books. He questioned every pupil and looked at every page of each of their work books. From time to time he would pause to watch me teach. At recess and lunch time he observed the children at play and watched them eating their morning tea and lunch. At about 3.00pm he asked to speak with the pupils, and asked them questions about their subjects and about me. I remember him saying to them *Mr Wells asks you 'why' a lot when he is teaching you. Why do you think he does this?* The children left at 3.30, and then he questioned me on matters such as *You have not made an entry in the program book for grade 6 English for week 3 of term 1. Why is that?* When I said that they were continuing what they were doing the previous week, he said that I should note that on the program. At about 5.00pm he apologised for having to leave so early because he had a meeting in town. I staggered back home exhausted.

He must have been satisfied, for I later received through the mail a NSW Teacher's Certificate, which still has a pride of place on my study wall. It is sometimes said that we were two -year trained teachers. In fact, we spent two years at teachers' college, completing academic studies and a practice teaching program. We then had three years supervised internship before we could qualify for our Teacher's Certificate. By my count, we underwent five years training.

From May 1957 until May 1961 I boarded with Mr and Mrs Richard Reading. It was just a short walk of about 250 metres from there to the school. I had to cross Spring Creek on the way, which was just a metre or so across stepping stones when the creek was down. When it was up after

heavy rain I walked over the flood gate. The flood gate consisted of two strands of the ubiquitous no. 8 fence wire. The lower wire was about 1 – 1½ metres above the bed of the creek, and had chicken mesh wire down to the creek bed. The upper wire was about 1½ metres above the lower wire. I would walk sidewise across the lower wire, hanging on to the upper wire. I became quite adept at it after a while. In places the creek had a sandy bed, and quite good swimming holes could be dug on hot days. About twelve months after I started boarding with Aunt and Uncle Dick, two of their nieces made a visit, and so I met Eileen and Fay Whitten. Eileen had her boyfriend Lawrence with her and, despite the fact that I had eyes for no one else during her visit, I followed the good manners custom of the day and tried to not come between Eileen and Lawrence. I have no memory whatsoever of what was discussed during the visit, just that a part of my mind would never be the same again.

About two months later Eileen came to visit her aunt and to give her a hand on the farm. By the third day of her stay I realised that she was not missing her boyfriend, so on the fourth day I asked her if she would like to go to the pictures on the Friday night. She said, *Yes*. We announced our engagement at her 21st birthday party on 12th September 1960 and set our wedding date to take place during the May school holidays the following year. We were married at Rockdale in Sydney on 13 May 1961.

Towards the end of the year I put in an application for transfer. I requested a small school with a residence, and nominated the school regions of the south coast, north coast or central west. At this time, there were many small schools around the state, so I thought our chances were fairly good. At the end of the 1961 school year we bid our farewells to the pupils, parents and locals of Gowrie, and left to stay with my parents in Brighton-le-Sands until the Department of Education had decided our future location.

A Letter from the Past

Ella Keesing (Redpath 1950-51)

Recently I received an email from the Secretary of the Life Activities Club to which I belong. It included the following attachment:

Hi,

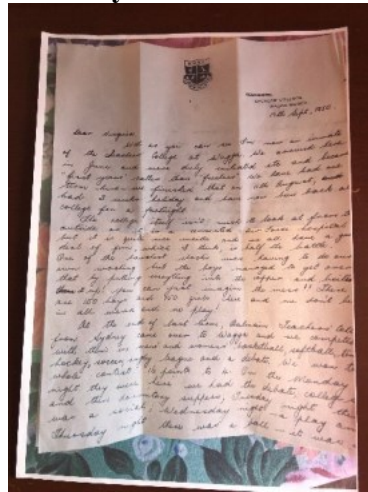
My mother used to have a pen-pal named Ella Redpath from Canberra when they were kids. They wrote to each other for years but lost contact when they both started college. My Mom's name is Virginia Sturgess from Orofino, Idaho in USA, now Virginia Bird. She asked me if I could possibly find Ella because she would love to say hello after all these years. I have attached a photo of a letter Ella wrote to my Mom when she was attending Wagga Wagga Teachers School in 1950. I was able to find some information online, and I found an Ella Redpath who married Peter Keesing. I found Ella's name in Waverley Life Activities Club newsletter.

Could you ask Ella if she is the person who was pen-pals with my mother Virginia Sturgess. Thank you,
Tom Bird Vancouver, Washington.

The secretary apologised and hoped it wasn't a scam but it had some accurate information in the letter plus an attached handwritten letter, written in 1950 and with a Wagga Wagga badge at the top of the paper! Yes, it was definitely my writing and, as in the original letter, I had been a pen pal with Tom's mother. So where had the letter been all these years and how had Tom traced me? As with many of us of vintage age his mother had been clearing out boxes in a garage and had found some letters, still folded. And how

to trace my name? I had written an article which had been published in a Victorian Life Activities Magazine so a Google search to the Secretary was a link to me!

Two days later I received a similar letter



from the Secretary of Key Word Sign Victoria apologising and hoping it wasn't a scam! Google had located me as having published a book for Key Word Sign through Newcastle University. And the change from Redpath to Keesing? I guess there are Google searches for that too.

The letter was dated 17th September, 1950. This was the time when we started at Wagga Wagga in June. I guess George Blake-more would not have been pleased that I described myself as being an inmate but that was my description as a 17-year-old!

The letter says: **TEACHERS' COLLEGE, WAGGA WAGGA**

Dear Virginia,

Well as you can see I am now an inmate of the Teachers' College

at Wagga. We arrived here in June and were duly initiated etc and became 'first years' rather than 'freshers'. We have had one term here - we finished that on the 11th of August, had three weeks holiday and have now been back at college for a fortnight.

The college itself isn't much to look at from the outside as it is a converted Air Force hospital but it is quite nice inside and we all have a great deal of fun, which I think, is half the battle. One of the harshest shocks was having to do our own washing but the boys managed to get over that by putting everything into the copper and boiling it up! You can just imagine the mess!! There are 150 boys and 150 girls here and we don't believe in all work and no play!

At the end of last term, Balmain Teachers' College from Sydney came over to Wagga and we competed with them in men's and women's basketball, softball, tennis, hockey, soccer, rugby league and a debate. We won the whole contest 16 points to 4. On the Monday night they were here we had the debate, college songs and then dormitory suppers; Tuesday night there was a social; Wednesday night - a play and Thursday night there was a ball - it was absolutely super with a wonderful orchestra. It finished at 2 and our warden said our doors were to be shut at 2.30 but people were still wandering in at 3 and 3.15!

On Friday there was a special train running to take Balmain T.C. back and Wagga T.C. went with them and got off at their various

stops as this was the beginning of our holidays. We had a marvellous time on the train with about 300 college kids – streamers flying and people singing! I stayed at home for about a fortnight and then went down to Sydney for a couple of days.

We're at present getting ready here for the Wagga Eisteddfod; we're putting in a mixed choir, a ladies' choir and a men's choir. The male choir from Canberra will be over also so I won't know which one to

cheer for most!

The Little Theatre Club is putting on a play this Friday night. They're all college kids and it's a student audience watching so I can just imagine there'll be some laughter in places there shouldn't be!

Well I must rest my weary bones now on the hard, hard beds.

Bye-bye for now,

Tons of love from Ella

AND HAVE I RESPONDED?

Yes! I responded with an email to the

address provided, outlining my life briefly after college, sent a photo of what I look like now and a couple of family photos. Virginia has responded with similar information. We have agreed it would be a pleasant way to stay in touch with a monthly email round up of events.

So, pen pals but in a very different way from 70+ years ago!

**Ella (Redpath) Keesing
(Wagga Wagga 50 – 51)**



The Auditorium, as we remember it

Grahame Keast (1962-63)

A bunch of ex WWTC folk (era early to mid sixties) are embarking on a 4 day cruise aboard Carnival Splendor next June. Why not join us? I'm sure there's room for you. Details are as follows:

4 day Moreton Island cruise, ship: Carnival Splendor, departs Sydney 20 June 2024, returns Sydney 24 June 2024

cruise contact: Nimoy - npaddyfoot@carnival.com, group booking # T5P7Q3



John Robinson (1952-53) on a Science Excursion in the Snowy Mountains

An appeal to each of you:

Another edition of *Talkabout* is entirely dependent on your submitted contributions

The cupboard is bare for the next edition!

As many of you know, the Riverina Regional Archives has an extensive collection on the region, including a large one incorporating documents and photographs from the Teachers' College from before its inception until its closure. Our Alumni Association has contributed a substantial amount of funding for this collection to be digitised and this growing volume can be viewed via the following URL.

<https://csuregarch.intersect.org.au/collections/show/2>

Talkabout past copies can be found at:

<https://alumni.csu.edu.au/news-and-events/newsletters/wwtca>



Wagga Wagga Teachers Alumni Association

KEEPING THE SPIRIT ALIVE IN 2024 TO SECURE THE FUTURE



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MEMBERSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

To ensure the continued financial viability of the Wagga Wagga Teachers Alumni Association the following membership contributions and services will apply from 1 January 2024

a) Electronic Membership:

Receive all information and three (3) copies of *Talkabout* electronically. \$10.00 p.a.

b) Standard Membership:

Receive all information and three (3) printed copies of *Talkabout* via standard mail.
\$20.00 p.a.

In addition to either Electronic or Standard Membership members may choose to make additional contributions from the options below.

c) Additional Contributions:

- i. general donation to the Alumni for ongoing projects e.g. digitise archives from \$10.00.
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