

Some of my recollections --

NUFFIELD FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP 1950.

The lapse of 45 years since being awarded a Nuffield Foundation Farming Scholarship to U.K. has not dimmed my recollections of the excitement I felt at the time.

Indeed, the experiences subsequently enjoyed have become indelibly imprinted in my mind, and have, if anything, grown in importance in my attitudes to farming and recognition of a public duty generally.

That sounds pretty pompous.

Nevertheless, how else could one feel, after being the recipient of such magnificent generosity. A 6 months study tour of U.K. with virtually all expenses paid, the payment of a farm manager in my absence, the very caring interest of the Foundation from the moment of my selection, the entrée and welcome into virtually every organisation, institution, farm, and home associated with the field of study.

How could I possibly have been selected, to be awarded an honour recognised then as being almost the equivalent of the top academic award-- the Rhodes Scholarship?

Why was I selected?

I can only speculate. Perhaps I had an appropriate background -- practical farming, an agricultural degree, a suitable age. The reasons can only be found in the minds of the Selection Committee which included Prof. Sam Wadham, C.W. Strutt, (Agricultural Attache to the British High Commission) and the Director of Agriculture, Victoria. What I do remember is that, despite my nervousness, it was one of the most pleasant, even enjoyable interviews I have ever experienced. However, what I must acknowledge is, that the first reason was because of course, I applied and that only because my wife, Ronda, saw and read the advertisement! (She is still doing similar things!)

The voyage to U.K. in the "Himalaya" was in itself a great experience, enjoyable and satisfying because of the associations I formed, but even more so, was the return voyage in the "Strathmore" with my wife,-- and in the company of the West Indies Cricket Team on its first Test Series in Australia-- to be reunited with our two small daughters.

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My first host, Dennis Clifton, farming 1000 acres on the Romney Marsh, provided the first revelations of British farming.

In our first discussion on the Sunday evening of my arrival, amongst many questions to get a picture of his farming, I asked "How many farm workers do you employ?" He hesitated, called in his Secretary for advice, and then said, "28, at last pay" ! Then, "How many tractors?" Answer "Roughly one for each man, Fergies, of course." !

I felt distinctly out of my element, with my 3,500 acres, much under developed, 2 men and one tractor!

However, normality returned with knowledge that in one County alone, Cornwall, there were 3,500 farms of less than 50 acres.

I quickly learned that Dennis was not typical of all British farmers, nor a tenant farmer, but he gave me an invaluable insight into the totality of British farming so recently after the War -- the need to farm every inch, the recognition that land is held in trust and must be cared for and so on.

Indeed, I found that while improved technology and increased sophistication were impressive, farm management and farm practices were even more so. In other words, it was the basic attitude to and philosophy of farming with centuries of background, that I found most instructive.

By way of illustration, I was invited by one host, Jack Humphrey, near Doncaster to sit in on his discussion with his Accountant. His was a mixed arable and dairy and livestock property. Due to some health problem with his cows, he proposed disposing of all his stock and concentrating on arable farming. His accountant was horrified! "But what will happen to your land without stock to keep it in good heart?" -- So it was yet another introduction to ley farming, and an insight into a practical recognition by others of the importance of good farm husbandry.

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I mentioned "tenant farming". I have on occasions, wondered whether such a system may have had merit in Australia, however heretical the thought.

Such a system, provided similar long term tenure was available, as in U.K., would obviate the need for massive capital outlays for farm and land purchase and thus permit its alternate use in farm development and production. What surely must be one of the most socially and economically distressing features of Australian farming is the inability, so frequently, to cope with consequences of drought and economic crises, and still meet the demands of large farm purchase outlays. Just a thought.

Britain, at that time, was readjusting after the War. Considerable subsidies were available to increase production, and the Post War Agriculture Act had been proclaimed. Production was encouraged, or discouraged, by price mechanisms by way of the Annual Price Review which, in 1951, while beneficial to some, was catastrophic for others -- notably, in poultry production.

Poultry farming, for egg production, was a major ingredient in mixed farming, as an element in diversification, and importantly for soil husbandry under intensive "grazing". My observations of the effects of statutory price control to control production were to prove invaluable in later years in my Parliamentary involvement in the critical production control (through quotas) in the Wheat Industry in the 1960's and in the operation of statutory marketing boards generally.

Through the most helpful offices of the National Farmers' Union, the Ministry of Agriculture and sections of the Agricultural Press, I was able to study at close hand Agricultural Extension Courses, the Artificial Breeding Schemes and fodder conservation techniques, under the tutorship of the renowned Rex Paterson, in silage making with his invention of the buck rake.

Perhaps it was fortuitous too, that I met up with W.A. Superintendent of Dairying (Maurice Cullity) in London, who also had special interests in these fields. Maybe it was thus instrumental in my being appointed district Agricultural Adviser in the Dairying Industry in W.A. a few years later, and prior to that, being appointed Commercial Dairy Farmers' representative on the Artificial Breeding Board in W.A. at its commencement in the early 1950's

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At the time of my selection in 1950, I was essentially a sheep and fat lamb producer, and yes, I did share in the bonanza of wool at 1 pound a pound (in money and weights of that time). And yes, it did bring me into conflict with Government with its immediate 20% wool tax and perhaps even then, a preliminary interest in Agricultural politics.

However, and directly as a result of my experience in U.K., immediately on my return in late 1951, my farm practices were changed considerably.

I became a "mixed" farmer. Commenced dairying as a processed whole milk producer, changed my fat lamb production from Merino-Romney-Southdown to Crossbred-Suffolk, and to great advantage. I commenced arable farming with significant vegetable production, notably potatoes, and extension into beef production.

The change from Southdown to Suffolk came with mixed feelings, as I had long been a Southdown adherent, and treasured very highly my association with Walter and Peter Langmead, near Arundel, with unquestionably the world's premier Southdown stud.

Which brings me to a touch of Studmaster wisdom. While inspecting the top sire -- to be the year's Champion Ram -- I asked "Shepherd" what it was that made it such an outstanding animal. "Oh, aye", he said. "It is not necessarily the animal that makes a champion, it's the ability to recognise him when he arrives."

So my farming practices underwent a change, but then so did my extra-farming activities. I became involved, largely by invitation, in farm politics, and Local Government, and then in regular rural oriented radio broadcasts, Leadership schools and the like.

Maybe there was something inevitable about entering politics, just 10 years after the Scholarship, in a largely rural electorate. So followed 22 years in Parliament, initially as a Federal Member with active participation in Party policy preparation on agricultural matters, including what was to become the I.A.C., establishment of the Veterinary School at Murdoch University (WA), Extension services and C.S.I.R.O.

Perhaps one of the things that I found personally gratifying, presumably as a consequence of these experiences, was to be invited to chair a session of the ANZAAS Conference held at the time at the University of WA.

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In later years, in the WA Parliament, and eventually as Minister (for Justice, Chief Secretary and Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) the opportunities were available to have a more direct involvement in Agricultural Politics, and none more so than in major legislation affecting the Dairy Industry and Statutory Authorities..

I may be forgiven for taking some pride in being selected as a State representative on two Commonwealth Constitutional Conventions; as a Deputy Leader of the Australian Delegation to the 5th U.N. Crime Congress, Geneva; as a WA delegate and keynote speaker at a US/Australian Parliamentary symposium in Hobart and WA delegate to the General Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Ottawa, Canada.

On a more local scene and towards the end of my Parliamentary life, I found myself as a member of an Honorary Royal Commission on the Milk Industry, and Chairman of a joint Parliamentary Select Committee on the WA Constitution, with particular reference to Offices of Profit and Members' Contracts with the Crown.

Maybe it could be thought that much of the foregoing Parliamentary experience was hardly an outcome of a Nuffield Farming Scholarship.

In my view, it was a vital ingredient.

The "Nuffield" provided an extraordinary opportunity to view Britain and its people at close hand, at their work and in industry, to see, as someone from a new country, how and why their institutions had developed over centuries, and to lead me to write, at that time, "I see now, why the British are a great people."

In lighter vein, even in my retirement (?) "Nuffield" is exercising its influence. For goodness sake, I'm still farming! Making hay, and, with the principles enunciated by Dr John Hammond at Cambridge, whom I was privileged to meet, ringing in my ears - I am still breeding cattle!

I offer only one comment for the consideration of future Scholars. By all means make special studies of your particular interest in these days of Hi-tech, computerised facilities and aids to Agricultural practices and production. But do not disregard the human side of farming.

I was often asked before I went to U.K., "Why Britain? Things are so different." True, many practices are different, but, as I found in U.K. and subsequently in Europe, Scandinavia and Canada, as well as Australia, it is the similarities, the human element of attitude and response to Nature; of concern for attention to the land, to the stock and crops in their care which left the most lasting impression.

63 Panorama Drive,
Preston Beach WA 6215.

Neil McNeill

